

MANNA

True Jesus Church ISSUE 38 OCT-DEC 2002 **Women in the Bible**



Finding **God**

Faith's Consequences: *The Story of Rebekah*

Interview with Pastor's Wives



Finding God

Caroline Ho—Miami, Florida, USA

GOD IS IN AMERICA

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I testify. My search for Christ began when I moved to the United States.

When I arrived in Miami, Florida, the first thing I noticed was how much more civilized Americans were compared to the Chinese. Even though Chinese history reached farther back in time, Americans were able to progress and develop much more efficiently. As I considered this, I also concluded that their success was the result of their religion.

Americans seem to entrust their national welfare to God. Their faith in a higher authority to protect and guide them is evident as they ask that “God bless America.” The four words printed on the United States currency serve as a declaration and reminder that it is “in

God we trust.” So I guess God gave this nation abundant blessings.

While exploring America, I also began to look for a church because I could see that this God was with His people. The problem wasn’t my determination but the multitude of churches in the United States. Not knowing which church was the right church, I prayed to God to lead me to where He dwelt.

We know that if we want to eat real Chinese food, we go to where Chinese people gather. There are only two places in America where you can get really good Chinese food—California and New York: the two states most heavily populated with Asians.

This was the “guide” I relied on when I needed to find the right church. Since Christianity came from the West, it

seemed most logical for me to turn to the West. So the first church I visited was a Catholic Church. The floors were marbled, the windows were glass stained, and the choir sang angelically.

Then I went to a Baptist Church, a Presbyterian Church, and many other denominations. They generally had large congregations, and everybody ate buffet-style.

One day, I read a report that identified the State of Utah to be the safest State in the country, so I thought about the Mormons. The next day, I encountered two Mormons on bicycles. They gave me a Mormon Bible and I started to read from it. For about a period of six months, I also studied with the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

In the end, I returned to the Catholic Church because I found their services to be the most reverent. I was serious about my search for God and I didn't want to give up the opportunity to find Him.

FINDING SPIRITUAL FRIENDS

On one encounter, someone told me that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of God, and when you receive it you will speak in a different tongue. I couldn't sleep that night because I thought, "If this is true, then God is a true God and not imagined!"

I was eager to get in touch with someone who had received the Holy Spirit. Who could such a person be, and what makes this person especially loved by God? But the discouraging notion that, among thousands of Christians, only a few will receive it disheartened me.

Whenever I met a Christian, I would ask if he or she spoke a different tongue. If their notion of the Holy Spirit differed from mine, I would stop listening to them.

In July 1992, one of my friends came for a visit. The night she arrived, I went to meet up with her at another friend's home. It was then that she introduced me to a friend of hers. This friend, Brother Lin, told me how his wife and her whole family were very devout Christians. They had been members of the True Jesus Church for the past two years.

At the time, his wife was still in Taiwan, so I requested that he ask his wife about the Holy Spirit the next time he spoke with her. He said, "I don't need to ask—I know that the Holy Spirit is true and that we will receive if we ask." But I remembered that only a few out of thousands have the Holy Spirit, so I

I was eager to get in touch with someone who had received the Holy Spirit. Who could such a person be, and what makes this person especially loved by God?

thought his answer was not right.

When I got home that evening, someone had broken into my house and turned everything upside down. All my wedding jewelry had been stolen. When the police left, I sat in the garage and cried. If I had not stayed at my friend's house and talked about the Holy Spirit, this would not have happened.

A couple of months after the burglary, I recovered from the shock and returned to the subject of the Holy Spirit. When I finally met up with Brother Lin's wife, Sister Lin, she told me that the True Jesus Church baptizes in living water. She emphasized that they pursue after the Holy Spirit. She turned to the Bible for evidence of the Holy Spirit, but when I asked her why living water was essential to baptism, she didn't know how to answer me.

When I got home that day I opened the Bible, and the first page that turned up was the baptism of Jesus Christ. I was really moved because I don't believe in coincidences—I believe this was the guidance of God.

I decided to attend service with this sister and her husband. Between the three of us, we had only one hymnbook, but we sang and prayed together. At the time, the three of us did not have the Holy Spirit. In prayer, we said only "Hallelujah."

MY CONVERSION

In May 1993, a pastor from California and a few brothers and sisters visited my house for the time. That was also the first

time I saw and heard what the Holy Spirit was all about.

One month later, we held another service at my house. I really wanted to be baptized, but the True Jesus Church encourages truthseekers to wait until they have fully accepted and understood the Truth before receiving baptism.

During that service, I could not concentrate on the sermon because all I could think about was receiving baptism. The minister then turned to Acts 22:16: "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

At the end of the service, I decided to bring up the matter even though it was too soon to ask for baptism. Thank God, they agreed to baptize me.

There was a spiritual convocation coming up in Tampa, Florida, where I was to receive baptism. I was told that a spiritual convocation offered a good opportunity to receive the Holy Spirit because it is several days long, and you can listen to sermons and pray throughout the day. Furthermore, there will be ministers present who will lay hands on you and pray for you.

Going to Tampa created much strife between my husband and me. At the time, I was in the first trimester of pregnancy, and since I miscarried before, the physician told me that I had to be bedridden. My husband would not let me go, saying that I'll have to bear the consequences alone if I put my unborn child in jeopardy.

But I decided to go because I thought, “Life is from the Lord. If my heart seeks after Him, He will not let me suffer a miscarriage.” Carrying that determination, Bro. Lin, Sis. Lin and I drove to Tampa, Florida, to attend the spiritual convocation.

The place of worship was a small office that accommodated about twenty to thirty people. It was a bit cramped, and with my pregnancy, I had a headache and couldn’t concentrate.

That night, I started to bleed and my stomach was in great pain. When I called my husband, he was very angry and ordered me to go back home immediately. I crumpled into tears.

Everything was unfamiliar to me, and having sought after God for so long, He still didn’t protect me. I risked the chance of another miscarriage, and He still did not care. This God is too hard to please. I didn’t know what else I had to do to show God that I really wanted to draw closer to Him.

The next day, the pastor brought a few brothers and sisters to my motel room to pray. I prayed very hard for the Holy Spirit, putting all my worries aside. All I could think about were the sins of my past. Things that I had long forgotten flooded back into my mind, and I was deeply aware of what a sinner I was.

After the baptism, we drove back to Miami, and I received the Holy Spirit the next day. Thank God!

VISIONS OF COMFORT

While we were in Tampa, a sister saw a vision during one of the evangelical services.

She first saw me dressed in white, holding a naked baby. After that, she saw a faceless figure dressed in white with two wings coming to hold the baby, and

He affirmed for me that this is the true church. He never appeared to me in all the other denominations that I visited.

the baby was now dressed in light blue.

Two large tears trickled down the child’s cheeks. Then, the hands disappeared and the child was suspended in air against a white backdrop. A third pair of hands came back to hold the baby, but the face of the hands’ owner was indistinguishable. The next day, another sister saw the identical vision, but they both did not tell anyone because they did not want to testify to a large group of people.

These visions took place during the spiritual convocation when I was only six weeks pregnant. It was only after I had endured a difficult labor that I understood the visions and became deeply convinced that this God is a living God.

The person in the first vision was me, and I was dressed in white because I had been cleansed through baptism. At first I was holding my child, but then I disappeared from the picture and another pair of hands held the child. The baby had two teardrops because I was to endure a very difficult labor.

After I gave birth, I hemorrhaged for many months. The doctor said that I could not care for my child nor do any housework. So for the first few months after I gave birth to my baby boy, I was unable to take care of him or my husband, and I felt so helpless.

I know now it was because I could not care for my baby that the angel’s hands came to hold him—comforting me that God will take care of everything.

In the last vision, it was I who returned to hold the baby. When I went to Tampa to attend the spiritual convoca-

tion, I sat in front of the sisters who saw the visions. I had run my hands through my hair, and the sisters recognized that it was the exact same pair of hands that returned to hold the baby. The fact that I came back to hold the baby meant that I would recover.

Whenever I think about this, I am greatly encouraged. Soon after my recovery, I was able to get out of bed and take care of my family. The doctor said I couldn’t deliver any more babies, but, because of the vision, I chose not to have my tubes tied.

In 1995, I went to another spiritual convocation in North Carolina. There, I asked God for another baby, and He gave me a girl.

Thank the Lord that, in the process of finding Him, He has guided and protected me. He affirmed for me that this is the true church. He never appeared to me in all the other churches that I visited.

I thank God for leading me to the church that He prophesied, and I am filled with joy for having received the Holy Spirit. I also thank God for making me a mother. When I see my child, I see the love of God in my life.

After I became a mother, I understood more deeply the immense love of Jesus Christ. May all glory be unto the Lord God. Amen.★



From Dreams To Belief

Priskila N.C. Puspanti—Cilicap, Central Java, Indonesia

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I testify.

Before I came to believe in Christ, I was a believer of another religion, and I never had the interest or desire to seek after other beliefs. Though my children attended Christian schools, I never paid attention to what Christianity had to offer, until I met up with a dressmaker.

Sis. Tanty Kristien is a dressmaker. We came to know each other and our

families because I had a dress made by her. After the first dress, she continued to be my regular dressmaker. I couldn't have known then that befriending her would bring me a string of dreams.

A CASTLE ON CLOUDS

After I met Sis. Tanty I had the first of many dreams to follow. In that dream, I saw a castle atop a sheet of clouds in the northeast direction. The castle was breathtaking and majestic. I woke up in bewilderment, amazed at what I saw.

A few days later, I dreamt of the same castle. Except this time, the castle was not gated, and a very bright light burst

through the open doors. Once again, I woke up feeling astonished.

The next day, I recounted these dreams to Sis. Tanty. She just smiled and brushed my stories aside, thinking they were the result of too much sleep. I still thought the dreams meant something because I always slept around midnight and my sleeping patterns were not out of the ordinary when the dreams took place.

A few days later, I dreamt of the castle again. This time, from the open doors emerged a human figure amidst the bright light. Though I could not see the face of this figure, I had the feeling that He was a great person.

Again, I told Sis. Tanty about my dreams, and I was very anxious because I thought they were signs of my impending

death because I kept dreaming of the same things. Sis. Tanty began to take my dreams seriously after this. She speculated that something might happen to me.

A FENCE ON FIRE

A couple of days later, I dreamt that the bamboo fence around my house was on fire. The only way to get out of the house and outside the fence was a small opening about one meter in width.

My three young children and I stood helplessly on the porch of our house because it seemed impossible that we could escape the fire if we tried to pass through that small breach.

Suddenly, the same castle I had been dreaming about appeared beyond the fence. Its doors opened and the great figure appeared from the inside. A stunning bright light surrounded Him as He waved His hands to us saying, “If you want to be saved, come follow Me.”

Still, I did not have the courage to pass through that narrow opening and be consumed by the blazing fire. But He kept waving His hands and smiling to us. At that moment I woke up from my sleep.

I told Sis. Tanty about this dream, too. She said, “Maybe God wants you and your family to follow Him. Why don’t I contact a pastor in Tasikmalaya to come to town and share God’s word with us?” I asked, “What is God’s word?” She only told me that I would know when the pastor came.

PASTORAL VISITS

When the pastor arrived, Sis. Tanty invited my children and I to her house. She also invited a few other brothers and sisters to come and listen to God’s word. Since my children were attending Christian

A stunning bright light surrounded Him as He waved His hands to us saying, “If you want to be saved, come follow Me.”

schools, they were familiar with the pastor’s message. But it was not so for me. God’s words sounded very peculiar to me.

After several pastoral visits, I dreamt about the castle again. This time, however, three figures emerged from the bright light instead of one. The middle person held a container in His hands. He came towards me and led me to a river. I still remember how clear the river’s water appeared.

He invited me to go down into the river, but I was afraid and refused His invitation. Despite my refusal, He never stopped smiling at me. That was when I woke up.

The next pastoral visit was made by a pastor from Jakarta, and he brought along another church member to visit me. I told them about this most recent dream, and they were convinced that God had a plan for my family. They encouraged me to attend church service regularly. At the time, services were held twice a month where I lived.

A BEAUTIFUL CHOIR

The last of the series of dreams that I had was of a very beautiful choir. All the choir singers wore white shirts and black pants, with the women forming a row in the front and the men forming a row behind them. I was introduced to two women—one with straight hair and one who was pregnant.

When I told Sis. Tanty about the dream, she was really amazed because she felt as if my dreams were a continuous series, and they were all parts of a complete narrative.

She invited me to the True Jesus Church in Jakarta because they were holding an evangelical service. I told her that I would think about the invitation. The day before we left for Jakarta, Sis. Tanty came to my house to confirm if I would accept the invitation.

I made a determination and told her that I would go. And if my dreams became a reality—if I saw the two women in the choir when I went to Jakarta—I would become a True Jesus Church member and believe in the Lord Jesus.

We finally arrived in Jakarta in the morning. Right in front of the chapel, I was greeted by one of the two women in my dream. But I told Sis. Tanty that the woman in my dream had straight hair, and the woman standing in front of me had curly hair. It turned out that this woman had a twin, and her twin was the one with straight hair!

But I still had not met the pregnant woman in my dream. So Sis. Tanty took me to meet a pregnant sister, and, sure enough, she was the other woman in my dream. Then, I saw the entire choir wearing the clothes I envisioned, and I knew without a doubt that this was the calling of God.

