

TRUE JESUS CHURCH

Manna

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Many Nations-One Church



GOD TOUCHED ME

Africa Missions

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GOD TOUCHED ME

Vuthy Nol-Mantia—Boston, Massachusetts, USA

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ I testify. I was born in Cambodia, and I came to the United States in 1981, when I was nine years old. From 1975 to 1979 there was a genocide in Cambodia: out of 6 million people, 3.5 million died during those years. Every day, people died from starvation or execution—even my relatives and my loved ones. I always asked myself, what kind of God created people, and then allowed them to die like that? How can this God be a good God? Can't He see that all these people are dying?

After I came to this country, I started having nightmares. It was the same nightmare every night. Five evil spirits would grab me: two of them would tie my hands, two of them would tie my feet, and one would choke me. I was so afraid of going to sleep. Growing up, I worked two or three jobs because I didn't want to sleep. All this time, I was so fearful and lonely. When I read the Buddhist sayings that the world is full of suffering, I really believed it.

TURBULENT YEARS

I had been seeking the truth and looking for God all my life, but I still felt so lonely in my heart. I said to myself, life must be better than this. In college, I went to parties where I saw people dancing, drinking, and having so much fun. I said, wow, this is what happiness is, huh? So during my first and second year in college, I went out and I drank and I danced. When I went to parties, I would get up on the stage and dance like crazy. People would yell my name, "Vuthy! Vuthy!" But I couldn't find happiness. Finally, I said to myself, this isn't the way.

I almost flunked out of school my sophomore year. When I realized what was happening to me, I settled down a little bit during my junior year, but I still felt so lonely. I thought that maybe, when I get out of college, I'll get a job and make some money, and that will make me happy. But after I graduated and got a good job, my heart still felt empty.

SEARCHING FOR THE TRUTH

I was still constantly searching for the truth all this time, but without any success. For a while I went to a Christian church, where I was baptized for the first time. But God didn't move me and I didn't see God in that church, so I left. After that, my mother took me to a Greek Orthodox church where I was baptized the second time. But I fell asleep every time I went there, because they spoke in Greek and I couldn't understand what they were saying.

After I left this second church I said to myself, forget it, God doesn't exist. I just focused on working at my agency. One of the women who worked there belongs to the True Jesus Church. One day she saw my Bible on my desk and asked me to attend a Bible study. I thought, why not, I have nothing to lose, and went to the Bible study. At the end, when they knelt down and prayed in tongues, I was really scared.

One of the sisters must have been praying for me, because the next week I couldn't wait to go to Bible study. At that meeting, I felt God move me. I started going to Bible study, and then I started to attend church services regularly. I felt that God was there, even though we gathered in only a prayer house. I started to pray sincerely every night because I felt the movement of God. Every biblical teaching that I learned and followed came true.

GOD TOUCHED ME

One night when I was sleeping, God's power came over

me and said, "Vuthy, get up and pray." So I said, "okay," and I started to pray.

I said, "Hallelujah," and this power came into me, and I started to speak in tongues. I started to weep from joy because I felt so much love and mercy from God. This was the first time I felt joy in my heart, and I knew it was from God. During that prayer God made me realize what kind of a person I was, and all the sinful things I had done in my high school and college years.

While I was praying, God moved me to say, "Turn to 1 Peter." I didn't even know where 1 Peter was in the Bible. So I got up, switched on the lights, and turned to 1 Peter, chapter 1. As I was reading, the words of God came alive, almost like they were three-dimensional. Every word came to me like it was living, and it really touched me.

SPIRITUAL WARFARE

A few days later, my nightmares came back again. I hadn't had those nightmares in a couple of years. They were the same five spirits, and this time they were choking me especially hard. I couldn't breathe, I couldn't yell, I couldn't scream. But I said, "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ," and they left.

I asked the brothers and sisters in church why I still had nightmares despite having received the Holy Spirit. They asked me if I had any idols in my house. I did have a little gold Buddha head, and they told me that I had to throw it away. So in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I flushed it down the toilet.

The next night I had another nightmare, but this time there was only one spirit. This big, black spirit was choking me, and I couldn't see its face. It really scared me because this was something new. I said, "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ," and I started choking the spirit back. I turned the spirit over on my bed, and I saw that its face was corroded and full of worms. Then suddenly, it disappeared.

Again I asked the sister at church why I still had these nightmares. I didn't know what was causing them; I didn't think I had anything else in my house. She said that I should check again. So I searched and searched, and finally I found another Buddha head that my mom had given me a long time ago. I had forgotten that it was in my jewelry box. So again in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I flushed it down the toilet.

One night when I was sleeping, God's power came over me and said, "Vuthy, get up and pray." So I said, "okay," and I started to pray.

MY FATHER'S "PRACTICE"

After I was baptized in the True Jesus Church, I started to tell my father about God. My father is seventy-three years old. Ever since he was a young man in Cambodia, he has always practiced witchcraft. It was known all over his town that no one could kill him by shooting or stabbing. When I was a child I felt proud of this, but I didn't really believe it.

When my family came to the U.S. in 1981, we were terribly mistreated. Our house was burned down twice. The second time, my father went outside and started fighting with the arsonists. One of them tried to hit my father with a baseball bat, but my father put his hand up and broke it in half. After that, I started to believe that my father really did use witchcraft.

The first time my father went to a Christian church after he came to America, he became so sick that he almost died. His "spirit master" of witchcraft warned him that he would kill him if he continued to go to church. So from 1981 until 1999, my father never went to church.

In June 1999, I went fishing with my father. By then, I'd been regularly attending services in the True Jesus Church. I really believed that God exists and I felt His love. So I said to myself, this is a great opportunity for me to talk to my father about God. I told him, "I've never asked you to do anything in my entire life. But I've found God, and I want you to come to church only five times. If after five times you don't feel anything, you don't ever have to come back." He agreed, "Okay son, I'll do it for you."

That same night, my niece was in my father's room. Suddenly, she started screaming, "Grandma, grandpa, someone's trying to kill me!" My father looked around and there was no one there. Then he realized that it was his spirit master again. He told me about it the next day, but I told him not to worry because God is all-powerful, and only He can take away life.

GETTING RID OF THE OLD

The next Friday at Bible study, I asked the brothers and sisters what I should do about all the Buddhism paraphernalia in my father's room. They advised me to pray and to remove it, but who would dare go into his room and remove all of it? My father wouldn't do it, and I didn't have enough faith to do it myself. So the only thing we could do was pray.

Thank God, my father came to church that Saturday. After the prayer, I asked him how he felt. He said, "I felt cold and full of chills." I thought, that doesn't sound right. Sure enough, I found out that he was wearing a big Buddha head around his neck. So I told him, "That's the problem, you need to get rid of that. You need to get rid of all the other things in your room, too, if you really want to pray to God."

So with God's help, my father removed all his Buddhism paraphernalia (including his necklace), and he began to pray every night.

A NEW LIFE

The next Sabbath, my father came to church and knelt down to pray again. I had never described to him what the Holy Spirit felt like. After the prayer, he said that he felt this tingling all through his body, and it felt really good. I really thanked God.

During that same week, my father's left leg began to

hurt so badly that he couldn't even walk. He didn't understand why this was happening to him. On the way to church he said to me, "If your God is the true God, let Him

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hurt so badly that he couldn't even walk. He didn't understand why this was happening to him. On the way to church he said to me, "If your God is the true God, let Him

heal my leg." So I thought, "We have him, Lord." My father is a man of his word. I knew that all we would have to do was to have faith and pray, and God would heal him.

His leg hurt for a week, and then one night he woke up crying from the pain. The minute he got up, he felt this power from his foot all the way to his knee, and he was able to walk. He called and told me about it, and I was so joyful. The brothers and sisters at church had prayed really hard for him.

On our way to the next Sabbath service, he told me, "Son, I will follow your faith; I have already told your mother that I will follow your faith and follow your God." I really thank God. My father has practiced Buddhism all his life, just like his grandparents and great-grandparents before him. For him to believe in God and come to church is a miracle.

Now my father, mother, and brother are attending Sabbath services regularly. God's love and mercy is beyond my imagination. When we pray with sincerity and faith, everything is possible through God. May all the glory and praise be unto our Lord Jesus. ★

IN THE EARLY MORNING HOURS OF TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 1999, I WAS AWAKENED THREE TIMES BY THE CREAKING OF THE WALLS AND DOORS OF MY BEDROOM AND THE SWAYING AND UNDULATION OF MY BED. ALTHOUGH I KNEW THAT THIS SHAKING WAS CAUSED BY EARTHQUAKES, I DID NOT YET REALIZE THAT WHAT I HAD EXPERIENCED THAT NIGHT WAS ONE OF TAIWAN'S BIGGEST EARTHQUAKES OF THE CENTURY.

Anna Ang—Taipei, TAIWAN

Earthquake

THE DESTRUCTION

For twenty hours after the earthquake, I was unable to receive any news because there was a power outage throughout most of Taiwan. So I had no idea of the extent of the damage or the death toll from the earthquake.

Later, when I was able to switch on my television, I saw scenes that I will never forget. The news showed building after building that was collapsed or heavily damaged, as well as bodies buried under the rubble.

Rescue workers risked their lives going in and out of the buildings, trying to save as many people as possible. Some survivors dug through the debris, looking for signs of loved ones, hoping that they were still alive. Others risked their lives just to salvage some of their personal belongings. Children looked for their parents in the chaos. People gave accounts of how roofs and walls came tumbling down, crushing family members, and how they could do nothing to help them.

These scenes were heartbreaking. Every night, as I watched the television updates, I ended up with tears in my eyes. So many children became orphans when their parents were killed in the earthquake. Some children faced amputation because their legs were trapped under concrete walls or pillars. Too young to understand that they had lost their parents, they called for Mommy and Daddy to comfort them in their great pain.

There were also the elderly who lost all their children and grandchildren in one night, becoming the sole survivors of their families. When they realized that they had no home to go back to, no food to eat, and no children or grandchildren to love, they lost their will to live.

REFLECTIONS

Although I had seen similar scenes of other earthquakes (such as the one in Turkey that had occurred just one month earlier), I had never felt such horror, pain, and sympathy toward the victims as I did this time. Since I had experienced this earthquake myself, my feelings were much stronger. I felt very happy every time someone was rescued, and I felt sad when the rescue workers carried out another dead body. I cried whenever I saw someone weeping because his or her loved ones were dead. I cried when a teenager read her poem for her dead parents, expressing her love for them, her loss, and how she would remain strong for her grandfather and younger brother.

How many of us have wished that our parents would stop nagging us, that they were less strict, or that we could live separately from them so that we could do whatever we liked? This earthquake made me realize how blessed I am to still have my parents who love me, and whom I can love. I still have a mother who, when I am sick, will make long distance calls to make sure that I take care of myself and eat well. I still have my parents who were so worried about my safety during the earthquake that they wanted me to return home immediately. But those orphaned kids will no longer have this luxury.

GOD'S MERCY AND GRACE

Despite the destruction, I also heard evidence of God's mercy and grace among our fellow believers. For instance, during the earthquake, one couple was trapped inside their house because it was shaking so violently that they could not make it out the door. They then decided to hold on to each other tightly, thinking that if they were

going to die, they wanted to die together. Miraculously, an unknown force brought them out of their house and into the open space. When they discovered that they were outside, they knew immediately that it was by the grace of God.

In another instance, a preacher and his family were unable to leave their house. The earthquake had damaged the door and they were unable to open it. Not knowing what else to do, the whole family knelt down to pray. While they were praying there was an aftershock, and the damaged door suddenly returned to its original shape! They quickly opened the door and ran to safety. The Lord had answered their prayers.

had either been destroyed by the earthquake or were already too full. There were simply too many bodies.

FAITH IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

After the Sabbath service, as I was watching news updates on the rescue work, I saw a report on a group of tribal people still trapped in the mountains. They were worshipping under a temporary tent made of a plastic sheet tied to four wooden poles. As I watched them singing hymns and praying in tongues, I realized that they were True Jesus Church members! Despite their plight, they had not forgotten to keep the Sabbath.

of the Century

WORSHIP

On Tuesday evening, service was held as usual at the church. There were more attendees than usual that night, because the earthquake had awakened some members and brought them back to the Lord.

During the service, the electrical power went off just as a brother was giving his testimony of how the Lord had chastised him. Although he then had to give his testimony in the dark, everybody sat quietly, listening. Even the children sat through the service without making as much noise as usual. Although nothing extraordinary happened, somehow I felt that this was a great service. It was a feeling I could not explain, but I felt as though I had just experienced a miracle.

Later that week, during the Sabbath service, the preacher gave an account of what he saw when he rushed to Tai Chung after the earthquake. He had difficulty getting there, because the highway was jammed with anxious people rushing to search for their family members. Finally, he got a motorcyclist to take him to his destination. They had to travel carefully because it was very dark and they could not see the road conditions. The familiar road that used to be flat had now become uneven. In the middle of a long stretch of flat highway, there was a one-meter-high bump caused by the shifting plates of the earthquake.

Despite the road conditions, the preacher managed to reach his destination and find the students and church members he was looking for. They were all safe and well, resting in temporary tents because their homes had either collapsed or were too damaged to stay in. Yet he also saw something more: behind the tents were rows of bodies covered with yellow or white cloth. All of the mortuaries

After watching this scene, I felt so ashamed. My Sabbath service that day had been held in a well-lit, air-conditioned building with proper benches. Yet even in this comfort, I had in a few instances fallen asleep. I thought of how I had considered skipping the Sabbath service because I was so tired. Yet these tribal members kept the Sabbath despite the earthquake, which had killed some of their loved ones and devastated their lives.

The September 1999 earthquake in Taiwan shows how small and powerless we humans are when faced with the work of God and the wrath of nature. Humans can fly to the moon, explore the depths of the ocean, and predict when a typhoon will occur. But today, we still cannot predict when and where an earthquake will strike.

Revelation 16:18 states "...and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth." If the earthquake in Taiwan caused such great devastation, we can only wonder what this last "great earthquake" will be like.

Still, whatever disaster may befall us, let us remember and take comfort in David's timeless words:

*The LORD is my rock and my fortress
and my deliverer;
The God of my strength, in whom I will trust;
My shield and the horn of my salvation,
My stronghold and my refuge;
My Savior... (2 Sam 22:2-3) ★*

AFRICA MISSION: KENYA

Jackson Jeng—Garden Grove, California, USA

In September 1998 I was blessed with the opportunity to join a volunteer program that allows church youths to participate in overseas holy work. Each year the International Assembly (IA) of the True Jesus Church sends three or four teams of workers to Africa to evangelize and pastor. I was assigned to one of these missionary trips, and my companions were Elder Hung-Dao Chen (Taiwan, IA chairperson), Pastor Joseph Shek (U.K.) and Brother T. K. Chin (U.K.). My main responsibility was to translate for Elder Chen, who can only speak Chinese.

On this one-month trip we visited Kenya, South Africa, and Ghana. Since it would be difficult for me to share all the experiences I had, I'd like to focus on some of the interesting observations and valuable lessons I learned in Kenya.

Kenya is situated on the eastern coast of Africa and is bordered by Uganda, Ethiopia, Tanzania, and the Indian Ocean. It is located on the equator, so it's very hot there all year round.

My first impression of Africa was that the people are extremely poor. Basic necessities are really lacking there. Most of our church members live in rural areas where there is often no electricity or tap water. People work hard all their lives just to provide food for themselves.

Some parents have to give their children away because they simply cannot feed them. Young girls around fifteen or sixteen years old sometimes marry much older men

simply so they can eat. Children often go without food for a couple of days, and they are usually very skinny due to malnutrition.

MONEY FOR BREAD

On our first day in Kenya, we rented a van to drive to our church, which was in the countryside about eight hours away. Before we started on our trip, we stopped by a grocery store to buy some mineral water. Pastor Shek and the local pastors

What can Jesus do for people? If someone asked me, "Can you give me Jesus?" what would my answer be? Can you give me Jesus?



went inside to buy water while I stayed in the van. As I waited, many people approached the van and looked inside. Everyone wanted something from us.

What left an impression on me was one thirteen-year-old boy. When he came up to my window, I heard him say, "Money for blood."

I asked, "Money for what?" My heart almost jumped out of my throat.

He repeated the same phrase. Finally, I understood. What he was actually saying was "money for bread." Relieved, I told him, "I don't have any money," because I didn't have any of their currency.

About every thirty seconds after that, the boy stretched out his open hand inside the window and asked, "Can I have your watch? Can I have your jacket? Can I have your pen?"

I didn't know what to do. I then realized that it was around noon on a Wednesday. I thought it was strange that this child wasn't in school, so I asked him, "Do you go to school?"

"Yes, I do go to school—Jesus Mission School," he answered.

"So do you know Jesus?" I asked.

"Yes, I know Jesus," he said. "Jesus is the Son of God."

"Well, why don't you ask for Jesus instead of money?" I asked.

He said, "If I ask for money, you can give me money, but if I ask for Jesus, you can't give me Jesus."

His response really troubled me because I didn't have an answer for him. Basically he was saying that if he asked for money, it could satisfy his hunger, but if he asked for Jesus, he would remain hungry.

I sat there thinking to myself, how are we supposed to preach to them something so abstract when they can't even fill their stomachs? Would it really make a difference if I preached to him about Jesus?

Jesus Christ—the Living Bread

This is probably the greatest obstacle to our missionary work today, not only in Africa, but around the world. That is, what can Jesus do for people? If someone asked me, "Can you give me Jesus?" what would my answer be? *Can you give me Jesus?*

The Bible records that one day Peter and John went up to the temple to pray. There was a man born lame begging by the gate. When he saw Peter and John, he asked them for alms. Basically, this beggar also wanted "money for bread."

Peter said to him, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6). By faith and by the power of Jesus, Peter healed the lame man. This man received something above and beyond what he had asked for.

If Jesus can feed five thousand, then He can also feed this hungry boy in Kenya. If Jesus can heal the lame through Peter's hand, then He can also feed the hungry through our hands.

