

TRUE JESUS CHURCH

Manna

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Entrusted
with
His Grace

FIGHTING A GOOD FIGHT
IN THE SHOES OF A MISSIONARY
REVIVING THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH



DISCOVERING GOD'S LIVING SPIRIT



Nhatha Nol-Mantia—Boston, Massachusetts, USA

In the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, I testify to honor God and share with the world how the Lord had brought me to His true church. May His name be glorified.

As a child, I was brought up in the Roman Catholic faith and attended Sunday services every week with my maternal grandparents (my father's family is Buddhist). I acknowledged God and cherished the golden cross that I wore around my neck, but I did not really know Him on an intimate, paternal level. I just imagined God as this awesome and powerful figure who ruled the earth from a far distance. I believed that He was a Supreme Being who could not be touched and was too busy and important to care about the trivial matters of this little world.

Every evening before I went to bed, I would routinely recite the Lord's Prayer and then ask God for all the things that I wished for, never knowing if He was actually listening.

LOSING MY GRASP ON GOD

My parents got divorced when I was seven years old, and as a result, I moved from California to Massachusetts. I lived with my father in Boston during the school year, and I spent the summers with my mother and new stepfather. I really disliked my mother's new husband because I thought he was the meanest, most dreadful man I had ever met in my life, and I blamed him for breaking up my family.

After I moved to Boston, I stopped going to church because my father was not religious. Still, every evening before I slept, I would say the Lord's Prayer

and then ask God to somehow bring my parents back together and reunite my family. I believed that the reason why my parents were separated was because of my stepfather, so I even asked God to "get rid of him" if it were possible—then my family would be together again.

Many years of tears passed and I witnessed my family situation get worse. My mother was stuck in an abusive relationship, my father had sunk into a deep depression and drank often, and I was home alone in a dark

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basement apartment feeling hopeless and empty, crying myself to sleep each night. I doubted that there was really a God out there, and if there was, then why was He not answering my prayers?

Eventually, I lost faith in God as my family remained separated and my prayers continued to go unanswered. I had no close family members to rely on and to comfort me, so I began to rely entirely on myself. My school friends became the closest people to me. I was determined to be successful and happy in life despite the circumstances.

The Bible warns us not to get caught up in worldly ambitions, "for all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 Jn 2:16). But like many people living without God, my idea of success and happiness was to be rich, have a high-profile future career, and enjoy all the pleasures of the world as often as I could. Everything that I did in high school and college was motivated by these three ambitious goals that I had set for myself in life.

I became the most competitive and self-centered person, extremely proud of my achievements. Each day I would work and study very hard to be the best student, athlete, and community figure. In the evening I would sneak out of the house, drink, dance, and party with my friends until morning. In fact, I met Vuthy, my future husband in Christ, at a downtown nightclub.

GIVING GOD ANOTHER CHANCE

Vuthy and I were engaged my junior year of college, before I left to study abroad in Paris. While I was studying in France, Vuthy called me and told me how he had started attending some Bible studies and was really enjoying it. I did not think too much of it because I understood Vuthy's personality well. He would get excited easily about different things, but then he would lose interest within a couple of weeks.

Surprisingly, Vuthy stuck with the

Gradually, I stopped going to the wild French parties, discos, and bars... I was beginning to fear God, and I was really starting to feel good about my new outlook on life.

Bible study longer than I had expected, and every once in a while he would update me on what he had learned during Bible study and tell me some testimonies he had heard. One of the memorable testimonies he told me concerned a sister who was watching some bad things on television, and as a result, God punished her with a terrible eye infection.

One night I went with a couple of American students to a gay bar in Paris just to check it out, because we heard that it was an interesting thing to do. The place we went to is comparable to Sodom and Gomorrah, but back then, I did not think that there was anything wrong with looking. It was not a big deal to me since I was just hanging out, not really participating in the activities.

The next morning, when I looked at myself in the mirror, I noticed that my eye was swollen. I immediately thought about the testimony that Vuthy had told me concerning the sister with the eye infection. I was a little worried, and I wondered to myself if it were possible that God was punishing me as well for going to the gay bar. Just to be on the safe side, I decided to repent and see if the swelling would disappear.

Miraculously, my eye was back to normal that same afternoon that I prayed to God! My belief in God was renewed after that incident, and I internally made a decision to give my faith in God another chance.

I was startled awake at four o'clock one morning when the phone rang.

When I picked up the receiver, I heard Vuthy crying emotionally. I asked him what was the matter, but he could not stop crying, and my heart sank because I thought it was something serious. When he was finally able to speak, he kept on repeating, "God exists, God exists." In between the sobs, he explained to me that while he was praying, God's power came down through his head. He felt a warm sensation throughout his body and he was overjoyed.

Vuthy then begged me to repent, kneel down, and pray for the Holy Spirit as he had done, but I was really in shock. I was not sure if this was really happening or if I was having a weird dream. Nevertheless, I knew that Vuthy was very sane and that what he was experiencing was very real. Out of hope and out of love, I promised Vuthy that I would sincerely give it a try.

Every evening, I prayed out loud, saying "hallelujah" and asking for the Holy Spirit as Vuthy had advised me. I even attempted to change my lifestyle and refrain from committing sin. Gradually, I stopped going to the wild French parties, discos, and bars. Of course, all of my friends, including my roommate, thought I was acting strangely, and even I was not so sure myself about my faith and where it was heading. All I knew was that I was beginning to fear God, and I was really starting to feel good about my new outlook on life. I was no longer that interested in pursuing one of my three

stated goals in life—no longer was I indulging in all the sinful pleasures of the world.

WON OVER BY EXAMPLE

My first semester in Paris ended and I was happy to return home for Christmas break. I remember feeling so excited when the plane landed in Boston, and I was particularly anxious to meet my fiancé and see if his looks or personality had changed since we had been apart. He picked me up at the airport dressed up in a suit, with flowers, a new haircut, and his big trademark smile.

He really did look handsome, but the most striking thing about him was not his outward appearance but his countenance and quiet disposition. His face was smooth and relaxed, almost glowing. All the previous anger creases on his forehead seemed to have faded away, and he was standing there, looking at me with gentle, loving eyes. When he spoke to me, I felt that he had such a peaceful and content heart. It was evident that he had been transformed into a better person, and I was grateful to God.

This airport encounter with Vuthy was the turning point in my spiritual life. God had renewed my faith through Vuthy, just as the Bible says: "...that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives [or husbands in this case], when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear" (1 Pet 3:1-2).

Witnessing his transformation, I agreed with Vuthy to attend the Friday evening Bible studies and Sabbath services. The sermons and Bible studies sparked my interest, and I was beginning to understand God's words for the very first time.

I grew fond of the church sisters, and fellowshiping soon became my

favorite pastime. I was supposed to return to France after the holiday break to finish my studies abroad, but I was no longer interested in pursuing my vain goals in life. Instead, I decided with Vuthy to pursue a peaceful and joyful life in the Holy Spirit, and to get baptized and married together in Christ.

After a confirming prayer to God, Vuthy and I happily decided to get married that summer. The entire Boston congregation traveled down to the Elizabeth Church in New Jersey for the baptism on April 25, 1999, and then again on July 10 for our blessed wedding ceremony. To top the year, God blessed me with the Holy Spirit during our honeymoon—two weeks in Philadelphia at the National Youth Theological Seminar.

This was the first time that my mother really opened up to me, and I felt like I was getting to know her for the first time.... God had answered my prayers and miraculously restored my relationship with my mother.

A RELATIONSHIP RESTORED

Vuthy's faith could only carry me so far, and I needed God to touch me directly so that my faith could rise to the next level of independence. For me, that moment of confirmation occurred when God released me from the bondage of hate and resentment.

As explained before, I did not have an ideal childhood because of my parents' divorce. Living for the most part with my father, I never really developed a good relationship with my mother. I hated my stepfather (now her ex-husband) for sabotaging my family, but I also resented my mother for not

being around when I needed maternal love. My animosity toward her reached its fullest during my time in Paris, when I wrote her an emotional letter and made up my mind that I no longer wanted anything to do with her.

I had decided that I would never call her again, yet when I returned to Boston, and Vuthy and I decided to get married, she was the first person I thought of. I had not spoken to her for six months, and I remember crying and feeling very sorry for myself because I could not share the good news of my marriage with my own mother. Vuthy felt sad for me and encouraged me to pray to God.

I took his advice, knelt down, and prayed to God with tears to release me from my sorrow. Amazingly, right after

the prayer, the phone rang—it was my mother! She had received the letter I wrote to her from France some time ago, and she wanted to speak to me about it. We ended up talking over the phone for two hours about everything from the past to the present and my future marriage.

This was the first time that my mother really opened up to me, and I felt like I was getting to know her for the first time. I cannot explain how joyous and lighthearted I felt after I spoke to my mother that night. I no longer had any feelings of resentment or animosity toward her. God had

answered my prayers and miraculously restored my relationship with my mother.

FREED FROM THE BONDAGE OF HATE

A few months later I flew to California for my maternal grandfather's funeral. It was very nice to see my mother again and to kick off our newfound mother-daughter relationship. I told her how I had found God and the truth in the Bible, and she was very receptive and happy for me.

I was feeling very joyous and everything was going well, until I saw my mother's ex-husband at the funeral home. Upon seeing him, all the deep feelings of hatred and resentment that I had kept bottled up for over ten years poured out of my heart. I truly despised him and I could not conceal it any longer, lest I burst. I purposely did not speak to him all day and tried to avoid seeing his face, but I could not stop thinking about him and recounting how much suffering this man had caused me and my family to endure.

That evening I was feeling very down and heavy-hearted, so I sought to find some peace in reading the Bible. I had only been seeking the truth for about five months, and I decided to read Matthew for the first time. It is amazing how God opened my spiritual eyes to see how true and living the Holy Bible is. I was able to absorb every verse that I read, and it was as if God was speaking to me directly when I read Matthew 5:43-48:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 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, that you may be sons of

your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."

When I got up from my prayer, I felt like a thousand-pound burden of hatred and strife was lifted off of my chest.... God had changed my heart and vanquished over ten years of built-up anger and resentment.

Tears fell down my cheek as I read these verses and thought about how far from perfect my character is. I am nothing but a tax collector, not worthy to be called a child of God. I did not love, but hated my mother's ex-husband; I did not bless, but cursed him in my heart; I did no good to him; I did not pray for him; and I did not greet him when I saw him at the funeral home.

I felt very ashamed, but at the same time, I could not help the way I felt about this man. I could not just forget the painful memories or erase my emotional wounds and suddenly love a man that I had despised for over ten years. People just don't change overnight.

I knelt down, repented for my evil heart, and prayed with tears to God: "God, I do not have the strength in me to do what You want me to do. If You want me to forgive and have love for this man, than You must help me, for I cannot possibly do it on my own."

That prayer was one of the best

prayers that I had in my life. When I got up from my prayer, I felt like a thousand-pound burden of hatred and strife was lifted off of my chest. I was finally released from carrying this burden of sin. God had touched me deeply, and He did what was impossible for me to do by myself. He had changed my heart and vanquished over ten years of built-up anger and resentment within twenty minutes of prayer.

This change of heart was not just a temporary disposition. The next morning, I saw my mother's ex-husband again at the funeral home. By God's grace, I truly did not feel any animosity toward him. In fact, I actually felt sorry for this man for the way he was, and I wished in my heart that he would someday be able to know God and behold the same peace and joy that I had received from Him. I even walked right up to him and sincerely greeted him with a smile.

I had forgiven him and he did not even know it. But he did not need to know it. This internal conflict was not really between me and him, but between me and God, and it could only be resolved through God. Fortunately, our Lord is the world's greatest Mediator.

GOD'S LIVING SPIRIT

Reflecting upon the wonderful life I now have in Christ, I am truly grateful to God. It is funny how I rarely thought

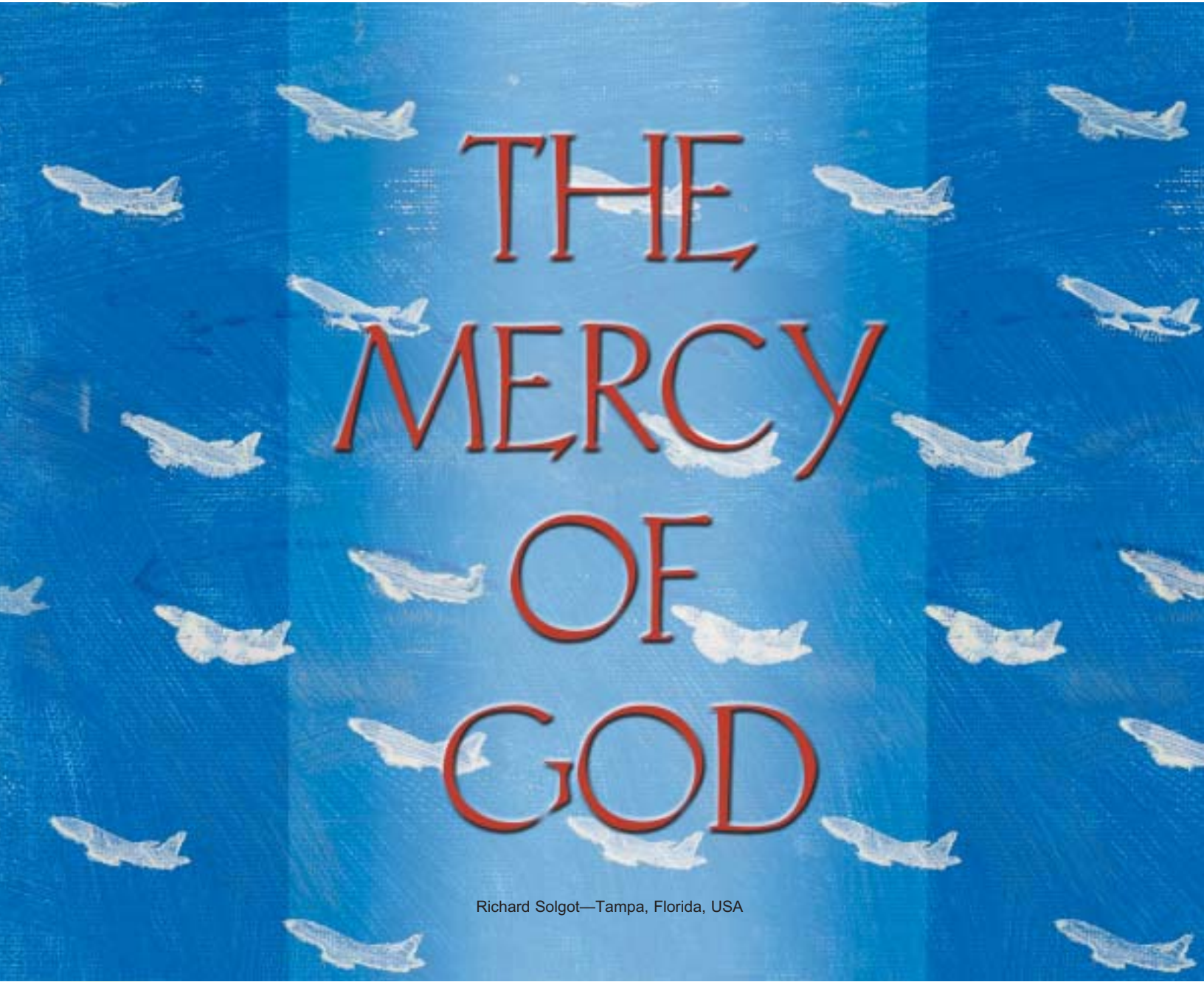
about God before, except during Christmas or Easter—but once the depressing holidays passed, I would again put God on the back burner.

Once in a while, I would feel really down and have an incredible urge to go to a church to be nearer to God. But every time I went to the chapel and sat down, hoping my soul would be comforted, I would feel nothing but emptiness. Eventually, I would rise and exit the building after just sitting and staring at Jesus' cross for a few minutes.

The cathedrals that I have visited are grand and beautiful indeed, but I was not searching for aesthetic beauty—I was seeking for God's living Spirit. I know now that the reason why my soul was not satisfied from being in church was simply because God was not there.

In 1 Corinthians 17:24, Paul states, "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands." Even though I earnestly sought for him, I realize now, after receiving the true gospel and Holy Spirit, that God does not reside inside a man-made building of brick and mortar. For "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:24).

I really thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit and for opening my eyes to find the truth of the Bible. I can now be sure that God exists and that He really listens to our prayers. Best of all, I am comforted in knowing that after all is past, there is the hope of everlasting life in His kingdom. ★



THE MERCY OF GOD

Richard Solgot—Tampa, Florida, USA

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I would like to share a testimony with you regarding my return flight home after the 2000 U.S. National Church Conference (NCC). I praise and thank God that His love and mercy has allowed me to live to be able to share this testimony with you all and to lift up and praise His precious name.