Through these dreams, Jesus called me into His fold. I have believed in Him ever since. I received baptism on March 2, 1988. I am still a member of the True Jesus Church today, and I try to serve God as much as I can.

Even though twenty years have come and gone, the mystery of His ways continue to amaze me. May all the glory be unto God! Amen. ★



In Hopelessness I Met God

Jason Yu—Baldwin Park, California, USA

Youth is the golden period of life and a time when hopes are high and the future bright.

But for me, a twenty-year-old freshman in college, I was addicted to drugs. My outlook on life was bleak. In the midst of a severe drug addiction, I became dreary and desolate—losing all hope in life to the point that even my family was ready to give up on me.

ADDICTION TO DRUGS

In 1990, my father sent me to the United States to continue my studies. Coming from Taiwan and not having my immediate family with me, I stayed with my aunt and attended high school in New Jersey. Since she was very strict with me, I decided to apply to the University of Arizona because I wanted more freedom.

My wish was realized in 1995. As I moved into the dormitory, I felt like a bird suddenly released from its cage. I was bursting with excitement and joy! With the luxury car my father gave me, I went to many parties where alcohol and drugs were consumed.

Curious and naive, I tried everything. I told myself, “I’m strong and I can control

myself.” Unfortunately, I overestimated myself and, before I knew it, I became addicted. I knew something was wrong when the drug use and spending escalated. I told myself to stay away from drugs but I caved into my cravings time and again.

What shocked me most was losing my hair. Because of heavy drug use, my hair came off by the handful each time I combed through it. It made me so anxious that, at one point, I shaved it all off, thinking that it would grow back fuller. But even that was futile.

Growing bald at twenty when appearance means everything was a terrible blow to my ego. It made me lose a lot of confidence in myself and it devas-

tated me. With the way I looked, any possibility of finding romance was out of the picture.

Between 1996 and 1998, I became deeply troubled over my baldness. I wore a baseball cap everyday and hid from visitors. I was going insane. Once, I even thought of getting a hair transplant, but the transplant would not work with the little hair that remained.

Crushed, I turned to alcohol to numb the pain. I continued to take drugs and wallowed in self-pity and depression. My grades suffered and I was eventually expelled from school.

FAMILY TURMOIL

Realizing his son was wasting away, my father urged me to stay with my brother in California for a change. So from 1998 to 1999, I attended college in California. But I still could not extricate myself from the deep addiction.

At this point, even my family was apprehensive about hearing from me. My sister, Ruo-Lan, lamented in retrospect, “My brother would often disappear for two to three days at a time. Whenever he called, he wanted money to redeem himself from drug dealers. He was terribly threatened. I was so nervous everyday and was afraid to receive his calls.”

As heartbreaking as it is for me to recount this, my mother even knelt down in front of me and begged me to turn from my ways. But at the time, my heart was hardened and my body enslaved to drugs.

Everyone in the family felt hopeless and did not really know what to do. My father wanted me to start off on a clean slate by going back to Taiwan to serve in the military, but having been in the U.S.

for eleven years and not graduating from college was too embarrassing for me to go back.

I was so lost that I even thought about becoming a Buddhist monk. In such helplessness, I decided to take my grandmother’s advice: “Believe in Jesus! This is the only way.”

SEARCHING FOR GOD

From then on, I would turn to the gospel channel at night, and soon I began to experience extraordinary things.

In such helplessness, I decided to take my grandmother’s advice: “Believe in Jesus! This is the only way.”

When I wanted to smoke, I would hear the TV evangelist preaching against smoking. When I loitered on the streets, I would hear voices or messages telling me to go home. When I wanted to read or watch pornography, either I could not reach the magazines under the sofa or the tapes were somehow erased.

At that time, I didn’t understand the spiritual realm and thought that some extra-terrestrial beings were guiding me. As I watched the gospel channel, I also learned to read the Bible. I often came across Bible verses that urged me not to fall into the traps of the devil.

Slowly, I realized that God detested filthy things, and so I burned all the pornographic materials I had. I also started to pray and asked God to deliver me. Oftentimes, my desolation humbled me to tears and hopelessness.

One time, a True Jesus Church member introduced the gospel to my brother. But since my brother did not believe in God, my sister was invited to church instead. She went to church to

pray for me—to ask God to help me. When she got back that night, she said, “It’s so amazing! The Holy Spirit is in the True Jesus Church!”

GOD’S CALLING TO THE TRUE JESUS CHURCH

I wanted to go to the church, but I hesitated because of my baldness. Besides, wouldn’t it be the same for me to pray and study the Bible at home?

Even so, God moved a church sister to invite me to the church. Because of my

baldness, I repeatedly declined her invitations. Despite her persistence, I told her, “I’ve made up my mind, please don’t call me again.”

I thought to myself, “Why won’t she give up and hang up?” Then I said to her, “Unless God calls me to go, I will not go!” Before she hung up she said, “Okay, that’s fine. Why don’t you write down the address of our church: B-a-l-d-w-i-n, Baldwin Park Church.”

I was stunned when I heard the address. What does she mean—Bald Win? The bald will win? I’ve been struggling with baldness since I was twenty. Does this mean that God wants me to go to this church and I will overcome my baldness? Does this mean I’m going to win?

This really gave me hope and I later asked Ruo-Lan, “Is it true that the church is in Baldwin?” When she confirmed it, I cried aloud, “The Lord Jesus has mercy on me! I want to go to church! I want to go to church!”

Wanting to go to church is one thing, but having to face people with my baldness

was much harder. I was struggling emotionally when I first visited the church. I even put on some hair-enhancing spray. After I went home from church, I dreamt that my hair grew back. This could only be the wonderful assurance of God.

In subsequent services, I felt that God spoke to me through the sermons. Many times, I was deeply moved and realized that I should not be so uneasy with my appearance. There were only two things that really mattered: fearing God and hating sin.

I also experienced the word of God:

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

As I came to understand the Bible, I stopped wearing my baseball cap. I was no longer afraid to reveal my true self in the church and in my worship. I also repented completely before God and asked Him to forgive my past transgressions. Overwhelmed by my past sins, I could only rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome my weaknesses.

RENEWED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

I was determined to pray for the Holy Spirit everyday. By December 2000, I started to fast and pray before services. In the morning of December 25, I encouraged myself to fast and focus on prayer in the church.

In tears, I repented from all my past transgressions. Then, a great surge of heat came upon me while I was deep in prayer. It was as if my whole body was electrified. I felt a strong current coursing

Overwhelmed by my past sins, I could only rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome my weaknesses...

through my hands. It was an experience of God's power I would never forget. After prayer, several church members told me that when one receives the Holy Spirit, one would be joyful and speak in tongue.

At the time, I could not speak in tongue, but I decided to pray again the next day. The next day, I prayed wholeheartedly, and the same power came back again, but I did not speak in tongue. Later, the pastor advised me not to be too tense. Soon after that, I received the Holy Spirit.

It's great to receive the Holy Spirit. When I have bad thoughts, the Holy Spirit rebukes me and heightens my awareness of them. I then submit to the Holy Spirit and the thoughts disappear right away. Whenever I feel the urge to use drugs, smoke, or drink, I pray in the spirit. The Holy Spirit helps me overcome the desires, and I once again find peace, happiness, and joy in the Lord.

In March 2001, I was baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. I felt like a new man after baptism because all my burdens were removed. In the past, I was an empty and hopeless shell, harboring suicidal thoughts, wreaking havoc on my family, and loitering on the streets.

Yet, the merciful Lord pulled me out of darkness and brought me into the light. He chose me and gave me the Holy Spirit; He enabled me to be reborn. All that I have and all that I am is from Him. This is why I feel so strongly about Luke 1:79: "To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to

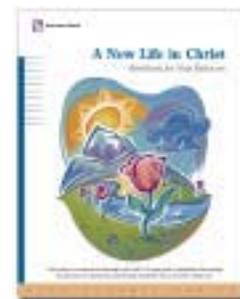
guide our feet into the way of peace."

Yes, only the Almighty God can perform such a miracle. Having experienced God's grace, I'm always joyful to see the Light in my life. The transformation from my struggles to my triumph over sin encourages me to journey on the path of light.

In church, I've experienced the true love of the brothers and sisters, and I can finally let go of past resentments. I am also compelled to turn this grace into action—to share His grace with others. The Lord Jesus is "[my] way, [my] truth, and [my] life" (John 14:6). ★

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Joseph's Tears

HH Ko—Heidelberg, GERMANY

“Forgive and forget.” Is it really possible to do this? We can forgive, but it is not so easy to forget.

God's word tells us, “Forgive, and you will be forgiven” (Lk 6:37). The word “forgive” in Greek implies release or liberation. When we forgive and “liberate” people, we, too, will be liberated.

Joseph went through great tribulations. We will use the story of Joseph to illustrate how he forgave his brothers and, in the process, liberated them and himself.

JOSEPH SOLD

Genesis 37 describes Joseph as a good child who disliked evil. His father loved him very much and made him a robe of many colors. Instead of bringing joy, unfortunately, his father's love created disharmony among the brothers.

God sent Joseph two dreams, revealing what would happen to him in the future. This was a promise from God, showing that he would have greater achievements than his brothers. Instead of bringing him respect from his brothers, the dreams caused his brothers to hate him. These dreams were from God; they were not his own dreams. But because God allowed him to have these dreams, his brothers condemned him.

One day, his brothers went far away to shepherd the flock. Joseph was sent by

his father to see how his brothers were doing. To his consternation, there he discovered his own end. When his brothers saw him approaching, they said, “Look, this dreamer is coming! ...Let us now kill him.” Fortunately, two of his brothers had more compassion and did not want to kill him. Instead, they sold him.

If you were Joseph, would you have been able to understand all of this? Of course, in hindsight, we could say that he should thank God because he would become prime minister of Egypt through all of this. But at that time, Joseph had no idea what would happen tomorrow. When he was about to be sold, he pleaded with his brothers in anguish and with tears (Gen 42:21). He was sold like cattle.

JOSEPH AS SLAVE AND PRISONER

After Joseph was brought to Egypt, he was sold as a slave to Potiphar. Most people would ask God, “Why did this happen? Why me?” Joseph must have thought about Abraham, his great-grandfather, whom God promised a great blessing. God revealed to Isaac that there would be a famine. Jacob wrestled with God Himself. But what about Joseph? If you study the Bible carefully, you’ll notice that God never appeared to Joseph nor spoke to him.

Here we see Joseph as a slave; however, he was not crushed by slavery. He could not understand why he was a slave, but he accepted it. He could not understand the situation he was in, but he accepted it. That was why he was able to become the best slave. He fell from the status of beloved son to slave, but he was not overcome by the tragedy. He became the steward of his master’s house, and God’s blessings followed wherever he went.

In Genesis 39:1, it states that God was with him. There seems to be a contradiction here, because if God was with Joseph, why was he a slave? But Joseph accepted it even though he could not understand why. He revered God, and God was with him.

Later on, Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce Joseph, but he refused to sin with her. Out of spite, she framed him, accusing him instead of trying to take advantage of her. Joseph was then thrown into prison.

Joseph was like a person getting struck down again and again as he tried to get up. The first time, his brothers struck him. The second time, he was struck down by his fear of God. It

seemed like the harder he worked, the worse his situation became. He became a slave through no fault of his own. Now he was thrown into prison for a sin he did not commit.

However, the story states repeatedly that the Lord was with Joseph (Gen 39:20). Joseph did not understand, yet he accepted his situation. He became the model prisoner and, once again, he transcended his miserable situation.

The more we try to forget about an incident in our lives, the more we remember. Even if we don’t stay angry at something, we will not forget it.

One morning, Joseph noticed two prisoners, the king’s butler and baker, looking very sad. He must have transcended his difficult situation in order to show his concern for others’ problems. For instance, if you’ve just lost ten million dollars, it is unlikely that you would notice other people’s suffering. But Joseph noticed these two prisoners, showed his concern, and helped them by interpreting their dreams.

Joseph interpreted the butler’s dream and told him that he would be restored to his original position. He asked the butler, “remember me when it is well with you, and please show kindness to me; make mention of me to the Pharaoh, and get me out of this house” (Gen 40:14). Notice how many times Joseph mentions the word “me” in his request. He wanted so much to leave this prison and return home; he was not happy.

Afterward, Joseph must have thought that this was an opportunity from God to leave the prison. Since only

God can give the wisdom to interpret dreams, he probably thought that God wanted to rescue him from prison. The butler brought wine to Pharaoh every day, and he would be able to bring his request before him. The butler was his only hope for freedom.

But after the butler left and was restored to his position, he “did not remember Joseph, but forgot him” (Gen 40:23). To say “did not remember” and

“forgot” is repetitive. This was written purposely, to show that it was God’s will. It was impossible that the butler could have forgotten! Everyday, as he bore the cup, he must have remembered how he got out of prison and how Joseph explained the dream. How could he forget something like that? But he did. Joseph waited day after day in prison, hoping that, each time the jail door opened, it would be to release him.

