

TRUE JESUS CHURCH

Manna

ISSUE 34 JAN-MAR 2001



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MY FATHER IN HEAVEN

Johnny Cheng—Toronto, Ontario, CANADA

Hallelujah, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ I testify about an experience I had during prayer on December 26, 1999, in Toronto church, Canada. During this prayer I was thinking about my father, who was in Taiwan working hard to support my family here in Canada. The last time I saw him was over a year ago, and I really missed him. Even though my father is very strict, I still wanted him to come back and hug me, and I wanted to tell him how much I loved him. Thinking about him being so far away made me want to cry.

A few minutes after the prayer began, a bright light suddenly shone into my eyes and began enveloping me until it completely surrounded me. I saw a person dressed in a white garment coming toward me. Following him were five to six people who were also all dressed in white. I then realized that the first person was Jesus and the people following Him were angels!

Jesus walked toward me and placed His loving arms around me. At that moment I felt incredibly joyful, peaceful, and comforted. I felt totally safe and pro-

tected. Jesus hugged me for what felt like a long time. Then He said, "I am your Father, I am your God." Jesus was telling me not to worry. My father in Taiwan would be all right, and Jesus would look after him and me.

Out of curiosity, I looked up because I wanted to see what Jesus looked like. But I could not see His face, because it was shining so brightly—even brighter than the sun. The faces of the angels were also shining brightly like Jesus. The angels formed a circle around Jesus and me, holding hands. They sang hymns in a spiritual language, praising the Lord. Even though I did not understand what they were singing, it sounded heavenly, harmonious, and melodious. I had never heard such beautiful singing in all my life!

I then looked down where I was kneeling. The ground had turned pure white, and the whiteness started to spread gradually from the spot where Jesus and I were, radiating out in all directions until it covered the entire area. The church seemed to disappear, and I felt that I was no longer in the world—I realized that I was in heaven! This was the first time I saw a glimpse of the heavenly kingdom with my own eyes. Words cannot describe the beautiful views that surrounded me. Everything was pure

white, but it did not seem strange.

Then I heard the prayer bell ring. Jesus stood up and walked away, with the angels following Him. They all disappeared into a white light in the distance.

As the vision ended, I started to sense the presence of the other brothers and sisters who were praying beside me. I opened my eyes, and I realized that I was in church. I felt incredibly joyful that I had been hugged by my Heavenly Father and that I saw Him with my own eyes!

This was a wonderful experience that I will never forget. I now know that the Lord my God is also my dearest, most precious, loving Heavenly Father. He will take care of me, love me, and always be at my side. I feel very blessed to be His child. May all glory and praise be given to our Lord Jesus forever. Hallelujah! Amen. ★

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. (1 John 3:1-2)



I was raised in a family with a long tradition of Catholic beliefs, dating back to the early 1600s in France, and I was educated in the Catholic school system. Through the years, though, I came to feel an emptiness in my heart. I felt that there was still something missing, that there was a void in my life, but I couldn't quite put my finger on what it was.

When I joined the military, I drifted away from my Catholic beliefs and didn't go to church as often as I used to. But thank God that when I got married, my wife, a member of the True Jesus Church, patiently waited and shed many tears in prayer for me. After fifteen years, God finally began to work in my heart. He began to show me what I needed to fill that emptiness inside me.

My family and I began to have Bible studies in our home on Sabbath mornings. My children had already been baptized in the True Jesus Church, and I had no problem with my wife's desire to improve their spiritual life. Both my wife and my son Randy had received the Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues, and even though I didn't object to them praying in this manner, I couldn't bring myself to seek after this gift. I felt that I needed to hold on to my old belief and pray in the way that I had been taught.

After we concluded our morning Bible studies, I would kneel down, and

my wife would ask me to pray out loud. But I would say, "No, I'm going to pray my own way." So I'd pray in understanding, silently. I'd pray to Mary and the saints, saying the various prayers that I'd been taught to say in the Catholic church.

THE FIRST VISION

I prayed this way for quite some time until one Sabbath morning, when something happened. We had been planning to go to the True Jesus Church in Pacifica, California, to attend a spiritual convocation. My wife wanted my youngest son, Sean, who was an infant at that time, to be baptized. I kept saying, "Okay, sure, we'll go," but inside I really didn't want to go. I tried to find some excuse to get out of it, so they could just go on their own and I could stay home. Since I was still in the military, I thought that I could just lie and say that my request for vacation time had not been approved. But God knows our hearts, and He knows what's best for us. Once God chooses you, there's no turning back.

When we knelt down to pray that morning, my wife again said to me, "Please, why don't you just pray out loud? Just say, 'Hallelujah, praise the Lord.' Just say it out loud, over and over." But I said, "No, don't bother me, I'm not going to say it that way. I'm going to pray my own way."

But as we knelt down to pray, I experienced something that I had never experienced before in my life. If you told me that I would have such an experience, I would have never believed you.

When I knelt down to pray, God gave me a vision. I saw myself kneeling in a circle of light, and on the edge of the circle were six figures wearing monks' robes, with their hoods over their faces. They had flaming swords in their hands. And they were closing in on me.

I had never experienced anything like this before, so the first thing I did was open my eyes. But when I opened them, I didn't see anything unusual. Then I closed my eyes, and the vision was there again. This frightened me. I remembered from our Bible studies that we can cast out demons in Jesus' name, so I said, "Hallelujah, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Satan be gone!" I didn't realize that I had said it out loud, but my family told me later that I had.

Suddenly those six dark figures were replaced by six glorious, white figures. I felt very warm and touched, very safe and secure. The prayer ended at that moment.

I didn't want to tell my family about my vision, because this was strange and totally new to me. But my family knew that something had happened, because they had heard me say out loud, "Hallelujah!" So they asked me, "Dad, what happened?" I said, "Oh, nothing."

CALLED OUT FROM THE WORLD

Richard Solgot—Tampa, Florida, USA

But they said, "No, something happened! You shouted "hallelujah" over and over, several times." I then told them what I had seen, and my wife said to me, "God is trying to tell you something. We need to pray again."

THE SECOND VISION

As I knelt down to pray again, another vision came upon me. In this vision, I saw myself on an old wooden ship, like those in biblical times. The ship and all the sea around it were on fire. I was terrified; I didn't know what to do.

I looked off into the distance, and I could see a beautiful green island. Then I saw that my family was standing on the island, and my wife was holding our youngest child. They were motioning to me to join them. But I thought, how can I join them? The sea is on fire, the ship is on fire, and there's no way I can get to them.

Then suddenly I heard a voice say, "Seek and you shall find, ask and you shall receive, knock and the door shall be opened to you." I looked over to the island, where the voice was coming from, and behind my family was a beautiful white figure. I couldn't see His face, but I knew it was our Lord Jesus. He was standing behind them, holding His arms around them. I lost my fear, and I saw myself going into this sea of fire. As I went in, I began to cry like a baby. The prayer ended at that time.

I cried for thirty or forty minutes after that. My wife asked me several times what I had seen, and I described the vision to her. She asked me, "What do you think God is trying to tell you?" I said, "We're going to San Francisco. We need to go, and I need to be baptized for the remission of my sins."

THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

So we went to California for the spiritual convocation. I had never before experienced that many people praying in tongues, with that much joy and that many tears being shed, as I did at the first morning prayer of the spiritual convocation. It was very comforting to me. I could definitely feel the Holy Spirit working, not only among the believers, but also in myself. I could feel myself moved by the Holy Spirit.

My daughter, who was thirteen years old at that time, received the Holy Spirit during that morning prayer. When I saw her face and how radiant she looked, and when I heard her testimony about how happy and joyful she was, I made a determination that this was something that I had to experience for myself.

So during the next prayer, in the late afternoon, I came right up to the front to pray. As I prayed, I tried to focus on our Lord Jesus on the cross and on all that He had suffered for me. I thought about all the sins that I had committed in my life, and I humbled myself before Him to ask for His forgiveness.

The minister came to lay hands on me during the prayer. As his hand neared the top of my head, the heat from his hand began to penetrate my heart. I began to perspire, and a glorious white light shone through the right side of my head and went down into my heart. When it came back out, all of my troubles, sadness, and frustration were taken away from me.

I began to cry and speak in an unknown tongue. My tongue began to roll, and I knew that the Holy Spirit was filling me. I had never experienced anything like that before in my life. I praise

God and I thank Him so much for the precious gift of His Holy Spirit.

FROM SERVANT TO FRIEND

During the rest of the week prior to my baptism, Satan began to work mightily to try to stop me from doing what I knew God wanted me to do. I began to experience the most awful, nauseating headaches every day. There were times that I couldn't sleep and couldn't even open my eyes. Thank God that my wife recognized what was happening. She gently, but firmly, coaxed me into making my way into the chapel for the class lectures. Gradually, after about three days, my headaches disappeared, and with the help of God the battle with Satan was won.

My son and I were baptized on July 5, 1985, in the Pacific Ocean, and since that time, our lives have been filled with one blessing after another. We have our share of trials and tribulations, but we know that our Lord Jesus is here with us, and He's guiding us every step of the way. Through Him, all of our sins have been washed away, our eternal life is in His hands, and one day we will join Him in heaven.

What a great blessing and joy it is to know that God has called me out from the world to be His friend. In John 15:15-16, the Lord Jesus says,

"No longer do I call you servants for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you."

I praise and thank the Lord Jesus so much for His wonderful gift of love. May all the glory be unto His Holy name! ★

JOURNEY INTO SABAH'S INTERIOR

King Fui Yong—Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, MALAYSIA

In the summer of 2000, a group of church members from Sabah accompanied Bro. Huang En Lin from Taiwan on a trip to Pesiangan, the heart of Sabah's interior. Bro. Huang En Lin was carrying out his thesis research on how the Murut (the natives of Sabah) embraced Christianity.

On July 2, 2000, we traveled to the True Jesus Church in Kapalarau, Sabah, East Malaysia, where Dn. Hsiao Rong Chan from Taiwan led a hymnal evangelical service. The church in Kampung (Malay for "village") Kapalarau is a beautiful, simple wooden building. It is situated deep inside the jungle, accessible via gravel roads and is without electricity or telephone facilities. Water is easily available from the nearby river. The congregation is primarily from the Murut tribe.

When we arrived at our destination, the Murut brethren, young and old alike, welcomed us warmly. They lined up in the church premises waiting to greet us with a heartwarming "Hallelujah!"

The church was packed to full capacity for the hymnal evangelical service, and many attendees had to stand around the entrance. At the concluding prayer, two people received the Holy Spirit, three saw visions, and many others were moved by the Holy Spirit.

FROM SORCERER TO MINISTER

In Kapalarau, Bro. Huang En Lin interviewed a man named Lumeh, a former *bomoh* (a native sorcerer or witch doctor). Lumeh told him how he often used to see a human skull flying around him. One day the skull said to him, "If you want to learn *silat*, just call out my name." (*Silat* is a kind of unarmed combat.) So Lumeh went into the jungle, and the skull instructed him on the art of *silat*.

Lumeh was then equipped with powerful skills. He wore a magical red amulet around his neck, and whenever he swung this amulet around, his enemies would also spin around until they lost consciousness. With the help of the evil spirit, he could stop a moving logging-truck just by touching it. He was

Lumeh's wife was afflicted with mental illness, which was caused by an evil spirit. One day she fled into the jungle for about one week without food or water.

even able to make himself invisible, and he would hitch rides into town without the driver noticing his presence.

Once, Lumeh was shot point-blank with a gun, but the bullets just bounced off his chest, leaving only scars. Lumeh unbuttoned his shirt to show the bullet scars.

Lumeh's wife was afflicted with mental illness, which was caused by an evil spirit. One day she fled into the jungle for about one week without food or water. She hid herself inside a big hole in a large tree, but Lumeh found her and brought her home. Pastor Titus, who happened to be on a pastoral visit there, prayed for her and preached to them about the Lord Jesus.

Later, Pastor Titus and four other preachers brought Lumeh's wife to the True Jesus Church in Keningau, which was about an hour's journey away. They fasted together for her for one week. After this, the evil spirit left her and she began to eat, drink, and wash herself.



Deacon Lukius shows his chest with bullet scars in Kapalarau

Through his wife's healing, Lumeh and the Murut community in this village realized the existence and greatness of the Heavenly God. Lumeh repented and

was baptized. He burned all of the evil things he had previously used to perform black magic. As he did this, he also saw a vision of many snakes spilling out of his mouth. After this, he and his wife began a new life.

Many years after his conversion, Lumeh was ordained a deacon of the True Jesus Church. He is now known as Deacon Lukius, and he ministers at the Kapalarau church.

GOD'S GRACE IN KAMPUNG LIMA

The True Jesus Church at Kampung Lima in the district of Nabawan, Sabah, is an exemplary church among the Murut believers. The natives here are more educated, especially the younger generation. Many of them can read the Bible and sing from the hymnbook. About ninety percent of the Muruts in Kampung Lima are members of the True Jesus Church.

On July 25, 2000, Dn. Hsiao Rong Chan held a hymnal evangelism service at the local community hall. One thousand people attended, half of whom were truthseekers. There were not enough seats, and many had to stand by the sides of the hall and outside the entrance.

On the third night, truthseekers were invited to the church specifically to share on the subject of the Holy Spirit. There was a large turnout, and some believers had to stand outside the church hall in order to make room for the truthseekers.

During the prayer after the discussion, three truthseekers received the Holy Spirit, nine saw visions, and many others were moved by the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the Lord Jesus has worked silently in the midst of the native Muruts. He has given them the precious Holy Spirit as the sign of their inheritance of



True Jesus Church in Kampung Lima in Nabawan

the kingdom of God as well as visions to strengthen their faith.

In one vision, a person saw a dove playing a flute near the pulpit, which was white. The dove's wings moved up and down like a conductor in a jovial mood. Another person saw a vision of the Lord Jesus' hands bearing the nail wounds. On each hand was a hole pierced by a nail.

A Murut sister, who was baptized in the True Jesus Church but occasionally attended other churches, saw a vision during that prayer. She saw a body that was half black and had a red eye. The dark half of the body said to her, "Your life is under my control." After this, a white sheet covered her face. The other half of the same body then became all white, and a voice said to her, "Your life is under my control."

This sister cried when she saw this vision. She asked the pastor what it could mean, since she did not understand it. The preacher advised her not to attend services at other churches again, and she repented.

BRAVING THE JUNGLE AND RAPIDS

We began our journey to the Pensiangan region, the heart of Sabah's interior, on



True Jesus Church boats in Pensiangan

On one of these journeys, our boat ran up against some rocks. Pastor Timothy was thrown into the muddy water and disappeared under the surface.



Crossing shallow, rocky river water is a must in certain parts of Pensiangan

August 4, 2000. Pr. Lemuel Leong, Bro. Huang En Lin, and a few others of us set off from Kota Kinabalu to Keningau and then to Kampung Lima.

From Kampung Lima we headed to Balantos in Pensiangan. We started very early in the morning in a four-wheel-drive vehicle, traveling up and down mountain terrain, and finally reached the riverbank of Balantos at night. When we arrived, Pastor Timothy was there with the church boats. The True Jesus Church in Balantos is a beautiful, simple wooden building, and all the believers are from the Murut tribe.

From there we went by boat to the prayer longhouse at Kampung Sinikaluan. There was a brother named Pundas Tikus, whom the Lord healed of terminal liver cancer.

From there we traveled by boat to the other Murut churches in Kampung Sikiat, Kampung Bakalongan, Kampung Salungnai, Kampung Sakali, and finally to the most remote part, called Kampung Salinatan.

The last leg of the journey from Kampung Sakali onward was the most difficult. From the Sakali church we walked through the jungle and across steep and low mountains to the Sabin Nite prayer longhouse. We walked for six challenging hours under the hot sun. After we finally arrived, we held a service that night. During the prayer, four Muruts received the Holy Spirit, includ-

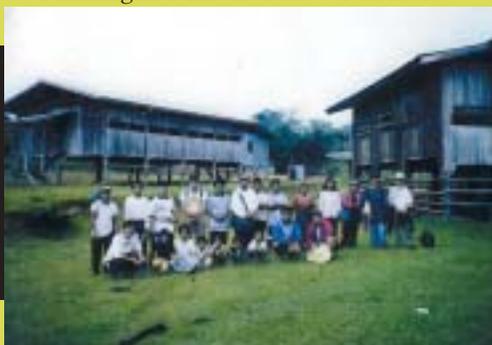


Walking across one of the log bridges to Sabin Nite in Pensiangan

ing a seven-year-old child. Some were also moved by the Holy Spirit. Praise the Lord.

The next day we walked back to Sakali. By now, most of us had sunburns over the exposed parts of our bodies. Our legs ached, there were blisters on our feet, and many of us could not walk normally because we were so tired. But with the help and guidance of our Lord, we walked, ate, and drank together as a team.

The main mode of transportation to the churches in the remote region of Pensiangan is motorboats. We often trav-



A part of Sabin Nite in Pensiangan

eled in dangerous waters, but it was under these precarious moments that we witnessed the guiding hands of God.

On one of these journeys, our boat ran up against some rocks. Pastor Timothy was thrown into the muddy water and disappeared under the surface. Thank God, after a few anxious moments, he managed to swim to the surface of the water without injury.

After this, the hull of the boat again ran up against some rocks, which caused the boat to rock heavily, like a rocking chair. A Murut sister named Theresa from Kampung Lima was thrown into the river. A brother quickly dived into the water and pulled her back into the boat. After coughing up the muddy water she had accidentally drank, she was fine. The two other Murut sisters who were with us broke down in tears. Thanks be to the Lord that He kept Theresa safe.