LOVE AND HOSPITALITY

The Kenyans eat mainly corn flour mixed with water. They make it into a big piece of cornbread, and during meals everyone takes small pieces and dips them in a spicy sauce to eat.

The meat (which is scarce) is mainly lamb, pork, and chicken (really skinny chicken).

During spiritual convocations, there aren't enough utensils for everybody, so they use big banana leaves as plates. After service, the benches double as dining tables.

I was really touched that these members showed so much love and hospitality even though they were extremely poor. They always let us eat first, and while we ate, they stood around us. They even bought Coca-



Eating a fellowship meal after service

Cola and Sprite for us. For our meal, they would cook rice and one dish. They usually cooked white rice for us, which is really expensive there. On the last day of the spiritual convocation, they slaughtered a lamb for us to eat.

Right: Our brothers and sisters in Kenya
Below: an eighteen-year-old woman receives baptism



A Cup of Cold Water

At first this special treatment made me very uncomfortable. Why should we eat first while they stood around waiting on us? Why should we eat meat and rice while they only ate cornbread?

Later I realized that this is how they showed their love for the Lord and for us. It's like parents who give the best to their children. They gladly sacrificed their best for me even though I wasn't even related to them. I also realized that you don't need to be rich to love and to show care. In fact, you can be as poor as these Africans and still be able to love.

Jesus says, "Whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward" (Mt 10:42). May the Lord bless these African brothers and sisters abundantly for their love and hospitality.

All of us should ask ourselves, who are the little ones in my life? Is it that brother standing by himself whom no one ever talks to? Is it that homeless person who sleeps outside the supermarket? How can I give this cup of cold water? Perhaps it's by picking up that piece of trash in the parking lot.

If you look closely enough, you will find the little ones in your own life. You don't have to be wealthy; in fact, you can even be poor. As long as you're willing to love and give, our Lord Jesus said that you shall by no means lose your reward.



TRANSPORTATION

Some of my most memorable experiences in Kenya involved transportation. In Kenya, the public "bus" is usually a pickup truck with doors at the back and two benches on either side of the bed. The sides and roof of the truck are lined with railing for

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the luggage. A director hangs outside on this railing and signals to the driver to stop or go. He also collects the fare.

The bus is meant to seat only sixteen people, but the director always accepts more passengers as long as they're willing to pay. The people keep stuffing inside, and there are often people crouching down, half-standing, or sitting on top of each other.

During one of my rides, there was someone on top of me, someone

beneath me, and both my feet were off the ground. It was like being in a human sardine can, and I could hardly breathe. I learned pretty quickly that the best seat in the house was in the luggage area. So I literally started "hanging out" with the natives.

One day we took a taxi to a hotel about one hour away for service. We pulled out of the parking lot at about five miles an hour. I thought the driver would speed up later, but it turned out that the car couldn't go any faster. When I looked at the dashboard, I discovered that none of the instruments were working, and in place of the gas pedal there was a metal rod.

The car shook violently as we went over pits and bumps. Whenever we made a turn, the doors would suddenly swing open. We sat very close to each other because we thought we would fall out of the car. The driver finally noticed our predicament, so he stopped the car and hammered the doors shut.

A NEW LIFE

During one of the services, we met an eighteen-year-old woman holding a small baby.

"Where is your husband?" Pastor Shek asked.

She shook her head.

"Do you have a husband?"

She said no.

Right: Jackson and the Kenyan children
Below: A Kenyan girl and her little brother



Later, we found out that her husband had passed away three months earlier. This woman was filled with pain and sorrow.

There was a baptism that day, and this woman was also going to be baptized. She took her baby and walked to the baptismal site without saying a word. On the way there, she prayed to God, asking Him to make a change in her life.

As she entered into the water during baptism, she asked the Lord to forgive her sins. She felt power come upon her as she was immersed

As she entered into the water during baptism, she asked the Lord to forgive her sins. She felt power come upon her as she was immersed in the water, and when she came up she saw a glorious light.

in the water, and when she came up she saw a glorious light. The power opened her mouth and she began to speak in tongues. She walked back to the shore with her eyes closed and knelt there praying in the Spirit.

Matthew 3 records that after Jesus received baptism and came out of the water, heaven opened and the Spirit of God descended on Him like

a dove. There was a voice that said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

What happened to this woman was according to Scripture. As I took a picture of this event, I couldn't hold back my tears. It was amazing to see how God grants blessings to those who really need Him. Elder Chen said that witnessing this miracle made the entire trip worthwhile.

THE CHILDREN

Because of poverty, sickness, and death, many of these children are orphans. Their parents often

pass away without any warning. Yet in a way, we are all like orphans. Our parents can't be with us forever. Our husbands, wives, children, and loved ones won't always be with us. But our Lord Jesus promised that He would not leave us as orphans. He is our heavenly Father.

The children in Africa are so innocent. They would come up to

me and touch my skin because it was a different color than theirs. They would touch my hair, wondering why it wasn't curly.

I wondered, what makes the children in more developed countries so different than the ones in Africa? Then I remembered that our children look much like them after a good prayer or spiritual convocation. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, our children can become as pure and innocent as these African children. I had a great time and sweet memories with them.

RETURNING HOME

Toward the end of my trip, I was really happy about returning home. Yet at the same time, I was very sad that I was leaving Africa behind. Looking back, I don't regret a single second of the trip. If I ever have the chance, I'll go back. I encourage every one of you to go and experience it for yourself.

Sometimes when I sleep, I have dreams about our African brothers and sisters. When I sing hymns here, I close my eyes and I can see them singing hymns with their eyes closed. Things in my everyday life remind me of the valuable lessons I learned and the time I spent with God.

I thank God for His guidance and mercy throughout my trip, and I thank all of you for your love, support, and prayers while I was away. May all the glory be unto Jesus' name. ☆

AFRICA MISSION: SOUTH AFRICA & GHANA

Tracy Huang—Queens, New York, USA
Yuyen Syukur—Pacifica, California, USA

Tracy's story:

"BROTHERS ONLY"

When I used to listen to testimonies about Africa and invitations for members to get involved, I had to remind myself that these invitations were not meant for me. There are different types of services for the Lord, and I thought that serving in Africa would not be my area. I thought if I wanted to see Africa, I would either have to go on vacation there or marry a brother who was willing to take me. So in August 1998 when I approached the International Assembly (IA) about applying as a volunteer, Africa was not a place I had in mind.

I do not know exactly how the prospective trip got started, but before I knew it, Sister Yuyen Syukur and I had the opportunity to join the June 1999 missionary trip to Africa. Though the IA accepted our applications in October 1998, I knew there were many factors that could hinder our trip. For one, there must have been concerns at different church administrative levels about sending the first group of sisters to Africa. If not concerns, then there were questions, and even doubts, from the members about the practicality of sending sisters to Africa.

I knew that confirmation from God was the only way to bypass these questions and sometimes-idle comments. I started to pray about this trip even before I submitted the application. I prayed to God that if it was His will for sisters to join the African missions, then He would give me

the courage to go through the entire process, from completing the application to preparing for and financing the trip, to actually making the journey.

CHALLENGES BEFORE THE TRIP

In the months before the trip, there were both personal and external challenges. Each one was resolved with God's help through prayer. The most visible and painful challenge came from the people I love and need the most. Here is the account I wrote during that time:

March 25, 1999

I received an email from an IA pastor this morning regarding Africa. The family called him a few days ago voicing their concerns (and "even objections," as he put it) about the trip to Africa.

I saw this coming; I knew they would do something. Somehow I still hoped that they would change their minds. Tears filled my eyes as I replied to the pastor. My heart is broken in two because I know what I'm supposed to do and want to do, but my heart is being tugged at the weakest spot.

Yesterday I wrote a letter to Mom expressing my reasons and wishes for going to Africa. I love Mom and wouldn't do anything that would cause her pain or worry. Yet, I'm doing exactly that...

I had many thoughts yesterday as I wrote

Religious education class at Pigfarm church in Accra



Gbefi church members praying in their chapel

Mom. I thought about what Jesus said about leaving one's family for His sake. I'm not sure if I'm being too extreme, but how far would I really go for Christ?

I thought about earthly relationships, especially with family, in relation to God. Am I crazy to think that there's no comparison? It seems illogical for me to put myself at risk against my family's wishes and knowingly cause Mom pain for this invisible thing called God—I question my own determination.

Reading my own words after returning from Africa reminds me again how gracious and awesome our Lord is. Not only did my family come around to support me, but they also came to support and comfort parents of other volunteers to Africa. My family was able to share with others how worried they were and how much they needed to trust God for my safety.

God is love. He does not like to see a rift between family members. What He does want is our heart and our complete determination. When God asked

Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, He wanted to see if he truly put God before his own son. Once Abraham proved that he had the faith, God blessed him even more. When my family tried to talk me out of going to Africa, I was sorrowful, but God gave me peace and courage. I made up my mind to go despite my family's objections, and I asked God to grant them the peace that He had granted me. In retrospect, I am deeply thankful for God's grace and His protection of my family.

SOUTH AFRICA

Yuyen and I met with two other IA workers in South Africa. As the trip began, I spent a week in South Africa visiting the members and assisting with the work there. Most of the members in South Africa are immigrants from Taiwan. Though they have a better religious foundation than the rest of the members in Africa, they still need spiritual nourishment, encouragement, and love. It is evident

that being minorities in a politically unstable country far from their homeland has taken a toll on some of the members there.

South Africa is a well-developed country, with modern facilities and comfortable living conditions. In fact, staying at church there is more comfortable than living at home in America. I stayed in a new room with a firm, queen-size bed. It is easy to live very comfortably in South Africa, especially near the southern coast. There is so much seafood available that it was beyond my ability to enjoy it all. I can still remember the experience of seeing and eating whole pieces of abalone.

GHANA

After South Africa, I headed to western Africa, to a different kind of Africa. In Ghana, other than some minor inconveniences such as the occasional lack of running water and electricity, it was like camping. I heard a rooster crow instead of the telephone ring, I saw goats and chickens on the road instead of dogs and cats, I listened to the radio instead of watching TV, and I used a fan instead of air conditioning. Ghana has tropical weather, so there is lots of sunshine

When I look at the members in Ghana, I can only attribute their faith to God; for we True Jesus Church members outside of Africa, who have abundant resources, have not done nearly enough.

and humidity, but there is also plenty of sweet and juicy tropical fruits such as pineapples, mangos, coconuts, papaya, sugar cane, and watermelon.

When I look at the members in Ghana, I can only attribute their faith to God; for we True Jesus Church members outside of Africa, who have abundant resources, have not done nearly enough. They need more assistance in every respect—particularly in the pastoral area—than we, the world outside Africa, may be able or willing to give. The pastoral resources for the entire country, with over ten churches and service areas, consist of three full-time workers and two full-time preachers. There are no other ministers serving the members. Imagine your local church or service area with ministers visiting once every four weeks if you're lucky, about four Bibles to share, and no access to sermon tapes and videos.

Moreover, since African members cannot afford to own a Bible or paper and pencils, it is quite difficult for

Members singing hymns in Pigfarm church



As I read up about Africa and the various diseases that I could possibly contract there, I asked myself if this was something I really wanted to do.

them to learn and retain information. Imagine if today all of your learning is completely auditory. Unless you have someone who reads and is willing to repeat the Bible verses to you over and over, you will only get to hear them read once during the service. Also keep in mind that you do not have the luxury of electricity and a study area to do your spiritual cultivation. How then do you become knowledgeable enough to provide good spiritual food for the children of God? Indeed, for those in Africa it is quite difficult, but by the grace of God our members have kept their faith for the past fourteen years.

HELP NEEDED

Africa is a beautiful place, full of natural resources and God's wonderful creation. Today, Africa needs to have willing workers to stay long-term in each country where we have churches. Our African brothers and sisters do not have the same resources that we have. If we love them and want them to learn and mature in the Lord, then we need to sacrifice and be there to teach them. It is difficult for us to provide help without knowing how they live from day to day and week to week.

How can parents teach their children if they do not know how to read or write, or do not even have a Bible at home? Without the basic tools, how do we help them if they do not fully comprehend English? How can we help the general congregation be rooted in the Word of God?

We all have the calling to answer these questions. We could help financially through the IA, by praying for them, and/or by spending time with them personally. Let us answer Jesus' calling and be one of the workers, for "the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field" (Mt 9:37-38).

My three short weeks in Africa were full of good fellowship with the brothers and sisters. I saw the power of our gospel working in simple people and those in spiritual poverty. Most of all, I tasted the joy and fulfillment of serving God all day, every day. For a short time I became one of the missionaries. We prayed, planned, worked, ate, shared, and laughed together. In a land far from home and our loved ones, we had God and one another to rely on—it was the most wonderful experience. When the work-

load called for us to separate for a few days, I was amazed at how much joy we felt when we saw each other again. It was as if we had been separated from our best friends for weeks. We recounted every detail, every emotion, and every reflection.

It was a privilege for me to serve God in Africa. What I have learned and gained from this trip is far more than words can describe. If you don't believe me, ask God to give you the opportunity to experience His grace and wonderful work as a missionary volunteer.

Yuyen's story:

I thank God for giving me the opportunity to visit the churches in Africa. I've wanted to visit these churches for a long time, but I've always been afraid that I would be a burden to the preachers. When Sister Tracy Huang asked me in late 1998 if I was interested in going to Africa, I replied yes. From then on she arranged most of the communication with the IA.

When I applied for leave from my work, another senior technologist there was also applying for his vacation at the same time. I thought that this would be a problem, because for about three weeks there would be only three technologists working. I was prepared that I might not be able to make this trip. Yet my director approved my leave, and I was able to get all the necessary visas to the U.K., South Africa, and Ghana.

As I read up about Africa and the various diseases that I could possibly contract there, I asked myself if this was something I really wanted to do. I had to get four different vaccinations, including the mandatory yellow fever vaccination, and we would have to take malaria pills while we were there. Finally, I just stopped worrying and entrusted everything to God. It all went smoothly from then on.

We were scheduled to go to South Africa and Ghana. I would be in South Africa for three days and

Members of Johannesburg church, South Africa



Members of Abiriw church, Ghana



Ghana for twelve days. Sister Tracy would stay for an additional week in Ghana.

At the end of May, I flew to London to meet Tracy. We rested a bit in London before continuing on to our journey to Johannesburg, a ten-hour flight.

SOUTH AFRICA

The True Jesus church in Johannesburg was dedicated in February 1999. It is a modified residential building. The city of Johannesburg has one of the highest homicide rates in the world, so like the houses around it, the church building has automatic double steel gates. As one gate closes, the other gate will open. It is surrounded by high walls, and on top of the walls are high-voltage electrical wires. This is supposed to stop intruders from trying to come in. As you walk around the church compound outside, you can hear a *bzz-bzz* sound.

The Johannesburg church is comprised of about four families. Brother Wen-Cheng Lee, the father of one of the families, was a member of the True Jesus Church before he went to South Africa more than ten years ago. He was a busy man, and he lived a comfortable life in South Africa. During his time there, he put aside his faith until an incident occurred in December 1997.

Brother Lee had bought a property for his business, and one day he and the real-estate agent went to the property to evict the seller, who had occupied the building way past the deadline. When they got to the building, the seller took out a gun and shot at them. Brother Lee's agent died at the scene, and Brother Lee was shot three times. He managed to escape and was sent to the hospital. Brother Lee told a brother who visited him at the hospital that if God allowed him to live, he would return to God and bring his family to believe. This was how his wife and two young sons came to believe and were baptized. Now they are zealously serving the Lord.

GHANA

Next we went to Ghana. When I arrived in Accra, the capital, at night, it reminded me of Indonesia. We had to

brush off the many porters who approached us, and a brother had to haggle with the taxi driver to take us to the church. On the way to the church, the engine of the taxi stopped several times, and I wondered if we would have to change taxis at some point. The taxi driver seemed unaffected by the problems, however, and each time the engine died he managed to restart it.

We visited other churches in the area as well, such as Kumasi and Amafrom. Kumasi is the second largest city in Ghana. There were about twenty members there when we arrived at the church for service. They had no electricity in the building, so we used kerosene lamps for the evening service.

The Kpandu church is another big church, and the building there is almost completed. They were adding another lodging area for ministers so they wouldn't have to stay in guest houses anymore. The members of the Kpandu church have experienced many miracles. There is Sister Felicia, who suffered from a boil on her finger

which became so serious that she died. The members prayed earnestly for her for more than an hour, and she came back to life. Now her little finger, which can't bend

anymore, holds the remaining sign of that miracle.

Another church we visited was the Abiriw church in the mountains. The church bought a plot of land there, but they haven't constructed a building yet. Currently they hold service in a rented house in a very small room. We could sense the joy of the members as they worshiped God.

Both Tracy and I wore head coverings there. The sisters in Ghana put on head coverings and wear skirts or dresses instead of pants. We covered our heads to show our respect and to prevent distractions. A lot of times, my head became extremely hot during prayer, but it was something that I had to get used to. I had to keep myself from taking it off. Another thing I had to get used to was kneeling on the hard ground to pray. It wasn't easy because the sharp, loose dirt pricked my knees.

They hold service in a rented house in a very small room. We could sense the joy of the members as they worshiped God.

Members of Gbefi church, Ghana



Sometimes I would take off my sandals and put them under my knees when I prayed. Praying on carpeted floors seems like a luxury now.

We also visited the Gbefi church. We walked for about twenty minutes through a village to get there. The simple design and material really touched me, because it's something that you don't see in the more developed countries. The church building was comprised of a straw roof and mud walls with a pole supporting it.

Throughout my visit in Ghana, I was touched by the fact that although we looked different, spoke a different language, and came from different cultures, we were still all part of the family of Christ. Sometimes I felt left out, and I yearned to understand the local language, to communicate with the believers, and to sing praises to God with them. But even so, these feelings do not separate us, nor should they. The feeling of oneness that we share is brought about especially by the one spiritual tongue, as we pray together to speak to God in His language.

