

Manna

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Be Rooted & Grow

SPECIAL YOUTH ISSUE

BE ROOTED AND GROW IN TURBULENT TIMES

Marian Shek—Leicester, UK

The idea for this youth-focused special issue was conceived pre-pandemic, in a seemingly simpler time, before the words “unprecedented” and “coronavirus” entered the daily discussions of ordinary people. Now, this issue is emerging into a landscape more challenging and complex than we could have imagined. It has been unequivocally shaped by the pandemic and the many forces that have risen in concert with it. The same can be said of the generation of youths who are now coming of age. While the Omicron variant has signaled the shift to a new, endemic phase for this disease in many countries—as we learn to live with the virus—if the last two years have taught us anything, it is that the situation can change in a heartbeat. Natural disasters, environmental devastation, conflicts, political unrest, divisions and disparities, will continue to upend the certainties that past generations trusted in (Mk 13:7–8). At the same time, the internet and social media have accelerated trend cycles, blurred the lines between truth, fiction and misinformation, and heightened the tenor of social discourse, causing massive shifts and schisms in social attitudes. This constantly churning world is one that our youth must navigate while undergoing the disorienting mental and physiological changes of adolescence, a stage typified by risk-taking behaviors, novelty seeking, and an increased focus on peer relationships and how one is perceived by others.¹

Amid such a maelstrom of pressures and influences, how can our True Jesus Church youth maintain their faith—to *Be Rooted and Grow*?

Throughout the process of putting this issue together, as the world transformed around us, the relevance of the theme we chose three years ago has become all the clearer, thus revealing the

timeless truth of God’s word. Though the youth must adapt to the challenges of this strange new world, we do well to remember that we are not of the world, and that our Lord Jesus has overcome this world (Jn 17:15–16; 16:33). Jesus Christ, and His message, remains the same (Heb 13:8), no matter how the world evolves.

This issue discusses how young believers can become rooted and grow in Christ through three sub-themes: *Plant Firm Roots*, *Nurture Growth*, and *Bear Fruit*. We have also experimented with design, digestible formats and infographic-style features, as well as addressing topics ranging from pop culture, to mental health, and stepping into independence, to speak more directly to our Gen-Z readers.

The youth have a vital role to play within church, within their families, and within society—they are to be like the tree of life bearing fruits of righteousness and bringing healing to the nations (Ezek 47:12; Rev 22:2; 2 Cor 9:10; Eph 5:9). To do so, they must be securely rooted in the truth, watered and revitalized by the pure waters of God’s Holy Spirit, and nourished through an intimate connection with Christ—the true vine—and His church (Col 2:6–8; Ezek 47:1–12; Rev 22:1; Jn 7:37–39; Jn 15:1–8; Eph 3:8–19).

Giving a plant the proper care and growing conditions allows it to develop strong roots and thrive. Do we take the same amount of care in nurturing the faith of our youth? If we are a youth, do we cultivate ourselves and ensure that we are firmly rooted in the truth? If we do, then our young saplings in faith will grow strong enough to withstand whatever winds and storms this life may bring, to flourish in the courts of God and bear fruit into old age (Ps 92:12–14).

¹ “Adolescence,” *Psychology Today*, accessed February 20, 2022, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/basics/adolescence>.

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CONTENTS

02 Theme: Plant Firm Roots

- 02 Be Rooted in Christ (Part 1)
Michael Chan, UK
- 04 The Garden of Prayer
Jachin, Singapore
- 06 How to Study the Bible
RE Students’ Bible Camp, Singapore
- 08 Pop Culture and Faith
Sen Kee Ho, Singapore
- 12 Take Root and Grow
Fu Ming Tse, Taiwan

14 Doctrinal Study

- 14 One True Church
Philip Shee, Singapore

18 Theme: Nurture Growth

- 18 Be Rooted in Christ (Part 2):
Grow in Christ
Michael Chan, UK
- 20 Take Action
Xhi Zian, Singapore
- 22 Q&A: Establishing Our Work-
Life and Service to God
Philip Shee, Singapore
- 25 Live According to the
Standard of God’s Word
Lydia and Sean Ho, UK
- 28 Looking after Our Spiritual
Health as Young Adults
Naomi Shek, UK

32 Testimony

- 32 God’s Mercy in Times of Sin
redeemed son, UK
- 36 God Guides Our Steps
Various

42 Theme: Bear Fruit

- 42 Be Rooted in Christ (Part 3):
Bear Fruit in Christ
Michael Chan, UK
- 46 Interview: Succession
Peter Shee, Singapore

48 Christian Living Columns

- 48 Youth: Overcoming Subtle
Temptations as a Student
Bianca Wong, UK
- 52 Evangelism: Adapting to
the Challenges of COVID-19
Joshua Phoong, Malaysia

54 Reflection

- 54 Let the Lower Lights
Be Burning
Brandon Shek, UK

56 Articles of Faith

57 Call for Articles



BE ROOTED IN CHRIST (PART 1)

Michael Chan—Leicester, UK

The Bible tells us that, in the end time, our lives will become increasingly complex and the world more chaotic. Although we are not of the world, we will still face the same trials and tribulations. But we live by faith, not by sight (2 Cor 5:7). By having our faith fully rooted in Christ, we can face whatever challenges that come our way.

Every physical structure, be it natural or manmade, requires a foundation. For that object to grow or expand, this foundation must be deeply rooted. So if we firmly root ourselves and our faith in Christ, then we can not only withstand the storms of life, but we will thrive and grow spiritually.

The question is, what steps must we take to become rooted in Christ?

THE DIFFICULTIES OF TAKING ROOT

No matter our circumstances—for example, our age or the country we live in—we will undoubtedly meet challenges to our faith. These are not limited to specific periods of our lives, and they do not come only in the form of physical illness or career problems. They could be either physical or spiritual issues, or both.

In Matthew 7:24–27, Jesus describes two houses—one built on the rock and one on the sand. Both houses face the same wind and floods, but only the one founded on the rock remains standing. We will all face the same challenges in our lives; the important thing is to build a solid foundation of faith and take root before such matters arise.

What kind of challenges will we have to face?

A. External Challenges

“Woe to the world because of offenses: For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!” (Mt 18:7)

Jesus confirms that offenses are caused by people and things in the world. These external challenges are unavoidable and may cause us to stumble. Whatever, or whomever, these external challenges turn out to be, we must be aware and prepared

to face them. Here are some types of external challenges we may encounter:

1. Heresies and ideologies

We must mature and no longer be swayed by the influences of society (Eph 4:14). In this end time, more heresies will arise (2 Pet 2:1), but they will be nothing new. They will be ideas we have heard before, either from the Bible or from human ideology, but tweaked slightly to make them seem like fresh revelations. In broader society, many concepts seem good and have changed the hearts of men, but they are not biblically founded.

2. Temptations and deceptions

In this world, we will face temptations of the flesh, such as lust and greed (2 Tim 3:6; 1 Tim 6:10). Satan will use these temptations to deceive us, and others will play on the desires of our hearts for their own gain.

3. Evils and unrighteousness

Jesus tells us that lawlessness will increase worldwide, causing love to decrease (Mt 24:12). This is manifested in how people conduct themselves. Evil and unrighteousness abound, and unfairness and injustice are part and parcel of life. This is the state of the world today.

B. Internal Conflict

“Not what goes into the mouth defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man. ...But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” (Mt 15:11, 18–19)

“When we allow internal conflicts to fester, there is a danger of giving place to the devil”

When talking about cleanliness or purity, Jesus emphasizes that it is what comes out of man’s heart that defiles him. Whether good or bad, a person’s actions are

controlled by his thoughts and feelings (Prov 4:20–27). Our heart determines whether we are deemed acceptable in God’s eyes, as someone who either conforms to the teachings of the Bible or the behaviors of the world. External challenges can affect us and enter our hearts. But at times, the conflict comes from our own heart or mind, which is not yet fully mature. When we allow internal conflicts to fester, there is a danger of giving place to the devil, of letting bitterness and anger erupt into evil speaking and sin. Our words become corrupt and contrary to biblical standards (Eph 4:25–31). Here are some forms of internal conflict to be aware of:

1. Self-centredness

In the end time, people will become “lovers of themselves” (2 Tim 3:1–2)—individuals will become more self-centered. We can see this playing out in the increase of protests, strikes, and complaints. These may be justified but ultimately arise from discontent and self-interest. When we are not content, we immediately complain and challenge the situation. As Christians, we should not be self-centered but God-centered. Unfortunately, we are still susceptible to being self-centered, whether we are conscious of it or not. This could be when we dwell on a frustrating situation or feel embarrassed or undermined by others.

2. Comparative mentality

Why is there strife? Because we lust for pleasures and covet what we do not have (Jas 4:1–3). We live in a competitive world that influences us to compare ourselves with others, not just in physical or material terms, but

also in our achievements. We may even look at how much honor we receive within the church compared to other brethren. These comparisons generate pride, jealousy, and imbalanced feelings.

3. Insubmissive behaviors

Often, when we hear something we dislike or feel challenged, we retaliate. Sometimes we feel oppressed and bullied, and these become our internal conflict. However, Paul tells us we should do all things without complaining and disputing so that we can remain blameless and shine as lights in the world (Phil 2:14–16).

In our lives, we will face both external challenges and internal conflicts. If we are not firmly rooted, we will be influenced or tempted by these things, leading us to fall.

ESTABLISH OUR ROOTS

A. Take Root in God and His word

1. God Is the One and only true God

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God.” (Jn 17:3a)

There is only One God, but we make the mistake of seeing God as being separate from His word. When we listen to a sermon, we forget that the message is the word of God—it is from God. God and His truth are inseparable—we cannot say that we believe in God but disagree with parts of the Bible.

In our evangelism work, we meet Christians from other denominations who believe that receiving the Holy Spirit and the correct water baptism are unnecessary—even despite the Bible’s instructions on these matters, including words spoken by Jesus Himself. How can they believe in Christ and not in His words?

We must be careful not to fall into this trap. If there is a biblical teaching that we cannot accept, then we are doubting God. How can we say that we honor and respect God if we do not follow His instructions? If we believe that

He is the One and only true God, we must accept that His word is the only truth.

2. Jesus Is the only Saviour

For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. (1 Tim 2:5–6)

Jesus is the only way to the Father (Jn 14:6). This is a teaching we need to hold on to firmly, and it is the only way to take root and be built up in faith.

3. The truth is found in the one true church

Through the church, God revealed mysteries hidden to previous generations (Eph 3:5, 10). The church is the pillar and foundation of the truth, built upon the apostles and prophets (1 Tim 3:15; Eph 2:19–20). Today, when we take root in God and His word and trust in Jesus as our Saviour, we cannot view the church as a separate entity. Once we submit to the truth given to the church and accept baptism, then we are grafted onto the body of Christ (1 Cor 10:17; 12:12–13).

“We need to renew our minds and take root in God, His word, and Christ our Saviour, through whom we reach the Father”

Therefore, the church is more than just a human organization. Spiritually, the church is perfect because it is formed by God’s complete truth—those who accept the truth become part of this church, those who do not believe drift away. If we do not take root in the truth and in Christ as our Saviour, we will be rooted in the wrong place. We may grow and have conviction in our beliefs, but those beliefs will be incorrect. Therefore, we need to renew our minds and take root in God, His word, and Christ our Saviour, through whom we reach the Father. On earth, Jesus Christ can only be found in the true church.

4. The truth remains unchanged

God and His word are not given to change; they will always remain the same (Ps 102:27; 119:89). Today, the true church of God has received the complete truth of salvation—we must hold on to this belief (Eph 3:10). If we do not take root in this understanding, even if we serve in the church, our foundation

will be wrong and we will not grow in faith.

B. Why Should We Take Root?

1. God’s will

It is God’s will to reveal Himself and His truth to humankind, and He desires for all to be saved (1 Tim 2:4; Mt 16:17). God chose to manifest His truth through the church so that we all have a chance to receive and accept His salvation. If God were not willing to reveal, we would have no hope of finding and understanding the things of God, regardless of how much effort we invest. There may be things we do not yet understand, but only through God, and by His will, can we search deeper and discover more profound spiritual teachings (Jn 16:13; 1 Cor 2:10–11).

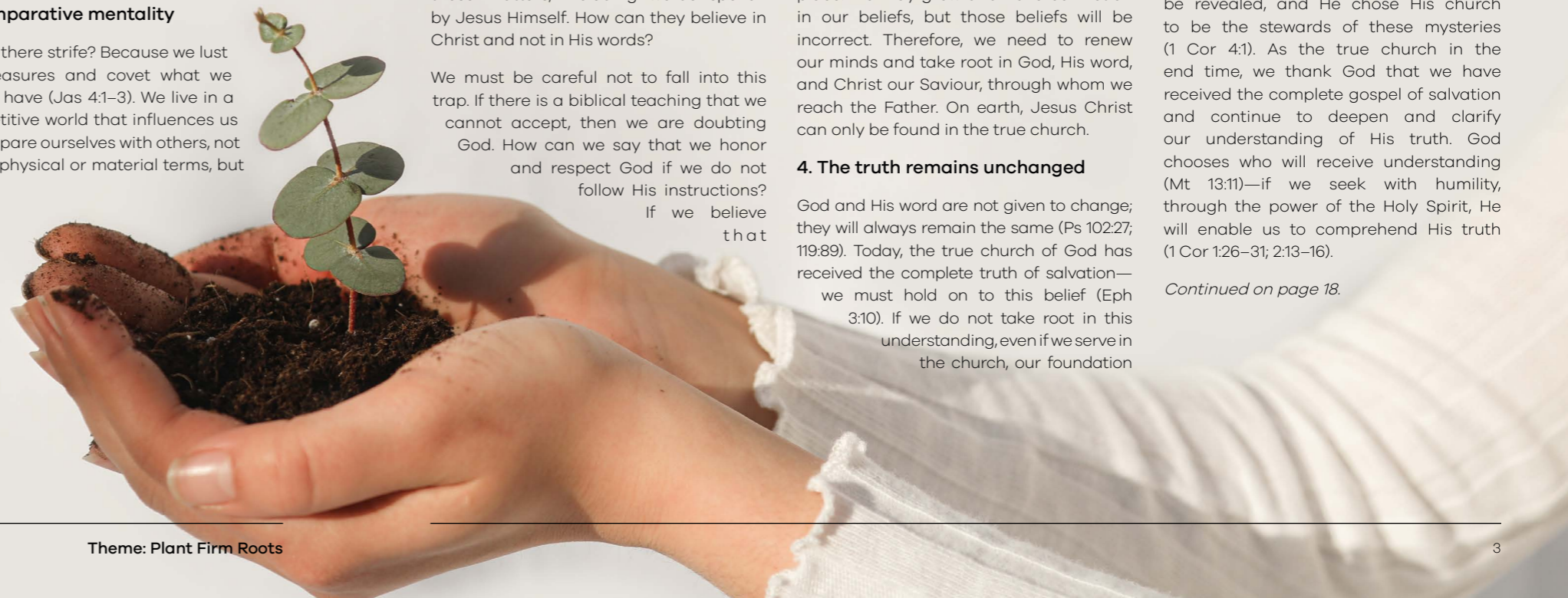
2. The Holy Spirit’s revelation

God has given us His Holy Spirit so that we can understand the things of God (1 Cor 2:11–13). The Holy Spirit teaches us so that we can comprehend and speak the things of God. The Holy Spirit is not only the guarantee of our heavenly inheritance (Eph 1:13–14) but the One who helps us take root and grow in God’s truth. For this reason, we should cherish the gift of the Holy Spirit and draw closer to God through prayer and meditation.

3. God’s plan

God desires to reveal His truth to humankind and has bestowed the Holy Spirit to enlighten and guide us in this endeavor, but God has His plan and schedule for when these revelations take place. Jesus highlighted this when He told His disciples they were blessed to see and hear things that the ancient saints had hoped to witness (Lk 10:23–24). God has His timing for when His mysteries would be revealed, and He chose His church to be the stewards of these mysteries (1 Cor 4:1). As the true church in the end time, we thank God that we have received the complete gospel of salvation and continue to deepen and clarify our understanding of His truth. God chooses who will receive understanding (Mt 13:11)—if we seek with humility, through the power of the Holy Spirit, He will enable us to comprehend His truth (1 Cor 1:26–31; 2:13–16).

Continued on page 18.



THE GARDEN OF PRAYER

Jachin—Singapore



MAKE TIME TO PRAY

Do we ever feel too busy to pray? There is always too much to do in a day, and we hurry to complete our to-do list. So when we kneel to pray, it is often a hurried prayer.

Time should not dictate our prayers. A lack of time isn't an excuse for not praying. God gives all of us twenty-four hours in a day—we need to make time to pray. Surely, we can sacrifice some screen time or give up some unnecessary leisure activities to pray.



DANIEL: COMMITMENT TO PRAYER

How did Daniel manage an impeccable prayer life with an impeccable work record (Dan 6:3–4, 10)? If we allow our time to dictate our prayers, then we will never have time to pray. There will always be time-consuming tasks that we have to fulfill. Time never dictated Daniel's prayer, it was prayer that dictated his time.

Daniel maintained his three-times-a-day prayer routine even when he became chief over all the wise men and had to manage others as well as his own tasks, and when he became a governor over the whole country and people were seeking his downfall. He even continued to pray when to do so would endanger his life. This is why the Bible said that Daniel had an excellent spirit—he was fully and truly committed to prayer.



JESUS: PRAY AS WE SERVE

Nothing happened in the work of Jesus without prayers (Mt 14:23; Mk 1:35; 6:46; Lk 9:18, 28; Jn 17). The more divine work Jesus did, the more He prayed. Often, the opposite is true for us. The more time we put into church work, the less time we have to pray. Why the difference? We have the misunderstanding that prayer is passive but the action is in the work. But prayer is not passive—it is active. Work before prayer emphasizes what we can do. Prayer before work emphasizes what God can do.

Rather than thinking that our lack of time is the cause for our lack of prayer, have we considered that it might be the other way round? Prayer creates time because we prioritize God, who will help us to do all that we need to do (Ps 127:1).



THE REALM OF PRAYER

The garden of prayer (Gen 3:8): Just as Adam and Eve talked with God in the garden of Eden, prayer is precious time spent alone with our Lord.

An offering of incense (Ps 141:2; Rev 5:8): Has the smoke of the incense of our prayers ascended before God?



EXAMINE OUR PRAYERS

If we have not yet received the Holy Spirit, have we lost heart? Or are we earnestly praying with faith, perseverance and humility, as when we first began (Lk 11:9–13)?

If we have already received the Holy Spirit, are we still praying as earnestly as before? Do we groan for our future inheritance, as Paul says, "earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven" (2 Cor 5:2)? Are we just satisfied to have received the Holy Spirit, or will we allow Him to work in us and help us in our weaknesses?

We tend to grow in our prayers from childhood to the time we receive the Holy Spirit. Have we stagnated since then? If we can grow in our prayers, we will grow spiritually and be firmly planted in our faith.



HOW SHOULD WE PRAY?

Philippians 4:6:
We can bring all our requests to God in prayer.

Ephesians 6:18:
Be watchful to pray with supplication and all perseverance.

Colossians 4:2:
Pray with thanksgiving.

Colossians 4:3:
Pray that God opens the door for His work to be done.

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes from RE Students' Bible Camp—Singapore



THE BASICS OF BIBLE STUDY

DESCRIPTION

The word of God is an integrated whole; we should understand the “big picture” before progressing to the particulars. Grasping the complete picture helps us to make sense of the details, so each part of the Bible can be seen in relation to the whole. It is like looking down on the earth from space and gradually zooming in to find the street where you live. Having a sense of the Bible's overall story makes your devotional reading much more inspiring and enjoyable.

OBSERVATION

- Read the passage several times and soak up every detail like a sponge.
- Facts (identify who, what, where, when, why, and how.)
- Correlation (trace the lines of thought, grasp the message as a whole.)
- Structure (note down clusters of related material, follow progression, mark out repetitions.)

ANALYSIS

- Understand the meaning of the words.
 - Read them in the context of verses before and after.
 - Look at the paragraph or chapter as a whole.
- Sectionalize the passage.
 - Themes, structure, paragraphs.
- Draw conclusions about the message.

CONCLUSION

Draw concrete points from the passage or book, and the role it plays in the overall Bible story.

APPLICATION

- Meditate on the passage.
- Digest the message.
- Relate your reading to your daily living.