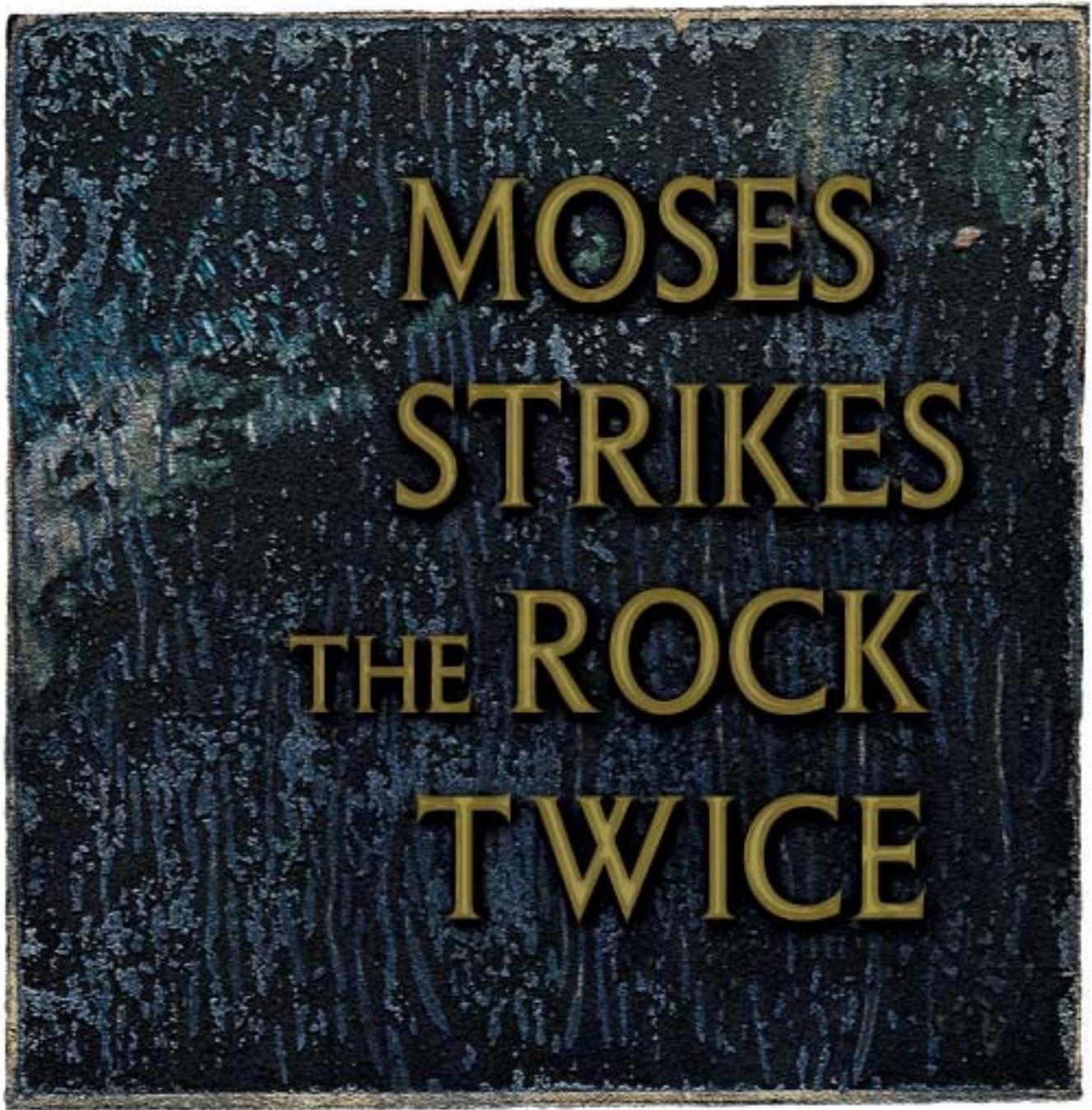
As we continued by boat along the rapids, the boat suddenly went out of control. It smashed against the big wall of rocks so hard that the boatsman, a Murut brother named Pension, was thrown off balance and hit the rocks full force. We could tell from the look on his face that he suffered great pain, but he endured it in silence for the Lord. Thanks be to the Lord Jesus, he only suffered a minor cut on his small toe.

At the times when the water in the river was too shallow, we had to climb out and give the boat a push or a pull to keep it going. The riverbed was full of jagged and slippery rocks, and when we lost our footing, our whole bodies would end up in the muddy water.

Many times the propeller of the outboard motor would hit against the rocky riverbed, which caused it to loosen and malfunction. We carried out the needed repairs with our only tool—a pair of ordinary pliers. In addition to this problem, the boat also leaked, and so we had to bail out water as quickly as possible.

After a physically demanding but spiritually enriching journey, we finally returned to Kota Kinabalu, tired but filled with thanks for the guidance of the Lord, for His special care, and for His great love. Praise be unto the Lord Jesus.

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THEN MOSES LIFTED HIS HAND AND STRUCK THE ROCK TWICE WITH HIS ROD; AND WATER CAME OUT ABUNDANTLY, AND THE CONGREGATION AND THEIR ANIMALS DRANK. THEN THE LORD SPOKE TO MOSES AND AARON, "BECAUSE YOU DID NOT BELIEVE ME, TO HALLOW ME IN THE EYES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, THEREFORE YOU SHALL NOT BRING THIS CONGREGATION INTO THE LAND WHICH I HAVE GIVEN THEM." (NUM 20:11-12)

This passage records a story of woe and disappointment. Many people find incomprehensible why this relatively minor error should deserve such swift and severe retribution. To obtain a deeper understanding of the reason for Moses and Aaron's punishment, we must examine God's immediate judgment of Moses after he struck the rock, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel," and His reiteration of why He

would not allow them to enter the land of Canaan: “Because you rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah” (Num 20:24), “you rebelled against My command to hallow Me at the waters before their eyes” (Num 27:14), “trespassed against Me” (Deut 32:51).

According to these verses, God would not allow Moses and Aaron to enter Canaan because they did not believe or hallow Him, they rebelled against His command, and they trespassed against Him. When Moses struck the rock with his rod instead of speaking to it, he showed, out of his disbelief, that he did not hallow God.

Moses believed and relied on God throughout his life and followed Him, and God said that he was “faithful in all My house” (Num 12:7). So, after forty years of trials and suffering, how could Moses return to Kadesh—where the ten spies had given a bad report of Canaan and caused great grief for the people—and commit the very same wrong as the ten spies did by not believing in God?

THE CONGREGATION AND WATER

First, we need to understand that the Israelites required vast quantities of water in the wilderness—not only for the people but also for the countless number of cattle and sheep. Explaining why there was no shortage of water during the forty years in the wilderness, Paul said that Christ was the spiritual Rock that followed the Israelites, providing water for the people and their animals (1 Cor 10:4). This water had to flow like a river every day, to the point where the desert became like God’s garden, quenching the Israelite people’s physical and spiritual thirst. After forty years of wandering in the wilderness and then returning to Kadesh, their starting point, Miriam died unexpectedly, without cause, and the water suddenly ceased to flow (Num 20:1-2).

The Israelites were stricken by Miriam’s death. No one could have

imagined that this prophetic, who served God faithfully all of her life and was not named among those forbidden to enter Canaan, would fall just a few steps away from the Promised Land after completing the forty-year journey.

Even harder to believe was that the water, which had followed them for forty years, dried up! The sudden, shocking news that there was no water to drink greatly discouraged the congregation, who after wandering for forty years and witnessing over six hundred thousand deaths, had eventually returned to the place where their woes began and believed that God’s punishment was finally over. They were terrified that they were about to relive the events of the past four decades.

Forty years ago, the remark, “There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers... in their sight,” caused God to punish them; forty years later, for no apparent reason, they received two heavy blows to their confidence, disintegrating what faith they had gained through forty years of hardships.

Although they were slaves in Egypt, the Israelites had multiplied from a small group of seventy people to a magnificent legion within four generations. During

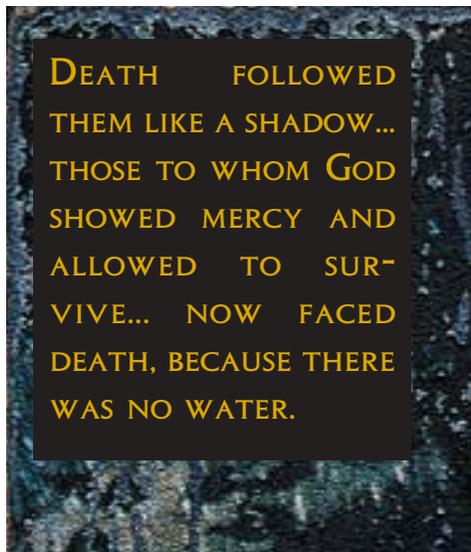
that time, they were blessed with life and had never felt threatened by death. At this moment, however, Death followed them like a shadow. Countless people had already died as a result of God’s punishment; those to whom God showed mercy and allowed to survive the forty-year journey through the wilderness now faced death, because there was no water and because they were about to fight “giants.”

The fears and feelings of betrayal from four decades past resurfaced, so the congregation gathered against Moses and Aaron: “Why have you made us come out of Egypt? Why have you brought us into the wilderness, that we and our animals should die here? The people who dwell in the land are strong and the cities are fortified.”

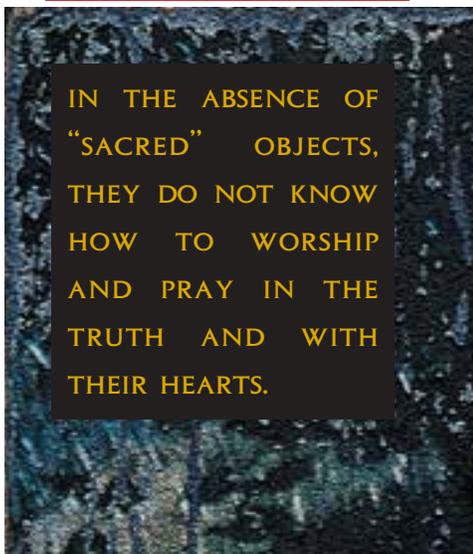
Reading how the congregation wept, we cannot help but wonder why God, for no apparent reason, suddenly let Miriam die on the outskirts of Canaan and let the water from the spiritual Rock stop flowing, just as the people reached the end of their arduous journey and happiness was within their grasp. Perhaps God was preparing His chosen people before they entered a land filled with idolatry.

IDOLATRY FORBIDDEN

As recorded in Deuteronomy, God was concerned that the Israelites would begin to worship foreign gods after they entered Canaan. At the beginning of the book, Moses warned the people, “Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image” (Deut 4:15-16), and “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One!” (Deut 6:4) Moses repeated his warning near the end of the book, “so that there may not be among you man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations” (Deut 29:18).



God commanded the Israelites to destroy all altars, break all sacred pillars, cut down all wooden images, and sanctify themselves after they entered Canaan, lest they felt the desire to worship idols. Furthermore, they were to destroy the seven tribes of Canaan utterly lest the inhabitants misled the chosen people and corrupted their hearts. God wanted His people to learn



not to worship images but to worship Him in truth and from their hearts. Thus, God reminded them of how He had spoken to them without face or form at Mount Sinai.

Idols do not move, speak, or think, yet who could have imagined that they would prove to be the biggest challenge met by the chosen people throughout time? Idols are idols because they have the inherent ability to rob people's hearts. Since the time that mankind has been enslaved by sin, people have felt the urge to worship the "mystical." Scientific knowledge has made worship of the elements (metal, wood, water, fire, earth) obsolete and replaced it with idols such as numbers, images, objects, and money.

Numbers. Thirteen in the West, four in China, eight hundred eighty-eight

in Hong Kong—how many inhabitants in these areas feel absolutely nothing when hearing these numbers? Some athletes must wear their lucky number on their jersey in each game because their performance is affected by a change in the number, just as a Hong Kong businessman feels immensely confident because the number "888" on his license plate is the homophone for "fortune, fortune, fortune" in Cantonese. Likewise, Chinese people avoid the number "4" at all costs because it is the homophone for "death," and most Christians choose "7" or "12" as their favorite numbers and consider "666" to be evil. These are just ordinary numbers but are as revered as idols in the hearts of logical beings because they are believed to have the power to bring either good or bad luck.

Images. To fill the emptiness in their lives, people—since "of the Rock who begot [them], [they] are unmindful, and have forgotten the God who fathered [them]" (Deut 32:18)—have transferred their affections from "god-like images" to tangible "stars." Every word spoken and every action taken by a "star" is emulated throughout the world. Top-notch athletes and singers have more or less become idols in our society today. In church, furthermore, there are undeniably many people whose faith is bolstered by the presence of "star servants of God," even though everyone knows that spiritual power comes from God alone. These star servants provide hope—their presence reassures people when doing holy work and makes prayers more relaxed and powerful. Without them, spirits inexplicably fall, and work is performed without zeal.

Objects. Christians rooted in God's blessings may not be shackled by numbers and images, but they are often bound by material objects of worship. Many churches and believers of Christ know that they "shall not make any carved image...[and] shall not bow down to them nor serve them," yet, in the absence of "sacred" objects, they do not

know how to worship and pray in the truth and with their hearts. Some Christians believe that a cup of holy water or baptismal water has the power to cure disease; other Christians may hold a cross while praying, wear it around their neck, or hang it in a visible area to remind them of their beliefs.

Man's inability to distance himself from material objects arises from the "tendency to worship things." Workers of God and religious objects are just the visible servants and vessels of God; however, people often find it easier to strengthen their faith with the "visible" because there is proof of its existence. As this dependency grows, the need for the "visible" gradually replaces the need for the invisible God.

There are incidents in the Bible that exemplify what occurs when faith is turned away from God to His vessel. For example, the Israelites shouted for joy when the Ark of the Covenant was brought out of Shiloh, but they suffered a great defeat (1 Sam 4). Also, the people of Judah would not amend their ways, misled by their belief that Jerusalem could never be defeated because it housed the temple of the Lord (Jer 7), little knowing that their entire kingdom would fall.

BELIEF IN GOD vs. BELIEF IN THE ROD

Amidst the chaos and contention because of the lack of water, God said to Moses, "Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together, speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water." A closer reading of this command shows us that it is very unique: God did not want to perform the miracle through the rod, but He, nevertheless, told Moses to fetch his rod. Moses obediently took that "rod of the Lord" from before God as He commanded (cf. Num 20:11; "his rod" refers to Moses and Aaron's rod).

What reaction did the congregation exhibit when Moses took from before

the Lord the rod that had seen them through so many battles? It was probably similar to the reaction of the Israelites five hundred years later upon seeing the ark—first, silence, and then, great excitement. All eyes closely followed the rod as it approached the rock. Experience told the people that the rod need only strike and there would be water to drink. Moses was clearly aware of the rod’s ability to bring water, and he further knew that striking the rock would bring forth this power. God had never before commanded Moses to take the rod but not use it, not to display His power through an intermediary but only to “command” the rock to yield water.

The previously complaining congregation moved toward the rock, slowly appeasing Moses’ anger. When the people reached the rock, however, his anger had not completely abated, so he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels!” Then, he lifted his rod and struck the rock twice. Water came out abundantly, and countless numbers of people and animals drank. As the people were quenching their thirst and rejoicing, Moses and Aaron suddenly heard God say, “Because you did not believe Me, [only the rod], [and failed] to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel [but let them give all glory unto the rod], therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.”

As difficult as it is to imagine, the congregation and even Moses began to believe that the withered branch he used to call forth plagues, part the sea, and bring water from a rock was imbued with power, calling it the “rod of God” (Ex 17:9).

Suppose instead the incident had happened this way:

Moses takes out the rod that could control the winds and water, and the contending congregation quiets. He stands still and then slowly turns, as stately as

GOD COULD NOT ALLOW MOSES TO “CROSS OVER” BECAUSE HE NEEDED TO MAKE AN EXAMPLE OF HIM, TO TEACH THE CONGREGATION A LESSON, AND TO SHOW FUTURE GENERATIONS HOW TO HALLOW HIM.

he was forty years before, when he stood before the Red Sea (the first time that the Israelites witnessed the use of the rod). He gives the people the same announcement, “See the salvation of the Lord, which He will accomplish for you today.” Then, without lifting the rod, he commands the rock to yield water. Hearing this command, water flows like a river from the rock... The Israelites cry, “Moses did not use the rod! Moses did not use the rod! It can be done without the rod!” Each cry of amazement erodes four decades of idolizing the rod. The people stand in awe and rejoice, for “God Himself has shown salvation.”

What a pity! If events had occurred this way, then the fact that things could be accomplished “without the rod” would have caused the Israelites to re-evaluate their superficial faith and raise it to the level where their only reliance is God. They would have turned their devotion of the rod to veneration of the Lord. They would no longer worship God through material objects, but rather with their hearts and in the truth, thereby obliterating all vestiges of idolatry.

THE LAST IDOL—MOSES

In Numbers 27:14, God explains to Moses one last time why he could not

enter Canaan: “For in the wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to hallow Me at the waters before their eyes.”

In the same way that God made the rod useless before the Israelites so that they would hallow Him, God also wanted to use the deaths of their leaders to break the people’s tendency toward idolatry before they entered Canaan. Without a leader and the rod, the people could finally realize that God alone watched over and blessed them. He chose Joshua, an unlikely choice for an idol, to lead the people in order to let them know that, even without Moses, they could cross the Jordan River as they did the Red Sea, and that, without Moses, they could conquer Jericho as they did the Amalekites.

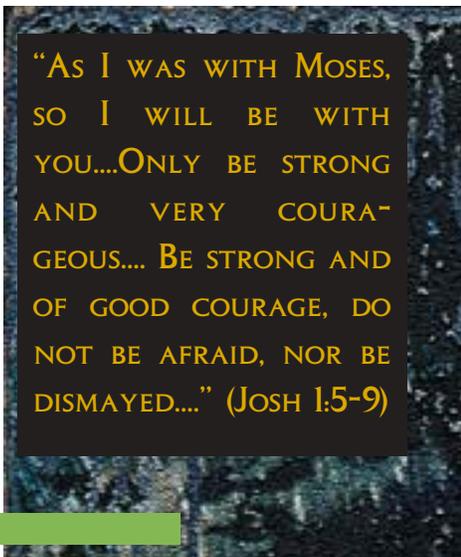
After the incident at the waters of Meribah, God commanded Moses, Aaron, and Eleazar to go up to Mount Hor. There, Aaron took off his garments, put them on Eleazar, and then died. The people of Israel mourned Aaron’s death for thirty days. Of the three siblings, there remained only Moses, who knew that he could not enter Canaan. Moses resigned himself to his fate, gathered his courage, and guided the people of Israel through the final trials of their journey through the wilderness—the fiery serpents, King Sihon of the Amorites, Balak’s attack, Balaam’s curse, and battle with the Midianites—until they finally arrived at the east bank of the Jordan River.

Facing the land they dreamed of, Moses could not suppress his desire to see Canaan. He gathered up his courage and pleaded with the Lord, saying, “I pray, let me cross over and see the good land.” But the Lord would not listen to him, and replied, “Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter” (Deut 3:25-26). God could not allow Moses to “cross over” because He needed to make an example of him, to teach the congregation a lesson, and to show future gener-

ations how to hallow Him. Moses did not raise this issue again after God ordered him to speak no more.

However, God did relent enough to allow Moses to go up to the top of Pisgah to view Canaan. Upon the mountaintop, God showed Moses all the land of Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the South, and the plain of the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar.

He showed the Promised Land to His servant who left his life at the palace for Him, lived on the run for Him, spoke to the pharaoh for Him, and led the



Israelites out of Egypt for Him. This was His servant whom He had spoken to on Mount Sinai for forty days and nights; this was His servant whom He had gently pushed into a cleft of a rock and shown His glory; this was His servant who had guided the Israelites through each hardship; this was His servant who led the people to the Jordan River alone and without complaint, knowing that he himself was forbidden to enter Canaan. God knew that He would never again find a servant as faithful as Moses.

Moses went to the place where God told him to go and looked upon the Promised Land with a radiant face.

Moses saw the land that, even if he had been permitted to enter, he would never have been able to see and visit in its entirety. He gazed one last time upon the land that he dreamed thousands of times of entering, and when he had looked his fill, he turned toward God, who had raised and watched over him throughout his life. Moses leaned contentedly upon God on that mountaintop, still vigorous after an unstable yet glorious and remarkable 120 years, slowly closed eyes that were still bright, and peacefully departed from his beloved people. He knew that God's Presence would be with them when he was gone (Ex 33:15-17). After Moses died, God buried him in a place where no one knows to this day.

It is difficult to say that this kind of ending was a punishment. Even though Canaan was forbidden to Moses, God's love and grace more than made up for it in reward and glory. We can only say that God would not give Moses entry into Canaan because he did not dispel the idols in the people's hearts and did not hallow Him. God reluctantly left Moses, who had become idolized by the people, in the wilderness. He would not let him lead the congregation into the land that He had given them (Num 20:12), so they could clearly see that God was the One truly leading them. The chosen people could proceed without Miriam, Aaron, the rod, or Moses.