On Sunday, November 18, 2001, I boarded a Continental Airlines flight that departed from Newark, New Jersey, at 5:10 p.m. From the outset, I could tell that this was not going to be a comfortable flight because the plane was filled to capacity. Little did I know exactly how uncomfortable it was going to be!

As we began to taxi down the runway and pick up speed, suddenly a

very uncomfortable feeling came over me. It is difficult to put into words, but the feeling was very foreboding and unsettling.

As is my usual custom on takeoff, I closed my eyes in prayer and began to pray for a safe takeoff from Newark. As the plane began to lift off the ground, I couldn't help but think that the takeoff speed seemed a little slower than usual. As the plane began its ascent, I thought it was unusual for it to begin to yaw to the left and then yaw to the right. But eventually it straightened out and began to level off.

I was sitting in an aisle seat one row forward of the exit door over the right wing. Since my seat would not recline, it was difficult for me to close

my eyes and take a nap, so I looked past the gentleman and lady sitting next to me and glanced out the window. As soon as I did, suddenly there was a very loud BANG and a very bright flash of light! Several people screamed loudly and I shouted, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" We saw a large fireball travel from the tip of the wing that we were sitting over toward our window. Then it appeared to pass through the cabin and toward the tip of the wing on the left side of the plane.

Suddenly all the lights in the cabin and at the exterior of the plane went out. As we were sitting in total darkness, the plane began to drop suddenly—so suddenly that we could feel the seats pushing up against us

from below, and we felt as if we were sinking into the seat cushions. At that moment, I knew that we were facing sure death.

I closed my eyes and began to pray in the Spirit. As I was praying, the man next to me kept telling me to shut up...I guess he thought I was in such a panic that I was incoherent. He did not realize that I was praying for us all.

For about the next three to five minutes no one talked, no one screamed, no one did anything but close their eyes. In total darkness we could only pray. While I was praying my thoughts were not of fear of death, but rather of how it was going to feel. How much farther did we have to fall before we hit the ground? Where were we going to crash? Would my death be instant or slow? Would I die from trauma or from fire?

Then I realized that these were all negative thoughts. God is all-powerful, loving, and kind. I then began to focus my prayer on worshipping Him and praising Him. I didn't realize I was doing it, but the people next to me told me that I began to sing "Precious Lord, Take My Hand," by Thomas Dorsey.

*"When my way groweth drear,
precious Lord linger near,
When my life is almost gone;
Hear my cry, hear my call,
Hold my hand, lest I fall,
Take my hand, precious Lord,
Lead me home.*

*Precious Lord, take my hand,
lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak,
I am worn;
Through the storm, through the night
Lead me on to the light;
Take my hand, precious Lord,
Lead me home."*

I knew that I was thinking of this hymn in my prayer, but didn't realize that I was singing it out loud! Later several people told me that it gave them comfort and made them feel better.

Praise God, after what seemed like an eternity, we suddenly felt the plane slowly begin to climb back up. A man

sitting behind me started shouting, "We're flying... we're flying!"

Hallelujah! Indeed we were! After about another five to ten minutes, the pilot finally announced that we had experienced what is known as "static discharge." Static discharge! None of us had ever heard of that before!

A few minutes later, after the lights were restored, the navigator came walking toward the rear of the plane. As he and the flight attendants walked back up front, a passenger grabbed his arm and said, "Tell us the truth—what really happened?" The navigator said that it was because of the cold, dry air: since the plane is not grounded, it builds up static electricity. However, he did admit that because of the discharge, we had lost power to one engine. Since we were halfway to Cleveland, Ohio, we would continue at a much lower altitude and land there.

Praise God that the rest of the flight was uneventful until we landed—or should I say bounced—into Cleveland. We still had to negotiate the wind, snow, and sleet coming into the airport, but as soon as we landed a loud cheer went up from the cabin as all the passengers rejoiced!

I share this testimony because this near-death experience made me fully realize something really important. Through all of the various emotions that I went through—fear, anxiety, excitement, anger, calm—the final summary was an obvious one.

During the NCC, we planned, we proposed, we discussed, we disagreed, we prayed, and we fellowshiped with each other. I heard about the "Valley of the Shadow of Death" from a brother who nearly died due to lung failure. I saw death bravely faced when I spoke to another brother who is in the final stages of cancer. Then I faced death on the plane. Through all of this, I came to realize the truth in one of the statements our ministers have made: "Without the abidance of God, we can do nothing!"

Without the abidance of God and the fervent prayers of the brothers and sisters, our brother would not have been healed of his lung ailment and would not be with us today. Without

the abidance of God, our dearly beloved brother in Christ would not so bravely and calmly be able to face the transition from this world to the next one that awaits him. Without the abidance of God I would have had no hope of survival as the plane was falling, no power in my prayer, no faith in His mercy and love, and I would not be with my family and you today. I am convinced that He saved us because of prayer. I know that I was not the only one praying on that plane. Many others, in their own way, were offering up prayers to Him.

But I truly feel that He allowed me this experience to show me an important truth. He has chosen each and every one of us in His true church to be united together with Him for the cause of the gospel. I bring you His "good news"—I am saved today because of His wonderful compassion and love. Whatever sacrifices must be made for the furthering of His gospel, we should make them. If it means that our churches must continue to work harder without the assistance of full-time ministers, then I pray that God will give us all the wisdom, strength, power, and patience to do so.

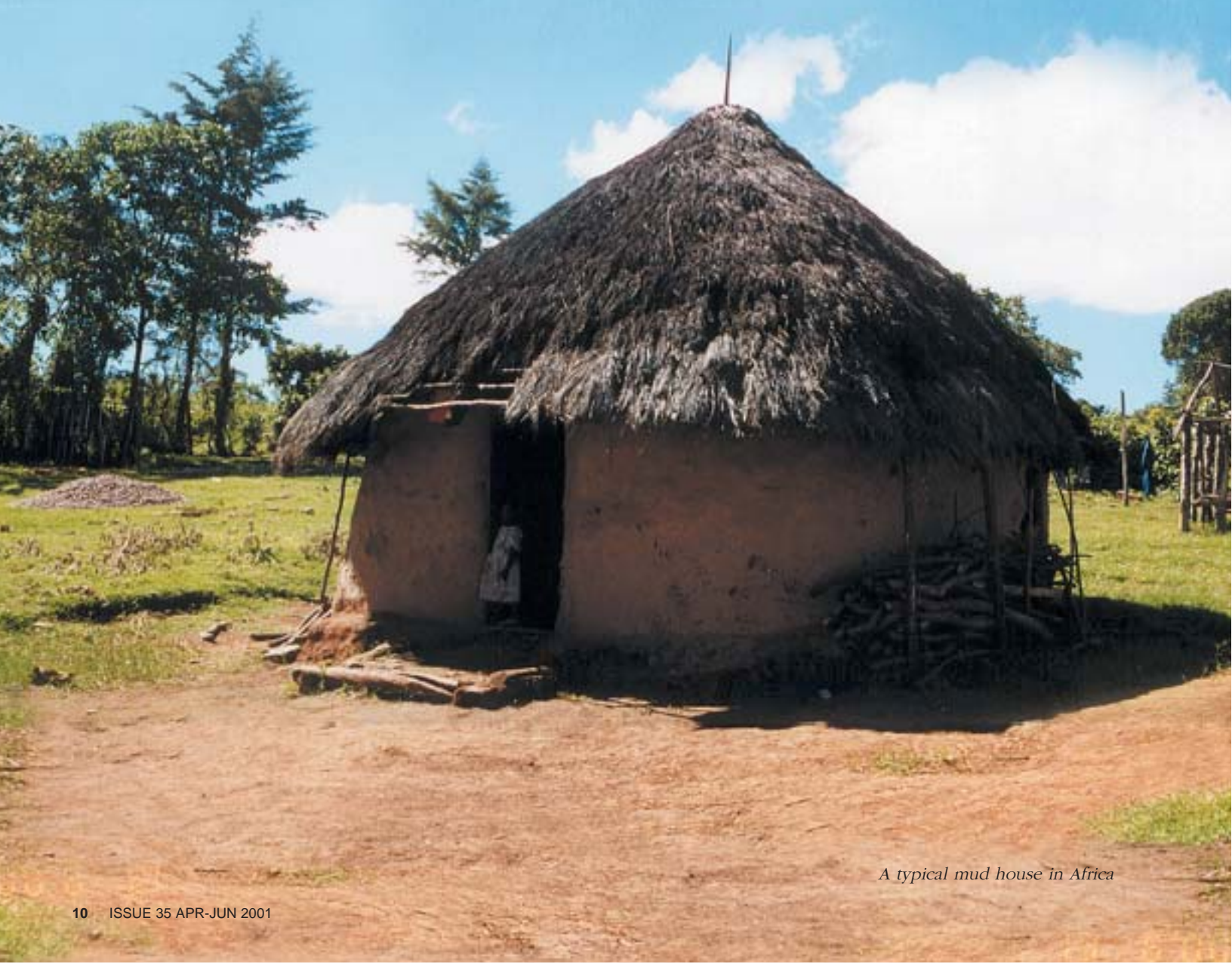
In His time, He will provide for our needs. We only need to trust in Him. By our own might we are limited, but with our trust in Him we are unstoppable. Allow God room to work in your life and in His Church. Trust in Him, love Him, and obey Him. If our need is for more full-time ministers, then let all of our churches unite in fasting and prayer for this. If our need is for more members to take an active role, then let us fast and pray together for it.

Until our prayers are answered, we should dedicate our morning prayers to the calling out of believers to join in the full-time ministry. We pray that He will move more youth to look at ministry not as a "sacrifice," but as an "offering"—an offering of themselves to His service and mission. If we are united in prayer, He will listen and answer.

I give heartfelt praise and thanks to Him for allowing me the opportunity to share this testimony with you all. May the Lord guide and bless us. ★

In The Shoes of A Missionary

Joshua Koh—SINGAPORE



A typical mud house in Africa



The Alunga chapel

If I were to say one thing about our missionary trip to Kenya, it would be that it was far too short. Although the one-week trip in June 2000 was very brief, it made an impact on me as well as the others in our missionary group, which consisted of two sisters and one brother from Scotland and three brothers from Singapore.

KISUMU

A Different Kind of Chapel

On our first Sabbath day in Kenya, we took a five-hour car ride from the capital of Nairobi to a town called Kisumu. There were believers in Kisumu but no church building as yet, so they held services in a school.

Half of our group stayed behind for service at Kisumu, while the other half traveled to two other villages, Alunga and Bunde, to conduct services. I was glad that I was in the latter group because what I saw was a real eye-opener. I discovered that services in mud houses and under trees were not uncommon in these areas. Alunga had a chapel, but it was merely a small, run-down wooden structure that could in no way keep out rain. At Bunde we held services under the leafy trees. But whether it was wood or leaves, God kindly offered a clear sky over our heads.



Prayer in the Alunga chapel

The Hospitality of Our Brethren

After the services at Alunga and Bunde, some of our brethren invited us to their homes. They offered us *ugali* (a product of maize), rice, curry, and tea. People in Africa usually survived on barely two meals a day. A basic meal consisted of *ugali*, rice, mutton, chicken, and fish.

Like most other homes in Africa,

theirs were built out of mud, with straw or zinc roofs. Surprisingly, the art of building mud houses is a technology in itself. Mud is compacted around a wooden structure to form the walls, and then cow dung is smoothed onto the walls and floor. This unique mud-and-cow-dung combination can withstand the punishing elements of nature and, amazingly, can repel mosquitoes.



Sabbath service at Bunde

The Miracle of Rain

When we arrived in Kenya, the country had already been suffering a drought for five months. The drought was serious enough for the government to declare a nationwide disaster. When those of us in the missionary group found out about the drought, we prayed earnestly for it to end during each prayer with our African brethren.

During our bicycle ride out from Bunde, my African cyclist (I was sitting behind him) described the difficulties caused by the drought. He mentioned the food shortages that the villagers were facing and how efforts to increase crop growth had gone in vain. Most of the time I could only listen to his story in silence, feeling heart-wrenching pity for these poor souls.

Unexpectedly, during that trip out of the village, it began to rain! It was truly a miracle and a reminder to us that our God is a living God. This unique incident reminded me of 2 Chronicles 7:14, which states: "If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

KILGORIS Transportation

On Sunday, our missionary group set out for another small town called Kilgoris.

In Kenya we typically traveled by bus, van, car, bicycle, or taxi (usually in Nairobi only). A bicycle is the standard form of transport into villages, and these trips can range between half an hour to an hour. We didn't pedal the bikes, but instead rode as passengers behind a cyclist. I felt sorry for these people because they worked so hard but earned so little.

Transportation in Africa is usually inefficient; drivers often wait for their vehicles to fill up before departing, and

sometimes this can take up to two or three hours. We didn't arrive in Kilgoris until Sunday evening.

Hospital Visitation

Our work in Kilgoris was basically evangelical, since there were no baptized members there yet.

On Monday we visited a hospital in Kilgoris that provided medical care to sick villagers for a small fee. Two doctors (a husband and wife team) ran the hospital, with a staff of several full-time nurses. They lacked medical equipment and beds, so they accepted second-hand equipment from more developed countries and commendably made do with what they had in order to help all their patients. By our standards the hospital was poorly equipped, but by their standards it was a luxury.

At the hospital we conducted a mini-hymnal evangelical service and a ward-to-ward visitation. During our visit with each patient, we prayed especially for each one's illness with prayers of understanding, hoping that they too

Evangelical service at a hospital in Kilgoris



Evening service at a truthseeker's home in Kilgoris



would learn to speak to God through prayer. At times we shared a hymn or two, and many patients sang and prayed along with us.

Although most did not show their pain and suffering outwardly, you could see it in their eyes while speaking and singing with them. They seemed so helpless in their suffering—you could tell they were looking for some glimmer of hope in their lives. We hoped that through the prayers and through God's power, these people could realize their need for God and somehow reach out and find Him.

Service by Lamplight

That night we held a service at the house of a woman who believed but was not yet baptized. She testified how God's grace had come upon her ever since she believed in Jesus Christ and started observing the Sabbath. Thank

God, many came to seek the truth that night.

Since electricity and running water is a luxury for most Africans, we had only one small kerosene lamp as our source of light in the dark house. It was placed in the middle of the room, giving barely enough light for everyone to see the speaker. Reading by this light was almost impossible, so the speakers had to use their small flashlights to read the Bible verses.

In this house, I thought about the contrast between life in the rich city and in rural Africa. Life in Africa ran at a slower pace; the mad rush of city life

was absent, and almost everyone turned in early. This was probably why there was no real need for bright electric lamps in the houses. I felt that these people were blessed because their simple lives allowed them to have a more simple faith in God. They probably weren't distracted by the many luxuries and worries of the world, as we sometimes are.

The Children

In Kilgoris and throughout the trip, I had a chance to interact with African children. These children were very adorable and friendly, and they could really melt your heart. I noticed that they were very different from the children in developed countries—the African children were more innocent and simple. This made me think of how Jesus must have felt when He took a little child into His arms and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 18:3).

These children also reminded me of the importance of religious education. Helping them learn about the Savior while they are young can mold them into God-fearing adults. Most of the places we visited had separate classes for the children, but there is still a great need for religious education teachers and hymnal worship leaders.

Children in Kilgoris



Preaching to a Tribal Chief

On Tuesday we visited the village chief of the Masai tribe and held a mini-evangelical service in his house. I noticed that there were tribesmen who wore the Masai uniform of war and carried a spear, a bow, and arrows. They were always on guard, ready to protect their land and cattle from neighboring tribes, who would sometimes try to steal from them. This illustrated the instability of life in rural Africa.

GOING HOME

On Wednesday we visited Kendu Bay, where there were plans to build a church. We met with the local church council to provide some guidance on the church building plans, along with other administrative matters.

After Kendu Bay, we journeyed back to Kisumu where we departed from the rest of the group and made our

way back to Nairobi. On Thursday afternoon, the three of us from Singapore caught a flight back home. We spent only one week on real missionary work, and this was definitely far too short a time.

EXPERIENCE IT FOR YOURSELF

During our trip, we stayed in hotels that were infested with insects and often lacked water and electricity. Bathwater sometimes came from a well, and there was one place that didn't have a toilet. But despite these living conditions, I learned some valuable lessons on this trip.