The future of the missionary work in Africa is to have long-term resident ministers on the continent. Currently there are three or four missionary trips each year that go to Africa from other countries. The IA assigns certain countries to be in charge of each African country or region.

More volunteers can help out in religious education and by holding student spiritual convocations there. There have not been any student spiritual convocations held in Africa before. An IA preacher has also suggested that churches in other countries can adopt a church in Africa, like a sister-church approach. For example, a local church in the U.S. could adopt Abiriw church in Ghana, and help them financially.

These are just some ideas of how we can participate in the Africa mission. My own stay in Africa was really short—too short, in fact, to understand the lives of the people there. There is still much work to be done in Africa. Please remember them in your prayers. All glory to God. ★

TRADITIONAL BELIEFS IN GHANA

Many of the traditional beliefs among the tribes in Ghana that existed before the arrival of the European missionaries actually correspond to the truth in the Bible.

The Akans in Ghana comprise the Akyems, Fantes, Kwabua, and Ashantes tribes, who speak a local language called Twi. The Ashantes and Akyems are polytheistic, but they also believe that there is only one Almighty God who created the heavens and the earth.

During the pouring of libation (a drink offering to a god), they utter the words "Otwereduampon Kwame. Woa woboo osoro ne asase." "Otwereduampon" literally means a tree (dua) that, if a man leans (otwere) against it, will never fall (mpon). "Kwame" is the name given to a male born on a Saturday, whereas "Woa woboo osoro ne asase" means "thou who created the heavens and the earth." As such, the drink offering is for a "high god," the Creator whom we can trust in and rely upon.

The use of the word "Kwame" is significant, because the tribes believe that the Almighty God was "born" on a Saturday. They traditionally believe that Saturday is a day that belongs to the Lord. Saturday is called "Memeneda"—which is a shortened form of "Mene nea meneda"—the "I Am that I Am's day." The name given to this day parallels the name God gave Himself in Exodus 3:14: "I Am that I Am."

The Akans also call Saturday "Dapaa," meaning a good day, and the other six days "Dabone," or bad days. The other six days are "Dabone" because these were days set aside to worship other gods and perform idolatrous rituals.

Saturday was a day treasured and respected by the Akans until the arrival of the European missionaries, who taught them to worship on Sundays.

Material provided by Pastors Joseph Danquah & Koma Jebu Appiah, Evangelism Coordination Council of the True Jesus Church, Ghana.

Miracles in Sabah, Malaysia



PENSIANGAN BACKGROUND

The Pensiangan district lies in the inner regions of southwestern Sabah (previously known as North Borneo when it was a British colony). Sabah is now one of the thirteen states that make up the country of Malaysia.

The people in Pensiangan are of the Murut tribe. They live a communal life, traditionally in long houses. The population is scattered along the Tagul River, hence they are called Murut-Tagul. They are farmers, good hunters, and fishermen, and the staple of their diet is tapioca. Traditional religion is still practiced, and traditional culture and costume are well preserved. However, many of them have now converted to Christianity.

Transportation in this region can be extremely difficult. Only the first three churches are accessible by ground transport; the other five are accessible only by boat through river rapids, either upstream or downstream. Boat rides from one church to another can take up to four or five hours, and there are often delays caused by shallow water or by trying to avoid large rocks. Flooding during the monsoon or rainy season makes these journeys very risky. Many villagers have lost their lives braving the rapids, having smashed their boats against timber logs that were washed downstream.

These are some of the conditions that our interior preachers in Pensiangan have to deal with as they carry out the Lord's work in this area.

THE MIRACLES

Names on the Scroll

In the mid-eighties, Preacher Timotius and the five other workers

Adapted from a testimony by Pr. Timotius
Compiled by Rocky Soh Andu—Kota Kinabalu Church, Sabah, MALAYSIA

In the early 1980s, the Sabah Education Department assigned Brother Ubong, a primary school teacher, to Kampung Salinatan (Kampung means "village" in Malay) in the Pensiangan district. Brother Ubong then introduced to the villagers Brother Juperin (now Preacher Zefanya), who at that time was working as a medical officer at the Keningau District Hospital.

Whenever Brother Juperin was stationed at Pensiangan to provide medical care to the villagers, he would bring along Preacher Timotius and five other brothers to preach the gospel to the spiritually thirsty people there. Miracles accompanied their work, and many villagers accepted the truth. Praise the Lord, the Holy Spirit worked wonders in this region.

In 1985, the Kg. Sakali and Kg. Sapulut prayer houses were established. Due to a severe shortage of manpower, however, the church in Sabah was unable to provide continuous pastoral care to these isolated villages. Despite this fact, the church slowly continued to expand to Kg. Lotong, Kg. Sikait, and Kg. Salinatan.

The number of believers totaled about two hundred and fifty.

During the last few years, holy work in this area has taken on a new momentum. By 1998, three churches were established, one each in Kg. Sikait, Kg. Sakali, and Kg. Salinatan. The mighty working of God has been evident, and this blessing, coupled with the increase in manpower from the Sabah General Assembly, has resulted in the present total church population of about five hundred in Pensiangan. At present, there are eight churches in the Pensiangan district: one each in Balantos, Lotong, Sakali, Salinatan, Salung, Sapulut, Sikait, and Sinikaluan.

were evangelizing in Kg. Sapulut. One night, Preacher Timotius dreamed of an open scroll with eleven names on it. His name and the workers' names comprised six of them, but he did not recognize the other five. The same dream appeared twice that night.

As he continued with his work the next day, Preacher Timotius completely forgot about the dream. It wasn't until he reviewed the list of newly baptized members that he realized that the first five names on it were the other five names on the scroll in his dream!

The Lord had told him through the dream that this region was a rich harvest field, and that the villagers here longed for the truth and thirsted for the word of God.

The Best Doctor

In 1989, there was a woman named Sabiah in Kg. Sikait who was sick for about a month. Although she had been hospitalized and had spent fourteen days at the local witch doctor's house, her illness continued to grow worse. Eventually, she asked Preacher Timotius to pray for her. Three days later she was completely healed, and she has remained so to this day.

The Lord also healed the illnesses of three children in this village through the power of prayer. From that point on, the local witch doctor dared not stop our preacher from preaching the gospel to the villagers. Through these healings, the villagers came to know that the Lord Jesus is the best doctor, and many decided to be baptized. This was how the Kg. Sikait Church was established.

The Woman Who Could Have Only One Child

There was a woman who could have only one child, as every time she gave birth to another child, the one that she already had would pass away. These tragedies continued through her fourth child. With a heart full of despondence, she came to accept Christ. Praise the Lord,



Bro. Pundus Tikus (front row, second from left) and family

now she is a woman blessed with many children.

Healed of Skin Disease

Many inhabitants of Kg. Sakali used to suffer from skin disease. They were so ashamed of their sickness that they would hide in the jungle, segregating themselves from the rest of the villagers, just like the lepers of biblical times. Miraculously, when the truth reached them and they accepted Christ, they were completely cured of their skin disease.

The Funeral that Never Happened

In early 1999, the Sabah GA assigned Preacher Timotius to the Pensiangan area for a duration of two years. On the way to Kg. Sinikaluan, Preacher Timotius met a stranger who asked him to visit his father's house because his father, Pundas Tikus, was dying from liver cancer. The stranger asked Preacher Timotius to pray for his father's soul, as the doctors who attended his father at the hospital had already given up hope and advised the family to prepare for the funeral.

Seeing his father lying there with his body and face swelled up, the son had been filial enough to request prayers to God for his father's soul to be saved. (Pundas Tikus, fifty-five years old, was a farmer and a pastor of another denomination.) As he reached the family's house, Preacher Timotius saw many villagers gathered there to bid farewell to the dying man, in accordance with village tradition. Friends and relatives were already busy preparing for Pundas' funeral.

Amid the mourners, and despite the ridicule of the unbelievers,

Preacher Timotius conducted a short prayer. Compassionately, he then consoled the dying man and the family members, telling them not to fear but to believe that life is in the hand of God. Therefore, he said, they should submit everything to God. He then told them that he would be back to see Pundas, and he proceeded to the other villages to carry out his pastoral rounds.

Amazingly, however, on his return to Kg. Sinikaluan a week later, he learned that the funeral had been canceled! The dying man recovered, and as a result of this healing, Pundas Tikus became a living witness of the life-giving authority of God. Many people were amazed at this wonderful miracle. On separate occasions, a total of 184 people repented and received water baptism in the Sapulut River, and three prayer houses were set up at Kg. Balantos, Kg. Salung, and Kg. Sinikaluan.

Praise the Lord for bringing all of these lost sheep back to His one sheep pen. Within a short period of time, a total of two hundred members in this region were brought back to the fold. God has blessed His workers and once again confirmed His word by the miracles that accompany it (Mk 16:20). May all the glory be to our Lord Jesus forever and ever. Amen. ☆

NOTE: The members of these newly established churches welcome pastoral care and visitors. Anyone interested in visiting these villages may contact the Pastoral Department of the True Jesus Church, Sabah GA, P.O. Box No. 10510, 88805 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, MALAYSIA.



Boatride along the Tagul River

Many Nations, One Church

AS THE TRUE JESUS CHURCH STRIVES TO FULFILL THE LORD JESUS' COMMISSION TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO EVERY LAND AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS, WE FACE MANY CHALLENGES: HOW CAN WE MORE EFFECTIVELY PREACH TO PEOPLE OF DIFFERENT CULTURES? IN OUR EVANGELISM, HOW CAN WE RECONCILE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND STILL PREACH THE PURE AND COMPLETE GOSPEL? AFTER PEOPLE HAVE ENTERED THE CHURCH, HOW CAN WE MAKE IT TRULY A HOME FOR ALL NATIONALITIES?

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES GIVE SOME INSIGHT INTO THESE QUESTIONS, TAKING A LOOK AT THE CHURCH SITUATION TODAY, EVALUATING OUR CURRENT COURSE OF ACTION, AND PROVIDING SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE DIRECTION. THEY EXAMINE GOD'S SALVATION PLAN FOR ALL NATIONS AND THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN HIS PLAN. THESE ARTICLES ALSO HIGHLIGHT SOME INSPIRING EXAMPLES OF CROSS-CULTURAL UNITY THROUGH OUR COMMON FAITH AND THROUGH THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

MAY THESE MESSAGES OPEN OUR SPIRITUAL EYES AND HEARTS, HELPING US TO SEE THE IMPORTANT ROLE EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US PLAYS IN GOD'S SALVATION PLAN. THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LORD JESUS' COMMISSION DEPENDS ON THE GRACE OF GOD AS WELL AS THE EFFORTS OF EVERY MEMBER. READ ON, AND SEE HOW YOU CAN TAKE PART IN MAKING OUR CHURCH A HOME TO ALL NATIONS.



GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS

Shyh-Kuang Yang—Sydney, New South Wales, AUSTRALIA



“BUT YOU SHALL RECEIVE POWER WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS COME UPON YOU; AND YOU SHALL BE WITNESSES TO ME IN JERUSALEM, AND IN ALL JUDEA AND SAMARIA, AND TO THE END OF THE EARTH.” (ACTS 1:8)

“GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL THE NATIONS, BAPTIZING THEM IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, TEACHING THEM TO OBSERVE ALL THINGS THAT I HAVE COMMANDED YOU; AND LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, EVEN TO THE END OF THE AGE.” (MT 28:19-20)

THE COURSE OF EVANGELISM THROUGHOUT CHURCH HISTORY

According to the Bible, it is the divine work of the church to preach the gospel to all peoples and make disciples of all nations. The Lord Jesus' commission to the disciples of the apostolic church is now the imperative responsibility of the True Jesus Church, and we must strive to accomplish this great task through constant effort and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. By examining the development of the apostolic church in its early evangelistic mission, we can see the path that we should follow as we continue that mission today.

EVANGELISM IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

First Stage. Two thousand years ago, on the day of Pentecost, the disciples first received the Holy Spirit and established the church in Jerusalem. This was the first stage of church development. During the era of the Jerusalem church (Acts 1-7) the work was confined within Jerusalem, and the believers comprised only Jews. This period set the foundation for the content of the gospel, Christian ethics, the mode of worship, and church ordination and administration.

Second Stage. It was obviously not God's will for the disciples to confine their preaching efforts to Jerusalem. He therefore allowed the church to meet with great persecution, “and they were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles.... Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:1,4). This opened the way for the second stage of evangelism for the apostolic

church (Acts 8-12). Believers took the seed of the gospel with them as they traveled and established churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (Acts 9:31). Some even traveled to Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (Acts 11:19). Yet even in these other lands, their target audience remained the Jews; only the believers at Antioch preached to the Hellenists (Acts 11:19-20). Once these new churches were established, the Jerusalem church sent workers like Peter, John, and Barnabas to pastor them (Acts 8:14-17; 11:22-24).

During this period there was no full-scale evangelism to the Gentiles, only a few activities personally directed by the Holy Spirit. For example, Philip preached to the Ethiopian eunuch, and Peter preached to Cornelius and his household. In particular, the preaching of the gospel to Cornelius was God's marvelous preparation for the Jerusalem Council, which affirmed God's acceptance of the Gentiles (Acts 15:6-11). It was about this time that God chose Paul to become a vessel of gentile conversion (Acts 9:1-16).

Third Stage. Acts 13:1-3 states, “In the church that was at Antioch ... as they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said: ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:1-3). This marks the beginning of the third phase of evangelism in the apostolic church (Acts 13-28).

In their first missionary trip, Paul and Barnabas still focused on preaching to Jews living in gentile lands. Because the Jews rejected the truth, however, Paul and Barnabas redirected their

The preaching of the gospel to Cornelius was God's marvelous preparation for the Jerusalem Council, which affirmed God's acceptance of the Gentiles.

efforts toward the Gentiles (Acts 13:46-49). This change in focus resulted in a debate within the church concerning the direction and content of gentile evangelism. At the Jerusalem Council, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the apostles and elders, together with Paul and Barnabas, who worked as evangelists abroad, laid down the principles of faith as guidelines for gentile Christians. All the churches adhered to the directives decided at the Council. So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and they increased in number

daily (Acts 16:4-5). Thus began a new chapter in the work of gentile evangelism.

Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Paul, Silas, and Timothy ventured into such foreign lands as Macedonia, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth, establishing mainly gentile churches. In addition, Paul and the other workers stayed in these newly established churches for long periods of time to teach and pastor new believers. For example, Paul stayed in the church of Corinth for one and a half years, teaching them the word of God (Acts 18:9-11). During the third missionary journey he again stayed at Ephesus for two years, propagating the gospel to both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:8-12).

EVANGELISM IN THE TRUE JESUS CHURCH

The True Jesus Church, entrusted with rediscovered teachings of the apostolic church, is the church that God has raised in the last days. She has the responsibility of preaching the true gospel throughout the world before Jesus' second coming. Like the apostolic church, we understand and hold fast to the truth, experience the abundant downpour of the Holy Spirit, and receive guidance in our work. When we recall the course of evangelism of the True Jesus Church since her establishment, we are deeply thankful for God's mighty work in our midst.

First Stage. Since 1917, when the Holy Spirit

Since 1917, when the Holy Spirit established the True Jesus Church in China, the evangelistic progress of the church has taken a course similar to that of the apostolic church.

established the True Jesus Church in China, the evangelistic progress of the church has taken a course similar to that of the apostolic church. During the early stages, evangelism was centered in China before the General Assembly (GA) relocated to Taiwan. Although during this period the focus of evangelism was to the Chinese, the church also laid the foundation for future evangelistic and pastoral work, religious education, and other aspects of church organization. Today the True Jesus Church throughout the world has benefited from this solid foundation.

Second Stage. In the 1960s the Taiwan GA, as the central coordination point, together with churches in other countries established the International Assembly (IA). The aim was to

strengthen the faith of every church and to strive toward the work of world evangelism. Thanks to the Lord, in the last thirty years churches have been constantly established throughout the world, particularly in the U.S., U.K., Europe, Canada, Central and South America, Australia, and New Zealand. GAs and Coordination Boards have also been set up. The seed of the gospel was sown as a result of believers immigrating to these places to study and work.

During the course of their growth, these newly established churches were strengthened by the continual pastoral visits of IA ministers. The nature of the work during this period was similar to the second phase of the work of the apostolic church. In the early days the apostolic believers were mainly of the same race, but God was at the same time preparing the future entry of other races. This period precedes the last and most important phase of the True Jesus Church, namely, preaching to all nations and peoples.

Third Stage—the Present and the Future. From the 1970s to the 1990s, the True Jesus Church's evangelistic activities progressed to India, the Philippines, and Africa. The major difference is that converts are now mainly the indigenous peoples of the respective countries. Through the sacrifice and labor of workers and the offerings and zeal of believers, churches in these newly developed areas have been established under God's protection and mercy. Yet work in these newly developed areas is limited to short-term pastoral visits, due to the lack of IA workers. Unfortunately, we cannot

expect believers who have just heard the truth and are unfamiliar with the essence, faith, history, and organization of our church to be rooted in faith purely through such short-term pastoral visits.

Facing the impending second coming of the Lord, we desperately need a meeting like that conducted in the Jerusalem church, in which the entire body of workers is united under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to formulate a plan for evangelism. We must also emulate Paul's method of preaching to the Gentiles by sending workers as pioneers to new areas. We need to conduct long-term pastoral and evangelistic programs in order to accomplish our goal of preaching the precious gospel to all nations.

STRATEGY AND PROSPECTS FOR WORLD EVANGELISM

GUIDELINES FOR EVANGELISM

“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these...” (Acts 15:28).

The content of the gospel is the truth, and the aim of the gospel is salvation. In global evangelism, we must uphold the truth and aim to present every person as perfect in Jesus Christ. If any local custom or lifestyle is against biblical teachings and leads one into sin, resulting in the loss of salvation, then it must be forbidden (similar to the resolution of the Jerusalem Council).

With regard to differences in lifestyle and cultural backgrounds, however, we must accommodate and accept one another. We preach God’s saving grace for humankind. This truth is universal and available to all. It is unchangeable; it is not something that can be altered by the traditions of an individual nation or people.