JOSEPH AS PRIME MINISTER

One day, two days, one month, one year, two years passed. The butler forgot about Joseph for two whole years (Gen 41:1) until Pharaoh had a dream that greatly troubled him. Then, the chief butler said he remembered Joseph and that he had fault (Gen 41:9). His remark shows that he did not intentionally forget about Joseph. He quickly called for Joseph, and Joseph interpreted Pharaoh’s dream. Pharaoh then made Joseph prime minister to oversee all the affairs of

Egypt, second in command only to Pharaoh.

In the space of a few magazine pages, we have covered Joseph's woes to him becoming prime minister. It seems like his suffering was momentary and easy to overcome. Oftentimes, this is where our problem lies. When people are suffering, we think, "No problem. You will become prime minister soon—in the next chapter." We are not able to empathize with others in their affliction, because we think their problems will soon pass.

Joseph was thirty years old when he became prime minister (Gen 41:46). If we assume that he was seventeen when he was sold into Egypt (Gen 37:2), he suffered for thirteen years. How many "thirteen years" do we have in our lives? Have we spent thirteen years as a slave or prisoner? What kind of person would we become after this experience? Very few people would want to go to prison for thirteen years, even if they could become prime minister afterward.

Trying to Forget

Later, Joseph married. Marriage is a turning point in life; to have children is an even greater turning point.

Now Joseph had two sons. The first son was called Manasseh, meaning "God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house" (Gen 41:51). But did he truly forget? When he said "forget," he remembered all the more. The more we try to forget about an incident in our lives, the more we remember. Even if we don't stay angry at something, we will not forget it. Even if we forgive, we cannot forget. We can forgive others, but we will not forget them.

If Joseph had really forgotten all

those trials, he would not try to forget. He named his second son Ephraim, which means "fruitful." He wanted to forget his past and start a new beginning, but that did not resolve anything. Even though he had that kind of resolution, could he forget the wickedness of his evil brothers and his sorrow the last thirteen years? No, he could not forget.

JOSEPH'S PATH TO FORGIVENESS

From Revenge

When Joseph was prime minister, a famine struck the whole land. His brothers came to buy food from him. Joseph sat up there as prime minister, and his brothers bowed down to him. Joseph remembered the two dreams he had before. After thirteen years, he was now wearing splendid garments, and his brothers were still shepherds.

"Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them" (Gen 42:7). As a prime minister, many people came to him each day to ask for food. If he did not look carefully, how could he recognize them? Yet, he recognized them, because he did not forget them.

Joseph spoke to them roughly, saying, "Where do you come from?" Of course, he knew where they were from. Once he remembered the past, did he forgive? No, things were not yet resolved. Joseph began to take revenge on his brothers. He said to them, "You are spies!" (Gen 42:9). In those days, spies were beheaded. An eye for an eye—they wanted to kill him before.

Joseph put them all in prison for three days. Those three days were probably very terrible for his brothers, because they did not know what would happen to them. In those three days, Joseph probably also struggled greatly.

But on the third day, Joseph brought the brothers out of prison and said to them, "I fear God" (Gen 42:18). Joseph feared God. It doesn't necessarily mean that a person who fears God will never get angry. But a person who fears God will control himself and will not harm people out of anger.

To Struggle

When this happened, the brothers' consciences rebuked them. They immediately thought back to their sin of selling Joseph (Gen 42:21). After twenty-two years, the brothers were still haunted by guilt.

The brothers spoke in Hebrew, and they thought Joseph did not understand. But Joseph understood. When he heard that his brothers were conscience-stricken for what they had done to him, he was greatly moved, because Joseph feared God. If he were a person with a heart of stone, he would want to repay his brothers with more harm.

Joseph "turned himself away from them and wept." People weep because they are not emotionally balanced—too happy, too sad, too frustrated, etc. Joseph released some of his heavy burdens by crying. However, he was not able to wash away everything. He was still unable to face his brothers. He went away from them to weep. Afterward, he returned to them, gave them food, and sent them home.

To Release

The second time, his brothers brought Benjamin his younger brother. When Joseph saw Benjamin, he quickly went into his room to weep. This time, he wept even more and he had to make haste, in case he was discovered. And after weeping,

How can we forgive others? We need to gradually to comprehend and understand the will of God for allowing the situation.

he even had to wash his face. Every time he wept, he released a little bit of his brothers as well as himself. If you cannot forgive someone, you are actually in bondage yourself.

The third time, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. This time, there was even more haste, but he could not escape. There was no time to run. Now Joseph could not restrain himself in front of all the people, so he made everyone go out from in front of him. He could not run somewhere else to cry, so he asked someone else to run.

“And he wept aloud”—he wept for all the years of bondage and affliction. He did not want others to hear him, but everyone heard. The Egyptians and also the house of Pharaoh all heard it because he cried so loudly (Gen 45:1,2). Joseph had tried to forget, but he could not. But Joseph wanted to forgive, because he feared God.

He said, “I am Joseph, does my father still live?” His brothers were terrified, but Joseph said to them, “Do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life” (Gen 45:5). How can we forgive others? We need to gradually to comprehend and understand the will of God for allowing the situation. At that moment Joseph understood there was a higher will of God for him. But Joseph’s realization did not come until after three or four times of

weeping and about twenty years of affliction. It was not that easy for him to do.

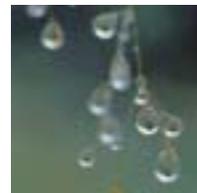
Joseph wept when he reunited with his father and again when his father passed away.

Joseph wept much, and through his tears, he forgave and liberated his brothers. But his brothers did not understand that he had already forgiven them. After their father died, they became nervous. They thought that Joseph did not harm them because their father was still alive.

So they sent messengers to Joseph saying, “I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you” (Gen 50:17). Joseph wept again. After he wept, he spoke words of kindness and comfort to his brothers. After this long, they still carried the burden with them.

You must liberate others in order to liberate yourself. You cannot forget the wrongs that others have done to you, but you must forgive and liberate them. If you don’t, they will also become a burden to yourself. When you forgive them, God will also forgive you. When you release others, you will also be released.

This is why Joseph wept. ★



Women in the Bible

Looking at the portraits that grace the cover of this issue, we catch a glimpse of several objects that are classically female. Just as women share similar likes and dislikes—from clothes to food to music—this is also true of a woman's experiences, emotions, and relationship with God.

In this section, you will find articles that trace the lives of several women in the Bible. These women serve as examples to encourage, to teach, and to warn us about our need to worship God and to follow in His way. To some women, God gave the gift of wisdom; to others, He gave the gift of faith, the power of prayer, the spirit of courage, and the heart of submission. It is by such virtues that women today are able to effectively play the roles of wife, mother, daughter, sister, and friend.

God created Rebekah, Sarah, Deborah, and Lot's wife each with a unique character, and He gave them their specific lot in life. It was up to each one to strive to grow in spirit and in truth—just as it is up to each Christian woman to do likewise today. We hope you will be able to learn from these women and, more importantly, through their stories, you might learn something about yourself.



Faith's Consequences:

The Story of Rebekah

Yvonne Chan—Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Rebekah certainly ranks as a key figure among God's chosen people. She was the wife of Isaac, mother of Esau and Jacob, and Abraham's great-niece. We first learn of Rebekah's existence in Genesis chapter twenty-two. Verses twenty to twenty-four of this passage prepare us for her entry into Abraham's family by telling us about Nahor, Abraham's brother. This is when we discover that Nahor had many sons by his wife and a concubine and that he had a granddaughter named Rebekah.

A DECISION OF FAITH

After his wife Sarah's death, Abraham sent the eldest servant of his house (Gen 24:2-10) to find a wife for his son Isaac.

This would be his most trusted servant, most likely his chief steward.

Abraham made his trusted servant swear that he would go to Abraham's homeland, to his family, in fact, to find a wife for Isaac. He did not wish to seek a woman from the pagan cultures around Canaan for his son.

Entrusted with such an important mission, Abraham's servant asked for a sign from God to ensure success. He never doubted that God would lead him to the young lady most suitable for his master's son.

The test he conceived was very straightforward. He would ask a young woman to draw some water for him to drink. The right woman would not only

do this for him but would also offer to draw water for his camels.

When Rebekah came to the well, the servant played out his test, and she passed with flying colors. Rebekah drew water for the servant to drink and willingly volunteered to draw water for the camels, a task normally performed by a servant.

As the servant revealed to Rebekah and her family the purpose of his mission, they would have realized that Abraham was a wealthy man, and Isaac would inherit his wealth. It was a noble marriage for Rebekah. She agreed to the proposal.

This seems a simple enough thing to do when we read the story, but imagine this situation. One day, out of the blue, a stranger appears at your house in a limousine laden with expensive presents.

He claims to be a representative of your father's long-lost brother and offers you a position of importance in your uncle's household. He tells you a story of how God guided his path as he searched for you, his employer's long-lost family, leading him to finally find you in a miraculous manner.

He asks you to leave everything you've ever known and go with him to a remote place very far away and inaccessible by normal means of transportation.

In our modern world, this situation would certainly cause a degree of suspicion. However, we would be able to check out this stranger's identity fairly easily. In fact, he should have some form of identification on him.

The identity of the man claiming to be your uncle could be confirmed, and you would even be able to speak to him on the telephone. No matter how remote the place was, there would be helicopters

or motorboats to make travelling possible, and you could e-mail your family. Technology gives us many options.

Well, Rebekah did not have these options. She could not telephone Abraham to confirm his identity or that of the servant. She had to take his word for it. It also required her to leave the home and only family she had known all her life. The distance meant that the chances of ever seeing her family again



was slim. It was a courageous decision for a young girl to make, and one which must have been influenced in some way by faith—faith in the God who guided the servant to her.

Abraham is often used to exemplify faith in action. Heb 11:8-10 talks about Abraham who went forth from his homeland when God called to him. He did not know where he was going. When he died, he had not seen this great nation, his descendents as many as the stars. Yet, he believed that it will happen. Heb 11:1 says, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Abraham's hope in

God's promises remained strong until his death.

It is hardly mentioned, but Rebekah's willingness to go to Isaac mirrors Abraham's faith. She did not hear God calling directly to her, just a servant whose loyalty and faith in God touched her and made her believe that what he promised was true. Like Abraham, she set out into the unknown with nothing more than the knowledge that God had a hand in this matter and the conviction that it was the right thing to do.

Gen 24:57-58 indicates that Rebekah had a choice in the matter. She was asked if she would go with the servant, and she agreed. The childlike simplicity of her faith is touching and an example to us. Jesus Himself told us to have a simple, childlike faith. "Assuredly, I say to you," He said, "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it." (Mk 10:15)

Rebekah's faith at this point serves as an example. She was rewarded for it with a wonderful marriage and a husband who loved her deeply.

ENCOUNTERING DIFFICULTIES

Rebekah's life changed upon becoming Isaac's wife. She now stood in the line of matriarchs who governed a large and wealthy household. Although Abraham married again after Sarah's death, we are told that Isaac was the sole inheritor of all that he had (Gen 25: 5, 6). This would give Rebekah significant status within the family.

Her faith complemented her husband's. When she could not conceive, Isaac prayed on her behalf (Gen 25:21). When she felt the twins within her struggling, and she became concerned about her pregnancy, she prayed to God

(Gen 25:22-23).

Sarah, her mother-in-law, was also barren. However, Rebekah never chose to give her maid to her husband, an option Sarah took. Rebekah waited with Isaac for twenty long years. We see a woman who waited patiently for her prayer to be answered. Many of us will be able to say with feeling that waiting for God's time can be very difficult indeed and requires a very firm faith.

Once again, Rebekah was courageous enough in faith to wait for God's time. As Abraham had hoped, his son had a wife who shared his faith, and the whole family prospered with blessings from God (Gen 25:11).

We like our prayers to be answered immediately! Many of us become impatient and even begin to doubt God when He seems not to hear us. Though we experience time flowing past daily, weekly, monthly, annually, God exists in every time—past, present and future.

He knows the best moment to grant us our requests, and He also knows which requests may not be granted. If we claim that we trust in God, we must also trust in His judgement.

A prayer unanswered does not mean God is not listening. It means that God is asking us to trust in His wisdom. Certainly, we may keep asking, but while we do, we must also find within us the willingness to submit to whatever decision God may make.

Rebekah was a woman who had great faith. She trusted in God to give her children. She trusted in God to reveal to her the reasons for her difficult pregnancy. As the Psalmist wrote:

*I waited patiently for the Lord;
And He inclined to me,
And heard my cry. (Ps 40:1)*

He knows the best moment to grant us our requests, and He also knows which requests may not be granted. If we claim that we trust in God, we must also trust in His judgement.

We can see God rewarding Rebekah in her life and how He gave her a loving husband and twin sons. "Blessed is that man who makes the Lord his trust..." (Ps 40:4).

TAKING MATTERS INTO HER OWN HANDS

Faith requires that we trust our all to God, and this is easier said than done. All along, we can see Rebekah's faith in action as she relied on the Lord in the decisions she had to make. But when it came to the welfare of her children, she relied on herself more than she relied on God.

When God explained to her the struggles she felt within her during her pregnancy, He revealed that there were two nations in her womb. He also revealed that the older would serve the younger (Gen 25:23). Thus, the destinies of the boys were set.

Rebekah did not trust in God to lead events to fulfillment. She took matters into her own hands by helping her younger son deceive his father. She became an unsuccessful parent when she loved Jacob more than Esau.

