

MANNA

True Jesus Church ISSUE 44 APR-JUN 2004 **The Lord's Teachings**

In Jesus Christ, **Dreams Do Come True!**
The Unprofitable Servant
Jeffrey's Miracle

MANNA

Apr-Jun 2004

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The Lord's Teachings

“The goal of Manna is to inspire believers to live an active faith through mutual encouragement and the study of biblical truths.”

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Dear Reader,

We are glad to bring the spring issue of 2004 to you, and we hope you will find the articles helpful and encouraging.

It is always heartening to see how the Lord continues to inspire our writers with spiritual depth and insight. Overtime, we truly thank God for building up a team of brothers and sisters who are dedicated to serving Him in this capacity.

To encourage more writers to share God's word, the International Assembly, with the help of the UKGA, has put together the English Writers' Retreat (EWR) to be held in Cambridge, England, this September. We invite all members who are interested in literary ministry to come and attend. By gathering together, we can share our spiritual experiences with one another, and help each other put those experiences in writing.

Literary ministry is a very important and fulfilling way to serve God and to build up one another in our faith.

You can find more information about the EWR on page 38 of this issue, or you can visit the website at: <http://events.tjc.org/ewr2004/>

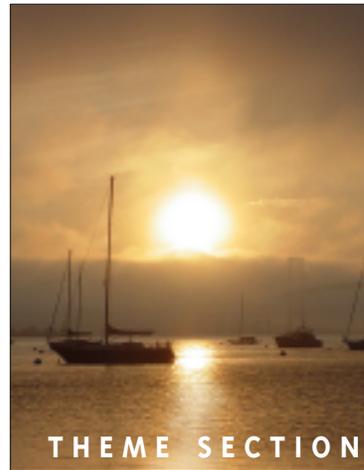
The Lord's Teachings



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TESTIMONY



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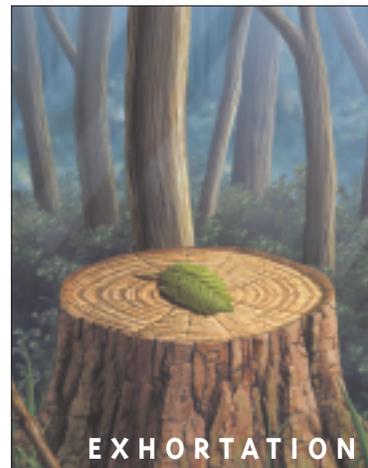
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Jesus Is The Meaning Of My Life

Tzu-Ann Chen—Vienna, Austria

LIFE IN VIENNA

Hallelujah, in the name of Jesus I testify. The following is my personal testimony about how I came to believe in Jesus, my journey in faith, and the grace of God in my life.

I remember that my mother first started attending Bible studies with the True Jesus Church when I was in kindergarten. At that time, she was a student in Germany, and there were only a few members who would gather together every Sabbath to worship God and study the truth.

Every time my mom went to those Bible studies she would take me with her. My father didn't really like that, but at that time he didn't oppose her.

A few years later, in 1985, my family moved to Austria, where there were no church members. Yet, my mom managed to keep in touch with the brethren in Germany.

I was five years old when we moved to Vienna, and I would often have horrible nightmares. This was when my mom first taught me how to pray. She told me to pray before going to bed and ask God to guide me safely through the night.

I followed her advice, and God graciously listened to and answered my prayers almost immediately. My nightmares were soon gone, and, from that time on, I firmly believed that God

existed and that He could do all things.

Throughout the following three years, many church members, preachers, and other holy workers came to Vienna to visit my parents and to talk with them about the truth. But my father's heart was hardened, and he always rejected what they said.

He believed only in his own abilities and would say that he was a person whom God would not want. He also opposed my mom in her search for the truth, which often led to marital conflicts.

Nevertheless, my mom decided to get baptized with me and my two siblings. Thank God, despite all obstacles, we were finally baptized on June 24,



Something was missing in my life, and I knew I couldn't go on like that.

1989, after making our way out of the house that morning like thieves, because we were afraid that my dad would come and stop us.

JESUS CAME INTO MY HEART

After our baptism, my mom told me to pray with her for the Holy Spirit and for my dad. We did, but always in secret because my dad would not allow us to pray at home.

I prayed persistently for the Holy Spirit, but I didn't receive it until three years after my baptism.

That year, a sister from Germany moved to Vienna to study, so we would meet with her on Sabbath to worship God. I really thank God for this sister who studied in Vienna at that time. She encouraged me a lot and also took extra time to pray with me.

One evening, she asked me again if I wanted to pray for the Holy Spirit, and I agreed. During that prayer I really had nothing else in my mind than receiving the Holy Spirit, and after an hour or so I began to speak in tongues. Tears of joy kept flowing down my cheeks, and I didn't want to stop praying.

Shortly before I received the Holy Spirit I had a dream: I saw angels in heaven and Jesus in the midst of them. Everything was very bright, and I couldn't see Jesus' face because there was so much light around it.

Then, the scene suddenly changed. I saw a house with a garden surrounded

by a fence, and the weather was grey and foggy. The gate to the garden opened, and a person clothed in white, barefooted, entered and walked up to the house.

Again, I was unable to see the face of the person. Only many years after I had received the Holy Spirit did I understand that this dream showed me that Jesus was coming into my heart to live there.

BACKSLIDING YEARS

Slowly, my faith began to backslide as I entered into the teenage years. Although I had the Holy Spirit, I didn't submit to its guidance.

I did what all my peers did—daydream and indulge in all sorts of pleasures, listening to pop music, going to the pub, and dating.

Basically, I was lost in the indulgences of the world. I loved them, and I didn't want to be different from my friends. After a few years, however, Jesus made me recognize that worldly pleasures were empty and vain.

King Solomon also understood this: "I said in my heart, 'Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure'; but surely, this also was vanity" (Eccl 2:1).

My selfishness and indulgence led to a lot of conflicts with my parents and also caused me to suffer emotionally. I suddenly realized how empty I felt inside. Something was missing in my life, and I knew I couldn't go on like that.

Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I? (Eccl 2:24-25)

While I was straying from God, my dad amazingly came to believe in Jesus. I still remember the day when my dad got baptized.

I couldn't believe that my father was actually accepting Jesus as his Savior, that it was he who entered the ice-cold water on that day in the fall of 1994, and it was he who shed many tears during the sacraments of footwashing and Holy Communion.

Only many years later did I get to know how many brothers and sisters had been praying for my dad while I had not cared at all. Why? Because I had been too busy having fun. Thank God that He eventually made me realize my need to turn back to him.

TURNING POINT IN MY FAITH

I attended a spiritual convocation for the very first time in 1997. During Holy Communion, the preacher talked about all the pain and agony Jesus had suffered on the cross to save us from eternal condemnation.

This was the first time that I fully understood how much God loved me. I was so touched by His love that I simply kept crying.

As we sang the communion hymn, the lyrics spoke volumes in my heart: "I gave, I gave My life for thee, What hast thou giv'n for me?" I felt so ashamed and sorrowful because I had neither appreciated nor tried to repay Jesus' love.

Thank God, this catalyzed the revival of my faith.

A year later, God gave me the opportunity to attend the Youth Theological Training Course (YTTC) in the United Kingdom—a church event that I didn't really want to go to at first.

I had just graduated from high school

that summer, and I wanted to study tourism management, for which I had to take exams. But I failed the exams, so all my plans were, in a way, destroyed.

Looking back, however, I must say that God had His wonderful plan for me. Since I didn't have anything to do after the failed exams, my mom sent me off to YTTC, and those two-and-a-half weeks of learning God's word and many earnest prayers gave my faith a big boost.

Also, when I came back to Vienna, I didn't know what to study or what to do next. But God graciously and marvelously directed me, opening all doors for me so that I finally entered the department of translation studies without any difficulty. Entering this program further allowed me to take time off in the summers to go to YTTC.

In the theological seminar, I did not only learn a lot about biblical truths and how to lead a life of spiritual cultivation but also got to know many youths in Christ. These brothers and sisters taught me what it means to love one another.

Many of them showed concern and a great deal of kindness to me from the very beginning, although I was basically a stranger to them, and that touched me very, very deeply.

Reflecting on the past few years, I must say that it is truly amazing how God has guided my family and me.

For a long time, we didn't have proper family services and religious education classes. I often felt like my family and I were sheep without a shepherd, since the lack of holy workers has not permitted for many pastoral visits to Vienna.



Reflecting on the past few years, I must say that it is truly amazing how God has guided my family and me.

In actuality, Jesus Himself has been pastoring us all this time—helping us to build up and to keep our faith in Him.

Today, I know that Jesus is always around, listening to our prayers, comforting and carrying us. He is teaching, trying, and shaping me every day to make me as pure as gold and more like Him.

Jesus is the meaning of my life. ★

¹Hymns of Praise (True Jesus Church, 1993), No. 297.



God Opened A Way For Me

Takehana Reiji—Tokyo, Japan

MY CHILDHOOD

Both of my parents are from Kurahashi, which is a small island in Seto-inland Sea Hiroshima.

During World War II, my father was dispatched to Singapore but returned to Japan with some injuries. My mother said that she personally heard and witnessed the explosions of the atomic bombs. My uncle passed away due to the after-effects of the bombs. All these things happened before I was born.

Because life in Hiroshima was very difficult, my father joined an agricultural exploitation program, and we moved to Jumonji, a place in Kyushu. This was where my brother and I were born in 1953 and 1951, respectively.

The people there lived a simple give-and-take lifestyle without even an amenity such as electricity. When I was three years old, Jumonji became an American army training camp, so we moved back to Hiroshima, where I grew up and stayed until I graduated from high school. After my graduation from The Institute in Osaka, I worked for five years and then joined the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer program in 1980.

During my training, I went to Zen temples, but I did not understand the Zen concept of self-denial, and I felt like I would never be able to understand it on my own.

EXPOSED TO DIFFERENT RELIGIONS

On one assignment, I was sent to the Philippines, where Catholicism is the dominant religion. Out of curiosity, I visited the church several times, but I was never compelled to enter into the faith. I feel like the Catholic faith places too much stress on the church's traditions rather than the Bible.

After I left the Philippines, I went to Indonesia, which is an Islamic country. I went to the mosques and worshiped in the name of Allah. At that time, I felt like religion and I had nothing to do with each other.

I had e-mailed a friend, whom I have known for more than twenty years,

about the Bible. He replied, “Talking about the Bible is unnecessary. I am a Christian and, at the same time, I am a Buddhist.” I was just like him: I thought that the world in front of me was everything. But thank God, He preserved me despite my ignorance.

While I resided in Taiwan, I visited the True Jesus Church several times. I felt that this church was different from the Catholic, Islamic, and Gospel churches I had visited. The feeling is hard to express with words, but I have the same impressions even now.

I thought to myself, “If I were to join a church, then let it be the True Jesus Church.” I really can’t put my finger on it, but there is this mysterious feeling of intimacy with God in this church. Soon after, however, I returned to society and lived a worldly life—promptly forgetting the presence of God.

I loved to drink, and I often couldn’t stop myself from drinking. Even though I would regret it the day after, I just couldn’t kick the habit. It was as if I had fallen into a ditch and couldn’t climb out.

Life seemed to drone on in these vicious cycles until I met with further disasters.

THE LORD IS MY REFUGE

On the same day that my company went bankrupt, my son encountered some mishaps. Everything happened so suddenly that I became afraid. I didn’t know what to do. It was then that I forsook my concept of the world and resolutely returned to the True Jesus Church.

To be completely honest I really didn’t have any other options at that time but to go to the church. I began drawing closer to God. Indeed, I’ve really

discovered that the Lord is our refuge.

While I was in Taiwan, I experienced the love and warmth of God through the embrace of the brothers and sisters. My tears would not stop rolling down my cheeks every time I sang hymns or prayed to God. I had no idea that one could shed that many tears.