	DEVOTIONAL READING	HERE'S AN EXAMPLE OF HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE THROUGH DEVOTIONAL READING, USING RUTH CHAPTER 1
DESCRIPTION	Devotional reading is reading the Bible meditatively, verse by verse. We read at a slower pace, so shorter passages are ideal. We glean the fruitful fields of the Bible diligently. This opens our hearts to see the potential plots of ground that we could excavate—areas we could study in further depth. Such study is immensely rewarding, but requires longer hours and greater effort.	
BIBLE PASSAGE	Read the passage several times to get the overall outline, then note down any important points. Group related points and summarize each section.	From Bethlehem to Moab (1:1–5) The return to Judah (1:6–7) Orpah and Ruth (1:8–18) Is this Naomi? (1:19–22)
OBSERVATION	As you read verse by verse, record anything that stimulates deeper thinking, and note any related verses in the same passage.	This took place during the period of the judges (1:1). Naomi's family moved to Moab because there was a famine in Canaan (1:1). They were Ephrathites (1:2). Ephrathah is an old name for Bethlehem (Mic 5:2). After their father's death, the sons took Moabite wives, and the family lived in Moab for ten years (1:3–4).
QUESTIONS	Write down any questions that come to mind. Allow yourself time to consider them later.	A. Why was there a famine when Bethlehem was supposed to be a house of bread? (<i>Bet Lehem</i> is Hebrew for “House of Bread.”) B. Why did they go to Moab and remain there? How long did they stay, and was this planned? C. Why were Naomi's daughters-in-law intent on following her back to Bethlehem? D. Why did Naomi insist that her daughters-in-law return to their own people and their own gods? Isn't it better for them to go with her to the true God? E. How long did the famine last?
ANSWERS	Record all possible answers, and narrow them down later when things become clear. You may not be able to answer every question.	A. Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord (Judg 2:11); famine is an affliction from God, to turn the hearts of the people back to Him (1 Kgs 8:35–40). B. Elimelech took his wife and two sons on a long and arduous journey across mountainous terrain and the Jordan River to reach Moab. The Bible says that they went to “dwell” there (1:1), so they indeed planned to stay for an indefinite amount of time. It is ironic that his name means “God is my King,” because during the time of tribulation, Elimelech moved away from God, left the land of his inheritance, and sought a more comfortable life in the country of the enemy. C. Over ten years, they had formed a close and loving relationship with Naomi, who was, as her name suggests, “sweet” and pleasant, as well as beloved in her hometown (1:8–9, 19–20). They had also come to know the true God through her (1:16). D. Naomi knew she would be unable to support her daughters-in-law, especially because she could not bear any more sons for them to marry (1:11–13). E. Naomi had dwelt in Moab for at least ten years before she heard that “the LORD had visited His people by giving them bread” (1:6).
CROSS-REFERENCES	Internal—how the verse relates to the passage, chapter, or book. External—elsewhere in the Bible that parallels, contrasts, corresponds to, or illustrates the verse.	Deuteronomy 25:5–10: According to the Mosaic Law, if a woman was left widowed and without a son, one of her husband's brothers would be responsible for providing her with a son. Deuteronomy 28:11, 15, 18: Obey the Lord, and the land will be fruitful; disobey, and there will be famine. Deuteronomy 23:3a: “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter the assembly of the LORD.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moabites were not allowed to join the congregation of Israel. • They were the most Gentile of Gentiles. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God has standards for His people, but He also has ways to save even the most Gentile of Gentiles.
CONCLUSION	Ask yourself what themes are discussed, or what the main message of the passage is. Give a title to the passage. Then draw conclusions from the discussions of each section or paragraph.	The Book of Ruth touches on issues of individual faith and the faith of a family, including various concepts of moral ethics. The theme is redemption—clinging on to the true God and becoming part of God's people. A Christian's regression starts with drifting away from God's blessings and abundance (1:1–5). God will take care of His people even during times of famine and tribulation; His care and protection will not change with time and space (1:6–7). The correct choice may need to be coupled with some personal sacrifices. A follower of God cannot be double minded (1:8–18). One will lose happiness if one departs from God. The realization of one being in the state of Mara (“bitterness”) is the first step towards Naomi (“sweetness”) (1:19–22).
APPLICATION	The Bible is not given for information but for transformation. After you have meditated on the Bible passage, write down how you can apply the teachings to your life. Ask yourself: Is there an example for me to follow? Is there a command for me to obey? Is there a warning for me to heed? Is there something I should improve or pray about? To ensure that you act on what you learn, your application must be written with specific, actionable steps, and a way to check your progress.	When presented with choices today, we should follow the example of Ruth. Even after Naomi implored her to turn back, Ruth chose to stay with her mother-in-law, who owned nothing to her name. But at the same time, she also chose a God who has everything. Fearing and serving God today is a conscious choice we and our families have to make. Jesus has told us that no one can serve two masters. We will love one and hate the other (Mt 6:24). Naomi renamed herself Mara. When bad things happen in our lives, we may also be discouraged and think that God taken away His blessings and made our life bitter. In actuality, the opposite was happening. God had an amazing plan (Rom 8:28). Let's not be too quick to judge our own situations as “Mara”.

POP CULTURE AND FAITH

Sen Kee Ho—Singapore

WHAT IS POP CULTURE?

1. Popular culture (“pop culture”) is the set of practices, beliefs and cultural products that are dominant in a particular society.
2. It has mass appeal and accessibility, and permeates the everyday life of the public.
3. Pop culture is often seen as a lower form of artistic expression. Common categories are entertainment, sports, fashion, technology, and slang.

Ashley Crossman, “Sociological Definition of Popular Culture,” ThoughtCo., last modified December 9, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/popular-culture-definition-3026453>.



IMPACT OF POP CULTURE?

POSITIVE

NEGATIVE

POSITIVE

- Brings people together across geographical, social, and generational lines.
- Builds and strengthens bonds between people who are into similar things, e.g., K Pop, environmental issues.
- Diverse representation in the media helps people to be more accepting towards marginalized groups.
- Tools for raising awareness and bringing to light various social issues and injustices.

POSITIVE EXAMPLES

1. Previously unknown individuals whose stories or activism inspire positive change in society.
2. Different civil and political movements have used online platforms to increase the awareness of injustices carried out against underrepresented and disempowered groups around the world.
3. Celebrities and famous individuals speaking out to educate the public about COVID-19.
4. People have come to know about Christianity through popular Christian music.

NEGATIVE

- Just as pop culture can be used to spread good, it can be used to spread bad.
- As pop culture becomes more globalized and homogenized, thousands of local cultures and traditions are being supplanted and erased. Sadly, local youths will see their own rich cultures as inferior to the behemoth of global pop culture.

NEGATIVE EXAMPLES

1. Children and young teens being exposed to inappropriate content before they are mentally and emotionally ready.
2. The depiction of violence, blood and gore can have serious psychological repercussions, especially on young children.
3. The normalization of ungodly behavior, e.g., the softening stance towards drugs, pre-marital sex, abortion, LGBTQ issues.
4. The difficulty of distinguishing reality from fantasy, and how the world really is compared to how it is presented in fictional universes.

WHY TALK?

WWW.POP-CULTURE.COM

The way we interact with pop culture reflects who we are and our thoughts and values.

The music we listen to reveals what kind of lyrics and rhythms excite us. The books we read reveal what type of stories and themes we enjoy. The clothes we wear express our values and the identity we wish to project.

Pop culture has real effects on our everyday life and how we see ourselves in relation to others. The culture we consume shapes our hearts and minds.

The ideas and values within pop culture permeate our lives, both consciously and subconsciously.

In a media-saturated society, the books we read, the movies we watch, the clothes we wear, and the music we listen to—what we consume, enjoy, admire, or dislike—are heavily influenced by what’s TRENDING.

But are these TRENDS against our faith and biblical teachings?

- Are they as harmless or mindless as what we perceive them to be?
- Do we unthinkingly accept them, not discerning which ones are contrary to Christian values?
- Do we seamlessly blend in, or are we distinctly different from people of the world?

Besides discerning what’s right and wrong, and not engaging in unwholesome pop culture:

- How can we engage in pop culture that helps us grow in faith?
- How can we engage in pop culture that lets others know about Jesus Christ?

WHY TALK ABOUT POP CULTURE?

IMPACT OF POP CULTURE ON OUR FAITH

IS POP CULTURE BAD FOR OUR FAITH?

Pop culture is ever-present in our daily lives. Some of it is positive or neutral, while much of it runs contrary to our Christian faith.

“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.” (Jn 17:15–16)

As Christians in this world, we should not hide ourselves and become hermits. Yet, the Lord Jesus tells us to preserve ourselves and be set apart from this world.

When exposed to and engaged with pop culture, we should in every way

[Cast] down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. (2 Cor 10:5)

We learn and make a conscious effort to discern, muster moral courage to reject what is wrong, accept what is good, and stand firm for what is right.

! HOW SHOULD A CHRISTIAN RESPOND TO POP CULTURE?

ILLUMINATE

- Matthew 5:13–16: Jesus wants us to be the “salt” and “light” of society, which flavors and preserves His social order.

DISCERN

- Distinguish good from evil (Heb 5:14).
- Face the trials of living in a culture that is increasingly hostile to biblical teaching: ask God to give us wisdom (Jas 1:5).
- Use biblical principles and common sense to judge how to engage with today’s culture.

ENGAGE

- Identify the good aspects of popular culture and use these as a bridge to God’s truth.
- Acts 17: Paul studied the religious beliefs of his day. In his speech before the Athenians, he quoted from their own pagan poets.
- He discerned what was true within their pagan worldview and used that as a starting point to present what they had been missing concerning God, man, and salvation.

HOW DID PAUL ENGAGE?

PAUL

- Paul was greatly distressed, yet impressed by their religiosity (Acts 17:16, 22).
- He acknowledges that they are religious, but do not know Who they are worshipping (Acts 17:22–23).
- He explained the concept that God is not a thing created by human hands. God has absolute authority and has determined that man should seek Him (Acts 17:26–28).
- Paul offered proof by stating the resurrection of Christ and judgment after death (Acts 17:31).
- He concluded by saying God forgives their ignorance, and they should come to know Him.

CONCLUSION

As society evolves, so do the trends of the world. The trends may change, but the motivation behind each lies at the core of human nature. The Bible does not explicitly name and state which trends we can follow. But God gave us timeless principles, and the Holy Spirit, to help us navigate through life’s journey.

Q&A

FILE EDIT VIEW SEARCH

Q1) Can I listen to Christian pop songs?
A) The Bible gives no clear guidance on listening to Christian pop music. There is nothing wrong with consuming popular Christian media, but there are a few things worth noting:

Q&A

Q2) Can I read fan fiction?
A) Fan fiction is written by fans of popular books and media, in which they imagine alternative storylines based on their own fantasies. Some are innocent and harmless stories, while some are violent, dark, and sexual in nature, diverging far from their original source material. Many indulge in fan fiction, and fiction in general, to imagine what it would be like to live in an alternative reality, to lead a different life. Being in the flesh, we constantly struggle with our sinful nature. Here are a few questions to reflect on, which also apply to the general pop culture and media we consume:

1. What effect does it have on our mind, desires, and spiritual life?
2. Does it bring us closer to God?
3. Does it pull us away from our Christian values?

- Are we drawn to the song because of a sense of euphoria?
- Are people attracted to the faith because the high energy music makes them feel close to God?
- Some songs contain false teachings, and the churches that produce them promote unbiblical beliefs and practices.
- Much of Christian pop culture is intertwined and highly influenced by the mainstream pop culture of the world.

ALERT!

Our guiding principle is not: “Is this permissible?” Instead, we should ask, “Does it draw me closer to God, or pull me away from Him? Does it edify man and glorify God?”

YES NO

TAKE ROOT AND GROW

Fu Ming Tse—Taichung, Taiwan

We have witnessed seismic shifts in society, changing lifestyles, and the clash of ideologies in the last few decades. These pressures have greatly challenged Christian values, leading to problems within the community of faith, such as the creeping in of deviant behavior and believers going astray. We must thus be rooted in faith and pursue spiritual growth to help us discern right from wrong, navigate the trade-offs between sacrifice and gain, know the truth of the Bible, and establish correct life goals. Positioning ourselves properly in these fast, ever-changing, and chaotic times enables us to adapt and stand firm in the truth.

HAVE A ROOTED FAITH

In the Gospel of Matthew, the Lord Jesus told the parable of a sower. Among the seeds sown:

“Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up, they were scorched, and because they had no root, they withered away.”
(Mt 13:5–6)

The Lord Jesus explained that these represent those who hear the word and receive it with joy. But without roots, they only endure for a short while. They immediately stumble when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word (Mt 13:20–21). As the Lord’s disciples, we must be deeply rooted in the faith before we can become sturdy, grow, and bear fruit.

Receiving the word of God, understanding the mystery of the truth, and experiencing God’s precious salvation will produce unwavering faith. The outcome of this faith is the salvation of our souls (1 Pet 1:9). If the seedlings do not take root and, thus, wither, the efforts invested in the sowing will be wasted. God once warned that His “people [were] destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos 4:6). We must have a rooted faith in our Christian lives and service to God; we ought to set the following goals in our pursuit of a rooted faith:

1. Be Rooted in Christ

In the history of the church, there was an apostle named Paul. Initially, he did not know Jesus and persecuted those who believed in Him (Acts 9:1–5). Subsequently called to believe in the Lord, Paul declared how excellent it is to know Christ (Phil 3:8). To him, neither tribulations nor distress, nor persecution, nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor sword could separate him from the love of Christ (Rom 8:35–39).

Moreover, Paul did not consider his own life when proclaiming God’s gospel of grace and fulfilling the mission entrusted by the Lord (Acts 22:22–24). He knew, believed, and loved Jesus deeply. He rooted his entire life in Christ and was so firmly grounded that he lived and died for the Lord (Rom 14:7–8). Paul writes, “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:11).

The Lord Jesus performed many miracles on earth, including feeding five thousand with just a few loaves of bread. However, when He started to talk about the bread of life, many people stopped following Him. At that moment, the Lord Jesus asked His disciples, “Do you also want to go away?” Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (Jn 6:66–69).

These two examples remind us that faith should not be rooted in material things, interpersonal relationships, or physical healing (Lk 17:11–19). Instead, it must be rooted in Christ.

2. Be Rooted in the Church

The church is the body of Christ (Eph 1:22–23). Redeemed by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus (Acts 20:28), the church is where God manifests His manifold wisdom and executes His saving grace (Eph 3:10). He established the end-time true church through the promised Holy Spirit, revealed the truth of salvation, and gathered His people from all nations, all tribes, all places, and all peoples; they shall flow to this spiritual Mount Zion (Acts 2; Isa 2:2–4).

The True Jesus Church is the true vine that

the Lord Jesus spoke of (Jn 15:1–8). The Lord Jesus said:

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.”
(Jn 15:5–6)

The Lord Jesus specifically emphasized the importance of being united in Him. If we abide in Him always, He will abide in us, enabling us to be fruitful and enjoy an abundant spiritual life. Rooted in the Vine, we have a robust stem, ensuring that we remain strong and sturdy. The church is the house of God and the gate of heaven (Gen 28:17). She has the abidance of God and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We ought to preserve ourselves in the love of God and be rooted in the church, the house of God.

3. Be Rooted in the Truth

The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim 3:15); the truth is the foundation of our faith. Paul urges us to be steadfast in this faith, not moving away from the gospel preached to every creature under heaven (Col 1:23).

Hold fast to the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.
(2 Tim 1:13–14)

As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.
(Col 2:6–7)

Paul reminds us that the Spirit expressly says that some will depart from the faith in latter times, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons (1 Tim 4:1). The day of the Lord’s coming will not arrive unless the falling away comes first—when the son of perdition is revealed. Therefore, our minds should not be shaken or troubled

(2 Thess 2:1–12). We should earnestly heed the gospel we have received, lest we drift away, corrupted by strange doctrines. Let our hearts be strengthened by grace, so that we can watch and stand fast in the faith (Heb 2:1; 13:9; 1 Cor 16:13).

GROW SPIRITUALLY

The Bible describes the man who trusts in the Lord as a tree planted by the waters, spreading its roots by the river. It will fear neither heat nor drought; it will continue to thrive and bear fruit (Jer 17:8). Psalm 1 echoes this sentiment, adding that the one who meditates day and night on the law of the Lord shall be like such a verdant tree, whose leaves shall not wither. If we are to grow and be rooted in faith, we must rely on God and His word.

1. Have the Right Heart

In the parable of the sower, the Lord Jesus spoke about four types of heart (Mt 13:3–23). First, some seeds fell by the wayside, and the birds came and devoured them. This refers to the word in people’s hearts being taken away by the evil one because they do not understand. Some seeds fell on stony places where the earth was shallow, springing up quickly, but withering in the sun. This is when the word fails to take root in people’s hearts—such faith is like a house built on sandy ground, which is then washed away when the winds and rains come. Some seeds fell among thorns; these are the ones whose hearts have been deceived by the cares and the riches of this world. Impeded by such cares, their spiritual lives do not grow. The final category of seeds fell on good soil and bear fruit to a hundred-fold, sixty-fold, and thirty-fold. These are those who hear the word with a noble and good heart, keep it, and bear fruit with patience (Lk 8:15). As Paul says, “I know whom I have believed (2 Tim 1:12). Those who “mix the word with faith” (Heb 4:2) will hear the word and understand it.

2. From Milk to Solid Food

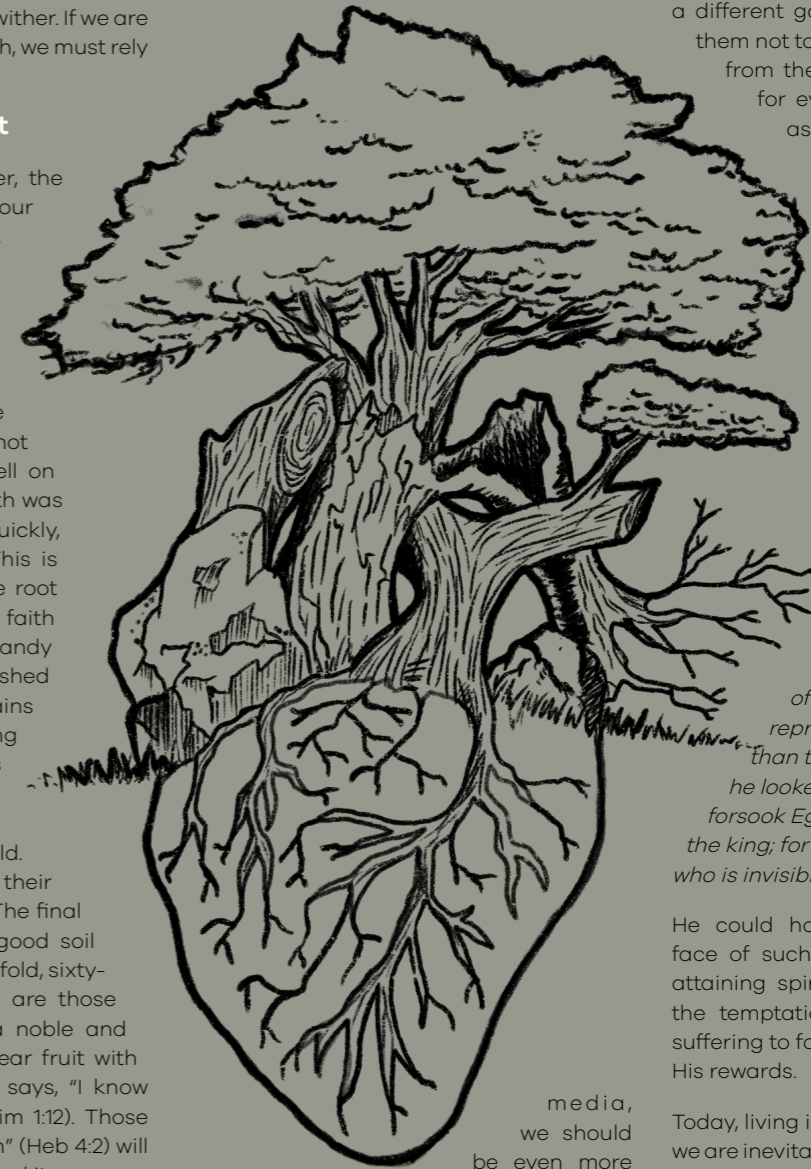
The Bible says:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of

righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.
(Heb 5:12–14)

Paul regarded the church in Corinth as babes in Christ who could only take milk and not solid food. They behaved as carnal men, affected by envy, strife, and divisions (1 Cor 3:1–3).

Today, the combination of technology and the havoc wrought by the rampant pandemic has created a volatile situation. With the plethora of information disseminated through the internet and a range of



media, we should be even more cautious and discerning to guard ourselves. If we are not watchful, the media we consume could become a snare, letting bitterness take root and confusing us in our faith. Ultimately, we may be deceived.

3. Maturing to Adulthood

Maturing into adulthood is the natural manifestation of growth. This growth

process requires care and cultivation to facilitate psychological maturity and spiritual progress. Paul describes this as the time when:

[W]e all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.
(Eph 4:13–14)

With full maturity, we will be able to discern truth from deception. In Paul’s time, some believers were turning away from Christ to a different gospel (Gal 1:6–7). He warned them not to let their minds be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light to deceive people (2 Cor 11:3–4, 14). Therefore, beware of those preaching another Jesus, a different spirit, or a different gospel, no matter how pleasing it may sound.

Moses is a good example of spiritual maturity:

By faith, when he came of age, Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he looked to the reward. By faith, he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.
(Heb 11:24–27)

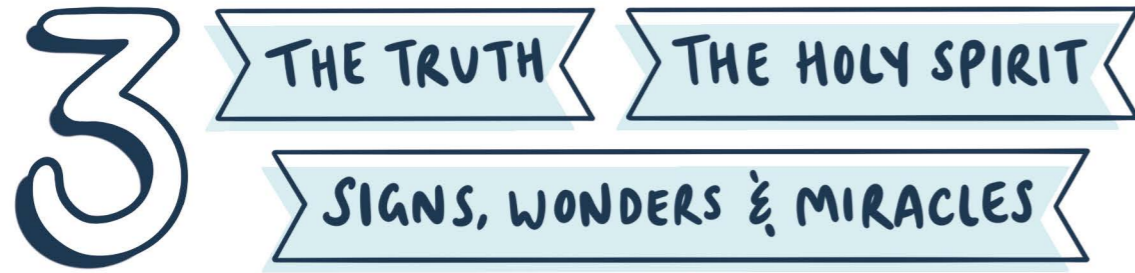
He could hold onto his values in the face of such great temptations only by attaining spiritual maturity, looking past the temptations of Egypt and his own suffering to focus on the invisible God and His rewards.

Today, living in a rapidly changing society, we are inevitably impacted by its pluralistic ideals and multiculturalism. Although we have little control over our environment, we can still preserve ourselves from getting lost in this great spinning wheel of our times. This is because Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8). For our faith is the victory that has overcome the world (1 Jn 5:4), and we will become partakers of Christ if we hold steadfastly to the beginning of our confidence to the end (Heb 3:14).

ONE TRUE CHURCH

ATTRIBUTES OF THE TRUE CHURCH

PHILIP SHEE, SINGAPORE



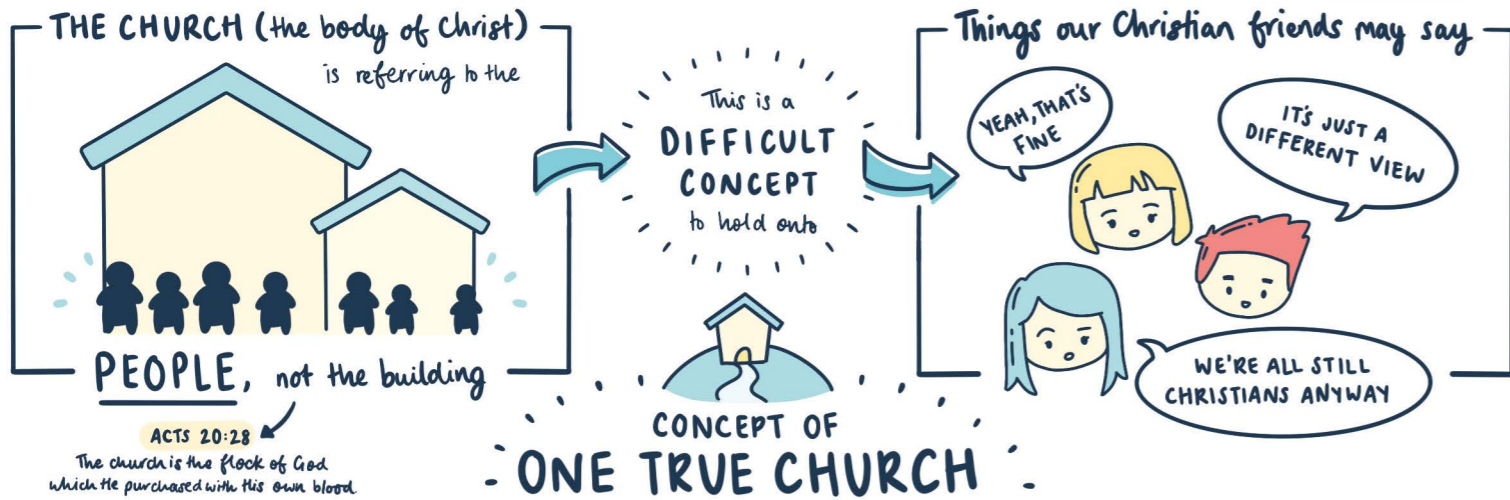
The three we often mention are the elementary understanding

Now we should go onto a higher level of understanding



Consider this verse:

“And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” (EPH 1:22-23)



ACTS 20:28
The church is the flock of God which He purchased with His own blood

⊘ is not scary ⊘ is not to be shunned ⊙ is absolute biblical truth

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” (EPH 4:4-6)

'ONE BODY, ONE FAITH'

HOW DOES THIS CONCEPT MANIFEST IN REAL LIFE?