Jacob enjoyed his mother's favoritism while he observed and experienced his father's favoritism for his brother. Such behavior from his parents probably served to polarize his feelings for each parent. He certainly showed no loyalty to his father or brother when his mother suggested that he should deceive his father.

In orchestrating the situation so that Isaac gave Jacob the blessing reserved for the eldest son, Rebekah exhibited a faith that had turned from trust into selfishness and manipulation. She thought that she could take matters into her own hands. She brushed aside consideration towards others for the sake of Jacob. "There are many plans in a man's heart, Nevertheless the Lord's counsel--that will stand" (Prov 19:21).

Many things are ordained by God. As His created beings, we must bow to the fact that what God has ordained will come about. There is nothing we can do that will change the situation once God has decided.

If we force matters, as Rebekah did, unfortunate consequences will result, perhaps causing grief and hatred. If Rebekah did nothing, she would have witnessed God's will in action, and the older would still serve the younger, for He had ordained it so.

The difference is that when it is God who arranges matters, no one gets hurt, and we are blessed for our trust in Him.

THE REPERCUSSIONS OF FAITHLESSNESS

When Rebekah used her human ingenuity to twist the situation, she caused deep hatred and enmity between the two brothers, which had serious repercussions on the people of God.

She also suffered separation from her favourite son for the rest of her life, since she was forced to send Jacob to her

brother's home in order to save him from his brother's wrath. Just as she could not expect to see her family again, Jacob could not expect to see his dearest mother again.

25:12, 13)

We will never know what might have been if only Rebekah had not taken things into her own hands. Perhaps the

The difference is that when it is God who arranges matters, no one gets hurt, and we are blessed for our trust in Him.

The consequences of her actions rippled through many generations into the future. Esau became the father of a great nation, which was later known as the Edomites. The Edomites became staunch enemies of Israel, finding every opportunity to take vengeance on the Israelites, even though they were brothers:

*For violence against your brother Jacob,
Shame shall cover you,
And you shall be cut off forever.
In the day that you stood on the other
side--
In the day that strangers carried captive his
forces,
When foreigners entered his gates
And cast lots for Jerusalem--
Even you were as one of them. (Obad 10-11)*

From these verses, we can see that much later on in history, Edom collaborated with the enemies of Israel. When the Israelites were taken captives, Edom stood by with the enemies. Indeed, the descendants of Esau continued to seek vengeance against Israel, with disastrous consequences for them:

Thus says the Lord God: "Because of what Edom did against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and has greatly offended by avenging itself on them...I will also stretch out My hand against Edom..." (Ezek

two nations would not have been enemies. Perhaps Esau's descendants might have had a chance for redemption.

During our struggles through life or some circumstance, we learn to trust in God because we see no other way. We place our hopes on Him when we need His help.

Rebekah placed a great deal of trust in God when she had to make what must have been the most important decision in her life—her marriage. She also kept her faith in God when she wanted to start a family, and could not.

We are more likely to cling to our faith when something crucial is at stake in our lives. The danger comes when we take matters into our own hands and forget that the Lord is the final director of our lives.

Therefore, we need to do according to His will at all times, and not just during times when we are faced with what seems to be the impossible. For every action—every act of faith—has its consequences, and by them we will stand before God in judgment.

May the Lord have mercy upon us



A Woman's Priorities:

Lessons Learned from the Proverbs 31 Woman

AWS—Garden Grove, California, USA

Many of us women today find ourselves juggling a job, a family, a household, and even volunteer work—leaving ourselves physically exhausted, emotionally drained, and performing none of our responsibilities well. It seems like there is so much to accomplish, and yet we have only a limited amount of time and energy.

Our Lord Jesus did not call us to such a harried, stressful, and unhappy life. Rather, He called us to a life of peace and joy. It's time for us overburdened women to re-evaluate our commitments and responsibilities in light of God's word, and to live out our role as women in the way God originally planned.

Proverbs 31:10-31 describes a woman who faced many of the same challenges women face today. She took care of a family, a household, a business, and even managed to reach out to those in her community—all the while keeping a positive outlook on life.

How did she manage to do everything and keep her sanity at the same time? If we study her life, we can see that her success hinged on two things: her priorities and her philosophy of life. Let's

study these principles and see how we can apply them to our own lives so that we, too, can enjoy a fulfilling life.

HER PRIORITIES

This woman could seemingly balance everything because she understood her three primary responsibilities in life: her husband, her household, and herself. All other commitments (such as her business and community involvement) were secondary—important, but supplementary.

Her Husband

This woman's dedication to her husband is summed up in the following description: "She does [her husband] good and not evil all the days of her life" (v. 12). Her life was devoted to "doing her husband good." She understood that God's main purpose for woman was to help man (Gen 2:18, 20).

However, being a helper to man does not make woman inferior to him. God Himself described woman as "a helper comparable to Him," and Paul wrote that male and female have been made equal in Christ (Gal 3:28).

In fact, the Bible describes woman as the "glory of man" (1 Cor 11:7-9) and an excellent wife as a "crown to her husband" (Prov 12:4). As wives, we hold a place of honor in God's eyes

So how does being a "helper" to man translate into daily life? Does this mean that we must now slavishly devote our lives to granting our husband's every wish and whim? Fortunately for us, this is not God's intention.

Instead, being a helper to our husbands begins with the right attitude. Our purpose as wives is to help build up our husbands in all aspects of their lives—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Our presence in their lives should be "a good thing" (Prov 18:22) rather than an "evil" thing (Prov 31:12).

Although each man is different and the ways in which a wife builds him up will be different, the Bible does give us a clue about one principle that is the same across the board. Paul in Ephesians 5:33 says, "Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

Paul was wise to understand how

God made males and females “tick.” Just as love and affection make women thrive and flourish, so respect and deference make men grow and succeed. One of the best ways we can build up our husbands is to respect them.

This is much easier said than done, especially after we’ve gotten to know our husbands—and all of their shortcomings. Our first reaction to these shortcomings is to “help” them overcome them by pointing them out, suggesting ways to fix them, and then reminding them (again and again) when they’ve failed to do so.

No one else can provide the love, companionship, and teaching that we provide for our children.

After many rounds of this, we realize that our efforts are futile and they just refuse to be “helped.” Their shortcomings are still there, the marriage becomes strained, and love and respect start to sprout wings and fly out the window. Then, as a last resort, we turn to prayer.

Many women, after many years of marriage, finally realize one shocking truth: we cannot change our husbands, no matter how much we plead, cajole, argue, threaten, debate, and confront.

But God can. And God works through our prayers for our husbands. We often don’t realize that all the unpleasantness can be avoided if only we turned to prayer from the beginning.

Being our husband’s helper does not mean that we have the license and responsibility to “fix” him. Being our husband’s helper does mean that we have the duty to pray to God so that He can build up our husband into what He wants him to become.

At the same time, we pray to the

Lord to help us keep a respectful heart toward our husband so that our actions build him up rather than tear him down. The best way we can “do good” to our husband all the days of our lives is to pray for him.

Her Household

Today, the great debate is whether or not a woman should be a homemaker or work outside the home. Many women today try to do both, leaving them exhausted and unhappy. The example of this wise woman shows us how to reconcile the two.

The bulk of this passage illustrates her care of the household (which included both children and maidservants). The passages says that “she watches over the ways of her household,” which means that she was responsible for making sure her household ran smoothly. And run it she did.

She made sure her household wore the best clothing (v. 21), which she made herself (v. 13). She provided the best food for her household (v. 14) and rose early to prepare it (v. 15). She even bought a vineyard with her own money (v. 16) in order to provide luxuries such as grapes, raisins, wine, and vinegar.

Most importantly, she was a good mother to her children, who attest to this by “call[ing] her blessed” (v. 28).

So what does her example mean to us today? Although it is politically incorrect in today’s society, this woman’s example tells us that our primary responsibility should be homemaking, especially if we have children.

Titus exhorts, “admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.” Paul also encouraged the young widows of his time to “marry, bear children, manage the house...” (1 Tim 5:14).

Today, most of the duties of women long ago, such as making clothes, cooking, and cleaning house can be delegated to others if we lack the time. But there is one duty that we cannot delegate to others, and that is being a mother.

No one else can be a mother to our children. No one else can provide the love, companionship, and teaching that we provide for our children. God did not intend for us to give birth to our children and then send them off to daycare, leaving strangers to raise them. Instead, God commands us:

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you



sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. (Deut 7:5-7)

God commands us to teach our children diligently, and in order to do this; we must be there to “talk to them,” “sit with them,” and “walk with them.” This means that we must spend “quantity time” with our children as well as “quality time.”

Children grow up so quickly, and there is only so much time that we have to “impress upon them” the word of the Lord. We must have the wisdom to weigh which is more important: using our time to mold our children into godly adults, or making more money to live a life of material comfort.

Does this mean that we must relegate ourselves to a tedious life of domesticism and shun anything that smacks of “work” or “profit”? Of course not.

This wise woman also supplemented the household income by maintaining a little “business” on the side. But notice that she did not do so at the expense of her family. She would use her spare time to make linen garments and sashes, which she sold for profit.

We, too, can work to supplement the household income, but it is important that we do not do so at the expense of our primary responsibility—our family and our household. If our work takes away time from our family and the running of our own house, then it is time to reconsider our work.

In addition, this wise woman’s life did not revolve solely around her family; she also reached out to her community by giving to the poor (v. 20). Being a homemaker does not mean that we are tied to the home.

Different seasons of life call for different measures, and we should ask God to give us the wisdom to devote our time wisely to the different areas of our life.

Today, we, too, can enrich our community by reaching out monetarily, emotionally, or through ministry. Again, we should make sure that it does not infringe on our family responsibilities.

Of course, time passes, children grow up, and they no longer need as much of our attention. Different seasons of life call for different measures, and we should ask God to give us the wisdom to devote our time wisely to the different areas of our life.

Herself

Many women today get lost in the shuffle of their never-ending “to-do” list. But we can see from this wise woman’s example that one of her primary priorities was—herself.

Although she was a wife, mother, and homemaker, she did not relegate herself to martyrdom. Instead, she dressed herself in “fine linen and purple” (v. 22), she clothed herself with “strength and honor” (v. 25), and she spoke with “wisdom” and “kindness” (v. 26). She made sure to keep her appearance, character, and actions in good shape.

Sometimes, we allow all our responsibilities to drain us of our physical and emotional strength and break down our character. It is important that we set apart the time to recharge and build ourselves up in all aspects: physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

This means that, yes, it is good for us to indulge in a bubble bath, a good book, a haircut, or whatever else that makes us

feel refreshed and recharged. We should be sure to keep ourselves physically active and eat a healthy diet.

This means that, yes, we should spend time talking with our girlfriends about our feelings, our struggles, and our joys. We should take that leisurely stroll on the beach, go on a date with our husband, or whatever else uplifts us emotionally.

This means that, yes, we must make time to ask the Lord for spiritual strength and join with others for fellowship. If we don’t have time for anything else, we must make time for daily communion with God through prayer and Bible reading.

This wise woman “girds herself with strength, and strengthens her arms” (v. 17). We too must do the same in order to shoulder the many responsibilities that God has entrusted to us.

Psalms 18:32 says, “It is God who arms me with strength, and makes my way perfect.” Psalm 118:14 says, “The LORD is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation.” The Lord will become our strength and our salvation if we make the time to build ourselves up in Him.

HER FOUNDATION

This woman’s philosophy of life was the secret to her satisfying and meaningful life, and it formed the foundation of all her actions. Her husband summed up her philosophy in these words: “...a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be

praised” (Prov 31:30). This woman built her life upon the “fear of the Lord.”

What does it mean to “fear the Lord”? Obviously, “fear” in this context does not mean that we must live in constant dread and worry of God’s punishment. Instead, the fear of the Lord is “a loving reverence of God that includes submission to His lordship and to the commands of His word (Eccl 12:13)” (NIV Study Bible, p. 939).

In other words, fearing the Lord means loving Him with all our heart (Mk 12:30) and making Him the master of all aspects of our lives (Mt 6:24), not just the parts related to worship services and holy work. Ultimately, we manifest our fear of the Lord through our obedience to His commands in our daily lives (Jn 14:21).

If we wish to have the wisdom to understand our place in this world, to have the strength to carry out our role effectively, and to enjoy a life of peace and fulfillment, then we, too, need to build our life upon the fear of the Lord. It needs to be the foundation of our lives, the beginning and the end of all that we do.

This woman reaped many benefits because she lived by the fear of the Lord. She enjoyed a life without worry or fear of the future (v.21), and she could rejoice in time to come (v. 25). She was a woman praised by her husband, her children, and her community (vv. 28-31). Her life is summed up in this:

*Many daughters have done well,
But you excel them all.
Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing,
But a woman who fears the LORD, she*

shall be praised.

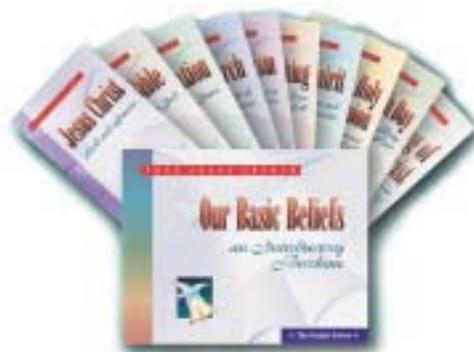
Give her of the fruit of her hands,

And let her own works praise her in the gates. (vv. 29-31)

Indeed, this wise woman enjoyed the fruit of her hands, and we too can enjoy the same fruit—a life of joy and fulfillment—in the roles that God intended for us, making Him the foundation and master of every aspect of our lives. ★

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GOSPEL SERIES

The Gospel Series is a series of booklets that provides a Bible-based explanation of ten basic beliefs of the Christian faith. They are written in simple language and fully illustrated so that even school children can understand them. The introductory brochure gives an overview of all ten articles of faith. A perfect tool for evangelism.