It was as if these tears washed away the wickedness in my past so that I could feel a deep joy from within. Because I did not have the money to provide my children with textbooks, school uniforms, or other necessities in life, we lived with my wife’s sister.

Despite the circumstances, my heart was peaceful because I lived by relying on the words of God (Mt. 6:25). Some people have everything in the world, such as status and wealth, but want to take their own lives because they do not have the hope or the strength to live on. To them, everything is vanity because they do not know His words.

Just as King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes, the world is vanity without the abundance of the words of God. What is worth celebrating is that His words are our bread of life. With Him, we won’t ever have to know what it’s like not to be able to live on. I thank God with all my heart for this blessing.

Experiencing Him

Perhaps it’s very difficult for someone without religion to understand that faith is strengthened by experience. But I truly believe that there is a spiritual realm because of my experiences of the Holy Spirit.

The first time I went to True Jesus Church, I remember thinking that the way they prayed was so strange and funny. As I had not received the Holy



With Him, we won’t ever have to know what it’s like not to be able to live on.

Spirit at the time, I would pray with words of understanding saying, “Hallelujah, praise the Lord.”

Once, while I was asleep, I dreamt of a bright light appearing overhead and encircled my entire body. I felt like I was floating in the air and I was full of joy inside. No words can describe that feeling.

After I received the Holy Spirit, I realized that I am no longer the same as before and I made the decision to get baptized at Osaka Church. I wanted to die to my old self and have the blood of Jesus wash away my sins as soon as possible.

On the plane to Osaka, I found myself gazing out the window at the same ocean in which I would be baptized. I clearly understood that, apart from Jesus, there was no one under the sun whom I could rely on.

GOD’S PROTECTION

Initially when my family first moved from Taiwan to Okinawa, I could not find a job. But thank the Lord, I later found one. I wholly entrusted my life to God and conducted a family thanksgiving at home everyday.

In Okinawa, I met fellow church members who had come from China to study in Japanese language schools. We held Sabbath services together and helped one another.

Everything was the meticulous plan of God, because He had already prepared the way for us (Ps. 139:3). For a period of time, while my children were still young, we couldn't afford food but, miraculously, God arranged for others to help us.

The timing was impeccable. Besides God, who could have given us such help? Another time, on my way to work, I was riding my motorcycle and approached a sharp curve. The visibility was very poor because it was raining, and as I lowered my head to dodge the rain a car appeared out of nowhere.

I couldn't react quickly enough and we collided head-on. I felt really helpless and yelled, "Hallelujah!" I found myself lying in the middle of the road with my motorcycle thrown to the side. To my bewilderment, I actually came out of the accident unscathed.

The driver of the car was also shocked and asked, "Are you alright?" Then he left. Even though I was the one who crossed the lane divider and hit his vehicle, he never looked into the matter or sued me for damages.

When I examined myself more carefully, I realized that my socks had ripped and I had only a minor scrape. Even today, I still deeply thank God in my heart. Surely God's protection far surpasses man's imagination.

HIS GUIDANCE

I had another miraculous experience when God guided a youth from China to me. I met him on a Sunday in the post office. He had wanted to buy a phone card, but the post office did not carry any. He spoke to me in English, and I replied to him in Chinese.

I noticed that he was carrying a Bible



Everything was the meticulous plan of God, because He had already prepared the way for us (Ps. 139:3).

and felt that he would come with us to believe in the Lord. Immediately, I brought him to Ghokusen-do where my wife worked. I couldn't believe that I was so bold. I don't really remember what I was doing at the time, but I had only one thought: "I must bring him to my wife!"

My wife then warmly introduced the truth to this youth. Later on, he was baptized and became our brother in Christ.

Because there are only a handful of believers in Okinawa, visits from brothers and sisters from other churches are great sources of encouragement to us. Also, pastoral visitations remind us to take the initiative in pursuing the truth in the Bible.

To me, these visitations are like battery chargers. I really thank God for guiding my path and letting me experience His constant abidance and protection. Amen. ★



Jeffrey's Miracle

Widya Susanto—Garden Grove, California, USA

A FRAGILE BOY

We believe there is a purpose for everything, and in my case, I believe there is a purpose that God brought my youngest son into this world.

Jeffrey is a four-and-a-half-year-old twin. When he was born, he was less than five pounds, which was somewhat normal for a twin. His sister, Renee, was almost one pound heavier and seven minutes older than him.

His birth was actually a miracle in itself, and I witnessed that for myself at the hospital. Because of the risks of twin delivery, my wife had to be brought into the operating room instead of the delivery room, just in case they had to perform the Caesarean procedure.

Thank God, there was no need for the operation, and both twins were

natural births. But Jeffrey was born with his feet instead of his head first. No matter how hard they tried to reverse him, it wouldn't work. Praise God that the babies were born healthy.

When Jeffrey was one year old, he had a breathing problem. The doctor sent him to the hospital, but they couldn't figure out what was wrong with him. When he began to feel fine, they sent him home.

Fast forward three-and-a-half years later. This winter, Southern California was hard hit with the influenza virus. Jeffrey and his siblings each had to receive flu shots. Perhaps a new strain of the virus rendered the vaccine ineffective, explaining why Jeffrey caught a bad case of the flu despite the preventative

measures we took.

So, we took him to the doctor and gave him some medicine. Instead of getting better a week later, his condition worsened. This was back in January 2004.

When my wife took him to see the doctor a second time, he was breathing really hard and gasping for air. The doctor, without talking to my wife, ordered the nurse to take Jeffrey into the emergency room.

He was immediately admitted into the ER for medical attention and given intravenous and breathing treatments, and he was closely watched for twenty-four hours. They gave him steroids to strengthen his immune system, but he couldn't eat or drink, so it was a very difficult time for him.

We prayed and prayed, even up to the time of the procedure and all the way to the end.

THE PAINFUL PROCEDURES

The doctors didn't actually know what was going on, so they had to do tests on Jeffrey. They started with X-rays, and when that didn't give them enough information, they ordered a CT scan and then an MRI.

Jeffrey didn't know what was going on and couldn't stay still. His constant fidgeting forced the doctors to perform a laryngoscopy, where a surgical apparatus and camera were inserted through his nose and down his throat, with only local anesthesia. It was a very painful process.

The doctors didn't discover anything wrong with his upper respiratory system. In order to test beyond the voice box, they had to give him general anesthesia and do a bronchoscopy, a procedure where a camera tracks activity from the throat all the way down to the lungs.

The risk of this procedure was the possibility that Jeffrey might lose his voice indefinitely, and this was when I started to ask brothers and sisters to pray for him. The other risk was that, if he couldn't breathe during the procedure, then they would have to cut open his throat.

Of course, with the general anesthesia, he might not wake up after being sedated. So I contacted some ministers, the church council, and the

church members to pray for him. I called my mom in Indonesia to ask the members there to pray for him, too.

We prayed and prayed, even up to the time of the procedure and all the way to the end. The procedure took about an hour, and we prayed the whole time.

When he got out of the operating room, he was still sleeping. That's when I saw the purple markings on his neck. They were X-marks. I asked the doctors why those marks were there, and they said the markings were points of incision if he stopped breathing during the operation.

Thank God that Jeffrey was able to breathe normally during the course of the procedure and that they didn't have to take such a drastic action.

FINDING OUT WHAT'S WRONG

The doctor discovered a condition, which is illustrated in the diagram below.

The first diagram on the left shows the normal respiratory anatomy of a human being. The trachea, also known as

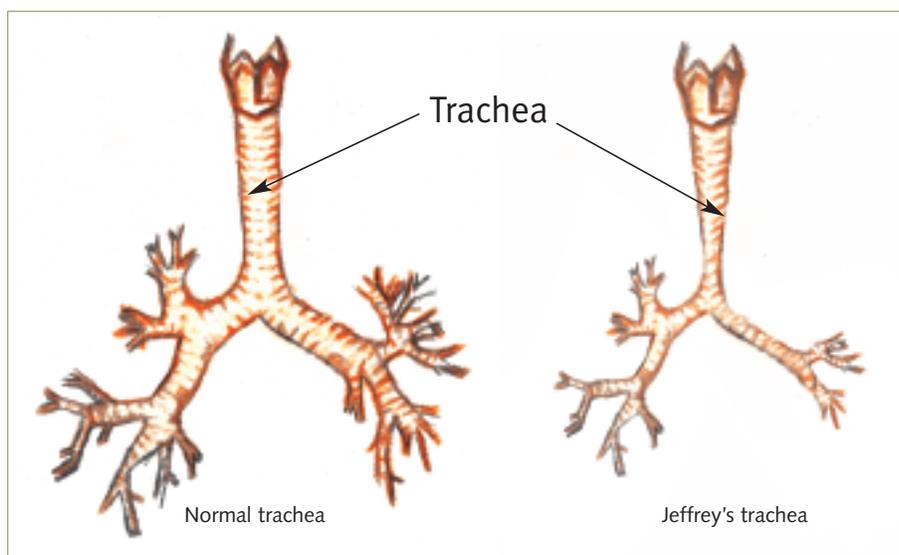
the windpipe, runs from the nasal cavity down to the lungs. It connects to the bronchial tubes, which bring oxygen into the lung cavity.

On the right diagram, we see Jeffrey's respiratory anatomy. The first problem is the progressive and rapid narrowing of the windpipe towards the bronchial tubes.

Under normal circumstances, he breathes like a normal little boy. But when the windpipe is too narrow, he doesn't get enough air. And the size of the narrowest ring in the windpipe is only about three millimeters.

According to one doctor, that is half the size of a newborn baby's tracheal ring. This explains some of the breathing troubles he experienced in the past. When the doctor diagnosed this, he was surprised that Jeffrey was still alive. He said, "It must be miracle."

When we heard that, we praised and thanked God for all His guidance all this while. Under normal medical conditions, even the doctor felt Jeffrey shouldn't



have lived as long as he did, and this doctor had over ten years of experience dealing with this condition. He had seen thousands of similar cases, and Jeffrey was the third surviving patient.

PRAYERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Every time Jeffrey had to be put under general anesthesia, we were afraid that he wouldn't wake up. So we prayed that, without anesthesia, he could stay still for the doctors to perform the necessary diagnostic procedures.

After all the prayers offered by the brothers, sisters, and ministers of the church, we could see that Jeffrey started to have more confidence, and he became calmer.

During the previous three CT scans, Jeffrey was moving too much, so the doctors had to give him general anesthesia. But they didn't have to put Jeffrey to sleep in one of the last procedures, which they needed to confirm their findings.

Because the procedure went smoothly, we went home early. Thank God we didn't have to go through another bout of general anesthesia.

After completing the final diagnostic procedure, the doctors wanted to perform a major operation on Jeffrey.

They believed they could enlarge the narrowest part of the windpipe, but they would have to borrow tissues from other parts of the body, and the chance of survival was only sixty percent. This was

like gambling to me. I did not feel comfortable that their best would only be sixty percent.

So my wife and I started to rely more on God.

RELYING COMPLETELY ON GOD

Psalm 71:6 reminds us who our Maker is:

*By You I have been upheld from birth;
You are He who took me out of my
mother's womb.
My praise shall be continually of You.*

This definitely applies to Jeffrey. Through the encouragement of ministers and members, we stood by the decision not to go through with the operation. And whenever we needed comfort from the Lord, we also remembered these words:

*Be my strong refuge,
To which I may resort continually;
You have given the commandment to save
me,
For You are my rock and my fortress.
(Ps 71:3)*

Right now, Jeffrey is doing very well. He's always been normal to us, and even though he has this condition, we never realized that it was this serious. Through God's protection, he has lived all these years. We continue praying, and we ask everyone to continue praying for us.

We received the last CT scan/MRI

results recently, but we had to go to a different doctor because Jeffrey's doctor belongs to another medical group/hospital.

When we took Jeffrey to this new doctor and his condition was examined, he looked at Jeffrey's last CT scan results and couldn't understand why the windpipe had enlarged. It was originally at three millimeters, but the last scan showed that it had grown.