Some may say

“Let different church denominations be different parts of the body”

BUT IS THIS TRUE?

EPH 4:4-6
Other than the body, this verse also talks about ONENESS

Do all churches have the SAME SPIRIT?

ACTS 2:4
Evidenced by the speaking of tongues

We must have the RIGHT BELIEF about receiving the Holy Spirit

ACTS 8:14-17
Receiving the Holy Spirit is separate from the point of belief and baptism

“For 'whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' How then shall they call on Him whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written:

'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things' ” (ROM 10:13-16)

“How shall they preach unless they are sent?”

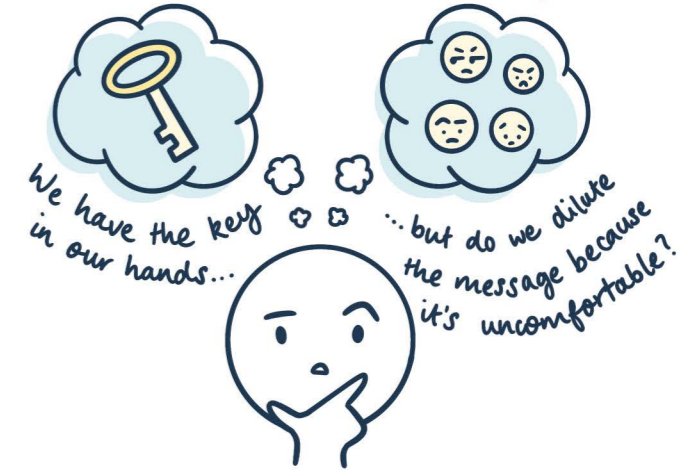
If preachers aren't sent, they have NO AUTHORITY to preach the gospel for people to hear, believe, and call on the Lord.

WHO IS SENT TODAY?

We must first be CONVICTED & COURAGEOUS to hold on to the end.

Some may say “The church is 'truer' than other churches”

NO - ONLY - TRUE CHURCH



OUR COMMISSION

HOW THE GOSPEL, HOLY SPIRIT, & BAPTISM ARE INTERTWINED

If we don't stand firm and have conviction in our beliefs, we would not:

- ▶ stand firm & protect the truth
- ▶ be compelled by love to save others

When some deviated, the apostles wrote letters to CORRECT THEM



But later in history...

HERESIES crept in, and the church DETERIORATED



DURING THE APOSTOLIC TIME, THERE WAS ONLY ONE CHURCH



If all churches had the same one faith (set of beliefs and doctrines) there would not be so many different churches

LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY

Today, many try to preach the gospel. The question is:



These are the words of **JESUS**

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."
(LK 4:18-19)

HOW WAS HE ANOINTED?
He was sent through the Holy Spirit who was upon Him

BUT WHOSE DUTY IS IT TO CARRY ON THE WORK?



Before Jesus' ascension, He told His disciples to **WAIT FOR THE PROMISE**

WHAT PROMISE?
WAIT FOR WHOM?

WAIT FOR THE **HOLY SPIRIT** TO COME

WHY WAIT?

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."
(ACTS 1:8)

WHAT ELSE DID JESUS SAY?

The one who carries out the mission of preaching the gospel

The continuation of the physical presence of Jesus to manifest the glory of God

To make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of Jesus is a commission on our shoulders
MT 28:19 ACTS 2:38

Not just given to full-time ministers, it is given to the whole church.

THE POWER & AUTHORITY TO GO OUT TO PREACH IS THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

A critical and mandatory step was **TO BAPTISE**

"Repent, and let everyone of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."
(ACTS 2:38)

FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN

Sin needs to be washed away so that we can become members of His body.

BELIEVING → **BAPTISM** MK 16:16 Baptism always follows and has to follow believing.

When the church was sent to preach, it wasn't just to proclaim the gospel

This is why being sent by the Holy Spirit is so important

Only the church sent by the Holy Spirit has the authority to administer baptism for the remission of sins.

WHO CAN ADMINISTER BAPTISM?

"So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."
(JN 20:21-23)

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

VERSES LOOKED AT
ROM 10:13-16 LK 4:18-19 ACTS 1:8 ACTS 2:38 JN 20:21-23



"This is He who came by water and blood— Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three who bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one."
(1JN 5:6-8)

NO HOLY SPIRIT? → NO AUTHORITY TO INVOKE THE BLOOD OF JESUS

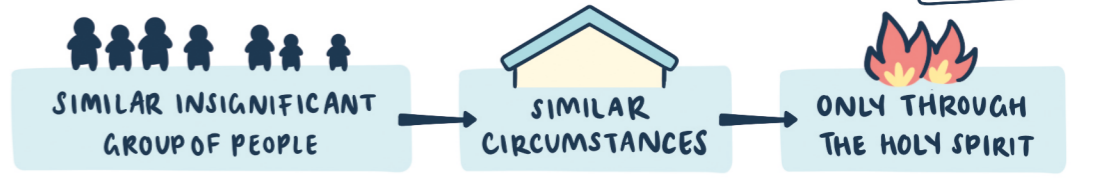
THE CHURCH WAS ESTABLISHED BY GOD

THE TRUE JESUS CHURCH IS ATTRIBUTED TO NO HUMAN BEING

A lot of churches in the world were started by human founders because of their theological thoughts, political reasons, and so on.

JUST LIKE ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST

The **HOLY SPIRIT** was poured down on insignificant people. Through the Holy Spirit, they came to understand the complete truth.



THE ONE TRUE CHURCH HAS BEEN GIVEN THE TRUTH

Apart from the administration of baptism, the church is also **given understanding** of the manifold wisdom of God.

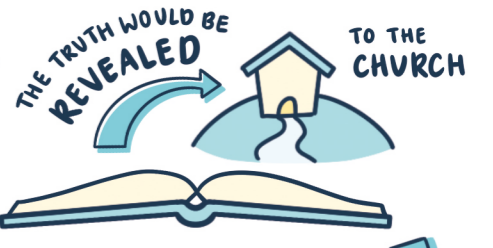
"To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places."
(EPH 3:10)

"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come."
(JN 16:13)

THE HOLY SPIRIT GUIDES US TO UNDERSTAND THE TRUTH

JN 14:17, 26

When Jesus was about to depart, He told His disciples not to worry because the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, would come to teach them all things and bring to remembrance all things Jesus said to them.



NOT RANDOM NEW THINGS

THE TRUTH THAT HAS ALREADY BEEN REVEALED

THE SPIRIT COMES TO GUIDE US INTO ALL TRUTH

Since the church has received the Holy Spirit, the truth has been revealed to the church.

TRUE JESUS CHURCH IS THE ONE TRUE CHURCH

Therefore is the **ONLY CHURCH** that has: the **AUTHORITY** to **ADMINISTER BAPTISM** & the **AUTHORITY** to **PREACH** the **COMPLETE GOSPEL**

Because she is the only church that has received the **HOLY SPIRIT**

We are the **only ones** who have been sent. It may be an uncomfortable topic, but we should realize the weight on our shoulders. May God help us.

BE ROOTED IN CHRIST (PART 2): GROW IN CHRIST

Michael Chan—Leicester, UK

SPIRITUAL CULTIVATION

We have established that God's plan and revelation are central to building our faith, but the human part of the equation is that we must pursue to learn before God bestows us understanding. Just as a plant needs suitable soil and conditions to thrive, we must cultivate the ideal spiritual environment where our faith can grow. Here are some requirements:

A. Be Willing to Live a Holy Life

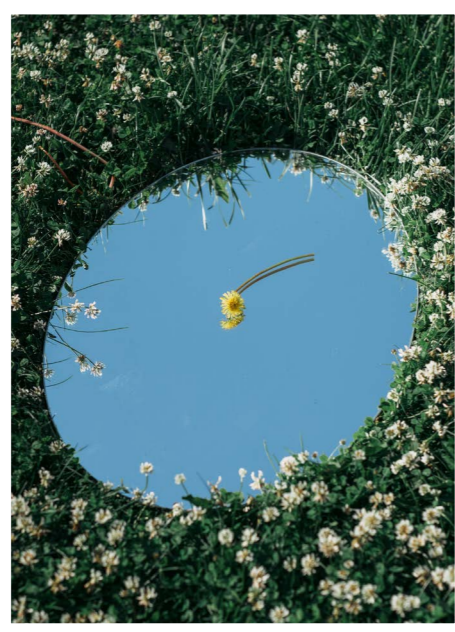
After Daniel had recorded and sealed a prophecy of the end time, he asked the angels to explain further the things that would come to pass (Dan 12:9–10). However, they responded that it was not yet time for God to reveal the meaning of the words. To whom would they be revealed? To those who are pure and wise. If we pursue a holy life, pleasing and acceptable to God, God will give us knowledge of the truth (2 Tim 3:1–7). Today, we must be willing and determined to live a holy life—one in which we avoid all wrong and defilement, in word, attitude, and action.

B. Take Action to Practice the Truth

Then He said to them, "Take heed what you hear. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear, more will be given. For whoever has, to him more will be given; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him."
(Mk 4:24–25)

"But if we only receive God's word for knowledge and not life application, then we will be unable to grasp it"

The "measure" here refers not to the standard by which we measure others but the measure of our mentality and heart towards God's word. Depending on how we receive, accept and use the word of God, He will bless us to the same degree. If we desire to learn and practice God's word, God will give us understanding (Jn 7:16–17). But if we only receive God's word for knowledge and not life application, then we will be unable to grasp it. Hence, Jesus



likens those who hear and do His word to the man who builds his house on the rock (Mt 7:24). Those who practice God's word will gain blessings and enlightenment to appreciate God's truth further.

We see this happening to the disciples in the Book of Acts: their understanding of God's word significantly increased because they were constantly practicing God's word, so God brought things to their remembrance. For example, John recounts Jesus' prophecy of the temple being destroyed and raised in three days—after

Jesus' resurrection, they realized He had been speaking about the temple of His body (Jn 2:21–22).

C. Wait Patiently for the Master

We often become frustrated when we read the Bible and cannot understand it immediately. We may become impatient. The desire to comprehend God's word is important, but the need for instant gratification could lead us to give up altogether. This is why the Bible tells us to wait for God (Ps 130:5). If we study His word patiently and persistently, with a heart of trust in God, then He will reveal everything in His time.

D. Believe in Christ and His Church

To be firmly rooted in the correct place, we must firmly believe and hold on to the correct doctrines (Jn 17:6–8), including believing in the true church as the steward of those doctrines (1 Cor 4:1; Col 1:25). Are we able to practice, preach and defend the teachings of the church without question? Since God is the One who bestows understanding, if we let doubts creep in, then our understanding of God's word and the truth will gradually decrease. If this continues, we may succumb to self-deception—we will falsely believe that we have a good level of understanding and will stray from the true gospel. Hence, we have to believe wholeheartedly in the true church and the complete truth of salvation.

E. Meditate and Reflect on God's Word

Whether studying the Bible or listening to sermons, we must reflect and meditate on the word we have received (Ps 1:1–2). Only by doing this will we have a deeper and broader understanding of the Scriptures, beyond the superficial. We will begin to understand how certain passages relate to other parts and teachings of the Bible. Meditation on God's word is why the saints of old had such deep relationships with

God. They could persevere no matter their challenges because they could access a deeper appreciation and understanding of God's word and will. We must do the same today.

F. Discuss to Learn

Malachi talks about how God listens to those who discuss God's word among themselves (Mal 3:16–18). Matthew also describes how the disciples asked Jesus to explain a parable to them (Mt 13:11). We should do the same—discuss the word of God to learn from one another. Having the humility to ask questions when we do not understand, and to listen, is important.

G. Proclaim and Cultivate

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."
(Josh 1:8)

"As we proclaim God's word, we must practice and believe what God has taught us"

Proclaiming God's word is not limited to preaching to non-believers. We must preach to and share God's word with our fellow brethren during classes, fellowships, and social situations. As we proclaim God's word, we must practice and believe what God has taught us. We will naturally reflect deeply on God's word and gain a deeper understanding through this process. This is why the ministers of God have great insight into the Scriptures—the more they preach, the more they are inspired by the Holy Spirit to recall and comprehend God's word, building on what they already know.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Although the roots of a plant or tree are hidden, you can usually estimate how deep and wide they stretch by how tall and large the plant has grown above ground. A small plant, such as a bonsai tree, will remain small unless it is transferred into a larger pot where its roots can spread. For some trees, the roots are at least a one-to-one ratio to the height, keeping them nourished and standing securely no matter how strongly the wind blows.

And the remnant who have escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward.
(Isa 37:31)

How do we know when our faith has taken root and is growing? Isaiah tells us the proof is when we bear fruit. How can we go about cultivating a fruit-bearing faith? Today, if we want to grow strong and manifest spiritual fruit, we must root ourselves deeply in God's will, not our own. When our roots are established, we will see the fruit in how our attitude and our prayers are transformed. So, what kind of prayers will a rooted faith produce?

A. Fruitful Prayers

1. Physical versus Spiritual

...From men of the world who have their portion in this life, And whose belly You fill with Your hidden treasure. They are satisfied with children, And leave the rest of their possession for their babes. As for me, I will see your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.
(Ps 17:14–15)

These verses talk about two types of believers. The first are those who are satisfied with things of the world. They are content with physical blessings—health, wealth, comfort, and security—and have no desire to pursue any further. The second type seek not for physical blessings but for spiritual ones. They desire a close relationship with God, to be more like Him, and to one day be with Him in eternity.

"We are blessed to have a loving heavenly Father whom we can approach for grace, healing in times of sickness, and guidance in our education or career"

Do we only pray for material things in our prayers, or have we started praying for spiritual matters? If we are rooted and growing spiritually, we will focus less on our physical lives and more on our spiritual lives. We are blessed to have a loving heavenly Father whom we can approach for grace, healing in times of sickness, and guidance in our education or career. But to mature in faith, we must seek the things above (Col 3:2; Mt 6:33) and realize that prayer is a time of spiritual cultivation and deep communion with God. Each morning, we can pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit and for God to help us fulfill His will in all we do. We are no longer thinking of what God can do for us, but what we can do for the Lord—how to be more pleasing to Him.

2. Self versus Others

Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.
(Phil 2:4)

We are told that we should mind our own business, but the above verse instructs us otherwise. If we pray only for our personal matters, then we are not progressing spiritually. When we start praying for the personal matters of others, it is an indication that we are growing and becoming more selfless. This goes beyond praying for our close friends and family because we love them and are personally affected by what happens to them. But when we pray for someone outside our family and close social circle, especially those we do not know, we are truly altruistic in sacrificing our time and effort for their benefit. Such prayers show spiritual maturity.

3. "Hear me" versus "Teach me"

I am Your servant; Give me understanding, That I may know Your testimonies.
(Ps 119:125)

We want the Lord to hear our prayers, but do we ask to seek a response? Instead of only seeking God's blessings, we should also seek His teaching. The above psalmist asked God for understanding so that he could know His testimonies, which are God's commandments. We should all pursue to reach this level of spiritual growth, where we seek to be taught and enlightened by God.

4. "Lord, love me" versus "Help me to love You more"

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died.
(2 Cor 5:14)

When we are first planted with the seed of faith, we are very sensitive to God's love. Every drop of grace causes us to sprout taller, and our prayers reflect the desire to be loved by God. But as we mature and learn to appreciate His sacrificial love, we are inspired to return that love. We want to love Him more and love others as He has loved us (Jn 15:12). Christ's love compels us to devote ourselves to serving others (1 Jn 3:16; 4:17). So in our prayers, we need to reflect and ask God to help us understand His love so that we can truly take root and grow.

Continued on page 42.

TAKE ACTION

ZHI XIAN—SINGAPORE



PHYSICAL VIRUS

COVID-19 is caused by the virus SARS-CoV-2. Viruses are invisible to the human eye and are potentially life-threatening.

DIGITAL VIRUS

These include malware and bugs that can be used in cyberattacks, but also misinformation that spreads like wildfire online.

SPIRITUAL VIRUS

Like leaven in the Bible, this could be something that starts off small, but has a big effect (Gal 5:9), like malice and wickedness (1 Cor 5:8).

POST-2020 IN ONE WORD: VIRAL



LOOK AROUND: DO WE HAVE A LITTLE LEAVEN IN US THAT HAS YET TO BE REMOVED?

TAKE ACTION: REMOVE SPIRITUAL LEAVEN

The spiritual virus of sin can be hard to discover and remove. David did a "virus scan."

*Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me, and know my anxieties. (Ps 139:23–24)*

TAKE ACTION: REMOVE PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL LEAVEN

- 1) Look around your room and private spaces —where you study, sleep, and relax.
- 2) Look at your devices and digital platforms.
- 3) If a little leaven is found, remove it —dispose, delete, unfollow, uninstall, etc.

*Say a short prayer before you begin: ask God for wisdom and strength to perform this virus sweep and removal.



IS THERE A SPIRITUAL VIRUS THAT, UNBEKNOWNST TO US, HAS INFILTRATED AND LURKS WITHIN OUR HEARTS?

Today, let us prove that we have indeed heard and learned Christ (Eph 4:20–24).

To live out the word of God, let us do regular scanning and removing sessions! Set aside time every day to look around you and on your devices. Run a "deep scan and reflect" program every day!

Remove the old man before you put on the new man (Eph 4:22–24)!



PUT ON THE NEW MAN

After removing the wickedness within, what do we fill the void with?

If we don't fill up the gap, the leaven will return...and perhaps even worsen!

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light. (Eph 5:8)

We need to walk in the light and let our light shine, so others may see our good deeds (1 Jn 1:7; Mt 5:16). Be the light of the world by adding more little lights into your life!



LOOK AROUND: WHAT LITTLE LIGHTS CAN WE ADD TO OUR LIVES?

TAKE ACTION: ADD A LITTLE LIGHT!

- 1) Look around your room and private spaces — where you study, sleep, and relax.
- 2) Look at your devices and digital platforms.
- 3) What little lights can we put in our lives? These could be small, simple, actionable.



CONTINUE ADDING ON REGULARLY! CHOOSE A DAY AND SET ASIDE A SHORT AMOUNT OF TIME TO: LOOK AROUND YOU, SCAN AND REFLECT!

1. STAY "WOKE"

Wake up from slumber, cast off the works of darkness, and make no provision for the flesh (Rom 13:11–14).

2. STAY "LIT"

Put aside the deeds of darkness, put on the armor of light, and walk in the day (Rom 13:12).



YES I CAN... TAKE ACTION!



Q&A: ESTABLISHING OUR WORK-LIFE AND SERVICE TO GOD

Philip Shee—Singapore

Editor's note: Leaving education and entering the workforce is a momentous step. We spend our first two decades preparing for it, yet it is only the first step in a long journey. With a struggling economy and longer life expectancy in the developed world, the younger generations may need to work for more than sixty years before they can retire! Even though it seems logical to focus all our energy on our career development at this early stage, it is more important to strengthen our faith and service to God during these formative years, when we are still relatively unburdened by responsibilities. As youths who love God, we may question if it is possible to dedicate ourselves to serving God while also having a successful career. How can we establish a rooted faith and service alongside our secular work? This Q&A, in which the Singapore youths posed their questions to Deacon Philip Shee, was conducted during one of their weekly youth services.

¹The Stanford Center on Longevity reports that as many as half of today's five-year-olds can expect to live to one hundred, and work for more than sixty years.

²"The 100-year life is here. We're not ready," Stanford Center on Longevity, accessed December 17, 2021, <https://longevity.stanford.edu/the-new-map-of-life-report/#1637124315004-b149a6e6-23ec>.

1) What are some guidelines for Christians in choosing which industry to enter for work?

The Bible gives us principles. If certain jobs break these principles or put us in a dilemma—reconsider. For example, should Christians be politicians? I say no, not because we shouldn't serve the country, but because politicians need to be diplomatic and will end up compromising their faith. Should Christians work in the casino or as chief research and design engineer for cigarettes? Gambling and smoking are against the Bible's principles, so avoid working in such industries. We should also think carefully about professions that will put us in unsavory environments or make us so busy that we have no time for God.

2) Is it possible to succeed at work and put God first? How do I make time to attend extra services, such as youth service or Bible study?

Yes, it is. Putting God first does not mean that our work will automatically suffer. I speak from experience and from seeing many other believers put God first while they work.

1. Remember our pivot

When we talk about work-life or work-faith balance, when one

side takes, the other must give. If work demands more time or energy, then our relationship with God suffers. The pivot model is more aligned with our Christian faith. Christ is the fulcrum—our center—and everything else revolves around Him. This leads us to the second point.

2. Remember our purpose

In order to keep our lives centered on Christ, we must remember our purpose. Why do we work hard? It is because Christ tells us that we are to serve our masters like we serve Christ (Eph 6:5–8) and because one who does not work shall not eat (2 Thess 3:10). Our purpose is Christ, not personal glory, wealth, or even to take advantage of society's kindness. When we see this as a purpose, then we work because we serve Christ, not ourselves or mammon. By extension, if our work takes a toll on our faith, consider changing jobs.

Our purpose also includes this: while we work to make a living, it is an opportunity for us to display our Christian virtues, evangelize, and glorify God. If we do not do this, then our pivot isn't Christ. Perhaps our pivot has become the need to survive, succeed at work, or even attain a luxurious life.

What practical steps can I take?