With hearts filled with tolerance and compassion, church ministers, preachers, workers, and the entire body of believers of the True Jesus Church must have the mind of Christ. They must bear these responsibilities with great conviction and without any racial prejudice. Yet while we may sow and water the seed, it is God who gives the growth.

The entire church has to be unanimous in her understanding and attitude toward nonbelievers. Only then will God guide us to set foot into “gentile” lands, just as He guided Paul, Silas, and Timothy into Macedonia after the Jerusalem Council.

SENDING APPROPRIATE WORKERS

“Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:2).

Initially, the Jerusalem church sent Barnabas to pastor the flock in Antioch. Yet the Holy Spirit revealed that he was to accompany Paul, prepared by God to be the “apostle to the Gentiles,” on Paul’s first missionary journey. Silas, a leader and a prophet in the Jerusalem church, was also chosen by God to accompany Paul on his second missionary journey. Even though the work of preaching to all peoples started from Antioch, participating workers came from both Jerusalem and Antioch.

Even more marvelous was the election of Timothy, a young believer of mixed parental heritage, having a Jewish mother and a Greek father. Very likely, he was familiar with the language, culture, and customs of both nationalities. Paul chose him at a time when Paul himself didn’t even realize that the path of evangelism would take him to Macedonia.

The entire church has to be unanimous in her understanding and attitude toward nonbelievers. Only then will God guide us to set foot into “gentile” lands.

But the direction of evangelism rests in the hands of God. He chose Timothy in order to prepare him for the

future direction of the church, just as He guided the early workers’ footsteps in their pioneering journeys to gentile lands. Timothy used his gifts and carried out his responsibilities in gentile churches like Thessalonica and Corinth (1 Thess 3:1-10; 1 Cor 16:10-11).

FORMATION OF EVANGELISM GROUPS

Using the apostolic church as a model, the True Jesus Church can establish some principles for sending workers to undertake pioneering work today. In evangelistic work our target is global, and the work is continuous. It requires concerted efforts in terms of manpower and financial support. It is not something that can be accomplished through the labors of just a few preachers.

To promote the pioneering work, IA workers together with GA workers gifted in evangelism should form evangelistic groups designated for specific areas, i.e., each GA can select from among her own preachers and church workers those who are fervent and gifted in evangelizing to form an evangelistic group. Ministers from IA would then work together with each of these groups to plan and carry out the pioneering and pastoral work of the respective regions.

The IA ministers could also concentrate their efforts on the pioneering aspects, and once a church is established in the new area, the respective GA or Coordination Board can provide the long-term and continuous pastoring care needed until this new congregation becomes rooted in faith.

In the church’s current global evangelistic efforts, the GAs and Coordination Boards responsible for pioneering areas are as follows:

- ◆ Australia and New Zealand Coordination Board: Pacific region
- ◆ Continental Europe Evangelical Group: Russia, Eastern European countries, Africa.
- ◆ Malaysia/Singapore GA: India (also assisting Southeast Asia)
- ◆ Sabah GA: The Philippines (also assisting Southeast Asia)
- ◆ Taiwan GA: East Asia, Thailand
- ◆ United Kingdom GA: Africa, parts of Europe
- ◆ United States GA: Central and South America (also assisting Africa)
- ◆ IA preachers: all areas, including Vietnam and Myanmar

TRAINING AND CULTIVATING YOUNG WORKERS

Timothy was chosen for the ministry to the Gentiles. Mark continued with Barnabas in the work of evangelism. They subsequently became important workers in the early church.

When we look at the True Jesus Church today, we can see that God has also prepared many youths for the work of His church. He has guided them to receive education and language training in various countries, and He has exposed them to many different cultures. Our youths today should have multiple channels to participate in global evangelism. Just as Paul took Timothy as an assistant in holy work, so the IA and GAs should encourage youths to assist preachers in pastoring believers and to help in religious education in the newly established areas.

In motivating and counseling young workers, we should adopt a more positive mode of active invitation and encouragement. Even though Mark was weak at one stage, Barnabas insisted on inviting him to join in the work. As a result, a valuable future worker was strengthened. Thus, in the course of the youths' participation, we have to actively help them to overcome their difficulties. For example, each GA and local church can assist them with expenses to cover their volunteering services.

RESIDENT PREACHERS

"Paul continued there [Corinth] a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them" (Acts 18:11).

The work of preaching the gospel and saving souls does not consist only of evangelizing and

baptizing. We must progress from preaching the gospel to leading truthseekers to repent, believe in the Lord, accept water baptism, receive the Holy Spirit, keep the Word, be sanctified, and serve God until they complete their journey in this life and obtain salvation. Short-term and intermittent evangelism and pastoral work cannot achieve in-depth guidance and cultivation. Thus, even though there are converts in newly pioneered areas and churches are established there, they are not able to take root, strengthen, and grow in terms of the truth, faith, and organization.

We desperately need to rethink our current strategies for sending workers to pioneering areas. The IA's "Overseas Missionary Training" program is for the purpose of cultivating preachers who can then be stationed in pioneering areas on a long-term basis. Only when preachers live among believers for a prolonged period of time can they understand the problems that believers face in their faith and daily lives, and thereby provide appropriate counseling and biblical knowledge. With long-term pastoral care, the preachers can systematically establish the foundation of the church and the faith of believers.

Currently, the GAs of each country may not

Short-term and intermittent evangelism and pastoral work cannot achieve in-depth guidance and cultivation.

be able to send resident workers to the pioneering areas under their care. But if preachers belonging to the evangelistic group of the GA

can be sent on a rotating basis and stay for two to three months each time to pastor believers, the newly established churches will be greatly stabilized. The growth of the churches in India, through the support and assistance of the Malaysia/Singapore GA, shows the effectiveness of such a program.

CHOOSING AND UTILIZING LOCAL WORKERS

"[Paul] sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church..." (Acts 20:17).

Paul was convinced that chains and tribulation awaited him in Jerusalem, and he knew that he would not see the believers in Ephesus again. Knowing that he needed to entrust the holy work to others, he met with the elders of the Ephesus church and instructed them, "take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God" (Acts 20:28). Paul considered the elders of the Ephesus church worthy to have work

entrusted to them because “Paul lived in Ephesus for three years, and he did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears” (Acts 20:31).

A key indicator of the stability of a newly established church is whether the local committee members have strong faith and serve the Lord faithfully. Such workers can only be fostered through long-term observation, cultivation, and training by preachers. Presently in the True Jesus Church, the ordination of preachers, elders, and deacons requires three to five years of religious training. This method is suitable for established churches with a long history, but it limits the number of workers available for new areas.

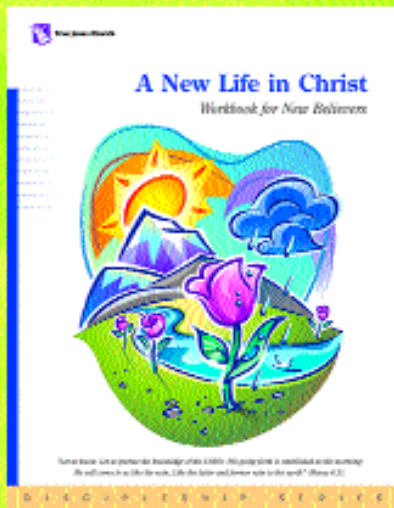
Establishing sufficient numbers of workers in new areas requires different methods. First, they need to be observed and fully trained by IA preachers or the responsible GA, but at the same time, they need to be utilized to assist in the local

holy work within a short timeframe. The method adopted by the East Asia churches is the “ordination of divine work,” rather than the “ordination of divine office.” This is a good strategy for the immediate use of local workers in new areas.

In promoting the divine work of spreading the gospel throughout the world, we need to establish a solid foundation and progress steadily toward our goal. When new challenges arise, we must be flexible and adaptable in order to meet them. Yet we should always remember to rely on God: “Except that the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it” (Ps 127:1). Although there are many geographical and cultural barriers to overcome, through our concrete efforts and our prayers we can be sure that the glorious body of Christ will be completely established, accomplishing the Lord’s will soon. ☆

HOT OFF THE PRESS

New publications for your spiritual cultivation



A NEW LIFE IN CHRIST: Workbook for New Believers

Are you a new believer in Christ? Now that you have accepted the Lord Jesus and have been baptized into His name, what should you do next? *A New Life in Christ* helps you begin your Christian walk. Through short essays, questions, case studies, and activities, the workbook helps you build a relationship with Christ, overcome obstacles through Him, and ultimately live for Him.



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Q&A on the BASIC BELIEFS

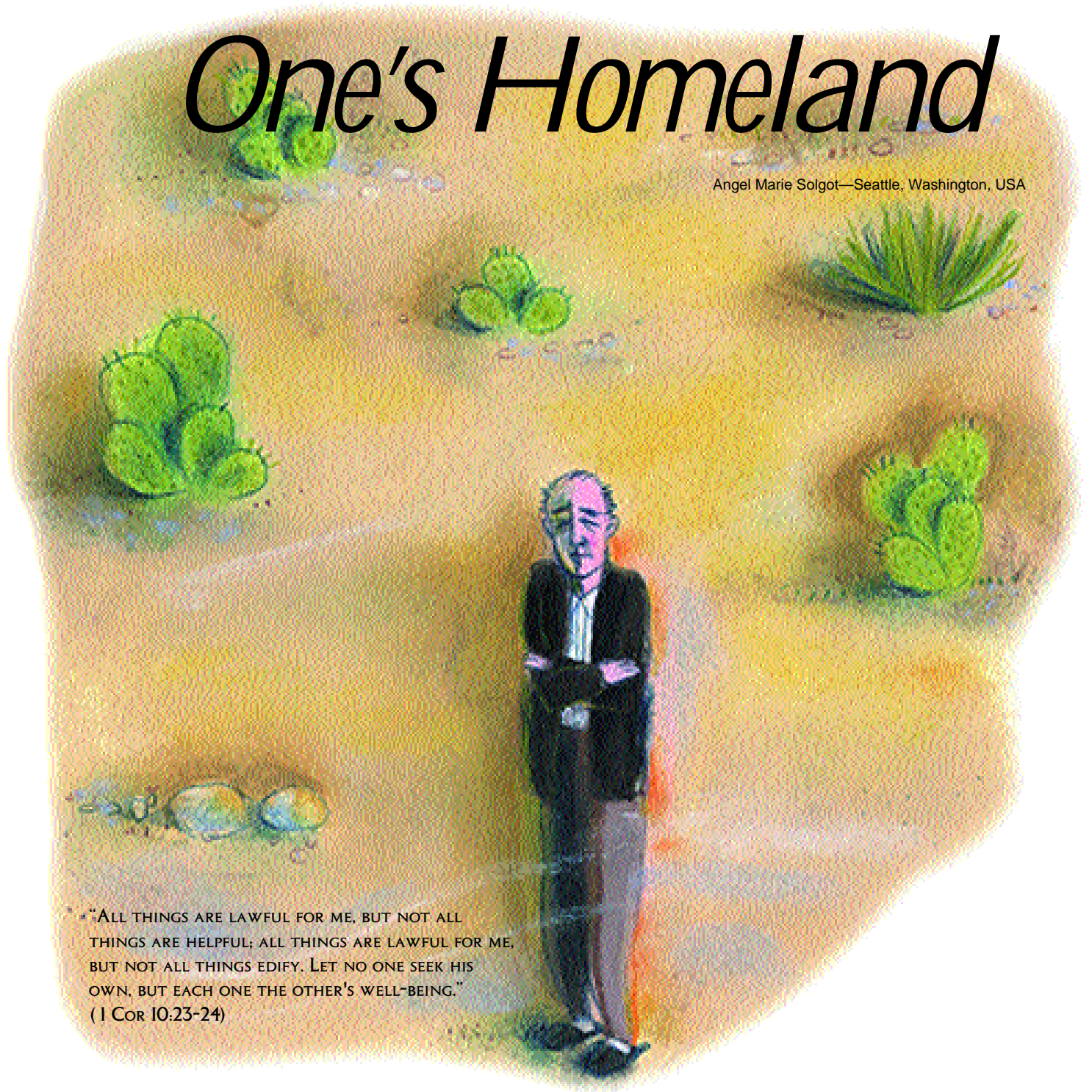
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A Stranger in One's Homeland

Angel Marie Solgot—Seattle, Washington, USA



“ALL THINGS ARE LAWFUL FOR ME, BUT NOT ALL THINGS ARE HELPFUL; ALL THINGS ARE LAWFUL FOR ME, BUT NOT ALL THINGS EDIFY. LET NO ONE SEEK HIS OWN, BUT EACH ONE THE OTHER'S WELL-BEING.”
(1 COR 10:23-24)

FOR A MOMENT, IMAGINE A COUNTRY AND PEOPLE VERY DIFFERENT FROM YOUR OWN. TO MAKE THIS A REALLY EFFECTIVE AND MEANINGFUL EXERCISE, MAKE SURE THIS COUNTRY YOU'RE THINKING OF IS ONE WITH A LANGUAGE COMPLETELY DIFFERENT FROM THE LANGUAGE YOU SPEAK.

THINK OF THE OUTER APPEARANCES OF THE PEOPLE. HOW ARE THEIR HAIR, SKIN, AND EYE COLOR DIFFERENT FROM YOURS? NOW, WHAT KINDS OF TRADITIONS AND VALUES DO THEY HAVE? ARE YOU KNOWLEDGEABLE OF THE STORIES BEHIND THESE TRADITIONS? DO THEY CELEBRATE THE HOLIDAYS AND EVENTS YOU'VE ALWAYS GROWN UP WITH? AND ARE THE VALUES THE PEOPLE HOLD IN THIS COUNTRY LIKE THE VALUES YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN TAUGHT?

Consider the foods that are eaten here. Are they similar to the foods you enjoy in your own homeland? Probably not, right? Now, if you were in a crowded marketplace with a hundred of these people all speaking in their own language to each other—almost oblivious to your presence and the fact that you cannot understand what they are saying—how would this make you feel? Lonely? Detached? Maybe inferior in some ways?

Finally, imagine having to live in this land for the rest of your earthly life. You have no choice in this matter. It's been designated as your new home. Do you miss your homeland already?

CHRISTIANS IN A FOREIGN LAND

Believe it or not, many believers in Christ—and, sadly, seekers of Christ—experience this homesickness every single time they enter the doors of some churches to honor the Sabbath and our Lord.

These Christians attend churches where the languages, physical appearances, traditions, values, and even foods served are so very different from what they've grown up with and become accustomed to. They feel almost like second-class citizens in a place where all citizens are supposed to be considered equal. They know they must attend the services at these churches, but, quite honestly, they never truly feel comfortable and at-home. They live like strangers in their own homes.

Some stay in the churches because of their commitment to the Lord's commandments, but they never quite feel accepted and united with the brothers and sisters in the church. Others come once or twice but are frightened away pretty quickly by a very unsettling culture shock. And when they never return for another visit, or seem reluctant to join in the church fellowships or serv-

ices, we simply tell each other that these visitors were just not willing to accept the truth or commit to Christ.

But is it really true that they don't attend church simply because they don't accept the doctrines? Can we honestly say that they don't come to church because they don't want to follow Christ? In full sincerity, we must admit that there is a very strong chance that we've allowed our own worldly traditions and cultural ideals to become almost obstacles to a person's faith in Christ and His church. Haven't we, in fact, made it really hard for others to feel like they belong to Christ's church?

PAUL'S EXAMPLE

These are questions we really have to consider, especially since we've been instructed by our Lord Jesus Christ to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19).

When we look at the teachings of the Apostle Paul, we see that he wrestled with these very same issues long ago, when he was given the mission to preach to the Jews as well as the Gentiles in many lands. In various letters to believers, Paul wrote about destroying barriers through the bond of Christ. He also wrote about how he made himself almost chameleon-like to win souls of different ethnicities, and he wrote about seeking the good of others.

Through the study of the following Bible passages, we'll explore exactly how the Apostle Paul was able to break through the ethnic barriers that so strongly weighed down the Jewish and gentile Christians. And, through this study, perhaps we can link the efforts he made years ago to efforts we can try to make today, so that all of our churches may become homes to all nations and races and souls.



No Longer Foreigners and Aliens, but Fellow Citizens

As humans, we all need to feel a sense of belonging. The Apostle Paul even tells us that we should all feel united through Christ, and that there should no longer be a separation between brothers and sisters of different ethnic groups. Paul writes:

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ... And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Eph 2:11-13, 17-22)

Paul's Example of Sacrifice

Paul understood that in God's eyes we are all created equal, and that no single race or culture is above another. He was able to love all souls, and because of this strong love and compassion, Paul strove to fight prejudices and ideas of ethnic superiority. He had the perfect combination of holding a deep love for God and a true love for mankind. He wanted everyone to know about our wonderful and merciful Lord Jesus Christ, and he gave up his

life to help all people find and stay on the path to eternal salvation.

In order to save so many souls, Paul understood that it would take uncomfortable and very dangerous sacrifices to carry out his mission. Just what types of sacrifices did he end up making? Well, we all know about his beatings, persecutions, jailings, and stonings. Those were all huge and noticeably significant situations that took place in his life quite often.

It's amazing that Paul chose to bear those terrifying and horrible loads for the sake of Christ's call. Just as amazing, though, were the small things that Paul did to find ways to reach out to all of God's people. Take a look at the following passage, and you'll see the touching detail Paul put into making sure all nationalities had the best opportunities to hear the message of Jesus Christ and to commit to a life for Him:

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my own body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (1 Cor 9:19-27)

SO THEN, JUST HOW DO WE APPLY PAUL'S EXAMPLE TO OUR OWN SPIRITUAL LIVES? AND WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO MAKE OUR CHURCH A HOME TO ALL NATIONS AND PEOPLES?

A SEAMLESS QUILT OF ETHNICITIES

So then, just how do we apply Paul's example to our own spiritual lives? And what will it take to make our church a home to all nations and peoples?