The poverty of the people was quite an unforgettable sight for me. After being exposed to such extreme poverty, I became more appreciative of God's blessings in my life. It helped me to understand and empathize with those

struggling with poverty.

Seeing how differently people live and think in another culture helped me to broaden my mind. I learned that in trying to teach others about God, we cannot always do things the same way, especially in other cultures and other countries.

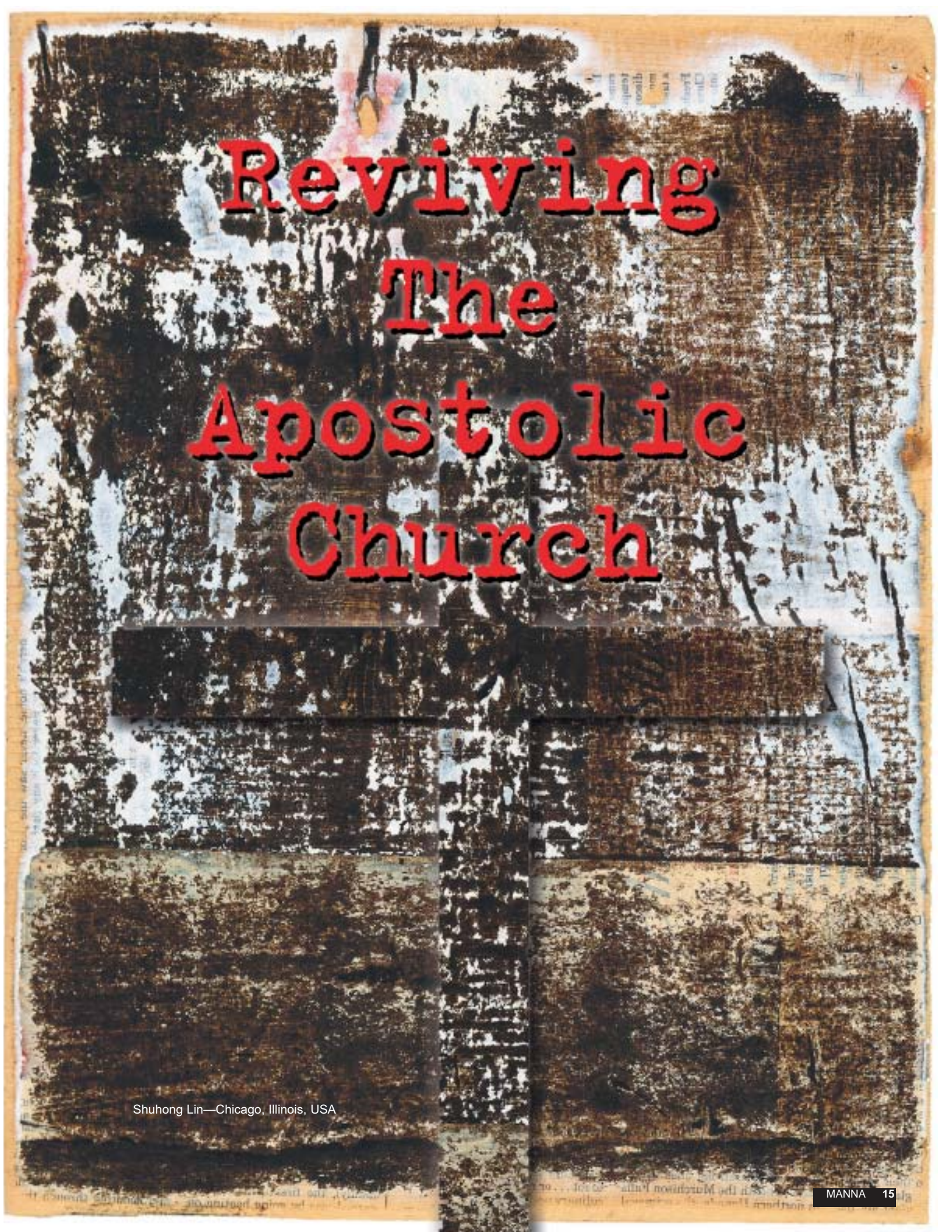
Most importantly, I saw how desperately these people need the Lord. There are so many people who are suffering, and only the Lord Jesus Christ can deliver them.

I am so thankful that God gave me the opportunity to walk in the shoes of a missionary, if only for a short time. If you are interested in serving the Lord in missionary work, and at the same time learning some important lessons, I strongly encourage you to experience this opportunity for yourself.

May all the glory be to our Lord Jesus Christ. ★



Planning for a church building at Kendu Bay



Reviving The Apostolic Church

Shuhong Lin—Chicago, Illinois, USA

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, He personally chose twelve disciples, eleven of whom later became the key players in the earliest stage of the history of the church. The church in the first century, during the times of the apostles, is, without dispute, the model church. They preached the set of doctrines that were imparted to them personally by the Lord, complete and perfect. Their daily living attested to the zeal and purity of their faith.

Soon after the apostles passed on, heresies crept into the church, and the church degenerated. What became of the original church of Jesus Christ is to be found in the fulfillment of the prophecies in the Old Testament—that in the last days, God would raise up His church again. “On that day, I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old” (Amos 9:11). This latter church is to be greater than the early church, for “the glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former” (Hag 2:9).

The True Jesus Church is the revival of the apostolic church. The church preaches the complete gospel of salvation (Gal 1:11-12; 2 Jn 9), miracles and signs testify to the truth that we preach (Heb 2:4; Mk 16:17), and the Holy Spirit of God abides in the church (1 Jn 3:24). These facts, however, should not be cause for complacency, but a motivation for us to zealously carry out God’s commission.

The acts of the early church were recorded during the times of the apostles, giving rise to the book of Acts. This book sets the standard by which we measure our own acts today, both as individual believers and collectively as a church. If our acts were to be recorded today as a sequel to Acts, what kind of a record would it be? Since we are the revived apostolic church, our acts ought

to follow in the pattern left behind by the early Christians. Hence, it is necessary that we take a look at Acts again and use it as a guide and gauge for what we are doing and where we are headed.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES AND OUR ACTIVITIES TODAY

Right before the Lord Jesus ascended to heaven, He commissioned His disciples to go forth and “make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to observe all the things” that He commanded (Mt 28:19-20). The disciples were to be “witnesses for [the Lord] in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). We know that the earliest disciples did not for a moment forget this great commission. The entire plot progression in Acts pivots on this one commission. Whether it was a record of a miracle performed or of a sermon spoken, or of how the early believers were strengthened in fellowship, the theme and focus of the early church never strayed from the work of saving souls.

Whether it was a record of a miracle performed or of a sermon spoken... the theme and focus of the early church never strayed from the work of saving souls. Today, are all our church activities truly rooted and motivated by the same commission of the Lord?

Today, are all our church activities truly rooted and motivated by the same commission of the Lord? We sometimes hear workers say that doing work for God is not the same as before. Times have changed. The world has moved on, and so church work must keep up with the times. One example that comes to mind is the method of large-scale evangelism. Holding evangelical services today just isn’t the way it was when

Peter stood up, spoke, and converted about three thousand souls. Without doubt, our societies today are far removed from those during the times of Peter and Paul. We no longer get a crowd gathering around us to observe us praying in tongues, and hence we have no chance to be like Peter, to stand up and speak a sermon that converts thousands of listeners. Even in other aspects of church work, there seem to be so many things that are necessary today that the apostles did not have to do during their time.

This brings us then to one very important question. It is a question that every worker of God, especially those in the position of planning and organizing, ought to consider. Are the activities we engage in today in the name of divine work really necessary in the sight of God? Or are we merely involved in some “much ado about nothing”? We have heard much exhortation to work while it is day, for when night comes we cannot work (Jn 9:4). That is true. But a potential danger is that we stretch and overgeneralize this teaching, resulting in

the misconception that any work done in the name of church work is acceptable in God’s eyes. What follows then is that time, money, and energy are channeled into the wrong places without our realization.

Going back to our earlier example of evangelical work, it has become a trend in many church locales to have choir presentations. If a church at a particular locale does not normally have

a choir, chances are we will see them forming an impromptu choir, sincerely thinking that this is the way things should be. And because it is an ad-hoc choir, the enthusiastic choir members find themselves spending a large part of their effort and time struggling to learn some new songs. For all their good intentions, these members fail to realize that their time could have been better spent witnessing to their friends and relatives and inviting them to hear the evangelical sermon.

When we find that we put in a lot of effort but harvest no true spiritual growth, we should not be quick to jump to the conclusion that the devil is foiling our work... The first question to ask, more appropriately, is whether we have done things the way God really wanted us to.

In other areas of church work, such as the work of religious education, teachers are often worried that they do not provide enough novelty to the lessons and activities and that, as a result, the students may not be drawn to God. The focus on novelty surpasses the concern for spiritual input.

Some members become stressed out by the work involved in spiritual convocations. As a consequence of the kind gesture of providing good meals for the attendees, they find themselves more concerned about physical food than about spiritual food. Is it any wonder, then, to hear people comment that working for God is not easy?

On one occasion, when the Lord Jesus was preaching at Bethany, two sisters' actions set up a contrast by which the Lord illustrated a very important teaching. While Jesus was preaching, Martha, the older sister, was busy playing the good hostess. Instead of helping Martha, the younger sister, Mary, sat down at the feet of Jesus to

listen to His word. When Martha complained that Mary did not bother to help her out, Jesus told her that Mary had chosen the good part, the part that is needful (Lk 10:38-43). Jesus does not say that the work of serving food is not important. But he does identify and distinguish between two categories: what is needful and what is not.

It is not the purpose here to generate a list of the activities that are needful and those that are not. Situational and locality variations will inevitably call

for different sets of needful activities at different times. However, as people who have received the blessed calling from God to work for Him, we must always make sure that we are using God's resources wisely. Life, time, money, and abilities are but God's resources distributed to different individuals, so that each may have a part in His holy work. These gifts must not be mishandled through our ignorance and misconceptions.

If God was able to save thousands in one day during Peter's time, then surely He is able to do the same today. The apostolic church was a "no-frills" church. Yet they accomplished the Lord's commandment and successfully preached the gospel to all Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (which at that time was the furthest ends of civilization known to them).

When we find that we put in a lot of effort but harvest no true spiritual growth, we should not be quick to jump

to the conclusion that the devil is foiling our work or that it is but the natural course of things. The first question to ask, more appropriately, is whether we have done things the way God really wanted us to. Are we adding all the frills that God never intended, at the expense of the things that God means for us to do?

CHURCH AND CHURCH BUILDINGS

The early apostolic church may seem "primitive" to some of us. Even the places of worship did not seem an issue that warranted the kind of concern that we have today. In contrast, our chapels today are getting more and more opulent. Endeavors to find a new chapel sometimes take years to see fruition because some of us set out to find or build a physical building that exudes enough grandeur so that it can bring glory to God's name.

Or, in other cases, we pride ourselves on being able to dedicate a chapel that is almost a landmark on the street where it stands, again hoping that God's name is thus glorified. Some chapels and church offices have the most modern and impressive interior decor and furniture. Thousands of dollars are spent on newfangled lighting systems, expensive flooring, and even designer furniture.

Such well-meaning efforts in the work of chapel building are certainly admirable. But, alas, God's name is never glorified as a result of any physical building. The archetype of modern-day chapels, Solomon's Temple, far surpassed any of our chapels in the excesses of grandeur. Our most magnificent buildings today all pale in comparison to the temple furnishings laden with pure gold.

Yet even the temple built by Solomon was not enough as a source of glory. Solomon himself acknowledged this: "Will God indeed dwell with men on earth? Behold, heaven and the

heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!" (2 Chron 6:14). The beauty and glory of God's creation abound on earth and up in the heavens. God does not need His children to construct any building to add to His glory.

Chapel building, or which location to use as a place of worship, was never an issue with the believers in the apostolic times. The book of Acts records instead how the believers lived in fellowship with one another, and how their numbers grew.

As the apostle Paul explains, the church is the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27; Eph 1:23). Individual believers are each the temple of the Holy Spirit of God, and we should glorify God in our bodies and in our spirit (1 Cor 6:19-20). It is the quantity and quality of believers that can bring glory to God, not the chapels that we buy or build.

We must be wary of the folly of measuring God's delight in us and our spiritual advancement in the terms of success defined by the world. Just as we should try to keep to the essentials in our activities for the service of God, we should practice parsimony and not waste resources on material things, such as facilities that far exceed the basic purposes of utility and necessity.

THE PLACE OF GOD'S POWER TODAY

Up to this point, some of the things discussed seem completely counterintuitive to the modern believer. Living in societies that prize novel plans and advocate being forward-looking, we find it inconceivable that God actually does not require us to do many of the things that we are already doing. This feeling is exactly a reflection of the phenomenon that may have stealthily crept into our consciousness and infiltrated into the way things are being done in church: we do things in church the way we do things out in the world.

In the choice of workers for church

work, some of us may unconsciously look up to people who are capable and successful in the world. Of course, being a worker approved by God and being someone successful in the world are definitely not mutually exclusive conditions. What is to be noted is a risk that exists today.

In some church locales, the membership is large and it becomes difficult for members to know one

God never relied on worldly methods or worldly advantages to execute His will. In fact, the way of God often runs contrary to conventional wisdom and logic.

another on deeper levels than being mere acquaintances. When it comes to having to choose workers for certain areas of work, we may lack knowledge about the personal lives and spiritual qualities of fellow church brethren, and so we tend to believe that someone who is successful in the world will also be a good worker of God.

A second risk then follows. If a person is successful in the world but is far away from God as a Christian, that person will bring into the church the ways he or she handles affairs and situations in the world outside (albeit unintentionally). Before long, the language and the organizational strategies of the corporate world may become something everyone thinks is the way to go.

However, that really is not God's way. Search the whole Bible through and through. God never relied on worldly methods or worldly advantages to execute His will. In fact, the way of God often runs contrary to conventional wisdom and logic. True, there are great men of God who had been great men in their careers. Joseph, Daniel, and Paul are some names to note. But as far as bringing about God's purposes, their worldly abilities were absolutely useless.

Daniel was not delivered from the lions' mouths because he was learned and was the premier in his country of exile. Paul explicitly says that "Christ did not send [him]... with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect" (1 Cor 1:17). In fact, if Paul had not put off all the trappings of being a learned Pharisee, God's power would not have been so mighty upon him.

The Acts can be summarized as a

record of how the earliest believers relied on God to accomplish what He commissioned. The majority of the key players were uneducated fishermen (Acts 4:13). The educated ones, if God worked with them, never once relied on their worldly education and abilities. The work of these believers gave rise to a golden period in the history of the church, a period in which the Holy Spirit worked mightily. They effected the words of God: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit" (Zech 4:6).

Can we say the same for ourselves today? Are we cluttering the church with principles and ideas of the world? Are we adding frills and extras, making the cross of Christ and God's power of no effect? These are the very things that will take away God's glory. It is not too late to do a thorough introspection of the revived apostolic church now. If need be, we must have the courage to change and make way for God's power. God's church can never be God's church if there is too much human noise and human ways.

May the revived true church of God exhibit even greater glory than the first true church did during the apostolic times—the glory of God. ★

Entrusted with His Grace

God's blessings abound in our lives.
He has given us life, skills, resources, and most importantly—the hope of salvation. But God's blessings aren't for us to enjoy alone;
He has entrusted us with His grace so that we can share it with others.

The following articles remind us to put to use the grace God has so generously bestowed upon us.

Entrusted with skills and resources, we should use them
to further God's kingdom.

Entrusted with the Lord's sheep, we should act as their spiritual watchmen,
being alert and warning them of potential dangers.

Entrusted with life, we should offer our very best—our youth—to the Lord.

Entrusted with the gospel of salvation, we should share the good news
with everyone, so that they too may be fellow partakers of God's grace.

Just One Talent?

Wenni Su—Garden Grove, California, USA

**pro-cras-ti-nate, vb—to defer action; to delay.
Or simply said, to put off until tomorrow what
can be done today.**

To some people, procrastination is just plain, simple laziness, but to those who have it honed to perfection, it's an art. And what an art it is—doing major spring cleaning the day before the in-laws arrive; preparing an hour-long

presentation, complete with charts, graphs, and slides, the night before the meeting; or cranking out a fifteen-page paper eight hours before it's due, all the while wired on adrenalin or caffeine or both and berating oneself for not having

begun a day earlier. But no matter how slapdash our efforts may be, we still enjoy some modicum of success from our labors. We arrogantly call it “rising to the challenge,” and we delude ourselves into believing that we produce better work under pressure. So with the next chore, project, or paper that comes along, we procrastinate—again.

This is, of course, assuming that we know the deadline. What if we don't

know the exact deadline? Should we postpone indefinitely whatever it is that needs to be done?