A JOSHUA WITHOUT MOSES

Joshua was the first to experience the difficulty in believing only in God and not in idols. He had to readjust his faith, heart, and actions. As recorded in the Bible, after the death of Moses, the Lord spoke to Joshua:

Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel.... As I was with Moses, so I will be with you.... Be strong and of good courage.... Only be strong and very courageous....

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage, do not be afraid, nor be dismayed.... (Josh 1:2-9)

Exactly what kind of fear did Joshua have in his heart? Why did God repeatedly encourage him to be strong and of good courage? We cannot say that what Joshua feared was the seven tribes of Canaan, for when the congregation refused to enter Canaan forty years ago, was it not Joshua and Caleb who tore their clothes and said to them, Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread... and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them (Num 14:6-9)? After forty years, and after having acquired more experience, could Joshua have suddenly become frightened of enemies he regarded as their bread forty years before?

No! Joshua definitely feared not physical enemies but confusion in his heart: What will I do without Moses? Therefore, God reassured him, saying, As I was with Moses, so I will be with you.... Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you. God wanted Joshua to understand that Moses was not indispensable. It was God who led the way; it was God who gave the power. As God was with Moses, so He would be with anyone who faithfully followed Him and obeyed the Law.

The Israelites finally entered Canaan, and the manna stopped falling. The lives of the chosen people seemed ready to unfold normally. One day, not far from Jericho, Joshua, like Moses, met the Commander of the Army of the Lord. Joshua fell to the ground and worshiped, and asked, What does my Lord say to His servant? God's reply was the same as the reply He gave to Moses from the burning bush forty years before: Take your sandal off your foot.

And so continued the history of the chosen people. ★

"YOU SHALL



Observing the Sabbath is one of the Ten Commandments, which are set in stone and unchanging. The Sabbath Day is the day that belongs to God (Gen 2:1ff; Ex 20:8ff; Deut 5:13ff).

FF Chong—London, UK

DO NO WORK”

Like the other commandments, it is binding on us. In fact, the degree it binds us is more significant than how it bound the people of Israel. By commanding the Israelites to keep the Sabbath, God gave them opportunities to reflect upon His creative power, His purpose for them (cf. Gen 2:1ff; Ex 20:8ff), and His deliverance (Deut 5:13ff).

Of course, these opportunities are also available to us today, and keeping the Sabbath in our time also ushers us into the rest of God—from the seventh day Sabbath’s rest to the eventual eternal rest.

For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all His works’... There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who entered His rest has Himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. (Heb 4:4, 9-10)

Without a doubt, Sabbath observance has a direct bearing on our salvation.

In the Gospels, Jesus teaches that we must keep God’s commandments not only in the literal sense but also from within our hearts (Mt 5). Therefore, at the outset, before we can understand the true essence of Sabbath observance, we have to comply with the letter of the commandment: “...Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the day of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work...” (Ex 20:8ff; Deut 5:13ff).

The command “you shall do no work” served to restrain God’s chosen people from laboring on the Sabbath. This ensured that they would keep the Sabbath as God had intended. However, the Old Testament Scriptures do not sufficiently elaborate this commandment in

a way that enables us to deal with it in the context of the new millennium (Ex 20:10). Therefore, we can illustrate only the principles of Sabbath observance.

THE ISRAELITES’ SABBATH OBSERVANCE

When God gave the Israelites this command, they were still wanderers in the wilderness. He first issued it in the form of “staying at home,” which meant “staying in one’s tents” as opposed to leaving home to gather manna just like on any other day of the week:

In the Gospels, Jesus teaches that we must keep God’s commandments not only in the literal sense, but also from within our hearts.

Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is the Sabbath, there will be none... See! For the Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you the six days. Let every man remain in his place... (Ex 16:26, 29)

It is clear that the gathering of manna outside one’s dwelling place amounted to “doing work”—that is, it was the same kind of labor as was done on the other six days of the week. So God clearly stipulated that if the Israelites worked on the seventh day, they would be profaning the Sabbath, and thus, severe consequences would befall them (Ex 31:14).

Once the Israelites settled and became farmers, they had to stop all forms of farming on the seventh day in order to keep with the essence of the Sabbath. Likewise, after they began to develop into a nation, gathering wood (Num 15:32-36), burden-bearing (Jer

17:21-27), traveling (Ex 16:29), and trading (Amos 8:5) were all forbidden on the Sabbath. To prevent business dealings, Nehemiah ordered the gates of the city to be closed on the Sabbath (Neh 10:31; 13:15,19). All of these are examples of the types of “works of labor” that the Israelites could do on the first six days of the week but not on the seventh.

In spite of the prohibition to do work on the Sabbath, there were some activities that were lawful and permissible. These included attending dedication feasts (1 Kgs 8:65; 2 Chr 7:8) and mar-

riage feasts (Jud 14:12-18), visiting a man of God (2 Kgs 4:23), changing the temple guards (2 Kgs 1:5-9), preparing the showbread (1 Chr 9:32), and leaving the East gate open (Ezek 46:1-3).

More specifically, the Israelites celebrated the Sabbath (Ex 31:16) by gathering together in holy convocation (Lev 23:3) to make offerings (Num 28:9-10), and by providing new showbread in the holy place (Lev 24:8). It was a day of gladness (Num 10:10; Is 58:13). Though such celebration may have amounted to “work,” it was permissible on Sabbaths.

JESUS’ SABBATH OBSERVANCE

When Jesus came into this world, He brought to light the meaning of Sabbath observance by declaring Himself the Lord of the Sabbath (Mk 2:28) and by declaring that the Sabbath is made for man and not man for the Sabbath.

Moreover, the command “to rest from all works” does not negate His

"YOU SHALL DO NO WORK"

activities (works) in accomplishing His salvation plan on any Sabbath day. Jesus said, "My Father is working until now and I am working" (Jn 5:17; cf. Jn 9:4). If God had rested after His creation, how could He have been working until now? Surely, God does not stop sustaining the universe, giving life, and judging on the Sabbath. Rather, He rested from His work of creation, the work of the six days, as an example for us to follow.

Many times when Jesus performed healing on the Sabbath, He took the opportunity to rectify the common perception of placing sacrifices above the need to keep God's word: "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice" (Mt 12:7; cf. Hos 6:6). Mercy should take precedence over sacrifice. Life is precious in His sight. Even though the Torah is silent about Sabbath healing, to do good and to save lives on the Sabbath are pleasing in His eyes (Mt 12:12; Mk 3:4).

From His reply to the people who accused him of being possessed by a demon, Jesus made it obvious that even the Law of Moses provided a level of tolerance to certain works done on the Sabbath, such as circumcision (Jn 7:21ff).

acceptable (Mk 3:1ff).

Jesus, however, never advocated that we can do the work of labor on the Sabbath, just as we do it on any other day. Once, Jesus permitted His disciples to pluck and eat ears of corn, to satisfy their basic need (Mt 12:1ff), but if we think about it, the act of plucking and eating do not amount to more "work" than that of placing manna into one's mouth to eat on the seventh day, as the Israelites did in Exodus 16.

SABBATH OBSERVANCE TODAY

Though the command "you shall do no work" is clear, it is difficult to define the work of labor, since it varies from one generation to another, from one community to another, as well as from one person to another. If we were to keep defining works of labor in every aspect of life, then outlining exactly what is permissible could become an impossible task. This is precisely the situation that the Scribes and Pharisees placed themselves in.

Isaiah, being moved by the Spirit, saw the crux of the matter concerning Sabbath observance. He taught, from a

your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken. (Isa 58:13-14)

When our hearts are with God, then our observance of the Sabbath will be in line with what God requires of us. In considering Isaiah's message, we can clearly see that our hearts control what we should and should not do on the Sabbath. In turn, the work we do will affect our observance of the Sabbath.

In a nutshell, the phrase "you shall do no work" defines the work of the world, involving the labor of the six days, which we can choose not to do on the seventh day. The difference between the types of work is clearly a distinction between personal matters, matters of necessity, and religious concerns. Even so, God provides a degree of tolerance that enables us to satisfy basic human needs on the Sabbath.

He places the meaning of Sabbath observance on the denial and renunciation of natural desires, such as making money, any form of pleasure-seeking activities (e.g., watching a movie), and the like. It is a day of complete dedication to serving (Jn 7:23; Mt 12:5), worshiping, and loving God (Is 56:2; 58:13f; Eze 20:12,21), as well as helping others in their physical and spiritual needs.

The Sabbath belongs to God. The purpose of refraining from work on the seventh day is to concentrate on entering into God's rest, to do good work and save lives, and, what is most important, to improve one's spirituality by assembling together (cf. Lev 23:3). ★

Isaiah taught, from a spiritual dimension, that no man should seek self-pleasure and must desist from his own ways on the Sabbath.

Certainly, Jesus did not intend to change the Law as He desired. His ministry of healing (Jn 5:1-11; Mt 12:9-14) and joining in feasting (Lk 14:1) merely demonstrated the types of work that are permissible on the Sabbath. Any work done on the Sabbath at the command of God (Jn 5:8), that glorifies Him (cf. Jn 5:8ff) and is good in His sight, is therefore

spiritual dimension, that no man should seek self-pleasure and must desist from his own ways on the Sabbath:

If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing

Facing Life's Challenges



You're busy, you're tired, and you've still got huge amounts of work to do.

Someone very important in your life has hurt you.

You're battling temptation, and you've lost more than once.

You feel like your life is ripping apart at the seams, and yet you've still got to push on.

These are just a few of the many challenges we may face in life. Why does it seem like life doesn't get any easier, even though we are the children of God?

Our Lord Jesus tells us that we will encounter troubles and tribulation as long as we are in this world (Jn 16:33). But He also tells us to "be of good cheer," because He has overcome the world!

The following articles address different aspects of life's challenges, like maintaining peace when balancing a busy life, loving our enemies, and overcoming temptation. They help us face our difficulties with the right attitude, count our many blessings, and remember how precious we are in the Lord's sight.

Most importantly, they remind us that we have hope, because through the Lord, we too can overcome the troubles of this world and have peace.



RECONCILING OUR FAITH WITH REALITY



A believer once asked me, “Why is it that after all these years of believing in the Lord, I still have so many problems? Don’t I have enough faith?” This believer had problems with family, work, and interpersonal relations, and people told her that if she had more faith in God, everything would be okay. Soon, she began to doubt whether she had any faith at all.

Is it true that if we just have enough faith, all our problems will disappear? Is genuine faith proven only by a happy and peaceful life? Let’s look at some examples from the Bible to see if this is the case.

Many consider Abraham the “father of faith,” but he encountered family conflict with Sarah and Hagar, ultimately having to send Ishmael away. Jacob spent his early years laboring for his uncle Laban and his later years mourning for Joseph. He described the days of his life as “few and evil” (Gen 47:9). Joseph spent the majority of his youth as a slave and prisoner in Egypt. And Moses saw God face to face, yet He describes his days as ones of “labor and sorrow” that soon “fly away” (Ps 90:9-10).

As these examples show, many of the saints in the Bible encountered difficulties, just as we do today. Being a Christian does not mean that we live in a utopia or an ivory tower, cut off from the rest of the world. The Lord Jesus does not want us to be removed from the realities and troubles of the world (Jn 17:15); instead, He wants us to overcome the world through Him (Jn 16:33).

GOD MOVES THE MOUNTAINS

Why did this believer ask, “Do I not have enough faith”? The question stems from the belief that faith can and will change reality, that problems will disappear, work will go smoothly, and family members will live in harmony. We point to Jesus’ words in Mark 11 and assert that faith should change reality:

“Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.” (Mt 11:22-24)

When we face great mountains—our personal problems, family problems, or career problems—we want to move them and make them disappear. We believe that faith can make the mountain disappear because we think that is what Jesus promised us. But we must pay attention to Jesus’ other words in this

passage: “Have faith in God.” Let’s think about this idea a bit—do we believe that we can move the mountain, or that *God* can move the mountain?

There is a very important differentiation here. When we want something to change in our lives, do we pray only for what we want, or are do we pray for God’s will to be done? It’s important for us to understand that God has the power to change reality and that He will do so if He wishes. Things don’t change just because we want them to and believe that we can do it. Our responsibility is to bring our requests before the Lord with the faith that He can accomplish anything and then leave the decision up to Him.

Matthew 8 describes the story of a man who faced a great mountain—leprosy. He probably endured both physical pain, as his body slowly deteriorated, and emotional pain because he was cut off from his family and all of society. When he came to the Lord Jesus, he did not forcefully ask to be healed, although he wanted it desperately. Instead, he said, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” The man wanted so much to be clean, but he understood that the power and the decision lay in Jesus’ hands. Jesus answered him, “I am willing; be cleansed.”

This man had the correct kind of faith. He didn’t focus on changing reality to get what he wanted; rather, he had faith that Jesus could change reality. These are two vastly different attitudes and understandings. Having this kind of faith means that instead of believing that you can receive anything you want just because you ask for it, you believe that God will fulfill your request if it is His will. This is faith in the power and mercy of God.

GOD HAS HIS TIME

We often wish that things would change immediately, that our problems would

be solved tomorrow. Our prayers are fervent in the beginning, but if things haven't changed and we feel that God hasn't answered us soon enough, then our prayers cease, our faith dwindles, and we settle back into our daily lives.

When Abraham was seventy-five years old, God promised him that that he would have a child. Abraham, of course,

Egypt when he was seventeen, and he didn't become prime minister until he was thirty. He spent thirteen years as a slave and prisoner. These long years were a great test of faith, but it wasn't until Joseph passed through this trial that he was able to accomplish God's will.

If we believe in God's power, we must also believe that He knows when



TRUE FAITH—THE CHANGE WITHIN

The ability to change our circumstances through our belief in God is only one aspect of faith. What happens if God chooses not to act? Where then does our faith stand?

If we look at the examples in the Bible, true faith surpasses circumstances and environment. This kind of faith no longer depends on the situation; it is not shaken when the circumstances do not change.

Paul was chosen by God and did much wonderful work for Him. God established many churches through Paul and gave him the ability to preach and even perform miracles. You might think that a man with such great faith had a problem-free life, but in reality, Paul had his own problems. He had an illness that gave him much trouble. This illness was so severe that Paul had to bring Luke, a physician, with him on his missionary trips.

Paul asked God to take away this "thorn in his flesh" three times, but God refused. Was this because Paul didn't

If we believe in God's power, we must also believe that He knows when the best time is. After we've placed our requests before the Lord, we must give Him time to work.

wished that he could have the child immediately, but he didn't receive Isaac until twenty-five years later, when he was one hundred years old. Unfortunately, Abraham didn't hold fast to his faith during these twenty-five years of testing. After ten years he took Hagar as his wife, and she gave birth to Ishmael. This lack of faith created much strife in his family.

Oftentimes, we don't persist in our faith because we want something right away. But if we want something to change and believe wholeheartedly that God can change it, then we should keep our hearts at peace and wait patiently.

James tells us that our faith in God must face the test of time in order to be perfected:

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (Jas 1:2-4)

It is through trials that a person's faith grows roots and is established; it is under the test of time that faith surpasses our desires. Joseph was sold into

the best time is. After we've placed our requests before the Lord, we must give Him time to work. We believe that God can change reality, but we must also understand that He will do things in His own time.

So no matter how long it takes for things to change, we should continue to pray, to believe, and to have peace in our hearts, because we have entrusted everything to God. Since God has the power to change things and knows when and how best to do it, we no longer need to worry about it. It may happen today, tomorrow, in two years, or in ten years. Regardless, we will continue to believe.

Paul realized the purpose of this thorn in his life. This is something that we too must realize when we face the realities of life. Once we realize the purpose of our thorn, we will be at peace.

Having true faith means that we do not forcefully place our desires before God; instead, we lay our requests before Him, and if it is His will, He will make it happen, in His own time.

have enough faith? No, it was because through this painful thorn, Paul could understand the true meaning of faith. God told him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in

weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). Paul realized in his prayer that God’s grace was sufficient for him. The thorn was indeed painful, but the abundance of God’s grace totally surpassed the pain.

Today, when we pray about our needs, we often neglect what God has given us and only dwell on our own thorns. If we pray for our career, we neglect to see the blessings of our family. If we want to change a person, improve our environment, or move a mountain, we think only about the problems they give us, not the blessings. We need to ask God to open our eyes so that we can see past our needs to the grace of God.

True faith is marked by this kind of change in our hearts and in our understanding of God. Because of this realization, Paul’s attitude changed toward the thorn itself: “Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor 12:9). Paul no longer saw the thorn as something negative but as something that allowed God’s grace to be magnified. Earlier, he asked God to remove the painful thorn, but later he gave thanks for it because he saw it as something beneficial.

Paul realized the purpose of this thorn in his life, which is something that we too must do when we face the realities of life. Once we understand the purpose of our thorn, we will be at peace. Paul realized that God had a purpose for his thorn: God didn’t want him to become proud because of the abundance of revelations he had received (2 Cor 12:7).

Paul focused on the grace of God, not on his own weakness. He realized that through his weakness he could better experience God’s grace, so he no longer tried to hide his problems. He thanked God that he encountered these problems, because through them he found joy, and he was able to see him-

self clearly and change his inner heart.

Many people in the Bible exhibit this true faith, such as Daniel, his three friends, and Jesus Himself. Sometimes God would change circumstances because of their faith and prayer—He healed their sicknesses, rescued them from enemies, and protected them from danger. But we shouldn’t just focus on these events.

If we look at the entirety of their lives, we see that they were closest to God when they could understand His will and submit to Him during times of distress. There were indeed miracles that happened in their lives, but it was when reality didn’t change that they learned to submit. They looked at their problems

with a different point of view and understanding, so for them the problems were no longer a burden. On the surface the problems were still there, but within their hearts, they were gone. This change of heart gave them blessed and victorious lives.

REJOICING IN THE LORD ALWAYS

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. 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 4:4-7)



A life of true faith is to rejoice in the Lord always, no matter what the situation is—whether we gain or lose, succeed or fail, live or die—because we believe that the work of God is the best, and that everything is God’s work. So we rely on the Lord and rejoice.