He called the first doctor, who immediately asked, "How is Jeffrey doing?" He almost couldn't believe that Jeffrey wasn't having any problems, so the second doctor said, "He looks normal to me."

Although his trachea is narrowing, he doesn't think it will be as bad. If you were to see Jeffrey today, you wouldn't know that he went through such a grand ordeal. We truly praise and thank God for His protection.

*Then I called upon the name of the Lord:
"O LORD, I implore You, deliver my
soul!"*

*Gracious is the LORD, and righteous;
Yes, our God is merciful.*

*The LORD preserves the simple;
I was brought low, and He saved me.*

(Ps 116:4-6)

This is very applicable to my wife and me. We were in despair when we were going through this ordeal. We were in the hospital for about eight days, and the two of us took turns to be with Jeffrey at all times.

There were times when we would lose hope because the doctors were clueless about the problem, which caused them to perform one test after another.

It was a difficult time for both of us,



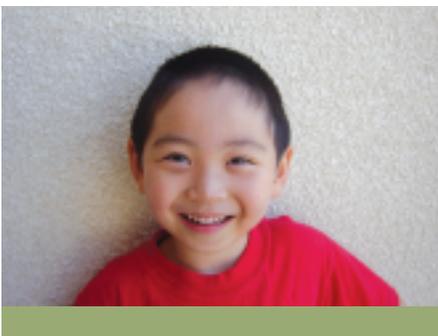
At that time, we relied on God and gave Jeffrey to Him. We can only ask, because it is God that really decides for us.

but we called on the Lord to help and save us. We knelt down and prayed and asked for forgiveness—that perhaps we had transgressed without our knowing, and we prayed that His will would be done.

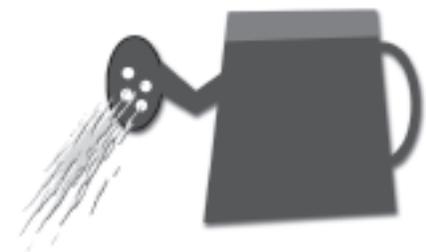
We didn't know whether Jeffrey was going to be discharged from the hospital, if he had to stay, or if his illness would go away completely. At that time, we relied on God and gave Jeffrey to Him. We can only ask, because it is God that really decides for us. So we ask for God's best for Jeffrey.

I believe there is a reason for everything, and God has answered our prayers and continues to be our protection. We would also like to express our sincere gratitude and heartfelt thanks to all the caring brothers and sisters who interceded for Jeffrey and our family. We are indebted to you always.

May all the glory be unto the Lord's name. ★



Editor's note: Jeffrey is doing very well and the narrowest ring in his trachea have continued to enlarge since the surgery, thanks to the miraculous grace of God and the loving intercessions of brothers and sisters.



a dollar a day...

How You Can Help

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If God Is For Us, Who Can Be Against Us?

Stéphane Pelard—Paris, France

Many people come to Jesus to find peace in their lives because He promised to give peace to His disciples. Some people, in particular, hope that by drawing near to the Almighty God, the creator of all things, their worries will cease to exist, thinking that the peace promised by Jesus is a peace from worldly cares: acquiring financial stability, living in a good neighborhood, and having good health.

In the book of Romans, Paul encourages the church, writing, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31). Taken out of its context, this verse implies that nothing can oppose us if God is with us, for who can counter our

success? So, we imagine living as a member of the upper class, being the president of a flourishing company, and being in vigorous health.

Paul further asks, “How shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rom 8:32) and tells us that “all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28).

However, this letter, placed in its context, was written while the church was under terrible persecution. We learn that the believers were distressed, persecuted, and killed (Rom 8:35-36), and being a chosen heir of God meant suffering with Christ in order to be glorified with Him (Rom 8:17).

From this, we see clearly that the world opposes those who give their heart to God. By measuring faith against material blessings or our vision of peace, we risk deceiving ourselves or, worse, setting ourselves up for failure.

If we use an incorrect standard to

assess the events in our life, we could come to fear that the slightest problem we encounter means we have been cursed, that becoming ill means we are being punished for having sinned, and that failure means God no longer loves us, even though we have been chosen for sanctification.

What, then, is the meaning of “God is with us”?

RENEW OUR MIND

First, the Bible teaches us that we must be renewed in our mind and must put on the new man, because relying on human understanding could estrange us from a life in God (Rom 8:17-24).

For this reason, our Lord Jesus proclaimed that we must be born again to see the kingdom of God. Otherwise, we risk being like the crowds who trailed after Jesus for miracles, for healing, and for bread and failed to understand the true reason for following Christ.

In fact, we could receive many types

of material blessings yet pass by the word of God and the way to eternal life.

Our Lord Jesus, therefore, commanded us to renew our mind, in order that we are not only able to see but also able to enter His kingdom and become a person pleasing to Him.

For this purpose, He told us to seek first the kingdom of God and He would take care of our material needs, so that worldly matters would not occupy our thoughts and our time while we strived to do so.

The mother of the sons of Zebedee was under the same misconception as the crowds when she asked Jesus to allow her sons to sit, one on His right and the other on His left, in His kingdom (Mt

follows will ensure that we walk with God in His way.

WALK IN THE WAY OF THE LORD

To keep from becoming discouraged, we must strengthen ourselves through our trials, bearing in mind that all things work together for our good and that tribulations are a part of the way shown by the Lord.

In fact, after Jesus received water baptism and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove, He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And He was subjected to various forms of injustice and attack up until His death on the cross.

nevertheless, conditional and that we must walk according to the Spirit and not the flesh to please God.

After baptism, we abide in Christ, and sin no longer has dominion over us (Rom 6:14-18), but we will still be tempted by carnal desires (Rom 8:1-8).

To live in grace, therefore, we must become slaves of righteousness (Rom 6:19), bearing fruits that lead to holiness and eternal life (Gal 5:16, 24, 25). By remaining firmly on this path, we will not fall into temptation.

But how do tribulations and spiritual combat benefit us?

SUFFERING FOR GOD IS A BLESSING

By faith, we can easily accept going to battle for the Lord: it is a natural expression of our faith, our gratitude, and our love for Him. The apostles testified that fighting by His side is a wonderful experience and a tremendous privilege. We will not forsake those whom we love!

After the apostle Paul escaped death at Lystra, he and Barnabas taught that tribulations lead to victory. From his experience, he saw that difficulties sanctify us by way of perseverance and hope. And we overcome our sufferings through the love of God.

Like Stephen at his stoning, those who suffer for Christ will be shown the kingdom of God. They will be strengthened while serving Him, knowing that their temporary suffering is nothing compared to the indescribable joy that will await them when they can be by His side for eternity.

The apostle Peter also exhorts us to rejoice when we are reproached for the name of Christ, because to suffer for



This trust in the Bible allows us to accept spiritual truth, which surpasses our wisdom, and to experience the grace and power of God in our life.

20:20, 21). She was hoping that Jesus would make them His chief ministers.

During this historical era, many believers were waiting for Christ to expel the Romans from their country and to take control. Jesus, seeing their lack of understanding, taught them to seek humility rather than the glory of the world.

This new way of thinking is gained through a strict faith and sincere trust in the words of the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles. This trust in the Bible allows us to accept spiritual truth, which surpasses our wisdom, and to experience the grace and power of God in our life. The assiduous and genuine application that

Similarly, the apostles encountered persecution, slander, and sufferings shortly after the establishment of the church on the Day of Pentecost.

We, too, may encounter difficulties in proportion to our strength. In our trials, we must remember that, as written by the apostle Paul to believers walking in the way of the Lord, “all things work together for good”!

Of course, we must discern between a test from God and a temptation from the devil—the former edifies us and the latter causes us to fall when we forget to be vigilant.

It is also for this reason that Paul emphasizes the fact that a blessing is,

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doing good is a grace before God. We should not forget that our Lord Jesus, at the beginning of His ministry, taught this very principle in the beatitudes, saying that the kingdom of heaven is for those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

Sufferings are not failings but are a grace of God. Common sense is reversed! True failure occurs when we return to sin and draw away from the love of both God and men.

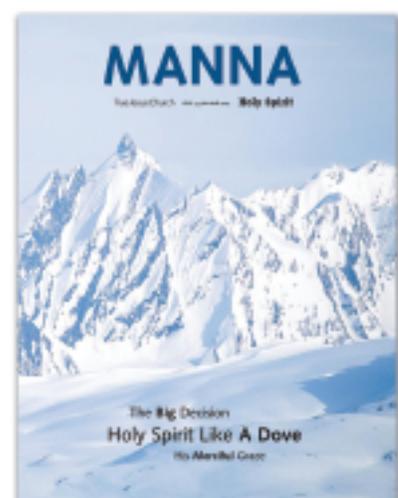
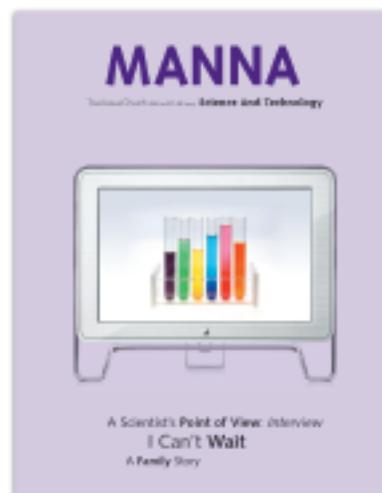
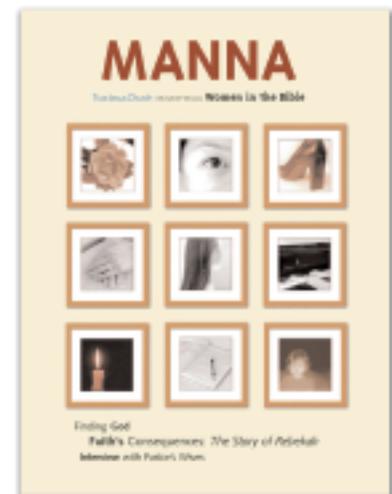
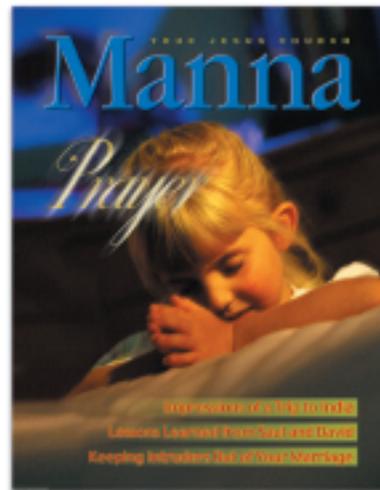
The purpose of these explanations is not to disclaim the material blessings of God, because they are abundant and do bring us much happiness, much like how nature flourishes after the rain. Rather, it is to help us understand that the blessings given by Him must not become an objective.

Our goal is to make progress in our relationship with Him.

Although Jesus, the Almighty, is with us as we travel on this path, we must understand that tribulations may arise, but they may also, by the miracle of faith and the grace of God, strengthen us and fill us with joy.

This may be foolishness for men, but it is grace for the children of God. The injustice we suffer will sanctify us and strengthen us as we strive to love God and love men.

God is with us to guide us in the way of excellence, a way that will bring us indescribable joy and peace beyond our comprehension—a profound peace within the storm. And nothing can stop this from happening if we remain faithful, steadfast, and vigilant in His way. ★



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A Quiet Time Of Meditation

Tan Guat Kim—Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

OUR NEED FOR QUIET TIME

Our wristwatches and clocks are very indispensable items! We spend a large portion of our daily time chasing the hands of the clock.

A multitude of things clamor for our attention. There are the mundane irritations of living—getting to work, household chores, parental and social obligations—all of which have become our “constants in life.”

Time is always at a premium—there are never enough hours to a day.

While we cannot deny or shirk our daily responsibilities, we must not forget to maintain a balance in our spiritual relationship with God. This is “God’s Time.” No matter how immersed we are in our daily pursuits, God should not be relegated to the back of our minds.