"But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking... and did not know until the flood came and took them all away" (Mt 24:37-39). In light of this warning, procrastination is surely not the smartest course of action.

Jesus himself exhorts us time and again in the Bible to "watch therefore" and "also be ready" for His second coming, because "of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mt 24:36-44; Mk 13:32-37; Lk 21:34-36). "I will come upon you as a thief" is His final warning to us in Revelation 3:3. Though these warnings resound through the Scriptures, we watch with a sense of detachment as the signs of the end of the age manifest. We reassure ourselves that the end is not quite imminent because our church is not yet "perfect," and we become complacent in the knowledge that we still have "time."

This is assuming that we live to see Jesus' second coming. Or maybe we believe that we'll live until we're seventy, and that we'll be able to compress into the last five years of our lives what we should have accomplished over five decades. What if Jesus decides to call us away tomorrow? What will we have to show for our time here on earth, for His care and guidance and grace? Are we ready to face Him come Judgment Day?

PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

There once was a man who was called away to a far country. He decided to entrust the care of his estate to his servants and gave them various amounts of money. To one he gave five

talents, to another two, and to a third he gave one—to each according to his own ability. The servant who received the five talents went and traded them and doubled his money, as did the servant with the two talents. However, the third servant dug a hole and buried his one talent in the ground. After a long time, the man returned and called his servants in to settle accounts with them.

The first servant said, "Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them." And the lord said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."

Likewise, the servant with the two talents showed the two he had gained, and the lord praised him similarly.

Finally, the servant with the one talent came before the lord and said,

"Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours."

"You wicked and lazy servant," the lord replied, "you knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest."

The lord then took away that servant's one talent and gave it to the servant who had ten, saying, "For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Mt 25:14-30).



THE TALENTS

In Biblical times, a talent was a unit of money worth about 6,000 denarii. One denarius was the equivalent of a day's wages, so it would take a common worker approximately twenty years to save one talent (and that's if the worker subsisted on air). Realistically, an individual would have to work at least twice that amount of time (a lifetime!) to be able to save that much money.

How fitting it is, then, that the modern definition of talent is a special or natural ability, for only something we are born with can be so priceless. We use "talented" to describe someone who is naturally skilled at doing something, like drawing or singing or writing. True, those skills can be learned to a certain extent, but creative genius either is there or it isn't. It can't be bought. We can try to explain it scientifically and say that it's because a certain part of the brain is more highly developed or because it was passed down by a miraculous combination of genes, but the gist of it is that we are given talent (or talents) the moment we are conceived.

Now, the operative word here is "given." Who "gives" us our talents? Our parents? If our parents could give us talents, we would all be Bill Gates. Frightening thought.

No, we receive our talents from God, just as we receive every other blessing from Him. Like the lord who gave a different amount of talents to each of his servants, God, too, gives us "gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us" (Rom 12:6). Some of us cook, some of us clean, some teach, and some preach, "for as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ" (Rom 12:4-5). Even Christ's body needs knees and elbows as well as fingers and toes.

God gave us different gifts not out



of bias or favoritism but so that we may make His body complete. "If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?... And if they were all one member, where would the body be?" (1 Cor 12:17-19).

God doesn't love the minister more than the cook, or the teacher more than the gardener—He loves them equally because they are all a part of Him. One person is not more important than the other, because they are all needed: one nourishes the spirit, one feeds the body, one opens the mind, and one makes His house beautiful. God is fair because He gives "to each according to his own ability." More talents may seem like more blessings and love, but it actually equates more responsibility. Regardless of our duties or the amount of responsibility we carry, we need to use our talents to edify others and to glorify God.

So from a spiritual perspective, a talent is a God-given gift. God may expect us to use it in a certain way, but

it's essentially a gift. And in the spirit of a gift, He grants us the freedom to exercise our will in determining the if, when, and how of its use.

THE SERVANTS

Though a talent is a gift, and though we can choose how to put it to use, there still is a right way and a wrong way of doing things, as exemplified by the servants in the parable.

The "good and faithful" servants, the ones who received the five and the two talents, were the ones who invested their talents and earned more money for their master. They were "good" because they knew the will of their master and cherished their talents by using them to the best of their abilities.

The servant who received the five talents did not flaunt his abundance or lord it over the other two servants because he received the most money; neither did the servant with the two talents complain about receiving less. Rather, both had one goal and one goal only—to be profitable servants. They were "faithful" because, entrusted with the estate, they fulfilled their duties and made it flourish. By being industrious, they doubled what they received and gave everything they earned to their master.

The "wicked and lazy" servant, on the other hand, buried his one talent in the ground. This action alone shows the blatant disregard he had for that one talent. Never mind that a talent took a lifetime to earn—he felt slighted because he received less than the other servants. Out of spite and laziness, he let the money sit idle rather than putting it in the bank to earn interest, even though he "knew" his master to be a "hard man." And to compound his wickedness, he tried to justify his actions by blaming them on his master's character!

The Bible tells us that servants should be "faithful" and "obedient to

those who are [their] masters" (1 Cor 4:2; Eph 6:5). As Christians, we are "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor 4:1). Therefore, we must also serve the Lord faithfully and obey His commands, "not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men" (Eph 6:6-7).

Like the servants with the five and the two talents, we need to understand the will of our master, the Lord, and actually do it. We should not emulate the servant with the one talent, who professed to know his master but found an excuse to shirk his duties. Paul tells us that because Jesus died to save us, "if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom 4:8). And since He was bruised, beaten, and battered for our sake, it is now our duty to care for His body, the Church.

God's love for us truly knows no bounds! As if it were not enough that Jesus redeemed us from sin, God even gave us each a different gift to assist with our duty. Our gift may be as spectacular as five talents or as seemingly insignificant as one talent—it may even be only half a talent. Regardless, we all received something.

The point here is not how much we have received but whether or not we put what we have to use. We can choose to use our gifts to glorify the Lord, like the good and faithful servants did, or we can let them stagnate, like the servant with the one talent did. But just because we have only one talent does not mean that we cannot be productive. We all have a skill that can be used for the benefit of the Lord. What seems trivial to us may actually be important to the Lord.

"No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker

are necessary.... But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another" (1 Cor 12:22-25). We should not look down on our one talent—nor, for that matter, should we look down on anyone else's one talent, because that talent is as essential as any other talents in making the Lord's body whole.

THE REWARD AND PUNISHMENT

It seems incomprehensible that one talent could hold as great an importance as five talents, but let's look at the situation from the master's perspective. The master's purpose in giving the talents to the servants was so that they could earn more talents. After settling the accounts, he rewarded the two servants who earned more talents, and he disowned the one who hid his talent in the ground.



On the surface, it seems as if the master was a hard taskmaster, judging the servants solely on the basis of whether or not they made money. Yet he said “Well done” to both the servant who earned five talents and the servant who earned two, made both “[rulers] over many things,” and allowed both to “enter into the joy of [their] lord.” If he had been concerned with only the amount of money they each made, then the servant who earned the five talents would have received greater honor.

Apparently, money is not the issue. Faithfulness, however, is. The master’s praise of the two good servants stems from the fact that both were “faithful over a few things.” Compared with each other, the servant with the five talents obviously made more money, but compared with what they each received, both made a profit of 100 percent. In the master’s eyes, both had fulfilled their duties.

So his rebuke of the lazy servant with “you ought to have” indicates that the servant was derelict in his duties. The master expected to receive something for his one talent; even with that talent sitting in the bank, he says, “I would have received back my own with interest.” But the servant was so “wicked and lazy” that he did not even have interest to show for his labor (or lack thereof).

Whether we have one or two or five talents, we each have the potential to give 100 percent of our effort to the Lord. Just as the “good and faithful” servants gave everything they earned to the Lord, so we, “whether [we] eat or drink, or whatever [we] do,” must “do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). And that, in a nutshell, is our duty—to glorify God.

As members of God’s body, we represent Him to the world. Our speech, behavior, and actions all reflect upon Him. Thus, we must use the gifts we

have at our disposal to add to, rather than detract from, His glory. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights...that we may be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures” (Jas 1:17-18). If the fruits we bear attest to our character, then we should strive to be perfect,



because by being perfect we, as the fruits of God’s labor, show others that God is perfect.

In the end, God will reward us for our faithfulness. If we show Him that we can be “faithful over a few things,” then He will make us “ruler over many things.” By doing what we were supposed to do anyway, we will be blessed, “for to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance.” In short, the more responsibilities we fulfill, or the more fruits we bear, the more responsibilities God will

entrust to us, and the more blessings He will give us to fulfill our duties. Furthermore, we will be able to “enter into the joy of [our] lord.” So when our time on earth is done, our faithfulness will have led us into the heavenly kingdom.

We must take care not to let our gifts lie idle, because the less we use them, the fewer blessings we will receive. This relentless cycle will continue until we become barren, and “from him who does not have, even what he was will be taken away.” Without fruits to show for our labor, our talents become useless, and God will take away what little responsibility He entrusted to us in the first place and give it to someone else. Not only will we be left destitute, but we will also be “cast...into the outer darkness.” There should be no doubt in our minds what that “darkness” will be.

Faithfulness takes time to express. So before we decide to put off our work for the Lord until the last five years of our life, we should keep in mind that there is no lottery, no single great feat that can proclaim, “Lord, I have been faithful.” Only God can tell us how faithful we have been, but, unfortunately, that won’t happen until Judgment Day. We can, however, take every opportunity to serve Him with love. We can start to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, perhaps enough so that it won’t matter when Jesus decides to visit us—next year, or tomorrow, or today. If we try our best to express our love through faithfulness, then He will also say to us, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

★

“Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore hear a word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me.”
(Ezek 3:17)

THE SPIRITUAL WATCHMAN

Wayne Chen—Irvine, California, USA

A brother who served in the military once took his troops out on a nighttime training exercise. He and the other training officer carried red markers in their pockets. In the darkness, in total silence, the soldiers were made to lie low in the grass and keep watch. As dawn came, some awoke to find bright red Xs on their foreheads. In a real battle, those who fall asleep on watch may face a much grimmer fate.

We are soldiers in a real battle, fighting in a spiritual war. "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood," Paul wrote, "but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12). Like Ezekiel, we are called to be watchmen, given the solemn duty of warning others of the dangers of sin in order to save life (Ezek 3:18-21).

People need alarms to survive. We rely on alarm clocks to avoid being late for work and warning lights in our cars to prevent us from being stranded on the road. More critical alarms, like a smoke alarm or a storm warning, help us to avert life-threatening situations. But we also need to be alerted to unseen spiritual threats. People can be unaware of the dangers of sin—they might be headed for eternal death without even knowing it. God's command in Ezekiel 3 is to "speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life" and to "warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin," with our own souls held accountable.

Today, having received the commission from Christ, we must stand prepared to do our duty. So how do you fulfill your role as a watchman for God?

THE REQUIREMENTS OF A WATCHMAN

"Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep." (Isaiah 56:10)

From God's condemnation of His failed watchmen, we learn what qualities we need to possess: keen insight, plenty of knowledge, the ability to identify and sound the alarm, and, finally, spiritual consciousness.

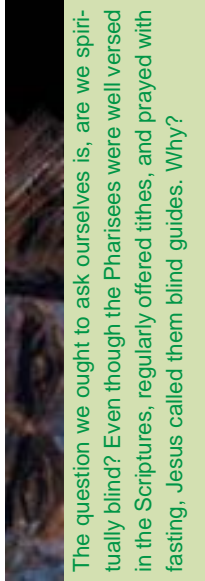
Possessing Spiritual Sight

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, an American radar operator detected the planes and reported them. But the officers on duty mistook them for Allied planes on an exercise mission and dismissed any threat. As a result, the lives of 2,335 American servicemen and 68 civilians were lost. The attack and resulting devastation came as a shock. The U.S. did not think the Japanese were either capable or daring enough to take such an action, and thus suffered a humiliating and terrible defeat.

A spiritual lesson we can draw from this painful episode is that we must never underestimate our enemy, the

versed in the Scriptures, regularly offered tithes, and prayed with fasting. Jesus called them blind guides (Mt 23:24). Why? Because they "neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith" (v. 23). The Pharisees practiced the letter of the law, but their hearts were far from being obedient to God. They failed to see the true will of God, to fully obey and follow His commands. This spiritual blindness causes a person to stumble, fall, and, like Eve, become easy pickings for Satan.

We may profess to be Christians and regularly attend services, read the Bible, and pray. Yet we could be blind to our own shortcomings—blind to the sins in ourselves or in people around us. Having eyes, do we not see? And having ears, do we not hear? (See Mark 8:11-18.) Let's be attentive and not turn into Pharisees who have the appearance of holiness but not the substance.



The question we ought to ask ourselves is, are we spiritually blind? Even though the Pharisees were well versed in the Scriptures, regularly offered tithes, and prayed with fasting, Jesus called them blind guides. Why?

Drawing from Spiritual Knowledge

God's criticism of His watchmen ties blindness with a lack of knowledge. The way to cure spiritual blindness is to obtain knowledge and discernment from God.

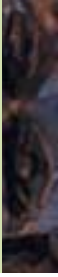
Jesus set the example. After Jesus fasted for forty days and nights, Satan came to tempt Him three times. When Jesus' physical state was at its weakest, Satan enticed Him, even with words from the Scripture. Yet each time Jesus discerned the temptation and was able to resist the devil by responding with discern signs of spiritual danger.

Though Satan twisted the words of God for his purposes, Jesus said, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on

bread, for anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins. (Jas 5:19-20)

At the same time, when others alert us to our sins, we need to examine ourselves with humility. If we are in the wrong, let us confess our sins and repent to God. Otherwise we will perish in our obstinacy, as Samson did when he refused his parents' counsel to turn away from sin.

Our duties as God's spiritual watchmen include warning those who are sinning to turn away from their sins.



Remaining Alert at All Times

We all need to sleep in order to regain strength. Oversleeping, however, is a sure sign of laziness and submission to physical cravings, for "laziness casts one into a deep sleep" (Prov 19:5).

We are most vulnerable in the state of sleep because we're completely unconscious of what's going on around us. It doesn't matter how strong we are—in sleep, even the most valiant warrior is unable to defend himself against harm, such as fire or an enemy attack.

Spiritual sleepiness makes us numb to sin. Ask yourself: when you encounter lustful images on TV or on the Internet, do you quickly switch to a different channel or site, or do you allow the sinfulness to stream inside, polluting your core? When evil thoughts spring to mind, do you shake them off or continue to dwell on them? When your friends or peers engage in uninspirational activities, do you have the guts to say no and turn away, or do you follow suit and yield to their influence?

The devil loves to attack us during our sleep. In Matthew 13:24-25, Jesus compares the Kingdom of heaven to "a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his

enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared." If we submit to weakness and lapse into spiritual slumber, then the fruits of sin will be revealed in the end.

The danger of spiritual slumber can be witnessed in the tragic case of Samson, a powerful judge and prophet of God. He was a Nazirite, a devout servant of God who could not drink wine, shave his hair, or eat or touch anything unclean. God gave him superhuman strength that allowed him to

single-handedly slaughter a thousand Philistines and kill a lion with his bare hands. Yet despite his might and exalted status, Samson fell into a deep spiritual sleep. He failed to remain alert through the fear of the Lord, and instead he fell asleep in the lap of a prostitute. When God left Samson, he didn't even realize it. Sadly, he paid with the loss of both eyes, and finally, his life (see Judges 16).

It doesn't matter how long we have believed in God or served Him. Even a godly person has to watch out for spiritual sleepiness. David, a man after God's own heart, failed miserably when he relaxed his vigilance. Arising late from bed one day, David saw a beautiful woman and yielded to temptation. Consequently, God condemned David to a life besieged by swords (2 Sam 12:8-10).

"Be sober, be vigilant," the apostle Peter admonishes us, "because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet 5:8). Let us be faithful watchmen who have the spiritual sight and knowledge to discern the dangers of sin and have the courage to warn others in order to save life. Let us be alert and not submit to our own weaknesses. May God preserve us and help us, for "unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain" (Ps 127:1). ★

The Yoke And The Youth

The Yoke And The Youth

Eng Guan Tay—SINGAPORE



A hotly debated topic in Singapore recently was scholarship holders who intended to break their commitment before serving out the full term that they had agreed to in exchange for their scholarship. The young men and women argued that it was not right that they should be held back by the terms of a paper agreement, especially when they were in the prime of life. Somehow, these youths had not factored in the benefits they had received as scholarship holders; also, they could not perceive their own dishonesty in signing on the dotted line.