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7. Holy Spirit: Helper and Counselor
8. Holy Communion: Remembrance of the Lord
9. Sabbath day: Holy Day of Rest
10. Church: Body of Christ
11. Coming of Christ: Judgment Day



They Ought To Be Remembered

Adapted from a sermon by Dede Irawan Godjali—Jakarta, Indonesia

There are three women I'd like to outline in this article because I think that it is good for us to remember their stories—two for their virtues and one for her vice.

SARAH

Sarah died when she was one hundred and twenty-seven years old. She never had the chance to see her beloved son, Isaac, married to Rebekah. Her husband Abraham mourned and wept for her at her funeral. Her death was a great loss to him because she was a good wife, and we can use her life as an example for us today.

She Accepted Her Husband's Lifestyle

Under God's abundant blessing, Abraham became a wealthy person (Gen 13:2; 24:34-35). Despite his wealth, Abraham lived in tents (Heb 11:9)—a far cry from Lot, who built his house in Sodom.

The present world offers worldly splendor far exceeding that in Abraham's time, and such a lifestyle depends on wealth. Great riches will buy you grand homes, beautiful clothing, and worldly luxuries. But there is more to life than these.

A wise wife will learn to support the life of her husband according to the teachings of God. Sarah did not insist that her husband build a great house, for she realized that she was just a sojourner on this earth and that the true home she would enjoy could only be found in heaven (Heb 11:11-16).

She Supported Her Husband

Sarah followed Abraham from Ur to Canaan. They must have shared much joy and sadness as they traveled near and far in their life together (Gen 11:31; 12:4-6; 12:10,11; 13:1-3). Her willingness to follow Abraham wherever God led them is an inspiring example of faith and submission.

Though filled with doubt whenever her husband had to uproot the entire family, Sarah gave her support to Abraham to fulfill God's commandment. The Bible never recorded her complaining in all the years that she followed her husband. This is not easy for most women.

Many years after Sarah, Paul would write about women and how they should learn to do likewise—by adorning themselves not with material things but what is "proper for women professing godliness, with good works. Let a woman learn in silence with all submission" (1 Tim 2:9-11).

It is true that God made a covenant with Abraham because of his faith. But behind every good man is a good woman. The quietness of Sarah's resolve to follow Abraham found the greatest favor with God, and He blessed her with a child in her old age.

DEBORAH

During the time of the judges, the Israelites did great evil in the sight of the Lord. So God surrendered them into the hands of Jabin, king of Canaan. Jabin persecuted and ruled over God's people for twenty years.

By His grace and mercy, God made Deborah judge and prophetess over Israel. Deborah would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim, where the people of Israel would come to seek her counsel (Judg 4:5).

She Judged Wisely

Deborah is the only female judge recorded in the Book of Judges. From her story, we can see that she is a wise and strong woman who was very capable in all things she set her mind to do. Because of her wisdom, she gained the respect and support of her people.

When the Israelites were about to fight against Jabin king of Canaan, God commanded Barak, son of Abinoam, to take ten thousand men into battle. Even though this command was from God, Barak did not feel safe in going alone. Barak insisted of Deborah, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!" (Judg 4:8).

Her presence and her judgment was a comfort to the Israelites. They sought

prophetess.

A prophetess is one who is in close communion with God, for God speaks through her and works through her, so that His glory may be witnessed. She found strength to carry out her duty as a judge because she relied on God.

She Gave Thanks to God

In the battle, Deborah witnessed how God was with them to give victory to the people of Israel:

And the Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot. (Judg 4:15)

After defeating the Canaanites, Deborah sang her song:

When leaders lead in Israel, When the people willingly offer themselves, Bless the Lord! Hear, O kings! Give ear, O princes! I, even I, will sing to the Lord; I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel... They fought from the heavens; The stars from their courses fought against Sisera. The torrent of Kishon swept them away, That ancient torrent, the torrent of Kishon. O my soul, march on in strength! (Judg 5:1-2,20-21)

A prophetess is one who is in close communion with God, for God speaks through her and works through her—that His glory might be witnessed.

her as their refuge. They knew that her wisdom lay with God because she was close to God. Apart from being a judge over God's people, she was also a

From this, we can see the joy Deborah found in God. After twenty years of longsuffering, she was still able to put her faith and hope in the Lord,

believing that God would deliver His people out of bondage.

As capable as she was, she remembered to give praise to God and to dedicate a song in remembrance of God's great victory.

This victory brought peace to Israel for forty years—a double portion of blessing compared to the twenty years they suffered.

LOT'S WIFE

Many Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign of the coming of the kingdom of heaven. In His reply, Jesus spoke about a woman saying, "remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32).

Lot was led by Abraham to the land of Canaan (Gen 12:5) and later to the land of Egypt (Gen 13:1). When Lot arrived at Bethel, he already had in his possession flocks, herds, and his own tents (Gen 13:5).

Abraham and Lot's combined possessions were so great that they could not dwell together anymore. Fighting and strife between Abraham and Lot's herdsmen were inevitable, which forced uncle and nephew to separate.

Lot led his followers to the east of Bethel to dwell in the plains of Jordan, and they pitched their tents up to Sodom (Gen 13:6-12). Finally, he settled with his wife and two daughters, and built his house in the city of Sodom (Gen 13:12; 19:2-3).

What can we learn from this woman who became Lot's wife?

She Loved the World

Lot's wife's memories were deeply tied to the city of Sodom. However, life in Sodom lacked fear of God's law and was filled

with the evil deeds of men. This wickedness continuously oppressed Lot because he was a righteous man (2 Pet 2:7).

When God decided to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness, Abraham pleaded with God to protect the life of Lot, and God sent His messengers to warn Lot and to rescue his family.

In the escape, the angels of God held Lot's wife's hand and brought her out of the city. Once they escaped from the city, Lot's wife turned back to look at Sodom, even though she was instructed not to (Gen 19:16,17). Instantly, she turned into a pillar of salt (Gen 19:26).

Nowadays, many Christians resemble Lot's wife. Even though they have been saved from the bondage of sin and have been reconciled to the Lord Jesus, they are still unable to let go of the things of this world. Apostle Paul admonishes us:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Rom 12:2)

The purpose for us to follow Jesus is to be able to reach the kingdom of God and enjoy eternal life. Paul said, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim 4:7). The Lord Jesus also emphasized, "he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matt 24:13).

At a destined point in time, God will let go of our hands, and He wants His people to be able to use their spiritual insights to walk aright. A spiritually mature person does not need constant guidance—somebody to hold his/her hands—because this person is strong

At a destined point in time, God will let go of our hands, and He wants His people to be able to use their spiritual insights to walk aright.

enough to walk with Jesus.

Lot's wife longed for Sodom more than the refuge that the angels of God offered her. Even though she escaped danger, her regrets of leaving Sodom tempted her to take one last look. She did not listen to the warnings of the angels of God.

She desired something better but could not leave the past behind. John encouraged us, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 Jn 2:15).

God wants us to desire something better and, if we do, He has promised to bless us with the riches of a heavenly home. His promise never fails—it is we who lose sight of God. Therefore, disclaim the world and follow God:

For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. (Heb 11: 14-16)

Whether virtue or vice, each of these three women had a story to share. Likewise, we will also weave our own personal story. And how we decide to live this life will have an impact on our salvation. The challenges we face will be different for each one of us, so we must

run our own race according to God's commandments.

If we choose to desire the world and forsake God as Lot's wife did, God will forsake us. But if we actively seek to draw close to the Lord as Deborah did, we will find wisdom and strength to carry out our lives on the right path. And if we learn from Sarah by putting our trust in the Lord and quietly following His will, He will bless us with abundant riches.★

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Q&A on the BASIC BELIEFS

Have you run into questions you couldn't answer when you tried to share the gospel? Maybe you're still skeptical of the Christian faith and have many questions. Q&A on the Basic Belief is a handy resource that gives concise and to-the-point answers to the most frequently asked questions about basic truths.

The Christian Woman In You

S and L—USA

L *It was one evening in the summer of 2002. Across some considerable miles, my friend and I talked over the phone. It was a wonderful conversation, and, during its course, we decided to co-author an article about some of the insecurities we face, some of the realizations we've made through the Bible, and how we can face imperfections as Christian women.*

Even though every woman is a unique creation of God, we share much of the same worries and experiences. What we hope to share with you in this short piece are some of the things that the Lord has helped us discover about ourselves and how we've found renewed assurance in knowing that we are not alone.

Accepting Our Bodies

L Having a healthy Christian perspective about our bodies isn't as easy as it seems. Women seem to suffer from an infinite dissatisfaction with their appearance. How do we love ourselves when we look in the mirror everyday and are reminded that our nose is too big, our chest too flat, or our cheeks too round?

Everybody's insecurities are different. For me, it's my weight. The first thing I notice isn't what I see in the mirror, it's the number on the scale. I don't understand—I eat healthily and exercise as often as I can, so why don't I like what I see?

S Weight is probably the one problem that perpetually plagues women. The media has a lot to do with perpetuating an unhealthy definition of the ideal body. Christian women are not immune to the idea that “thinner is better.” Whether we admit it or not, many of us do care a lot about our weight.

L For quite some time, my weight was a thorn in my side until one day, as I was reading the Bible, God warned and comforted me with these words:

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? (1 Cor 6:19)



I realized that I couldn't obtain my “ideal body” because I didn't see myself the way God saw me. God sees my body as the temple of His Holy Spirit, the place where He dwells. This verse reminds me that my body is not my own.

“For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Cor 6:20). I was bought at a price, and this price was the crucifixion of the Son of God for my sake. With His body He purchased mine.

S Seeing my body as God's gift helped me understand that I shouldn't do harmful things to myself for the sake of looking good (i.e. starving myself to stay thin, spending too much time and money keeping abreast of the latest fashions, etc.).

I try to remember the biblical principle that our adornment should be the “hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God” (1 Pet 3:4).

There's a difference between wanting to look good out of self-respect and wanting to look good out of vanity. Self-respect stems from the understanding that we are God's creation, and, because we are His creation, we value and take care of our physical bodies. Vanity stems from the desire to be admired or envied. This, unfortunately, indicates a need to

be better than others in order to gain a sense of self-worth.

It's hard to draw the line between pride and vanity, so we should search our heart to determine which condition our actions reflect. This issue is really between God and us, and not between other women or other men and us.

L Understanding that my body is the temple of the Holy Spirit mended how I look at what God has given me. If I learned anything, it would be that it is not good to despise the creation of God. To be happy with how we look is an indication that we are thankful for what we have, and what we have comes from God.

Coming to terms with this also reminded me that whatever God has created, He created because "He [also] saw that it was good" (Gen 1:10). And what is good to Him is good for me.

Accepting Our Limitations

L Many women I know want to have it all and do it all. We build dreams and ambitions, and we even create timelines for when we want to achieve them. But when we are unsuccessful in the things we do, we automatically think there's something innately wrong with us.

S Sometimes I can be hard on myself, too, attributing failures to causes I know are not true—such as "I must have done something wrong in the past and God is punishing me for it now" or "I must have been born with this inability to..."

Accepting failure does not come easy for most people. The people we associate with, as well as the stage of life we are at, plays a factor in how well we deal with failure, as well as, because they define

I have come to understand that accepting our limitations and failures is a rite of passage into maturity.

what's important and what's not, and they can provide (or not provide) the right kind of support.

I have come to understand that accepting our limitations and failures is a rite of passage into maturity. When I encounter failure, I try to make the most of what I have and move on, instead of looking back and harping on what cannot be regained.

L With each passing year, I've become less dreamy and less ambitious. Not to say that I don't think dreams and ambitions are important, because I do. They keep me disciplined, creative, and focused on my future. Rather, it's my limitations that set me back.

But I've discovered that dreams, ambitions, and limitations need to complement one another. This helps me juggle disappointment in a healthier way, and this affords me peace of mind and genuine reliance on God.

And He said to me, "My Grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12:9)

S When it comes to aspirations and failures, Peter provides the most vivid example for me. Here is a man whom our Lord Jesus loved and who loved

Jesus in return, even to the end of his life. But in his walk with Jesus, there were times when he failed miserably.

He wanted to walk on water but ended up sinking in the waves (Mt 14:28-31). He boldly declared that even if all were to stumble and deny Jesus, He would never (Mt 26:31-35). Alas, when Jesus was arrested, it was this same Peter who swore that he never knew Jesus (Mt 26:69-74).

Aren't these things that many of us can identify with? We aspire to many things but often realize that we've thought too highly of ourselves.

Peter's life, however, does inspire me to always hold on to one principle. When the waves overwhelmed Peter, he cried out to the Lord, "Save me!" Peter knew whom to call upon when he was sinking.