Simplify our life. There is a brother whose work in finance leaves him with a packed schedule. To help himself pivot his life around Christ and fulfill his purpose, he diligently fulfills his responsibilities but eliminates the unnecessary, such as socializing through golf, since this takes up a sizeable amount of time. He also simplifies his life by not watching television. His purpose guides his actions—at the end of the day, he isn't in the banking industry to make a name for himself. By keeping a lower profile, he isn't roped into taking on extra responsibilities that take time away from serving God.

Reflecting on our life's current pivot and purpose gives us the chance to recalibrate. Is the way we think about work aligned with how God wants us to think? Are we struggling to fulfill our basic duty at work, or is it because we have taken on extra unnecessary responsibilities? If we try to live our lives according to God's purpose and yet our faith continues to suffer, it may be time to change jobs or consider dropping our various commitments, such as "side hustles" or personal projects. It may even mean drawing a lower salary or slowing down our climb up the career ladder.

While attending extra services may appear to take time away from one's study or work, if we are diligent in working hard during the week, then we can use these services as a time to unwind and enjoy close communion with our God and His people.

The struggle of seeking God first while working gets more complicated when one is married and, subsequently, has children. One of the best decisions that we True Jesus Church Christians can make for ourselves is to marry in the Lord. Having a God-fearing spouse makes this challenge of seeking God first a lot easier to manage.

3) Is it okay to take a break from church work that gives me stress and anxiety?

Paul offers us some useful principles for this question in Romans 12:3–8, 11–12. The first principle is to be realistic about what we can handle.

For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt each one a measure of faith. (Rom 12:3)

Not thinking of ourselves more highly than we should includes

the amount or type of work we can do.

Serving God starts with the needs of the church and her people. The purpose of church work is to let us grow spiritually as we help others grow too. If we are so badly affected by the work, how can we help others grow? That is why Romans 12:3 urges us to serve according to the measure of our faith. If, at a particular moment, we are so burdened that it impacts our health and faith, take a break. However, remember that breaks do not last forever. Deciding to give up serving God is not correct. We must serve or face the same consequences as the unprofitable servant who hid his master's talent in the ground (Mt 25:18, 30).

Those who coordinate church work should consider the gifts that others have. We can also reflect on what gifts the Lord has given to us. Going a step further, we can pray for gifts. If we are struggling to fulfill a role because we lack a specific skill, pray for God to give us the ability to do His work.

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. (2 Cor 9:8)

Maybe we have gifts, but we are going through a rough patch in our life that makes fulfilling a certain role too onerous to bear. It could be that, at such a moment, we don't have that measure of faith to serve in this area. In this case, take a step back. God's grace is not meant to crush us but to lift us. If we witness such a scenario, be understanding: even the spiritually strong have moments of weakness. Don't judge them. Help them and lighten their load for a while.

Sometimes when we do church work, we give ourselves pressure! We may have unrealistic expectations that we struggle to achieve. Remember that God helps us according to His will. We sow and water, but the increase ultimately comes from Him (1 Cor 3:6).

Nevertheless, we need to be mindful of our attitude as we serve, such that we are "not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Rom 12:11). We should reflect on ourselves and consider the source of our stress or anxieties. Does our anxiety, for instance, stem from a desire to quickly deal with the matters of God so that we can spend more time on our leisure?

The following verse tells us to develop and sustain a zeal that can triumph over difficulties by "rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer" (Rom 12:12). Our worship of God must come before our work for Him.

4) How can I prevent physical and spiritual burnout?

In the Bible, there were people who burned out, such as Moses and Elijah. If we experience burnout, we shouldn't hate ourselves for it. Why did Moses and Elijah burn out? Because they cared. They cared about their people, but they also cared about themselves in an unhealthy way. Elijah, for example, exclaimed, "It is enough! Now, LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" (1 Kgs 19:4; emphasis added).

1. Get physical rest

Do not underestimate the need for physical rest. Being insufficiently rested will take a toll on you. Carve out time in your schedule to rest and exercise. I make time on Sunday mornings to walk, for instance. Do things that you find therapeutic; this will help you both physically and mentally and thus indirectly benefit you spiritually. If getting enough sleep means putting aside some forms of leisure, such as watching shows or gaming, consider making that choice.

2. Reflect on our expectations

Should we find ourselves increasingly frustrated or fatigued with our work, we can ask ourselves: *Why am I burning out? What am I expecting?*

The root cause of Elijah's burnout was his misaligned expectations. After he defeated the false prophets, he assumed that God's people would turn back and the battle would be over. However, this did not happen.

Maybe we too have expectations today: *I thought that if I advised my friend, he would turn back to God. I thought the church would move this way, but it hasn't. I put in so much effort, but my hopes have not been met.*

Do we, too, have misaligned expectations? We are often encouraged when we see good results from our work. However, when our expectations are unmet, we grow disappointed and tired, leading to burnout.

3. Know our motivation

Another important question to ask ourselves is: *Why do I serve? What is my motivation, and what do I seek to achieve through our work?*

We are often affected by what people say and expect of us. We are affected by the physical results we see. Consider Noah's work of building the ark. Over the years, not a single soul listened. Not only that, they mocked. But Noah was a righteous man. When we do the right thing and have no result, that does not mean we have done the wrong thing. This gives us two more points for consideration:

a. Are we doing the right thing? If we are, then even if there are no favorable results, it's okay, just as in Noah's case.

b. Do we remember that God is present and that we are not alone? Elijah thought he was alone. But God was still there, just not in the way he thought—God was in the still, small voice. Elijah didn't know there were seven thousand others whom God had preserved either. If we believe we are the only ones who can defend the truth and are doing what is right, and we feel like the whole world is turning against us, let us remember that God has preserved others too in this faith. Without such spiritual eyesight, we would easily feel demoralized.

4. Regain strength by being alone with God

Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. (Mt 14:22–23)

We often burn out because we are so overwhelmed with tasks that we forget to spend time alone with our heavenly Father. As Jesus worked tirelessly in His earthly ministry, He rested, not by laying down, but by recharging spiritually.

It is in prayer that we can understand God's will better. The less we pray, the less we understand. It is easy to find ourselves in a vicious cycle where doing more church work means having less time to pray, so we do not understand God's will. This inevitably leads to spending more time on His work. What, then, should we pray for? To renew our minds according to God's perspective and to recalibrate our attitudes towards His work.

5. Seek support from others

At different points in time, some believers may be strong, while others are weak. When the strong become weak for a moment, then co-workers who are strong can step in to support. Ultimately, we are journeying together towards the heavenly kingdom, so do not hesitate to ask for help.

If we find ourselves supporting a co-worker going through difficulties, they may wish to vent their frustrations or sorrows. At such moments, lend them a non-judgmental listening ear. After they cool down, there may be room to gently address some of their ways of thinking, such as offering an alternative perspective, without coming across as being self-righteous.

5) If I am already involved in many church works, how do I politely turn down new church work assignments?

If you are already involved in many church works, don't feel shy about declining new tasks. However, it is important to note several things. Firstly, we tend to stick to what we are more familiar with. Are we rejecting a piece of church work because it is out of our comfort zone? Next, we should not do church work just because we enjoy it. We have to do what is needful for the church, and we must consider the church's needs holistically. Ultimately, we are vessels for God.

Also, consider the following questions:

1. Is the work that needs to be done important, urgent, and meaningful?
2. Are there others who can do this work? Are we one of the few who have the skills for this work?
3. If the work is important and/or urgent, can I deprioritize or let go of other less important and/or urgent tasks?
4. If the work is not so important and urgent, can I consider doing it another time, or suggest an alternative person be approached?
5. Would I be able to stretch myself and do this work if I reprioritize my current tasks?
6. Is the person asking me new to the role or inexperienced in coordinating work? If I turn him or her down, how can I encourage or help him or her find an alternative?

6) I have served with my church co-workers for a long time, yet I do not feel like we are friends. Do you have tips on how to develop a better relationship with them?

It is good to reflect on our relationships with co-workers from time to time and to seek a more brotherly bond with them.

In church, do not be task-oriented; be people-focused. Serving God is different from secular work, and we do not just tick items off our agenda here. Fundamentally, what is important is not just getting the work done but also doing it with people next to us and growing together.

Learn to go beyond the superficial in church. Get to know one another and share about our faith issues so we can intercede for each other. When we do, we will naturally learn to care for one another. This mutual care will help us iron out unnecessary misunderstandings as we serve together.

Do fun activities and eat together. Visit each other. Ask each other about personal experiences. Regularly ask yourself these, too, as you serve: *How many people were edified today? Today, have I grown in my faith?*

LIVE ACCORDING TO THE STANDARD OF GOD'S WORD

Lydia and Sean Ho—Newcastle, UK

We all have our **OWN STANDARDS** of what we deem **ACCEPTABLE** or **NOT ACCEPTABLE**.

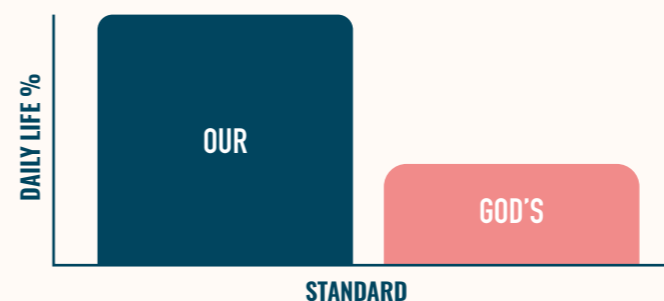


For example, consider our standard for hygiene at home: Do we allow shoes indoors? How often do we vacuum and dust? Can we eat in bed?

These standards are adopted either through trial and error, or based on **our own preferences**, which we then impose upon ourselves and those around us.

OUR STANDARD

God's standard holds a vital purpose in our salvation—it is a matter of life and death. In contrast, our standard is merely based on our own thoughts and feelings.



Every day, how much importance do we place on living by our own standard vs. God's standard?

Do we subconsciously place our own standard above God's standard?

ROMANS 12:1

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

The emphasis here is on **REASONABLE**. In other words, by God's standard, the **BARE MINIMUM** for **ALL CHRISTIANS** is to be a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God.

GOD'S STANDARD



FROM CREATION, which God deemed to be good according to **HIS STANDARD**



TO NOAH'S ARK, which God instructed Noah to build according to **HIS STANDARD** in order to **SAVE** Noah and his family



WEIGHED IN THE BALANCE



MEASURED AGAINST A MEASURING REED

THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE, we see the imagery of being weighed in the balance (Dan 5:27), and being measured against a measuring reed (Rev 11:1–2).




REVELATION 11:1–2

God will measure His temple—His church, which is His people. He will measure our worship and service to Him. **HOWEVER**, the outer court that has been trampled by the Gentiles will not be measured.

So we see, being **MEASURED AGAINST GOD'S STANDARD** is a **GOOD THING**, and something God looks highly upon—especially for those closest to and loved by God.

QUESTION: How determined are we to live according to God's standard in our day-to-day life? Is it enough that only part of our lives align with God's standard?

Let's reflect on different aspects of our lives, and consider what behaviors may be unacceptable, acceptable and ideal for a Christian

	UNACCEPTABLE	ACCEPTABLE	IDEAL
UNIVERSITY 	Purposely deciding to study at a university with no church nearby Hiding our Christian identity Putting our studies or work above our faith Missing church services for study	Studying in a place that is within easy traveling distance to a church Not neglecting our church work and faith when working towards deadlines Using the opportunity to preach	Always being the salt and light of the world, and shining for God Putting God first, and living a God-centered life Giving our best in our studies, according to God's will, as service to the Lord
SERVICE 	Seeking the praise of others Accepting and doing the work for self-serving reasons Showing partiality when assigning tasks	Using our God-given talents Serving with a willing heart Serving church members with love Knowing the purpose of our commission to pastor the flock and preach to the world	Relying on the Holy Spirit and not on our own ability, wisdom, and talent Emptying and cleansing ourselves to be a humble and useful vessel Praying for God's guidance and grace at every step Living a God-fearing life, both in and out of church
PRAYER 	Letting our mind and heart drift during prayer Demanding our own desires be fulfilled Praying only out of habit	Praying when we need God Giving thanks to God for His blessings Making use of scheduled prayer sessions Interceding for friends and family members Reciting the Lord's Prayer	Standing in the breach—praying for those lost in sin to be reconciled to God Giving thanks under all circumstances Praying for all who are in need, and for those who dislike us or have wronged us Praying for the divine works of the church
MARRIAGE 	Crossing the boundary of purity before marriage Allowing dating to interfere with our church work, studies, or livelihood Marrying someone of a different faith	Marrying someone of the same faith within the True Jesus Church Praying for God to guide us towards marriage Asking our parents and marriage counsellors for advice	Finding someone within the church who is God-fearing Preparing to be a spiritual blessing for our future spouse before starting a relationship Always including God and our parents when deciding on our spouse
SABBATH DAY 	Choosing to miss church even though we are able to attend Going to church with a casual attitude, and socializing instead of attending services	Trying our best to attend church services when we are free Putting aside our work or studies during worship time	Understanding the purpose of Sabbath and seeing it as a delight Observing the whole Sabbath day, from Friday evening to Saturday evening Laying aside all worldly matters to worship wholeheartedly Putting down our burdens to find spiritual and physical rest

Although this is not a comprehensive list, it illustrates that, within God's standard, there are things that are acceptable and things that are unacceptable. When our actions fall into the unacceptable category, we may seek to change. But if our actions are deemed acceptable, we are satisfied. However, God's standard requires us to aim for the ideal, to constantly strive to do better, and become more pleasing to God.

VISION OF THE PLUMB LINE (AMOS 7:7-9)

“BEHOLD, I AM SETTING A PLUMB LINE IN THE MIDST OF MY PEOPLE ISRAEL.”

TEACHINGS

We must understand the importance of **actually living** according to the **standard of God and His word**

God relented twice to allow the Israelites to repent twice before this vision. **God understands the struggles, obstacles and temptations** we face on a daily basis

God wants us to **stand in the breach and pray for one another**, especially those who have fallen short of God's standard

We must understand the **seriousness of rejecting** and not aligning ourselves to God's standard. If we do not **grasp the opportunity to repent and return now**, there will come a time when it is too late to do so

WHEN YOU DO NOT LIVE ACCORDING TO GOD'S STANDARD, WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

“I don't trust in God's wisdom, because I know what's best for me.”

“It's okay to relax because God's word doesn't apply to me.”

“My idea of what God's standard should be is better than God's actual standard.”

By putting ourselves, our feelings, and our comfort above God's word, we have created **idols**. This is a serious sin.

QUESTION: Will God find us crooked or straight when He measures us?



CONCLUSION

2 TIMOTHY 2:15

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

Be diligent to know the standard of God. Be diligent to go beyond the “just acceptable” in our actions. Be diligent to live to God's standard, which is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind (Lk 10:27a). This is to also love God's word, God's standard. This is how we can present ourselves approved to God (2 Tim 2:15).

We need to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). Why? Because it isn't easy. And if we fail to reach God's standard, God will bring destruction, as revealed in Amos 7:9. We need to acknowledge that God's standard is very real and very serious, it is not merely a suggestion to live by, but a blueprint for our life.

If we feel that we don't know God's standard that well and have only been living by our own standards, or our own idea of God's standard, then take this opportunity to work out our own salvation. Read the Bible more and pray more. Because it is the power of God's word and the Holy Spirit that allow us to know and do God's will (Phil 2:13).

LOOKING AFTER OUR SPIRITUAL HEALTH AS YOUNG ADULTS

Naomi Shek—Edinburgh, UK

For many students, starting university presents an array of new and unique experiences. We are likely to take on more responsibilities, independently managing our studies, time, and money. We learn important lessons on looking after ourselves, and acquire valuable skills for entering the workforce. As well as being exciting and enjoyable, the experience also eases us into adulthood. Thus, it is a critical time for us to become more independent and mature.

After moving away for university, I noticed that phone calls with my parents mainly centered around my health and well-being. They often reminded me to look after my physical health by eating well, sleeping enough, and exercising, but they also encouraged me to take care of my spiritual health.

“The signs of poor spiritual health may not always be as obvious”

Taking care of my physical health was pretty straightforward, but when it came to my spiritual health, there were times when I felt out of my depth. It is relatively easy to tell when our physical health is not doing well—we may feel more tired than usual or experience an unexpected pain or itch. However, the signs of poor spiritual health may not always be as obvious. This is why, like with our physical health, we must perform a thorough examination to know the condition of our faith.

After four years at university—of growing in independence and stepping into adulthood—I have learned many valuable lessons in how to nurture my spirituality. Here are some teachings I have gained so far.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EXAMINING OUR FAITH

“Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren.” (Deut 4:9)

In this passage, God teaches the new generation of Israelites His law before they enter Canaan. He instructs each person to pay close attention to themselves, lest they forget the grace and wondrous things He has done for them and depart. The instruction to “take heed” is repeated three more times (Deut 4:15, 19, 23). If the people do not follow God’s guidance and are drawn to create idols and serve other gods, they will face specific consequences. God, as a consuming fire, will utterly destroy them (Deut 4:24).

This applies to us today. God instructs us to pay careful attention. We must examine ourselves to ensure that we do not stray from His word—to keep within His promise. Taking heed means we must constantly examine our conduct, thoughts, and attitude to ensure that we are fully in line with God’s commandments. Otherwise, we may unwittingly depart from His grace.

Having enrolled in an intensive and competitive course, notorious for its heavy workload, I knew that I could not afford to slack off. I also recognized the importance of being a well-rounded student, so I took the opportunity to join different societies during my first year. I quickly found myself busy with my studies and extracurriculars, which became permanent residents in my thoughts. Slowly, almost without realizing it, I reduced my daily Bible reading to only a few times a week, and my prayers grew shorter.



I knew that my spiritual health was suffering, but I attributed this to my heavy workload and adjusting to university life. In reality, I had become spiritually lazy and ensnared by worldly trends and desires.

It is easy for us to become immersed in our busy lives. Especially when we enter into a new environment such as university or college, our faith can be demoted on our mental priority list. This is dangerous, as we risk departing from God’s commandments. Our own lives and achievements can become idols in our hearts, unbeknownst to us.

God instructs us to be alert in our faith and pay close attention to how we live. This is His great mercy and love for us.

KNOWING THE CONDITION OF OUR FAITH

Knowing that we need to examine our faith is one thing, but knowing how to do it is another; here are some steps I found helpful during my studies.

Honest Self-Reflection

Let us search out and examine our ways, And turn back to the LORD. (Lam 3:40)

Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified. But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified. (2 Cor 13:5–6)

Perhaps we have identified a problem, or maybe we have yet to. To know the condition of our faith requires that we must first look, through self-reflection. Reflection is a helpful tool involving a process of careful and conscious consideration of a topic or experience and developing personal insights and actionable takeaways that improve our understanding.

How can we apply reflection to our faith? Let us focus on a particular aspect: prayer. When we pray, do we consider the objectives of our prayer before we begin?

We can start by asking ourselves a few questions before we kneel. What will take up most of our focus during prayer time? Why are we praying for such matters? What is our overall goal? Perhaps we spend a large portion of our time praying for our studies, that they may go smoothly and that we may be successful.

By questioning ourselves and inspecting our innermost requests, we can discover insights into the condition of our faith. If we are mostly praying for worldly comforts and blessings, and spending less of our prayers on matters relating to God’s salvation plan, this may reveal that our spiritual health is suffering. Our hearts may be solely focused on the things of the

world rather than God's divine will and salvation plan.

Next time, before we pray or read the Bible, we can set aside some time to prepare and reflect on a few questions for ourselves. I do this by taking a quiet moment and creating a mental note of my objectives and needs, and considering whether they are in line with God's will. Reminding ourselves of our purpose and His word can help bring our focus back to God. We can also use this method to reflect upon other aspects of our faith. If we are honest, God will reveal our spiritual condition.

Upon reflecting on my faith, I was able to experience a change in my thoughts and mindset towards my life and my relationship with God. Firstly, I identified that I had not entirely given myself to God and lacked good spiritual habits such as daily Bible reading and prayers. These good habits had been replaced by unhealthy secular desires, by which I had become influenced. When I considered honestly, I realized that I was not too busy for God. I wasted much of my free time on worthless and unedifying activities. I thank God that I learned from and identified my weaknesses through reflection.

God as Our Examiner

Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; Try my mind and my heart. (Ps 26:2)

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting. (Ps 139:23-24)

Introspection may reveal insights into the condition of our faith, but to understand more deeply, we must turn to God and ask Him to examine our hearts. We can do this by studying and meditating on God's word. God is almighty and all-knowing; our minds and understanding are limited, but His understanding is limitless (Rom 11:33; Ps 147:5).

Just as we take notes during our university classes for revision, some of us may like to take notes during sermons and cultivation seminars. How often do we review our notes for further edification? There is little benefit if we take notes and never revisit them, forgetting all the teachings once the notebook is closed. Reviewing the sermon, using our notes or mental recall, provides an opportunity for consolidation, meditation, and assimilation of God's word. There is always something more we can take away from studying God's word, and through this, God speaks to us and brings to light our spiritual malaise.

Meditation can also be done during prayer: the Holy Spirit is able to search into our innermost thoughts to reveal our spiritual impurities and intercede for us (1 Cor 2:10, Rom 8:26). If we are willing, God will reveal ways to improve and change ourselves so that we live a genuinely God-centered life.

Spiritual Companionship

Sometimes, it takes a friend to point out our habits or weaknesses for us to notice them ourselves. This is the same for our faith; we are not alone on this journey of faith (Eccl 4:9). Sometimes a gentle reminder from a fellow brother or sister alerts us to an area where we are falling short.

When we receive reminders from others, we should honestly examine ourselves concerning whatever has been brought to attention, and work with God to change ourselves for the better. We should also



be supporting our spiritual companions by looking out for them and their faith. Remember, they are doing it out of love, as a messenger from God. God will use us to look after each other.

Many students experience loneliness at some point in their university journey, especially as children of God who do not conform to the world. Some of our fellow students may indulge in drinking, partying, and worldly chatter. If we do not have any other brothers- and sisters-in-Christ at our university, we may feel lonely in our journey of faith. However, we can still be spiritual companions for others even if we are physically apart. We can do this by meeting virtually and sharing through online fellowships, prayer groups, and Bible studies. We are all part of the body

of Christ, and every member contributes to the growth and edification of the whole (Eph 4:15-16).

We can start by building spiritual relationships within our youth fellowships. I observed that youths may spend a lot of time together and know about each other's lives yet understand little about each other's spirituality. We must prioritize fruitful and edifying discussion over worldly chatter to build spiritual relationships. We must have the willingness to be open about our faith to others. This may involve sharing during fellowship meals or creating a group message chat for encouragement during the week.