In a materialistic society, pragmatism means doing what is best for oneself, and what is best for oneself is measured in terms of dollars (no need for cents, thank you). To be held back by a previous agreement when a better offer is made is sacrilegious to this religion of self.

Against this view of life stands a passage from Lamentations: "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth" (3:27). While many churches now preach that one can serve God and still have the world, true Christians must be aware that the teachings of Christ are often diametrically opposed to the concepts of the world. So even though youths in the world seek freedom and release from responsibility in their prime years, the Bible teaches young people that putting on the yoke of God is beneficial to all.

There are four main reasons why it is good for young people to bear the yoke in their youth.

1) DO NOT GIVE GOD THE LEFTOVERS

When they say that they should be allowed to seize all opportunities that come their way while in their prime, the scholarship holders in Singapore imply that others, including their sponsoring organizations, are only worth their leftovers. Christian youths who do not put on the yoke of God are essentially saying the same thing to Him. Some would delude themselves into thinking that God wouldn't mind, but we should pay attention to what Malachi 1:6-14 says. I've taken the liberty of adapting this passage to today's setting:

*A son honors his father
And a servant his master.
If then I am the Father,
Where is my honor?
And if I am a Master*

Youths in the world seek freedom and release from responsibility in their prime years, but the Bible teaches young people that putting on the yoke of God is beneficial to all.

*Where is my reverence?
Says the Lord of hosts
To you priests (see 1 Pet 2:9) who
despise my name.
Yet you say, "In what way have we
despised Your name?"*

*You offer defiled money in the offering
box,
But you say, "In what way have we
defiled you?"*

*By saying,
"The table of the Lord is contemptible."
And if you sleep during worship
service,
Is it not evil?
And if you work for God only when
you are old and feeble
Is it not evil?
Offer the same to your boss!
Would he be pleased with you?
Would he accept you favorably?"*

Says the Lord of hosts...

*"For from the rising of the sun, even to
its going down,
My name shall be great among the
Gentiles;
In every place prayer shall be offered
to My name
And a pure offering;
For My name shall be great among the
nations,"*

Says the Lord of hosts...

*"But cursed be the deceiver,
Who has some ability
And vows to use it for the Lord
But sacrifices instead the leftovers—
For I am a great King,"*

*Says the Lord of hosts,
"And my name is to be feared among
the nations."*

While the Bible does not command everyone to be full-time church workers, it clearly expects every Christian to dedicate his whole life to the Lord (Rom 12:1-2). A nation does not need all of its able-bodied men as army regulars, but in some nations—such as Israel and Singapore, where national service is compulsory—all able-bodied men are required to take up arms immediately when asked to do so. Soldiers of Christ must likewise be prepared to drop everything when required to do something for the Lord. Someone who only gives God the leftovers, however, cannot make this offering, because very often he will feel that there is not enough for himself: not enough time, money, or even family harmony.

To bear the yoke in your youth is good because God deserves the best.

2) SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD

The Sermon on the Mount set out many lofty ideals, and there were surely some listeners who doubted that these were possible in the face of material lack. Jesus addressed this doubt by encouraging His followers to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. He then reassured them by saying, "And all these things shall be added to you" (Mt 6:31-33).

Through the years, I have found myself again and again returning to this theme. Against the competing pulls of studies, career, and family (not necessarily in that order, in terms of priority or chronology), the truth of this message has often been obscured, faded, or, for some churchgoers, simply

ignored. Many of these people reason, "If I don't look after myself (my career, my family), who else is going to do it? God doesn't need me (and even He can take care of His own things!), but my family surely needs me."

This argument fails, for God would ask, "Don't you trust me?" Faith without works is dead. The fact is, when we struggle for ourselves, it is often to increase an already adequate bank balance or to seek status and fulfillment in our careers. No Christian I know has starved because he worked for God. A man refuses to bear the yoke in his

two to take a well-deserved break and to recharge his batteries for another joust with the world.

To bear the yoke of God in your youth is good because then you avoid bearing the yoke of the world. Although the rewards of the world seem more glamorous, many who have chosen this path have tasted its bitter fruit:

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (1 Tim 6:10)

To bear the yoke of God in your youth is good because then you avoid bearing the yoke of the world. Although the rewards of the world seem more glamorous, many who have chosen this path have tasted its bitter fruit.

youth because he thinks that the field of God that he is called to work in is incompatible with the grass and the fruits of the world outside. And this is true, although apparently, in this case, not with the result that God expects, for no man can serve two masters (a phrase that Jesus used to precede His exhortation to seek first the Kingdom of God; cf. Mt 6:24).

I am not totally against insurance and investment. It is saddening, however, when a person extends himself to the maximum in order to pay monthly premiums and mortgages, and then says that he has no money or time to give to his parents or to the church, because he has to work so hard to pay for all these things. On top of that, this same overworked person will skip church services because he needs to rest, and then, once or twice a year, he disappears with his family for a week or

But those who have trusted God and sought first His kingdom have found His promise to be true. Although very few who make this choice are considered to be "doing very well" in the world, the peace and joy they find in health, family harmony, and saving souls certainly has captured the true meaning of life.

3) DISCIPLINE THE BODY

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight; not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest,

when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (1 Cor 9:24-27)

This passage reminds us that not everyone who participates in a race gets the prize (see Mt 22:14). Many modern athletes who become champions began their training very early in life. Similarly, we tell our children to excel in their studies at an early age, and we help them by disciplining them and providing financial and tutorial support. Young people at the beginning of their careers are told to put in maximum effort and to learn as much as they can. Why then do these same people think that attaining heaven is a cinch and does not require effort?

To bear the yoke in your youth is good because by doing so, you discipline and train yourself in the word and the work of God, so as to save both yourself and those whom you love. It is never too early to start. If we enter the race too late, we may not even be able to complete it, much less win a prize. If we abstain from participating till later, we may find ourselves disqualified for not meeting the entry requirements.

We are very joyful when a lost brother returns to God and serves him faithfully. However, we should not romanticize the parable of the prodigal son and imagine that this scenario is actually better because the returned brother is able to serve the Lord with more conviction after having been lost in the world. Such a witness is indeed powerful, but the returned brother himself would tell us how he wishes that he had been wiser and had avoided all the suffering, and how wonderful it would be if he could recoup all those wasted years.

How much effort do we need to put in? Swimmers train about two hours each day, seven days a week. If he started at five and made the major leagues at

twenty, a professional baseball pitcher will have pitched about one million balls. Therefore, attending four services a week to prepare oneself for heaven doesn't look very fanatical, does it?

4) KEEP THE PATTERN OF SOUND WORDS

The true faith is passed down the generations through the process of apprenticeship. Jesus trained His disciples, and the apostles took apprentices along in their work. For example, Barnabas took John Mark, and Paul trained Silas and Timothy (Acts 15:37-16:3).

Apprentices such as Mark and Timothy were young men. In fact, Paul himself was young (Acts 7:58) when he was chosen by Jesus. And when they were with Jesus, the twelve apostles also were relatively young. Learning the word of God while still young is optimal in absorbing the full goodness of the gospel. Age brings experience, but it also very often brings prejudices and self-interests, which may hinder the complete growth of the word of God in us (see Mt 13:22). Besides, we all know that age slows us down, both physically and mentally (Ecc 12:1-5), and age means less time (Ecc 12:6-7).

Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus ... And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. (2 Tim 1:13; 2:2)

Youths must bear the yoke with regard to knowing the word of God and contending for the truth (Jude 3). The church is in danger when we abdicate the defense of the truth to a few good men, and older men at that. When these good men pass away (as they must), or if a few of them go astray (as they may), the truth will be compromised and

Youths must bear the yoke with regard to knowing the word of God and contending for the truth. The church is in danger when we abdicate the defense of the truth to a few good men, and older men at that.

perverted by wolves all too eager to destroy the church (Acts 20:28-30). However, if we nurture a large cohort of believers who can discern the word of God rightly (2 Tim 2:15; Acts 17:11), and who do not leave decisions on doctrines solely in the hands of a few, then it will not be easy for the devil to corrupt the church.

For a number of years, we detected a downward trend in enthusiasm for Bible study among the youths, at least in some locations. Increasingly, young people seemed to prefer other options such as choir singing, technical and maintenance duties, and organizational work. Many shunned work that involved reading, writing, and expounding the teachings of God found in the Bible. Recently, however, we have seen a number of youths showing genuine interest in the word of God. We pray that this revival will be sustained and will grow stronger.

It is good for us to bear the yoke in our youth because "what goes around comes around." The suffering that comes with bearing the yoke brings benefit to the next generation. For in preserving the truth by absorbing it, the youths of today secure a good future for their descendants. Only by continuing this apprenticeship, can we break the following cycle of decline:

*A generation suffers for the Lord.
They are blessed by Him.
The next generation enjoys the physical blessings due to their parents.
They neglect the yoke of the Lord.
Their next generation suffers because the truth is compromised.*

Perhaps, they search for the truth and find it again.

Perhaps, they are destroyed.

If the former, will the cycle be repeated?

If the latter, we will be defeated.

Life has meaning and is full of hope for those who would live life the way God intended it to be lived. This means a life lived in the will of God revealed in the Bible. Many have tried it and found it to be true. Let us encourage one another, and especially our young people, in His way.

This I recall to my mind,

Therefore I have hope.

Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed,

Because His compassions fail not.

They are new every morning;

Great is Your faithfulness.

"The Lord is my portion," says my soul,

"Therefore I hope in Him!"

The Lord is good to those who wait for Him,

To the soul who seeks Him.

It is good that one should hope and wait quietly

For the salvation of the Lord.

It is good for a man to bear

The yoke in his youth. (Lam 3:21-27)

★

Lessons Learned From

Personal Evangelism



Nhatha Nol-Mantia—Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Since my conversion in 1999, I have spoken to many people about Christ, including friends, family members, classmates, and even random people on the street. It is the most wonderful feeling to be able to glorify God and lift the spirits of those who are hopeless. Unfortunately, there also have been some sour moments when I know that God's name was not glorified by my idle ramblings. During those times, it might have been better if I had not opened my mouth at all. In this article I would like to give a personal account of what I believe worked in my personal evangelism and what resulted in failure.

TAILORED-FIT GOSPEL

There exists only one Truth, but this does not mean that there is only one way to present that Truth. I quickly learned that we can't approach everyone with the gospel in the same manner.

The apostle Paul wrote, "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9:22). Likewise, we should all be conscious of and sensitive to each person's religion as well as family, economic, and social background. Preaching the gospel is not mass advertising. God's message should be tailored to each person's life-situation. To be good preachers, we must first be good listeners.

Paul did not preach to the Gentiles in the same manner as he preached to the Jews. When speaking to Christians of other denominations, we should familiarize ourselves with their beliefs and doctrines. We should also have a solid understanding of the Bible and of our own beliefs so that we can speak with confidence and wisdom.

When preaching to people of other religions, we should try to understand

why they believe what they believe. I once tried to speak to a Muslim friend about my newfound faith in Christ. My efforts proved futile because she already believed that the Koran was the truth. I had very little understanding of Islam and the Koran, so I could not convincingly explain to her why she should believe in the Bible instead of the Koran. I assumed that Islam was just a culture-specific tradition. I found out later that the Koran is very similar to the Bible in that it contains most of the stories mentioned in the Old Testament. Like the Jews, the Muslims believe in Jesus—but only that He was a great prophet.

All this time, I was trying to convince my friend that the Bible was the only true book in the world. Meanwhile, she was not even disagreeing with the validity of the Bible; she was really struggling with how Jesus, a man, could be God. I sincerely regret that I did not do my homework before approaching my dear friend about Christianity. With a rushing desire to bring my friend to Christ, I was not patient enough to rely on God's wisdom and have faith in prayer.

SHINING THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

It is our duty as followers of Christ to shine bright in this world of darkness. No matter whom we are speaking to, we must let them see God's light and love in us. If we tell them that God will give them peace, then we must have peace. If we promise joy, then we must also express joy in preaching. If we say that their lives will change, then we must present ourselves as living examples of holiness.

When I was first drawn to Christ, it was not because the church or doctrine motivated me. Rather, it was because I perceived a significant change in the character of my would-be husband in Christ. He somehow had become more loving, calmer, and gentler. I needed not to be persuaded by his words, because I was convinced by his actions.

When I met the church members, I really felt that their countenances were like those of angels. They seemed so different from people I had met before—the brothers and sisters were sincerely kind, gentle, pure, and innocent. Of course, everyone has their weaknesses, but it was at that critical time when I was forming my impression of the church that I needed to see all the goodness in them and of the Holy Spirit.

From this experience, I learned that love is a very powerful tool in evangelism. In a world where everyone is looking out for himself, a person expressing unconditional love is an exception.

I had a co-worker who was one of the unfortunate contractors affected by a mass layoff in my company. I did not know him very well, since I had only been with the company for two months. Still, I felt bad for him when I heard the news, so I visited him at his cubicle to wish him well and take him to lunch.

To my surprise, he was visibly astonished and touched that I had come down to see him, since we only had a few brief conversations in the hallway.



He was feeling pretty depressed and accepted my invitation to lunch.

We went for a walk and had a pleasant conversation about life and how one could draw closer to God. Thank God, when we returned to the office, he told me that he had been really worried about his job situation, but after the walk he felt really uplifted and hopeful.

I will never forget when he looked at me and said, "You know, you are really an exception." As a Christian, we must try to be an exception every minute because we never know when someone is paying attention.

PRAYING FOR GOD'S ABIDANCE

It is pure joy when I am able to glorify God's name through evangelism, but it is the worst feeling when I know that I did not preach according to His will.

I had a bad experience when I was trying to preach to a classmate in college. By chance, I met her at the library, and I did not pray before

of a cultic church that her uncle had encouraged her to join. I fear that I left her with a bad impression of God's true church. My tongue, which should be used to edify, was instead a stumbling block to her faith.

From this experience, I learned that we must have God's abidance in any holy work. Peter and John were untrained and uneducated men, yet God used them and gave them the gifts to carry out His plan. We must not rely on our own understanding but instead utilize God's words to move a person's heart. It is not by our own understanding that we can move a person's heart, but only with God's words and the Holy Spirit working through us in His time.

I learned that love is a very powerful tool in evangelism. In a world where everyone is looking out for himself, a person expressing unconditional love is an exception.

approaching her because I was pretty confident that I could preach on the fly. I had heard many sermons on our doctrines, and I had spoken with ease to many people about my personal experiences with God.

But this time when I spoke to my classmate, I could not put one comprehensible sentence together, nor was I prepared to answer any of the questions she had concerning our church. My heart sank when she said that my description of our church reminded her

in my home. This sister had just met this man on the train and knew very little of his background. I was concerned about having a stranger know my address, and I wanted her to get to know him a little better before bringing him into my home.

Immediately after I said this to her in a telephone conversation, I felt really bad, as if the Holy Spirit was rebuking me for having so little faith in God's protection. I knew that I should welcome anyone who wished to draw closer to God, but I also could not help fearing that this person could be a potential robber or murderer.

I prayed to God for guidance and I repented for having so much self-concern and so little faith in Him. Through prayer, I came to realize that I should honor God with all of my possessions—for all that I have, whether it be my home or my life, was given by God. I called the sister back to tell her to bring anyone to my house who wanted to hear the Truth.

Just as God trained Peter (Acts 10:34) to refrain from calling any man common or unclean, we should not hold any prejudice or reservation in holy work. God has shown me that His divine love is very different from the love that I thought I possessed. I do not know if I will ever really be able to love my neighbor as myself, but I know that I am just beginning to understand what love really is, as described in 1 Corinthians 13.

God does not distinguish between family members, friends, or strangers, and God does not reserve His love only for people closest to Him. Thank God for His goodness and mercy. May the love of Christ fill us all so that our efforts in evangelism will bear much fruit. ★



WELCOMING ALL WITHOUT RESERVATION

It is sometimes difficult to be unbiased toward people who we wish could be saved, but it is important that we welcome everyone into Christ without prejudice. God's pure love is unconditional, and to Him every soul is precious, worth more than the whole world.

There was one time when I hesitated to allow a sister to bring a potential truthseeker to the Bible study held

FIGHTING A GOOD FIGHT

Jennifer Lu—San Jose, California, USA



As two people get ready to be married, they are often filled with blissful thoughts of their honeymoon or their new home. They might even imagine how they will share breakfast in the mornings or take long walks in the park after dinner. The furthest thing from their minds is how they will fight together.

Unfortunately, arguments are a very real part of marriage. All couples have had their fair share of bickering, whether big or small. Even though it sounds awful, the good fight, ironically, can bring two people closer together. These fights usually start because they are desperate attempts at communicating our thoughts and feelings when we feel frustrated or misunderstood. So, whether we know it or not, the good fight is really about a husband and wife trying to understand one another better. Since it's something that cannot be avoided, the trick is to learn to fight a good fight.