As Christians, we should spend some quiet time with God everyday; it is a time of peaceful silence whereby we can feel so much closer to Him.

Spending quiet time with Him offers the much-needed diversion from the secular rhythms of worldly thoughts and physical needs. It can be our guide to spiritual renewal and enable us to put all matters in the right perspective.

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (Jas 4:8). It is imperative to “draw near to God” and seek Him. Spending personal time with Him is an important conduit for Christians to stay connected to Him: “The Lord is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth” (Ps 145:18).

The Right Time, the Right Place

It is for us to decide on the right time and the right place to devote some peaceful and quiet moments to communicate with God. Choosing the best time and place may be the easy part, but keeping this appointment faithfully and consistently may be more difficult!

Spending time with God should be a regular habit rather than a sporadic occurrence. We should be committed to our decision, and this requires discipline and perseverance. “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart” (Gal 6:9).

You may choose to have a quiet time in the silence of the morning by starting the day with God, making Him your first priority. David began his days with a morning prayer: “My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up” (Ps 5:3).

For some, the morning time may not be the right time, so choosing a quiet time in the evening or at night may be more appropriate. In the silence of the night, you can review the day’s events and communicate with God undisturbed.

Isaac went out to meditate in the

fields in the evening (Gen 24:63), and psalmists meditated on God's promises and prayed fervently throughout the night for deliverance (Ps 119:148).

"Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice" (Ps 55:17).

JESUS' NEED FOR QUIET TIME

So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed. (Lk 5:16)
When Jesus heard it, He departed from there by boat to a deserted place by Himself... (Mt 14:13)

Because of His great healing powers and compassionate nature, Jesus was often mobbed by huge crowds of people who followed Him wherever He went. He was a much sought-after physician. The crowd often pursued Him on foot to have Him heal their sicknesses.

To escape the crowd, Christ withdrew to a lonely place to seek God's counsel. During His ministry on earth, He, too, felt the need for quiet time—a time He could have communion and fellowship with God and to ask for strength and wisdom from the heavenly father.

"Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed" (Mk 1:35). In the quiet of the morning, as the dark sky lightened the dawn, Jesus sought a quiet time and place for morning devotion.

He has set us an inspiring example.

I like to begin with a morning prayer of thanksgiving to God for allowing me to witness the dawn of a new day and for His guidance and blessings of the previous day. I pray for my thoughts to remain optimistic, positive, and focused,



Remember, prayer is the special and intimate union between God and us—it is a manifestation of our belief and faith.

which sets the tone to a new day for me.

Spending quiet time in prayer will restore our wavering confidence in our hectic and often chaotic lives. We should be able to attain motivation and endurance from prayers so that we can regain our fragile confidence.

Prayer is communication between God and man (1 Jn 1:3), and it is the key to our strength, as well as the dynamic force of our spiritual renewal (Rom 8:26-27).

Private Prayers

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Mt 6:6)

Jesus' emphasis is on private and personal prayers. He encourages us to pray in a private and quiet place with perseverance and discipline. He abhors prayers that are outward shows of piety (Mt 6:5). Jesus further warns us that we should "not use vain repetitions as the heathen do" (Mt 6:7). These are His instructions on ineffective prayers.

Our intimate prayers should progress beyond the stage of meaningless repetitions and endless monologues. If we reflect sufficiently on our prayers, it should be a prayer that is inspired, earnest, and fervent.

We must make provision for a quiet

time to pray assiduously because the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much (Jas 5:16). Remember, prayer is the special and intimate union between God and us—it is a manifestation of our belief and faith.

Should we be lacking in prayers, do not feel the need for prayers, or can't get ourselves to pray to God, we need to take these as warning signs to pay more attention to our spirituality. What is keeping us from drawing close to God?

MEDITATION IS MORE THAN SKIN DEEP

This book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. (Josh 1:8)

To "meditate" means to take time to ponder, reflect, and focus on a matter. This word is rooted in the Bible, which instructs us to meditate on God's word because it pleases Him.

"But His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law He meditates day and night" (Ps 1:2). This psalm inspires us to ruminate and meditate on God's word. In return, we will receive blessings and happiness, just like a tree planted by the river that has blossomed to full maturity.

Many of us do read the Bible occasionally. But because we are constrained by time, we may read it

hastily and without much thought. Sometimes, we compel ourselves to read the Bible. After all, is it not our duty to do so? We need to be careful that we do not read the Bible out of obligation.

Can we gain much or improve our Bible knowledge if we read it in this manner and neglect to think deeper into the words of God?

“Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day” (Ps 119:97). David considered meditating on God’s word a joy. He did not consider it a burden, an obligation, or responsibility, but rather an expression of devotion and delight.

When we meditate on God’s word in our quiet time, we should take time to focus and project our thoughts further and deeper—to meditate, familiarize, and reflect on His precepts, mightiness, and holiness. We need to digest and assimilate His words in our hearts.

Then, we need to take it a step further—to do what it says (Jas 1:22): practice what we have meditated, allow God’s word to purify our hearts and dominate our lives.

We must examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith (2 Cor 3:5). On an individual level, we need these quiet moments for self-examination, to chart the direction we are heading in our life of faith.



Spending quiet time alone with our Lord Jesus yields an immeasurable sense of fulfillment..

Furthermore, meditating on God’s word will enable us to attain a growing relationship with Him. Reading and understanding His word will ensure that we familiarize ourselves with His teachings.

It is a means to grace and spiritual growth, for His word enlightens and molds us into His image so that we may grow in the stature of Christ (2 Cor 3:18).

He Will Meet Us There

Apart from attending church services diligently and actively participating in church work, spending quiet time alone with our Lord Jesus yields an immeasurable sense of fulfillment.

The tranquil and quiet moments will prove to be comforting and reassuring. If you have not set aside some quiet time yet, make one, and you will definitely find it worthwhile and rewarding. Put aside some time daily so that your Christian life will be enriched and not grow stagnant.

*A quiet time is all I need,
A quiet time of prayer.
A quiet time alone with Jesus,
He will meet me there.*

A tranquil and peaceful atmosphere closes around me whenever I sing the inspiring lyrics to this song, “The Apostles.” The opening verse expresses a yearning to keep a quiet time with Jesus. There is a desire to acquire inner calm, unmarred by outward restlessness and worries, and free from distractions and intrusion.

Therefore, it is good to put aside some time for God, conversing with Him through prayer, and allowing Him to answer through our meditation of His

words.

A daily quiet time allows us to stay connected with Him, receive nourishment, draw inspiration, and put things in the right perspective. ★

The Lord's Teachings

While our Lord Jesus Christ was preaching the message of salvation in the three years of His ministry, He also taught His disciples many precious lessons about how to live a Christ-like life in the world.

He taught them what it means to be good and faithful servants, and to understand servitude from the perspective of God. He used parables, miracles, and signs to explain important truths to those He loved, though many times they did not understand.

Most importantly, He showed them what it means to walk in the Lord by living out His own life under the temptations and tests of the flesh. Having overcome everything in this world, He has also shown us that we can rely on Him to be victorious in our own faith.



The Unprofitable Servant

Adapted sermon by HH Ko—Heidelberg, Germany

Our Lord Jesus was always telling stories. One of the stories He told near the end of His three-year ministry was about the qualities of a servant worthy of the kingdom of heaven. What makes us good servants and what makes us lousy ones?

THE TALENT PARABLE

The parable begins with a man, who was about to travel to a far country, entrusting three of his servants with his goods (Mt 25:14-30). If you think about it, this was an act of great trust.

One servant received five talents, another received two, and the third received one talent—each according to what he was able to manage.

Exactly how much is in a talent, anyway?

In fact, one talent is quite a handsome amount. According to Unger's Expository Dictionary, one talent is equal to about 6,000 denarii, which is about 240 English pounds. So don't think that one talent is not worth much.

The servant with the five talents,



What the Lord cares more about is the heart of His servants and not necessarily their ability or skill.

without saying anything, traded them and made five more. The servant with the two talents also went and earned two more talents. After a long time, the master came back to settle his accounts with them.

Settling meant that he would find out what they had done with his money. “Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them,” said the first servant (v. 20).

“Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them,” echoed the second servant (v. 22).

Satisfied with their earnings, the man gave both of them the same praise: “Well done, good and faithful servant[s]; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (v. 21, 23). According to the man, their earnings were only “a few things”, in other words, it wasn’t very much.

The servant with the one talent, however, had a different plan. He took the money and, after having found a good place, dug a hole and hid it until the man returned.

GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANTS

If we refer to the Bible, what does “good” mean?

One time a person went up to Jesus and asked, “Good teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” Jesus replied, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God” (Mt 19:16-17).

When the Bible speaks of “good,” it refers to God Himself, and no other can be of the same measure. The Lord did not praise the first two servants for having a business mind or for doing all the hard work. Being able to make another five or another two talents was not the most important to Him.

These two servants were praised because they had the characteristic of God for being good.

What about “faithful”? Revelation 19 records that Jesus’ name is “faithful.” So, these two servants with the five and two talents possessed another characteristic of Jesus, and they were praised for this virtue.

The person who received the five talents actually had build a great wealth for his master. Even so, in the eyes of God, this was not much. We may think it is a lot, but in God’s eyes, it is only a small amount. What the Lord cares more about is the heart of His servants and not necessarily their ability or skill.

Because these two servants were good and faithful over a few things, the man declared that he would make them ruler over many things and said to them, “Enter into the joy of your lord” (v. 21). There aren’t many masters who are like this master.

After he tested them, he not only let them take care of more things but also welcomed them into his joy. That is to say, he would let them enjoy everything that he enjoyed. In modern terms, if you were the master and asked your servant

to enjoy your joy, this could mean enjoying your possessions and wealth: he could use your car, your swimming pool, and your house.

Many times, we try to be polite by inviting houseguests to make themselves at home. But if they were to touch our safety deposit box, we would become nervous. In Jesus’ case, He asks us to enjoy everything that is His. Even if we were to touch His safety deposit box, He would give it to us freely.

It’s Not About the Work

This master was very open with what he had to share with his servants. This is indeed a parable of heaven, for who else on earth could be this generous?

Not only was the man generous, he also had a unique definition of equality. When the servant with the two talents reported his success, the man replied in the same way that he did with the five-talent servant. He also said, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” praising him for having the attributes of the Lord Jesus.

Normally, someone who makes the most would be ranked first, and anyone making less than him would be ranked lower than him. This is how society works. But the man praised his servants equally, even though their loads were not.

When we do holy work, it is not about our talent or gift, though they help us do the work. What the man praised about the servants was their resemblance to God’s character. Likewise for us today, it is not about how much we do for Christ but how the work is accomplished through our Christ-like attributes and how we see things from His perspective.

Whether we are entrusted with five

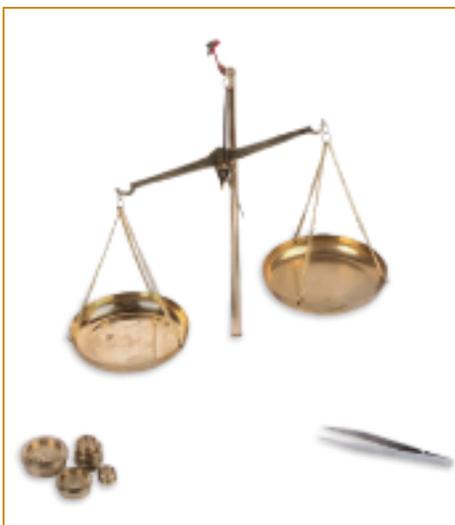
or two talents, we can share in the same joy of the Lord Jesus if we remain good and faithful towards Him.

THE ONE-TALENT SERVANT

Then came the last servant, who was given one talent. Like the previous two, he also acknowledged and referred to his master as “lord.” He thought of himself as a very good servant because he was sure of what he knew about the master. This was a servant wise in his own eyes.

He said, “Lord, I knew you to be a hard man,” and he even explained why his master was difficult, adding, “reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed” (v. 24).