So what should we do when we face a challenging situation? We should tell God what we need in our prayers.,

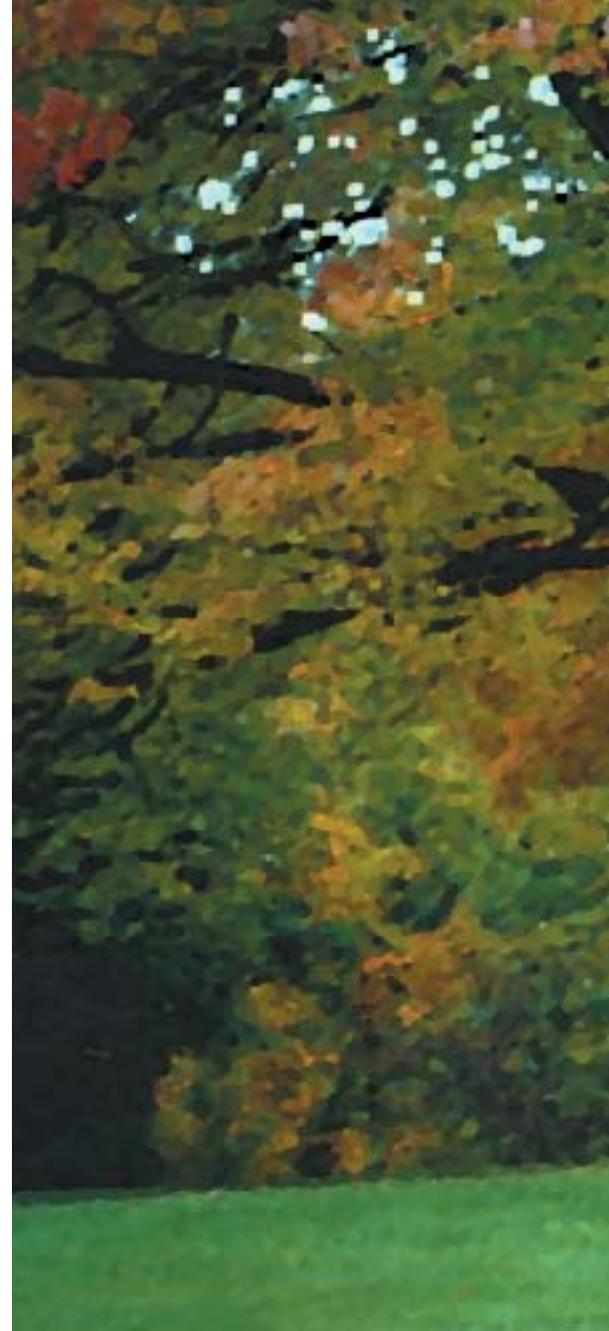
A life of true faith is to rejoice in the Lord always, no matter what the situation is—whether we gain or lose, succeed or fail, live or die—because we believe that the work of God is the best, and that everything is God’s work. So we rely on the Lord and rejoice.

not only crying out to Him, but also giving thanks. When we tell God what is in our heart, He will change it. His peace, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds.

As Christians, our lives may not seem different from that of a non-believer’s. We don’t live in ivory towers, and we still encounter problems like everyone else. But we are able to pray to God, and in His mercy, He may change our circumstances. But if God chooses not to change things, we must remember that it is during these times that our faith is tested and transformed. This is when we begin to understand the purpose of God in our lives and the meaning of the thorn in our flesh. It is during these times of great trials and distress that our transformation brings forth the greatest and truest faith. ★

Sometimes we're just so overwhelmed with work, family, and perhaps even church work that we can't help feeling weighed down with burden and weariness, unable to experience the joy and freedom that God has promised. Coming home from class one day, I found my house a mess—the dishes needed washing, socks needed picking up, the kids needed attention—and I still had to make time for church and school work. I wanted to scream at the top of my voice,

Jennifer Zon—Dallas, Texas, USA



I felt resentful and totally fed up. "Life is so unfair!" I protested to myself. All these responsibilities piled up like weights on my shoulders. I wondered, "Is this the kind of life God intended for me?"

Humility Is the Key

One night during service, we turned to Matthew 11:28. The gracious words of our Lord Jesus reached out to me: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." I thought, "That's exactly what I need, but how?" Verses 29 and 30 explained, "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for My

yoke is easy and My burden is light."

That night, the Lord Jesus gave me the answer that I'd been searching for! He instructed me to learn from Him, to be gentle and humble in heart. Only then would my soul find rest. But I had one question: what is a "humble heart"? The meaning of humility is so abstract. How can one grasp it? I was determined to find the answer.

Taking the Focus off Yourself

An interesting fact about humility and pride came to my attention as I read a Christian publication. It explained that humility is focused outward, while pride is focused inward. In other words, pride is self-seeking, but humility is not. This

didn't seem to make sense at first, but upon further research, it made perfect sense to me. Humility is not about denying compliments or degrading yourself. It's about not thinking of self at all.

When God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses kept making excuses until God's anger burned against him (Ex 4:14). Why was God angry with him for saying such humble statements as "Who am I?" and "I am not eloquent"? By saying these things, he was exalting his own opinion over God's command. He was saying that he knew himself better, that God had chosen the wrong guy.

Furthermore, Moses wasn't thinking about the freedom of his fellow Israelites

FINDING PEACE

but about himself. He was worried about the possibility of making a fool of himself before a multitude of people, even after God assured him time and time again that He would be with him. Moses was worried about his own abilities rather than trusting in the power of God.

Saul and David are also classic biblical examples demonstrating the characteristics of pride vs. humility. When Saul heard the women singing and exalting David above himself (1 Sam 18:7), he was angry and jealous. Why? Because Saul was proud. Rather than rejoicing with the people over the triumph of defeating Goliath, his focus was on himself. He was worried about his reputation and his kingship, and he resented

how he didn't receive as much credit from the people as David did.

On the other hand, David demonstrated humility during the two incidents where he spared Saul's life. Instead of seeking his own interest, his focus was on the interests of God. Respecting the Lord's anointed was more important than anything, even when his own life was on the line (1 Sam 26:9). In the end, God exalted David above Saul, for "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (Jam 4:6).

Meeting the Needs of Others

1 Peter 5:6-7 tells us, "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the

proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." By casting all our cares upon the Lord, we shift our attention from ourselves, and our burdens are lightened.

There was a young man who visited a pastor in Dallas; depression had gripped him for nine months. After hearing his story, the pastor offered no counsel but wrote down a name and hospital room number on a piece of paper and said, "This person has to be visited today, but I don't have time. Can you stop by on your way home and visit him for me?"

The young man was surprised, but he agreed to go. Then something remarkable happened. As he visited with



Resting in God's Love

the patient, the power of his depression was broken. He was freed. Why? Because he finally focused on somebody other than himself.¹

From teaching children's religious education classes, I've had similar experiences. The class had always been unmanageable, and most of the students lacked respect for adults. I didn't understand the reason for their misbehavior, nor did I have time to care. Even though I was doing a "good thing" by working for God, I wasn't experiencing any peace and joy. Instead, it was a burden.

But when I took the focus off myself, amazing things started to happen. I decided to take God's word for it and just "cast all my cares upon Him." Then I listed the children's needs—emotional well being, sense of security, affection, recognition, freedom from guilt, and new experiences. Before I started planning a lesson, I posed the question, "How can I meet their needs?" The results were marvelous. The children were more interested and more attentive, and God touched their hearts.

What a difference it made when I took up the words of God and turned the attention from myself to my students! I was freed from my worries and burden of teaching, and God's joy flowed in. One of the characteristics of love is "not self seeking" (1 Cor 13:5). There is a direct connection between humility and love, for only a humble heart is truly able to love. In John 15:11-12, the Lord Jesus says:

"These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you."

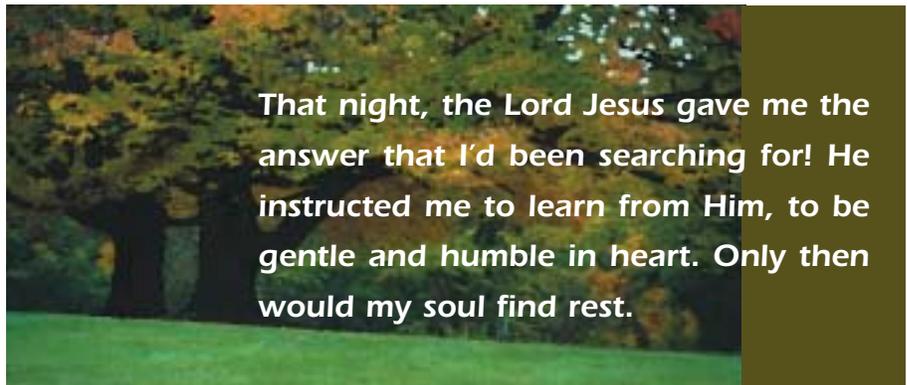
Jesus knew true humility, and He loved and cared the most. Therefore, He was anointed with the oil of joy above all others (Ps 45:7). Humility benefits a person in many ways. Not only does it give us rest and peace, but it also comes with blessings of joy!

Before we can have a successful relationship with another person, we must make sure that our relationship with God is set right. The Bible says, "We love because He first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19).

When a person is in need of love, he or she is like an empty cup that needs to be filled. One of Satan's deadliest weapons is to raise doubts in us about God's love. Satan whispers to us, "You are not good enough for Him," and "Why would God love someone like you?" Satan emphasizes our own inadequacies rather than the grace, the cleans-

change. We change from an empty cup to a full cup, ready to give. We will no longer be troubled with our own world of worries but instead start to think about what we can do to help others. It may be to build up and edify their faith and to advance the kingdom of God.

Everyday we should ask ourselves, "What is God's calling for me?" Do not disregard even a small deed, for any small gesture or word of kindness is like a tiny drop of water that helps to make up a mighty ocean. The most important thing is to be a part of it, and to realize that each one of us can add a significant drop.



That night, the Lord Jesus gave me the answer that I'd been searching for! He instructed me to learn from Him, to be gentle and humble in heart. Only then would my soul find rest.

ing, and the power of God. That's why we need to shield ourselves with faith to block his flaming darts (Eph 6:16).

The Lord said, "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jer 31:3), and "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that who ever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16). The Bible declares that nothing can separate us from the love of God:

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39).

God's promises of love are fulfilling and unailing. Only when we are confident of God's love will our perspective

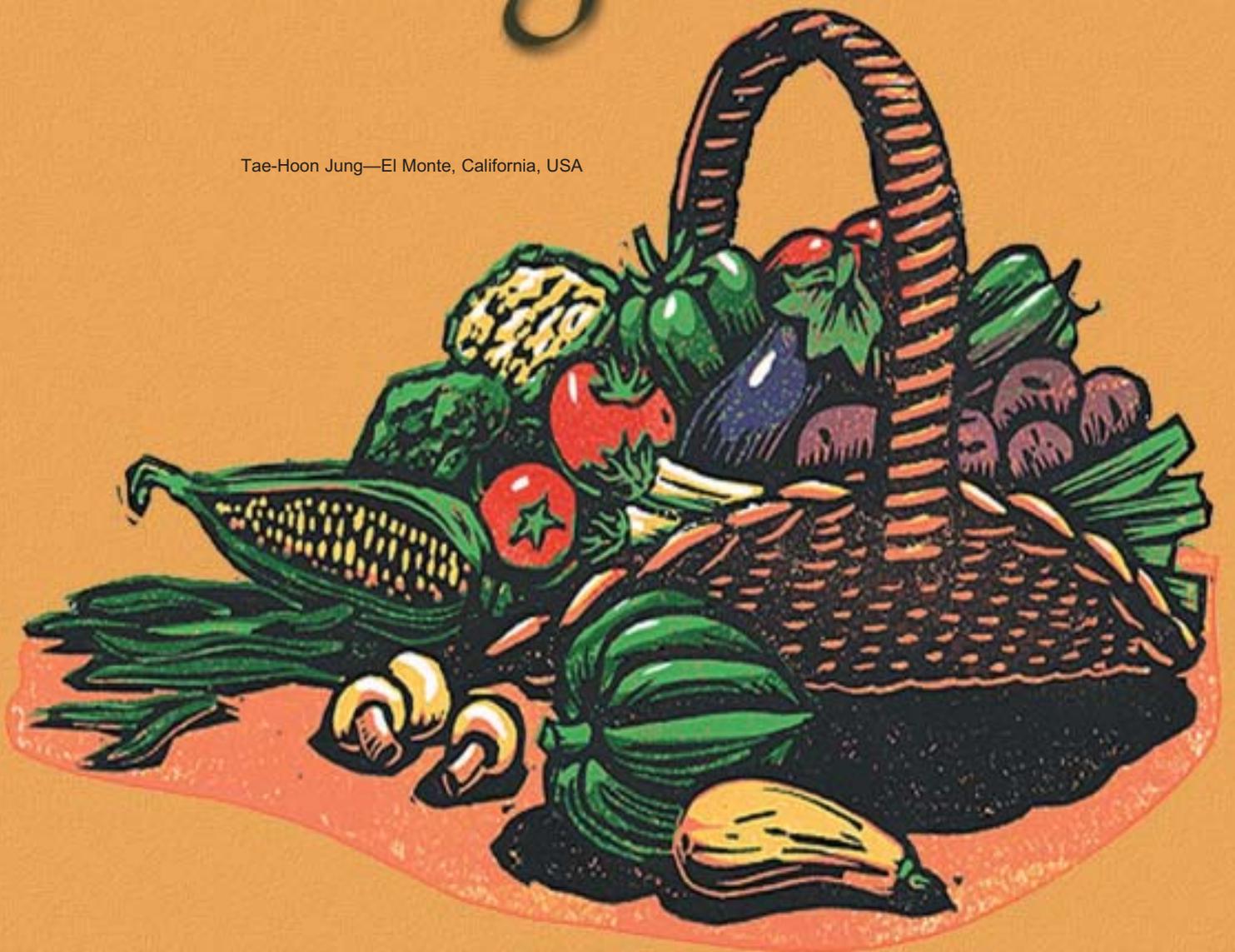
This enlightenment has been an enriching experience for me. The heavy workload of yesterday becomes a precious opportunity to serve today. Although sometimes I have a tendency to revert back to a self-seeking mode, by the grace of God and with more practice, the future looks pretty bright.

Finding rest for our souls does not mean ridding ourselves of our responsibilities but facing them with a new attitude, with the power of the word and the promise behind it, for we are "transformed by the renewing of our mind" (Rom 12:2). Learn from Jesus' humble and gentle spirit, and you will fulfill the law of love. And above all, remain in Jesus (Jn 15:5). Continue to grow in faith, through prayer and the precious words of the Bible. Only in Christ can we find life, hope, joy, and peace at last. "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:13). ★

1. "Dispelling the Gloom of Depression," in Rick Howard, Jamie Lash, and Jack W. Hayford, *This Was Your Life: Preparing to Meet God Face to Face* (Chosen Books, 1998)

Gathering up The Leftover Fragments

Tae-Hoon Jung—El Monte, California, USA





During His ministry, Jesus performed many miracles and healed many people of their diseases. News of Him spread everywhere, and soon people were following Him wherever He went. These people had different reasons for following Jesus. Many thought that if they followed Him, they would get something in return.

Once there was a group of five thousand men following Jesus, and when they didn't have anything to eat, He fed them all with five loaves and two fish. During this miraculous event, Jesus commanded the disciples to gather up the leftover fragments of food:

So when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost." Therefore they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten. (Jn 6:12-13)

Sometimes, having leftovers is like having a penny in our pocket—we don't think it's very important. To some people, leftovers are worthless, while to others, they are very important. Jesus told His disciples to gather up the leftover fragments because He viewed the leftovers as important.

There was a very famous man who, when he was a child, was very different from other children. He would often stare out the windows, daydreaming about other things. His classmates thought he was strange, and they liked to make fun of him. They would tease him, offering him the choice between a nickel and a penny, and he would always pick the penny. If they gave him the choice between a dime and a nickel, he would pick the nickel. This child would always smilingly take the lesser amount. His teacher told his parents about this, and they began to worry, wondering if he had some kind of mental problem. One day, careful not to hurt his feelings, they asked him cautiously, "Why do you always take the lesser amount?" Their son replied, "This way the other kids will keep on playing with me, and I can earn my pocket money."

So we shouldn't look lightly on small fragments, because they can add up to something greater. Even leftover fragments, like the ones Jesus had His disciples gather, can give us new insight into God.

The people following Jesus had many different motives. "Then a great multitude followed Him, because they saw His signs which He performed on those who were diseased" (Jn 6:2). These people didn't want to listen to God's word; they just wanted to watch Jesus perform miracles for their entertainment or to fulfill their curiosity. But no matter why they followed Him, Jesus

God also chose twelve disciples who weren't famous or powerful. He chose the "leftovers" of this world to glorify His name.

loved them, taught them, and healed them. When they were hungry, He fed them.

After the great miracle of Jesus feeding the multitude, the people wanted to make Him king. No one asked why He performed this miracle; they only saw that He could do great things and that He could provide for them. As a result, they wanted to make him king (Jn 6:15).

The purpose of Jesus' miracles was to convey the truth of the gospel, so that people would return to God. But these people didn't understand the truth. That's why Jesus had to withdraw. When Jesus performed great miracles, people often reacted with the wrong motives. They couldn't see that Jesus truly is king already—not of a physical kingdom, but of a spiritual one.

So Jesus used this opportunity to teach His disciples about the spiritual kingdom. He wanted them to gather up the fragments so that nothing would be lost. The multitude did not think the fragments were important. But Jesus had the disciples pick up every single one.

GATHERING UP THE FRAGMENTS OF GOD'S GRACE

Jesus turned five loaves of bread and two fish into a huge amount of food,

enough to feed the five thousand. In fact, this number probably only included the men in the crowd; if we include the women and children, the crowd was probably about ten thousand people.

The multitude threw away the leftovers once their stomachs were full. But these fragments were part of God's grace. That's why Jesus told the disciples to gather up the leftover fragments. They were evidence of God's blessings and miracles. Jesus did not want them to be considered worthless.

Let's think about the mindset of the disciples as they picked up the fragments. In the beginning, they saw that

there were only five loaves and two fish. But Jesus used this small amount of food to feed ten thousand people. As the disciples moved around the crowd picking up the leftover fragments, filling their baskets, they began to understand the work of God. The disciples had to take time to gather up the fragments, and in doing so, they experienced and became witnesses of the grace of Jesus Christ.

When we think about our own lives, we can probably remember the "big" blessings that God has given us. But sometimes we forget about the small ones. Sometimes we're too lazy to gather up these fragments of blessing. This leads us to underestimate the grace of God in our lives.

Yet we are here today because of these many small fragments of grace. There's a hymn that reminds us, "Count Your Blessings." It is our duty to keep these small fragments in our basket. God performs miracles and gives us blessings and grace, but it is our duty to gather up the fragments.

We often complain, wondering why God seems to give more blessings to others than He gives to us. This is because we don't pick up all of the small fragments of God's grace. If we gather up all the fragments and put them in our baskets, we will see the abundance of grace inside. We will understand God's bless-



ings for us, and this will give us comfort and encouragement. Through these experiences, we can understand the love of God, and our faith will become rooted in the truth. Then we will see that God is with us in our hearts.

them rejoiced because their illness was healed, but only one knew how to give thanks. This is wisdom.

We should have the same attitude toward God. He knows we have busy lives, and He doesn't expect us to dedi-

rather than on the things of this world. Our goal is to glorify God. We should remember the story of the widow's two mites. From the worldly point of view, this woman was poor, and her two mites were worthless. But in God's eyes, these two mites were worth everything, for the widow gave Him all she had.

We often underestimate the good of attending church services. But this fragment is also important in God's eyes. Sometimes when we go to church, our expectations are not fulfilled. But even if our hearts are not moved by the sermon, we should not be discouraged. As long as we come to church with the right heart, God will give us blessings. We don't know when these fragments will change our lives, but they are part of the miracles of God. They will be gathered on the last day, and they will bring us joy. Perhaps we have given only five loaves and two fish, but we will have twelve baskets at the end.

This principle also applies to prayer. We shouldn't pray only at church, for we can pray anytime: in class, at work, or in the car. Each time our heart connects with God, these small fragments reinforce our faith and create a more blissful life in the Lord.

The same principle also applies to reading the Bible. We don't have to read ten chapters a day; perhaps we only have time for a few verses. But if we have the heart, these words of God will become fragments of spiritual food. If we gather up these small fragments every day, we will glorify God.

Jesus commanded the disciples to "gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost" (Jn 6:12).