Not Allowing Emotions To Rule

"Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear" (Jn 18:10). In a fit of rage, Peter decided that cutting off someone's ear would get his point across. Because we are human, our first reaction during a fight is to get mad or upset. Although we may not go so far as to physically harm another person, we often raise our voices and say hurtful things. In Peter's case, Jesus Christ was there to salvage the situation by healing the servant, who was then no worse off. But it usually isn't possible to take back our words, which can cause great damage to a relationship. When we allow our emotions to take over, we get blinded and lose track of our thoughts.

One time, a man in a truck honked at me as I was parked with my family in front of a driveway entrance. Seeing that we were in his way, I drove off. As we left, my husband, who was in the back seat with our son, glared at the other man. This man must have had a bad day, because he immediately made a u-turn and chased after us. Not wanting to get into a confrontation, I drove as fast as I could. After several blocks, the man in the truck turned around and gave up his pursuit. At

that point, I got extremely upset and began a verbal attack on my husband. I listed all of the things he had done wrong, and it took a good five minutes to get everything out of my system. My husband remained quiet during the entire time. I was so angry that I shouted, "Don't you have anything to say? What if he had had a gun?" Other than these words, I honestly can't remember much else of what I said.

I just kept spewing out sentence after sentence, hoping to let my husband know how upset I was. It wasn't productive at all, because I was too mad to think straight.

Sometimes hurtful words can cause the other person to go on the offensive and create a fight that is not even about the real issue at hand. To help us control our anger, a lot of people suggest count-

Sometimes hurtful words can cause the other person to go on the offensive and create a fight that is not even about the real issue at hand.



ing to ten before we say anything, and although it sounds silly, the reasons behind it make sense. That extra time allows us to take a deep breath and analyze the situation. As Christians, instead of counting, we can first try praying to God together. In addition to giving us some time to help ourselves remain calm, we will find that God will help us see things a little differently. When we choose to trust God, He will open our eyes and hearts in a way that nothing else can.

After I stopped yelling, my husband said, “I’m sorry. That was a stupid thing to do.” While I was screaming like a lunatic, he had the time to reflect on what had happened. Then he responded appropriately to my outburst, which helped me to calm down. We were even able to make a pact about what we would do if either one of us were caught in a similar situation in the future.

Focusing On The Real Issue

During a fight with our marriage partner, we often find ourselves listing—or at least thinking about—the other person’s past mistakes. This is not a good strategy. It only sends the argument completely out of control and ends up hurting both people.

When God forgives us, our transgressions are blotted out. When the Israelites sinned, they could redeem themselves by offering sacrifices to God, and He accepted them as atonement. “For on that day the priest shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the Lord” (Lev 16:30). God does not remind us daily of all the mistakes we made in the past—that would make it too hard for us to restore our relationship with Him. If God can forgive us completely, why can’t we do the same for others? When we drag up the past, we are telling our partners that we haven’t forgotten it, or perhaps we are looking for ammunition to use against

them. Unfortunately, these kinds of bullets only steer us away from having a productive fight. A good fight focuses on the real issues.

After I gave birth to my son, I found myself getting mad at my husband over his pick-up basketball games at the local park. Although I didn’t say anything, after a month he asked me what was wrong, because he could sense that I was unhappy each time he left for a game. I thought about it and realized that it wasn’t the fact that he was playing basketball that bothered me; rather, I just wanted him to spend more time with me and to help take care of our new child. Once we got to the real problem, my feelings of hurt and frustration disappeared. We agreed on a schedule that would be acceptable to both of us concerning his games, and we were able to spend more quality time together as a family.

If we find that the same things always trigger a fight or that the past is getting in the way, then it is time to really sit down and have a lengthy discussion with our partner about those unresolved tensions. Otherwise, they will be a constant source of problems. And once they have been talked about and worked out, we need to let them go. It’s the only way to establish a trusting and loving bond.

saying. That’s why fights in a marriage almost always turn into shouting matches—because we equate volume with clarity. The truth is, the more we say hurtful things, the more our partner will tune us out.

“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Prov 15:1). In a good fight, by softening our voices and expressing ourselves using specific phrases, such as “This is what is bothering me” and “This is what I need from you,” we can get our message across ten times clearer. In addition, we can let the other person know that we are trying to understand them by saying, “I think this is what you are saying to me” and “I can sense that you are upset.” When said in the right context and correct volume, the proper words can open up a great communication channel.

A good fight will also sometimes involve being the bigger person and saying the right words to change the entire atmosphere. Once during a fight my husband blurted out to me, “Why do we argue? You always win.” That caught me so off guard that I could only burst into laughter. After I managed to control myself, our anger had subsided and we managed to calmly discuss what we had been fighting over. It’s not always easy to

A good fight will also sometimes involve being the bigger person and saying the right words to change the entire atmosphere.

Using Meaningful Words

When we fight, we tend to use harsh words because we think that our partner will pay more attention to what we’re

be the bigger person, because it is human nature to try to get in the last word. But when we humble ourselves, we may be surprised at the results.

Apologizing For Getting Angry

Proverbs says, "Do not strive with a man without cause, if he has done you no harm" (Prov 3:30). This verse seems to suggest that fighting is acceptable as long as there is good reason. But there isn't always a justification for the way

or in our children that we don't always set aside enough quality time to spend with each other. But we need to make an effort to take time out each week to talk about whatever is on our minds. Schedule it in, if that's what it takes. Good old-fashioned talking, face to face, can be refreshing and beneficial to your relationship.

that way. He didn't do this to encourage us to fight about our differences, but rather to allow us to complement one another in the various aspects of our lives. "Let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (Eph 5:33). So rather than sweating over the small stuff, we need to think about what the other person brings to the relationship that is unique and lovable. After all, that's why God joined us together as one.

There is a lot of power in the words "I'm sorry" when they are said sincerely and quickly.

we fight or the things we say. No matter who began the dispute, if either partner loses his or her temper, then that person needs to apologize. By doing so, we are acknowledging that we were at fault to some degree, because no one person is completely right or wrong.

There is a lot of power in the words "I'm sorry" when they are said sincerely—and quickly. "Do not let the sun go down on your wrath" (Eph 4:26). Any fight should be resolved right away, because there is just no reason why two people cannot talk things out. That is one of the vows we make when we agree to spend the rest of our life with someone else: to stick it out through the good and the bad. For that promise to work, we need to communicate. If we get mad and slam the door on each other, the feelings won't go away. They will only build up over time, and one day we will end up really hurting each other.

We will also discover that regular communication can decrease the number of fights we have in our marriage, because we can better understand our partner's needs and wants. Although this sounds like an easy solution, it is hard to carry out. We get so caught up in work, in church,

Understanding We Are Unique Individuals

My husband has a habit of leaving his dirty socks on the bedroom floor after he changes. I don't argue with him about this habit, because it's not that difficult for me to pick them up and throw them into the hamper along with my own clothes. But more important, I know that I have some quirks that he has to live with, too. For instance, I like predictability, and I get frustrated very easily when he springs something on me at the last minute.

Some things about us are difficult to change. Yet when we are in the middle of a fight, we expect our partner to think the same way we do. No doubt we have all said things like, "Why can't you see things my way?" or "What's wrong with you?" More likely than not, there's nothing wrong with our partner. In fact, we are just as guilty ourselves of not seeing things from the other person's perspective. What it boils down to is that we need to make compromises in a relationship. Unfortunately, we tend to want to take more than we give out.

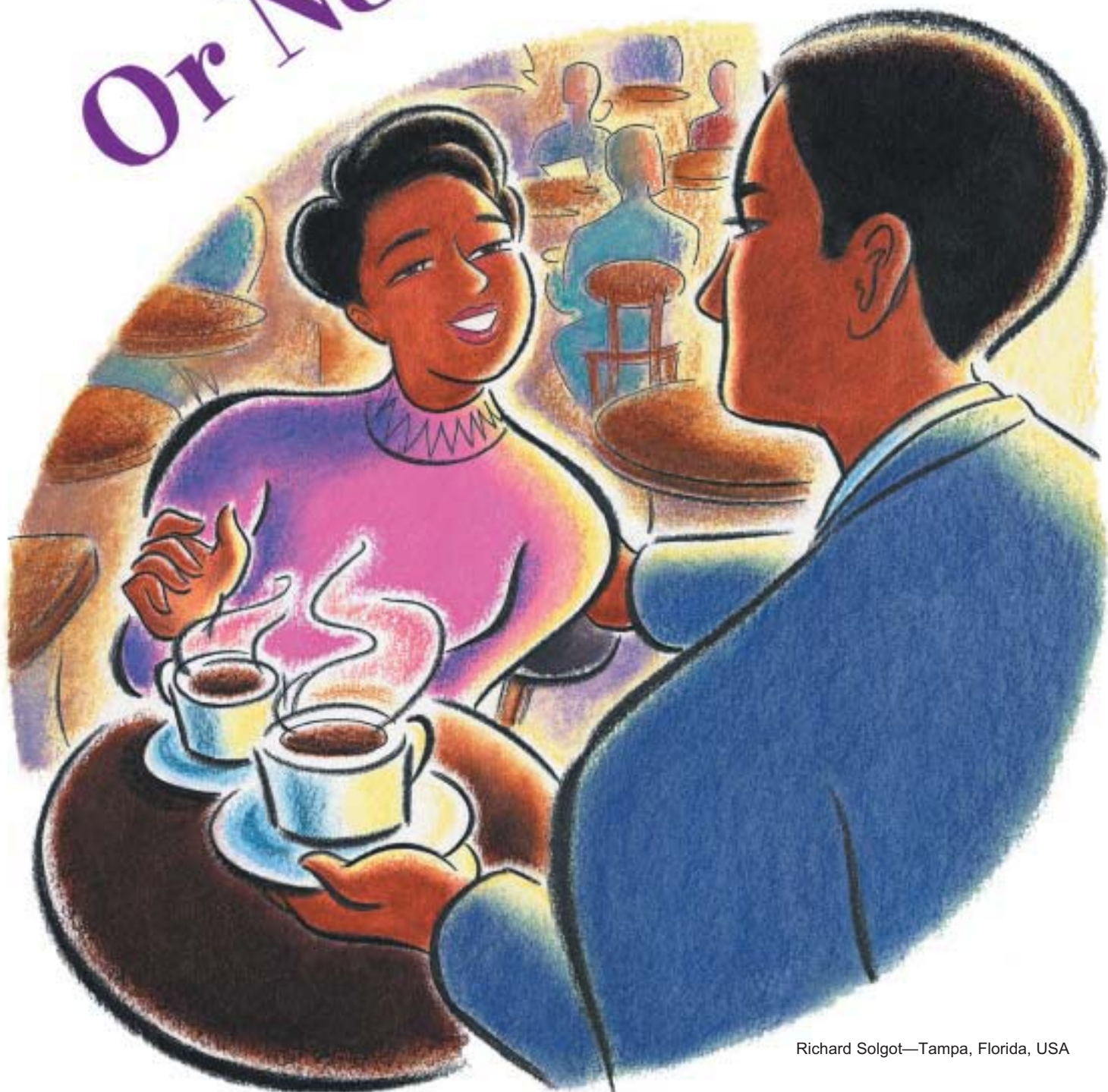
God knows full well that no two people are alike, because He created us

Fights in a marriage may be inevitable, but they don't have to be painful and ugly affairs. When we recognize that the good fight is a means through which a couple communicates, then we can turn our attention away from just getting our point across, and focus instead on what we are really trying to say. But arguments, no matter how great or small, can have a lasting effect on two people. Since arguing is part and parcel with the relationship, rather than having meaningless shouting matches, we should focus on creating productive meetings of the minds. A good fight eliminates the unnecessary accusations and discusses the real issues, using meaningful words. A good fight strips away the anger and involves two words: "I'm sorry." A good fight brings two people closer together.

★

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

To Date Or Not To Date ?



Richard Solgot—Tampa, Florida, USA

Love and marriage, love and marriage, go together like a horse and carriage. This refrain from a song from generations past comes a lot closer to reflecting biblical truth than most of the music heard today. At least then it was popular to celebrate marriage as the natural context for love; since then, however, music has celebrated the liberation of “love” from marriage. It has become the music of the dating culture.

Lately in Christian circles there has been renewed interest in the concept and practice of courtship and betrothal. “Courtship” is not a biblical term. “Betrothal” is. But both refer to a process of moving toward marriage that respects certain fundamental values, including parental authority and protection, moral purity, exclusivity of affection, and a God-centered understanding of marriage. None of these values characterize the surrounding culture of dating that we have grown up in and in which we are now raising our children.

As our response to the mercies of God in Christ, we are called to worship God in all that we do: “I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom 12:1-2). Christians have conformed to this world’s patterns of boy-girl relationships, preparation for marriage, and marriage itself. But we need to work hard at renewing our minds by taking every thought captive to Christ in these too often unexamined areas of life (2 Cor 10:5).

Plato taught, “The life which is unexamined life is not worth living.” As Christians, the unexamined life may destroy our children and dishonor Christ. The practice of dating must be excluded from any family that is serious about raising godly children and pleasing God in their conduct. Why? By

contrasting dating and courtship in the light of God’s word, let’s consider four ways in which dating falls short of God’s glory.

DATING REMOVES YOUTHS FROM PARENTAL PROTECTION

And she’ll have fun, fun, fun ‘til her daddy takes the T-bird awaaaay. This popular American hit from the 1960s depicts a teenager who takes the family car and cruises around on her own, having fun with her friends. The only threat to this state of teen bliss is the prospect of the girl’s father taking the

as a man who would “command his children and his household after him... [to] keep the way of the Lord” (Gen 18:19). Do you think Abraham would have allowed his daughter to sneak off on his sportiest camel to carouse with the local pagans? Neither would a Christian father who is admonished to “bring [his children] up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). This process doesn’t stop when a youth can drive or when the world considers him or her old enough to date.

In particular, the process of bringing young men and women together is always to be guided by the father, not

Dating removes the father from the process, cedes authority to the youths themselves, and leaves them unprotected from the very real dangers of being alone together.

car away. Of course, we might ask why Daddy let her take the car in the first place, or how his control could be so loose that she takes it without his knowledge! And we may wonder if indeed this lackadaisical father will bother to intervene at all. Dad here is not the godly father of Scripture; he is simply a potential threat to fun, fun, fun. This is a fair description of a father’s role in the dating culture.

The first and major problem of dating is that it removes youths from the authority and protection of their fathers. Isn’t the whole idea of dating to “go out” together, away from parents and family? This is consistent with the modern practice of removing children from parental oversight, counsel, and care. Its effects, however, are disastrous.

In contrast, according to biblical teaching, fathers are responsible for guiding and protecting their children through the whole period of their upbringing. Abraham was commended

carried on independently by the couple themselves. God, the original Father, set the example when He oversaw the process of bringing Eve to Adam and “giving her away” to him (Gen 2:22). Abraham took the initiative of finding a wife for his son Isaac (Gen 24:2-4). Jacob had to win the permission of Rachel’s father, Laban, before he could marry her (Gen 29:18-19; see Ex 22:16-17; Judg 14:1-10; 1 Sam 18:17-21 for other biblical examples). This total oversight of the coupling of youths is perfectly consistent with the father’s responsibility to guide and protect his children. Dating removes the father from the process, cedes authority to the youths themselves, and leaves them unprotected from the very real dangers of being alone together.

DATING TEMPTS YOUTHS TO SEXUAL IMPURITY

It’s not surprising that mild lyrics like *I want to hold your hand* in the early



sixties gave way in a short time to jarring lines like *I can't get no satisfaction*. The one leads to the other as surely as night leads to day. And any parent who denies this is being willfully blind.

The second problem of dating is that it tempts youths to sexual impurity and most often leads to sin and damaged lives. God's standard is that there is to be no sexual touching before marriage. It is His design that when a man and woman are alone together their interest will develop along sexual lines, especially once any physical contact takes place. This is not evil, it is good—but it must be kept within the boundaries that God gives us: romantic touching is for marriage. When God gave Eve to Adam, He immediately

declared the propriety of their becoming "one flesh" (Gen 2:24). A male and female being alone together logically and properly leads to sexual union. That's why it is not safe or proper for a man and woman to be alone or to touch outside of the bounds of marriage vows.

One of the most damaging things about dating is that it encourages people to give their hearts to others, over and over.