According to him, his master made his servants work and took what was not his. It was the picture of a master who was beyond reason and difficult to be with. This servant made it seem as if he was being forced into this work and, being in that predicament, had no choice but to hide the one talent the master gave him.



We need to recognize what the Lord has given us and the work that He has entrusted us with.

From the servant’s perspective, we might actually believe his story—that he was justified in what he did because he said matter-of-factly, “Look, there you have what is yours.” He wasn’t afraid because he felt he did the right thing.

Maybe he was waiting for his master’s approval. Maybe he thought the master would praise him and say, “You are a hero in your own right. Because you knew how to observe, and you did not just leave my talent anywhere.”

But what did the master say? The master rebuked, “You wicked and lazy servant” (v. 26). “Wicked” actually refers to evil, which represents Satan. He accused this servant of having the heart of Satan.

This master was actually a good lord, but an evil person will only be able to see evil. We say that whatever glasses you wear is what you will see the world with. If you wear red sunglasses, you will see the world painted red. If you wear black glasses, all that you see is black.

This servant with the one talent wore the glasses of Satan. He saw a hard man who was beyond reason. So the master took the talent from him and gave it to the man with ten talents.

Jesus made this proclamation: “For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away” (v. 29). This is the final judgment and, if found guilty, He will “cast the unprofitable servant into

the outer darkness” and “there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (v. 30).

WHEN CAN WE CALL OURSELVES UNPROFITABLE?

In a different story, Jesus also told His disciples of another man who had sent his servant to hard work. When this servant came back, the master asked him to prepare supper, to get ready, and to wait on the master as he ate and drank. After all this, did the master thank the servant for doing his job? (Lk 17:7ff)

The master would not be expected to say, “Come, sit down and eat.” The master knew that the servant would be hungry, and he told him to gird himself so that he could have more strength to do more work. And whatever would be left of the master’s supper, perhaps the servant could eat that. Even then, he should only call himself an unprofitable servant.

Similarly, the servants with the five and two talents did not say much when they were entrusted with their talents. They went and did their work quietly with diligence, so they were able to earn double what they had been given. Even after they finished their work, they simply reported what they had done.

Just the same for us, it is only after we have done our entire work can we afford to say, “We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do” (Lk 17:10).

If, before we start working, we call

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ourselves unprofitable servants, then we are no better than the servant with the one talent.

We need to recognize what the Lord has given us and the work that He has entrusted us with. We also need to examine our thoughts and our perspective to see if we have strayed from His instructions. Otherwise, we may fall into the same end as the unprofitable servant.

Before we do His work, we shouldn't call ourselves useless. We can only try our very best to strive forward with the strength of God. Paul encouraged us:

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil 3:13-14)

And when does the end goal come? Paul tells us that the end of his journey and his goal comes at his death, after which the Lord will deliver him and prepare him for the heavenly kingdom (2 Tim 4:6-18). In the same way, when we reach this same end, we can finally call ourselves unprofitable. ★

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Christian Living



Be A Perfect Person

If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. —James 3:2

God revealed Himself to Abraham and said, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless" (Gen 17:1). To be a perfect person is not only God's command to us, it must also be the desire of our conscience. Although it is difficult to attain such a goal, we must strain toward it with all our effort in order to please God.

What is the image of a "perfect man"? James did not list many criteria. He mentioned only the issue of "words." Restraining one's tongue is the start to becoming a perfect person. If anyone can completely control his tongue and be faultless in what he says, he has already understood an important aspect of becoming a perfect person.

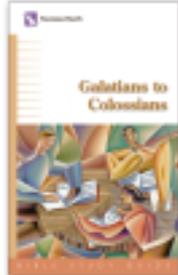
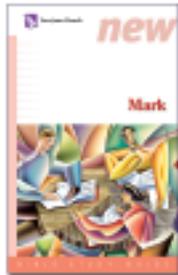
In our daily lives, we have many opportunities to speak. If we were to keep quiet for long periods of time, the whole world would likely be in chaos, because everyone would go insane living in complete silence. Language is essential for communicating with each other. Without words, people would not be able to exchange ideas and opinions. How could people coexist peacefully in a non-communicative world? Without any expression of thoughts and feelings, how could we transcend isolation and individualism?

The discovery of fire was critical to the development of civilization. Yet a spark of fire can burn up a whole pasture. According to James, the tongue is like a fire. As an instrument of communication, it is as necessary as fire for the development and sustenance of life. But unchecked speech leaves behind endless troubles. The right word is like an apple of gold in a setting of silver. An improper word not only ruins the person who speaks it, but also corrupts others.

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Transforming Water Into Wine

Jason Hsu—Baldwin Park, California, USA



When we listen to God's word, we must not only hear the words, we must hear them with faith (Heb 4:2). In the same way, studying the signs recorded in John's gospel requires us to use our eyes of faith. Only eyes of faith can see the Lord's glory for it is veiled to those without faith (2 Cor 3:14-16).

As we study the sign of water into wine in John 2:1-11, let us draw upon our faith so that we may learn the lessons this passage offers to better understand our relationship with the Lord.

RUNNING OUT OF WINE

John 2:3 records a problem that occurred at a wedding banquet Jesus was attending: the wedding participants ran out of wine.

God's wine is the best (Jn 2:10), for it is a sign of His blessing (Gen 27:28; Hos 2:8; Jer 31:12; Joel 3:18; cf. Joel 1:10). Wine is also a biblical symbol of joy (Judg 9:13; Ps 4:7; 104:15; Eccl 10:19). For the wedding hosts to run out of wine at the wedding was both shameful and a bad omen: (1) shameful because of the lack of resources; (2) a bad omen because of the symbolic foreshadowing to "running out" of joy.

A wedding feast is a joyful occasion (Isa 25:6-8; Rev 19:7-9). To lose our sense of joy in this life is not so different than running out of wine at a wedding feast. We might compare the "no wine" problem of the wedding banquet to our own loss of spiritual joy in our walk with the Lord.

So why do we lose our joy in the Lord?

We might relate our problems to two types of unhealthy relationships people have with the Lord:

- 1) Those who feel obligated to do “something” for the Lord and are therefore burdened by that obligation (Lk 15:29-30); and
- 2) Those who forsake their sense of duty to the Lord and seek their satisfaction in the world (Lk 15:13).

These unhealthy relationships could be discerned another way—from the antithesis to Jesus’ teaching in John 4:24. In other words, the burden we feel in our relationship with the Lord stems from our inability to worship God: (1) in spirit and (2) in truth.

COMPLETION OF THE OLD ORDER

In John 2:6, we notice six stone waterpots at the wedding banquet, which were used for the ceremonial washings of the Jews. The six stone waterpots can represent the limitations of man under the law (cf. Gen 1:26-27, 31; Rev 13:18; 2 Cor 3:3, 7; Jer 2:13; 14:3).

The law burdens us because it obligates us to obey its requirements (Col 2:14). But the law is not evil (Rom 7:12); it should be our delight (Ps 1:2; 119:16).

How can we find joy in fulfilling the righteous requirements of the law?

James 2:10 says, “[W]hoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.” Therefore, the law challenges our sinful nature (Rom 7:5).

Now some free themselves from the shackles of the law and choose to live “above the law.” But others may actually find comfort in the letter of the law; yet,

they obey the law with their fleshly nature and the spirit of the law is unfulfilled (cf. Mt 15:1-9; 23:1-33; Rom 13:10).

The sign of water into wine teaches us about how the Lord came to complete the old ways. After Jesus’ mother told Jesus, “They have no wine,” He told the servants to fill the six stone waterpots to the brim with water (Jn 2:7). The filling of the six stone waterpots “to the brim” signifies the completion of the old order, which is God’s solution to the limitations of man under the law.

John 1:17 says, “[T]he law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” Moses’ first miracle was to turn water into blood—signifying death (Ex 7:14-25). Jesus’ first miracle was to turn water into wine—signifying a positive transformation (Jn 2:11).

Under the law, we are all guilty as transgressors (Rom 3:19f). But, in the Lord, we find grace and truth (Rom 6:14; Gal 2:14-21). This is the positive change we discover in the sign of water into wine.



When we acknowledge that we are incomplete, we draw ourselves towards the true spirit of worship.

THE SPIRIT OF WORSHIP

Today, we no longer live under the law; yet, we may still hold on to traditions and routines that burden our relationship with the Lord (cf. Mt 15:1-9; Mk 7:6-13).

Do you believe it is possible to

become so preoccupied with the obligations of the law that the spirit of the law is forgotten? (Mt 5:21f, 27-48.)

Many people believe that if they do certain works they are “good Christians” and, by default, close to God. Yet good works, while “good” on some level, do not guarantee our closeness to the Lord (cf. Lk 18:9-14).

Instead, good works often feed our pride and self-righteousness (Mt 6:1-4)—leading us to compare our righteousness against others (cf. Lk 15:29-30; 18:11-12). We must be wary of a self-confident pride that glories in the law of obligation, lest we fall into the pitfalls of pride (cf. Prov 16:18; Col 2:18, 23).

Perhaps it is human nature to compare. But what can we truly compare against one another? Bible knowledge? Riches and wisdom?

As rich and wise as you may be, there is always potentially someone richer and wiser. Therefore, human comparisons are relative, and it misses the point: the Lord alone possesses complete “fullness.” Jesus said, “Fill the waterpots” (Jn 2:7). After Jesus fills the waterpots, we realize the old ways have been completely filled and there is nothing left to compare.

When we acknowledge that we are incomplete, we draw ourselves towards the true spirit of worship. For when we acknowledge the Lord, we begin to recognize our human limitations. As we realize our human limitations, we begin to understand there is nothing to boast about before the Lord or against one another. That is when we can progress to the spirit.

Like beating against stone, we find in the law a hard teacher of humility. Stone will crush us before we break it. For despite our best efforts, we will never be

able to meet the righteous requirements of the law.

Through the realization of his limitations in the flesh, apostle Paul understood he needed to rely on the Lord (Rom 7:15-25). Today, we need to realize what apostle Paul did.

Truth in Worship

True worship means having the right focus. As Christians, we know we need the Lord; yet, many of us still seek our satisfaction in the world. The lie of this world is that we can find our satisfaction apart from God.

Finding our satisfaction in this world can be compared to being drunk with the wine of this world (Eph 5:18; Rev 17:2). But the other extreme—asceticism—has “no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (Col 2:23). The Lord does not want us to be an extreme person, for this implies imbalance and impairs the proper direction of our relationship with the Lord.

THE WATER, THE INFERIOR WINE, AND THE GOOD WINE

Now John 2:1-11 implies three distinct choices of “drinks”: water, inferior wine, and good wine.

Water is the most common drink. Most people drink water in their day-to-day life and not wine. In the context of John 2:1-11, water represents the old ways; we might go so far as to say “old habits.” However, we must take care not to over-analogize. Generally speaking, old ways may include the old ways of worship (Jn 4:20-21), the old temple (Jn 2:19ff), and the old traditions (Mt 9:14ff).

Inferior wine (Jn 2:10) represents

those things that can never spiritually satisfy a person (Jn 4:13; 6:27). However, good wine is the better wine (Jn 2:10); it represents the blessing that comes from the Lord and serves as a sign of the completion of the Lord’s blessing (Mt 26:29).

As we consider our drink choices, let’s remember that the problems we face in our relationship with the Lord often stem from our inability to worship God in spirit and in truth, which we should view as two sides of a single coin.

Drinking water, the old ways, can be compared to our inability to worship in spirit. Our inability to worship in spirit can be paralleled to the ritual of worship that comes about when we become complacent in the old ways and routines of our worship. Even worse, we may actually think our old ways of worship are pleasing to the Lord when, in fact, they are not (cf. Jn 2:13-17).

In terms of applying the teachings of the “water” from John 2:1-11, some believers might say, “We should be content to drink water when we run out of wine.” In other words, we should be content to just continue in the old ways (cf. Mt 9:16f; 21:12, 15, 23; Jn 2:18). This mentality is what keeps us from tasting the new things of the Lord, for this mentality best captures what it means to be spiritually complacent and to value form over substance in our worship.