First, we must truly understand that if we are to be united as one in Christ, we must strive to stitch our backgrounds and cultures together almost seamlessly. We must look to the Apostle Paul—the zealous preacher to both the Jews and Gentiles—to provide us with examples of just how this union of ethnic groups in Christ can be achieved.

Let's take that last passage from the Bible and see if we can somehow translate it to today's situation (I do realize that this is a very, very loose translation, but bear with me, because it just may lead to something):

Though we, as a church, are predominantly Chinese, and really don't have to hide our ethnicity or our values and traditions, we must somehow find ways to blend into the lives of all non-Chinese truthseekers, and brothers and sisters in Christ, in order to make them feel more connected to our church and the Christ we share.

To Caucasians, we become like Caucasians (even making conscious efforts to serve their foods and speak their languages), in order to make it easier for them to come to our church and hear the message of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To the Latin or Hispanic heirs of Christ's salvation, we become like our Latin or Hispanic friends (even serving yellow rice and black beans, learning a few phrases in their languages, and appreciating their love for various forms of dance), in order to win those souls to Christ.

To those brothers and sisters, or friends of ours, of African decent, we make ourselves like those of African decent (understanding and respecting their histories and cultural traditions), in order to connect with them and offer them a comfortable church to attend and worship our one Lord and Savior.

We, as the True Jesus Church, become all things to all men so that by all possible means

we might save some. We do all this for the sake of the gospel, that we may share in its blessings.

We know that in a race all the teams run, but only one team gets the prize. That is why we run in such a way as to get the prize of souls saved for Christ. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training—just as we train ourselves to give up our own comforts of speaking our native language and eating our favorite kinds of Chinese foods.

Runners do this to get a crown that will not last; but we, as Christians, do this to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, we do not run like men running aimlessly; we don't fight like Christians beating the air. No, we beat our bodies—our cultures and traditions—to make them slaves, so that after we have preached to others, we, as members of the True Jesus Church, will not be disqualified for the prize.

LOVE—THE SIMPLE ANSWER

Now, that wasn't too much of a stretch, was it? Probably not, if we seriously think about it. The bottom line is that we must learn to sacrifice our own comforts and identities in order to reach out to souls in search of Christ. We cannot sit back and relax with only those of our own ethnic groups. We can no longer allow Christians of other races, nations, or cultures to leave our churches feeling such a strong sense of being different or excluded.

Since we know we have the true gospel of Christ, we must take that truth to other nations and peoples—this is what our Lord Jesus Christ has commanded of us. In order to reach as many nations and individuals as possible, and to make their conversions to Christ as easy as possible, we must eliminate as many obstacles to their faith as possible. We must find ways to blend our separate traditions, languages, and cultures together as smoothly and unnoticeably as possible.

All it takes is true and active love. If we strive to imitate our Savior by following his actions of sacrificial love, we will draw many, many peoples and nations to eternal life. ☆



The MULTICULTURAL ESSENCE *Of* THE CHURCH

KC Tsai—Toronto, Ontario, CANADA

The Lord Jesus proclaimed that He is the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through Him (Jn 14:6).

A pathway points to a direction and leads to a destination. Jesus is the only pathway between all people and their heavenly home.

After Jacob departed from his father's land, he came to a place that he later called Bethel. There, he slept in the wilderness and had a dream. He saw a ladder that was set on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven. Angels of God ascended and descended on this bridge between heaven and earth (Gen 28:12). Jesus, as many believe, was referring to Jacob's dream when He said to His disciples, "You shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." (Jn 1:51).

Jacob's dream and Jesus' words illustrate the same idea: just as the angels of God ascended and descended on the ladder of Jacob, they would ascend and descend on the body of Christ. Jacob called this place the house of God, the gate of heaven (Gen 28:17).

Today, the church is the body of Christ—the fullness of Him, who fills all in all (Eph 4:11-13). Christ is head of the church and Savior of the body (Eph 5:23), and the church is one with Him (Eph 5:31). God chose His church in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4). This church includes the ancient saints who were called

back at the end of their individual journeys of faith, as well as we who live today under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. On the last day, this true church of salvation will be lifted up and will enjoy eternal glory with God. The church, the body of Christ, is comprised of members from every corner of the world.

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith—to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. (Rom 16:25-26)

It is God's plan that through His church and the teachings of the Scriptures, people of all nations will

come to believe and obey the truth. God's salvation does not exclude anyone.

Throughout the generations, God's promises and declarations have continually demonstrated His unyielding plan: that through His promise to Abraham, the messages of the Old Testament prophets, Jesus' command to His disciples, and the revelation of the Holy Spirit in the epistles, God's salvation transcends cultural boundaries.

In its evangelical planning, the church must seek to eliminate cultural barriers, so that those who seek God will not encounter any impediments caused by the negligence of the church administration.

GOD'S PROMISE TO ABRAHAM

"In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3).

It was credited to Abraham as righteousness because he "believed in the LORD" (Gen 15:6). In the same way, God will have mercy on those who believe in Him (Gal 3:9).

God called Abraham out of his country, away from his kindred and his father's house, and blessed him. God established a covenant between Himself and Abraham. He wanted to be God to him and his descendents, and He promised that all people of the earth will be blessed in him. Abraham lived a nomadic life. God did not give him any earthly inheritance, not even a place to set his foot upon (Acts 7:5). The only plot of land that Abraham owned was the burial ground, which he had bought from the Hittites, for him and his wife.

Nevertheless, Abraham believed that he had been granted what God had promised him, and so those promises did not fail. God is not ashamed to be called Abraham's God, because Abraham received through faith the inheritance that he did not see with his fleshly eyes. He died completely without regret, because God was worthy of his faith and had already prepared everything according to His promise (Heb 11:16).

Abraham's blessing was to be justified by God—a blessing that surpasses all worldly blessings. The Lord Jesus Christ, who is God manifested in the flesh, was crucified and shed His precious blood so that people of faith from all nations might be saved. Those who believe in the saving power of His blood, receive water baptism for the remission of sins, and enter the true church of salvation will also inherit Abraham's blessing—to be righteous in the sight of God. They will be called the children of Abraham, because they carry on the same faith. They too will receive justification by faith, the blessing that God promised to all nations through Abraham's act of believing (Gal 3:6-9).

God's covenant with Abraham shows that the church of salvation is available to anyone who has faith—regardless of race.

ISAIAH'S PROPHECY

*Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
That the mountain of the LORD's house
Shall be established on the top
of the mountains,
And shall be exalted above the hills;
And all nations shall flow to it.
Many people shall come and say,
"Come, and let us go up to the
mountain of the LORD,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
He will teach us His ways,
And we shall walk in His paths."
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.
(Isa 2:2-3)*

Isaiah foretold that in the last days God would lift up His church and gather to Himself people of all nations who are called by His name (Isa 43:5-7). Isaiah also prophesied that the church would "arise and shine." The spirit of God will be given to His church and to those who repent and believe, and He will enrich their lives with His words. When the glory of the Lord arises, nations and people from afar will come to His light, and together they will praise and worship the Lord (Isa 60:1-3).

The chosen people will come from various corners of the world. The same Spirit of God will call each of them to receive His revelation and guidance, to love His teachings, to be baptized under the witness of the Holy Spirit, and to enter the church with the abidance of the Holy Spirit and the truth (Eph 4:4).

There is only one church of salvation, and this church must reach even to the most remote rural villages, like

those in China and in the deep jungles of Africa and South America. Although the members in these areas might use different languages and come from different cultures, they are truly brothers and sisters—as well as the children of God.

JESUS' COMMISSION

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Mt 28:19).

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15).

"You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Before the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven, He instructed His disciples to go into the world and proclaim the truth to all nations, making them His disciples. He commanded them to preach the gospel to every creature and to witness His name to the ends of the earth.

Although these commands were fresh in his mind, Peter was still perplexed when he saw the three visions instructing him to kill the unclean animals and eat. When

THE CHOSEN PEOPLE WILL COME FROM VARIOUS CORNERS OF THE WORLD. THE SAME SPIRIT OF GOD WILL CALL EACH OF THEM TO RECEIVE HIS REVELATION AND GUIDANCE.

the Holy Spirit sent him to the house of Cornelius, a non-Jew, Peter wondered what he could do for this Italian household, which he thought had no part in salvation (Acts 10:21). According to his understanding, the majority of people, being non-Jews, did not fall within the scope of salvation.

Today, how well does the True Church understand the commission of Jesus? How much acceptance and appreciation do we have of other cultures? Are we interested in reaching out to them? What is our vision and understanding of the scale of the church?

Most of the members in the U.S. are only aware of and concerned for the U.S. churches. Likewise, members in India probably know only the Indian churches. We might be aware of brothers and sisters in other areas, but meeting with them often does not satisfy our expectations and instead increases the feelings of foreignness.

The multicultural essence of the church demands all members to develop a concern for brethren far away whom they might never meet. Whether they are worshipping in a remote village on the other side of the world or right next to you in the chapel, they are your brothers and sisters, in the same family. To realize and exercise such a brotherhood is something we all need to learn. No one is superior or inferior to anyone else, because we are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). Our attitude should be the same as His.

Worship services, fellowships, and meals in the church should be conducted in a way that allows people of different races to integrate easily. If at any time a member or truthseeker from a different culture were to join the worship service, he should feel the warmth and ease of home. Jesus' commission to "make disciples of all nations," and Paul's exhortation that we are "no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 3:19), should permeate church activities.

PAUL'S EVANGELISM PHILOSOPHY

"Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name" (Rom 1:5).

"...the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister" (Col 1:23).

"That I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9:22)—this was Paul's philosophy toward evangelism. "By all means" encompasses Paul's willingness to be a man under the law in order to save those under the law. Although he argued against the necessity of circumcision, he circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3). Paul was willing to become weak in order to win the weak. He did this so that people of all different mindsets and backgrounds could receive the gospel.

In order to win a person's soul, we must try to understand his situation and see things from his perspective. A person encountering our church for the first time will notice a rather strong cultural overtone. Yet God established this church for all nations of the world, for all peoples. The cultural majority in the local church should endeavor to remove any cultural obstacles.

At the same time, we should try to understand that it takes time for people of different cultures to love and accept one another and to live together. Such closeness is a gradual process that develops according to the Lord Jesus' time and through His guidance, and it should not be rushed.

The most important thing is to recognize that the church preaches the absolute truth. With this in mind, we can face these cultural issues with an open heart.

REVISITING THE TOWER OF BABEL

Human beings lost their common language during the construction of the Tower of Babel. Today, if the church wishes to restore harmony between the different cultures, we must reexamine the reason why God confused human speech in the first place.

The people of that time wanted to build a city with a tower that reached to the heavens in order to make a name for themselves. Because of this, God disciplined them. The loss of common language was the direct result of human pride. Due to their humanistic thoughts and their lack of sincere fear toward God, humans not only lost favor in the sight of God, but they also lost harmony with each other.

During the early apostolic times, some members complained because they felt that the church was

neglecting their needs and disregarding their "rights" (Acts 6:1). In actuality, the church was focused on preaching the word of God and did not deliberately ignore them. If these members were to fix their eyes on the Lord, they would have seen the gospel being preached everywhere. They would have tried to find where in the mission they could fit in, rather than looking out only for their own interests.

We are chosen by God because of His mercy and grace, not because we are worthy. If we could humble ourselves, take on the heart of the Lord, and lift up the name of Christ, we would not think of only our own "rights," but of the mission of the church.

After all, this church is the only "ladder on the earth" with "its top reaching to heaven." It is the house of God and the gate of heaven, which "has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to faith."

This is the very mystery which has been kept hidden from ages and from generations, but has now been revealed to His saints (Col 1:26). ★

TODAY, HOW WELL DOES THE TRUE CHURCH UNDERSTAND THE COMMISSION OF JESUS?

A MULTIETHNIC CHURCH: *Is It Really Possible?*

Jesus Christ gave His disciples two great commissions before ascending into heaven: to care for His church and to preach the gospel to all nations (Mt 28:19; Lk 24:47). This was a command to the first Christians, and similarly it is a command to us today. Because it is a command, we have assurance that we can succeed in this mission.

The unity of cultures corresponds to the Lord's will (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11; Is 11:6-9) and should not pose an obstacle for the church today. Harmony between members despite differences of culture shows that we are united by the power of the Holy Spirit, the one faith, and the will of God. We should try our best to carry out this mission so that all peoples can see our union of love, peace, and joy.

SPG—Paris, FRANCE

ADDRESSING MULTICULTURAL ISSUES

Many problems arose when the church in Jerusalem, which comprised primarily Jewish members, began to include Gentiles. There were theological problems (i.e., should Gentiles be circumcised?), cultural differences (i.e., should women be veiled?), and no doubt communication issues (i.e., which language should sermons be delivered in or translated into?).

Today, some people think that the solution to multicultural issues in the church is to separate the cultures, but that would be a serious mistake. First, this is not the example set by the apostolic church. Second, the multiethnic church is proof that unity comes from our faith and from the Holy Spirit. If other churches fail, we the True Jesus Church can suc-

ceed because we are the only church united by the one true faith and the Holy Spirit.

Although it is the will of God for all nations to be unified in His church, the task is not necessarily an easy one. It requires a good understanding of God's will and a lot of effort from the believers.

THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH AND THE TRUE JESUS CHURCH

When the Holy Spirit first descended on the Jewish believers in Jerusalem during the apostolic period, they began spreading the good news. Their mission was to preach the message of salvation to all corners of the earth—which in their minds stopped at Spain!

Members of the early church in Jerusalem were in no hurry to preach the gospel “in all Judea and

Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” They were too busy managing the daily growth of the church. The believers were rejoicing under the blessing of the Lord and led abundant Christian lives full of sincerity, joy, and harmony. It was only when persecution arose that the church started to expand.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit descended at the beginning of this century as the latter rain, fulfilling Old Testament prophecies. Jesus Christ has chosen the True Jesus Church, which originated from China, to spread the true and complete plan of salvation to all nations.¹

Like the early church, the True Jesus Church is heavily involved in caring for local churches. The majority of preachers spend their time and energy pastoring members rather than spreading the Word. Like the early Jewish Christians who preached to their fellow Jews, the majority of the Chinese members preach to other Chinese simply because it is easier and more natural.

HOPE OF THE NEW GENERATION

Despite this situation, the gospel has begun to spread to all continents due to immigration and occasionally to missionary work.

Unfortunately, though, most of the churches comprised of Asian immigrants have been unable to “open up” to all cultures—particularly to the local population. Generally, the True Jesus Church has spread to different countries without really integrating with the local people or accepting the local customs. It is therefore difficult for the only church of God, chosen by His Spirit, to accomplish the plan of salvation for all nations.

Today, we are at the beginning of a new phase. The second-generation immigrants have integrated with the local culture and speak the native language. Perhaps God will work with the second-generation immigrants to bring new believers from all nations into the church. Furthermore, overseas missionary training programs are now in progress to complete the mission that the Lord has entrusted to us.

Most churches established by immigrants face similar problems—they are involved in pioneer work without the benefit of prior experience that other local churches enjoy. But due to God’s grace and members’ efforts, the church has successfully begun to open up to non-Asians, thereby concretely carrying out God’s mission.

THE PARIS CHURCH

An Example of a Multiethnic Church Today

The True Jesus Church in Paris is one of the churches whose multiethnic congregation enjoys unity through our faith and through the Holy Spirit. The Paris church has a congregation of about sixty members who attend services regularly. These believers are from Cambodia, France, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Korea, Laos, Reunion Island, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

Though the majority are Asians, they neither speak the same language nor share the same culture. About 20% of the Paris members are Caucasian—the highest percentage of any local True Jesus Church. By the grace of the Lord, none of the native French members have left the church.

Background of France

France is traditionally a Catholic country. However, the majority of the French do not read the Bible and do not believe that it is the Word of the living God. Generally, people go to church for baptisms, marriages, and funerals; some attend midnight mass on December 24th. In French history, the church was responsible for much bloodshed. Unable to overlook the past, most French reject Christianity and consequently reject Jesus.

French philosophers like Descartes spread the humanistic view that people are intelligent enough to detect God’s presence; and since they cannot prove it, therefore God does not exist. This concept led most French to become atheists. There are also some French who, having been disappointed by Christianity and rationalism, have turned to Buddhism.

These confused circumstances make it difficult for the True Jesus Church to preach the gospel in France, but if we keep our eyes on our almighty God, we need not be discouraged.

A Church for All People

When the Paris church was first established, members were conscious of the difficulties of preaching in the western hemisphere and were prepared to integrate. They wanted

others to know that this is the Church of God—not a “Chinese church.”

Some of our church buildings in western countries display the name “True Jesus Church” only in Chinese. This reinforces the popular notion that the Chinese tend to congregate and to re-create their native environment wherever they go. The non-Asians who pass by take no notice at all because they think it is a Chinese church—not a place where they belong.

Although in Paris the majority of the mem-

bers are Chinese, the name of the church is displayed in French. This shows nonmembers that this is a church for all people, not just for the Chinese community.

Bridging the Gap

When you come to the Paris church, you often feel touched by the love and kindness of the members who approach you with slightly broken French, trying their best to make you feel at ease. You also hear everybody singing hymns in French, except on rare occasions when there are visitors from abroad.

Realizing that it is hard for people to be touched by hymns in a foreign language, the Paris church worked hard to produce a French hymnbook. The members learned to sing in French in order to evangelize to the native population. The Chinese members put aside their Chinese hymnbooks to sing in a language they barely understood, practicing each hymn and learning the meaning of the words.

For the native French members, this was a tremendous blessing. It showed the members’ spiritual growth and their love for those who have not heard the Truth. These acts, which reach out to people of other cultures, are a kind of holy work that should not be overlooked. Today, the Asian members have improved their French through sermon translations

(from Mandarin to French) and by communicating with the native French believers.