Proverbs 6:29 warns a man regarding his neighbor's wife that "whoever touches her will not go unpunished." This does not mean that a man can affectionately embrace, kiss, or otherwise touch a woman as long as he does

not have intercourse with her. The mildest form of sexual touching leads down the path to intercourse. When God protected Sarah from any advances from Abimelech, it was not that Abimelech stopped short of sleeping with her. We are told that he "had not come near her" and that the Lord did not allow him to "touch her" (Gen 20:4, 6). Even if Scripture does not delineate the point, common sense tells us that there are no safe lines to draw in this matter, other than "don't touch." The isolation of a couple when dating is a direct invitation to break God's protective rules against immorality (Mt 5:28; 1 Cor 6:18; Eph 5:3).

Courtship protects youths from sexual immorality by keeping the couple in the context of family, under the oversight of parents. The concept of chaperoned encounters is the only one consistent with the principles of parental authority and protection from sexual impurity. Absolute privacy is not necessary or safe. Meetings can occur under the watchful eye and within earshot of the parental guardian. Any conversations too intimate for this setting are too intimate for this stage of the relationship.

DATING PROMOTES EMOTIONAL FORNICATION

Dating leads necessarily to a mutual giving of hearts—but without commitment. *Breaking up is hard to do*. Indeed it is! *Will I see you in September or lose*

you to a summer love? Breaking up, making up, changing partners—this has been the stock and trade of popular music. And it is a natural part of the dating scene. If you get tired of the partner you have, trade him or her in for

another. If you're not with the one you love, love the one you're with. Broken hearts and violated affections are the inevitable accompaniment to the institution of dating.

The third problem of dating is the practice of serial relationships that promotes emotional fornication and is a rehearsal for divorce. God's plan is for one man to have one woman for life (Gen 2:24). Even if a dating couple manages to avoid the trap of sexual involvement, they will be involved

marriage before even allowing him regular contact with the young lady in an effort to win her heart. Otherwise, he may succeed in winning her heart only to decide she is not the one for him. Then we have the same problem as with dating. Young men need to consider carefully and be prepared to commit themselves if they succeed in winning the young woman's heart. The aim is to have each one give his or her heart to only one other.

Dating is that it is an exercise in pleasing oneself rather than God.

emotionally and will set their affections upon one another. This point is really just an extension of the last, but it is worth separate emphasis.

One of the most damaging things about dating is that it encourages people to give their hearts to others, over and over. When it comes time to marry someone, they are not able to offer their hearts with pristine purity. They will have the memories of all those (or even just the one) to whom they had given their hearts, if not their bodies, in the past. If God means for each person to have a single life-partner, He means for that partner to get not only exclusive rights to the body but also to the affections of that person (1 Cor 7:4).

Moreover, those who have been in the practice of changing the objects of their affections will be tempted after marriage to do the same thing. This will lead to sin and dissatisfaction within the marriage, and will often result in divorce. After all, divorce is just another form of "breaking up."

Courtship guards against emotional fornication by limiting one-on-one encounters to those couples that are seriously pursuing the possibility of marriage. It is even wise to require a young man to affirm his commitment to

DATING IS INDULGENCE IN PERSONAL PLEASURE

Love can't be wrong when it feels so right. These lyrics reflect the focus of the dating culture: self-gratification. If it feels good, it's okay. Dating is a self-centered practice where the purpose is the fulfillment of personal desires. This subjective, emotional preoccupation drowns out God's standards for what is right and wrong.

The fourth problem of dating is that it is an exercise in pleasing oneself rather than God. It is obvious how this is so when a couple engages in sexual sin. But self-centeredness is no less the purpose when a couple dates just to have fun and enjoy the company of someone they think is attractive. Personal pleasure still defines the content of the encounter.

The purpose of courtship is marriage. The goal is the formation of a new family unit to the glory of God. A young man must have serious intent if he asks a young lady's father for the privilege of seeking to win her hand in marriage. But there can be no other justifiable reason for a young man and woman to develop a relationship. Without the end of marriage in view, "courtship" simply becomes dating by another name.

A MESSAGE FOR PARENTS

At the start of every school year, the newspapers often feature a photograph of a five-year-old near tears boarding a bus, going off to his first day of school. This rite of passage is considered normal and healthy. Yet it is the beginning of an alienation of affection that can hinder family life and the development of the child. The natural parent-child bonds are violated for the "wisdom" of peer-oriented, mass education.

Letting go. This is the great mandate thrust upon parents. You let go of wee ones to kindergarten. At the other end of childhood, you let go to college or career. Parents do need to let go when a young person is ready to set up a household of his own, but short of that, "letting go" is not the mandate. Instead you should be holding on, shaping, disciplining, and pouring yourselves into your children—not to stifle development, but to fully develop all their potential to the glory of God.

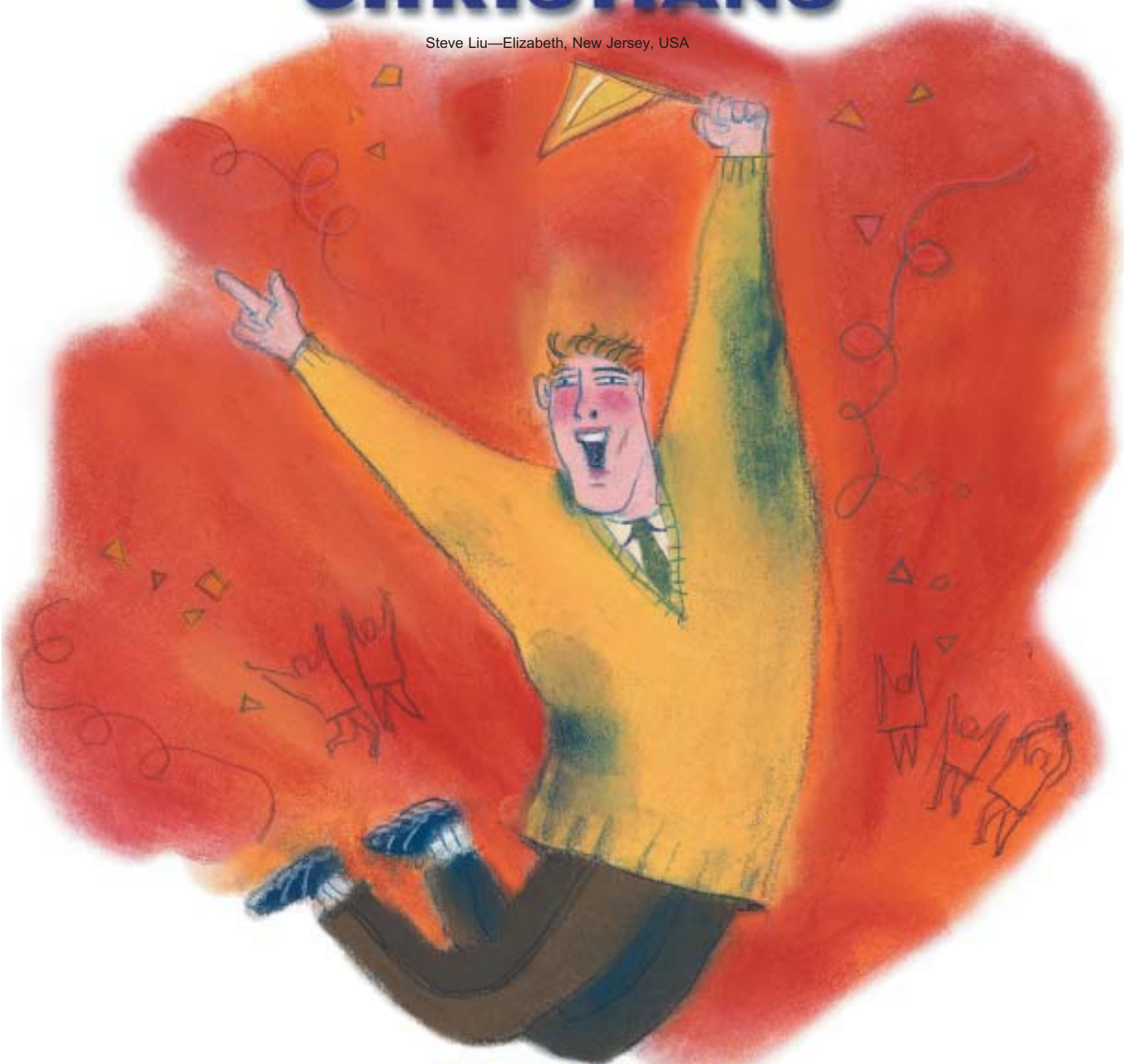
Dating is part of the perverse "letting go" syndrome. Let teens go have their fun. They need to be alone. After all, we did it when we were their age. Yeah, we sure did, and we suffered for it.

Parents, you are failing your teens if you let go of your authority and protection over them and abandon them to the dangers of dating. It is not God's way, and it is harmful to your dear children. Let their teen years be ones in which you draw them even closer and lovingly assert your authority and protection over them. Don't conform to the pattern of this world. Be responsible for the children God has given to your care. ★

"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



(Parts 5 & 6)



We now come to the last in this series of “In the Workforce” columns. For the last year now, I’ve been going through each of the bits of advice that my father gave me before I started working. Here are the last two.

5) Learn as much as you can, so that you are winning two things at one time: your salary and your experience.

A lot of people coming out of college receive their diplomas, throw their caps in the air, burn their textbooks in the summertime grill, and think that the learning is over. No more books, no more lectures, no more papers, no more all-nighters. It’s probably as close as we’ll get to experiencing Revelation 21:4 this side of glory. And yes, there are no more exams. One of the greatest feelings in life after graduation is to wake up after a recurring nightmare in which you’re ill-prepared for an exam and, after thinking about it for a few seconds, realize that you’ve graduated and will never have to take another exam for the rest of your life.

Of course, when you start life in the workforce, you’ll notice very quickly that the learning continues, but just in different ways. It’s not done in a classroom, of course. Classroom learning is no longer anathema; to the contrary, now it’s usually accompanied by free lunch or even a “conference” in Orlando.

You begin your learning the first day you start work. The first day on a new job is often terrifying. Most of us remember the feeling. You’re not sure what to wear. You don’t know where to sit. You have no phone, no desk, no computer. You don’t know anyone’s name, and no one knows yours. You remember vaguely from the interview what sorts of things you’re supposed to

be doing, but when your boss plops a pile of papers on your desk, it may as well be written in Egyptian hieroglyphics. You smile to the world, but inside you’re thinking... what have I done? How am I going to fool these people into thinking they haven’t made a mistake by hiring me?

Of course, for most people the feeling doesn’t last (if it does last, congratulations! You’re ready to move into management). No, a week passes, and you spend the time reading and talking to people to find out more about the job you’re going to do. After two weeks, you’re matching the names with the faces. You’re starting to realize that you know just as much as anyone else in the place, and what you don’t know, you can learn. After three weeks, your ratio of “dumb questions” to “smart questions” starts to even out a bit. After a month, you’ve got some simple accomplishments done, and people start to recognize your name. And by this time, new people have come on board, so you can pass the ignominious moniker of “New Guy” to someone else.

Getting from ground zero to a point where you feel like you fit in takes work. This is all part of the learning process. But it doesn’t just last for a month. It needs to continue for the rest of your life. “The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, And the ear of the wise seeks knowledge” (Prov 18:15).

To be successful in the workforce, you constantly need to acquire new knowledge. You need to learn not just technical knowledge to do your job, but even more importantly, you need to

learn how to live. How to write an e-mail that is both respectful and brings your point across. How to conduct yourself in a meeting. How to talk on the phone in a professional way. How to deal with the various personalities that you encounter each day. How to give a presentation. How to deal with success, disappointment, or change. You don’t learn these things in a textbook. You learn them by trying to do them, failing, picking yourself up, and trying again. And yes, it does help if you have the word of God planted in you. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov 1:7).

Funny thing is, the more you learn, the more confidence you gain, and the more confidence others gain in you.

*Through wisdom a house is built,
And by understanding it is established;
By knowledge the rooms are filled
With all precious and pleasant riches.
(Prov 24:3-4)*

There are those who remain so stuck in their ways that they refuse to learn. You know the type: these are the people who said that the horseless carriage would never catch on, or asked why anyone would use an electric light bulb when candles and lanterns worked just fine.

In the workforce, you’ll see these people, too. They’re the ones who are so stuck in their ways that they get a reputation for being dead wood. The Bible has a word for this type of person: The Sluggard. Compare the vineyard of the sluggard with the house of the wise.

*I went past the field of the sluggard,
past the vineyard of the man who
lacks judgment;
thorns had come up everywhere,
the ground was covered with weeds,
and the stone wall was in ruins.
I applied my heart to what I observed
and learned a lesson from what I saw:
A little sleep, a little slumber,*



*a little folding of the hands to rest—
and poverty will come on you like a
bandit
and scarcity like an armed man.
(Prov 24:30-34, NIV)*

And now, to the last tip.

6) I am sure that after three months, they will not only hire you, they will pay you more!

This was not so much a piece of advice as it was a prediction. I had been hired at my company as a consultant, not as a full-time employee. Consultants were hired on a three-month “trial” basis, and, pessimistic ol’ me, as I described the job to my Dad, I lamented that I would probably be let go after this period.

Dad took my cue and encouraged me with this last tip. Remarkably, he was right. I had started out my career at a job at the very bottom—low pay, long hours, and thankless work. Six months after I started, I was hired as a permanent employee. Six months after that, I got a promotion. Another six months after that, I got another one. And after six months at that position, I finally got one more promotion. Through a combination of fortuitous timing and good luck, not even three years after I entered the workforce, I ended up with a job that I loved and a position and salary that were, at last, commensurate with my skills and education.

Some people in the company told me that the norm is to wait years and years to be converted to an employee, or to get even one promotion. But for some reason, while there were bumps along the three years, things did seem to fall into place for me. I didn’t need to play the game or schmooze or do anything except be myself.

I recall that day, three years into my career, that I started that new dream job, sitting in my new office and smil-

ing. I looked back and thought to myself, here’s a guy who, while his alma mater is by no means anything to sneeze at today, went to that university at a time when it was not the most prestigious of schools, and yet advanced over people who went to even the top schools. Here’s a guy whose college transcript looks like a can of Campbell’s alphabet soup. Here’s a guy with practically no social skills and limited business sense, and who, with no false modesty here, honestly has no business at all making it in the corporate world, but somehow ended up enjoying some level of success.

THE ULTIMATE SOURCE OF SUCCESS

Since that time, I’ve changed jobs, but the Six Habits remain with me. In each new job, they remain a guiding force in whatever I do. I still have that grease-stained, crumpled piece of paper sitting in my desk drawer. If you look back at the Six Habits, you’ll see the source of whatever success I’ve enjoyed. It started with the voice of a loving father, echoing all that he had learned over his life from his loving Father.

Some people spend all their time reading up on the latest business trends and catch-phrases. Others make it a priority to go to social events where they can impress and be seen by the elite. Some spend all their efforts trying to take advantage of others for their gain. Some work long hours in the name of providing for their families, while what they should be doing is spending time with the families for whom they are ostensibly providing.

Just about all these people have but two things on their minds: I want to make more money, and I want to be promoted to a higher level. This is the big lie that the corporate world dishes out—that somehow a higher salary and a better position will bring fulfillment. It is a lie, because with more money and

more power comes a deeper hunger for even more. At the end of that rainbow is regret, not success.