POST-EXAMINATION: RENEWING OURSELVES

Once we have identified our spiritually unhealthy habits, we must change them. The elder James reminds us to be doers, not just hearers, of the word (Jas 1:22-25). If we have learned something new about our faith, we must rectify it by taking action to improve ourselves so that our lives more closely reflect God's standard. If we neglect to act upon what God has revealed to us, we are just like the man who observes himself in the mirror and, when he goes away, immediately forgets what kind of man he is.

Sometimes we can be unknowingly influenced by the things of this world, especially within an unfamiliar environment such as a university. Adopting a reflective attitude towards my faith has helped me grow and discover areas I need to improve. Doing so has allowed me to honestly assess whether I am fully obeying God's word or if there are parts of me that deny or disobey Him. I have truly felt His abidance and blessings when I work to improve my spiritual health.

Today, we are walking this faith journey in a world where temptation and sin lurk around every corner. To protect us, God has instructed us to pay close attention to ourselves, that we may be kept in His promise and continue to be built up in our faith. To maintain our spiritual health, we need to cultivate a life of honest reflection on our faith, while allowing God's word to examine us. Remember, we are not alone on this journey. God has prepared for us spiritual companions. It is our holy duty to look out for each other's spiritual health.

Adopting good spiritual habits can be difficult at first, but as long as we are willing to change, God will work with us and bless us even more extensively.

ONLINE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH FELLOWSHIP 2022



PARTNERSHIP

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PROSPER THE GOSPEL

Dear youths of the True Jesus Church

Praise and thank God, the International Assembly (IA) will hold two International Youth Fellowship (IYF) online events in 2022, with the theme *Partnership to Prosper the Gospel*.

WESTERN HEMISPHERE

Date: June 12-14, 2022
Host: Europe Youth Committee
Limited to 300 applicants

EASTERN HEMISPHERE

Date: July 23-24, 2022
Host: Indonesia General Assembly
Limited to 500 applicants

As we are in the end time, the True Jesus Church would like to use this occasion to invite youths from around the world to meet, share, and reflect on God's mission for the church, and to kindle our zeal through the power of the Holy Spirit.

APPLICATION PROCESS

- Obtain further information and registration form from your local church
- Submit completed registration form to your local church by **March 15, 2022**
- Local church will forward your application to the General Assembly/Coordination Center, who will send it on to the IA office in US (ia@tjc.org) by **April 1, 2022**
- Complete the online registration after receiving a confirmation letter
- Registration will close when the number of applicants reaches capacity

May the Lord Jesus Christ move you to take this rare opportunity to meet and have fellowship with brethren-in-Christ from various parts of the world!



GOD'S MERCY IN TIMES OF SIN

redeemed son—UK

“Have you seen this? Have you looked at that? You should definitely give it a go!” Allowing these thoughts to enter and dwell in my heart was the biggest mistake of my life.

During secondary school, I only had a small group of friends. They would talk about pornography and other explicit things and, as time went by, my curiosity was piqued, and I made the fatal mistake of looking at explicit materials. During my nine years of indulging in pornography, my relationships with my family, brethren-in-Christ, and God deteriorated. I also developed a gaming addiction and depression.

We often look at sin from the perspective

of our spiritual life—how Satan attacks us with the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. We know its effects on our spirituality—how it leads us away from God. But the physical effects of sin are not often discussed. When sin dwells in our hearts for a long time, it bears fruits that are physically manifested (Gal 5:19).

Furthermore, sin affects not only the individual but also those around him. “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Gal 5:9). This does not just mean that sin can spread to others, but also that the whole lump can feel the effects of sin. If we do not get rid of the sin right away, those closest to us, our family, and the whole church will be impacted.

THE EFFECTS OF SIN

Our Relationship with Family

When sin entered my heart, the first thing my family noticed was that I spent more time alone in my room. I would stay out at the library most nights to do coursework and assignments. I would not tell my parents what I was doing or when I would be home because I did not want to hear their nagging. When I got home, I would watch pornography or YouTube further into the night, refusing to go to bed (Jas 1:14). When my parents asked me what I had been up to, I would give a lackluster response, hinting at my annoyance. When they asked me to do light chores around

the house, I would consistently refuse. When they started pointing out my wrongs, I would get frustrated and spend more time in my bedroom, gratifying my flesh with pornography, gaming, and watching YouTube. Since I did not listen to my parents' instructions, I was a fool (Prov 15:5).

There was a breakdown in communication between my parents and me. They wanted to know what was causing the change in my behavior to provide advice and support. But I thought my parents would not understand the peer pressure I had been through initially and would judge me by pointing out my wrongs and telling me that I was not good enough. So I decided it would be best not to tell anyone about what I was going through. As time went by, my hatred towards my parents increased, as did the feeling that they did not care for me.

“Burying our feelings is dangerous as they can explode uncontrollably”

This contributed to my depression as my feelings were being bottled up, with no outlet to relieve the pressure. Burying our feelings is dangerous as they can explode uncontrollably. Like a balloon filled with a steady stream of air, it will eventually burst.

Our Relationship with Brethren

Sin also had an impact on my relationships with fellow brethren-in-Christ. Seeing others serving faithfully in church and participating in church activities made me feel that I could not reach that same level of fervor. I thought they could not possibly empathize with me since they were so strong in faith; if I told them about my situation, they would only share the usual Bible verses and tell me to pray to God. The problem here was not with their potential advice but with the lack of empathy and connection between my fellow brethren and me.

As a result, I distanced myself from my brothers and sisters. I would sit alone in services, and I gradually attended fewer and fewer church activities. I started going to the gym instead of fellowships, thinking I did not need my brethren—the only thing that mattered was that I cared for myself. I had a similar response to the Israelites when they waited for Moses to descend from Mount Sinai. They grew impatient and turned to Aaron to make a golden calf for them to worship. Since I received no physical help, I decided to replace God with other methods to help me cope.

Again, this exacerbated my depression

because my brothers and sisters did not seem to care about my situation. Although I was drawing away from them, I also hoped for one person to reach out and ask me what was wrong. But there was no one. This was when thoughts of suicide entered my mind. I felt that my fellow brethren had abandoned me, leaving me to drown in sin.

Our Relationship with God

Throughout this whole process, I was withdrawing further from God, and it grew harder to escape the bondage of sin. It was similar to what Paul experienced:

For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. (Rom 7:14–15)

I was ashamed of watching pornography and being addicted to gaming, and I felt that I was not good enough for God's calling. Many teachings pricked my conscience, telling me to stop sinning—but since I could not stop myself, I thought it was impossible to become holy in the eyes of God again.

My spiritual development had ceased. I did not pay attention during services, and I stopped serving God, thinking God would not want to use a dirty vessel. Personal cultivation did not happen because I would rather indulge in sin than read the Bible.

As my mental health deteriorated, I constantly thought I was a disappointment to the church and God. All that time and effort spent on planning various events for me to attend had been wasted. I thought I was the worst person alive and deserved to be in such a situation. I even doubted whether God truly loved me and whether His blood was able to cleanse me from my sins. Thoughts of suicide were powerful at this point. If no one I knew truly cared, not even God, then why carry on living?

THE TURNING POINT

Warning from Workers of God

Late one night, after watching pornography, I noticed I had not plugged in my headphones. Later that week, I received a message from a deacon to meet with him and a preacher. My sin had been exposed—one of my family members had heard the noise that night. I confessed to the ministers that I had sinned against God but did not open up about my mental well-being. I was determined not to sin, but I was not at peace. I still spent most of my time in my room, so pornography was within arm's reach. Before long, I was back in the same cycle, although I would not watch for as long as I had when I first became addicted. I felt even worse because I had already resolved to stop.

“I had to learn from my mistake and come before God to seek help”

God can use different people and different methods to tell us we are sinning. It could be through a sermon, a fellowship, or the words of a brother or sister. Christ has experienced every temptation and, though He is sinless, He can empathize with us (Heb 4:14–16). Therefore, after hearing a rebuke from a minister, or reminders through sermons or fellowships, I had to learn from my mistake and come before God to seek help.

Confession to Close Brethren

After the meeting with the ministers, I received a WhatsApp message from the youth visitation team. I ignored it for a while because I thought they would interrogate me about my regular absence from church. At the same time, another thought came into my head: *What if I reveal everything? What if I pour my heart out and truly seek help?* So I met with the visitation team and talked about my deteriorating relationships with my parents and the church brethren. Still, I did not feel comfortable talking about

the issue of pornography. It was not until I requested an individual meeting with one of the youth visitation team members that I could open up.

We may all be in unique situations, but God has solutions for all our needs and problems. For me, one solution was to open up to the youths within the visitation group. Even though it was painful to talk about my mental health problems, I was glad that I did because the brethren could now intercede for me and help me on my spiritual journey (Jas 5:16). When the opportunity comes for us to confess our problems, feeling ashamed is normal, but we must put aside those feelings to gain the spiritual help we need.

Confession to Family Members

At this point, I was still unable to talk to my parents and communicate what was wrong. They would constantly ask me why I looked sad all the time and explained that if I did not speak up, they would not know how to help. So finally, I took the most challenging step and sent a WhatsApp message to my parents about everything on my mind. In a subsequent family service, we talked about my issues—how I felt constantly compared to others and deemed not good enough, and how they only focused on my mistakes. We concluded that we needed to repent before God, ask for forgiveness, and change. God had opened the third outlet for the rest of my feelings to gush out. I felt a sense of relief in my heart that my burden had truly been lifted, and I could finally run back to God.

Confessing to my family was the hardest thing for me to do since I did not speak to them often. I was ashamed to reveal the sin I had hidden from them while living under the same roof. But our family members are the ones who can physically help us the most. Even though it is hard, do not be afraid to gather the whole family for a talk. We may receive some rebuke, but our parents do this because they love us and do not want to see us in sin (Prov 13:24).

TAKING CARE OF THE STRAYING ONES

The act of saving souls is not only directed towards people who have yet to believe in God, but also towards brethren who may have gone astray. We save them from the fruit of sin, which is death (Jas 5:19–20). If we notice someone who is not being themselves or whose behavior has been changing for the worse for some time, here is some advice on how to help them.

Advice for Brethren

As members of the church, we need to be alert to any changes in the behavior of our fellow brethren. For example, we may notice a brother looking a bit down or becoming less engaged in church activities. If we see this, take the initiative to ask how he is doing and be consistent with establishing a spiritual bond and showing that you genuinely care about him. Of course, we cannot assume that a missed fellowship or a bout of fatigue is a sign of sin, but we can reach out to a fellow member if we sense some subtle and prolonged changes within him. If the brother feels someone cares, he may open up eventually. When he does open up, do not be rash and rebuke him. Instead, listen to what he has to say. He may be keeping many feelings bottled up, so you can become a mental outlet for him if you spend time listening.

Advice for Parents

If your child spends a lot of time in his room or refuses to do chores, do not focus on the child. Instead, focus on drawing the whole family nearer to God. Gather everyone for family service to sing hymns, study the word of God, and pray together. Through the continual worship of God as a whole family, we increase in spiritual wisdom, knowing how to walk worthy of the Lord in a manner pleasing to Him. We also remind ourselves that through the blood of Christ, God has made us worthy to become partakers in His kingdom (Col 1:9–14).

TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES

Filled with God's Word

*The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.* (Ps 19:7–10)

We should fill our hearts with God's word and have the determination to read the Bible and put its teachings into practice. Meditate constantly on what we have read and apply these teachings in our lives. As we continue to walk in the word of God, we will find that it is trustworthy and true, strengthening our desire to seek for more.

Filled with Prayer

And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. (Jas 5:15)

When we stop indulging in sin, we may find ourselves with much free time. We should use this time to pray. Reflect on the matters of the church, the brothers and sisters who need our intercession, our family, and our own faith. Then spend the effort to mention each matter in prayer, asking God to guide.

Find a Spiritual Companion

*Two are better than one,
Because they have a good reward for their labor.
For if they fall, one will lift up his companion.
But woe to him who is alone when he falls,
For he has no one to help him up.
Again, if two lie down together, they will*

*keep warm;
But how can one be warm alone?
Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him.
And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.* (Eccl 4:9–12)

I had struggled to open up to brethren because of pride. I refused to let go of the image other church members had of me: a good Christian who attended services and fellowships and served in the church. But when the youth visitation team messaged me, I knew this was my opportunity to talk about all of my problems. Even though I had the misconception that others would not sympathize with me, I prayed to God to remove such thoughts and my pride, to have the courage to admit my sin.

We, too, may have this pride that stops us from establishing spiritual companionships, but we must look at the result. We can stay in our pride, which leads to destruction, or suffer a little shame for eternal life. Then, through prayer, ask God to remove the pride in our hearts and give us the willingness of heart to share.

“It was only through love that the youth visitation team was willing to judge and, more importantly, to help me turn back to God”

On reflection, I should not have focused on being judged by my brethren. Yes, the judgment will be there, but it is all part of love—not just for me, but also for the entire church. It was only through love that the youth visitation team was willing to judge and, more importantly, to help me turn back to God. If we have already revealed the most shameful thing in our hearts, there will be nothing to hide from the other person, thus establishing a spiritual companionship. This bond can be strengthened by helping one another, using God's word as our foundation.

Final Words

What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. (Mt 18:12–14)

Thank God for His wonderful grace in saving me from the clutches of sin. Through His love and enduring patience, I can return to His fold and be united with brethren in fellowship and prayer. It is so true that God will do everything in His power to find that one sheep that has gone astray. Whether on the highest of mountains or in the deepest of valleys, God will search for and bring back the lost sheep. Even though from the sheep's point of view, the situation is impossible to escape, God will use His mighty power and love to return them to His bosom.

If you are in the depths of sin and are reading this today, you still have the chance to change. Do not be afraid to confess (Jas 5:16a). We may think it is futile because we expect stern rebuke or generic encouragements in return, but this is a misconception. Remember, God cares for you, and so do the brethren in church. But we must humble ourselves and admit our wrongs so that our fellow brethren can encourage and help us on our spiritual journey to heaven.

May all glory be given to God! Amen.

GOD GUIDES OUR STEPS

Various

Love Lifted Me

Lin Xin Chen—Singapore

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I testify.

I am a second-generation True Jesus Church believer, so I grew up in the church. Since young, I diligently attended church services and religious education (RE) classes. However, this faith was not personal as I was just blindly following my mother to church.

THE DECLINE

My faith gradually declined when I was in secondary school. I continued this mindless routine of going to church only on Sabbaths and leaving straight after attending RE class. There were times when I could not even remember the sermon title. As I grew older, I became more self-conscious at church—I felt lonely and afraid to mix with my peers. I worried about what people would think of me. I could not comprehend why it was so difficult to make friends in church when I had so many good friends outside. I eventually stopped attending RE classes for about three years and did not join church camps or Bible seminars. Over the years, many church brethren encouraged me to be more active in church, but to no avail. My heart was hardened, and I felt this faith was quite meaningless.

I picked up some bad habits from my non-church friends during this period. They were good people, but their behaviors were very worldly—they cracked dirty jokes without a second thought and listened to profanity-filled music. Under these influences, using vulgar words and hand gestures became habitual. As I grew increasingly attached to my friends, I grew increasingly distant from God.

At home, I neither read the Bible nor sang

hymns. I only prayed once a day, and the prayer would last less than a minute. When I was too tired, I would utter one line, such as: “Dear God, please help me to sleep well. Amen.” I was lost in my faith, just as the hymn *Love Lifted Me* describes:

*I was sinking deep in sin,
Far from the peaceful shore,
Very deeply stained within,
Sinking to rise no more!*

Although I attended Sabbath church services, I was constantly engaged with the world. I was physically in church, but my heart was not receptive to God's word. I was aware that my actions were displeasing in God's eyes, but I was under the bondage of sin and did not know how to change.

“However, after being encouraged by a local church deaconess, my mum registered me for the course without my consent. Little did I know it would be a complete life-changer”

Unsurprisingly, I did not wish to attend the Students Theological Training Course (STTC), an annual three-week seminar for students aged fourteen to sixteen. I came up with various excuses not to join when I was fourteen and fifteen. In 2016, the church brethren were even more persistent and persuasive, but I did not relent. However, after being encouraged by a local church deaconess, my mum registered me for the course without my consent. Little did I know it would be a complete life-changer.

THE TURNING POINT

My first year of STTC was the turning point

1. By James Rowe (1912).

of my faith. I was forced to attend, and I had to be there for twenty-one days, like it or not. So I thought that I should devote myself to God and start working on my faith. For the first few days, I felt out of place and uncomfortable. It was torturous because I had no friends and was not used to this “holy life.” However, as I returned to square one and started learning about God's word again, it felt like I was beginning to know God for the first time in my sixteen years of life.

God was slowly working within me. I reflected on my behavior and started to pray for God's forgiveness. I begged Him to have mercy on me, for I was ignorant and knew little about Him. I felt so ashamed that I had sinned so greatly, and I could no longer face Him. I began to re-examine my faith, realizing how terribly I had fared thus far. I knew that I needed to pray for the Holy Spirit, but this felt foreign to me because I had not done it for at least three years.

As I prayed, I asked God—the One I had been taught to worship since young—who He is. Through the Basic Bible Doctrine classes, I realized that I needed to be like God and have His attributes such as holiness, humility, and love (1 Pet 1:15–16; Jas 4:10; 1 Jn 4:7). I resolved to change for the better. I apologized to God for not keeping my faith and for falling into the temptation of sin and the worldly influence of my friends. I became aware of the weaknesses of the flesh that were beyond my control.

As the days passed, and the more I thought about my sins, the more my heart ached. I regretted taking God's name in vain and crediting all glory to myself. For example, I was doing relatively well in my studies and felt gratified that my hard work paid off. I did not understand why I had to give God credit. I justified my mindset by pointing out that I still had to study for the test—if I had not worked hard, would I have done well? However, what

a preacher said in class really struck me. Paraphrasing Psalm 127:1–2, he said, “If God doesn't allow it to happen, it wouldn't happen.” This is a simple concept, but my pride had blinded me. I realized that things might not have gone so smoothly if not for God's will and guidance. God is displeased when man magnifies himself. So I begged for the Lord's forgiveness. At that point, I felt a great urgency to receive the Holy Spirit as soon as possible.

I persistently told God that I really wanted to change for the better and abandon my old self in my prayers. However, I had no confidence in myself and was afraid that, after the STTC, I would return to my old ways and depart even further from church. Hence, I truly needed the Holy Spirit to live within me to help me change. I knew that I am but flesh and, thus, I had many faults that I felt powerless to overcome. I told Him that I was willing to lay down my pride and weaknesses before Him. I truly yearned for the Holy Spirit through fasting and prayer.

“In every prayer after that, I anticipated that God would give me the Holy Spirit in that very prayer”

Though I prayed earnestly, I felt no improvements in my prayer. I was growing weary. I questioned God and started to doubt whether He was listening to my prayers. However, part of me knew that God was testing my faith, to see if I was strong enough to persist. I thought, *If I can't even persevere now, how is God going to give me the Holy Spirit?* In every prayer after that, I anticipated that God would give me the Holy Spirit in that very prayer. I reminded myself not to doubt God but trust that He would give me the promised Holy Spirit.

GOD'S ACCEPTANCE

Thank God that I was the first person in that STTC to receive the Holy Spirit. Upon confirmation by the preachers, I felt extreme joy in my heart. God had heard my pleading cries and answered my prayers. I could barely sleep that night, knowing that God had not given up on me, that He was willing to accept me once again.

After this experience, I could better understand Paul's message when he writes: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief” (1 Tim 1:15b). I truly felt the joy and workings of God transforming my life.

Five years later, I am actively serving in church. When I tell others my story,

they cannot believe how rebellious I was in secondary school. I am a completely different person now. In hindsight, if I had not attended the STTC, perhaps I would not be in God's house today. Thank God for the brethren who stood by me and encouraged me repeatedly even though I turned them away time after time. Indeed, when nothing seemed to help, it was the love of God that touched and lifted me.

My encouragement is this: God has turned me, such a great sinner, back to Him. So, as long as we do not give up on ourselves, God will not give up on us. Is there anything within us holding us back from obeying God's word, or preventing Him from entering our hearts? If we have received the Holy Spirit, have we allowed Him to transform us? Let us continue to hold on to God and His promise.

May all glory be given to God! Amen.

Be Rooted and Grow: Understanding God's Plan

Jonathon Ho—Elgin, UK

Hallelujah, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I testify. May all glory be unto His name, and may He be glorified through my testimony.

“God has blessed me through many stages of my life, but two episodes in my faith journey stand out as the most meaningful”

As a youth in today's society, it is difficult to be submissive. Many in the wider world are disobeying authority, protesting, and becoming more vocal in their opinions. In the church, outside influences like these may stir us up and entice us to follow the same path of resistance.

But we have to remember: submission to God and authority keeps us rooted and allows us to grow in the way God expects us to. Submission to our parents is of utmost importance because God commands us to do so (Col 3:20). Submission to authorities ensures that we do not stray and corrupt ourselves morally (Rom 13:2).

God has blessed me through many stages of my life, but two episodes in my faith journey stand out as the most meaningful. They serve as a great reminder for me to remain submissive and rooted in God, to grow in faith.

EXAMPLE 1: MY FIRST JOB

Coming out of university, I searched religiously for a job. It was important to my parents and me that I find employment. Fortunately, within a year, I was blessed to find a job nearby in my field of study. I could stay at home to assist in the family business and the local church work.

All seemed well for the first few weeks as I settled in. Since the work was not difficult or time-consuming, I spent most of my time on the internet. I thought this would be fine, since I always completed my assigned tasks first. One day, I was called into the manager's office where he proceeded to print out every single page of my internet history. I was shocked to realize that I was now involved in disciplinary proceedings because of my low productivity. A second meeting quickly followed when my attempts to improve were deemed unsatisfactory. The following day, I was still reeling from these events when the manager came into the office, ordered me to collect my belongings, and marched me out of the building.

The walk back home was painfully hard and tearful. I had never felt so humiliated. It was like watching a scene straight from a movie—I could hardly believe this was happening to me. My mind was plagued with the feeling of failure and thoughts of how disappointed my parents would be.

Understanding My Mistake

After this event, I became resentful towards God. He had blessed me with the job I wanted, but then it was taken away abruptly, and in the most humiliating fashion. It was so easy to blame God and ask Him, “Why have You done this to me?” or “What did I do to deserve this?”

Upon reflection, it was clear where I went wrong. I was blessed beyond my comprehension but I forgot one thing: God. Complacency is a dangerous thing. It provides a false sense of security and opens us up to being easily misled. We overlook God's blessings and forget to thank Him for His guidance—we even begin to think that everything we have achieved was through our own doing. I thank God that this mindset only lasted a short while. If I had been rooted firmly, then I would have remembered God's providence and given Him the glory and praise that He deserved daily.