If we wanted to transfer water from one cup to another, we wouldn't care if we spilled a few drops. But if the cup was filled with gold powder or diamonds, we would be sure to transfer every bit. God's blessings are even more precious than gold or diamonds. We shouldn't overlook even one small piece of this grace; instead, we should gather all of His grace and blessings into our baskets. And then we will understand and experience the abundance of God's grace and love. ✨

No matter what kind of situation we encounter, there are always small fragments of God's grace all around us. If we are wise, we will gather them up.

Sometimes we encounter difficult situations, and sometimes we have success and prosperity. Perhaps our business goes bankrupt, or perhaps we are promoted. But no matter what kind of situation we encounter, there are always small fragments of God's grace all around us. If we are wise, we will gather them up.

This is the secret of how we can rejoice all the time. Those who do not know God cannot rejoice, because when they encounter problems, they complain or discourage themselves. But as Christians we are different, because God is always around us and within our hearts. God has given us enough grace and blessings; all we have to do is find them. Although physically we may be suffering or in tribulation, we can experience true joy when we pick up these fragments.

"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Th 5:16-18). This verse can truly work in our lives. When we know how to rejoice always, we will be able to pray at all times and give thanks in all circumstances. If we can do this, the kingdom of God is already established in our hearts. A true Christian is not affected by outward circumstances, for if we wholeheartedly rely on God, He will be with us and bless us.

GIVING BACK TO GOD

Once we've gathered everything, we need to give it back to God. When Jesus healed the ten lepers, only one came back to Jesus and thanked Him. Nine of

cate all of our time to His work. His expectations are always reasonable and can be accomplished. And any work, no matter how small it seems, is important. Even picking up a piece of trash is a great work.

There are some people who work very hard in church, but they stop if they feel that they don't receive any recognition from other people. But God's eyes are always on us. He wants to see if we can find the small fragments in church to pay Him back. If we know how to pay Him back with these small fragments, He will bless us even more.

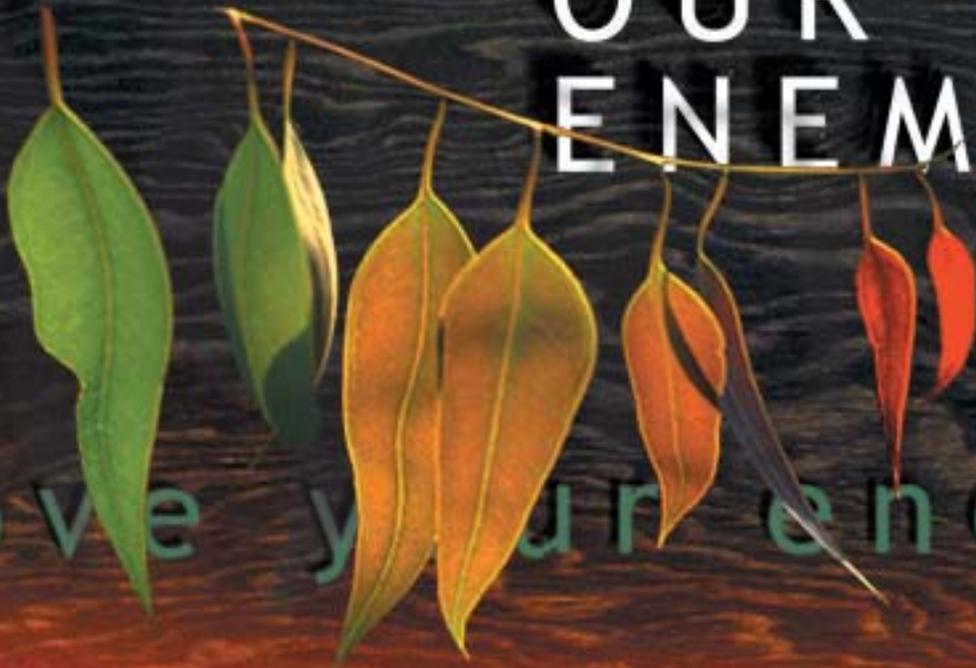
God often works with those who are not well known or acknowledged by many people. Joseph was a slave in the land of Egypt; no one expected that he would become a prime minister. But he knew how to collect the small fragments. Under such suffering and tribulation, he still knew how to hold on to God. He never complained, so God continued to bless him abundantly.

God also chose the Israelites, who were a very small tribe. He could have chosen the Babylonians, a great empire, so that His name could be spread throughout the known world. Instead, God chose to glorify His name through this small, weak group of people.

God also chose twelve disciples who weren't famous or powerful. He chose the "leftovers" of this world to glorify His name. In the same way, we may view ourselves as small or weak. But in the eyes of God, we have His truth. Therefore, it is our duty to gather the "leftovers" of the world and bring them back to God (Lk 14:15-24).

How can we do this? We need to change our lifestyles, to focus on God

LOVING OUR ENEMIES



love your enemies

BUT I SAY TO YOU,

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES,

BLESS THOSE WHO CURSE YOU,

DO GOOD TO THOSE WHO HATE YOU

AND PRAY FOR THOSE WHO SPITEFULLY

USE YOU AND PERSECUTE YOU.

(MT 5:44)

your enemies

LOVING OUR ENEMIES

The Bible revolves around love, teaching us the way to love God and to love man. Love is the meaning and motivation for life. With love, life is wonderful and joyful; without it, life is just dull and uninteresting. Our Lord Jesus tells us that we have to bear our cross and follow Him. These teachings behind the cross are the teachings of love, representing the relationship between God and us, and the relationship we have with each other.

It is easy, of course, to love God and to love people who love us in return. But it's not so easy to love those who don't love us back. Our Lord Jesus teaches us not merely to love our enemies but also to pray for those who persecute us (Mt 5:44). This may seem to be an even harder task, but when we consider how Jesus and Stephen were able to do it, how can we, who are determined to follow Christ, fail at it? As believers who claim to have picked up our cross and followed Christ, we must remember that the burden of the cross lies in this kind of love. The Bible tells us the reasons why we should love our enemies.

WHY WE SHOULD LOVE

Because Jesus First Loved Us

If Jesus had not come into this world in the form of flesh and redeemed us from our sins by shedding His own blood, we would not someday be able to stand blameless before God. While we were still sinners, God sent His only Son as a sacrifice for the atonement of our sins, because He loved us so.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (Jn 3:16-18)

It is thus a wonderful grace to be chosen by God today. It is such a great change for us: once we were near the borders of destruction, but now we are His children. Since God loves us so much, we should emulate Christ's love by loving those who need our love.

In Matthew 18:23-35, Jesus tells us the parable of the servant who owed his master ten thousand talents. Often we are like this servant—we know how to receive God's love, but we don't know how to reflect it onto others who need it. We might be angry when we read about the servant in the parable because we think he's too cruel. Yet we should realize that we are not so different from that cruel servant; when we criticize him, we are really criticizing ourselves.

Taking Away the Obstacle to Prayer

"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." (Mt 5:23-24)

In these verses, Jesus reminds us of the importance of reconciliation. The altar represents prayer, as a way of gathering and of getting closer to God. If we wish to maintain a good relationship with God and have Him accept our offerings, we must first reconcile with those who have something against us. For



**The love we express toward our brethren
is the best and most practical way to
show our love for God.**

God will accept our prayers and offerings only after we have accomplished this task.

A quarrel is usually caused by shortcomings in both parties. This passage in the Bible emphasizes the person who is trying to make an offering to God; more importantly, it says that someone has a grudge against him, rather than him having a grudge against someone else. Perhaps the person trying to make the offering has had an argument or a slight disagreement with someone else and has already forgotten about the matter or forgiven the other party. Yet he has not made attempts at reconciliation, and the other party is still displeased with him. As a result, he is unable to gain God's approval and pleasure when he makes his offering.

If we wish our prayers and works to be accepted by God, we first have to love our enemies and those who are still displeased with us. This is the only way that God will be pleased with all we have to offer.

God Forgives Us When We Forgive Others

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Mt 6:14-15)

If we are able to forgive others, then if we happen to offend someone, that person will be more likely to forgive us. It is only through this kind of positive cycle that the relationships between people can stay happy. Also, by removing the barrier that sin creates between God and us, we will gain His forgiveness for our past wrongs and shorten the distance between Him and us.

Peter once asked Jesus how often we should forgive others (Mt 18:21-22). Peter thought that it was quite an accomplishment to be able to forgive someone seven times for their wrongs, but the answer that Jesus gave surprised him: Jesus said that we have to forgive someone seventy times seven times. It may seem hard for us even to meet someone face-to-face who has wronged us, so it would be truly amazing to be able to forgive someone seventy times seven times. In actuality, what Jesus meant is that we should not think about the number of times that others offend us, but we should for-

give them unconditionally, just as He forgave us. In doing so can we be deemed the true children of God.

We Love God by Loving Those around Us

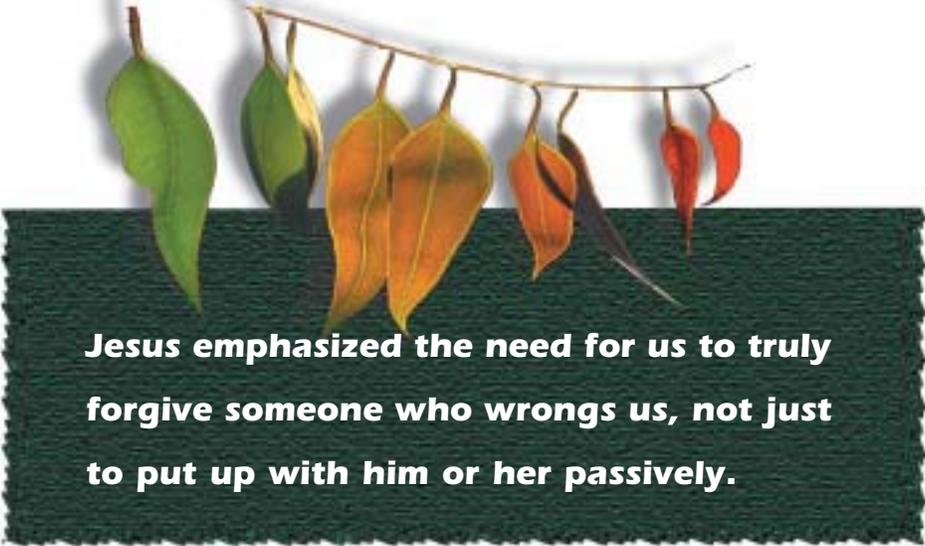
"We love Him because He first loved us. If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also." (1 Jn 4:19-21)

Jesus has also told us, "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth" (Jn 4:24). Many people put great effort into their own worship of God, but they are unclear about what His commands mean. In order to express their love for God, they read the Bible, have fellowships and prayers, and sing praises to Him every day. But they are not complete in their love for God, because they fail to love others unconditionally. Quite often they continue to hold grudges and feel hatred toward others, and they have many enemies. There is a great contrast between the way they worship and the way they treat other people. The apostle John was thinking of this attitude when he remarked, "If someone says 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar" (1 Jn 4:20). The love we express toward our brethren is the best and most practical way to show our love for God.

We have thus considered the reasons why we should love our enemies. But just how should we love them?

HOW TO LOVE COMPLETELY Love from Our Hearts

Many people think that it is good enough to love an enemy by being able to remain silent and bear all attacks with retort. They may hate the other person deep down in their hearts, but they are able to suppress it and not reveal it in front of their enemy. They may then say bad things about the person behind his or her back, trying to relieve some of the frustration they feel or trying to gain support and approval from others. They may have trouble eating or sleeping as long as they continue to think about the unhappy incidents. They feel miserable, because they haven't forgiven the other person.



Jesus emphasized the need for us to truly forgive someone who wrongs us, not just to put up with him or her passively.

This is not the way Jesus taught us to love our enemies. He taught us to forgive them completely, from the bottom of our hearts, and to let them feel our love, so that we may convert them from our enemies to our friends. “But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. To one who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also” (Luke 6:27-29).

Jesus emphasized the need for us to truly forgive someone who wrongs us, not just to put up with him or her passively. If we truly love others, we will be able to forgive not only the one who strikes our cheek but also the one who hits us with a stick or even attempts to kill us. Only if we have this kind of love are we among those who bear the cross with Christ.

Bless Them

God will judge us by the words we speak as Christians. That’s why Paul encouraged the believers in the church at Rome to “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse” (Rom 12:14). When we talk about the act of loving our enemies, we should remember the following passage:

“But whoever slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.” (Mt 5:38-42)

Ordinarily, we might feel that these actual expressions of love for our enemies are quite impossible. Yet it’s not enough just to maintain a façade of harmony; we need to take a step forward by also asking God to bless our enemies. This teaching cannot be found in any other book, for only in the Bible are we able to find complete love. Before Stephen died for Jesus, he prayed to God, saying, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin” (Acts 7:60). Stephen was human just like us, and he felt the pain when he was attacked. But instead of asking God to curse those who persecuted him, he begged God not to charge them with the sin.

This kind of love is something that each and every Christian should possess, for our God is love and He wants us

to have love like His (1 Jn 4:7-8). The Lord Jesus commanded His twelve disciples to preach the gospel and to greet each household. If the household was worthy, peace would come upon them; but if it was not worthy, peace would return to the disciples (Mt 10:11-13), for only blessings should be given, not curses.

Pray for Them

It may seem sufficient to give our enemies additional love and to bless them. But that is still not complete love, for we must also pray for them (Lk 6:28). We who are in the flesh are often weak, and there may be times when we act in haste, times when our tempers are short, and times when we underestimate others or regard them with hatred. All of these weaknesses lead to the possibility of conflicts. Thus, in praying for our enemies, we are also praying for ourselves. We must be able to confess our own trespasses and pray for one another (Jam 5:16) in order to be pleasing in God’s eyes.

Do Not Gloat over Their Misfortune

Proverbs 24:17-18 tells us, “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; Lest the Lord see it, and it displease Him...”

No matter how awful our enemies may be, we must accept what has happened without blaming them. Otherwise, we will feel anger, frustration, and vengeance that come with these thoughts. Paul told us that we should not try to avenge ourselves but to give way and await the judgment of God. For it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” says the Lord” (Rom 12:19). In doing good to our enemies, we are heaping coals of fire upon their heads (Rom 12:20).

If we see that our enemies are being punished or disciplined by God, we should not gloat. Instead, we should have a sympathetic heart, so that God will not direct His anger toward us.

Peter encourages us to love one another and to bless those who persecute us, so that we may inherit a blessing (1 Pet 3:8-9). In this way we can be worthy children of God, able to inherit the eternal heavenly kingdom, for in the heavenly kingdom, there is no hatred. Let us all rely on God to love one another.★

SHEDDING LIGHT ON THE DARKNESS OF CYBERPORN

Tedd—UNITED KINGDOM



Kevin was hunched over his computer late one night. A deacon at his church and the father of three, Kevin wondered how his wife and his church friends would react if they could see him now—because Kevin was searching for sex on the Internet.

The above story was taken from the pages of an online Christian addiction recovery resource.¹ Alarming, it shows how easy the Internet is making it to bring sexual temptation right into our homes.

The Internet is a rapidly expanding “online” encyclopedia—with seemingly infinite information on news, science, art, education, sports, and entertainment. The categories are innumerable, and both e-commerce and religious information are destined to thrive on the Internet in the coming years. Millions of people use the Internet every day, and even governments encourage their citizens to join the cyber-revolution.

However, the virtual world is also a dangerous place, and as Christians we should be aware of the dangers that lurk there. The “net” is getting larger and



more influential by the minute, which is exactly why we must “give the more earnest heed” to this phenomenal trend, “lest we drift away” (Heb 2:1).

This article will explore how Satan uses pornography on the Internet to addict people, the power of addiction, and the adverse effects of pornography. Finally, we’ll examine how we can escape from the trap of pornography.

THE POWERFUL ALLURE OF CYBERPORN

Sadly, the introduction of pornography to the information superhighway has made home computers the primary and fastest-growing mode of distribution of illegal pornography. Conservative estimates for the number of X-rated sites on the net range from twenty thousand to seven million. Every day, up to thirty million people log on to pornographic websites.²

Easy access, anonymity, and affordability have all made Internet porn more attractive and seemingly less dangerous than before. In 1995, Time magazine broke one of the first big stories on “cyberporn.” In that piece, Philip Elmer-Dewitt described the new allure of online porn:

...pornography is different on the computer networks. You can obtain it in the privacy of your home—without having to walk into a seedy bookstore or movie house... You can explore different aspects of your sexuality without exposing yourself to communicable diseases or public ridicule.³

But don’t think that Christians are immune to this threat. Zogby International conducted a survey recently for Focus on the Family, a Christian radio broadcast program, to find out how widespread the problem is. The results were shocking. It appears that one out of five adults in the United States may have visited a sexually oriented website—nearly forty million people.

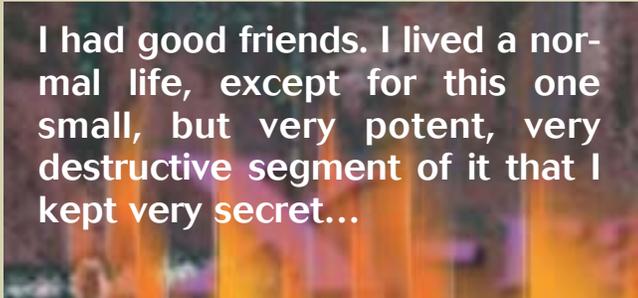
Of interest to Focus on the Family was the fact that 17.8 percent of those who claim to be “born again” Christians and 18 percent of those who are married have also viewed sex sites. Calls from ministers to Focus on the Family’s pastoral counseling lines reveal that even pastors are not immune from the “siren song” of pornography.⁴

So why do people go online to view porn in the first place? Greg Gutfield says that most people may not have a problem with porn, but may stumble upon it

out of curiosity and quickly become addicted.⁵ Internet pornography has rightly earned a reputation for being the “crack cocaine” of sexual addiction. “It works so quickly and it’s so instantly intense,” says Dr. Robert Weiss of the Sexual Recovery Institute in Los Angeles. The experience of physical arousal can be adrenalized and intense when viewing pornography, and like any drug-induced “high,” your body will crave another hit.⁶

Once we understand the nature of addiction, we shouldn’t be surprised to learn that so many people are enslaved to pornography. Dr. Victor Cline of the University of Utah has studied the pattern of addiction, escalation, desensitization, and acting out.⁷

- ◆ **Addiction:** You keep coming back to porn. It becomes a regular part of your life. You’re hooked and can’t quit.
- ◆ **Escalation:** You start to look for more graphic pornography. You start using porn that disgusted you earlier but is now enticing to you.
- ◆ **Desensitization:** You begin feeling numb toward the images you see. Even the most graphic porn is no longer arousing. You become des-



I had good friends. I lived a normal life, except for this one small, but very potent, very destructive segment of it that I kept very secret...

perate to feel the same thrill again, but you can't find it.

- ◆ **Acting out sexually.** This is the point where you make a critical jump and start acting out the images you have seen and rehearsed in your mind.

James 1:14-15 states, "But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. And desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full grown brings forth death." Once lured by our lusts we quickly become slaves to the sin of cyberporn, and in time we bear the fruit of spiritual death.