Celebration of Brotherly Love

Last year, the Paris church made further progress by holding the annual New Year’s meal on the French New Year rather than the Chinese (lunar) New Year. During this celebration, one Chinese mother cooked a French dish for the members who preferred

For the majority of the Paris members, there is no such thing as “Chinese” or “French,” because we are all one in Christ Jesus!

French cuisine, and a French mother cooked a Chinese dish for her Asian brothers and sisters! The food is not the issue here; it is that these acts of thoughtfulness show brotherly love and kindness.

Through the grace of God, this is the spirit of the Paris church today. We still have a long way to go, but for the majority of the Paris members, there is no such thing as “Chinese” or “French,” because we are all one in Christ Jesus!

UNITY—EVERYONE’S RESPONSIBILITY

In the True Jesus Church it is possible for all cultures to come together in Jesus, and this quality shows the world that we are the only church of the last days. But this is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit, which is manifested by a concrete willingness to love God and to love men.

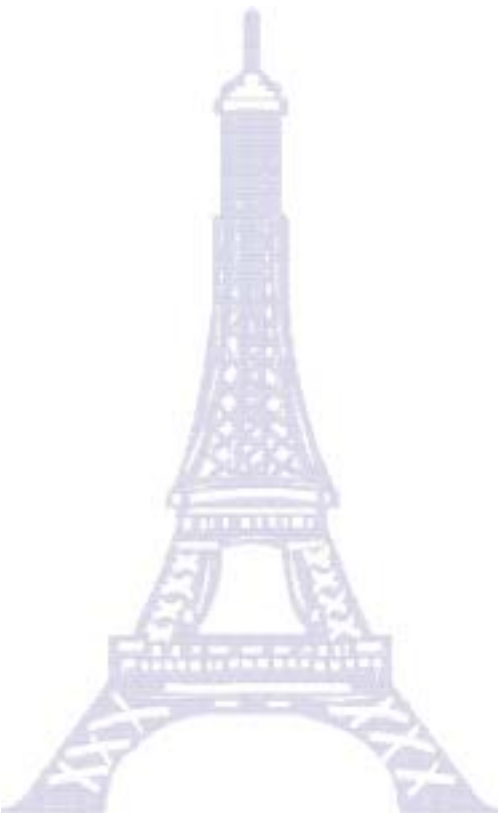
Paul said that he was free from all men, but he became a servant to all so that he would not be an obstacle for the spread of the gospel. He became all things to all men so that he might by all means save some (1 Cor 9:19ff). Of course, Paul did so within the bounds of the gospel.

Paul’s attitude reminds us to try our utmost to become a Kenyan in Kenya, a Canadian in Canada, a German in Germany, and a Cambodian in Cambodia—out of

love, out of duty, and to have a part in the blessing of the gospel (1 Cor 9:23).

The Paris church still needs to improve in many areas, and it should not be seen as the ideal church. Through its example, however, we can see that cultural unity requires everyone’s effort. Although it is the will and command of God, there are many things we must do to achieve it. May God help us as we encourage one another to accomplish His will and to preach to all nations. Amen! ☆

I During the apostolic times in the “winter” after the “fall rain,” heresies began to invade the church and the gospel of salvation became corrupted (Deut 11:14; Jer 5:24; Joel 2:23; Zech 10:1; Jas 5:7). According to Scripture, God would establish a second church during the “spring rain,” before His coming in the summer. This last and glorious church would come from the East (Ezek 43:2; Mt 24:27; Rev 7:2).



WHAT DO YOU SEE?

JNT—San Jose, California, USA

I like looking at people. There are all kinds of good places to do this—at the airport, on a train, from a shop window...

Sometimes I'll look at a young child and think, what will this boy look like when he's an old man? I can almost see that ancient face amid childhood's bloom. Other times, I look at the old. Their faces are often so tired and sad. But if I look closely—in their eyes, the curves and planes of their bones—I can sometimes see the faces of kings and queens. Or again, walking through a sea of faces on a city street, I have the overpowering feeling that I am about to see someone I know, even though I may be ten thousand miles from home. So what am I supposed to glean from these imaginings, these premonitions, these almost-visions? Are these remnants of an Edenic familiarity that I am called to act upon?

Nowadays such occasions are rare. Mostly, I simply see what I want to see in other people. It's too tiring to try to see more. The labels, categories, and boxes that we put people in, if rarely true, are at least useful in one respect: to insulate us from each other and to make the world more manageable. But this insulation is not always a good thing. As I get older, I feel that I am growing gradually harder and tougher inside. I have learned to fashion impassable barricades with the raw materials of past experience, prejudice, and fear.

The Bible, as it so often does, teaches differently. From reading the Word of God, it seems that we were meant to follow a *reversed* developmental process in one important respect: that we become ever more open, ever more innocent of the evil of hardened hearts. "Though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day," Paul says (2 Cor 4:16). We must become like little children to enter the kingdom of God (Mt 18:3).

Let's also look at the case of Peter (Acts 10). Here was a man who thought that the gospel would never move outside of the Jewish circles he knew. But miraculously, with the urging (nay, prodding) of God, Peter finally took the plunge and traveled to Caesarea to preach Jesus Christ to a Gentile, to someone whom he could previously envision only as something akin to a reptile, a cloven-hoofed animal, or any number of other bestial symbols of ritual uncleanness.

But when Peter got to Caesarea, a most wonderful thing happened. God's Spirit, the same Spirit that moved within Peter, descended upon Cornelius. In wonder, Peter exclaimed, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" On that day Peter's life changed, for it was on that day that he met his brother in Cornelius.

In the eighties film *Wings of Desire*, angels are sent down to earth to watch over the planet's sad inhabitants. These invisible messengers hear the silent stories of humans, comforting and holding them in invisible arms as they cry. We may wonder: Is it only angels who can possess this kind of vision? What would I have to do to see the person in front of me truly, not as a construct of demography but as a child of God?

No, we do not have to be angels. For the story of Peter gives us a very clear message. If we are prayerful, if we are attentive to the cues, large and small, that the Lord gives us, we too can change the way we look into the faces of those around us.

Lord, fill us with your love. Give us new eyes to see with. Help us to see your children, our brothers and sisters, all around us. ★

Our Children and Discrimination

Alice Jung—El Monte, California, USA

We see it everywhere: in our government, our workplaces, our schools, our neighborhoods—even in our homes. It's discrimination.





“Discrimination” sounds like such a bad word. We all hate to be discriminated against, and we never think that we ourselves discriminate against others. Generally, we know right away when we are being discriminated against—when others treat us unfairly because of our gender, race, nationality, religion, education, disability, physical appearance, social or economic background, or whatever it is that sets us apart. However, we usually are not aware when we discriminate against others. A single careless word or act can cause a lot of harm to someone, and that is why we need to be careful when we deal with others, regardless of how different they may be from us.

As parents, not only is it important to have a positive attitude toward people who are different from us, but we also have the responsibility to teach our children this important value. Using biblical examples and principles as a guide, this article will discuss how we can help our children deal with discrimination in a positive way.

HELPING OUR CHILDREN DEAL WITH DISCRIMINATION

Most of us have been victims of discrimination at one time or another. Growing up, I felt that others looked down on me because I was shy and did poorly in school. When my family moved to various countries, people would make lewd racial remarks or even physically tease me. I remember the terrible self-pity I carried around inside when people mistreated me, because all I could do was ignore them. Later, as I slowly came to understand myself and the world around me, I found it easier to deal with unpleasant incidents of discrimination.

How should we respond if our children come to us with teary eyes, telling us how others have made fun of them for being different in some way? Our immediate response may be anger at the aggressor, or pity for our beloved children. But what our children need most at that moment is our sympathy and guidance to restore their positive self-image.

Building a Positive Self-Image through Love

There is no way we can prevent our children from encountering discrimination, even in the most controlled environments. But what we can do as parents is help our children develop a positive self-image even before they are exposed to it. First of all, our children need to be convinced that God and their parents love them just as they are. While we make every attempt to mold our children to be more Christ-like, we need to remind them that regardless of how different they may be from others, they are precious to God and to us.

When we help our children develop a positive self-image, it will lessen or eliminate the hurt of discrimination because they will understand that words cannot change who they really are inside. Furthermore, a positive self-image in oneself builds the foundation for a positive attitude about others. People who do not feel loved cannot love others.

How should we respond if our children come to us with teary eyes, telling us how others have made fun of them for being different in some way?

For children who are especially sensitive and are often picked on, we need to be extra sympathetic toward their situation. You can

validate their hurt feelings by telling them, perhaps, your own experiences of being teased. Let them know that while it is natural to feel bad, we should not cocoon ourselves in self-pity. Tell your children how precious they are in many ways, to God and to you. Finally, you may want to rehearse with them what to do if something similar happens to them again.

Avoiding Discriminating against Others

Because children learn about God from what we do more than from what we say, they will expect us to model God's unconditional acceptance. This means that we should always avoid stereotypical labeling or name-calling ourselves, especially toward our own children. We should never underestimate the power of words. If children hear enough of a derogatory label (such as “lazy,” “stupid,” or “dumb”), they will eventually believe it and start to act like the “label.” Labeling only damages children's self-images, and it actually encourages them to continue the same misbehavior. At the same time, it also teaches them that it is okay to label others too.

When our children misbehave in a way that may tempt us to label them, we need first to find out the cause of their misbehavior. An effective way to do this is simply to listen. Very often we can find out a lot about our children just because we're willing to listen. After we better understand why they are behaving in such a way, we can find a more appropriate alternative to correct the misbehavior.

TEACHING OUR CHILDREN TO APPRECIATE EACH OTHER

Genesis 11 tells us that God caused the descendants of Noah to scatter from one place by confusing the common language. Thus, there came about the many races and cultures in the world today.

So how can we help our children appreciate people who may not only look different from us, but also have very distinct cultural traditions? The first step is to help our children focus on our many similarities, rather than our differences.



Everyone has a Soul

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16).

So great was the love of God that He indiscriminately offered His salvation to every living soul who is willing to believe in Him. God cares about our souls first, because that is what will last forever. We should constantly remind ourselves and our children that God loves each and every person’s soul, so we should always do our best to care for another’s soul no matter how different that person may look on the outside. Our God is a God of all the people (Rom 3:29).

Everyone is a Sinner

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” (Rom 3:23).

Help your children understand that despite the differences in ethnic make-up, deep down inside we are all very much alike. For one thing, the Bible tells us that we are all sinners, and we all need God. We may be tempted to stereotype people and make comments like, “People from _____ country are so lazy (or sly, stingy, dangerous, unclean, etc.).”

Just because you may have experienced two bad apples, it doesn’t mean that the whole batch is bad. In each race or culture, there are always some good people and some bad people. No one race is better than another race, because in the eyes of God we are all the same.

Everyone has the Same Basic Needs

“...God causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (Mt 5:45).

All of us have the same basic physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Everyone needs air, water, food, and shelter. Everyone needs human affection and love. And everyone needs Jesus, because all of us will face God’s judgment one day (Rev 14: 6-7; 20:12). Regardless of who we are, God provides all of this freely. People may express their needs and emotions differently, but God understands that those needs are all the same. We should teach our children that, like our Lord Jesus, we too should understand the basic needs of people and try to provide for them when we can.

ENCOURAGING OUR CHILDREN TO LOVE THE UNLOVED

It is easy to notice differences between various races or cultures. However, people within the same race or culture also have many differences among themselves. Unfortunately, people do not always appreciate each other’s differences. There are some differences that people may prize or favor (i.e., being beautiful, wealthy, or

famous), but there are some differences that people may despise (being physically or mentally handicapped, overweight, or too short or too tall).

But Jesus said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” (Mt 9:12). Oftentimes we read about how Jesus was the friend of the “social outcasts” of His time. He had compassion for all of those who came to Him, and He healed those who had diseases. He even touched lepers to make them well (Mt 8: 2-4). Jesus dared to associate with tax collectors and “sinners” because He cared more about their souls than what others said about Him. Jesus saw the need to love those who were unloved.

We should follow His example and teach our children to show the love of Jesus to the unloved of our society. We can do this by helping those who are less fortunate whenever the opportunity arises. For example, we

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can bring our children to visit someone who is in the hospital, volunteer at a homeless shelter, or make it a habit to donate extra belongings to charity organizations. Or it can be as simple as inviting a neglected church member home for dinner. This shows our children that a little bit of concern can go a long way.

Children are such precious gifts from God. We wish we could protect our innocent children from all the evils of this world, but we should never forget that the best protection comes from their Heavenly Father, who loves them even more than we do. The key lies in leading our children to a deep relationship with the mightiest Protector of all. Equip your children with godly principles so that they know the right thing to do. Above all, pray with and for your children, so that God can give them the wisdom to handle any difficulty and to glorify His name. ☆

“Family Altar” is dedicated to providing practical, biblical insight for parents who face the challenge of raising a family in today’s fast-paced and varied society. Please direct comments on this article or questions about parenting to family.altar@tjc.org.



FROM ISAAC & JACOB TO COURTSHIP TODAY:

Dating vs. Matchmaking

Terry Chang—Chicago, Illinois, USA

One topic that has caused countless debates at slumber parties, fellowships, and other gatherings is finding the most correct path to marriage according to the Bible. Almost always, these juicy discussions leave us with many interesting anecdotes and personal testimonials, but few insights into what the Bible actually says on the matter. Since this subject concerns all of us, let's try to find out what the scriptures teach.

The stories of Isaac and Jacob in the Book of Genesis are often used to illustrate the two main paths to marriage, with Isaac representing matchmaking and Jacob representing dating. To some people, Isaac is the epitome of a godly son who showed his perfect faith by submitting to God and allowing his marriage to be arranged, while Jacob is the fleshly one who chased love solely out of his own desires. Conversely, others view Jacob as the father of dating, whose wonderful example encourages us to fall in love with someone we have freely chosen. In this view, Isaac is backward and unromantic.

PUTTING GOD IN THE EQUATION

Contrary to what many people think, the Bible actually does not favor either matchmaking or dating as the only path to marriage. It does not judge either Isaac or Jacob as "better"; instead, it records that both men have a tremendous amount of obedience and faith.

Although Jacob's way is often regarded as being driven by personal preferences alone, in fact Jacob chose his mate according to his parents' specific instructions and God's commandment to marry among His chosen people. When he was living in the land of the Canaanites, Jacob kept himself separate from them. Unlike his brother Esau, who freely chose his wife from among the Gentiles, Jacob refrained from courting any Canaanite woman. He did not begin to look for a wife until his parents instructed him to choose one from among their own people.

Jacob could wait when he needed to and act when instructed to because he was submissive to God's teachings and had unwavering faith in divine providence. Although he

ultimately chose someone on his own, he did so in accordance with God's timing and commandments.

Likewise, Isaac's actions reflected his unquestioning faith, humility, and obedience to God. Without ever having seen Rebecca, Isaac joyfully took her as his wife. He humbly believed that divine providence would be more perfect than his own actions, and so with obedience and faith he accepted the girl brought to him by his servant. And considering the fact that his mother had just passed away, Isaac's act of faith is even more remarkable. In his sadness and loneliness, Isaac did not seek a mate for his own comfort. Instead, the Bible records that he "went out to meditate in the field" (Gen 24:63). Most likely, Isaac meditated often on the Word of God, prayed in his solitude, and quietly waited for God's guidance.

Both Isaac and Jacob put their faith in God's teachings ahead of their own wishes and of external influences. The same principle applies to our own path to marriage today. Although the ways chosen by Isaac and Jacob share certain qualities, they also have different challenges. Whether we find someone on our own and get to know that person through dating, or we begin a relationship through matchmaking, the most important thing is that we follow the examples of both Isaac and Jacob by acting with humility, faith, and obedience to God. Then, like Isaac and Jacob, we too will be rewarded with love, beauty, and perfect companionship in our future marriages.

CHALLENGE OF MATCHMAKING

Waiting

For those who choose to follow the path of matchmaking, the initial waiting period can be a trying one. As time passes, it is easy for even the most faithful to get discouraged. What should they do then? The scriptures encourage us:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:6-7)

Prayers and prayerful meditations helped



to quiet Isaac's bereaved heart and enabled him to entrust his cares unto the Lord. In turn, God provided him with Rebecca, whom he loved and found comfort in after his mother's death (Gen 24:67).

CHALLENGES OF DATING

Holiness

Dating also has its challenges. One of the biggest issues concerns holiness. When we date someone who makes our heart flutter, we would naturally wish to get physically close with that person—to hold hands, kiss, embrace intimately, caress, and, at the extreme, to have sex. But are these activities permissible?

The Bible leaves no room for argument regarding pre-marital sex. However, it

does not directly identify the other acts as sins. In a world that condones sex in any context and at any age, many Christians are confused about whether these activities are innocent expressions of love or just lustful behaviors. It is important to look at what the Bible says about these issues.

From antiquity, God has called his people to be holy (Lev 11:44) and to exercise self-control over lustful desires:

Dating also has its challenges. One of the biggest issues concerns holiness. When we date someone who makes our heart flutter, we would naturally wish to get physically close with that person.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God... For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. (1 Thess 4:3-5, 7)

God requires his believers to behave with complete holiness. Even a slightly lustful act that may be viewed as “romantic” by secular trends goes against God’s commandments. Sure, we could provide countless reasons why any of these “romantic gestures” may be acceptable to God. Perhaps we could boast of ironclad self-control or unshakable faith. But let us keep in mind that we are accountable to God, not to other people. Social norms and rationalizations cannot alter God’s standards.

We need to be completely honest with ourselves and ask whether or not we could kiss, hold hands, and “make out” with someone and then stand before God with a clear conscience. For most of us, once we open ourselves to even small physical gestures of affection, we will begin to think about, desire, and/or engage in more intense, prolonged, and frequent physical acts.

Think about what it would be like to drive a car at eighty miles per hour and then suddenly shift the gear into reverse. It would be just as absurd to think that we could stop our sexual desires after we’ve built them up over

time. Moreover, if we were to become physically intimate with some-

one we’re dating but eventually break up with, in the future could we stand before our spouse without guilt or shame? If we do not consider these questions when we date, our actions may feed on fleshly desires.