Drinking the inferior wine, the wine of this world, can be compared to our inability to worship in truth.

In terms of applying the teachings of the “inferior wine” from John 2:1-11, we might think of “inferior wine” as a false substitute. A misdirected worship is one that attempts to find satisfaction in the wrong places—in those things that cannot satisfy. For example, inferior wine might be: alcohol to alcoholics, worldly pleasure to pleasure-seekers, knowledge to the seekers of knowledge, money to the greedy, etc.

If we are ever seeking our satisfaction in the former things, we will never know the true satisfaction the Lord provides for us in His new creation.

RENEWED JOY IN THE LORD—THE GOOD WINE

After the waterpots were filled with water Jesus commanded the servants: “Draw some out now...” (Jn 2:8). What the servants drew out, however, was not water but a good wine.

The gospel is compared to a good and beautiful seed (Mt 13:24). Likewise, the good wine brings something good and beautiful for us to enjoy.

When Jesus told the Samaritan woman about living water, she asked, “Where do you get that living water?” (Jn 4:11.) Similarly, we might ask, where can we get the good wine?

Many read John 2:8 and assume the



A misdirected worship is one that attempts to find satisfaction in the wrong places—in those things that cannot satisfy.

good wine was drawn from the stone waterpots and not from the original source that filled the waterpots. However, regardless of one's interpretation of the physical source of the good wine, the good wine was actually drawn from a much deeper "well" than any physical source could provide.

As humans we tend to focus on the physical but God is more concerned with the spiritual, because what we see is temporary but what we cannot see is eternal (2 Cor 4:18). The Lord was not concerned about physical wine (Jn 2:4), for Jesus turned water into wine for us and not Himself. We must see beyond the physical source as we study the sign of water into wine.

The Lord is the true source of the good wine, for He is the source of all blessings (Jas 1:17; Jn 3:27). He is the source of that joy we may have lost because we chose to drink water, the old ways, instead of the good wine. He is the source of that satisfaction we may no longer experience because we chose to drink the inferior wine that can never satisfy us.



When we acknowledge that we are incomplete, we draw ourselves towards the true spirit of worship.

Application of the Good Wine

Earlier, we noted the burden of the law is that it obligates us to obey. We related this burden to obey to the things that burden our worship in spirit and truth. So

we asked the question: how can find joy as we fulfill the law's requirements? And we gave the answer: we will find our joy in the Lord when we draw out the good wine.

The process sounds so easy on paper, doesn't it? "Just draw out the good wine and all your problems will be solved." It reminds of us of how easy it is to encourage others, in the face of their problems, to "just read the Bible and pray." But is it truly that easy to draw out the good wine? (Jn 2:8.)

To do whatever the Lord commands is not always easy (cf. Jn 2:5). When Jesus commanded the servants to fill the large stone waterpots to the brim with water it was not an easy task. It is hard for those of us with modern-day plumbing to understand the difficulties of drawing large quantities of water in Jesus' day. Yet, that is what the Lord required.

The Bible says, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam 15:22). Although a sacrifice is precious in the eyes of the law, in God's eyes obedience is much more precious.

Sometimes, obedience requires a heavy price. This price of obedience may be more difficult to give than to sacrifice because we give away ourselves in obedience but we give outside of ourselves in sacrifice.

In the words of the parable in Luke 15:11-32, is the prodigal son and the embittered faithful son both fated to feel so alien to their loving father and his commandments?

Many of us, in our relationship with the Lord, come to the Lord on our own terms with high expectations. Sometimes it feels like we come to an empty spring. But is it true that the Lord is an empty

spring? Or is there something more, something else, that is hindering us from obtaining our joy in the Lord?

The answer to these questions may seem far away but, in truth, the answer is very near (Rom 10:8). The answer lies in faith. In faith we obey, we draw from the true Source, and we see Him face to face. In faith, what used to be our burden is complete and transforms into our blessing.

May each of us seek this type of faith in the Lord, so that we might again discover our joy in the Lord and taste the completion of His blessings in our spiritual life. Amen. ★



Temptation And Test

FF Chong—London, United Kingdom

THE PREMISE

In the English language, there are specific differences between the two terms, “temptation” and “test.” The former refers primarily to a sense of seduction, while the latter, in modern usage, is intended for improving and raising standards.

In Hebrew, the Old Testament (OT) texts appear to use various words to express the meanings of both terms. But in the Greek text of the New Testament (NT), both terms originate from the root word “peirasmos.” Therefore, different usages of the terms in the Bible depend on the context. The NT treats both terms well by extrapolating the actual meaning in each situation.

Through different translations of the Bible, it is not difficult for us to know the meaning of the word “temptation”: it means an evil intent to expose weaknesses that would cause a downfall.

The word “test” refers to the purpose of improving virtues and qualities, but it may not always be used in a positive

light. For example, the Jews tested Jesus with hateful resentment (Mk 8:11).

For clarity’s sake, in this article, we will say that “temptation” exists for an evil purpose and “test” for a good and noble one.

BLESSED IS HE WHO ENDURES TEMPTATIONS

We often associate people in temptation with spiritually flawed characters. Elder James, however, says it is a blessing for those who endure temptation (Jas 1:12). To extract the real meaning of this verse, we need to make sure that James is specifically talking about temptation and not test:

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (Jas 1:14, 15)

Elder James clearly spells out the

process of temptation, how it progresses to the point of death.

Joseph’s story proves Elder James’ point: he endured the seduction of his mistress until, frustrated, she accused him falsely. He was in a situation where he was tempted to the full. Another example is Job. He endured a stream of attacks from Satan.

Facing temptation in life is always real, and to meet with one is inevitable. Which saint in the Bible or believer of God has not been tempted? The important thing is that we must not succumb to temptation. If we can withstand our weaknesses, we will enjoy the continuous presence of God in our life.

One recurrent message to the seven churches in Revelation is to triumph over temptation¹, and their corresponding blessings are spoken of in every message to those who overcome². This tells us that overcoming temptation means to be steadfast in doing the will of God.

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION

But there is a difference between being tempted by evil and being tempted by our own lusts or weaknesses. For this reason, Jesus said, “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mt 26:41).

Entering into temptation is definitely connected to our weaknesses. Even the Lord’s Prayer emphasizes the need to pray that the Lord leads us away from it (Mt 6:13a). But what does Jesus mean? Will prayer alone do the trick?

In addition to prayer, living each day by overcoming our weaknesses is the best way to prevent ourselves from falling. Joseph emerged victorious because he endured and eventually fled from temptation. He did not step into temptation when it came to him. By his example, we must leave no room for Satan to cause harm to our spirituality.

Because of his determination, the Lord delivered Joseph from that evil, and this is also how the Lord delivers us from the evil one (Mt 6:13b). When we invite or enter into temptation, we will surely be tempted and, eventually, be drawn away by the desires of the flesh.

When we are tempted, we cannot place the blame on God. Elder James explained to those who inaccurately claimed, “I am tempted by God,” that “God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone” (Jas 1:13).

God Cannot Be Tempted By Evil

*Yes, again and again they tempted God,
And limited the Holy One of Israel.
They did not remember His power:
The day when He redeemed them from the*

enemy. (Ps 78:41-42)

The Israelites defiantly challenged the faithfulness of God and tempted Him by their wicked ways. But their consequence tells us that God will not tolerate anyone tempting Him³.

They started to grumble against God not many days after they had been delivered from the oppression of the Egyptian Pharaoh. They witnessed for themselves the love that God showed them when He found a way for them to cross the Red Sea.

When they arrived in the Wilderness of Sin, they misconstrued the kind intention of God as brutal aggression against them (Ex 16:3). Basically, they twisted reality. They knew that it was not God’s intention to bring them out of Egypt to annihilate them with thirst, but they still made the accusation (Ex 17:3).

Tempting God also undermines His power. Ten of the twelve spies sent to survey the land of Canaan came back with bad reports. They underestimated the strength of the Lord to overthrow the Canaanites (Num 14:22).

Another form of tempting or testing God is to disobey Him. When God initially asked the Israelites to overcome the Canaanites, they did not because they were without strength. But once they grew strong, they refused to displace them completely. Instead, they used the Canaanites as labor (Josh 16:10, 17:13; Judg 1:27-36).

Consequently, they became ensnared by the idols of the Canaanites (Judg 2:11-13).

He Does Not Tempt Anyone

Now, does God tempt anyone? According to Elder James’ definition of



When we are tempted, we cannot place the blame on God.

temptation (Jas 1:13), God neither entices nor snares us into temptation with lusts. Rather, it is our weaknesses that leave room for temptation.

Samson was tempted to visit a harlot in Gaza even without her seduction (Judg 16:1), and he did the same in the valley of Sorek, where he met Delilah (Judg 16:4).

Many times, a physical object becomes a form of temptation when our carnal self desires it. For example, money by itself may not appear tempting to honest people who are content with what they have. But to the greedy, it causes them to act sinfully. This greed was what caused Judas to betray Jesus.

To be spiritual requires elimination of the flesh, which always goes against what is spiritual. So, our religious life is always disturbed by this inevitable friction between the flesh and the spirit. And when we fail to overcome the flesh, we cannot blame God, for He has given us His truth and the Holy Spirit to guide us.

Now, the choice is ours: Are we determined to live according to the flesh or live by the Spirit and put to death the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13)?

What this is asking is whether or not we are willing to be obedient to God in every situation in life, because when we chose to follow the Spirit and the truth to keep us from sin, we can overcome both temptations and tests.

GOD PERMITS TESTS TO COME OUR WAY

God permits tests to come our way to train and to build up those He loves. He does this with good and noble reasons, so that we may be refined.

Even if God allowed trials to test His people, it doesn't mean that evil is from Him. The Bible records that He sometimes allows Satan to do his work as a form of trial for His people. But Satan cannot have his way with us without the consent of God, that is, if we do not live in sin: "We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him" (1 Jn 5:18).

More often than not, tests appear to be a form of punishment from God towards His people for failing to do their part in driving out the pagans:

I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nations which Joshua left when he died, so that through them I may test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of the Lord to walk in them as their fathers kept them, or not. (Judg 2:21-22)

One example is the story of Habakkuk. Having asked God to deal with the sins of His own people, Habakkuk was dumbfounded by the response of God to raise up Babylon, a very wicked nation, to chastise the nation of Israel—His dearly chosen ones.

Although it was God's will that such an unbearable suffering be inflicted upon the Israelites, it, in fact, revealed His righteousness.

God's Intentions Verses Satan's

The two opposing tensions in the

spiritual realm are God's intention to build us up and Satan's intention to destroy us:

- When God allowed Satan to consider Job on two occasions, He wanted to refine and to build Job up, but Satan maliciously tried to break down Job's belief in God.
- God subjected the Israelites to various tests to punish them for their



Just as with serving God and others, spreading the gospel should not feel like something we do because we have to, but something we do because we want to.

disobedience while they wandered in the wilderness. But He was always ready to take them back if they returned, even though they succumbed to the temptations presented by their surroundings (1 Cor 10:8-13). As a result, many failed and perished in the wilderness.

- When Jesus was tempted, it was the Spirit that allowed such a trial to happen to Him so as to empower Him for His ministry (Lk 4:1, 14), but the intent of Satan was clear: to cause Jesus to sin against God.



God permits tests to come our way to train and to build up those He loves. He does this with good and noble reasons, so that we may be refined.

- The members at Thessalonica faced great affliction after they came into Christ. Paul left them when they were only three weeks old in faith (Acts 17:2). The apostolic account tells us that envious Jews incited some evil men to set the city in an uproar to stop Paul from preaching (Acts 17:5-9). Their spiritual lives could've been damaged had their faith buckled under the intense pressure of the persecution. But they emerged strong in their faith with joy in the Holy Spirit and became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia (1 Thess 1:7).
- Paul's trials were the result of the evil plots of the Jews, who became instruments of Satan to destroy Paul and his work for God. Satan intended to shipwreck his faith, but the chronic persecution Paul experienced only drove him closer to the Lord:

You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me...and how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 20:18-21)

- When trials came upon the recipients of Peter's letters, they were encouraged

by his words. After enduring those tests, their faith became as pure as gold (1 Pet 1:6-7).