THE EFFECTS OF PORNOGRAPHY

The evidence of porn's effects on an individual's spiritual, emotional, and physical life is well-documented by national family and child protection groups, psychologists, social scientists, and Christian addiction-recovery organizations. Pornography's harms include the extreme situations where addiction may lead to rape or sexual abuse. Most broadly, pornography has been demonstrated to shape attitudes, and its harms can range from damaged marriage and family relationships to the increasingly common incidences of date rape.⁸

Distorting Healthy Views of Relationships and Sexuality

Today, pornography continues to teach an entire generation of young men and women distorted values about their sexuality and healthy relationships with the opposite sex. This is sobering and tragic since the Bible teaches us that sex is a beautiful gift from God, designed within the context of a committed and loving marital relationship.

Viewing pornography online may seem harmless, especially for those who just see it as entertainment. Quickly, however, these activities can lead to compulsive behavior, addiction, and

damaged relationships. Dr. Gary Brooks details in his book *The Centerfold Syndrome*⁹ how pornography subtly affects the way that men view women. Essentially, for some men, women lose their relational value and are viewed only as sexual objects. These effects are especially obvious in marital relationships. "When a man, after weeks of [Internet pornography] actually sleeps with his wife, he's in for a letdown," says Greg Gutfield.

The New York Times recently told the story of a thirty-four-year-old woman who discovered that her husband—a minister—had an online porn habit. "How can I compete with hundreds of anonymous others who are now in our bed, in his head? Our bed is crowded with countless faceless strangers, where once we were intimate."¹⁰

Relationships are threatened not only by competing online images; many also become threatened by real-life affairs inspired by online experimentation. It's easy to become attracted to a would-be Internet lover. The person on the screen seems to have only good qualities. The Internet provides a disguise much like those used at a masquerade ball, inflaming curiosity and fantasies that often push men and women to leave their "real world" relationships behind and commit adultery.

"Acting out"—A Real Life Tragedy

Not only can pornography affect a man's ability to relate intimately with women, but in some cases, obscene images can also create in males a desire to "act out" in dangerous ways. Many convicted rapists and child molesters have testified that they were exposed to hard-core pornography at formative times in their lives.

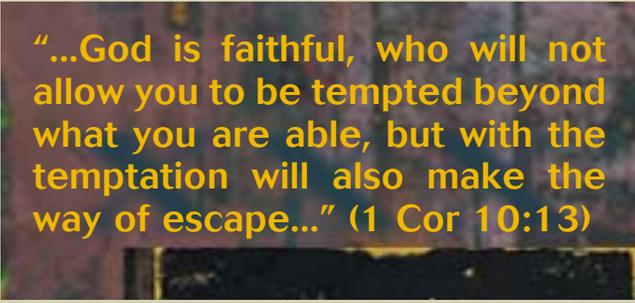
Ted Bundy testified that he was exposed to soft-core porn when he was thirteen years old, which instantly captivated him. In time, Bundy became more

and more addicted to violent images of females in magazines and videos. When he tired of this, there was only one place his addiction could go—from fantasy to reality. By the time he was apprehended, Bundy had killed at least twenty-eight young women and girls in acts too horrible to contemplate. He was finally convicted and sentenced to death for killing a twelve-year-old girl and dumping her body in a pigsty.

Before his execution, Ted Bundy was anxious to warn people of the dangers of hard-core pornography and to explain how it had led him to murder so many innocent women and girls. His craze to kill was always inflamed by violent pornography. Quoted below is a short transcript of an interview with Bundy taken from Dr. James Dobson's book, *Life on the Edge*:

Basically, I was a normal person. I wasn't some guy hanging out at bars, or a bum... I had good friends. I lived a normal life, except for this one small, but very potent, very destructive segment of it that I kept very secret... I think people need to recognize that those of us who have been so much influenced by violence in the media—in particular pornographic violence—are not some kind of inherent monsters. We are your sons, and we are your husbands. And we grew up in regular families. And pornography can reach out and snatch a kid out of any house today. It snatched me out of my home twenty, thirty years ago, as diligent as my parents were, and they were diligent in protecting their children. And as good a Christian home as we had... there is no protection against the kinds of influences that there are loose in a society that tolerates.¹¹

The effects of pornography are truly frightening. Even the godliest of men can become "monsters" when caught in its deadly grasp. Just consider King David, who, after seeing Bathsheba bathing, committed adultery with her and murdered her husband.



"...God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape..." (1 Cor 10:13)

This is why we must be ever vigilant and watchful in our lifestyles. The temptation to click on an X-rated website when we go online is ever-present. If we understand the insidious and devastating effects of pornography, we will think twice about clicking on that X-rated site or watching sexually explicit television shows and movies, which can place seeds of sin in our hearts that will one day bear fruit.

ESCAPING THE TRAP OF PORNOGRAPHY

For those of us who have been tempted and have succumbed to the temptation of pornography, how can we escape its snare? The Bible offers guidance and hope to those who are enslaved by any kind of addiction:

No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (1 Cor 10:13)

This verse tells us that desires and temptations happen to everyone. If you feel isolated by your struggle with porn, know that you're not alone, no matter how "special" your situation is. The verse follows up with a bold ray of hope: there's a way to escape every temptation.

The Greek word for "bear" is *hupophero*, meaning to bear patiently and endure (Thayer's Greek Lexicon). Bearing up can seem impossible when seized by a powerful temptation like net porn. Yet the Bible promises us hope in such circumstances. The ability to stand strong depends not on brute force or our moral strength, but on God's provision of "a way out." So we must take our eyes off our inadequate strength and focus instead on God's ability to deliver us from temptation. God is the only "way out" of temptation. We need to look to Him for deliverance and for true hope.

Repent and Confess to God

If we have been caught in the trap of pornography and wish to restore our broken relationship with God, we must emulate King David. David wrote, "When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long... I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, And You forgave the iniquity of my sin' (Ps 32:3-5).

David knew that God doesn't listen to the prayers of those who "cherish iniquity in their heart." However, he also realized that God is forgiving and merciful, and will not despise the prayer of the contrite and broken-hearted (Ps 51:17).

After David repented, God forgave and restored him. In the same way, God can make us clean once again and take away our feelings of guilt and shame. It takes courage to admit our sins to ourselves and to the Lord. But "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:9-10).

After we have repented and confessed our sin before God, we need to make a determination to be pure. True repentance should be accompanied by a change in our lifestyle. Job kept himself pure and blameless by making a covenant with his eyes not to look upon a young woman (Job 31:1). His determination stemmed from the understanding that the Lord sees all things (Job 31:4). We, too, should constantly remind ourselves that the Lord sees all things and will bring all things to light when He comes again (1 Cor 4:5).

Seek Spiritual Support

After confronting our online addiction problem, we need to seek help from trustworthy, spiritual brothers or sisters, counselors, or ministers who can maintain our confidentiality, pray for us, and hold us accountable for our determination. "Therefore confess your sins to one

another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects" (Jas 5:16). Without a spiritual support group, we will quickly relapse into our addictions.

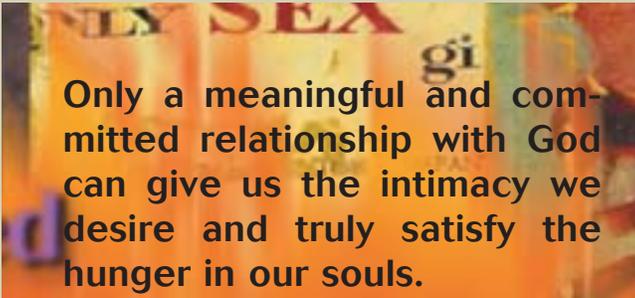
Stephen Arterburn, in his book *Addicted to Love*, says that probably the most important factor in long-term recovery is accountability.¹² It is the lack of accountability that allows the problem to develop, and it is the lack of accountability that will lead the addict back into the problem. Not only should the recovering sex addict be accountable to the group, but he should also find one person in particular, a sponsor, who will hold him individually accountable. This means that on a regular basis the addict will be asked about where he has been going and how he has been spending his time.

In addition to accountability, the addict must have a plan that keeps him away from the lure of online images. The plan must address all areas of the person, including physical, mental, social, and spiritual needs. A protection plan includes helpful reading material and audio or videotapes, Bible study and prayer, and even when and how a person will have fun. The lure of lust is powerful and, to avoid its snare, the addict must be wise in protecting every possible area of temptation.

God's word encourages us to remove anything that might cause us to sin:

"And if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish than for your whole body to be cast into hell" (Mt 5:29).

We need to remove anything from our lives that could potentially cause us to relapse into sin. For those with an addiction to online pornography, this could mean obtaining filters for their Internet service or even eliminating it completely until they feel that they've



Only a meaningful and committed relationship with God can give us the intimacy we desire and truly satisfy the hunger in our souls.

established control over the problem.

Establish Intimacy with God

Dr. David Greenfield, a psychologist who has treated Internet porn addiction, discovered in a survey of over eighteen thousand people that a major reason individuals go online is to find intimacy. Yet while the Internet offers plenty of sex, it fails to offer the depth and long-term satisfaction of face-to-face intimacy with a real person in a committed relationship.

In their book *The Sacred Romance*, Brent Curtis and John Eldredge also point out that humans are designed for intimacy with God.¹³ Sometimes we allow the world to drown out God's voice, but our need for communion with Him never goes away. Instead of seeking fulfillment in Christ, the sex addict tries to fill the emptiness with other things: pornography, an affair, or a fantasy life.

There is an inherent desire within each of us for eternal and intimate communion with God. Nothing less than this kind of unfallen communion will ever satisfy our desire or allow us to live freely without becoming imprisoned by the temptations of the world. Once taken captive, trying to free ourselves through willpower is futile. Only God's Spirit can free us or bring us to our senses.

The Lord Jesus has given us living water, and He said, "Whoever drinks of this water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up to everlasting life" (Jn 4:14). The "living water" that will quench our thirst is the Holy Spirit (Jn 7:37-39).

Spending time in communion with God through prayer in the Spirit will satisfy our souls, and so we will not need to find other ways to fill the void in our lives. Paul tells us that if we walk in the Spirit, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Gal 5:16). If we spend our time and energy walking in the Spirit and trying to produce its fruit (Gal 5:22-23), we will not be susceptible to sinful desires.

Another integral part of maintaining our walk with God is doing good and serving Him. As believers who have been sanctified by the blood of the Lord Jesus, we are called to do good works. Paul wrote, "we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10).

If we focus on maintaining a close communion with the Lord and put our efforts in serving Him, we will not be tempted to fill our lives with empty pursuits or vain gratification.

THE BATTLE FOR OUR MINDS AND SOULS

In today's sex-saturated culture, Christians face a battle for their minds like never before. Cyberporn is just one of Satan's deadly weapons to corrupt and enslave our minds, to poison our relationship with God and our loved ones.

Cyberporn is a sham. It promises fulfillment and intimacy, but it can't deliver. Only a meaningful and committed relationship with God can give us the intimacy we desire and truly satisfy the hunger in our souls. Anything else will only leave us feeling unsatisfied and disappointed.

Don't let cyberporn or the indulgence of any other wrong desires sever you or someone else from God's grace and salvation. The shame and emotional guilt, together with an almost certain spiritual death, are surely not worth the fleeting moments of self-gratification. Therefore, we must do our utmost to guard our minds against all forms of unrighteousness, especially against pornography. Let us be watchful all the time, lest we are ensnared by our own desires. Our minds are the seedbeds of our actions. If our minds are filled with lustful thoughts, it will be only a little while before our lives produce the fruit of our flesh.

Let us rely upon the Spirit to transform our minds into the mind of Christ and to help us make our every stray thought captive to Him. We may feel powerless to stand up against our lusts, but Christ will give us the strength to stand firm against temptation. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can break the chains of addiction and restore our own integrity and our relationship with God.

Satan will use any temptation, thought, event, or circumstance to cause us to fall away from Christ. The only way we can be victorious in this battle for our hearts and souls is to fight this battle on our knees. Let us daily put on our spiritual armor, especially the shield of faith, with which we can "quench all the flaming darts of the evil one" (Eph 6:16).

Let us pray that the Lord will continually deliver us from temptations (Mt 6:13) and help us "to live for the rest of the time in the flesh, no longer by human passions but by the will of God" (1 Pet 4:2). ★

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THE APPLE OF GOD'S EYE

"...he who touches you touches the apple of His eye." (Zech 2:8)

In our daily lives, whether or not we are followers of Jesus Christ, we have to face universal human conditions such as toil, sickness, loneliness, sorrow, and loss. Sometimes we encounter tasks that threaten to sap us of our energy and time, and yet we still have no confidence to do them well. Some of us may be going through some type of physical ailment or have some hidden fears. We feel that no one in this whole world can fully empathize with the sufferings that we have to endure each day.

At times we may feel an ineffable sense of loneliness and abandonment that leaves us unfulfilled. In such situations, it feels as if God is far away and has not heard our cries for help and relief. But it is precisely in such moments that we have to remind ourselves that we are special in God's eyes. We are the very apple of His eye!

We are the apple of God's eye! How marvelous a thought! The apple of our eye is so delicate a part of our body that it is literally untouchable. Our eyelid instantaneously lowers itself and shuts tightly if any foreign body even draws close. We instinctively raise our hands to ward off anything that comes near our eyes. That is exactly how precious we are to the Lord.

Whoever attempts to touch us attempts to touch the apple of God's eye. God would never allow it.

As God's people, we are the apple of His eye. God knows every trial that we encounter, and all will be well, for He is in control. He will guide and protect us according to His will, which surpasses common human understanding.

So let us remember that we who belong to God are not like those without Him. Once, we were far off, "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" (Eph 2:12). But now we have been found by God, as in the days of old when He searched out and made Israel His very own. "He found [Israel] in a desert land, and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness. He encircled him, He instructed him. He kept him as the apple of His eye" (Deut 32:10).

Whenever we feel small or down and out, we should think of how precious we are in God's sight. When we suffer, God actually suffers just as much, if not more, than we do, because "in all [our] affliction, He [is] afflicted" (Isa 63:9). Let us therefore with faith cry out to Him, "Keep me as the apple of Your eye" (Ps 17:8)! ★

TURN TO JESUS

Sonia Chang--Cheras Church, Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA

When pressure seems to accumulate,
When problems appear one after another,
When life seems to be dreary and sorrowful,
When it doesn't seem worth living anymore,

When storms come your way,
When the calm ocean has metamorphosed into a violent, rough beast,
When all hope and strength is lost,
When your path seems to be obstructed,

When the whole world has turned against you,
When no one seems to be there for you,
When you seem to be living in a world of pitch-black darkness,
When you are weary and depressed,

Suddenly,
Your curiosity is aroused,
Wondering why life is so unbearable,
Wondering why these burdens have been cast upon you,
Wondering why, oh why, you come across such unwanted experiences?

But remember...
Turn to Jesus,

For Christ, the Mighty One, is our hope, our strength,
He, the Omnipresent One, is everywhere, watching over us,
He, the Omniscient One, knows how much suffering we're going through,
He, the Omnipotent One, will deliver us from our trials and tribulations,

As long as we confide in Him,
As long as we pray to Him,
As long as we live for Him,
As long as we become good soldiers of Christ,
As long as we share the joyful tidings with others...

The love of God is priceless,
Trials and tribulations are only temporary,
Jesus has rewarded us
With everlasting joy and peace,

That is,
Entering His heavenly kingdom,
And spending eternity with Him,

Therefore,
Let us look forward to this amazing gift of His,
And receive our trials and tribulations with joy,
For the Almighty Savior and Greatest God will always stand by your side.

So...
Turn to Jesus...

STANDING YOUR GROUND

Confronting Campus Challenges Through Christ



Angel Marie Solgot—Seattle, Washington, USA

When you browse through a university's welcoming brochure, or check out the websites for various institutes of higher learning, what do you typically see? Smiling, wholesome students and friendly, caring instructors, right?

University catalogs and brochures can be incredibly deceiving, much like those travel brochures that promise you a charming bed-and-breakfast inn by the beach, when they're really providing a hideous shack by a murky swamp. Like the deceiving travel brochures, what the university catalogs don't show you are the all-night cramming frenzies, the disorganized and disenchanting professors, and especially the constant spiritual challenges that await a Christian student at every corner of the campus.

While it's true that college life can be, and most often is, a terrific growth experience for many young adults, it is also quite often a devastating turning point for many vulnerable young Christians. Let's meet Caroline and take a look into a day in the life of a young Christian away at college. Let's examine some of the spiritual issues she faces daily, and let's consider some of the options she has when it comes to standing her ground and keeping her Christian beliefs and standards throughout her years of college.

A DAY ON CAMPUS

A Chronicle of a Typical Christian's Day in the World of Academia

8:00 a.m. (Friday Morning Wake-Up) Caroline realizes that she's overslept again, and she's going to be late to her biology class for at least the fifth time. She reminds herself that she's got to stop staying up so late hanging out with her roommates and get to bed at a decent hour.



8:30 a.m. (Biology Class) Caroline shamefully slips into the only remaining chair, which is at the front of the class, and Dr. Payton makes sure that she's aware of his annoyance at her tardiness. She's arrived just in time to hear her professor's lecture on the Theory of Evolution. Apparently, there's going to be an exam on the subject, so she really needs to pay close attention to the lecture.

10:00 a.m. (English Class) This is an easy and enjoyable class for Caroline, because the instructor, Dr. Schmidt, is such a talented teacher, and he genuinely seems to care about his students. Today, while the class is enjoying a break and Dr. Schmidt is socializing with the students, he begins to talk a little about his partner. It's at this point that Caroline realizes that this teacher, whom she really respects, is, in fact, living a homosexual lifestyle. She knows what the Bible says about this issue, but everyone seems to be so accepting of it, and this instructor is such a great person. She just doesn't know what to think.

12:00 p.m. (Lunch) It's been a fun year, and Caroline's enjoyed meeting a great group of friends. Although they don't have the same religious beliefs as Caroline, they get along wonderfully and spend a lot of time together. Today at lunch, her friend Rebecca jokingly tells the others about her romantic experiences with a guy she's been pretty intimate with lately. The conversation lasts a while, as the others chime in with their own humorous experiences in dating and intimate relationships. Caroline, meanwhile, smiles and laughs with them, even though she realizes deep inside that these sexual relationships they're all joking about are sinful in God's eyes. Not wanting to correct, separate herself from, or sound like she's preaching to the others, she keeps her silence and acts as if she doesn't mind the topic at all. Later on during lunch, Caroline's friends invite her to go on a canoeing trip on Saturday morning. Instead of telling them about her Sabbath commitment, she tells them that she's got some work to do this weekend, and she's sorry that she can't go with them.

1:30 p.m. (Calculus Class) Since calculus isn't Caroline's favorite subject, she's been unable to finish the take-home exam that the professor gave her to work on. It's due today, and Caroline feels that since she really needs a couple of extra days, she'd better go ahead and skip this class. She decides to leave a message on Dr. King's answering machine to let him know that she's come down with a really terrible flu and that she won't be able to drop the exam off at his office until Monday morning.

3:30 p.m. (Philosophy Class) Required readings lead Caroline to wonder if Absolute Truth is even a possibility.

What we've just read is not far from reality. Although it may seem that Caroline is facing an awful lot of temptations and confusions in one day, she is really dealing with things that we all deal with on a daily basis, especially in the campus setting. Along with the newfound independence that many college students are granted comes much freedom. But, as we all know, freedom opens up many doors to temptations that may be very difficult to resist.