Life always dishes out more troubles and setbacks than we can handle. The important thing is never to lose sight of whom we can cry out to for help. In life's tumultuous sea, this provides an anchor that stabilizes my heart. No matter what, I know that He is there to reach out His hand and lead me safely back to the boat.

L Just like Peter, I realize that when I fall short of my achievements, God compensates with His grace and mercy. Each time I run into a dead end, "He must increase, and I must decrease" (Jn 3:30).

So when things don't turn out the way I plan, my pride may suffer, but that's okay, because what I gain, I gain through Jesus Christ. And through Him is also where I find joy. Let's always rely on

our Lord Jesus to walk us “safely back to the boat.”

Facing Doubts and Self Worth

S I have realized that, even though my girlfriends and I hold on to God and tell ourselves that all will be well, it is really difficult not to succumb to doubt. As a social animal, I sometimes find it hard not to look at others’ qualities and possessions (material or otherwise) and wonder if I could be better than what I am now.

At a certain age, when peers seem to be more “established in life”—settled down with family and kids, successful in their careers, or, quite simply, affluent—it’s tempting to start wondering what I’m really doing with my life.

Of course, the grand scheme of things is clear: I am a child of God, here on earth to do my part in His will and finish the work He has entrusted unto me. But, I sometimes wonder if my present circumstance is the consequence of having made the wrong choices.

If we can balance contentment with how little or how much we are given and, through it all, never forget to thank God, I believe our sense of self worth will faithfully improve.

L I’m not sure if there is a point in our life when we can say that we are completely over this dilemma. A lot of the times, our sense of self worth is measured by how much we can accumulate in material things and by our status out in the “real world.”

When I was still in college, everyone seemed to be my equal, so my sense of self worth as a student was pretty much up to par with everyone else. But after graduation, some people moved on to

graduate school, some went on to professional degrees, and others remained jobless. That’s when self worth and doubting came to the fore.

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (1 Tim 6:9, 10)

Sometimes, my doubts and lack of self worth is an indication that I want more than I need. I doubt myself and may inadvertently offend the Lord, because doubting myself is much akin to doubting the greater possibilities of what God can do.

We need to live within our means. All that we have comes from God. If we can balance contentment with how little or how much we are given and, through it all, never forget to thank God, I believe

our sense of self worth will faithfully improve.

For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. (1 Tim 6:7, 8)

S At the end of it all, I believe that God sees us not in relative terms, as compared to others, but as unique entities.

The woman who offered only two copper coins (Mark 12:41-44) always serves to remind me that God does not see us as most of the world does. He does not compare us to anyone else.

I look at where I started out and cannot but marvel at how far along I have come. So, even if I’m not a high-achiever among my peers, I know that what I have today is all because of the grace of God.

I know it’s the same for my level of faith and spirituality. He compares me against what I was and not what others are. This is a very comforting thought to know that God cherishes us regardless of how inferior we are by the standards of others.

Insecurities and challenges of various kinds are universally part and parcel of life. But there is so much beauty in life if one knows to turn to God. When one walks closely with God, there really is nothing to fear and nothing that cannot be overcome.

As a well-loved hymn goes, as long as we hold on firmly to God’s hand, all will be well no matter what comes our way:

*Sometimes 'mid scenes of deepest gloom,
Sometimes where Eden's bowers bloom,
By waters still, over troubled sea,
Still 'tis His hand that leadeth me. ★*

An Interview With Pastors' Wives

In conjunction with the theme of this issue of *Manna*, we decided to conduct an interview with pastors' wives. The theme section covers women of the past, so perhaps this interview might provide some insight into today's women.

So often, we regard pastors' wives in a different class from other women because of their husbands' work. But what we fail to realize, and what they really want for us to know, is that they are just like any other Christian woman—they share the same struggles and experiences in their faith and their relationships.

Across divides, age gaps, and culturally different backgrounds, each of them shares her story with us so that we might benefit from their life journey and ponder about our own faith and relationship with God.

Audrey Chan—UK

1 ■ Can you share instances of God's providence and care?

I see God's providential care all the time. I feel that He has been walking with us, sometimes along some difficult stretches, but then the latter has served to remind us to trust in God and to understand that He is in control. He has given us so many blessings over the years...

I have a good husband and two beautiful boys who are very affectionate. I have a job I find rewarding, we have enough to pay the bills, and we have somewhere to live in a beautiful part of Leicestershire. I am grateful. I did not have any expectations of what God would do for us once my husband became a preacher, but what God has given us has surprised me.

During the course of my husband's decision to become a preacher, I did tell

God that I was a little worried about how we would manage financially since my husband had to give up his secular job. In that prayer, I felt the grace and love of God surrounding me, and I knew God had acknowledged my concerns, and that He would take care of us. Once he came out to be a preacher, I understood why God had to reassure me. It has not been plain sailing, but God never fails to watch over us.

One instance of God's providential care concerned our move from London to Leicestershire. For the first eighteen months, no matter how hard I looked I could not find work in my specific area of training. On reflection, I had spent that time well—dedicating my time to my then baby son. At the end of this period, our finances were somewhat depleted, and very quickly an opening for work

came up. I applied and was accepted. God's timing is good.

The above is just one example. I see God's grace every day. They come in the form of on-going practical help, support with childcare, and occasional phone calls from caring brothers and sisters offering words of encouragement that can make all the difference in a hectic week.

2. What would you say to a sister whose husband was considering becoming a pastor?

Every person's journey is different, so I would not presume to advise that her experience would be the same as mine. A first and obvious bit of advice is:

- Pray as a couple about it together
- Give it some time to be sure it's not a sudden urge/purely emotional deci-

sion (It's got to be a decision you make in dialogue with God and with each other).

Practically:

- If you have children, talk to your children to see how they feel, as any decision will very much affect them
- Do your sums to see if you can afford to live on the new income and what contingency plan you have in case of the unexpected, such as losing your job, which you both depend upon to pay the bills
- Decide and plan how you will manage without your husband around—you could have to balance a career, a home, children, and Church work
- Be sure that you enjoy (or at least can tolerate!) your own company
- Build up a good network of friends and family around you—ones that

can offer you encouragement and remind you of God's love and grace

- Be prepared to take on (at least some) of the tasks that you may have happily delegated to your husband

Also:

- Be prepared for things to be hard and sometimes for Satan to discourage you; actively trust in God and keep watchful. Don't expect special treatment from God, but believe that He will provide

3. What is your favorite passage from the Bible?

Micah 6:8 is a lovely verse: "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

I believe that God does not expect great acts of faith from most of us, just small ones lived out everyday in a consistent manner. Justice, kindness, humility before God—these are simple things that God expects us to manifest, the qualities of a practicing Christian.

Most important of all, these three things are not just characteristics per se but the guiding principles by which we live with our fellow man and our God. Christianity is an active faith; one where we can show that we care about the people around us as well as the world we live in. It is not a faith to be had in isolation. It is too easy to go to church each week and yet be concerned only with our own affairs. I guess we need to ask, "When was the last time I stood up for something right, or showed kindness to someone?"

I am still learning.

Siglinde Ko—Germany

1. What are the unique challenges of being a pastor's wife?

One of the greatest challenges of being a pastor's wife is that the husband is very often gone for long periods of time. Although this is not unique to a pastor's wife (i.e. there are also other wives whose husbands are away from home because of their career), it is nevertheless characteristic of her struggles. I say unique because his absence is for the

sake of preaching the gospel. It is for that reason that I can bear his being away with a positive attitude—knowing that God is with us and will help us.

A by-product of my husband's long absences is the strain it puts on our relationship. It is difficult for us to grow deeper as husband and wife because the marriage is peppered with long interruptions of him being gone. This leaves us

going through much of life alone.

Another challenge is the expectations of others. Some people automatically assume that I must be very strong in faith, in life, and in all things. This is of course not true. And I feel that my relationship with others may tend to lean on formalities because others identify me as a pastor's wife rather than a regular individual or believer.

People may think that a pastor's wife is less likely to encounter problems in her faith, or they assume that she can ask her husband any question and can get an immediate answer. This is also not true, for the relationship between a pastor and his spouse is as a man to his wife. There are many everyday-decisions for a couple to make and daily affairs to take care of.

To pray to God and trust that He will aid us is one important way to overcome all the challenges we face. The loving intercession of the church members is another very effective way.

2. Can you share instances of God's providence and care?

Every day I thank God for His guidance and blessings. It has always been through God's grace and His mercy that I'm able to manage life as a pastor's wife. I'm often weak and at a loss regarding how to go on, but it has been my expe-

rience that there is always a way out of a problem when we are under God's providential care.

Through the years when all three of my children were still small and could not be left home alone, God provided us with a very trustworthy sister from church who was willing to live together with us. That made things much easier when the pastor was away.

I feel it's also due to God's loving care for our family that the children are healthy and doing well in school. On their level, they understand the importance of faith and they know to observe Sabbath every week. They are even ready to sacrifice some of their friends' invitations and activities for the sake of God. Nowadays, with so many worldly temptations, this kind of self-discipline cannot be taken for granted. I thank God for watching over them.

3. What is your favorite passage from the Bible?

I like many verses in the Bible so it's hard to share just one. But one verse I find worthy of mentioning here is Matt 6:33, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

At different times in life, we need to make important decisions concerning our careers, our marriage, our family, etc. In our daily living, we also have to make small decisions, and all these life-important and small issues can bring us a lot of sorrow about our future.

This verse really helps us focus on the right priorities with the correct perspective. On the one hand, this passage reminds us to set our foot on the right path when we have to make decisions. On the other, it comforts us—assuring us that as long as we strive for the kingdom of God, we will not worry about the future.

Chin-Li Chou—USA

1. What are some of the benefits of being a pastor's wife?

Definitely, the word of God is more abundant in my life because my husband comes home and shares his experiences and lessons. Oftentimes, I would visit members with my husband, and through their testimonies and life stories, I am much edified. And so in this sense I gain more.

Also, the love of the members is ceaseless. After so many years, I still

marvel at how much others care about the lifestyle of a pastor and his family. Perhaps to others, our lives may not seem as smooth or as materially stable, but we are very grateful for all their support to us.

I have felt God's grace especially with regard to my children. They have also gained much from God Himself—in learning how to grow as children of God and how to put their trust and reliance on Him.

Whenever we lacked material things or had financial needs, we'd find that God would always find a way for us. My husband would often say, "Don't worry, it will fall from heaven," and I'd ask, "But where? Why can't I see it?!" But in the end, God always came through.

Another benefit is having the opportunity to open up and communicate with all kinds of people on a deeper level. It helps me grow as a person and teaches me how to receive and ask for the gift of

counseling from God—how to be friendly, to give good advice, and to comfort others. Oftentimes, church sisters may encounter personal problems that are too private to discuss with a pastor, so they would approach me instead. I think it is a great benefit for me because I have the opportunity to serve God by helping others.

2. How has being a pastor's wife impacted your own faith and relationship with God?

When my husband first went off to theological training I was very happy for him. But when he came back home during breaks, he'd tell me to study the Bible and pray more. Because I was busy with work and had to mind the children, I would get annoyed with him. I did not have his luxury of studying the Bible as a living.

It is a great challenge finding the right balance between our spirituality and worldly cares. In Taiwan, I was a schoolteacher, and my spirituality at the time was a bit lethargic. After we came to the United States, the rigors of a different lifestyle pushed me to rely on God. There were a great number of obstacles that I had to face. There were communication difficulties, cultural differences, and many expectations.

My first job in the U.S. was to be a housewife, and this was when my spirituality began to grow. Because my husband was stationed in our local area, we could treasure the time God gave to our family to grow together in Him. I had more opportunities to cultivate my faith, and to help my children overcome the obstacles they had to encounter. Now that my children are grown and independent, I have more time to devote to

God's work. I find much fulfillment in my life, and it has greatly improved my faith.

Many times, members would open up to me about their sorrows. But coming to know of their problems doesn't always mean I have the capability to resolve their issues, because I am human, too. Many troubles are beyond the horizon of man. When at a loss as to how to help, I kneel down and cry out to God, and my comfort comes directly from above. In such instances, the Holy Spirit counsels and brings me peace.

3. Which woman can you most relate to in the Bible?

I don't know if I can most relate to her, but the woman I truly admire is Ruth. To be a woman, you need to know your position and your place. I feel that Ruth was very aware of herself. She was a very wise woman even though she seemed soft at times. Her strength came from within, and she was clear on what she needed. To be soft and gentle with everyone yet strong and courageous within is not easy for a woman to achieve.

Ruth was going to an unknown place, and she had to take care of a mother-in-law who relied completely upon her—her faith must have been great to do so. Ruth never expected anything from anyone, and she never asked for anything from God. She only submitted to the work she had to do. It is no wonder God's grace fell so richly upon her.

You don't always have to be strong or show yourself capable at all times. You just need to be gentle, and you will grow more beautiful because of it.

4. What is your favorite passage from the Bible?

My favorite passage is Isa 30:15: "For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel: 'In returning and rest you shall be saved; In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.'"

My husband is a very good spouse. This passage expresses how I strive to grow in Christ with my husband. The longer we serve God, the more our relationship and our love for one another grow, and the more joy we share in our marriage. Even though we are unique individuals, we try our best to walk quietly together with God because He is our confidence and our strength. We come together in the issues we need to face as a team, but we also give each other room to attend to our own matters.