The Bible warns against acting without godly forethought:

*Rejoice, O young man, in your youth,
/ And let your heart cheer you in the
days of your youth; / Walk in the*

ways of your heart, / And in the sight of your eyes; / But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment. (Eccl 11:9)

Therefore, if we choose to date, we need to be completely honest with ourselves and decide ahead of time how we can stay holy. We may find that the only safe solution is not to engage in even the slightest physical gestures of affection.

Timing

Another big challenge in dating is timing. Jacob began to date only after he had reached a marriageable age and had received clear instructions from his parents. This is in agreement with God's teachings. In contrast, most of us begin to date as soon as we feel a special chemistry with someone. Driven by our raging hormones, we often do not consider the two key elements in choosing a mate—our readiness and God's will.

If we are still too young or financially dependent on our parents, marriage is a distant reality. Should we then spend these years battling either heartbreak or the temptation to get physical? Would this not be a waste of our youth, when we could apply ourselves to more worthy endeavors and nourish our emotional wellspring for the one whom we will later marry?

If we think we're ready to begin a relationship, we should seek God's will. When we rely solely on our own preferences, we may not be able to see that the person we've chosen is not suitable for us. Months or years of courtship may end in heartache, because the relationship began against God's will.

Instead of relying on our own desires and wishes, we should first seek God's timing and guidance. It may mean being patient and waiting for God to inspire us about the rightness or appropriate timing of a relationship through prayer or the scriptures. It may mean having the humility to listen to what God tells us through a family member, a pastor, or a friend. It may also mean cultivating our spirituality to a higher level so that we can easily sense God's instructions. If we have the faith to seek God's will before we begin a relationship, He will surely instruct and abide with us at the right time.

A SUCCESSFUL MARRIAGE—FROM FIRST TO LAST

A successful marriage is one of God's great blessings. Naturally, we all want to know which path—matchmaking or dating—leads to a better marriage. The Apostle Paul said that salvation is completed only when we maintain our faith "from first to last" (Rom 1:17, NIV). This same persistence applies to marriage. It is important to approach marriage with faith and God's guidance. It is even more important to continue one's marriage in faith and with divine abidance. Without God, it would be difficult to sustain love, for the Bible clearly tells us that love is more than a feeling. Feelings ebb and flow, but scripture-defined love is constant and absolute:

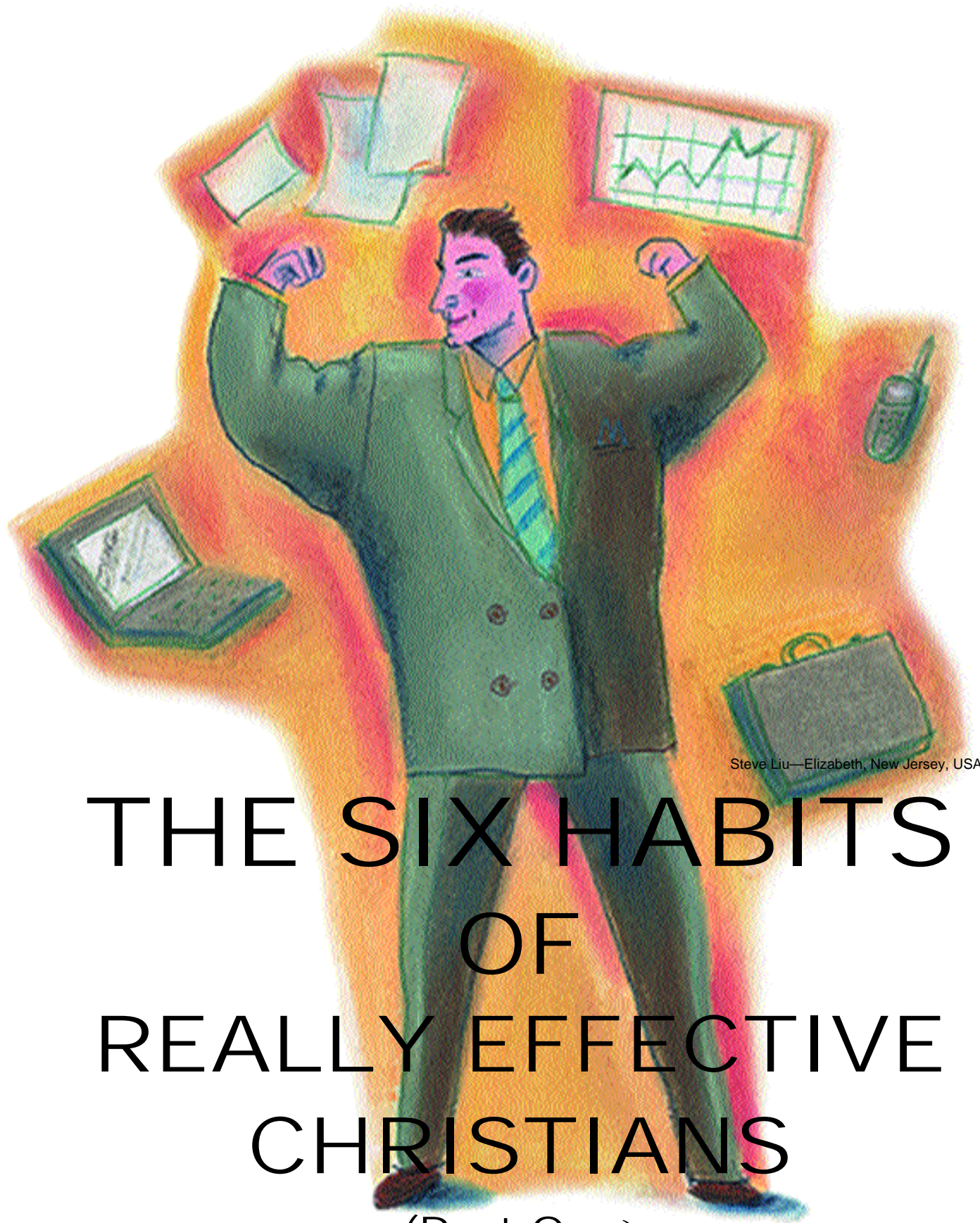
We often do not consider the two key elements in choosing a mate—our readiness and God's will.

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. (1 Cor 13:4-8)

Therefore, what contributes most to a loving and lasting relationship is what we continue to do after the marriage ceremony. We should not be concerned only with which path we take to get to the altar, for whether we choose Isaac's path of an arranged marriage or Jacob's path of courtship, our primary focus should be to place God's will and teachings above our own, to seek His guidance, and to act by faith and with obedience. A blessed marriage is completed by divine abidance and a lifelong commitment to love our spouse in the way that God defines perfect love, through every season of life. ✨



"Love & Marriage" seeks to address and provide biblical advice on the wide range of questions and issues related to dating, singlehood, and marriage. If you have any comments or suggestions for this column, please write to love.marriage@tjc.org.



Steve Liu—Elizabeth, New Jersey, USA

THE SIX HABITS OF REALLY EFFECTIVE CHRISTIANS

(Part One)

There's a book by Stephen Covey called *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. The book is a best-seller, and for good reason. It talks about how to set schedules, manage priorities, be successful in the business world, and balance your life so that you have the time to do the things that are important to you. But with all due respect to Mr. Covey, there are some tips that he didn't mention that have proven pretty helpful to me.

Flash back to June 1995. For the past twenty years, I'd been a full-time student. Elementary school led to junior high, high school led to college, and college led to graduate school. After graduate school, there was no more school left. So I started applying for a job.

After seven months of nonstop rejections, insults, and despondency, one week in January I got a phone call. I spoke to the recruiter on a Wednesday and interviewed on a Thursday. I was to start work on Monday, at 8 A.M. sharp.

After the excitement of it all wore off, I started to think. The extent of my work experience up to that point had been a few part-time college jobs. I'd never really had to deal with a full-time job. Do they wear suits? Whom will I eat lunch with? How do I ask for office supplies? What if my boss hates me?

I had a lot of questions. Not the least of these was, "What do I do?"

DAD'S ADVICE

In the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey sees a billboard that reads, "Ask Dad. He Knows." I saw this billboard flash in my head, so I went over to Dad. I asked him to give me some advice on how to make it in the business world. Now, Dad's never been the CEO of a corporation. He made a decent salary, but nothing spectacular. But one thing I noticed was that Dad enjoyed his job. And while our family wasn't the wealthiest family in the world, I noticed that Dad and Mom did manage to live in a pretty nice house, provide pretty good food and decent clothes for their kids, and send their three kids off to college. I know they worked hard, but we always had time to go on family vacations, do church work, and spend time together.

So I wanted to know "his secret." How was it that he'd managed to stay in his company for thirty years, and

all the while remain pretty happy?

He started to tell me, and I stopped him. "Could you write it down for me?"

He agreed and, a few hours later, knocked at my door. He handed me a slip of paper with a list of six things written on it.

- 1) Most Important—Get along with everybody. You need all the friends you can get. One enemy would be too many. Be appreciative and congenial.

My first few months on the job, it amazed me to see the amount of office politics that went on. People chose sides and made allies and enemies. It wasn't uncommon at all to hear people bad-mouth someone behind his back, and then be as friendly as ever when they came face to face with that person.

There was a time in my wide-eyed, idealistic phase when I thought that everyone in our company was committed solely to the success of the company. I talked about the subject with a colleague, and he told me something interesting. "Next time you're in a meeting," he said, "listen carefully to what each person says and ask yourself, 'Why is that person saying that? What's in it for them?'"

So I did this, and I came to a pretty startling conclusion: People are generally selfish.

SELFISH AMBITION

I once heard someone say, "Hatred isn't the opposite of love. Selfishness is the opposite of love."

In Galatians 5:20, Paul lists "selfish ambition" as one of the "acts of the sinful nature," along with quite a few other unpleasant things. At first, "selfish ambition" might not seem to fit in this list. Few will deny that all the other



sins listed are destructive. But these days, “selfish ambition” is often looked upon favorably, especially in the business world.

So what can you do? How in the world do you get along with everybody when everyone’s in it for himself, when people wouldn’t think twice about taking advantage of you for their own gain? Paul gives some pretty good advice:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. (Phil 2:3-6)

Now these are pretty heavy words, considering what Paul was going through when he wrote them. Just a chapter before, Paul explained his situation. While he was locked in prison, some preachers came to the Philippian church. In Paul’s absence, they spoke disparagingly of him in front of the very church that he loved deeply. They sought to fill the vacuum that Paul left, to jockey for position, and to obtain some glory for themselves.

Now if you were Paul, what would you do? There are a bunch of evangelists out there who are in competition with you. They take advantage of your situation to boost their own egos and better their political position. And on top of that, because they’re so jealous of you, they say anything they can to make your suffering even worse.

Paul chose to continue to glorify God, by not giving way to Satan and by recognizing Satan’s attempts to break his spirit. So over four chapters, Paul mentions the words “joy” and “rejoice” over and over again. Even though Paul had every right to condemn these men, he chose to look the other way and, furthermore, to rejoice at the work they were doing.

In this simple statement, Paul showed to all the Philippians—and the rest of us as well—what his attitude was in his work. He didn’t feel he had to defend himself

or coddle his ego. And so his silence spoke louder than anything he could have said.

AMBITION: GOOD OR BAD?

If Paul were to tell these preachers what they should have been told, he probably would have said something along the lines of what James wrote:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. (Jas 3:13-16)

Notice how both Paul and James use the term “selfish ambition,” not just “ambition.” There’s an important distinction. Ambition by itself is not a bad thing. It’s one of the things that makes you do the very best work you can, and it pushes you to achieve to the fullest of your potential.

The difference is in motives. Is your ultimate goal your own fame and fortune? Are you motivated by pride or ego, or by jealousy of what others have? Or is your ultimate

goal to make an honest day’s wages for an honest day’s work? Is your ultimate goal to glorify yourself or to glorify God?

These are important questions, and you need to be brutally honest with yourself in answering them. Proverbs 16:2 says, “All a man’s ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord.”

THE TRAP OF ENVY

Selfish ambition and envy usually go together. Ecclesiastes 4:4 says, “And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man’s envy of his neighbor.”

It’s so easy to be caught in this trap. Our society breeds it. If you make \$40,000 a year, I want to make \$60,000 a year. If you have a Toyota, I want a Lexus. If you get promoted to District Manager, I want to be pro-

So what can you do? How in the world do you get along with everybody when everyone’s in for himself?

The people who lasted in the company were those who gained the respect and admiration of others around them, by displaying character and integrity.

moted to Division Manager. If your kid goes to MIT, I want my kid to go to MIT on a full scholarship. It's an easy trap to fall into, because it seems that everyone does it. But it's a trap that leads to destruction. Remember Proverbs 14:30: "A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones."

How do we fight it? Let your ambition be motivated by something other than competition, greed, or self-glory. So what should your ambition be?

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. (1 Thess 4:11-12)

In the world out there, people who know how to manipulate situations and people, with no concern for the welfare of others, usually do very well for themselves at first. They get what they want immediately. But ask anyone who's worked many years in a company, and they'll tell you that while such people tend to rise like a rocket, they tend to fall like a shooting star. They'll tell you that the people who lasted in the company were those who gained the respect and admiration of others around them by displaying character and integrity.

Happily, if you are a Christian and strive for righteousness, character and integrity come as part of the package.

THE ANSWER: LOVE & HUMILITY

So to sum up, how do you get along with everyone?

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. (1 Pet 3:8-9)

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. (Gal 6:9-10)

There's a theme throughout all the verses we've read. Learn to show Christian love and humility toward others. Despite what anyone else does around you, do good to others. Shine the light of Christ wherever you are. Show the fruit of the spirit in your everyday life, not just on Saturdays when you go to church. And seek the glory of God in everything you do.

So I learned right off the bat that Dad's first piece of advice wasn't bad at all. We'll get to the other five in future issues. ☆



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"In the Workforce" is a recurring column in *Manna* dedicated to survival tips and advice on how to shine the light as a Christian at work.

If you have some advice or anecdotes from your own work experience that you feel may be edifying to the fellowship of brothers and sisters in Christ, please send it to workforce@tjc.org. Writers who are selected for publication will receive an "In the Workforce" T-shirt, and may feel free to put their achievement on their list of annual accomplishments at work.



IS YOUR FAITH YOUR OWN?

Jennifer Li—New Haven, Connecticut, USA

Moving away from home to go to college was one of the most challenging yet rewarding experiences of my life. While three thousand miles separated me physically from my family and familiar surroundings, I felt as if a galaxy stood between my spiritual foundation and my personal faith in and relationship with God. Of course, I didn't realize this at first. Until I moved away, my faith had been rooted in my family, my brothers and sisters in the True Jesus Church, and the cultural and social ritual of going to church.

ENJOYING NEWFOUND FREEDOM

So I left the comforts of home to explore college, make new friends, attend classes, and enjoy the luxuries of a liberal arts education. I have to admit that I didn't really think about what was going to happen to my faith. It hadn't occurred to me that anything would fundamentally change or that I should be concerned about my spiritual identity. I wish I could say that I searched immediately for friends who also shared faith, or that I prayed and studied the Bible on my own to cultivate a relationship with God. In truth, I was so focused on my education and all the new stimuli around me that I hardly thought about God, salvation, fellowship, prayer, and so on. No one around me had expectations for me to attend church every weekend or "be Christian." Unfortunately, without the external pressure and my own internal fire for God, my faith hit a standstill.

In fact, I found excitement and new challenges in this newfound independence. I remember late-night conversations with hall-mates

about political beliefs or socioeconomic injustices in the world. I studied the politics of war, macroeconomics, psychology, and literature. All these things I found edifying, but in an academic sense—even casual debates about religion and the validity and deconstruction of the Bible. Like many college kids, I attended parties, hung out with peers, ate pizza, ice cream, and lots of mashed potatoes, and attended football and basketball games. Unaware that my spiritual health needed to be nurtured, I let down God by letting my faith fall behind.

FANNING THE FLAME OF FAITH

Toward the end of my freshman year, I found success in academics and in an outgoing group of friends. I was, by and large, a well-adjusted college student. Yet a distant, dull emptiness and sadness existed in my heart. I felt unsettled that maybe my self-selected friends didn't really know who I was. Sure, they knew I was a Chinese-American woman from Southern California interested in democracy

and political science, a feminist and a former cheerleader. But did they know that my spiritual faith (admittedly a weak one) existed and had informed my values and beliefs for as far back as I could remember? And yet, how could they? Furthermore, why had I failed to communicate to others either through actions or words that this faith existed?

By some grace of God, or maybe even as a result of that tiny flame of faith built up by family and a lifetime ritual of going to church, I met a friend, Ruth, at the end of my freshman year. We shared questions about religion and faith, and for the very first time in my life someone challenged me to explain my beliefs. Why did I go to church on Saturday (at least theoretically, since I wasn't regularly attending the Philadelphia prayer house services)? How did I understand the path to salvation to be constructed? Is the Holy Spirit truly present only when spiritual tongues are spoken?

To my embarrassment, I didn't have ready answers to these questions. But finally I began exploring the beliefs I had held and practiced for almost two decades.

The most poignant thing about this time in my life was that I needed to figure out—on my own terms and through my own actions—why I believed in God. Did He truly love me? Was I really a part of His flock? If so, what did this mean for me—this idealistic college student, far away from home? And, most important, what choices would I make about how I lived my life?

FINDING GOD—AGAIN

Over the next year, I found God again. I wouldn't say that I ever wholly lost Him, but more that I found him on my own. There wasn't a dramatic moment of clarity when, through lightning and thunder, God spoke to me. No bells and whistles or fanfare about it. Rather, finding my faith and experiencing God's love came over time, through a process in which I continued to seek him out. Through a combination of studying the Bible, singing praises through an a cappella Christian group, praying, and seeking friends with whom I could be challenged in faith, my spiritual foundation built up.