Admittedly, I was dismissed because I was at fault. I took my position for granted and expected an easy ride. This carefree and complacent attitude was not what God wanted me to have. It led to my managers becoming suspicious of me, creating a

toxic work environment where people spoke about me and decided that I was taking advantage of them. Shamefully, by taking their generosity for granted, I lost their trust and confidence.

Even though this job was a blessing from God, it did not mean He would overlook my actions. I was reminded that God would address any adverse consequences of my behavior. The most important lesson for me was to accept His chastisement.

EXAMPLE 2: BEING INTRODUCED TO A SISTER

More recently, I was approached by a preacher who wanted to introduce me to a sister for marriage. I never actively went out to seek a sister, so I thanked God for His providence and for blessing me with this opportunity.

When I relayed the news to my parents, they were overjoyed. They are not the type to outwardly show their pleasure and approval much, but I knew they were pleased and joyful through their words and gentle demeanor. They always encouraged me to pray about this matter and shared what they expected of a potential spouse—that she would be a True Jesus Church member from the UK. These conditions were met.

Throughout the relationship, I constantly held on to the thought that God had provided me this opportunity, so I should do my best not to waste it. However, things did not go to plan, and within a year, we ended our relationship amicably, with no hard feelings.

Questioning God

I have never been a person to experience feelings of depression and downheartedness—I have always tried to maintain a positive mindset and not allow negative feelings to show through. But this time I questioned God. Shamefully, I asked God in prayer: “Why have You allowed this to happen? I have followed Your way and always ensured I respected and cherished this opportunity You have given me. I have prayed for this to work out, so why has it come to this?” I was confused: since God had guided me throughout my life, why had He allowed this to happen?

What My Parents Instilled in Me

My parents are quiet in nature, and I am thankful they are always calm. They exhibit peace and gentleness in what they say, never chastising or humiliating me

for what I have done. They always give me the same encouragement whenever I face setbacks: “God will guide you; keep praying to Him!”

It sounds generic, and they say it often, but that does not dilute the sentiment. It rings true on so many levels.

We often think we know what is best for us, and when our plans fall through, we become annoyed and even angry at God. It becomes harder to accept when we understand that these were blessings from God in the first place. It is tempting to conveniently blame God.

However, my parents have instilled this heart of faith in me: always remember that God has a plan for us—difficulties and disappointments included. They have shown concern for my faith through the family altar, frequent encouragements, and prayers. They have prayed often to God that I remain rooted in my faith.

“I took this relationship for granted, and it was wrong of me to think that everything before me was set”

Similar to my first experience, I became complacent in being matched with a sister. I took this relationship for granted, and it was wrong of me to think that everything before me was set. It takes prayers and submission to God for things to work out, and I lacked this mindset. Once again, I lacked humility and submission to God, possibly the deciding factor in the relationship ending.

The Challenge That Paul Faced

My struggles remind me of the thorn in Paul’s flesh (2 Cor 12:7). Even as a strong servant of God, Paul was still susceptible to weaknesses and challenges. He needed to plead for God’s help. Three times Paul prayed, but did God take this “messenger of Satan” away? No. Instead, God reminded him:

“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”
(2 Cor 12:9a)

Paul realized that his strength and faith would be perfected in these moments of weakness. God could have granted Paul’s request to remove his thorn and allowed him to go on his journey pain-free. But enduring the pain and overcoming the

obstacle was far more beneficial to Paul’s faith. Paul could have become dismayed and angry with God; he could have left the ministry to spite God. However, Paul remained resolute in his faith. He understood what these sufferings were for.

When we follow God, we may believe that we are strong in our faith. We may believe that we are firmly rooted and able to grow. However, when our faith is challenged or when we encounter struggles, that is when we can truly see how firm our faith is and where our weaknesses lie.

Paul’s mindset completely changed, from misunderstanding to a complete understanding of why he faced these challenges. Rather than criticizing God for not responding in the way that he expected, Paul understood that God’s response was the perfect way to remind him that God would strengthen him in those difficult times. They were to strengthen him even further.

APPLYING THIS TO MY LIFE

Reflecting on these two experiences, I understand why God put me through these situations. Complacency had seeped into my life and given me a false sense of security. My service and attitude were lacking, and God took a back seat while I went on with my life and took His blessings for granted. God has His particular way of reminding us about our faith and how we should constantly seek and please Him. He uses different methods to remind us if we stray or anger Him, whether it be a gentle reminder or a brutal wake-up call.

In those difficult times, blaming God is the easiest option. I have witnessed youths becoming angered, dismayed, or disillusioned with God because of what they have been through. They question God’s motives and plans, seeking an answer to their sufferings, but overlooking precisely the reason why they are going through such trials: God wants them to turn to Him for help and to warn them not to neglect His grace and mercy. He also wants them to submit to Him to find joy and understanding in the trials when difficulties arise. It is when we are weak that we are strengthened.

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

(Jer 29:11)

This verse serves as a good reminder that God is not playing around with us when challenges arise or things

do not go our way. He does not find pleasure in our downfall; rather, He is pleased when we realize our wrongs and turn to Him for strength and guidance.

“We may not always understand why something is happening, but we must accept God’s plan instead of grumbling”

For myself, God is reminding me that when I am lost or feel challenged, this is the time to turn to Him. Rather than becoming disgruntled, we should, like Paul, find strength in our weakness, submit to God, and stir up our zeal to draw closer to Him. That way, we become further rooted in God and can appreciate His blessings. We will want to do more for Him when He is constantly by our side.

We may not always understand why something is happening, but we must accept God’s plan instead of grumbling. I truly thank God that He has rooted me firmly to understand His will and why He sometimes puts me through challenging times. He has blessed me beyond my expectations.

Refinement Is Key for Us as Youths

Because we must undergo this refining process (1 Pet 1:6–7), we know that we will face difficulties at various points in our lives. Although this seems daunting, we can come to this understanding: God will guide us if we turn to Him (Mk 11:22–23). When we turn to Him for help, we realize just how vulnerable we are. We realize we are so weak without Him.

A preacher once said: “In times of suffering, turn your head to God.” We must constantly remember that God does not seek to make our lives difficult. We bring difficulties on ourselves through our disobedience and willfulness, when we go against God. I have learned the hard way that being firmly rooted in God is imperative for youths. Strive to root ourselves in the truth firmly, and He will surely allow us to flourish (1 Pet 2:2). Become always submissive to Him, and our fervor in God will never wane.

May all glory be unto His name. Amen!

Put God Above Our Goals

Eve Chin—London, UK

In 2014, I came to the United Kingdom from Malaysia to pursue higher education. I felt immense pressure to excel and make my family proud. Like many Asian parents, my father invested a lot of money in my education so I could obtain good qualifications. Naturally, I felt the need to do my absolute best, but this sense of duty to please my parents caused excessive stress along the way and hindered my relationship with God. Over time, however, I learned that academic and physical achievements should not be my main focus. No matter how hard I try, it is God who gives success (Ps 127:1). He has the power to give and to take away. And just as Jesus promised, when I learned to seek first the kingdom of God, He took care of all my physical needs (Mt 6:33).

BUILDING MY FAITH IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY

“Therefore, during my university years, I learned to let go of my worries, put God first in my life, and trust in Him”

I decided to study at the University of Reading, which is within traveling distance of the True Jesus Church in Central London, since studying in London itself was too expensive. I studied hard and tried my best to keep the Sabbath in my first year. To me, this meant attending at least one church service on Saturday. Even though I was born into the True Jesus Church, there was a considerable gap between my biblical knowledge and how I lived out God’s word in practical terms. Although they did not state it directly, the church youth tried to help me keep the full Sabbath by persistently inviting me to sleep over at church on Friday and Saturday nights. It is apt that my welcome gift from the London youths was a framed photo with the Bible verse:

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

(Mt 6:33)

Jesus said we need not worry about what we will eat or what we will wear; we should not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow



has its own worries. Today’s worth of trouble is enough (Mt 6:31, 34). The anxieties of life are never-ending. Indeed, we can plan, but if God is not willing, things will not go as we intended (Jas 4:13–15). So rather than worrying endlessly about the future, we should seek first the things above. Seek God’s word, righteousness, and kingdom; then He will take care of our needs.

Therefore, during my university years, I learned to let go of my worries, put God first in my life, and trust in Him.

STRUGGLES BETWEEN ACADEMIC PURSUIT AND GOD

Thank God, my foundation year and the first year of my Bachelor’s degree went smoothly. I studied diligently but gradually started putting God first and observing the full Sabbath day. However, the second year was more difficult. The amount of coursework and exams doubled, and so did my stress levels. What if I could only manage a pass? How could I let my father spend so much money for such a disappointing result? What if I end up with a low-paying job and cannot earn enough to repay my father? Furthermore, paying for weekly train tickets down to London added to my financial worries.

Sometimes, I would find peace through prayer; at other times, I could not handle the pressure. In those moments, I felt suffocated and found no relief. For the sake of studying, I spent less time in church. There were a few occasions when I did not attend Sabbath services. I preferred using my time to study or do coursework with my peers. Spending more time with my university friends seemed to make perfect sense because we had the same goal to do well academically. However, strangely, my grades dropped that year. If my university had not reviewed our course and adjusted the pass rate, I would have failed one of my modules.

Why did my results not reflect my effort? I was frustrated, and I felt the world was unfair. What more could I do? That was when I started to reflect deeply on my Christian life.

*And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:
Fear God and keep His commandments,
For this is man's all. (Eccl 12:12–13)*

The Preacher says there is no end to wisdom and studying can weary the flesh. God tells us that, instead of pursuing endless knowledge, we should focus on fearing Him and keeping His commandments.

Thank God that He gave me a summer internship in London that year despite my shortcomings. I was away from university, my university peers, and friends for two months. I could attend Wednesday youth fellowships and had no excuse for missing the Sabbath or Sunday church activities. Day in, day out, I spent my time wisely for God.

RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

Before my summer internship ended, we had a fellowship with brothers and sisters who had just returned from the Youth Theological Training Course. One brother shared how he had received the Holy Spirit during the three weeks. Initially, when the preacher confirmed that he had received the Holy Spirit, the brother would not accept it because he did not feel anything in his prayer and did not feel his tongue roll. Based on testimonies he had heard, he was expecting an extraordinary experience, like fire or a bright light shining from heaven. The preacher later approached him twice to confirm that he had received the Holy Spirit, yet the brother did not believe. The preacher rebuked him and encouraged the brother to pray with him to ask God's forgiveness for his unbelief. He felt his tongue roll in that prayer and was finally convinced that he had received the Holy Spirit.

I was ashamed when I heard this testimony. I had been praying for the Holy Spirit for so long. Perhaps, deep down, I, too, was unbelieving.

“That Sabbath, the preacher confirmed that I had received the Holy Spirit. Praise God!”

Before the youths parted ways, we prayed in the chapel. I kept the testimony in my heart and cried out to God to forgive my unbelieving heart. I sincerely apologized to God and told Him that I did not know what else to do apart from crying out to Him. I asked Him to forgive me, teach me,

and guide me. Suddenly, I felt my tongue rolling. I knew that God had given me His Holy Spirit. I could not stop crying; I was overjoyed. Everything made sense to me, and I understood that God is the Almighty God. He is omniscient and everlasting. It was then that I realized, without the Holy Spirit's guidance, it is impossible to understand the things of God (Jn 16:13; 1 Cor 2:11). That Sabbath, the preacher confirmed that I had received the Holy Spirit. Praise God!

GOD'S MERCY AND GRACE WHEN YOU SEEK HIM FIRST

In the final year of my course, I tried to adjust my life to live out my faith. This time around, I had the help of the Holy Spirit. Thank God, the academic stress was a lot easier to bear. I was more willing to travel to the church in London to spend time with God and partake in Sunday prayer sessions, church activities, and youth fellowships. Through continual prayers and encouragement from the brethren, I could focus on the things above rather than my worldly goals.

*He who walks with wise men will be wise,
But the companion of fools will be destroyed. (Prov 13:20)*

If we spend more time with our brethren—be it in fellowship, conversation over tea, or even shopping trips—we give God more opportunities to work among us. We have more chances to engage in godly conversations.

“While our education and career are important, I realized that these matters should not come before our faith”

In the eyes of my university friends, I may have seemed foolish because I no longer spent as much time studying or networking. While our education and career are important, I realized that these matters should not come before our faith.

[A]s newborn babies, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby. (1 Pet 2:2)

Rather than yearning for the things of the world, we should yearn for the word of God as newborns long for pure milk because God's word gives life and leads to salvation.

Praise the Almighty God that, of the three years of my degree, I achieved my highest grade in the final year. Even though I did not graduate with a first-class distinction—as was my ambition—I was completely at peace.

*Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things,
And revive me in Your way. (Ps 119:37)*

Often, we do not know that the things stored in our hearts are worthless. We need to open up to God to ask Him to guide us and show us what displeases Him. When He does, we should submit to Him. If we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, bit by bit, He will surely revive us in His way. He is faithful to those who are faithful to Him (Deut 7:9).

May all glory be unto God's name. Amen.

Journey of Faith

Rachel Lin—Calgary, Canada

RAISED IN THE FAITH

As a fourth-generation True Jesus Church believer, I was baptized as a baby and inherited the faith from my parents. My family showed me how important God is to them through their words and their service to God. From their testimonies of how they turned to the Almighty God and how He guided them in their lives, I gained conviction in my faith. And I, too, developed a personal relationship with God.

Our relationship with God is not only based on whether or not we believe. As we face different challenges and circumstances in life, our faith grows with us. For example, Jacob grew up hearing about the works of God and inherited the same faith and promises as his forefathers (Heb 11:9). However, only through his trials did Jacob establish his relationship with God. God used the adversities Jacob faced to show him that He is the one true God. These experiences strengthened Jacob's faith and transformed him from a self-centered young man to a humble servant who understood his place before the Lord. Likewise, today, the difficulties we face in our lives can deepen our faith.

Here, I share two periods of my life where I, too, felt God guiding me into a fuller understanding of my faith.

PERIOD 1: MOVING AWAY TO STUDY

In 2012, I moved to London for three years of university. It was my first time living away from home and attending services at the two churches in London. Nevertheless, the warmth I received from the London brethren made me feel very much at home. During my first year, I stayed at student

accommodation. Due to my shy and reserved nature, I struggled to form meaningful friendships with my classmates. As a result, I spent the year with minimal peer interaction. If it were not for the midweek youth fellowships, Friday night services, and weekly Sabbath sleepovers at church, I would have lived a very isolated existence and would not be as happy as I am today.

Living alone taught me that our relationship with God depends on the efforts we invest in it. Back at home, routines had been long established, and I did not have to work to keep my faith. However, I had to take responsibility for my own faith at university. Preserving my faith became a matter of self-discipline. Although it would have been easy to justify my absence from church, I did not allow myself to make excuses for any laziness, poor time management, or lack of motivation. I made sure to attend all the fellowships and services.

“I did not allow myself to make excuses for any laziness, poor time management, or lack of motivation”

Despite my efforts, I still felt distant from God. The life I led did not reflect that of a child of God. My attitude towards the Most High God was not of reverence and fear. My days were spent in a self-centered and imprudent manner. While we caution ourselves against committing obvious sins such as fornication, stealing, and murder, we tend to overlook the supposedly less severe forms of sin, sometimes to the point that we deem them to be normal. For example, social media and gaming addictions are forms of idol worship in today's context. If we are not alert and discerning, these sins will lead to the hardening of our hearts and, ultimately, spiritual death. Anything that does not follow the word of God will draw us away from Him.

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the

deceitfulness of sin. (Heb 3:12–13)

Towards the end of my first year, I reflected on the state of my faith and knew I had to improve. I did not want my faith to be simply habitual. I realized that to sustain a meaningful relationship with God, I had to be more sincere and zealous in my worship. In the following university years, I strove to live a God-centered life. When we genuinely seek God, He reveals Himself through His word and the Holy Spirit. I learned many spiritual teachings and developed a close relationship with God in this period.

Period 2: Returning Home

During my three years in London, I adapted well to the fast-paced city lifestyle and started actively serving God. Upon graduation, I returned home to a quiet town on the edge of the equally quiet city of Sunderland. Once again, it was a struggle to adjust to the change in environment. I found myself suddenly without a timetable or direction in life. Although I found great comfort in being reunited with family and having fellowship with church members, I felt empty and confused.

Logically, the next step for me was to find a job, but I did not know where to start. Entering the working world was a daunting prospect. I found myself among thousands of applicants vying for limited vacancies in the aftermath of the global recession of the late-2000s. During my search, I was offered a position that required me to work one Sabbath a month. In my state of desperation, I considered accepting the offer. I spent a long time rationalizing the decision. However, reflecting upon God's teachings on the Sabbath, I understood that I must not compromise my faith, and I turned down the job. From then on, I firmly refused work that challenged or jeopardized my faithfulness to God's will, no matter how tempting. After a year and a half of unsuccessful job-hunting, I was discouraged and dejected. I wondered why God was not giving me a chance. I felt like a failure to God and those around me.

“All the world's riches, fame, and glory are unprofitable if one does not know God”

Nevertheless, God's blessings remain upon us even in times of despair. In retrospect, I realize the two-year break God gave me between graduation and starting work was a precious time of rest and self-reflection. While I was preoccupied with job-hunting, I ended up taking the blessing of quietude and the opportunity to serve for granted.

Now that I am working, I long to return to that period of tranquility. Without work commitments, I attended many church events, served in various church seminars, and even volunteered on a one-month missionary trip to Africa. These opportunities were God's gift to me. I also spent much quiet time with God, praising Him in word and through hymns. As I drew nearer to Him, I recognized that although I have little to offer, I am still saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8–9). All the world's riches, fame, and glory are unprofitable if one does not know God.

*Thus says the LORD:
“Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,
Let not the mighty man glory in his might,
Nor let the rich man glory in his riches;
But let him who glories glory in this,
That he understands and knows Me,
That I am the LORD, exercising
lovingkindness, judgment, and
righteousness in the earth.
For in these I delight,” says the LORD.*

(Jer 9:23–24)

To lead a meaningful life, one must live for God. Whatever our earthly pursuits, our purpose and decisions in life should be centered around God.

“The lesson I learned is that we must be God-fearing children, always trusting and following Him throughout our life journey”

To stay rooted in Christ, we need to prioritize God in our lives. We must know what we believe in and trust in His promises with all our heart. Jacob came to acknowledge the Lord as His God and Master as he overcame various troubles in his life. To a lesser extent, I also witnessed the power of God and felt His guiding hand working in my life as I faced problems. Through both my university time and job-hunting journey, God never failed to guide and bless me with many opportunities. In any new life experience, whether great or small, Jesus can teach us a lot about our relationship with Him if we allow ourselves to be sensitive to His guidance. The lesson I learned is that we must be God-fearing children, always trusting and following Him throughout our life journey.

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.
Do not be wise in your own eyes;
Fear the LORD and depart from evil.*

(Prov 3:5–7)

BE ROOTED IN CHRIST (PART 3):

BEAR FRUIT IN CHRIST

Michael Chan—Leicester, UK

Mature faith overcomes all things—it remains steadfast in the face of temptation and trials. A mature faith even thrives and bears fruit *through* trials. How can we overcome the obstacles to our growth to cultivate such a victorious faith?

OBSTACLES TO OUR GROWTH

Sometimes we feel distant from God, as though many things are standing between Him and us. There will always be obstacles hindering us from drawing near or fully worshipping God. Here are a few areas where difficulties can arise:

A. The Environment

We could be affected by different issues that come with our circumstances (Mt 13:20–22). We could face poverty, illness, unemployment, or a work situation that conflicts with our Christian status. These factors may or may not be within our control, but they can stop us from drawing close to God.

B. The Self

Although we like to think of ourselves as rational beings, humans are governed by our emotions. Our actions and outlook are influenced by whether we are happy, angry, or sad at any given moment (Prov 4:23). If we do not feel like obeying God's word or do not enjoy worshipping God, are we able to deny ourselves?

C. Relationships with Others

If there is hatred and antagonism between ourselves and another, there is a barrier preventing us from drawing close to God (Mt 5:22–24). Sadly, conflicts may arise between brethren when there are misunderstandings or disagreements, which can escalate to the point where one party stops coming to church for a time. We may even become so angry with someone that we do not feel like praying or worshipping in God's house.

HOLDING FAST TO OUR FAITH

Many biblical characters held on to their faith in God, despite undergoing great sorrow and suffering. One example is Hannah. Every year, she would go to Shiloh with her family to offer sacrifices and worship God (1 Sam 1). But Peninnah would use these trips as opportunities to mock Hannah for being childless. So each time Hannah went to worship God, the occasion would be tainted with sorrow and humiliation. If every Sabbath we returned home from church distressed and in tears, would we be able to endure and continue attending weekly worship? Though Hannah must have anticipated these attacks, she faithfully made the yearly pilgrimage to worship God.

Another example is Job. For most people, it would be devastating to go through

bankruptcy and lose everything they own. But if they have their health and a loving family, they can rebuild meaningful lives. Losing a child is much harder to accept and move on from, no matter how long we had them in our lives. We may think facing chronic illness would be easier, but we know from experience that even a minor infection can have us begging to return to full health.

“It was not that he felt no sorrow or physical suffering, but Job knew he could not sin against God”

Job lost all his possessions, his children, and his health. He did not only lose one child but ten children and their families. The boils so deformed his face that his friends did not recognize him. These were unbearable trials, but Job held on to his faith. He did not sin, even when his wife tried to provoke him. It was not that he felt no sorrow or physical suffering, but Job knew he could not sin against God.

How can we, like these characters, hold on to our faith while facing trials and obstacles to our growth?

A. Faith, Not Feelings

If we are truly rooted and growing spiritually, then our environment, our

elves, and our relationships will not prevent us from drawing close to God. Faith is not dependent on feelings, and our emotions will not take precedent in our practice of the truth. If we constantly dwell on and plant our roots in our feelings, we will not see how God is trying to strengthen us, and we will not grow.

B. Be Constantly Filled By the Holy Spirit

We should not pray to be momentarily filled by the Holy Spirit when we occasionally need Him. We should not only seek Him when we feel weak. We should pray to be constantly filled by the Spirit, to transform our behavior and character.

“One powerful prayer will not inspire and sustain us to keep doing God's will”

If we only desire the spiritual “feeling” of being filled by the Spirit, our roots will be shallow. One powerful prayer will not inspire and sustain us to keep doing God's will, to preach and be faithful to His word, especially when we face troubles and can no longer feel that special feeling. Can we be like Daniel's three friends, who remained faithful in the face of certain death, even though there were no signs from God that He would save them (Dan 3:16–18)?