Quite often there are temptations to become lazy or irresponsible, to lie or deceive others in order to protect ourselves, to hide our values and beliefs in God from others, or even to question the validity of our beliefs in God and His church. Eventually, these temptations are so intertwined in our daily lives that they become almost invisible and unnoticeable to us. What's frightening is that we may unknowingly fall to these temptations in the most subtle, subliminal ways, placing our salvation in jeopardy.

As we look into Caroline's day at school, we see someone who is experiencing various tests of her faith. How Caroline sees these challenges and how she ultimately decides to handle or confront them will determine the quality and status of her faith at the end of her four years of college life.

TAKE ACTION TO PROTECT YOUR FAITH

A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, But the simple pass on and are punished. (Prov 22:3)

Looking into Caroline's day at school and even into our own days at college or in the working world shows that we need to take action in order to stand our ground as Christians bound for eternal life. If we don't take action, we will find ourselves falling farther and farther away from our faith and our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are three actions that we, as Christians, need to take:

1. Read the Bible and other Christian literature on a daily basis
2. Develop a healthy Christian lifestyle
3. Publicly acknowledge our Lord Jesus Christ

By carrying out these very important actions, the temptations that come our way each and every day will become less appealing to us. These temptations to doubt our faith, to lie or deceive others, or to hide our beliefs and our convictions in Christ will no longer cause us to stumble along this bumpy path in life. Instead, we will be able to face and overcome these temptations, while standing our ground as Christians capable of bringing souls to Christ and worthy of the calling we have received.



Immerse Yourself in Christian Literature and the Bible

Your testimonies are wonderful; Therefore my soul keeps them. The entrance of Your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple. (Ps 119:129-130)

Looking back at Caroline's day, we see how easy it can be for a person to slip into a life where the main focus becomes mere survival in the academic and social world. Instead of keeping their salvation and Christian duty at the

ings of the Bible, how will we be able to know where we stand as Christians? Where else will we find a mirror as clear and powerful as the Bible to help us view ourselves truthfully, to tell us whether we are indeed reflecting God's light or, in fact, the darkness of the earth? We need to remember to fill ourselves up with God's words, because they will constantly help us to decipher right from wrong and to deal with the many temptations to our faith that we encounter.

As we saw in the chronicle of Caroline's day, she's dealing with some classes that lead her to question her own faith, causing her to start doubting the truth she has been taught all her life. The same thing can happen to any of us if we aren't careful. When we read the Bible on a daily basis, the Holy Spirit will work to reveal God's truth to us, equipping us to handle the various questions we may be asked by others who want to know about our beliefs. Without a developed knowledge of the Bible and God's truth, how will we be able to stand our ground as Christians?

Also, it is vital that we continue to read the various Christian publications that are made available to us. The written testimonies and encouragements of our brothers and sisters in Christ are absolutely precious, as they provide us with so many spiritual insights and work to strengthen our faith in the power and love of God. Without the knowledge of these testimonies and experiences in our

Instead of keeping their salvation and Christian duty at the core of their lives, what happens is that college students may begin to see their studies and campus life as the central part of their existence.

core of their lives, what happens is that college students may begin to see their studies and campus life as the central part of their existence. How can we keep this from happening to us? Well, one action we can take is to make Bible reading, along with the reading of many other kinds of Christian resources, a daily part of our lives. Without the teach-

Lord Jesus Christ and the true gospel, we are left spiritually vulnerable and sometimes unable to handle the questions, criticisms, and doubts that other people direct at our beliefs. But through these amazing and moving testimonies of visions, healings, rescues, and personal transformations, we find our faith preserved, and we become

equipped to handle almost anything that comes our way, especially when dealing with philosophical arguments or even arguments of science. These testimonies help to give us a cushion of faith to fall back on when questions can't be answered with mere science, philosophy, or earthly reasoning.

Develop a Healthy Christian Lifestyle

As for God, His way is perfect; The word of the LORD is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him. (2 Sam 22:31)

Who am I? What does God want me to do with my life? And, what will be my legacy when I leave this earth? All Christians must ask themselves these questions, and they should try to figure out the answers before they even set foot onto a college campus. Who are you? You are God's precious creation. You are the very soul that our Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross to save. What does God want you to do with your life? In John 15:9-11, Jesus tells us,

"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that your joy may be full."

And He also tells us in Matthew 5:14-16,

"You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

These verses tell us that a Christian's duty in life is to strive to abide in God's love by keeping His commands and to strive to shine God's light to others, that He may be glorified and that others may be guided to our Father in heaven. If we

follow these commands, we will have very touching and beautiful legacies—legacies of saved souls, forgiven sinners, and joyful lives. This is what we will leave behind on this earth when we pass on to the eternal life ahead.

To lead this kind of life, though, takes careful thought and dedication. We have to constantly consider our actions and our words, our hearts and our motives, and we must evaluate our sur-

Do this one thing for yourself: set aside time for yourself on a daily basis. Clear away all of the noise and clamor around you, and just spend time with yourself and God.

roundings. In order to keep yourself in Christ, you will have to decide for yourself, on a constant basis, whether your actions are Christ-like or if, in fact, they are worldly and leading you away from God.

Are you living a life in Christ, or are you beginning to engage in sinful actions that have the tendency to lead souls to drunkenness, sexual immorality, laziness, rude language, and lies? Is your heart filled with the love, happiness, contentment, and peace that Christians are easily recognized by, or is it filled with anger, jealousy, malice, bitterness, resentment, depression, fear, and worry? And what type of environment are you surrounding yourself with? Is it an environment of purity, peace, goodness, and Christian friendships, or is it an environment of godlessness, shifting values and morals, disorder, strife, and worldly friendships? These are the things you have to constantly monitor and evaluate in order to live your life as a Christian, saved and bound for your eternal home.

Looking back at Caroline's situation, we can see that she's beginning to lose her ground as a Christian. Her daily life is becoming overwhelmed by her care-free surroundings. She's living an undisciplined life—which is pretty evident by the fact that she's been oversleeping in the mornings because of her late nights out with her friends. And the fact that she wasn't able to finish her exam shows

that she's not prioritizing the various aspects of her life correctly.

This reckless attitude may be a result of the fact that Caroline has surrounded herself with too many non-Christian friends and has spent too little time alone in spiritual evaluation and reflection. This chaos happens to all of us at various times in our lives, and it's something we must learn to overcome and prevent. It's not okay to lie to our

professors to cover up for our irresponsible actions, and it's not okay to become reckless individuals, staying out late and forgetting the behavioral and spiritual standards we have as Christians. When we see such things beginning to happen to us, we must resolve to make major changes in our lives.

It may seem difficult, but we must make the determination to work on establishing for ourselves a healthy Christian lifestyle. But how do we create this kind of life for ourselves, especially when we are so busy with school, work, church, family, and friends? How do we find the time?

Would you believe me if I told you that there is one very selfish act you are allowed and encouraged to make a regular part of your life, and that this act has God's stamp of approval? You'd probably wonder, "When was God ever selfish?" Well, whenever our Lord Jesus Christ went off to be alone to pray, He did it to build up His own strength—He did it for His own good, ultimately benefiting all of mankind. He knew the importance of separating from this world, and He knew that this was the only way He could keep His life's mission straight.

Do this one thing for yourself: set aside time for yourself on a daily basis. Clear away all of the noise and clamor around you, and just spend time with yourself and God. Isaiah 30:15 tells us,

“In returning and rest you shall be saved; In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.” Use this time to pray, to meditate, to read Christian literature, to explore all kinds of edifying classical or contemporary Christian hymns, or to write in your journal. It’s amazing how powerful these activities are when it comes to keeping your faith and actions in check. Remember to do this one selfish thing for yourself, and set aside time for your own spiritual evaluation and growth.

Publicly Acknowledge Your Lord Jesus Christ

“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.” (Mt 10:32)

After reading the account of Caroline’s day, do you get the feeling that Caroline’s friends don’t even know that she’s a Christian? If they did, would they talk so casually about their intimate relationships around her? Would they even bother to invite her on their canoeing trip, knowing that she keeps the Sabbath? Probably not. The fact is that Caroline is most likely a quiet Christian and keeps her faith to herself. This practice can lead to several problems.

First, by not letting her friends know about her beliefs and convictions, Caroline is keeping the door of temptation open for herself. Not knowing that she is a Christian who keeps the Sabbath, Caroline’s friends will continue to invite her on weekend outings that involve neglecting the Sabbath. And their invitations will remain a great source of temptation for her. It’s extremely possible that Caroline will succumb to their constant requests and slowly begin to break her Sabbath commitment. Also, because her friends don’t know about her religious beliefs, they will continue to discuss their intimate relationships with her, which may slowly and unnoticeably entice Caroline into following in their sexually immoral footsteps.

Second, by not letting her friends know about her beliefs and convictions

concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, Caroline is missing out on great opportunities to lead souls to Christ. She is letting these good friends of hers miss out on God’s salvation and blessings, simply because of her need to fit in. In fact, she is neglecting her duty as a Christian, which is to shine God’s light to others.

The last problem concerns what Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:32: “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.” How sad it would be for Caroline to be turned away from the eternal rest that our Heavenly Father has promised us, because she chose to keep quiet about His incredible sacrifice for mankind. When I was younger, I never really understood how a person could simply deny Jesus before men. But now I think I can understand how easy it is to deny our Lord Jesus Christ without even realizing that we’re doing such an awful thing.

When you are among a group of friends at lunch, do you quickly gather your hands, nod your head, and blink your eyes, considering this brief action a thanksgiving prayer for the food you’re about to receive? Or do you solemnly fold your hands, bow your head, close your eyes, and meaningfully offer a prayer of thanksgiving to our Lord? What about situations when your friends are discussing their religious beliefs or arguments? Do you offer your personal testimonies and your beliefs, or do you quietly keep your faith to yourself, hoping to avoid their criticism and ridicule? Believe it or not, this is a denial of our faith and our Lord Jesus Christ, and for many of us it happens all the time. The apostle Paul encourages us in 2 Timothy 1:6-9:

Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of

God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.

Realizing God’s calling, let’s make the determination to publicly acknowledge the love, power, faithfulness, and truth of our Lord Jesus Christ to the many people who surround us on a daily basis.

STANDING FAST IN THE FAITH

The apostle Paul encourages us in 1 Corinthians 10:12-13:

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

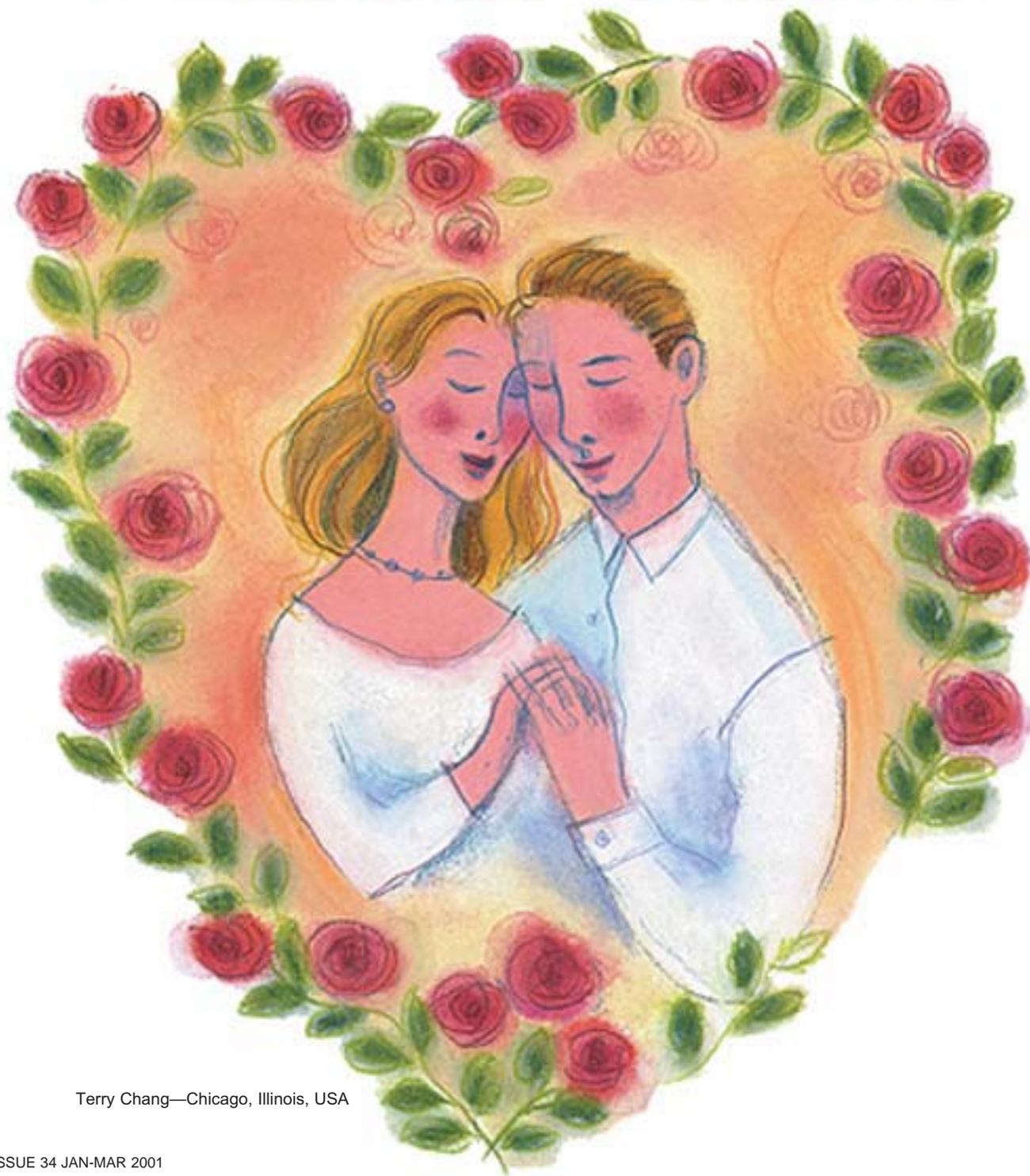
And in 1 Corinthians 16:13, Paul urges us, “Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.”

In our daily lives on campus, we must always remember to carry out the three critical actions of reading the Bible and other Christian resources daily, working to build healthy Christian lifestyles for ourselves, and making the determination to publicly confess our beliefs and our Lord Jesus Christ to others. By doing so, we will steadily build a powerful and enormous fortress that will work to guard our spirits and help us stand our ground as Christians bound for our eternal home with our Heavenly Father.

As you walk the campus of your university and gather with your college friends and study groups, may you always remember to stand your ground as a Christian, and may you shine your light to others, that they will see Christ through you. ★

“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.

Nakedness Without Shame



Terry Chang—Chicago, Illinois, USA



The husband awakens from deep slumber and sees his wife. Overcome with love, he whispers ever so adoringly to her, “sweet bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” Ah, such intimacy. Such tenderness. Seems like love in paradise, doesn’t it? In fact it is—in a paradise called Eden. God intended Adam and Eve, the man and woman He created, to share a blissful intimacy that joins the husband and wife as one flesh, without any separateness between the two (Gen 2:21-24). The sense of oneness and closeness is so complete that the Scripture goes on to emphasize that “the man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame” (Gen 2:25).

I have often wondered about this verse: of the countless possible qualities that may depict a perfect spousal relationship, the Scripture chooses this one—nakedness without shame. Let’s think about this for a moment. Why is our capacity to be stark naked in the presence of our spouse and feel no shame of such great significance? We often assume that the Scripture is talking only about nakedness in physical terms. But imagine, also, the likelihood of Adam and Eve being naked, emotionally and spiritually, with each other and feeling no shame. Why is this significant and how does it apply to our marriages today?



PHYSICAL NAKEDNESS

Physical nakedness without shame in a marriage is an easy concept to grasp. We can all understand and accept its relevance in a happy marriage. Few would argue that a concrete and immediate way that we can show our love for our spouse is to accept whatever shape, size, or form our loved one may be in. The artificial coverings that help us to stay

selectively protected and hidden from the rest of the world should be unnecessary within the intimacy of marriage.

But with age, our bodies undergo unbecoming changes; perhaps most common are those flabby, not so lovely “love handles” around the hips and waists. There may also be unforeseen life circumstances that disfigure the body, such as accidents, diseases, or medical conditions and procedures. Even one of the natural miracles of life, pregnancy and childbirth, can change the mother’s once slim figure into something else. Accepting each other’s physical nakedness in these and many other situations is a challenge that becomes even more important for maintaining a healthy marriage.

Physical intimacy between husband and wife is a profound mystery created by God. In no other love relationship do we expect to find this physical consummation. This union involves the total giving of oneself and the receiving of another, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. God created this intimacy for a husband and wife so that they may share an exclusive, special connection with each other. This bond is shattered when we

choose to share this intimacy with someone other than our spouse. Therefore, we should take care to protect and nourish this marital blessing by being loyal and monogamous to our life-long partner so that we can continue to stand before our spouse naked and without shame.



EMOTIONAL NAKEDNESS

Now, let’s go beyond the physical body. Consider the different ways that the vicissitudes of life can leave us feeling rather naked emotionally. Losing our job, for instance, may strip us of our self-esteem. Encountering disappointments big and small may cast our spouse in a new, unattractive light, exposing his or her hidden weaknesses and insecurities.

When these situations arise, can we share our deepest pains and our darkest worries with our intimate other? Are we able to show our loved one the most private and vulnerable emotions within us? Conversely, can our spouse count on our unconditional acceptance, patience, and support when baring his or her soul to us, even when we may not be in the

Our relationship with God is an essential component of our marital relationship. How close we are to God and how blameless we are before God directly impacts the level of intimacy we have with our spouse. But why is this so?



mood to listen? Being emotionally naked and feeling no shame with our spouse means being able to do any of these things. But for one reason or another, we often cannot.

It is not merely external changes that can shake up the harmony in a marriage or strip us of dignity, leaving us feeling naked. In fact, both partners bring into a marriage many different views and ways of doing things, and these differences can often lead to an emotional rift in the relationship. But isn't it true that every husband and wife, even the most compatible of all, encounters differences with each other? How could two people who grew up in different families and with different norms not be different from each other? From varying tastes in furniture to conflicting spending habits and communication styles, differences are inevitable.

The question is how we resolve our differences with our spouse. Sometimes we handle this problem by avoiding it, kind of like hiding behind protective barriers in order to not fully expose and deal with our discrepancies. We may feel shame and fear about being emotionally naked, because we don't trust that our spouse could understand our perspective. And perhaps we are too painfully familiar with the road that leads to arguments and hurt.



SPIRITUAL NAKEDNESS

Similarly, the reluctance to shed our emotional defenses in order to allow our spouse to see our inner core may apply

to our spiritual side. In particular, the longer we are married, the more spiritual weaknesses we may see in our partner. This may crush our ideal of him as the spiritual head of the family or shatter our image of her as a steadfast companion.

During these times, we may find it difficult to be kind to our spouse and accept his or her spiritual flaws. Instead of gently pointing out the imperfections as normal shortcomings to improve on, we may unleash insults on our loved one and inflict unnecessary wounds with little respect. In a similar vein, just as we find it tough to accept our partner's spiritual flaws, we in turn fear baring all of our spiritual weaknesses to our loved one. Shame paves the way to fear, which then creates barriers to our ability to communicate with our spouse or to lend a spiritual helping hand. Not only is this harmful to the relationship but it also goes against God's will for the spouses to be each other's suitable spiritual helper (Gen 2:18).