I remember one conversation when a friend asked if I believed that God loved me and that He promised His salvation for me. I just knew. I can't accurately describe why, or how it felt, but my heart was sure of God's love for me. It's weird how life plays out. During that time in college, I didn't actively have to pursue a faith; I could have

walked away. How terribly scary and powerful is that? Yet, I found Him.

Looking back, I can't recall how those conversations with Ruth began or how I even met her. I found mercy in God's eyes and He drew me near. I believe that God kept me in His fold because I hadn't totally closed him out—somehow my heart still wanted to know what faith meant to me. God doesn't fail us if we have a heart to seek Him. And so I share this story not because I'm proud of my particular path of faith, but simply to convey that God is so patient and so kind, and He is constantly with us—even when we feel the farthest away.

DO YOU KNOW WHOM YOU BELIEVE?

Independence and freedom come with choice and free will—tremendous responsibilities for an eighteen-year-old. From the mundane decisions in life (Do I feel like going to class today?) to the more weighty ones (Should I go to this party and drink?), all of a sudden I had complete say in what I chose to do and who I chose to be. So if you are enjoying your newfound independence and still

wondering how faith fits into your life, don't forget to ask questions and find out for yourself. You alone are responsible for your own path. And a relationship with God is truly the most personal relationship you can have.

Leaving the safe harbor of home and family can be both strangely terrifying and exhilarating at the same time. Now I'm a student again, this time in graduate school, also some three thousand miles from home. I face similar challenges to those of my college days, such as meeting a new set of friends and adjusting to a new environment. This time around, however, my foundation of faith is my own. So as I ride this roller coaster of my life, where there are so many opportunities to redefine who I want to be, how does my faith in God play out in day-to-day priorities and practical living?

It's a constant struggle to draw closer to God and keep an active faith. I would be lying if I said that it wasn't. But I've experienced the love of Christ for myself, and I know whom I believe in. Do you? If not, do you have the heart to seek answers? ☆



"On Campus" seeks to support and inspire an active faith among our youth through candid discussion and exploration of the many challenges facing Christians on campus. Please send comments on this article or questions about student life to on.campus@tjc.org.

Messages



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Babylonian army completed its task of destroying Jerusalem and her sacred temple in 586 B.C. From then on, the Jewish people faced years in captivity. Taken to the faraway land of Babylon, the pious Jews wept when they remembered Zion. Without the temple, the center of their life, they experienced a deep sense of loss. As prophesied (Jer 29:10), their exile lasted only seventy years. Around 539 B.C., Babylon fell into the hands of the Persian troops. Unknown to the exiled populace, a new era of Jewish history had begun.

Cyrus, the king of Persia, reversed the deportation policies of the Babylonian empire and paved the way for the return of the Jews to their homeland. In 538 B.C., he issued a decree authorizing the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, which the Babylonians had plundered. Furthermore, the expense of the project was to be met from the royal treasury (Ezra 6:3-5).

Following the decree, the first Jews prepared to return home, their number amounting to nearly fifty thousand (Ezra 2:64-65). On arrival, they directed their efforts toward the reconstruction of the holy temple, laying the foundation within two years (Ezra 3:8-10).

However, their enthusiasm was soon dampened by the Edomites, Moabites, Ammonites, Philistines, and Samaritans, who during their absence had taken over residence of the Judean countryside. They resented the exiles' return, and avidly devised tactics to hinder their construction work (Ezra 4:5, 11-16). Harassed by unfriendly neighbors, the post-exilic community became despondent, and the rebuilding work came to a halt. This dismal state of affairs lasted for about eighteen years.

Alleging that the project was inopportune, the people's priorities changed. They began to establish a livelihood for themselves. Paneled houses were built, fields were ploughed. God's temple, however, remained untouched. In the year 520 B.C., God called Haggai to be His messenger, to revive the people and overcome this spirit of lethargy.

From Haggai

Lee Jin—SINGAPORE

THE BOOK OF HAGGAI

Written in 520 B.C., Haggai is the first prophetic work of the post-exilic period. It covers only a four-month span. Within this time, God spoke to His people through the prophet Haggai on five separate occasions with four specific messages. Although the message was different each time, the underlying theme was the same. The Lord desired to stir up His people to a successful effort to rebuild the temple.

The First Message (1:1-11)

The first message came to Haggai on the first day of the sixth month (*Elul*). God instructed Haggai to rebuke the people for failing to rebuild the temple. The Lord rejected their excuse that the time had not yet come. He summed up the plight of the people (1:5-6) and

GOD WANTED THESE POST-EXILIC JEWS TO REALIZE THAT A PERSON'S PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL PROSPERITY ARE FROM GOD.

asked them to ponder why, despite their hard labor, their lifestyle remained pathetic and their harvest meager. God then gave the reason for their distress (1:7-11). The economic disaster was the direct result of their neglect of the temple (1:10). He had withheld His blessings.

An important implication from this message is that God wanted these post-exilic Jews to realize that a person's physical and spiritual prosperity are from God. If they place His affairs as most important, His blessings will come freely to them, without their asking. Conversely, if they do not concern themselves with the house of God, whatever they reap, God will take away.

Unfortunately, the failure to put God first in one's life is not confined to the distant past. In our daily living, we may be blinded by our selfish ambitions and pursue our own business, neglecting our service to our Heavenly Father. We misplace our priorities and displace God from the center of our existence. We become like the post-exilic Jews, who had forgotten God—we sow much but reap little.

We must not follow in the footsteps of the post-exilic Jews. Instead, we must hold true to our initial conviction: seeking first God's kingdom and His righteousness. God's blessings will then shower upon us when we draw near to Him and let Him lead. Therefore, we must always examine our ways, analyzing our actions and evaluating whether or not they are pleasing in God's eyes.

In Haggai, God's first message provoked a decisive response. Starting with the leaders, the whole community obeyed the voice of the Lord and took up the challenge (1:12).

On the twenty-fourth of the same month, God acknowledged His people's response with a short yet powerful "I am with you" (1:13). To show divine acceptance, He told them that He would be on their side to help them fight against their enemies. This is the greatest blessing possible. The post-exilic Jews received such assurance because of their united obedience to the message. Likewise, in order to prosper the

church and glorify God's name, the entire congregation must listen to and carry out the word of God. They must work in unity. God worked mightily among the apostolic church because the early believers served Him with a singleness of mind. They placed God first in their lives and worked with a common objective for the good of the church.

The phrase "I am with you" is also significant in another respect. We note that God did not explicitly tell the post-exilic Jews that He was to bless them. Rather, he informed them that He would be with them. This distinction is important. Many Christians only pursue God's material blessings. They forget that it is God whom they should seek, not His blessings. Once they draw near to God, the source of all blessings, He will automatically see to their daily needs and bestow His blessings on them.

The pronouncement of His care greatly encouraged and motivated the post-exilic workers (1:14). Likewise, in our daily service to the Lord, we must always cling to God's promise. Because

we resolve to serve Him, God will be with us. Paul declares, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31)

The Second Message (2:1-9)

Firmly committed to rebuilding the temple, the people pondered over some difficult questions.

GOD'S PRESENCE AT A CHURCH IS NOT DEPENDENT ON THE ARCHITECTURAL SPLendor OF THE BUILDING, BUT ON WHETHER THE BELIEVERS WORSHIP HIM WITH SINCERITY OF MIND AND HEART.

How beautiful would the new temple be? How would its glory compare with Solomon's temple? The former temple was magnificent. The whole construction took about seven years, with extensive resources and manpower. Some elderly

Jews who could still recall the beauty of the first temple felt that the new temple could never compete with Solomon's. Mixed feelings prevailed. While they rejoiced over the rebuilding, they could not help but feel sad at the same time.

On the twenty-first day of the seventh month (*Tisbri*), God's second message came to the prophet Haggai. Although some had questioned the outcome of the second temple in contrast to the splendor of the first, God encouraged the builders to "take courage" (2:4). He directed these words first to Zerubbabel (the governor), then to Joshua (the high priest), and finally to the masses. This message was then followed by the plural imperative addressed to all three, "For I am with you."

Through this message, God indicated that although the task He had assigned might not be of the same magnitude as that of Solomon's temple, it was just as important for them to complete their assignment. Also, the responsibilities might be different, but the same almighty God would be with them to strengthen them. There may be occasions when we question our ability to fulfill the commission entrusted to us by God. While we acknowledge the need to propagate the gospel and to tend the flock, we are overwhelmed by the immensity of the tasks. However, we must remember that our success

GOD WANTED HIS PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND THAT THEIR WORK WOULD ONLY BE ACCEPTABLE IF THEY PURSUED AND MAINTAINED HOLINESS.

comes from God. When He leads us, we cannot fail. We are but the humble servants whose jobs are to plant and water. It is God who gives the increase (1 Cor 3:16).

In His second message, God had also promised that the glory of this new temple would be greater than that of the former, because in it, He would grant peace. The physical magnificence of Solomon's temple during its dedication (2 Chr 7:2) eventually departed. The Israelites failed to worship God in spirit and in truth. Hence, we see the severe reprimand in Isaiah 29:13: "These people draw near with their mouths / And honor Me with their lips, / But have removed their hearts far from Me."

At His temple, they offered the outward act of worship, but in secret, God had declared, they worshiped idols (Ezek 8:6-16). Indeed, God's presence at a church is not dependent on the architectural splendor of the building, but on whether the believers worship Him with sincerity of mind and heart. When a church manifests unity and true worship, God's Spirit, glory, and peace will abide. This is the essence of the second message.

The Third Message (2:10-19)

The third message was given on the twenty-fourth of the ninth month (*Chisleu*), exactly three months after the people, in response to Haggai's initial challenge, had begun the rebuilding project. It would appear that the people's positive response to the call had not changed their economic misfortune (2:16-19). Harvests were pitifully small, and food was scarce. Once again, God instructed His people to consider the reasons for such misfortune (2:15).

First, God directed Haggai to question the priests, the legal experts in the land since the days of Moses, about the contagious nature of sin (2:10-13). The issue concerned the transmission of holiness (2:12; cf. Lev 6:27) and of uncleanness (2:13; cf. Num 19:11-13), both of which received considerable attention in the Pentateuch. Through this reasoning, God pointed out that the power of defilement was far easier to transmit than the power of holiness.

Next, Haggai applied this principle, discussed in 2:12-13, to the nation itself. Although the people were working in the right direction, they were still tainted with sin. To serve God effectively, they had to be holy. And to achieve holiness, each person had to cultivate strong determination. In other words, holiness could not be “transmitted” from person to person. Defilement, on the other hand, could easily pollute a congregation. God wanted His people to understand that their work would only be acceptable if they pursued and maintained holiness at the same time.

Today, we who work for the Lord must pay special attention to this teaching. To receive divine blessing for our labor, our thoughts and our deeds must be sanctified.

The Fourth Message (2:20-23)

Later on that same day, the twenty-fourth day of the month, God’s fourth message came to Haggai. Unlike the previous messages, this final message was directed to an individual, Zerubbabel, the governor and leader of the post-exilic community. God promised him constant providential protection. Therefore, Zerubbabel should not be afraid of his heavy responsibilities. As long as he stood firm, God would be with him.

In other words, God acknowledged that He had entrusted a heavy commission to His steward. Such a person was expected to make more sacrifices for the Lord and His flock. He had to be on guard at all times lest Satan comes to attack the Lord’s sheep. He had to earn the respect of his charge. Also, he had to set a good example in his daily living and lead the way. The Lord Jesus stated the criteria of a good shepherd in John 10:1-18. A good shepherd, He pointed out, must know his sheep and even be willing to die for them.

All stewards chosen to take care of the congregation of God must appreciate the extent of their responsibilities. God has high expectations for His stewards. They must be strong and courageous, prepared to make sacrifices for His sake. In return, God will always be with them and in their work. Their reward will also be great when their labors are completed.

SPIRITUAL REVIVAL—THEN AND TODAY

The messages of God, recorded by Haggai, were aimed at reviving the faith of the post-exilic community. Through these messages, God wanted to motivate the people to rebuild His temple. However, the teachings of these messages are just as relevant to the Christians of the last days.

GOD ACKNOWLEDGED THAT HE HAD ENTRUSTED A HEAVY COMMISSION TO HIS STEWARD. SUCH A PERSON WAS EXPECTED TO MAKE MORE SACRIFICES FOR THE LORD AND HIS FLOCK.

The first message awakened the people to consider their ways.

Their priorities had to change: God’s affairs must come first in their lives. They

would then witness the mighty downpour of divine blessings. The people’s response met with divine approval, and God empowered them with the promise, “I will be with you.” Likewise, if we lead a God-centered life, we too will receive the same providential care.

The second message encouraged and empowered God’s people to stand firm when they encountered obstacles in their task. As long as they worked with determination, God’s Spirit would remain with them. They had no cause to fear. Similarly, in the last days, we have to fulfill our pastoral and evangelical duties. The commission is heavy, but God is always there to lead us.

Next, the people’s thoughts and deeds had to be holy. Their motive in serving God had to be pure. Only then would God accept their offerings. This is the third message. When we resolve to participate in church ministry, we must first eradicate unclean thoughts and unbecoming actions from our daily living. Only then will our offering be acceptable to God.

Finally, in the last message, God acknowledged the heavy responsibility placed on the shoulders of His stewards. Yet as long as they fulfill their commission courageously, God will be with them and reward them.

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LETTERS FROM MOM

Honey,

By the time this letter arrives, you will have stepped a little closer toward the threshold of adulthood and be in a position to throw open that door and step out into the world of many possibilities that lie at your feet. My natural instinct is to pull you back in and slam the door shut tight. But such is the natural progression of life, and the time has come when you must go. Still, I can't help but think that it is a big, bad world out there. You've heard it said that only the fittest survive. Would you get eaten alive?

Today, I feel drawn to Scripture that speaks of remembering and not forgetting. Moses, for one, seemed especially inclined to include these themes in his farewell address to the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land. There, by the edge of Canaan, Moses told the Israelites that they were soon to part company. He told them to remember everything that God had done to get them thus far. He told them not to forget to obey God's commandments when they start anew in Canaan. At one point, Moses told the Israelites, "Observe therefore all the commands I am giving you today, so that you may have the strength to go in and take over the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, and so that you may live long in the land that the Lord swore to your forefathers to give to them and their descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Deut 11:8,9).

Somehow, this passage gives me comfort and encouragement. Although your journey through the wilderness of this life has been short, I must not forget that many times along the way, I've caught glimpses of the lessons you were learning. Nevertheless, I do have a list of concerns.

Safety will remain Number One. It's a concern that never goes away. It was there when you started pre-school. It was there again when you went off to elementary school, and again in junior high, then high school... You get the picture.

But there is one experience I must not forget. It was a winter's evening in your freshman year of high school. You'd signed up for a physical education class at the community college to fulfill your graduation requirements. The sun had already set a few hours earlier when I drove you into the dimly-lit parking lot. Although the gymnasium was located just around the corner, I could not see if there was a path to the building that seemed to me was cloaked in a blanket of trees and shrubs.

Scanning the quiet campus for a security person, I asked, "You want me to walk you there?"

You lifted your head and surveyed the scene before you.

"No," you answered, "I can pray."

Even so, I have other concerns. How, for example, would you manage to pick your way through opportunities that come your way as you maneuver the next phase of your life's journey to go on to the next, and the next one after that? And if, for instance, you could narrow each difficult decision to five choices, how would you know whether to pick (a), (b), (c), (d), or (e)?

You could probably confirm that it's a concern that never goes away. I remember this incident at the start of your senior year of high school. As you worked back and forth on the scheduling to fit all of the academic courses you needed into a six-period day, you were also under great pressure to give up one of these for jazz ensemble.

But one evening, I overheard you speaking into the telephone.

"I was praying, and it wasn't even an issue at all!"

If this were a Top Ten List, my next concern would

rank high. In a culture where absolute truths rank near or at the bottom of the pile, how would you feel your way out of the morass of confusion? If what's morally right or wrong depends upon a society's definition at a particular time, how would you not get caught in this current and be swept out to the sea of a multitude shades of gray?

Actually, from my parenting corner, I have observed that you are no stranger to matters of right and wrong. Perhaps I really ought to be comforted that you adhered to and championed principles of classroom ethics while you were in high school. But when you step through that door, your fights will not be about the temptation to scrap together English papers from study guides. Few, if any, of your fights will be won because you chose to read an assigned book from cover to cover.

Yet I shall not despair. In fact, I shall be encouraged. As He did during the first phase of your life's journey, the Lord Himself will go before you and be with you: if you need to be carried, He will carry you; if you get lost, He will show you the way you should go; and if you must fight, He will fight for you. The Lord our God is an awesome God, and there is none like Him. Only remember to love Him with all your heart, and do not forget to listen to His voice and hold fast to Him. If you do, you will be walking in faith toward that day when—though you may have arrived at the end of your life's journey—you will be assured that just beyond the river, there awaits your soul the Promised Land of the New Jerusalem. There you will be safe and secure in that place where the glory of God lights up the city infinitely, where God wipes away every tear, and where nothing and no one impure will be. So be strong and courageous.

*Love,
Mom*

Written as a mother would to her child, "Letters from Mom" addresses the struggles of our young people as they step toward the threshold of adulthood. This column hopes to encourage, comfort, and urge the youth to continue living as children of God. Please send comments or questions to [this.mom@tjc.org](mailto:his.mom@tjc.org).

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Due to the rapid spread of the gospel in many countries (i.e. Africa, India, Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaysia), the True Jesus Church needs volunteers to help in work such as religious education, pastoring, translation, and church visitation.

If you are willing to serve the Lord, have been a member of the True Jesus Church for more than three years, have the Holy Spirit, and are over twenty years old, please contact the International Assembly of the True Jesus Church for an application form.

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Tears



Moon-Sook Kim—Garden Grove, California, USA

My Lord
Now
With nothing to give you
Clasping my hands
Closing my eyes
Always
Deep in my mind
Quietly runs a river

Your face
Your mind
Reflect in the river
Gathering pearls of tears
Stringing them together
One by one
Making a necklace
To place around you