Today, we need to reflect on whether we are submitting to the Holy Spirit in our everyday life and doing everything to be acceptable to God. When we live to please God, we can be reassured that God is with us (Phil 2:13).

C. Faith Is the Core of Life

Our faith should be the core and most important aspect of our lives. However, we often treat it as a supplement to tap into when encountering problems or needs. We see it as just another thing to juggle and prioritize our other responsibilities above it. For example, we may see our education as the core of our life and only pray to God for academic success. We may decline church work assignments when we have exams and even miss Sabbath worship to revise. This shows that education has replaced God as the center of our lives, and faith is merely a supplement.

“But if we can still our hearts and find peace during trials, we know that we have grown in faith”

If faith is truly our core, we will invest time and effort into other aspects of our lives—our family, career, or passions—but we would never compromise or neglect our worship and relationship with God. We would continue to practice God’s commands, as faithful as ever. Our faith will no longer crumble or be lost in the face of adversity—it will be the thing that we hold firmly to keep us afloat.

COMFORT IN THE TIME OF CALAMITIES

As we undergo challenges and hold fast to our faith, God does not expect us to grit our teeth and carry on through sheer determination of will. God knows that we need encouragement and strength to keep us going during painful times. If we have faith in His good will for us, God will comfort us and help us to grow.

A. God Gives His Beloved Sleep

In times of trouble, the fear and anxiety churning within us can make us lose sleep. But when we fully entrust

our lives to God, we find that we sleep peacefully, just like Jesus and Peter did when they were in dangerous situations (Mt 8:24; Acts 12:6, 7, 9; Ps 127:2). If we can let things go and allow God full control, our hearts will be calm when trouble comes. This is not apathy—we will still care and be affected by the ups and downs of life. But if we can still our hearts and find peace during trials, we know that we have grown in faith (Isa 26:3).

B. Seek to Comfort, Not to Be Comforted

“But some have been able to look beyond their suffering and show concern for others”

Showing concern for others is more relevant today, during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic or any other collective crisis and catastrophe. Individually, we have experienced different levels and forms of stress and uncertainty. Government restrictions and social distancing measures have severely impacted our lives, and the combination of these factors has created a mental health crisis. But some have been able to look beyond their suffering and show concern for others (Phil 2:30). If we are spiritually mature, we will put our worries aside to reach out to our brothers and sisters, both near and far, to see how they are doing.

GROWTH THROUGH TRIALS

There are examples in the Bible of people firmly rooted in God’s word, who reached a spiritual maturity level that overcame their circumstances. They did not wait for times of peace to cultivate themselves, and instead, they served God faithfully during great persecution. Even when they knew their remaining time on earth would be short, they did not complain or question but used the opportunity to write their prophecies, testimonies, and encouragements for the benefit of the church.

A. Peter: Grasp Every Opportunity

When Peter wrote his second epistle, he knew that he would die soon (2 Pet 1:12–21). What would we do if we knew that we would be imminently “putting off our tent”? Jesus had already told Peter that he would die an unpleasant and violent death (Jn 21:18–19). He would be persecuted, but his death would bring glory to God. Nonetheless, he wrote:

I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you. ...Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease. (2 Pet 1:13–15)

Peter continued to encourage the brethren, ensuring that his testimony would remain after his demise.

Today, do we put off serving God

when we have time and a degree of material comfort? As we grow older and gain more responsibilities in life, we should grasp every opportunity to cultivate ourselves, seek God’s pleasure, and encourage others, no matter our circumstances.

B. Paul: Unbound By Circumstances

Paul endured several stretches in prison and house arrest. If he ever felt a moment of sadness or frustration about being in chains, we never see any sign of it. When he and Silas were imprisoned, they spent their time singing and praying (Acts 16:25). Physically, they were in prison, but spiritually, through faith, they were free. Another time, Paul explained to Timothy that, though he was in chains,

encouragement for the believers and formed a crucial portion of the New Testament, edifying and enlightening countless souls throughout history. Today, thanks to Paul’s prison epistles, we have a clearer understanding of our belief and the doctrines of God.

C. John: Higher Spiritual Ground

John’s life also ended in dire circumstances. He was persecuted and exiled to the island of Patmos as a criminal. But it was here that God chose to reveal to John His mysteries and visions of things to come, which John recorded as the Book of Revelation (Rev 1:9). When we are going through difficulties, it is not uncommon for God to reveal His will and help us learn from the experience.

“We must change and root ourselves deeper in God’s word”

All three of these apostles faced calamity, but they did not seek comfort or freedom; instead, they accepted and made use of their respective situations. They recorded what they received from God to educate, encourage, and edify the members. Today, if we desire to take root in Christ, His church, and the truth, we need to respond positively to challenges and constraints. If our behavior and mindset do not align with the Bible’s requirements, we must change and root ourselves deeper in God’s word.

CONCLUSION

Taking root and growing in the Lord is not simply a thought or an abstract idea—it must be accomplished with practical and attainable steps. It is God’s will for every one of us to be firmly established in Him. But most importantly, we must be rooted and spiritually thriving to prosper the work of God and edify those around us, so we can all be built up in Christ (Eph 4:11–17). So, let us reflect: *How deeply rooted am I in the truth? How strong is my faith? Am I able to defend our beliefs? And do I have unwavering trust in God, no matter what I encounter?*

God is with us and will never leave those who do His will. So let us not be troubled, whatever befalls us, as God’s promises never fail. We will be as a fruitful tree through faith in God, planted by the waters (Ps 1:3; Jer 17:8).



the word of God is not chained (2 Tim 2:9). This is why Paul wrote many letters while under house arrest (Eph 6:20). Today, we may not physically be in prison, but we may feel bound by our circumstances. During periods of complete lockdown, youths may feel locked out of employment, and parents may feel imprisoned by the constant grind of childcare and homeschool duties, on top of working from home. Like in prison, we lose our liberty and are forced into a position not of our choosing. Would we feel discouraged, or would we use this as an opportunity to grow in Christ?

Paul chose the latter—he could no longer travel to preach, so he took this opportunity to write. His letters were sources of

INTERVIEW: SUCCESSION

Peter Shee—Singapore

Editor's note: In our Christian journey, as we root and grow in the grace and word of the Lord, the natural result is that we will bear fruit (Isa 37:31; Jn 15:5; Rom 7:4). And the more we come to know God, the more we will be compelled by Christ's love to offer up our bodies as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1). Serving the Lord as part of the body of Christ, as part of His royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9), becomes our duty and purpose. Therefore, the topic of succession is essential for the youth, as they prepare themselves to take their next steps in the ministry and assume more responsibilities. Here, we ask Preacher Peter Shee for his advice to the youth—the future pillars of the church.

The Bible has many examples of mentors and their successors, such as Moses and Joshua, and Elijah and Elisha. Is there a Bible passage that you would like to share on the theme of succession?

Paul's second letter to Timothy, one of his successors, offers many valuable insights on this theme. It contains one of the most relevant verses to any discussion of succession:

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Tim 2:2)

The epistle focuses principally on Paul's mentorship of Timothy, but if we look closely, the verse reveals *four generations of succession*—from Paul to Timothy and other witnesses, to another group of faithful men, who can teach others. It is worth noting that Paul saw his mentors as forefathers and Timothy as his son (2 Tim 1:3; 2:1). The work of the ministry is a family business.

That's an encouraging way of looking at it—how intimate our relationships as co-workers can be. What lessons about succession can we learn from 2 Timothy?

We can start with the verse I just shared, 2 Timothy 2:2. Many witnesses heard Paul, but Paul was writing only to Timothy. Today, are we just witnesses who don't contribute? Perhaps there were other

believers around Timothy, but not many were suitable to succeed in the ministry. It is like a pyramid: Paul commits the gospel to Timothy, who commits it to more people, who each commit it to even more. But how many faithful men would Timothy have been able to find? Likewise, we may have difficulties finding successors or co-workers. But first, we can reflect on whether others will find us faithful to succeed in the ministry.

Only adjusting our external behavior is insufficient. It is also about our internal state. We need purity built upon the doctrine and God's holiness to fulfill our ministry. Paul lists the moral degradation that will happen to people in the last days (2 Tim 3:1–7). A lack of knowledge of the truth leads to sinfulness because they are "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim 3:7). Doctrine and behavior go hand in hand.

Succeeding to the ministry is not easy. Timothy faced challenges in his environment. A few times, Paul begins his encouragement to Timothy with the phrase, "*But you*" (2 Tim 3:10, 14; 4:5). Paul highlighted the corruption of Timothy's peers, whom Paul even described as evil (2 Tim 3:13). Thus, when we take up the challenge of succeeding to the ministry, Paul declares that we must be like soldiers and athletes: focused and disciplined (2 Tim 2:3–5). We must be disciplined in pursuing righteousness and the things of God.

No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. (2 Tim 2:4)

Finally, just as Timothy observed Paul, we can observe older servants of God and carefully follow what they do well. My peers and I have to reflect on 2 Timothy 3:10–11. Have we been good examples in doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, and afflictions?

You will notice that these lessons all relate to the challenges involved in succeeding to the ministry.

I suppose these challenges that Timothy faced are what we also encounter today.

Yes. How many youths—both brothers and sisters—want to enter the full-time ministry? Sisters may not serve in the same capacity as brothers, but they can serve full-time too.

Or think about striving for holiness. How many of your peers are virgins before marriage? Our behavior has to be different! Remember the imperative: "*But you.*"

We can also ask ourselves: *Have I suffered for Christ? What's my worst experience of suffering for Him? Have I ever been spat at while preaching?* Another preacher once had someone crush an evangelistic pamphlet right in front of him. Not many of us have suffered much for Christ. God has been very kind and patient in training us, but He has not tested us yet. We have not suffered. We are far from ready. We must be prepared for people to insult us! And we cannot react with our fists—we need to respond like Jesus and Paul. How do we gently and humbly correct them (2 Tim 2:24–26)? How do we toughen ourselves up, when we are so comfortable, so that we can stand when fierce persecutions come?

Succeeding to the ministry is not about *what challenges you face now, but what challenges you will take up*. Anyone who wants to live as a godly person will be persecuted (2 Tim 3:12; 2:3). Enduring persecution is part of doing God's work.

What if I feel like I don't have the necessary gifts to take up the challenges involved with succeeding to the ministry?

When we say that we can't do this or that for the Lord, we are lying against the truth! Once we are baptized, every member is a *functioning* member. The Lord does not put us in the body of Christ without gifts (Rom 12:4–8). We may feel that we are not gifted, but this is untrue. Hence, Paul reminds Timothy "to stir up the gift of God which is in [him]" (2 Tim 1:6). Whether we think we have the capabilities to

serve God or not is in our mind. Paul points out that God gives us not a spirit of fear, but of a sound mind (2 Tim 1:7). This sound mind helps us to think according to what God wants.

How were you mentored when you were a youth?

I would accompany a brother to Bible studies held at different districts and school campuses a few times a week. Back then, Singapore had one church. The youth were leading Bible studies for adults! They were examples to the believers (1 Tim 4:12). I learned a lot from observing others and through doing God's work in situations like these. We also influenced our peers and younger ones to love God's word. Hence, more and more youths attended at least one of these district Bible studies each week. Now, they are God's faithful workers in church.

On this note, there were some youths slightly younger than me who called themselves the Timothians. They were very evangelistic. Their Intermediate Youth class grew, and grew, and grew! They were a strong group of youths. About half of them were truth-seekers, many of whom got baptized and serve actively in the church today. We need a strong youth core—it is vital for the church. These members don't have to be in committees.

What is some other advice you have for the youth today?

Forging relationships with the ones coming up behind us is very important,

so the youth need to connect with the children and younger youths going through the religious education (RE) system. Before you look at the RE teachers, look at yourself. How committed are you to the word of God and to attending fellowships? If you are an RE teacher, look at your RE class. Are they strong? Do they have RE at home? We have to start young because the world is already influencing them! One RE lesson a week is not enough to keep the world at bay. It's an uphill task, but all youths—not only the ones who are teachers—need to make friends with our RE students. If you love the word of God, look out for these younger youths. Be a positive Christian influence.

Why did Paul ask Timothy to look for faithful men who can teach others (2 Tim 2:2)? Because being able to teach the word of God is essential for succession. Teaching is not just about being an RE teacher. Teaching God's word is about using the Bible and our lives to inspire others to be good Christians.

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Tim 2:15)

Dividing the word of truth is splitting God's word into smaller portions that people can

understand. We may be good workers, but are we able to teach?

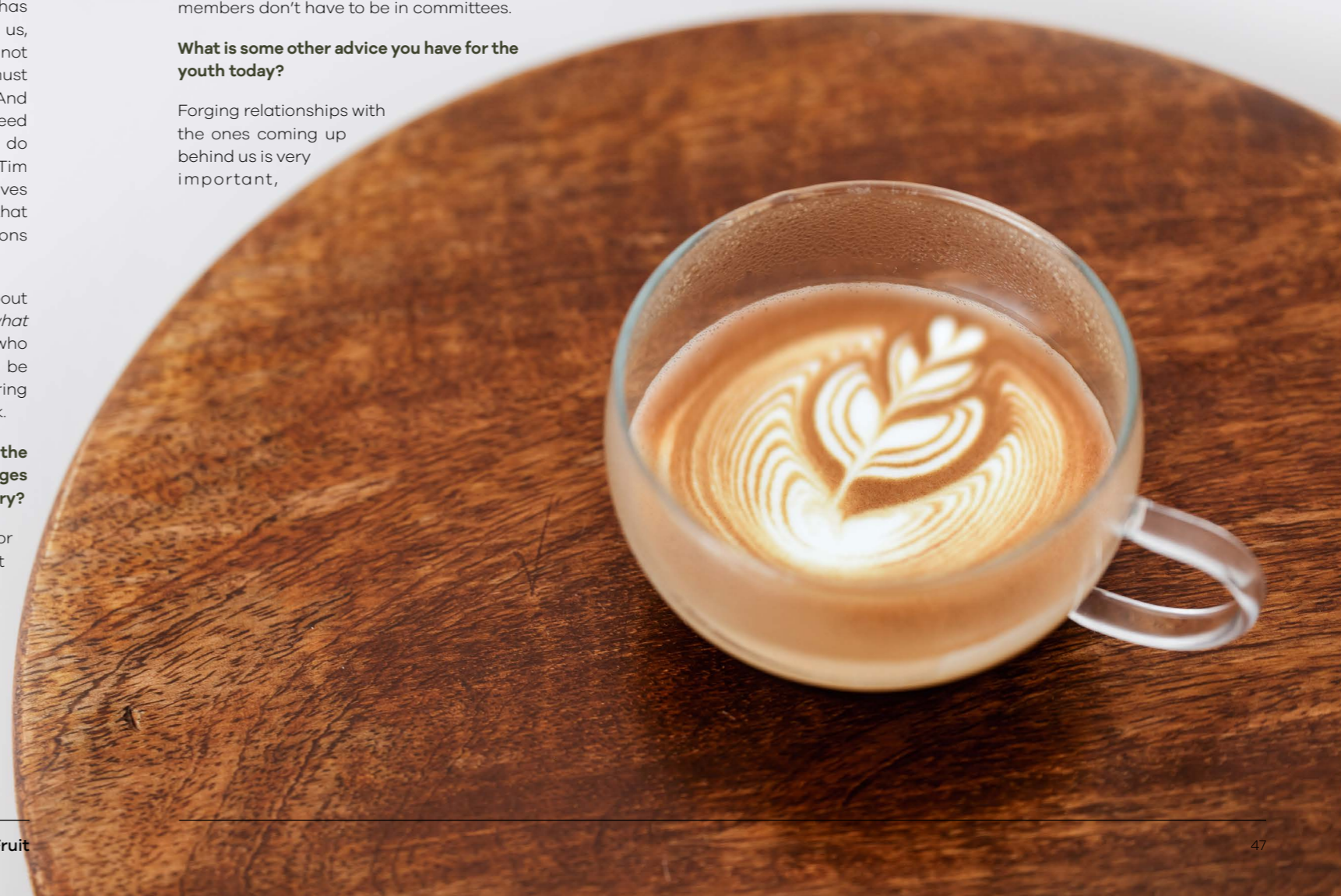
We should influence and encourage one another in the love of God's word. How can we be good Christian influencers? We cannot only be task-oriented; we should be people-centered. We cannot keep to ourselves if we want to encourage others in the word. Connect with church brethren across age groups, and keep friendships going.

In the future, if you become a worker of God serving on a committee, don't abandon the youth. They need mentorship.

Thanks for sharing your advice, Preacher Shee. Any final words for us?

No one forces you to be a Christian. Once you are a Christian, you have no choice but to serve in the ministry. The ministry and Christian living have no dividing line. In following Paul's ministry and doctrine, Timothy followed Paul's manner of life (2 Tim 3:10–12). Take up the challenge. Be strong and of good courage!

Christian living have no dividing line. In following Paul's ministry and doctrine, Timothy had to follow Paul's manner of life (2 Tim 3:10–12). Take up the challenge. Be strong and of good courage!



OVERCOMING SUBTLE TEMPTATIONS AS A STUDENT

Bianca Wong—Newcastle, UK



Our student years are often when our social life peaks: we meet like-minded people with similar passions and aspirations, and we have more time and opportunities to socialize. However, the world's deceptive glamour has entrapped many through such social activities, masking the evil that separates us from God.

The Bible teaches us that Satan's plans are cunning, calculated, and made-to-measure for us (1 Pet 5:8). This would be frightening if it were not for God's omnibenevolent protection over His children. Yet, like Paul, we may still find ourselves struggling against the recurring evil that we ought not to do (Rom 7:19).

THE TEMPTATION TO PLEASE

More often than not, the less obvious temptations trip us up the most. Temptations of this nature do not come with flashing and blaring "choose me" signs, and Satan craftily makes them subtle for a reason. They are easily masked by what is deemed normal or acceptable for a student. The pull to sin against God is almost undetectable as we gradually conform to the worldly norm.

Temptations in the form of peer pressure can be spoken, unspoken, direct, and even indirect. No matter what form they take, temptations always force us to choose. Do we succumb to pleasing others and our carnal desires, or do we submit to the word of God?

I recall three incidents where, as a university student, the temptation to please man over God challenged my faith.

1. The Temptation to Please Our Peers

Our family and church brethren often encourage us to interact with our university classmates and friends to create opportunities to preach. Although this is a good reason to socialize, we may unwittingly be sucked into the vortex of wanting to fit in with our fellow students by behaving as they do.

FOMO: the "fear of missing out." We have all felt it before. It is that uncomfortable feeling of knowing that our friends and peers are enjoying themselves without us. But this uneasy feeling recedes when we are aware of the dangers of indulging in

sinful worldly activities, such as clubbing and drinking, or when it is apparent that it goes against the commandments of God, such as skipping church services on the holy Sabbath day.

It has gradually become easier to say no in today's society because the world is becoming more accepting of people's individualism, personal identities, values, and beliefs. The need to "fit in" is not so trendy now.

Nevertheless, subtle and indirect temptations are harder to detect and say no. We may not even realize we have been tempted until after we have sinned and the condition of our heart and faith are exposed. For example, we may find ourselves jumping into conversations to criticize our tutors or fellow students, or complain about assignments and marking schemes. We may even purposely stir up these discussions to gain popularity and build friendships.

This indirect peer pressure tempts us to mimic the sinful behavior we see others doing. On the surface, it may seem to have little impact on our salvation, but the words we choose to speak will reflect the condition of our heart.

"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." (Lk 6:45)

2. The Temptation to Please Ourselves

We live in a dog-eat-dog world, and university is no exception. University is an institute filled with burgeoning prospects, fuelling the ambition of students to achieve greater things.

We know that if we work hard in our education and secular jobs, we can enjoy the riches of our labor that God grants us (Eccl 5:18–20; 9:10). Peter also reminds us to submit to those who have authority over us (1 Pet 2:18). We must diligently fulfill our duty as students to complete our assignments, attend classes, and follow our tutors' instructions. However, in this competitive environment, it is tempting to chase after our dreams and neglect the things of God, especially when we compare our academic efforts and achievements with non-believers.

To achieve the best, be noticed, and find ways to fast-track to success are typical aspirations for a student, but these stem

from a self-serving desire. Though there is nothing wrong with trying our best, making progress, and serving our secular masters, this competitive mindset can breed discontentment when we only prioritize our own aspirations.

"This temptation to please ourselves clouds God's standards and instead illuminates our own"

This discontentment can lead us to diminish the severity of keeping the commandments and principles of God, which often takes sacrifice. When we compare ourselves to those who do not



have these principles, losing out becomes much more apparent and difficult to bear. For example, we may neglect to observe the holy Sabbath day in its entirety or stop attending fellowships to study more, receive extra credit, and be top of the class.

This temptation to please ourselves clouds God's standards and instead illuminates our own.

3. The Temptation to Please Our Tutors

Society encourages inclusivity of all beliefs and identities, including LGBTQ rights,

religious stances, and gender identity. Although this can benefit our ability to preach and practice our religion, at the same time, it can significantly impact our faith.

As Christians, we must follow the principles of God to obey our secular masters. However, when tutors or those in authority push us to do what is against righteousness and truth, like joining in religious and paganistic festivals or LGBTQ-related events, we are faced with the temptation to please them to gain their favor over pleasing God.

I experienced this struggle during my final year of university. All students in my final year group were fundraising for our prestigious annual graduate design show in London. One event that raises the most money is the Christmas party, held in the last week before the winter break. Although I was not involved in the planning process, my intention of skipping the event did not go unnoticed. My friends were not surprised since I had declined to attend in the previous years. And when my classmates tried to persuade me, I did not waver in my decision.

On the day of the event, my tutor approached me to ask if I was attending the party. This time, I felt immediate pressure. When I said I was not going, he asked me why. I was not brave enough to explain my Christian stance; instead, I responded that I was not the type to go to these social events, all the while hoping for a subject change.

"I did not go to the Christmas party, but I was faced with the guilt of compromising my faith and displeasing my God"

I remember the disappointed look on his face when he said, "You are supposed to be raising money for your year group, and you are meant to be part of the team. Of all people, I thought you'd be the one to go."

From that point on, I felt pressure to please my tutor and go to the party. I considered how I could attend without being seen by church members: I could just turn up, greet everyone there and then leave quickly, or even buy a ticket with no intention of going. I ended up swaying by replying that I would think about it. In the end, I did not go to the Christmas party, but I was faced with the guilt of compromising my faith and displeasing my God.

HOW CAN WE OVERCOME SUBTLE TEMPTATIONS?