Being a pastor's wife is just like being any other Christian in the church. We all need to build our foundation upon the Lord Jesus Christ and strive to imitate Him. We don't need to worry too much about other people's expectations of us—we just need to be ourselves because the Lord is our refuge and our stronghold. ★



Myths About Marriage

Jennifer Lu—San Jose, California, USA

The word “myth” means a fiction or half-truth, especially one that forms part of an ideology. We have myths for almost every subject known to man, from ancient Greek gods who roamed the earth to determining the gender of an unborn child.

Why do myths exist? Amazingly, myths can begin with just one person. If someone believes something is true without proof and spreads this half-truth around, over time, a myth is created.

The problem with myths, unfortunately, is that they become ingrained in the minds of people and, for all intents and purposes, serve as the truth. This is dangerous when it comes to an important issue like marriage.

Recent statistics indicate that about half of all marriages end in divorce. No one walks down the aisle thinking their relationship will fail, but many do have ill-conceived ideas about what it means for two people to be together.

Let’s explore three common myths concerning marriage today.

MYTH 1: Marriage does not have to be forever.

These days, multiple marriages are very common. If it’s not working, people think, it’s okay to get out—after all, it’s just a piece of paper. Some people who don’t want to go through one marriage after another cohabit instead, steering clear of signing anything legal or marrying before God.

Both views are fundamentally wrong because they allow couples to come and go as they please when they become

dissatisfied with a relationship. With the exception of abusive or unfaithful unions, God intended marriage to be a permanent institution.

This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman because she was taken out of man. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” (Gen 2:23-24)

Adam and Eve may not have signed any documents, but they were married and blessed before God. Their marriage was a gift. This kind of bond cannot and should not be taken lightly. Some couples cite “irreconcilable differences” as the reason for leaving the marriage. In other words, they feel that they can’t get along. But we need to understand that no two people are going to be perfect matches.

What then, contributes to this care-free attitude toward marriage? One major reason is that many couples do not

place God as the head of their families. For a marriage to be successful, God needs to be there. He teaches us how to love, care, and work together as one. He provides us with the spiritual wisdom to make sound decisions and fills us so that we can bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

We can all remember a time when we've needed extra patience, gentleness, or self-control. This kind of selfless and submissive love can only come from Christ alone. Before we give up on a relationship, we should kneel down and pray to our Lord for strength and guidance. When we are able to yield to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to lead us, we will see things with a new perspective.

Ephesians 5:21 states, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." When we encounter what seems to be an insurmountable problem, we need to remember to submit to and love one another even more deeply because of our love and respect for God. Of course, submission is not easy because it usually means letting go of what we believe is right. But what good is it to stand firm and stubborn while the marriage disintegrates?

Part of the beauty of marriage is being able to weather storms. When we are able to weather storms, we will find that our relationship is even stronger and better than before.

MYTH 2: Marriage is supposed to be easy

Another factor that contributes to such a high divorce rate is that many people walk into a marriage with unrealistic expectations.

When two people think about spending the rest of their lives together,

When we encounter what seems to be an insurmountable problem, we need to remember to love one another even more deeply because of our love and respect for God.

they might dream about making meals together or taking strolls on the beach. But soon after the honeymoon is over, they discover that it's not just about sharing a bed or dividing the rent. There are finances to balance, children to raise, and fights that keep rearing their ugly heads. On top of that, what were once insignificant problems now become huge issues. There are arguments over toilet seats or hair on the bathroom floor.

Suddenly, making the marriage work isn't as simple as the couple first envisioned. Since many couples aren't ready to deal with their "problems," often one or both choose to abandon the relationship. The reality is that marriage takes a lot of work and couples will face problems.

Does this mean that we shouldn't get married until we have all received a degree in marriage and are prepared for any issue that might surface? Of course not—this is neither possible nor practical. There is no way we can anticipate everything that can go wrong in a marriage. Rather, the answer lies in whether or not two people are willing and ready to make a life-long commitment to stay with each other, despite the things they may not know.

Of course, it doesn't hurt to talk about the really important issues beforehand. When I was dating my husband, we spent the first several outings together talking about what was important to us. Because we had each been involved in a failed relationship before, we both realized that some issues were dear to us and wanted to make those issues clear

before we got too emotionally involved. We didn't come to a bargaining table and check off a list of items, but, through casual discussion, we worked out our needs and plans for the future.

Although there are still things we disagree on, we have learned that communication really is a key to making a relationship last. Talking on any level allows us to feel connected and share a closeness that cannot be reproduced with anyone else. It also makes the problems seem just a little bit more surmountable. Studies have shown that a lack of communication usually leads to a breakdown in physical and emotional intimacy, both vital to a thriving marriage.

A life-long commitment to another person is not easy, but it doesn't have to be overwhelming, as long as we have healthy and realistic expectations. Marriage is a learning process and takes effort. No one is born an expert at marriage or suddenly ready for it when they turn a magical age.

In order for a marriage to last, we need to stick around to reap the results.

MYTH 3: It's okay to take our spouse for granted

When was the last time we said thank you to our spouse for the dinner on the table or expressed appreciation for staying home with the kids while we had some personal time?

Some people say that this kind of stuff is for newlyweds; we don't need to act like a couple of teenagers after we've been together so many years. It's true

that we should be able to feel completely at ease with our spouse. After all, they see us in the morning before we brush our teeth and tolerate us when we are sick.

But should the things that were important at the beginning of the relationship gradually be brushed aside? Sometimes, becoming careless with our other half can cause the fizzle to go out of marriage. After years of being together we assume that our spouse knows us well and certain things can be left unsaid. But when problems arise, we make many accusations. We wish the other helped more around the house. We complain that our partner doesn't communicate enough. We feel a lack of emotional intimacy.

For a relationship to grow, it's important to show our appreciation. Expressing appreciation also is a good way to keep two people connected.

After years of being together we assume that our spouse knows us well and certain things can be left unsaid. But when problems arise, we make many accusations.

*It is good to give thanks to the Lord,
And to sing praises to Your name, O Most High;
To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning,
And Your faithfulness every night." (Ps 92:1-2)*

Just as we sing praises of thanksgiving to God on a daily basis, we will find that our attitudes will also be more cheerful and loving when we see our partner through "thankful" and "appreciative eyes."

Recently, my husband awoke one morning unable to fall back asleep. Being a light sleeper, I knew he was tossing and turning, so I asked him if there was something on his mind. He looked at me and whispered, "I love you. I know you work very hard at home."

Although a marriage will not survive on these words alone, they certainly make one's day much brighter. These sweet words probably had a lot to do with the fact that I was complaining bitterly the night before about a terrible backache. But these words came from the deepest part of his heart, and for that I am thankful.

Sometimes, our daily chores find us lost in the humdrum of life and we really don't stop to think about what our spouse has contributed to the relationship. It seems normal and expected that one should make breakfast and the other take the kids to school.

Think about the three things we would miss the most if our spouse went away on a month-long trip. When was the last time we let him or her know that we appreciate these things? It may seem trivial to say or do things showing our love and thankfulness, but our spouse shouldn't have to guess in what ways we feel blessed to be them.

Many people bemoan the fact that the sparks are gone from their marriage and use that as an excuse to have an affair. They claim they feel a more physical, intellectual, and emotional connection with a new love. If we put as much energy

into the existing marriage, we will also feel just as many sparks in the air. If the daily grind is getting the better of us, try some of the following suggestions to add some spice to your marriage:

- Schedule a date and have some fun
- Send a card for no reason other than to say "I love you"
- Stick a personal Post-It Note in the bagged lunch
- Surprise your spouse at work and take him/her out to lunch
- Cook a special meal at home and offer to wash the dishes
- Give each other a back rub
- Bring home some flowers or an inexpensive gift

No matter what we choose to do, the most important thing is to let the other know the difference he or she makes in our life.

A BEAUTIFUL UNION

When God instituted marriage, He meant for it to be permanent. To be joined together with another person as one and be so intimately connected is as beautiful as it is a mystery. Although God has promised to guide us every step of the way, marriage will have its high and low points. Within it, we are bound to experience joy, anger, pain, and excitement all rolled into one. However, we don't have to look for a way out the minute we have a fight or find that we don't always agree. Rather, look to the Holy Spirit to show us how to become even stronger as one. After all, marriage is about helping each other grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. ★



Living A Meaningful College Life

Olive Tree—Garden Grove, California, USA

To keep up with the increasing pace and demands of our current society, students are studying harder and placing greater emphasis in extracurricular activities on campus, often sacrificing and putting their social and family life on hold.

An overload of work may cause some people to neglect a well-balanced and healthy diet, as well as foregoing the luxury of any regular exercise. In general, life gets more complicated with age, and many struggle to find meaning in their busy lifestyles.

As Christians, our spirituality is an additional dimension to our life. More concretely, it should be a part of our daily living in which we allocate time to cultivate and nurture our faith. As a religious education teacher, I see and hear about many youths struggling with the same issue of seeking spiritual meaning in their student life.

Having been through this same issue, I have learned that it is crucial to understand basic biblical concepts early on to help guide, shape, and discipline our lifestyle. When youths can fully grasp and gradually put these principles to practice, their faith will steadily take root and mature.

The following are five major concepts and tasks that have guided me toward a more fulfilling Christian lifestyle in my college years and beyond:

- Recognize our commission from our Lord Jesus Christ
- Evaluate our goals and values
- Manage our time effectively and efficiently
- Entrust our burdens to God
- Give all glory to our Heavenly Father

Recognize Our Commission from Our Lord Jesus Christ

As the “chosen generation, a royal priesthood” of God, we are commissioned by our Lord Jesus Christ to spread His gospel to all and pastor His sheep (1 Pet 2:9, 5:2; Mk 16:15; Jn 21:15-17). This is first and foremost commission we must recognize as His chosen people.

Since we have received the grace of His salvation so freely, it is only natural for us to proclaim His name, His salvation, and the boundless grace and blessings that follow when we believe.

This does not mean that we all have to become fulltime pastors to complete God’s mission. If we can be reminded of this commission in our everyday lives, however, our lives would be more meaningful.

For example, during our studies, whether we are in junior high, in college, or in graduate school, we can seize every opportunity to testify for our Lord Jesus Christ to friends, teachers, or even strangers on our campus.

We should not dwell solely in our studies for the sake of achieving a higher education or obtaining a good career but think of school or our job as avenues of opportunity given by God for us to sow the seeds.

I can never forget an encouragement that a brother gave me before I entered college. He told me to remember two things: (1) evangelism is not very difficult—we just need to pray and ask God to bring His sheep to us, and (2) students can do a lot of evangelical work within college campuses.

I kept his words in mind and prayed accordingly, and his words miraculously came true! God brought many of His sheep to me and allowed me to share the

We should not dwell solely in our studies for the sake of achieving a higher education or obtaining a good career but think of school or our job as avenues of opportunity given by God for us to sow the seeds.

complete gospel with them.

God helped me sow some seeds and, under His guidance, a few seeds blossomed into diligent and devout brethren in our church. Praise the Lord!

Through all this, I learned that, as long as we have the heart and determination to spread the gospel and know to put it into our daily prayers, God will surely help and guide us.

Evaluate Our Goals and Values

Once we recognize our commission from our Lord Jesus Christ, it should help us establish a clearer goal for our life. This allows us to center our priorities around God, which in turn, helps us focus and find meaning in all we do.

As Apostle Paul reminded us, let us “glorify God in [our] body and in [our] spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor 6:20). Therefore, our goals and value system must not be conformed to this world, which only gratifies the lust of our eyes, the lust of our flesh, and the pride of life.

All these are transient, but “he who does the will of God abides forever”(1 Jn 2:17). As we reflect on our own goals and values, we can ask ourselves this question: Do our goals and values glorify God and edify men?

For example, we should examine the motivation behind choosing what we are planning to select or have selected.

Our motivation may be valid, positive, and beneficial to our society, but does it include the glorification of God? Would the major and/or career path chosen (i.e.

work environment, time commitment, nature of the work, etc.) negatively affect our spirituality?

And would it be an obstacle to our faith and/or overload us with too much work that we do not even have enough time to cultivate our spirituality

Managing Our Time Effectively and Efficiently

Time management is an important key to an enriched Christian lifestyle. This is often a very difficult challenge for youths and even for mature adults.

Learning to manage our time effectively and efficiently requires our sensitivity to time, recognition of our priorities, and discipline in our lifestyle. For example, we should have some daily “spiritual habits” (i.e. reading the Bible and praying for a set time) and “secular habits” (i.e. regular bedtime hours, brushing before and after bedtime, eating regularly, etc.).

If we just live from day to day with a whatever-goes or whatever-happens attitude, it is very unlikely that we can achieve a victorious Christian lifestyle that pleases God.

Let us not slumber and idle around, for poverty will “come on you like a prowler” and “casts one into a deep sleep” (Prov 6:9-11, 19:15). But just as Jesus told His disciples, we must “watch and pray, lest [we] enter into temptation” (Mt 26:41).

Moreover, Apostle Paul exhorts us to be diligent in our pursuit of spiritual

maturity, “to make [our] call and election sure, for if [we] do these things [we] will never stumble” (2 Pet 1:5-7,10).

Entrust Our Burdens to God

We all can admit that our flesh is weak but our spirit is willing. By the same token, we may have Biblical knowledge but lack the power to follow the will of God. This is why God promised to direct our path if we trust in Him and consult Him before every decision we make (Prov 3:5).