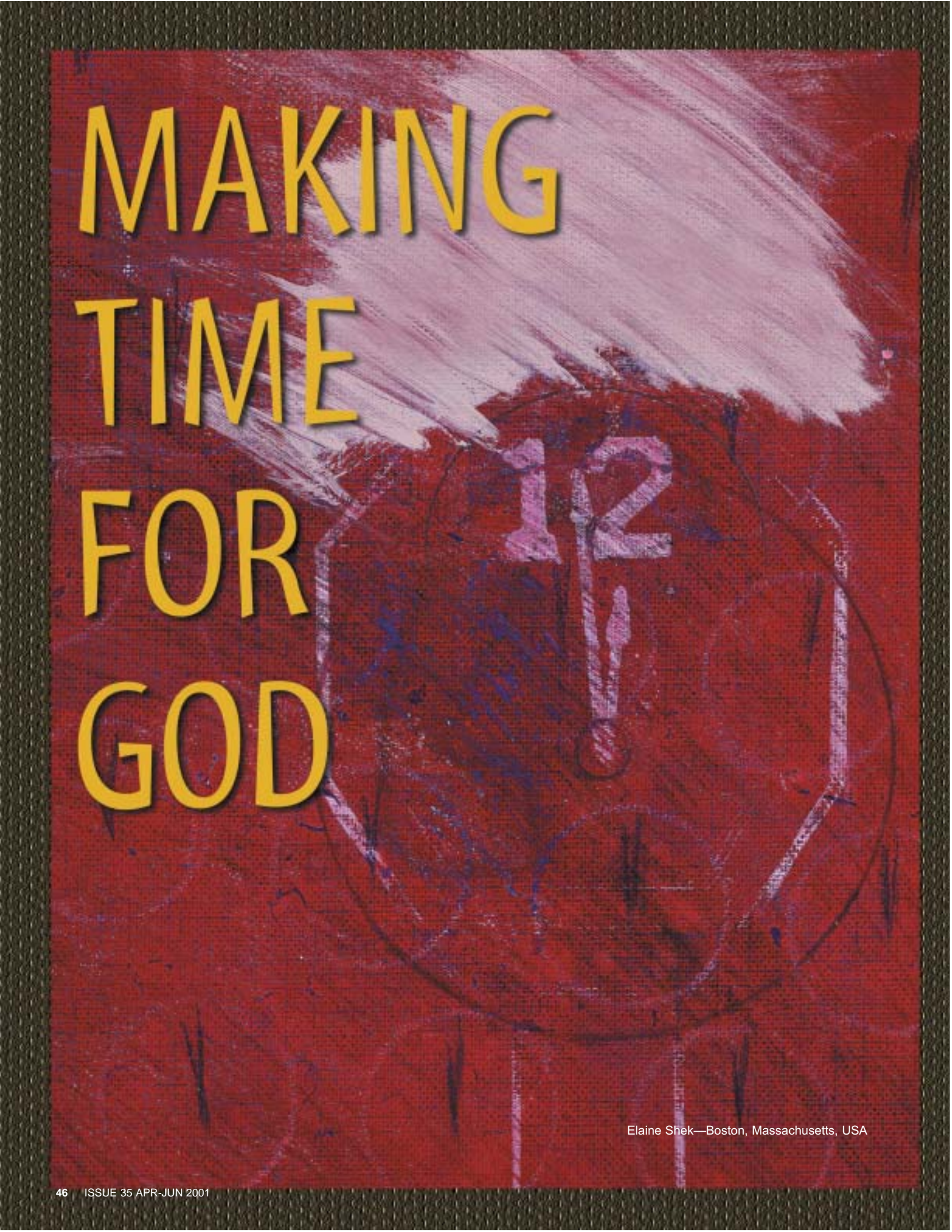
No, the road to being highly successful goes beyond a good title and a high salary. It’s being able to look yourself in the face every morning and see a child of God looking back. It’s doing your work, whatever it is, for the ultimate glory of God. It’s having people look at you in the office and know that there’s something special about you—something that they can’t quite put their fingers on, but something they want to experience, too. It’s being able to face successes knowing without a shadow of a doubt who the Source of your strength is, and being in constant communication with that Source. It’s being able to face burnout, anger, disappointment, hardships, and the unknown, knowing that, at the end, you will come forth as gold. It’s being able to set clear priorities in your mind—that your love for and relationship with God comes first, your family is a very close second, your work for church comes after that, and everything else is a distant fourth.

I have no idea where my career will go from here, but if there’s one thing that I’ve learned so far, it’s this: the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, but time and chance happen to all (Eccl 9:11). If you can commit first to shining the light for Christ wherever you are and in whatever you do, time and chance have a funny tendency of working out just right for you.

Thanks Dad. ★



“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.



MAKING TIME FOR GOD

Elaine Shek—Boston, Massachusetts, USA

It's 3 p.m. on Friday. Liz has just finished a full day of classes, and she rushes back to her dormitory to pick up her gear for swim practice. After swim practice, she grabs a bite to eat before preparing for her religious education lesson tomorrow. Bible study is at 7:30 p.m., but she is nowhere near ready to teach her lesson. Perhaps she'll skip Bible study tonight...

It's now midnight, and Liz has managed to complete her preparation for tomorrow's lesson, but she's missed Bible study in the process. Exhausted, she gets down on her knees, mumbles a few words of thanks, and climbs into bed. She notices her Bible lying on the nightstand and decides that she'll read it tomorrow. After all, it is the Sabbath, and she'll be spending most of the day at church.

How many of us can relate to a situation like this? Many times, we feel that there isn't enough time in the day to get everything done. Time—it is something we all treasure, something we wish we had more of, but it just seems to slip so quickly through our fingers.

As students, we are often burdened with so much work that we tend to let go of things that are vital to our well-being: God and our faith. How many times have we pushed God away because of our busy schedules? How many times have we missed services because we had to write a paper? How many times have we rushed off to school without first giving thanks to God for another day to live and just mumbled a few words of thanks seconds before jumping into bed?

When we follow such a busy and hectic lifestyle, it is no wonder that God is often left out. We have lectures to attend, papers to write, and exams to take. How are we supposed to put it all together and find time for God in our busy lives?

This article will address the importance of making time for God, how to do so, and the results of making time for God.

WHY MAKE TIME FOR GOD?

*To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven.
(Eccl 3:1)*

According to the words of wise King Solomon, there is a time for everything: a time to study and a time to play, a time to learn worldly knowledge and a time to gain spiritual wisdom. But it is up to us to set out that time, to use our time wisely and devote part of it to God.

Imagine that, week in and week out, our days begin at 8 a.m. and end at 12 a.m., with no time to talk to God except for a few seconds before bed. What would our faith and our relationship with God be like? It would probably be weak, if not nonexistent. Like any other relationship, we need to spend time with God in order to develop a closer and more personal relationship with Him.

In addition, setting aside time for God allows us to keep sight of what is important—our ultimate destination of the heavenly kingdom. Our faith has a direct impact on whether or not we can enter heaven—and this is definitely worth making time for. Spending time with God not only impacts our ultimate goal, but it also makes a great difference

in our daily lives. The following poem entitled "The Difference" illustrates how important it is for us to come into God's presence daily in order to gain strength and peace from Him. The busier we are and the larger our tasks, the more important it is to pray to the Lord.

*I got up early one morning,
And rushed through the day;
I had so much to accomplish,
That I didn't have time to pray.*

*Problems just tumbled about me,
And heavier came each task;
"Why doesn't God help me?"
I wondered,
He answered, "You didn't ask."*

*I wanted to see joy and beauty,
But the day toiled on gray and bleak;
I wondered why God didn't show me,
He said, "But you didn't seek."*

*I tried to come into God's presence,
I tried every key in the lock;
God gently and lovingly chided,
"My child, you didn't knock."*

*I woke up early this morning,
And paused before starting the day;
I had so much to accomplish,
That I had to take time to pray.*

HOW TO SCHEDULE GOD IN OUR LIVES

Make an Appointment with the Lord

A good way to put God in our lives is to make an appointment with Him each day. We should examine our lives and determine when the best time is for us to communicate with Him and to meditate on His words. For King David, it was in the morning and in the evening:

*O God, You are my God:
Early will I seek You... (Ps 63:1)*

*When I remember You on my bed,
I meditate on You in the night
watches. (Ps 63:6)*

In the morning, before we start our busy day, we can thank God for giving us another day to live, ask Him for guidance and protection, and ask for His help to make the day a fruitful and God-pleasing one. In the evening, before bed, we can review our day with the Lord, thank Him for the guidance and protection He gave us, and reflect on issues we encountered during the day.

Offer the Best Time in Your Day

For some people, morning and evening meetings with God may not work. The morning may be too early—we're tired and grouchy, and it's hard to kneel down to pray. At night, we may be too tired after a long day's work, and all we want to do is just climb into bed.

We need to choose a time when we're not too tired and when our mind is clear to offer our best to Him. Just as Abel offered the best of his flock to the Lord, we need to offer the best time of our day to the Lord.

I finally managed to figure out the best routine for myself by my second year of university. Although I prayed morning and evening, they were usually short prayers. I felt that I needed to find a better time when I could really pray in-depth and meditate on the words of God.

I discovered that the best time for me was around 8 p.m. I studied and ate dinner, and then it was time for God. Even if I was working on a paper, I would drop everything and give an hour to God. During that time, I would sing hymns, read the Bible, and then end with a prayer. It was time well spent, and I truly treasured it.

RESULTS OF MAKING TIME FOR GOD

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Mt 6:33)

Once we place God first, we will experience an immense difference in our lives. I noticed that when I made time

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and My burden is light.

I encourage you to give it a try, even if you can only afford to give up twenty minutes. Use that time to meditate on His words and to tell Him what a stressful day you've had. You'll definitely feel the difference in your life. As long as we put God first in our lives, we truly don't have to worry about anything—everything will fall nicely into place.

The world around us is always trying to invent novel ways to get things done more quickly—from fast food to instant

A good way to put God in our lives is to make an appointment with Him each day. We should examine our lives and determine when the best time is for us to communicate with Him and to meditate on His words.

for God by scheduling a period of time with Him each evening, I always completed my work within a shorter amount of time. I would often receive inspiration from Him when I was stuck on a paper.

Moreover, the time that I set out for God also became a stress reliever for me. For that hour, I would forget about my studies and concentrate on the Lord. Amazingly, during the most stressful days, the lyrics of a hymn or a Bible verse would always touch me and lift my burdens. I truly felt immense peace and joy in my heart during those times. During my final year of university, whenever I was completely overwhelmed with work, God provided me with the sanity I needed.

Jesus encourages us in Matthew 11:28-30:

messaging. In such a fast-paced society, seeking God seems like the last thing on our minds. However, making time for God could mean the difference between being a stressed-out, harried student and being a successful, peaceful Christian student. The choice and the time are yours. ★

"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.

LETTERS FROM MOM



Honey,

Did you catch the Worldwide Church Report in the April-June 2000 issue of Manna? Coming from a 136-member local church, I was much encouraged that, officially, there are 85,557 of us. However, as I weighed this number against the backdrop of the current world population, which already numbered well over six billion persons at the turn of the twenty-first century, it dawned on me that the body of believers is very small. Yet, as Scripture verses came to my mind, I realized that, at the appointed time, the body of believers will become a great multitude.

I don't know if you've already had a chance to study Revelation. Filled with symbols and imagery, this last book in the Bible gives us a sense of God's master plan. Written by the apostle John, Revelation is a record of the vision that the Lord Jesus revealed to this beloved disciple. According to John, the Lord was very specific: "Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this," He commanded (Rev 1:19). Although no one knows for certain when John wrote it, scholars agree that it was some time during the second half of the first century.

Revelation is a fascinating book. At once alarming and enlightening, this book spurs the repentant to belief and action and counsels the believer to understanding and patience.¹ One of the astounding scenes John saw was "...a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb'" (Rev 7:9-10, NIV).

I'm a believer. What John saw assures me of God's great love for humanity, whom He created in His own image. They tell me that though our society is in disarray, the repentant will stop sinning and mend their ways to live in obedience to

Christ. In the end, "a great multitude" of souls will be saved. Sometimes, however, the skeptic in me casts a sweeping glance at statistics and taunts the believer. I am startled and confused. I hang my head and shuffle along in my Christian journey. But suddenly, another Scripture verse comes to my mind. I straighten up and look for my Bible. And I read, "In the last days... peoples will stream to [the mountain of the Lord]. Many nations will come and say, 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us His ways, so that we may walk in His paths'" (Mic 4:2, NIV). I stride forward. The skeptic in me does not give up. But the prophet Micah was not alone, I find myself thinking. The prophet Isaiah said it, too: "... it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it" (Isa 2:2). I summon my powers of imagination to see how this is possible. But another verse comes to my mind: "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible" (Mk 10:27). I pick up my pace and quicken my step.

So I wondered about the church.

No, this is not wishful thinking. It is true that in the eighty-four year history of the True Jesus Church, we have been regarded as a "Chinese church." But even though it was not always apparent during this period, the Lord has been moving the hearts and minds of men and women of other nations, inspiring them to seek His face and learn His ways. As documented in the April-June 2000 issue of Manna, our church family now includes men, women, and children whom the Lord has called out from various nations to worship Him. It is a beautiful picture.

But I see an even more beautiful picture when I read the TJC Internet Report in the July-September 2000 issue of Manna. Through the wonders of modern technology, people of all

example, if we choose to imitate Paul, would we know when and how to speak boldly (Acts 19:8), and when and how to be graceful in speech (Col 4:6)? Also, what did Paul mean when he said, "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9:22)? And what was that... "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim 4:16, NIV)?

I would venture to guess that you are already prayerfully adding to this partial list. Your list and those of your peers may be even longer than anything I can come up with because, coming of age at the turn of the twenty-first century, you understand present-day concerns better than I can. Surely your place in the world at this particular time is no mere accident; rather, it's that you have been called to speak of that which has been revealed to you. This society is in disarray, and many people are looking for a sense of direction that will point them back to God. Also, "[a]t the present moment, many churches are under extraordinary fiery ordeals and are facing various trials."² We must not look away and pretend that we do not care. Paul

reminds us that everyone in the church has a contributing role because God has "called us with a holy calling ... according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began" (2 Tim 1:9). Therefore, whatever your role, do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord (2 Tim 1:8). Keep the faith and preach the Word, for every prophecy made long ago shall be fulfilled in its appointed time (2 Tim 4:1-8; Rev 22:12-21).

*Love,
Mom*

1. Bible Study Guide Series: Revelation (True Jesus Church, 1999), p. 9.
2. John Yang, The Book of Daniel (California: Word of Life Publishing House, 1997), p. 116.

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



THE ANSWER LIES WITH GOD

Esther Chin—SINGAPORE

I TURNED MY BACK ON YOU, LORD
WHEN YOU CLEARLY SHOWED ME THE WAY.

I CHOSE TO TAKE CONTROL
AND WANTED MY SAY.

YOU SPOKE TO ME IN PRAYER;
HOW WONDERFUL THAT EXPERIENCE WAS!
I WAS REASSURED FOR A MOMENT;
I WAS LIFTED OF THAT BURDEN.
JOY, LIGHTNESS, COMFORT...

YOU HAD A WAY FOR ME;
YOU TOLD ME AS MUCH.
YOU WOULD PROVIDE.
I WASN'T TO WORRY,
I WASN'T TO FEAR,
I WASN'T TO BE CONFUSED.

I WAS TO STRIVE FOR YOU,
I WAS TO PREACH YOUR GOSPEL,
I WAS TO LOVE ALL WITH YOUR LOVE.

THESE WERE WHAT YOU SAID TO ME.
AGAIN, HOW WONDERFUL THAT EXPERIENCE WAS!

YET HOW BRIEFLY THAT REASSURANCE LASTED,
WHEN IT WAS MEANT TO STAY.
THE BEST-LAID PLANS GOD HAD FOR ME
WENT AWRY,
ONCE I LET MY EMOTIONS OVERCOME ME.

THIS IS NOT TO SAY GOD'S PLAN CAN BE FOILED BY
MY FOOLISHNESS;
I SIMPLY CHOSE THE LONGER AND TOUGHER ROUTE.

I COULD DECEIVE EVERYONE,
BUT I COULDN'T MYSELF.
I THREW MYSELF INTO ONE AWFUL TANGLED WEB
OF CONFUSION;
I PUT MYSELF THROUGH PAIN;
I WENT THROUGH TEDIOUS GUESSING GAMES,
WHEN ALL GOD WANTED WAS
FOR ME TO TRUST HIS GUIDANCE
AND TO KNOW THAT IN EVERYTHING
THERE IS HIS TIME.

RIGHT NOW, FOR ME, AND AS FOR YOU TOO,
HE MADE CLEAR HIS COMMISSION.
HE EMPHASIZED HIS GREATEST COMMANDMENT:
WE ARE TO CARRY THEM OUT.
EVERYTHING ELSE, GOD WILL PROVIDE.

THE ANSWER I SOUGHT AND WHAT YOU GAVE
WEREN'T EXACTLY THE SAME.
I WANTED AN EXPLICIT "YES" OR "NO,"
YOU GAVE ME DIRECTION INSTEAD.

I REALIZED HOW SHORTSIGHTED I WAS!
I WON'T PROBE ANY FURTHER.
YOU ARE NOT A FORTUNE-TELLER;
FOR WHAT GOOD WOULD IT BE IF I HAD KNOWN
SOMETHING BAD, OR SOMETHING GOOD
WOULD BEFALL ME ON THIS DAY OR THAT DAY?
WHAT PURPOSE WOULD IT SERVE IF I HAD
KNOWN THAT
THIS PERSON OR THAT PERSON
WOULD BE MY LIFE-LONG FRIEND OR FOE?

I THANK GOD FOR HAVING REMINDED ME AGAIN
TO TURN AROUND TO FACE HIM,
TO HEED HIS CALL AND HEAR HIM.

AMEN.