RECONCILIATION THROUGH GOD

Given the challenges and obstacles to our capacity to bare body and soul to our spouse with no shame, how then do we attain the complete oneness and openness shared between the first man and woman? To discover the key to this question, we need to return to the story of Adam and Eve and first try to understand the reason for their downfall. Sadly, only seven verses after the por-

trayal of their perfect relationship, this same couple that knew no bounds to their connection and openness with each other suddenly felt ashamed of their nakedness. They felt a need to sew fig leaves together to make coverings for themselves (Gen 3:7).

What happened? Did the husband and wife have a fight with each other? You might think that some kind of interpersonal friction must have arisen between them to stir up mistrust and shame, right? Yet what is so striking about the story is that it was Adam and Eve's sin against God that created the rift they experienced between each other. It wasn't an interpersonal conflict between them, but rather their transgression against the Lord. Immediately after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they suddenly realized that they were naked. And this was no longer okay for them, because the moment they fell away from God's grace and presence, the perfect harmony that they once shared with each other was forever disturbed.

What a sobering teaching this is! Our relationship with God is an essential component of our marital relationship. How close we are to God and how blameless we are before God directly impacts the level of intimacy we have with our spouse. But why is this so?

God as the Source of Love

On one of several occasions, Jesus taught, "If you obey my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commandments and remain in his love" (Jn 15:10). To remain in God's love, we must obey His com-



God can bring about kindness, humility, and, yes, even love in our wounded, bitter, and unforgiving heart. He can help us restore that precious intimacy with our spouse when we are least likely to know how to do it alone.

mandments. This in turn is crucial to our ability to love our spouse, because “God is love” and “love comes from God” (1 Jn 4:7, 8).

Think of this analogy: to obtain a constant supply of water, we would need a pipeline that carries the water directly from a lake or river, wouldn’t we? Similarly, in order to love our spouse truly, unselfishly, and wholesomely, it makes complete sense that we would need to be close to the source of that perfect love, God Himself. When we are initially caught up with the visceral feelings of being in love, we cannot appreciate the profound mystery of this teaching. But look to the Scripture and we see that “there is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love” (1 Jn 4:18). To be able to bare our soul, our body, our all to our partner, without shame and fear, we absolutely need God to live in us so that we can draw upon the source of perfect love.

God as Our Strength

Recognizing the value and necessity of His presence in our marriage is only the beginning of understanding how God works to bring us closer to our spouse. Turning to the Lord in the midst of our marital strife is the next step in making this concept a reality. In the heat of the moment, when insults and criticisms fill the angry expanse between our spouse and us, it is impossible to think kindly of that unreasonable “shrew” or “iceberg” we think our partner to be. Often we walk away feeling hurt and unresolved,

believing that once again our spouse was wrong and has let us down. “How could he have done such a stupid thing?” “How could she say something so nasty?” we wonder ever so self-righteously, don’t we? It is precisely when we are least able to feel love for our spouse that God can supply us with the wisdom and strength to cross the angry divide, but only if we turn to Him and seek His assistance.

This is an incredible mystery and wonder. We may not be able to comprehend it fully, but it is true. Some of the most moving experiences that couples have gone through come from seeing and experiencing God’s loving intervention, which enabled them to soften their hearts toward each other and to realize something they did not realize before. Often these unforgettable moments come as the wonderful result of prayer. The Spirit of God helps the believer to see his or her own flaws and role in creating a hurtful argument. As God’s teachings and love fill the person, self-righteous anger gives way to humility and repentance. Who is right or wrong no longer matters. Ultimately, the believer can initiate a sincere and loving reconciliation with his or her spouse and, in return, experience the partner’s tender extension of forgiveness and apology.

This is the wonder of divine intervention. The Scripture records that the Spirit of God “will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment” and is “the Spirit of Truth” who will guide believers into all truth (Jn 16:8, 13). By helping us see our own faults when we are least able to, by guid-

ing us to the truth of His teachings when we are least open to them, God can bring about kindness, humility, and, yes, even love in our wounded, bitter, and unforgiving heart. He can help us restore that precious intimacy with our spouse when we are least likely to know how to do it alone.

The complete unity and trust that Adam and Eve enjoyed before they fell from divine grace is the intimacy that God intends for every husband and wife today. How truly wonderful it would be if we could bare our body and soul to our intimate other and feel not shame but closeness, joy, and trust. This blessing is what God wishes for each of us to experience, perhaps as a way to taste a bit of heaven and tranquility in a turbulent world. So long as we live in God’s presence and love by obeying His commandments and seeking His assistance, His promise will be realized in our marriages today. Nakedness without shame. It would be a return to paradise lost. ★

“Love & Marriage” seeks to address and provide biblical advice on a 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.

Raising

~ Even Prior To



“Hallelujah! In the name of the Lor’ Jesus pray... thank you Lor’ Jesus for the yummy noodles. *Kamsahamnida,* amen.*”

Covering her eyes with folded up hands and peeping between her fingers, my three-year-old says grace before her meal. “Amen!” The rest of the family responds with delight as we witness Anna developing a good new habit.

Why do we make such a big deal over saying grace before a meal? We try to include God in as many aspects of our daily life as we can think of so that our children may come to know God as early as possible. We consider a quiet but faithful life in the Lord to be more of a success than any other accomplishment of this world. Therefore, we want

to instill the habit of prayer in our children because it is the best way to establish a close relationship with God.

How can we help our children establish the habit of prayer even before they begin religious education classes? In this article, I’d like to share with fellow parents some reflections on this task.

SET THE EXAMPLE

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children... (Deut 6:5-7)

We know that children learn best by watching and imitating those closest to them. Naturally, if we want our children to pray, we must first become praying parents. We want to let our children know that prayer is as much a part of our family life as brushing our teeth every day.

How early should we start? Try fetal education—though, of course, I would recommend that parents start praying even before their child’s conception. According to medical reports, fetuses begin to hear around the fifth month. The sound of prayer has been familiar to both of my children since they were in the womb, because today it never bothers them, even when they are sleeping. In fact, to them the sound of prayer is one of the best lullabies.

In addition to observing close family members praying, it is very beneficial for young children to be familiar with prayer in the church environment. The sooner your children get used to group prayer, the easier it will be for them to begin praying as well.

During group prayer, hold your infants or have them nearby while you pray, even if they are sleeping. As they get bigger, you can try letting them sit

Praying Children

Religious Education Classes

on your lap while you kneel and sit on your heels to pray. There will come a period of time when your children are too big to sit on your lap but are too young to kneel next to you or stay close by without disturbing others. At this time, instead of joining the rest of the congregation during prayer, you may have to pray in the nursery so that your toddlers will not be zigzagging around praying church members.

Don't worry if you have not been paying too much attention to nurturing a prayerful life in your children or if you are new to the faith. It's never too late to start, no matter how old or young your child is. Different age levels require different strategies. This article focuses mainly on preschoolers; nevertheless, there are some principles at the end of this article that can be applied to any age group.

TALK ABOUT PRAYER

Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deut 6:7)

How can we include God in every aspect of our daily lives, as the verse above commands us to do? One of the best ways is to encourage prayer in the family as often as possible.

In any good relationship, open communication is absolutely essential. Likewise, our Heavenly Father wants us to speak to Him at all times. Prayers do not always have to be at a set time during the day. Rather, we can help our children say a short prayer whenever there is a need.

For example, a few months ago, we received a phone call telling us that Harmony, Anna's grandmother, had taken a fall and fractured her hipbone. Right away, we told little Anna and we said a prayer for Harmony. We also prayed for Harmony every time we said grace or during our nightly

prayers. One day, about five weeks after Harmony's fall, we mentioned to Anna that we were going to visit Harmony. Anna quickly responded by saying, "Oh, Harmony fell and her side hurts (rubbing her hip). We need to pray for her." At that point our daughter knelt down and said a short prayer for her grandmother. My husband and I were amazed and very thankful for her newly learned lesson.

Another way to reinforce the practice of prayer in children is to tell stories about it. My three-year-old has always enjoyed the Bible stories I tell her from illustrated children's Bibles. I simplify the stories to focus on the main teachings, pointing out that people in the Bible pray just like us. In addition to Bible stories, children may also enjoy contemporary stories. These can be our own or other people's testimonies. If I can't think of a testimony to tell Anna, I sometimes make up stories about how prayer helped a little girl just like her.

SET UP ROUTINES

Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deut 6:8-9)

Children crave the security of routines. Try to begin the habit of prayer as early as you can. I began to teach my newborns to say grace before each feeding by holding their tiny hands together and saying simply, "In the name of the Lord Jesus we pray. Thank You, Jesus, for giving the baby milk to drink. Hallelujah! Amen."

By the time Anna began to eat from a high chair, I made sure that she folded up her hands and bowed her head while I said grace before her meal. She would join in the prayer by saying "Amen" right after she heard the cue word, "kamsahamni-da,"* before the end of the prayer. Anna did go through a rebellious period when she refused to

join in the prayer. But then, once she got over that, she became the “prayer police”—that is, she made sure everyone at the table was praying or she would command, “Pray!”

Our family also goes through nightly “rituals” before bedtime. We all kneel and listen to Daddy pray, thanking God for the day and asking Him for a good night’s sleep for us and our loved ones. Now, as we go through the same prayer each night, our three-year-old can recite the names of the people we are praying for. Sometimes she’ll add Grandma’s two dogs to the prayer list. After we pray, we sing Barney’s “I Love You” song before we kiss each other good night.

THE FIVE P’S OF A PRAYING CHILD

There is no formula that can guarantee that a child will love to pray, but I would like to suggest a few principles for mutual encouragement. I call them “The Five P’s of a Praying Child”: Practice, Patience, Praise, Pleasantness, and Prayer.

Practice. As with all new skills, a toddler needs practice before mastery. Parents must provide plenty of opportunities for children to practice without the fear of humiliation or rebuke. Begin with simple tasks such as joining in with “Amen” at the conclusion of a prayer. Slowly move on to “repeat-after-me” short prayers. Then, as the child acquires more vocabulary and understanding, allow the child to say his or her own prayers.

Patience. Expect refusals, giggles, partial cooperation, and the like. Parents must ask God for daily doses of patience in order to maintain a normal level of mental health, especially as the child gains more independence with age. Remind yourself that God will not be offended by your youngster’s act of noncompliance during prayers. Sooner or later, your little clown will actually take the initiative to pray. The key is to not give up!

Praise. It is always good practice to praise your child in whatever endeavor he or she is taking toward worship. Children thrive with positive reinforcement. Another aspect of praise is in the form of music. Children love to sing songs of praise. Don’t forget that praise is also an important form of worship.

Pleasantness. Remember to make prayer, or any kind of worship, as pleasant as possible for your children. Prayer need not be a chore or a bore. At the dinner table, we let Anna decide who should say the grace—herself or someone else. During our nightly prayers, we make it a privilege for everyone to gather in prayer. Often, a dose of creativity helps tremendously.

Prayer. Last, but most important, we parents must first be praying warriors ourselves. Our children need to know that we value prayer in our own lives and that we are praying for them, no matter how old they are.

I must admit, many times my husband and I feel like we are totally in the dark in this parenting business. But we know that the Lord Jesus is our best consultant and example. We are so thankful for having the opportunity each day to learn together with our children. May the Lord continue to grant each of us the patience and wisdom necessary to guide our children into a prayerful life. ★

**Kamsahamnida means “thank God” in Korean.*

“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 variant society. Please direct comments on this article or questions about parenting to family.altar@tjc.org.



SIX HABITS OF REALLY EFFECTIVE CHRISTIANS

Steve Liu—Elizabeth, New Jersey, USA



(Part 4)

When you want to make an appointment to talk to your company's CEO, perhaps his or her secretary will clear two minutes off the CEO's calendar for you to stop in and talk. Of course, there won't be an opening for a few months. Mind you, there's a good chance your appointment will be cancelled. And, of course, you'd better have something very important to say, as the CEO's time is valuable.

Yet to talk to the Lord God, the Founder of the universe, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, all you need to do is bow your head and close your eyes wherever you are, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, weekends and holidays included. This brings us to number four of the Six Habits of Really Effective Christians: "Pray to God to guide you and help you."

In a recent Bible Study at our church, the topic of "prayer in everyday life" came up. Instantly, many people in the room had an anecdote to tell. A teacher recounted how well her students responded to her lessons when she began with a short prayer to herself. A doctor described how smoothly his surgeries went whenever he said a short prayer before the procedure. A businessman spoke of how people with many disparate personalities all seemed to come to agreement in meetings he conducted whenever he said a short prayer to himself before starting.



PRAYER—ANYTIME, ANYWHERE

Usually when people think of prayer, they think of specific times of the day—thirty minutes during Sabbath services, an hour during spiritual convocations, twenty seconds before and after meals, three score and ten seconds before bed, or if by reasons of strength, four score.

Likewise, when people think of reasons to pray, they have specific ones. They need to pray for someone who is suffering and needs healing, for the holy work of the church, or for their families.

These are all valid and important times and reasons to pray, of course. But sometimes people tend to think that these are the only times and the only reasons to pray. That's not what the Bible says. Ephesians 6:18 says, "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."

Prayer is not a chore, to be done at set times and only for certain purposes. It's a gift from God, one that not many people in the history of human civilization have been blessed to have. There was a time when pretty much the only way to reach God was through sacrificial offerings, and even that wasn't direct communication with Him. Plus, it was pretty much only for people who happened to be born into a certain family line.

Today, you can consider prayer a "perk." You can almost consider it the greatest job benefit you have. It's a direct line to God that has been granted freely to all who have been saved and who have been declared righteous in the eyes of God. Like all your other benefits, you should try to get the most use out of it that you can.

We need God's power, guidance, and strength throughout our lives—not just for the 13,000 hours of our adult

lives that we'll spend in church but also for the 100,000 hours we'll spend at work.

While it's probably not proper etiquette to kneel down in the middle of a meeting and start speaking in unknown tongues, there's no rule that says you can't seek out quiet places to pray, whether out loud or in silence. You can use your office, an empty meeting room, or the copy room.



THINGS TO PRAY FOR IN THE WORKPLACE

So what can we pray for at work?

For guidance and knowledge. Are you faced with an impossible project at work? Why not ask the One who managed, engineered, and deployed the creation of the heavens and the earth for His take on things?

For wisdom. If you're leading a meeting, consider saying a short, silent prayer to yourself before it starts, asking God to allow it to run smoothly. When you're typing an e-mail or talking to others, pray for God to give you the right words to say. When rancor and disagreement arise, as they usually do, only God has the power to understand and to melt human hearts.

For courage and strength. Perhaps you have a big presentation to give, an audience scheduled with some top executives, or some other daunting task facing you. Or maybe you just feel overwhelmed and burned out. Whenever you're feeling weak or nervous, remember what it says in 2 Chronicles 20:15, and over a hundred more times in the

There are as many reasons to pray as there are issues to deal with on the job. And the remarkable thing is that God will always listen. There is no reason too petty, no length of prayer too short, no person too unimportant that God will not hear from heaven and act.

Bible: “Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God’s.”

For comfort. You may have friends in the workplace, but chances are good that you don’t have someone who can sympathize with your every weakness and understand when you feel alone, helpless, or frustrated. Proverbs 18:24 says, “A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”

For patience. When someone wrongs you, the knee-jerk reaction is to strike back with a vengeance. Yet, “a man’s wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense” (Prov 19:11). Try as we might to force ourselves, this kind of patience and forgiveness only comes from God.

For purity. I was recently talking to a brother who’d just started working in an office. One of the first things he noticed was: “Those people all have dirty mouths!” It’s true. We live in a world where swearing, drinking, and slander are the norm. As the apostle Peter says, someone who has the attitude of Christ “does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God” (1 Pet 4:2). It takes reliance on God to keep from being polluted by the world.

For a reality check. The next time you receive an award or accolades from those around you, remember what Jesus did. When the crowds wanted to make Him king, he withdrew and prayed. He didn’t bask in his own earthly glory but recognized in humility that the glory came from and belonged to the Father.

Through prayer, He kept Himself in check.

For forgiveness. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and especially the pride of life are alive and well in the workplace. We commit sins in many ways there, most of the time without even knowing it. Worse, we may be guilty of the sin of denying God. When we realize that we’ve sinned and confess to God, He is faithful and will forgive us.

In thanksgiving. “When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other” (Ecc 7:14). Whether our current situation at work is smooth or rough, God intends it for good. Through good and bad, God gives us opportunities to learn, to grow, and to become more perfect in His sight. And for that, we should be very thankful. There’s a reason why Paul wrote the phrase “give thanks in all circumstances” immediately after the phrase “pray continually” (1 Thess 5:18).

For your co-workers. “The entire law is summed up in a single command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal 5:14). In the parable of the Good Samaritan, only the Samaritan realized that his neighbor was anyone he came across in life who needed God’s healing touch. In the same way, our prayers should extend to our co-workers and those who are impacted by our work so that, in our work and our daily lives, they can see and experience the love and power of Christ through us.

PRAYER AS PART OF THE WORKDAY

The list goes on and on. There are as

many reasons to pray as there are issues to deal with on the job. And the remarkable thing is that God will always listen. There is no reason too petty, no length of prayer too short, no person too unimportant that God will not hear from heaven and act.

Try this everyday for just one week and see if it doesn’t make a difference in your life: before you start your morning commute or before you get out of the car in the parking lot at work, spend a couple of minutes to say a short prayer for the coming day. Ask God to guide you in all that you do during the coming hours. Ask the Lord to help you to glorify His name in whatever you do that day.

Then, continually throughout the day, if the thought of prayer enters your mind, don’t squelch it and say that you’ll kneel down and “properly” pray after you get home. Instead, speak then and there to God. At the end of the day, on the ride home, reflect on the hours that have just passed, and give thanks for the blessings of another day.

Chances are, you’ll suddenly find that meetings become more productive, your relationships with colleagues improve, you have the wisdom to tackle the most difficult tasks and the patience to handle the most tedious ones, and your day goes by much smoother. After you’ve tried it for a week, you’ll most likely wonder how you ever got by without it. ★



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.

I CAME SO CLOSE

Sharon Chang—SINGAPORE



I came so close
To losing You
For the love of man
Tender words
Beguiling smiles
Led me farther and farther
Astray
Prayers missed
Services skipped
Made my faith my love my hope
Colder and colder
A still small voice
Murmured in warning
Beware ye the lust of flesh
I stilled the voice
The disquiet in quiet

I came so close
To losing You
For the beauty of woman
Glittering world
Promising pleasure
I never knew
Blinding iridescence
Blinding me
Hiding the shallowness and evil
A still small voice
Murmured in warning
Beware ye the lust of the eye
Surely not
I who am
So discerning

I who have heard
So many sermons
I who have counselled
So many others

I came so close
To losing You
For the pride of self
Honored
Pleased
That the world loved me in return
Forgetting
Ignoring
Who else loved me
Loved me first, loved me more
A still small voice
Murmured in warning
Beware ye the pride of life
I stilled Your voice
I rejected Your call

I came so close
To losing You
But for the love of man

Fasting
Praying
They interceded for me
Plain faces
Beautiful hearts
They wept to You to save me
Despite rejection
Without pride
They reached out to me
Urging pleading nagging
No small voices these

I was plucked
From danger's brink
Saved by One
Who loved me
Loved me first, loved me more

But for the love of the Son of Man
I came so close
To losing You
All I ask now Lord
Let me come close
Back to You.