Satan presents these subtle temptations as “normal” societal and student behaviors, which warps our minds and causes us to be desensitized to the pull of sin. Therefore, we must be simple concerning what is evil (Rom 16:19).

The first step is to identify exactly what evil is. Since God is good, it only makes sense

to turn to Him for clarity.

For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Heb 5:13–14)

Only by God’s words can we become spiritually mature, able to exercise our senses to discern good and evil. This comes from cultivating a good and regular Bible reading habit.

We are often reminded that Bible reading is important because there is no better way to ascertain what God regards as evil. Like reading an instruction manual, we

learn what we need to do, find solutions to problems, and most importantly, identify what is dangerous (2 Tim 3:16). If we neglect the word of God, it is like throwing away this instruction manual; we become susceptible to danger, failure, and long-term problems.

“We must implement the principles of God in our lives by developing good habits, and allowing His words to guide our decision-making”

To be under God’s protection, we must draw close to His word so that it exposes

the evil that tempts us. We must implement the principles of God in our lives by developing good habits, and allowing His words to guide our decision-making. Then we can abstain from every form of evil (1 Thess 5:22) and remain safe in God’s preservation.

HOW DID MORDECAI OVERCOME PEER PRESSURE?

Like us today, Mordecai was surrounded by those who were not of the truth, pressuring him to go against God’s word. Mordecai understood and demonstrated the need to remain faithful to God’s principles, despite the peer pressure he faced from the king’s servants for not bowing down to Haman (Est 3:1–3).

In Esther 3, Mordecai took three actions to resist peer pressure. By observing his actions, we can learn how to stay within God’s protection and overcome temptations.

1. Swift Refusal at the Very Beginning

And all the king’s servants who were within the king’s gate bowed and paid homage to Haman, for so the king had commanded concerning him. But Mordecai would not bow or pay homage. (Est 3:2)

When we face temptation, learn to say no as soon as it appears. Delaying our decision leaves room for overthinking, leading us to compromise our faith. Since carnal lusts war against the soul, we must quickly opt to walk in the Spirit, Who strengthens us to overcome these subtle temptations (1 Pet 2:11; Gal 5:16).

2. Daily Persistence in His Refusal

Then the king’s servants who were within the king’s gate said to Mordecai, “Why do you transgress the king’s command?” Now it happened, when they spoke to him daily and he would not listen to them, that they told it to Haman, to see whether Mordecai’s words would stand. (Est 3:3–4a)

“Have faith in God’s promise of rewarding those who endure temptation with the crown of life”

Secondly, we must persist in our refusal by clinging to what is righteous. Satan waits for no one, tempting us daily, everywhere we go. Therefore, we must persistently refuse to succumb to peer pressure by conscientiously aspiring to please God. Have faith in God’s promise of rewarding those who endure temptation with the crown of life (Jas 1:12).

more accepting of us and our choices, we can, by God’s grace, positively influence them to become righteous before God.

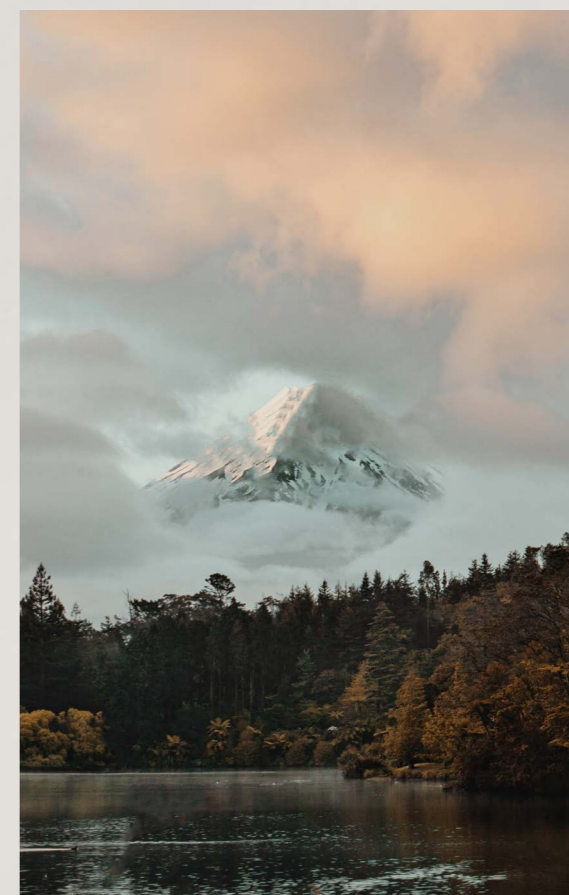
We know that Mordecai was sentenced to execution as punishment, along with the annihilation of the Jews. Similarly, when we hold fast to our faith, we may face difficulties such as mocking, social isolation, missed opportunities, or even more pressure. It may seem as though holding onto the word of God is not worth going through such suffering.

But remember, God protected Mordecai, saved the Jews, and defeated their enemies. Let us look beyond our temporary emotions and physical circumstances and look towards the eternal life of glory, honor, immortality, and peace for doing what is good (Rom 2:7,10).

CONCLUSION

As students, we need to hold fast to God’s principles because subtle forms of temptations can significantly impact our spiritual lives. As our social life peaks, we constantly decide whether to please others, please our flesh, or please God. To make these decisions, we need to be simple-minded concerning what is evil by drawing close to God’s word.

Furthermore, take active steps as Mordecai did. Although we may seem to lose out or face more challenges, have faith that the decision to please God and cling to His commandments will lead to a long-term reward: salvation.



3. Explaining the Reasons for His Refusal

[F]or Mordecai had told them that he was a Jew. ...But [Haman] disdained to lay hands on Mordecai alone, for they had told him of the people of Mordecai. Instead, Haman sought to destroy all the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus—the people of Mordecai. (Est 3:4b, 6)

Thirdly, Mordecai explained the reasons for his refusal to bow down to Haman. When we explain to others our Christian stance, we make God and His principles known to man (Ps 40:9–10). When our peers become





ADAPTING TO THE CHALLENGES OF COVID-19

Joshua Phoong—Ipoh, Malaysia

We are living in a time unprecedented in its volatility and uncertainty. The overwhelming force of the pandemic, which has raged beyond two years, shows little sign of abatement. This monumental threat to public health has disrupted daily life, wrought sociopolitical and economic havoc, and caused untold misery. With many countries imposing widespread restrictions on movement and urging residents to limit physical interaction during this period, we have been forced to reconsider and adapt in almost every aspect of life—the way we work, socialize, and most importantly, the way we worship and carry out the Lord's mission of propagating the gospel.

Lockdowns—notably, the unpredictability of their recurrence—may appear to render evangelism impossible. How can we preach when we cannot reach? How can we plan when things change at the drop of a hat? But nothing is impossible with a willing and receptive heart and with God's inspiration through the Holy Spirit. Instead of resigning ourselves to inaction, we must proactively adapt our long-held traditions to overcome physical barriers, changing how we conduct services, care for one another, and how we pastor and

evangelize. Specifically, in the context of world mission, we must boldly empower and revitalize the church to “[g]o into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15).

The work of the gospel must never cease or stagnate. In the new normal of living with the pandemic, we must work even harder to make disciples of all nations. What does it take to do so?

FORWARD-THINKING WITH RENEWED CONVICTION

For a start, we must understand that mission work has to continue irrespective of any changes in environment or circumstance. Our Lord instructs us to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19–20). The apostle Paul reminds us that this mission must remain the foremost priority, and we have to be ready to preach the gospel, in season and out of season (2 Tim 4:2).

To date, the True Jesus Church has tended to rely on personal invitations—to the church or family services—as a means of introducing the truth to our friends. While this was effective in the past,

present COVID-19-mitigation measures, such as countrywide lockdowns, have disrupted such an approach. Nevertheless, continuing to fulfill the Lord's charge to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom (Mt 24:14) is non-negotiable. We must, thus, formulate new strategies and proceed with renewed conviction. Charging ahead to propagate the gospel requires several things.

Embracing Change

First, we must embrace change and reskill ourselves to suit the current circumstances. We must become all things to all men so that we may save some (1 Cor 9:22). Through God's guidance, the church has actively deployed new digital methods and various tools to maintain our connection with believers and spread the gospel of Christ to the broader public. Through these, we can hold regular virtual services, religious education lessons, seminars, and training quite seamlessly.

However, we must not become complacent. In our hyperconnected world, billions of people use social media and various online platforms to stay connected. So, we must keep up with and explore the full potential of these platforms. As creatures of habit,

there is a natural inclination for speakers to rely on the same presentation strategy. When told to adapt from in-person to a virtual format, we minimally tweak what we have always done. This is insufficient. We have to rethink and redesign our online engagement strategies.

In-person, meet-and-greet sessions are critical in spurring one another in love and good deeds for our mutual encouragement (Heb 10:24–25). However, in light of the varied restrictions on congregating physically, the church must adopt a flexible and hybrid approach, switching seamlessly between physical and digital. Technological formats and solutions evolve very quickly. We must constantly refine our online engagement approaches to find the most effective ways to connect with members and truth-seekers alike. Examples of initiatives to be piloted or strengthened include:

- **New platforms:** online evangelistic platforms and virtual forums to engage people and encourage discussion on relevant topics.
- **New structures:** internet evangelism teams and community outreach volunteers (COV) to reach different target segments.

Staying Steadfast in Faith

Second, even as we learn to use new tools, we must never lack spiritual preparation. We need to remain steadfast in faith. We need to deepen our understanding of different geographical, environmental, and societal contexts. These attune us to the needs and specific circumstances of the people to whom we are reaching out. However, increasing our knowledge of the Bible, the doctrines, and the truth is even more critical as these help us better expound the Scriptures (2 Tim 1:13–14).

We also need to pray incessantly (1 Thess 5:17), not only for ourselves as individual parts of the body of Christ (Rom 12:4–6) but also for the spiritual health and development of the body itself—our church as a whole.

Prayer is also crucial in ensuring that we remain faithful to the truth. Despite our need to be nimble in our gospel outreach strategy, we must never compromise our doctrines. Our core message must remain unchanged. We are adapting to how we deliver our message to reach a new generation of believers.

This requires us to constantly examine ourselves and ensure that we hold firmly to the doctrines and truth.

Seizing Opportunities

Third, we must seize every opportunity to advance the truth. This includes taking advantage of new challenges and trials. On an individual basis, tribulations hone our spiritual resilience (Jas 1:3; 1 Pet 4:12). As a church, trials unlock new opportunities. To illustrate: the disciples' dispersal from Jerusalem, driven by intense persecution (Acts 8), was the will of God as it allowed the apostolic church to spread the gospel to the four corners of the earth. Without this abrupt, tumultuous event that displaced members of the apostolic church far and wide, the spread of the gospel would have been geographically stunted.

“Have faith in God's promise of rewarding those who endure temptation with the crown of life”

Do not be tempted to think of lockdowns as opportunities to withdraw and rest. With believers waiting only for “favorable conditions” to preach, slow growth and complacency are often fertile seedbeds for doctrinal perversion. Do not fear the present adversity. Learning from the persecution of the apostolic church, cherish the opportunities that present themselves amid tribulations. Trust that all things work together for the good of those who love Him (Rom 8:28).

God gives wisdom to face trials to all who ask (Jas 1:5). Forging ahead, we can ask Him to provide us the strength and wisdom to recognize new opportunities in the face of adversity, to adapt our legacy approaches to the changing circumstances, and make the most of every opportunity He provides (Eph 5:15–16).

CONCLUSION: SAME GOSPEL, DIFFERENT APPROACH

Faced with the constant barrage of reports on COVID-19 infections and deaths, it is natural for us to be afraid and discouraged from carrying out our Lord's commission. But if we love propagating the gospel and place our trust in God, not deviating from His path, God's love will find a way. We are only His vessels. Let us be diligent, innovative, tenacious stewards who faithfully keep His word and preach it to the nations!

And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not lose heart.
(Gal 6:9)



LET THE LOWER LIGHTS BE BURNING

Brandon Shek—Edinburgh, UK

Editor's note: Hymns are woven into the very fabric of our Christian lives. We praise God with hymns during worship services and through choir presentations, we listen to recordings of hymn at home or in our cars, and we may even hum them as we go about our daily business. Hymnal praise brings vivid colour into our worship, as we sacrifice the fruit of our lips as a sweet offering, with grace and melody in our hearts, to the Lord (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16; Heb 13:15). But do we sometimes take hymn singing for granted? How often do we reflect on the lyrics of a hymn and allow ourselves to be spiritually edified by the truth of the message therein? In this reflection, the writer does just that and discovers new depths and insights to a hymn he learned long ago.

On the final evening of the Literary Ministry Seminar (2018), participants had the opportunity to share and reflect on some hymns. As I was considering which hymn to choose, I recalled a line from a hymn I had not sung in a long time:

***Some poor fainting, struggling seaman
You may rescue, you may save.***

I then turned to the hymn *Let the Lower Lights Be Burning* by Philip P Bliss (1838–1876) to remind myself of its contents.

I distinctly remember learning this hymn at a younger age. My vivid childhood imagination turned the nautical imagery, often used in the Bible, into great scenes of sailing the vast seas on a small boat. As my focus was on the imagery, I did not properly pay attention to the hymn leader's explanation and encouragement.

Returning to this hymn after attending many spiritual convocations and youth theological training courses, I reflected on its teachings and what they can mean.

***Brightly beams our Father's mercy
From His lighthouse evermore,
But to us He gives the keeping
Of the lights along the shore.***

The first verse speaks about the mercy of God, forever shining brightly to all who are in the world, like the light from a lighthouse. But what are the "lights along the shore," given to us to keep?

In seafaring, lighthouses guide ships in unfavorable conditions—strong winds, storms, fog, and darkness. They serve as a navigational aid for sailors to avoid dangerous rocks and reefs, leading them safely into harbor. The lower lights along the shore illuminate the harbor, further guiding the ships to dock safely.

Both the lighthouse and the lower lights are important in a ship's voyage, especially in times of difficulty. As light from a lighthouse, the grace of God can be witnessed by all; it guides souls to the truth and His church. God then entrusts us with the lights on the shore. This is the part we play in bringing people to the truth.

***Eager eyes are watching, longing
For the lights along the shore.***

It is common for sailors to be battered by wind and rain on long voyages—a very unpleasant situation. It can be an overwhelming and tiring struggle against the currents and winds that beat against you. In exhaustion, you desperately seek a light in the darkness—the lights that will lead you safely to the shore.

In the Bible, the sea can represent the world, where sin and the dead are (Rev 20:13). But more specifically, it can express a believer's heart or faith when beset by false doctrine and doubt:

*But let him ask in faith, with no doubting,
for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea
driven and tossed by the wind. (Jas 1:6)*

*That we should no longer be children,
tossed to and fro and carried about with
every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of
men, in the cunning craftiness of
deceitful plotting. (Eph 4:14)*

A believer is tossed to and fro in such situations, like a ship in a storm. This person will find neither rest nor peace, lost and desperate, as though he were sinking or drowning at sea. We may have even experienced this struggle ourselves.

Knowing this, the third verse of the hymn brings together the importance of diligently keeping our lights burning:

***Trim your feeble lamp, my brother,
Some poor sailor tempest tossed,
Trying now to make the harbor,
In the darkness may be lost.***

In Ephesians, Paul tells us that we were once darkness, but now we are light in the Lord (Eph 5:8). He then instructs us to walk as children of light, to find out what is acceptable to the Lord, and expose the works of darkness (Eph 5:10–13).

As a light in the Lord, we find out what is acceptable to God—that which is righteous, pleasing in the eyes of God, and according to God's will—before fulfilling it in our lives. This also means that we should discern what is unacceptable to God to expose the works of darkness. In doing this, we will understand what is needed to guide the lost to the light.

Ultimately, we guide the lost by shining God's light through sharing the mercy of God—the blessings and teachings we have gained from His word in our journey of faith. By reflecting on God's grace and manifesting it through our actions and sharing it in testimonies, we may become like lights to guide others—both those in the truth and those who have yet to know the truth. This light is a lamp we need to trim and tend to regularly because we do not know who will need help or when they will need it most. If we continuously shine as lights in the world, as blameless children of God (Phil 2:15), we can safely guide those lost at sea to shore.

***Let the lower lights be burning!
Send a gleam across the wave!
Some poor, fainting, struggling seaman
You may rescue, you may save.***

Ezekiel chapters 3 and 33 record Ezekiel's duty as a watchman—one who stands watch on the wall and watchtowers of a city, warning the people of any incoming danger. God tasks the watchman to turn the wicked from their ways and the righteous from wickedness (Ezek 3:17–21). This critical task is not to be taken lightly. If a watchman fails to warn the people, their blood will be on his head. This is the job of a prophet: Ezekiel is to speak the word of God to warn the people of the punishment they will face if they do not turn from their ways. This responsibility shows that not only is there a personal consequence for not fulfilling our task, but more importantly, we should have the conviction to try to save lives.

As watchmen, if we shine God's light as far as we can across the sea, we may save someone struggling and lost. We should testify of God to all those around—to those yet to know the truth and those who are lost—and by the grace of God, we may rescue, we may save. Once they have come to the shore, they too can keep the lower lights to shine the light of how God has helped them. As children and servants of the one true God, this is our duty: to shine the light of His glory in the world (Phil 2:15).

Hallelujah! May all glory and praise be unto His holy name. Amen!

ARTICLES OF FAITH

JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ, the Word who became flesh, died on the cross for the redemption of sinners, resurrected on the third day, and ascended to heaven. He is the only Savior of mankind, the Creator of the heavens and earth, and the only true God.

HOLY BIBLE

The Holy Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is inspired by God, the only scriptural truth, and the standard for Christian living.

TRUE JESUS CHURCH

The True Jesus Church, established by our Lord Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit during the time of the 'latter rain', is the restored true church of the apostolic time.

WATER BAPTISM

Water baptism is the sacrament for the remission of sins for regeneration. The baptism must take place in natural living water, such as the river, sea, or spring. The Baptist, who already has had received baptism of water and the Holy Spirit, conducts the baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the person receiving the baptism must be completely immersed in water with head bowed and face downward.

HOLY SPIRIT

Receiving the Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues, is the guarantee of our inheritance of the kingdom of heaven.

FOOTWASHING

The sacrament of footwashing enables one to have a part with the Lord Jesus. It also serves as a constant reminder that one should have love, holiness, humility, forgiveness, and service. Every person who has received water baptism must have his/her feet washed in the name of Jesus Christ. Mutual footwashing may be practiced whenever is appropriate.

HOLY COMMUNION

The Holy Communion is the sacrament to commemorate the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. It enables us to partake of the flesh and blood of our Lord and to be in communion with Him so that we can have eternal life and be raised on the last day. This sacrament shall be held as often as possible. Only one unleavened bread and grape juice shall be used.

SABBATH DAY

The Sabbath day, the seventh day of the week (Saturday), is a holy day, blessed and sanctified by God. It is to be observed under the Lord's grace for the commemoration of God's creation and salvation, and with the hope of eternal rest in the life to come.

SALVATION

Salvation is given by the grace of God through faith. Believers must rely on the Holy Spirit to pursue holiness, to honor God, and to love humanity.

LORD'S SECOND COMING

The Lord's Second Coming will take place on the last day when He descends from heaven to judge the world: the righteous will receive eternal life, while the wicked will be eternally condemned.

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Issue #94: Our Beliefs
Articles due: June 1, 2022

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?... So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.
(Rom 10:14, 17)

Before an individual can accept Christ and receive baptism for the cleansing of sins, he must first hear the word and believe (Mk 16:16; Acts 2:38). For those who come to the faith as adults, the transformation from unbeliever to child of God can be traced through the stages of truth-seeking, understanding, belief, to an earnest desire for God's blessings and baptism. But for those baptized as infants, the journey is not as straightforward. They are children of God who have been spoon-fed His word

since before they could use a knife and fork or form words of their own, and have learned of His almighty power alongside their ABCs. But after years of immersion in God's word—through religious education classes, spiritual convocations, Bible camps, seminars, sermons and fellowships—have they graduated to solid food and spiritual maturity (Heb 5:12–14)?

Every believer must have that moment of epiphany—when his heart proclaims true belief in God (Rom 10:9–10). This is especially important in these last days as the truth is under constant attack from heresies, false teachers, and worldly philosophies. And this is why those raised in the faith must move from passive learning to actively seeking the truth and pursuing an understanding of God's word.

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you.
(1 Cor 15:1–2a)

[T]hat we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine.
(Eph 4:14a)

Do we know what we believe, and do we believe in the doctrines of the true church? How do we progress from hearing to believing? Which areas of study should we focus on? How do we share our beliefs and explain our Articles of Faith to others? Finally, do we have testimonies of standing firm when our doctrines are challenged, or of finding conviction in the truth through the process of preaching?

GENERAL WRITING GUIDELINES

Content

- Content should be biblically sound and adhere to biblical principles.
- The article should be organized and have a logical flow of thought.
- The main point or teaching of the article should be clear to the reader.
- Readers should be able to apply what they have read to their daily lives.
- Do not plagiarize the work of other writers or institutions, published either in print or online. Any quotations, ideas, or concepts taken from other sources must be properly referenced.

Grammar/Style

- Use active instead of passive voice.
- Write concisely.
- Use concrete words and ideas instead of abstract concepts.
- Use "plain English" instead of obscure, academic language.
- Use the NKJV version when quoting Bible verses.
- Use American spelling, if possible. In print or online.

Manna only accepts submissions written by True Jesus Church members. If you are planning to write an article (regardless of topic), please try to adhere to one of the genres below.

Christian Living

A Christian Living article gives practical biblical guidance on real-life issues and how to use Jesus' teachings in our daily lives.
Article length: 1500–2000 words.

Bible Study

A Bible Study explores a passage or character from the Bible and draws out the teachings for readers to apply to their lives.
Article length: 2500–3000 words.

Doctrinal Study

A Doctrinal Study examines an aspect of True Jesus Church beliefs and may present it in comparison to other beliefs.
Article length: 2500–3000 words.

Exhortation

An Exhortation encourages and admonishes the reader in different aspects of the Christian faith.
Article length: 2000–2500 words.

Testimony

A Testimony recounts an experience in the Lord that will encourage and edify the reader.
Article length: 1500–2000 words.

Creative Writing

Creative Writing pieces include poems, parables, or short stories that illustrate a biblical teaching or idea. Keep in mind as you're writing: how will this edify the reader?

Submission Information

Please email articles as Microsoft Word documents to manna@tjc.org, including your name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number. By submitting an article, you consent for it to be edited and published in Manna, in print and online, distributed globally and promoted on social media. If accepted for publication, your article may also be edited and/or translated for other True Jesus Church publications and websites.

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Be Rooted & Grow



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