Regardless of whether a test comes from God or from Satan, anyone who deserts his faith and denies Christ in the process will face the reality of being denied by Jesus when He comes again (Mt 10:31). Two questions come to mind:

If a trial originates from God, then why should the price of failure to pass the test be the forfeit of our salvation? If the trial is the work of Satan, why does Elder James consider it an opportunity for the believers to improve their faith?

THE HIGHER PURPOSE OF GOD

Both trial and temptation, though brought on by opposing forces of good and evil intentions, can be edifying to those who love the Lord. In the process, God's mighty power is disclosed, as it was in Jesus Christ Himself while He was on earth.

The same power of God also works in those who triumph over temptation; fulfilling Jesus' promise to us: "In Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33). "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life...nor any created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39).

The relationship between enduring temptation and receiving salvation, according to Elder James, is closely tied because temptation can be a means to prove our faith (Jas 1:12). But how do we prove ourselves?

We prove ourselves by successfully enduring temptation and tests without losing faith in God. Life's temptations are hurdles we have to overcome to receive salvation, but temptation itself does not help us realize the purpose of God's salvation plan for us.

Proving ourselves also implies that we are able to come out of those trials in better spiritual shape than before, thereby qualifying ourselves for the kingdom of God: "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (Jas 1:12).

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.
(Rev 2:10)

God knew beforehand that Satan was about to strike some of the faithful of Smyrna Church by threatening their physical lives. But the Lord did not take them away from Satan's attacks. Instead, He made known Satan's schemes to prepare them and encouraged them to remain faithful to the point of death.

Likewise today, God has made known Satan's intentions to destroy us with the temptations and tests of this world. If we are rooted in Him and are filled with His Spirit and His word, we will be able to withstand the work of the evil one and remain faithful to the end.



“Behold, Now Is The Accepted Time...”

By PCC

You and a partner have just finished working on a class presentation, and you think about how nice it would be if he could come to church. You suddenly remember that there’s an evangelical service at church this weekend. What do you do?

A million thoughts run through your head—most of them a series of “what if’s.” What if he thinks I’m weird? What if he’s already a Christian? What if this puts a strain on our “working relationship?” What if people at church think he’s my boyfriend? What if he’s scared by the

way we pray?

Within seconds, the train of doubt-ridden questions gives way to more definite assumptions. He’s probably not interested anyway. He’s probably an atheist, and he’s probably busy, too—it is Friday night after all.

Do you:

- a) Silently pack up your books as you internally lament the tragedy of the situation, tell your classmate you’ll see him in class next week, and head back to your dorm; or
- b) Swallow your nervousness, nonchalantly ask your classmate what his plans are for the weekend, and prepare to turn the conversation into an invitation to Bible study

For many of us, it’s probably less of a hassle to pick a).

WHAT’S HOLDING US BACK?

When I was little, I would occasionally read those choose-your-own-adventure books where you could pick to read from a number of different scenarios. Depending upon your choices, you could wind up with a completely different story and ending than someone else who read the same book.

Admittedly, I always cheated whenever I read those books. If it seemed like the story was heading in a bad direction, I would go back and carefully re-read as many different choices as I could until I ended on a brighter note.



Distinguishing between reason and excuse takes a hearty amount of self-reflection and the spiritual wisdom that comes from none other than God.

When it comes to spreading the gospel, we don't always have the luxury of being able to sit back and debate the pros and cons of a certain situation, or the ins and outs of how to go about preaching.

A lot of times, we need to make decisions on the spot, which we, more often than not, have no way of reversing.

Of course, we can try to comfort ourselves after missed preaching opportunities with the thought that there's always the possibility of a second chance. For instance, you might run into an acquaintance you weren't able to preach to before and whom you never thought you would see again.

However, instead of consoling ourselves for bygones, it's better to remind ourselves that we must make the most of our present opportunities.

So if hesitation is preventing us from spreading the precious gospel, we should try to think in terms of what we are going to do in the here and now. As 2 Corinthians 6:2 states, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

If we dwell in the hypothetical past or the future while neglecting the urgency of the present—if only I had done this, tomorrow I'm going to do that—no action occurs.

We must also be honest with ourselves, since excuses often unconsciously masquerade as legitimate

reasons. For example, we could and should try to use judgment and discretion when it comes to finding an opportune time to share the gospel.

But we must also be careful that the desire to come across a better moment isn't just an excuse not to preach. If we keep waiting for the "ideal" preaching conditions, odds are we'll end up waiting forever.

Distinguishing between reason and excuse takes a hearty amount of self-reflection and the spiritual wisdom that comes from none other than God.

GO FOR IT WITH GOD'S SPIRIT

If there's one thing I've learned over the years in terms of trying to preach to classmates, it's that no matter how hard I try, I can never predict God.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord" (Isa 55:8). Knowing God's sovereignty, it seems almost shockingly irreverent that one would dare to predict or second-guess the thoughts and plans of the Creator of the entire universe.

Yet, we do it all the time.

Oftentimes, before we've even spoken a word of God's grace and salvation aloud, we've already said something in our hearts like, "Oh, she'd never accept the truth" or "Why bother, no one ever believes anyway."

Such defeating assumptions not only place doubt on God's power to make

possible the impossible, but also place human logic above God's. Whether we mean to or not, we are sending God the message: I know better than You do.

Once, in my freshman year of college, I was eating in the dining hall with two other classmates, and they started talking about their plans for the coming weekend. Since it was the beginning of the school year, none of us knew each other very well, and I wasn't sure what they thought of Christianity, let alone whether they'd be interested in coming to church with me.

I mentioned how I was planning to go to Bible study and church that Friday and Saturday. I hesitated for a split-second before I went on, and then I decided just to go for it.

"You're both more than welcome to come with me," I continued. Then, I gave a brief spiel about how our services are usually run.

Neither of them was scared off by my proposal, but they didn't seem particularly interested either. Oh well, I thought, maybe some other time—at least I tried. To my surprise though, as we were leaving the cafeteria, one of my classmates suddenly turned to me and asked, "Hey, can I come with you to Bible study this weekend?"

Follow His Lead

Preaching about God to others helped me to learn more about Him myself. The more I tried to invite my friends and classmates to church, the more I realized that God indeed works in mysterious ways and often in ways that are contrary to what human reasoning would prescribe.

For instance, last semester, a church worker from out of town was scheduled

to give a sermon during one of our Sabbath services. Hoping to use this “special” occasion as a means to plug our church, I decided to email some of my classmates with an invite.

However, there were a few people on my email list I wasn’t sure about. Two of the girls had been unable to come to Bible study several times, and eventually I assumed that their busyness was a polite way of saying, thanks, but no thanks.

Another potential prospect was a classmate whose email address I so happened to have, but whom I had just recently met.

As I was debating about whether or not I should include them as part of the informal list I had drawn up, it occurred to me that maybe I should kneel down and pray. My first thought, though, was whether I should bother praying about something so seemingly trivial as sending out a few emails.

Why not just boldly shoot those invites out across the waves of the internet and not look back? Right away though, I realized that I should put my trust in Him with even with the “little” things, since anything we do for God is never really trivial to begin with.

Freshly humbled, I knelt down and prayed for God to let His spirit work in the hearts of those who had not yet received the true gospel. I also prayed that I could remember my own role—as an unworthy vessel merely planting the seeds of the gospel. Without God, those seeds could never grow.

Interestingly enough, the only ones who were able to make it to service were the ones I had been most unsure of. What’s more, the classmate I had been almost positive wouldn’t be interested



Just as with serving God and others, spreading the gospel should not feel like something we do because we have to, but something we do because we want to.

actually brought a friend with her as well!

Be Bold

Just as much as we need God to help us overcome our timidity, we also need God when we are feeling bold. Being a person who’s usually not too afraid of coming across as “different” in the eyes of my peers doesn’t make me any less in need of God’s assistance.

As Paul writes in his epistle to the Romans:

So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes... (Rom 1:15-16)

Paul was obviously an apostle who preached the gospel without fear or shame, yet he was careful to recognize that spreading the news of salvation was possible not because of his own courage but because of the power and mercy of God.

Furthermore, I’ve learned that regardless of the outcome and whether or not any friends or classmates ended up visiting or joining our church, I should still continue to do my part.

If there are times when I feel

discouraged and it seems like no one is interested in the gospel, I think of Daniel’s three friends before they were thrown into the fiery furnace. They were able to proclaim that they could accept whatever fate God had in store for them.

Regardless of whether this meant their deliverance or their death, their faith never wavered. How much more, then, should we be relentless to proclaim the truth no matter what the possible return or lack thereof!

TELL OF THE WONDERFUL THINGS HE’S DONE

When we’re under potentially nerve-wracking or pressure-inducing circumstances, clinging onto our own logic often gives us a momentary, if not false, sense of safety amidst confusion. Yet, God wants us to do just the opposite.

He wants us to take that leap into the unknown, so long as we don’t forget another crucial step—trusting in and asking for His guidance along the way. In other words, we must have faith.

Although easier said than done, preaching shouldn’t be a high-anxiety experience. Just as with other types of holy work, sharing God’s words with others should be a natural and pleasant extension of our genuine desire to repay His love.

Just as with serving God and others, spreading the gospel should not feel like something we do because we have to, but something we do because we want to.

What’s usually our first instinct after, say, hearing something interesting on the news? Witnessing something during the day that was absolutely hysterical? Experiencing a random and unusual act

of kindness?

Most of us would probably go and tell someone. Awe, laughter, thanksgiving, and other forms of joy are often best when they are shared. In the words of Jesus, who lights a lamp to put it under a basket? Doesn't it make more sense to put it on a lampstand so all can benefit from its light?

Let's say a complete stranger saved you from an awful death by pushing you out of the way of a moving train but, in doing so, lost her own life. I'm sure we would not only feel indebted to this individual for the rest of our lives, but we would also be singing her praises to anyone within earshot.



Not only is testifying of God's grace a way of preaching, but it is also a way of praising Him.

Compelled and Convicted

Now consider the gospel, which literally means "good news" and is actually the greatest news in the world: that we have been saved from the most horrible of deaths—eternal suffering in hell.

Shouldn't we not only feel grateful but also compelled to proclaim the news of Jesus Christ our Savior to anyone and everyone?

I must admit, there have been times when an opportunity to share God's message has come up and I didn't act, not out of fear but because I was spiritually weak.

Worse yet is talking about God while

feeling low in spirit and in heart. Each word sounds more and more hollow as the minutes drag by, and you think, this must be what God hears when we pray to him half-heartedly.

On the flip side, there are the times when I reflect upon all the blessings in my life, when I feel that closeness to Him in prayer, when I experience the joy of fellowship, and I cannot but help wish that others could taste that same sweetness.

This must be what David felt when he wrote Psalm 9:1, "I will praise You, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works." Not only is testifying of God's grace a way of preaching, but it is also a way of praising Him.

We need many things when we preach the words of God, from a sound understanding of the truth and the knowledge that we are merely God's instruments to the boldness to speak out.

However, all these qualities are useless if we do not also speak with true conviction. As Paul states in 1 Thessalonians 1:5, "For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance..."

We can have all the biblical knowledge in the world, and maybe insults harmlessly roll off our backs like water, but if we do not possess that full assurance of what Jesus has done and will continue to do in our lives, our words may have about as much impact as silence.

Spreading the gospel is not an easy task, as even the most seasoned of evangelists will attest. And no matter how hard we may try to find one, there is no exact formula we can use to ensure

the best results. Yet, it can be made a less stressful and more pleasant experience when we try to reflect upon not only how we preach but also why we preach.