When the work is done, whether great or small, let us remember to give all glory to our Heavenly Father. Again, we should acknowledge Him not only at the beginning but also at the end of each completed work.

God wants us to learn to cast our burdens on Him so that we may find peace and rest in Him (Mt 11:28). But in order to cast our burdens on God, we must learn from the humility and gentleness of Jesus Christ (Mt 11:29).

Only when we realize that everything comes from God can we humble ourselves to rely on Him. And only when we have the gentleness that accompanies patience can we wait on the Lord. As a result, our strength shall be renewed.

*But those who wait on the Lord
Shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings like
eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint. (Isa 40:31)*

Therefore, let us learn to trust in Him and cast our cares upon Him, so that we may not grow weary in our spiritual pursuits.

I once was involved in a campus

fellowship group, of which I was very honored to be a part. All the students in the group were zealous in doing holy work. However, some local believers not part of the campus fellowship were weak in faith at the time, and we, the students, tried to find ways to help them.

After some time and numerous attempts at encouragement, things had not improved nor moved forward for these local believers. Gradually, we began to complain to one another about the situation.

But one time, a sister stood up and reminded everyone to remain humble and to entrust this matter to God in our prayers. After she said this, I immediately realized that the Holy Spirit was awakening our hearts from self-righteousness and pride.

From that time on, we began to put this matter into our daily fasting and prayer. Slowly, we began to see the wonderful work of God evolve before our eyes. This was truly a vivid and valuable lesson I learned during my college years. Praise God!

Give All Glory to Our Heavenly Father

When the work is done, whether great or small, let us remember to give all glory to our Heavenly Father. Again, we should acknowledge Him not only at the beginning but also at the end of each completed work.

This way, we are constantly reminded that it is through God that we are able to

do anything. So, how can we give glory to God? One simple way is to give thanks to God in our prayers or to make more offerings (e.g., our time, money, talent) to show our appreciation.

Let us check and balance our priorities with the lifestyles we lead. Does the secular part of our life outweigh our spiritual life? The Bible warns us that if we put our emphasis in this world over our eternal salvation, we are considered to be the “most pitiable” among the believers (1 Cor 15:19).

Be comforted in knowing that if we seek God’s kingdom first, He will bless us according to our physical needs.

May we all continue to encourage and help one another in our path towards the heavenly kingdom. And may we strive diligently to submit to the Holy Spirit and rely on its power so that we can lead a meaningful Christian life. ★

Mothers in the Bible

Susan Estrada—Pacifica, California, USA



Mothers in the Bible make for a worthwhile study. Every written account is significant. They let us look at things from God's perspective. If we can see which mother did what was good and right in God's eyes and which mothers did not, then we will know what to do and what not to do. This study gives us a glimpse of how two mothers fared.

The mother who turned her son to worship idols: Micah's Mother

This mother is known only as Micah's mother. Micah and his mother were Israelites from the tribe of Ephraim. They lived at a time when Israel was a young nation in the Promised Land.

Without leaders like Moses, Joshua, or the elders who had lived through the exodus to lead them, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg 17:6).

The account begins with Micah owning up to stealing a large amount of silver from his mother. He owned up after he heard her curse the thief. Forgiving him, Micah's mother asked God to bless him. Then she said to him, "I had wholly dedicated the silver from my hand to the Lord for my son, to make a carved image and a molded image" (v. 3).

We find that Micah's mother gave a silversmith a portion of the silver for this purpose. When finished, these idols were placed inside Micah's house. He was captivated.

Micah created a shrine. He made an ephod, which was a priestly garment. He even added some household idols. He also made one of his sons to be his priest (v. 5).

When a Levite came to town, Micah quickly made him priest in his house. He was exuberant. He said, "Now I know that the Lord will be good to me, since I have a Levite as priest!" (v. 13)

On the surface, Micah's mother did a good thing. She got her son thinking about God and turned him into a devout



worshiper. Unfortunately, she made him an idol worshiper.

This mother did not have a basic understanding of the one true God. Although she knew that blessings came from God (v. 2b), she did not know that the Lord would have nothing to do with idols (Ex 20:3,23; Lev 19:4; 26:1; Deut 29:16-26). She was mixing it up. Her son also mixed it up.

It is very easy to mix it up, and it is easier today than ever before. The phrase “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” seems to describe the times in which we live.

But while none of us would actually pay a craftsman to fashion an idol or two for our sons and daughters, we must be aware that if we do not understand the teachings of the Bible, we will mix them up with the teachings of this world.

Our actions carry with them grave

and eternal consequences. We only have to remember what happened to Micah. He became an idol worshiper, and he turned his son into an idol worshiper. But the corruption did not end there.

The Danites, a neighboring tribe, came upon Micah’s elaborate form of worship and was hooked. They stole his set-up and persuaded his priest to join them (Judg 18:1-31).

She was a student of the Word. And long before she met the Son of God, Salome already loved God with all her heart, soul, and mind.

As a result, a tribe of people was corrupted and sinned against the Lord. There would even come a time in the history of Israel when people of other tribes journeyed to this place to worship idols (1 Kgs 12:28-30).

The mother who wanted her sons to be closest to Jesus: James and John’s Mother

The mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, lived during Jesus’ time. Her sons were of our Lord’s generation. The three of them were followers of Jesus. In fact, this mother was one of the women who supplied our Lord’s needs. Her name was Salome (Mt 27:56; Mk 15:40-41;

Mk 16:1).

Our Lord’s gospel of the kingdom of heaven intrigued this mother, as much as it did her sons. Like most everyone else, she had been waiting for the Messiah, the savior king, to liberate the land, now called Palestine, from Roman rule.

Even though Jesus' background was only that of a carpenter, the mother of the sons of Zebedee put her faith in Him. One day in the third year of His public ministry, Jesus headed to Jerusalem with His followers¹ and, while He was there, He predicted His death a second time (Mk 10:32-34).

Seizing the moment, this mother approached our Lord with her sons. She knelt before Jesus and made a special request. She said, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your kingdom" (Mt 20:21).

The mother of the sons of Zebedee had great faith. Although Jesus had nothing to show for the kingdom of which He had been speaking, she had seen enough miracles to know that nothing was ever impossible with Jesus. What the Teacher said always came true.

When Jesus began His reign, this mother knew that she wanted her sons to be closest to Him. As did James and John themselves, she wanted them sitting right next to the king so they would "share in the glory and power of Christ and be the greatest in God's kingdom."

Our Lord gave them a reality check. After all, Jesus' kingdom was not the earthly kind. He asked mother and sons if they knew what they were asking for. And he corrected their notion of greatness (Mt 20:22-28; Mk 10:38-45).

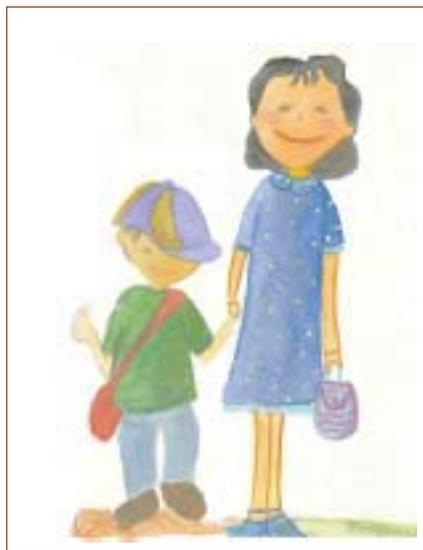
Despite that reality check, the mother of the sons of Zebedee was undeterred. She kept her faith and remained a devoted follower. A woman of lesser faith would have fallen away.

But this mother was no stranger to the Holy Scriptures—what we call the Old Testament. She was a student of the Word. And long before she met the Son

They were members of His "inner circle" and were two of the three disciples that were closest to Him.

of God, Salome already loved God with all her heart, soul, and mind.

We can see that this love rubbed off on her sons. John is a perfect example. He was a disciple of John the Baptist before Jesus began His ministry. John, as you might recall, was a no-nonsense kind of preacher who lived in the desert.



One day, when Jesus was in the neighborhood where John the Baptist was performing baptism, John and his companion took the initiative to follow Jesus to the place where He was staying and spent the day with Him (Jn 1:35-39).

Several months later, Jesus came to John's own neighborhood. As soon as our Lord called out to John and his older brother, James, to follow Him, they dropped everything and went (Mt 4:21-22; Mk 1:19-20).

James and John loved Jesus. Sometimes, they overdid it. Once our Lord was snubbed in a village. Right away, the sons of Zebedee felt a righteous indignation. They recalled a reading from Scripture and asked Jesus if they should call down fire from heaven, "just as Elijah did" (Lk 9:54-56).

This helps us understand why Jesus had a special place in His heart for the sons of Zebedee. They were members of His "inner circle" and were two of the three disciples that were closest to Him.

Whenever our Lord preferred not to be alone or not to be with a big group of people, He had the brothers and one other apostle to keep Him company (Mk 5:37-43; 9:2-13; Mt 26:37-46). It was also understood among the apostles that John was "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (Jn 13:21-25 NIV).

John was the only one of the twelve who did not abandon Jesus throughout His ordeal. Like his mother, who refused to abandon the Son of God as He bore the sins of the world on the cross, John stayed as close to his Teacher, Lord, and Master, as was possible.

Years later John would write, "When Jesus saw His mother there, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.'" (Jn 19:26-27 NIV).

The sons of Zebedee would go on to serve the risen Lord all the days of their lives. James was the first apostle to be martyred (Acts 12:2). John was the last.

Out of all the apostles, he served Christ the longest.

John authored five of the sixty-six books in the Bible. The theme of love is everywhere in his writing. In the gospel according to John, he writes about the love of God and of His son, Jesus Christ. In 1, 2, and 3 John, his letters to the early church, John also writes about the love between brethren.³ In Revelation, John shares the vision he saw that gives us a preview of the history of this world.

All his writings reflect what Jesus said was the greatest commandment (Mt 22:34-40). They minister to us even today and draw us close to Jesus, as they would every believer, until the day our Lord comes in all His splendor and glory to give to everyone according to what he has done (Rev 22:12).

Both these mothers had great influence on their children. One of them turned hers far from Him while the other drew hers close to the Lord. The choices these mothers made were dependent upon how well they understood God's word.

The same is true for you and me. We must, therefore, make every effort to read the Bible and understand God's word. If you've found this study helpful, we encourage you to study other mothers in the Bible.

Do this in the privacy of your home or in the company of your family, friends, and church group. You will be the wiser for it, and your sons and daughters will greatly benefit.★

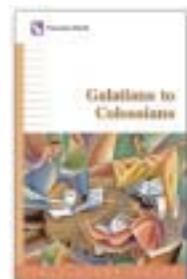
1 Bible Study Guide Series: Matthew (True Jesus Church, 1999), pg 8

2 Bible Study Guide Series: Matthew (True Jesus Church, 1999), pg 242

3 Bible Study Guide Series: 1, 2, 3 John & Jude (True Jesus Church, 1999), pg. 10-12

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Quiet Times

When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.
—Revelation 8:1

Spend a few moments dwelling on God's creation and His works in your life. Be filled with the silence of worship.



If silence is golden, why are so many books written on how to speak and so few on how to be quiet? Silence, at the very least, offers protection. You don't have to explain what you haven't said. Besides, it's better to remain quiet and be thought dense and witless than to speak volumes and remove all doubts.

In the expression of faith, time for silence is advisable, too. Sometimes we need to do nothing but think and leave our hearts and minds open to discovering God's will for us. Of course, "doing nothing" isn't natural for many Christians, so here are two hints on how to keep silent before God:

1 Think for a moment about the last time you were left speechless. Maybe you were afraid or so awestruck that you were at a loss for words. Or maybe someone said something so profound (or painfully true) that your usually quick wit slipped to half speed.

God is awesome; therefore, it's natural—and wise—to be awestruck in His presence. The very fact that God listens to our prayers, meets our needs, and accepts our love is enough to stir such strong feelings of respect that we're temporarily silent. Silence is faith's exclamation of respect. And God listens to it!

2 Silence is golden in the presence of those who know more than us. God knows everything, and He wants us to know part of what He knows. Listening to God, however, is futile if you expect to hear voices inside your head. God talks through the Bible as we quietly meditate on His Word. His Holy Spirit will guide us by revealing and opening up His loving Truth. It's good to conduct some silent, informal conversation with Him at these times. Tell Him that you want to do His will. Then go about your business, confident that God will guide your ways and your words.

Now there is something to talk about.



EVE

BSP—Garden Grove, California, USA

*Eve was God's gift to Adam
For his loneliness reached the heart of the Lord.
He needed someone to assist him—
Someone to be his blessing and support.*

*She was created out of Adam,
Not from his head—to rule over him.
Nor from his feet;
To be trampled by his whim.*

*She was a refined and feminine being,
One made of a different tone and texture.
Hers was unlike the masculinity of man.
Rather, God made her soft, elegant and tender.*

*She was made from Adam's rib—
His very flesh and bone.
To be close and protected by him;
To be loved as his very own.*

*O Eve, mother of all mankind,
You are the marvelous work of God.
You are Adam's bone of bones and flesh of flesh,
Wondrous creation of the Lord!*