Surely, the sound of such heartfelt testaments of God's grace must be music to His ears. ★



In Jesus Christ, Dreams Do Come True

Irene Lane—Irvine, California, USA

Recently, a few friends and I went out to lunch with Irene, and the conversation took a nice turn to her marriage journey. Just shy of six months since the wedding, we were very glad to listen to how God guided her through this important stage in her life. Since each of us were able to take away a few insightful lessons about the period of waiting, trusting, and relying on God, perhaps you might relate to her story, too.

—the Editor

How did you and your husband meet?

I didn't realize that my one-time meeting with a brother in the summer of 1995 would turn into a marriage nine years later. When I was in the United States, I studied in Northern California.

That summer, I traveled down to Southern California to attend the National Youth Theological Seminar (NYTS), and the church had somehow arranged for this brother to take me and two other sisters to visit neighboring churches.

This was unusual because he was not frequently assigned as a driver for the church. He was also the brother of my best friend. I didn't think too much at the time and, not

too long after, I moved back home to Indonesia to be with my family before settling in New Zealand.

When did you start to seriously consider marriage?

Life was peaceful and wonderful in New Zealand until my parents started to call me long-distance from Indonesia to ask about my marriage. Brothers, sisters, and deacons of the church also started to become concerned for me—they thought I should start thinking about my marriage.

I was twenty-five years old at the time and I was enjoying my youth. So you can imagine how this alarmed me and prompted me to start thinking seriously about getting married. To me,

marriage was the next most serious matter after getting baptized and accepting Christ into my life.

I began to pray earnestly for a spouse that year and resolved to set some criteria for a potential husband. I was strongly determined not to marry the wrong person, that is, to marry the person God intended for me. I started making a list of what was important to me in a spouse. After a few revisions, additions, and deletions I settled on a list with twenty-five items.

Not long after, ministers and members tried to match-make me with a few brothers, but I knew that they were not the one I was praying for.

I guess curious minds would like to know about your list...

Well, I think it's good for everyone to have a list. One reason is that it helps you recognize what is important to you and what is secondary. A large part of that list was whether or not he was a Christian and strived to lead a Christ-like life. I didn't want to marry a smoker, a gambler, or someone who did not maintain his purity before marriage.

I also put this list in my prayers, asking that God lead me to the right person. There were other things apart from the fact that he had to be a True Jesus Church member, but the most important was that he had to be fervent in the Lord. It was important to me that he had a burning desire to love, to fear, and to serve God.

Tell us more about the marriage process.

The marriage process was painfully difficult! During that period of time, I experienced hopelessness, depression,

and confusion. A preacher from Taiwan once called and comforted me. He said that if it was God's will for me not to get married in this life, I should concentrate on serving and dedicating myself fully to Him. To be able to remain single is the highest form of gift from God. He also told me that it is better not to get married than to get married to the wrong person—I totally agreed.

A deacon's wife, who has always been praying for my marriage, encouraged me: "Irene, since you did your studies in the U.S., God will send a brother from the U.S. to fly over here to see you and to marry you." I believed it was the movement of the Holy Spirit and prayed accordingly with faith. Nevertheless, there would be times when I doubted, "How can that be possible? I'm living in Christchurch, New Zealand—close to the South Pole. It only happens in fairy tales or in dreams."

But in the Lord Jesus Christ, dreams do come true!

How did things start to come together?

Things really began to change once I resolved to prepare for the possibility of being single all my life. I surrendered the pressures of marriage in exchange for whatever God had in store for me—even if that meant staying unmarried. It was when I put Him first in my determination that things began to fall into place.

After about two years of praying, a miraculous thing happened. I had moved many times and my best friend, whom I had lost contact with for a long time, sent me a wedding invitation card. Even though she had printed the incorrect street address on the envelope, the card still reached my mail box.

So I called her in the U.S. to congratulate her on her wedding announcement. Naturally, she asked me if I was getting married or if I was attached to anyone, and I told her that maybe I would stay single because I hadn't found the right person.

Then she asked me, "Why don't you come back to the U.S.? Who knows, maybe your Mr. Right is over here." I replied, "How can it be? I've graduated from the NYTS, and I've already met all the brothers in the U.S. churches! Obviously, my Adam is not there."

She paused for a while, "Well, actually, my brother has always thought very highly of you..." She started to tell me what kind of a person he was, and I was shocked with disbelief! We had only one brief encounter in Southern California in 1995. Who could have guessed that God had put it in his heart to remember me for seven years?

I never realized that, while I had lost hope, God knew everything in my heart. Even before we speak, He has arranged everything for us. I was even more surprised when this brother matched twenty-two items on my list. He has most of the qualities that I prayed for, including spirituality and the fear of God in his heart.

By the arrangement of God, this brother, my best friend, and their parents flew to New Zealand to see me.



It was when I put Him first in my determination that things began to fall into place.



Welcome to the 2004 English Writers' Retreat

The purpose of this retreat is to give writers in church the opportunity to take part in literary ministry. During this one-week retreat, you will be able to withdraw from the cares of your busy life and focus on writing for the church. Through collaboration and discussions, you will also draw inspiration and encouragement from fellow writers. If you have always wanted to write for church, but never had the time to do so, this retreat is for you.

Although the UKGA is sponsoring this event, participation is open to all English writers around the world. We would like to request all churches to encourage brothers and sisters who are gifted in this area to join this workshop. We would also greatly appreciate it if the local church could help identify writers and even subsidize their traveling expenses. Your involvement in this sacred work will be of tremendous help to the ministry.

- **Date:** September 6 (Sunday) - 11 (Saturday), 2004
- **Location:** Cambridge House of Prayer (United Kingdom)
- **What to Bring:** Notebook computer (optional)
- **Projects:** Daily devotionals and feature-length articles (see below)

Devotionals

Devotionals are one of the most widely viewed areas of the TJC web site. And in fact, one of the strengths of the web is the ability to provide visitors with regularly updated content that they can access at any time, at their convenience. Devotional writing is therefore well-suited for the web, for it offers users a compact but regular "dose" of spiritual nourishment for their daily lives.

The objective of this project will be to create "short and vivid" articles (300-350 words), inspired by biblical teachings and applicable to daily life, to inspire contemplation, deepened conviction, and ongoing spiritual nurture in the faith-life of believers.

Articles

The goal is to write new articles to be posted on the web and printed in Manna. Writers will complete at least one article by the end of the retreat.

Writers will first "get their feet wet" by sharing and writing briefly on several article genres: Testimony, Christian Living, and Bible Study. Each writer will then choose one article to expand and complete by the end of the seminar. There will be "round robins" where writers will read and give feedback on each other's work.

For more information about this event and registration, please visit the website: <http://events.tjc.org/ewr2004/>.

What a wonderful story of God's providence!

In 1995, God had already let me meet my future husband. I just didn't know it and had to travel around the world to wait and to pray for His time. How amazing and wonderful is our God. He gives us according to what we ask for, when we ask with His will in mind.

During the NYTS that year, each student was given a t-shirt as a souvenir. At the back of the t-shirt was the message: In His Time.

For the important things in our lives, we truly have to wait for God's time.

On the way back, Irene shared something else that I thought was very inspiring about the process of waiting. Waiting usually applies more to sisters than brothers, and how each person waits varies from one person to another. But despite our unique situations, waiting is really about putting our faith in God and making Him our first priority. Thanks for sharing, Irene. ★

My Precious Ones



Sit with me a while, my Lord

Today was very hard:

Faith woke up too late again,

Hope forgot her lunch.

Help this child calm down, O Lord

And give my Love a patient heart.

Keep these precious ones from harm

And fill their thoughts to brim with Yours.

So Faith can have more faith each day;

So Hope would not be lost.

Please don't forget my third, my dove,

And give my Love a humble heart.

You graced me with each one, my Lord

You entrusted me Your gems.

You weaved them in my body once—

Please have Your way with them.

When Faith and Hope and Love are grown,

They are Your glory and Your crowned reward.



Manna is looking for certain types of articles, or article genres. Each genre constitutes a different subject matter and writing approach. If you are planning to write an article (regardless of topic), please try to adhere to one of the genres below.

Christian Living

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

Bible Study

A *Bible Study* explores a passage or character from the Bible and draws out the teachings for readers to apply to their lives. Article length: 2000 words.

Doctrinal Study

A *Doctrinal Study* examines an aspect of True Jesus Church beliefs and may present it in comparison to other beliefs. Article length: 2000 words.

Exhortation

An *Exhortation* encourages and admonishes the reader in different aspects of the Christian faith. Article length: 1500-2000 words.

Testimony

A *Testimony* recounts an experience in the Lord that will encourage and edify the reader. Article length: 1000-1500 words.

Creative Writing

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

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Please email electronic files of articles (Word, Wordperfect, ASCII text) to manna@tjc.org, or send hardcopy and disk to:

Manna
General Assembly of True Jesus Church
314 S. Brookhurst St, #104
Anaheim, CA 92804 USA

Please direct any questions to manna@tjc.org or
Phone: +1-714-533-8808
Fax: +1-714-533-8878

In your submission, please include your name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number even if you wish to remain anonymous.

Call For Articles

Author Guidelines & Editorial Calendar

Issue #46

Theme: Evangelism

Articles due: August 31, 2004

This theme will address the precious gospel entrusted to the true church. How do we equip ourselves to spread the gospel; what are the correct approaches and attitudes to evangelism? And how does this involve me?

Issue #47

Theme: Worship

Articles due: November 30, 2004

What is the meaning of true worship? What kind of relationship do we want to build with God? What are the elements of worship and how can it benefit my life?

Issue #48

Theme: The Body of Christ

Articles due: Feb 28, 2005

How do we as members function in the body of Christ, and how do we respect each other's roles? What does the Bible teach us about unity in the body, and how does this affect our salvation?

In your submission, please include your name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number

GENERAL WRITING GUIDELINES

CONTENT

- Content should be biblically sound and adhere to biblical principles.
- Article should be organized and have a logical flow of thought.
- The main point or teaching of the article should be clear to the reader.
- Readers should be able to apply what they have read to their daily lives.

GRAMMAR/STYLE

- Use active instead of passive voice.
- Write concisely.
- Use concrete words and ideas instead of abstract concepts.
- Use "plain old English" instead of obscure, academic language.
- Use the NKJV version when quoting Bible verses.
- Use American spelling, if possible.
- Adhere to the IA Style Guide, except for He/Him when referring to God/Jesus.

True Jesus Church

Articles of Faith

Jesus the True God

The One True God was manifested in the flesh. He is the Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for the redemption of sinners, was resurrected on the third day, and ascended to heaven. He is the only Savior of mankind, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and the only True God.

Holy Bible

The Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible are inspired by God and are therefore the only authentic scriptures which testify to the Truth.

Church

The True Jesus Church was established by our Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit (the Latter Rain) and is the revival of the True Church of the Apostolic Days.

Salvation

Salvation is given by grace through faith. However, it is necessary to rely on the Holy Spirit to pursue holiness and to keep the biblical teachings of honoring God and loving humanity.

Baptism

The Baptism of Water is the sacrament for the remission of sins and for regeneration. The baptist must already have received baptisms of water and the Holy Spirit. The baptism must be immersion in natural, living water and must be administered in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, with the candidate's head facing downward.

Foot Washing

The Washing of Feet is a sacrament which enables one to have a part in the Lord and teaches mutual love, holiness, humility, service, and forgiveness. The sacrament of the washing of feet must be performed in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ to all newly baptized members. Mutual washing of feet may be practiced when necessary.

Holy Spirit

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a prerequisite for entering heaven; speaking in tongues is the evidence of having received the Holy Spirit.

Holy Communion

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

Sabbath Day

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

Judgment Day

The Lord Jesus Christ will descend from heaven on the Last Day to judge all people; the righteous will receive eternal life, while the wicked will be eternally condemned.

TRUE JESUS CHURCH CONTACT INFORMATION

For additional information on the True Jesus Church, contact us or visit us on our website. We look forward to hearing from you!

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