

MANNA

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ISSUE 49 JUL-SEP 2005

After God's Heart

Godly Sorrow

Songs of Homecoming

Introduction to **Literary Ministry** (Part 2):

Internet Ministry

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After God's Heart

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



Dear Reader,

By the time this issue has reached your hands, much devastation has occurred in a matter of a few short summer months. There were the destructions of Hurricane Katrina and Rita, the bombings in Bali and London, and many other current disasters that still linger in our thoughts.

These events make us more acutely aware of how much we need God and His protection, and how insignificant we are in the face of God's greatness. Therefore, we ought to count our blessings, and reflect upon our relationship with God to see where we stand in our faith journey.

In this issue, a few writers share their heartfelt testimonies of God's protection and providence, and they call us to do the same—to think about our personal experiences with God, and to challenge ourselves to know Him more.

As we examine ourselves, we might begin to realize the ways in which we lack an authentic life in Christ. If this sounds like your challenge, be sure to read the final article in this issue, *Songs of Homecoming*, which calls us to come home to God.

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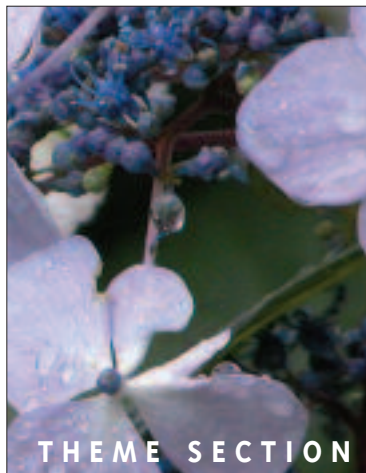
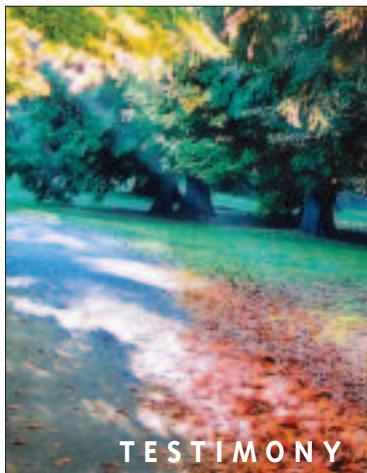
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After God's Heart



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How I Learned to Walk with God

Julie Lee—Baldwin Park, California, USA

Our faith in the Lord is not a series of isolated events but a seamless thread that runs from faith to faith. I can relate very well to such a thought because from the day that I believed in God until now, He has blessed me in so many ways that has rooted my faith and allowed me to approach Him better.

God has indeed chosen us not because of anything we've done but because of His mercy and grace. He also gives us rich experiences that compel us to return His

love and to study His teachings more deeply.

The following is a retelling of a fraction of His blessings to me, and each experience anchors my faith deeper and helps me walk with God in Spirit and in truth.

God's Grace

My family moved to Argentina in 1986 because of my father's work relocation. At that time I was five years old and the True Jesus Church in Argentina was still at its infancy. My mother brought my siblings and me to worship there, but we were not baptized at the time.

It wasn't until 1992 that the church held the first spiritual convocation. I remember that the first night of evangel-

ical service was on a Wednesday, and everyone was telling me how wonderful it is to receive the Holy Spirit, and how, without the Holy Spirit, we would not be able to enter the doors of heaven. Back then, I was just an innocent eleven-year-old who did not know too much about salvation, but I was very determined to receive the Holy Spirit.

I remember making a promise to God, during one prayer at the convocation, that if He gave me the Holy Spirit I would offer myself as a living sacrifice to serve Him for the rest of my life. I felt like a child who was trading something precious for an even bigger treasure.

After I made this promise to God, I felt a tremendous heat come from above and

it filled my body. As the Holy Spirit filled me, a very bright light bursted in front of me. It seemed brighter than the sun and it was very warm. I could look straight into it, and there was a soothing feeling of kindness incomparable with any other kind of light.

As it got closer to me, I began to trace the lines of a cross that was emerging from the light, which was brighter than the light itself, and the crystal-like cross seemed transparent and very precious. The light and the cross came closer to me, and when it was right before my face, I saw a man hung on it.

He was severely beaten up and emaciated to the point where I could survey His bones. His eyes were shut and I saw the pierced crown on His head, but His countenance was not of a man who was severely wounded. He had a very kind look—a look that I was drawn to approach, which said, “I love you. This is what it took for Me to save you.”

This vision compelled me to receive baptism after the convocation that year. But most importantly, I realized how much God loves me and how I should also love Him.

During the years of growing pains that followed, and when my faith was low, this vision reminded me that I had been purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ, and it was by His grace that salvation had come to me. Therefore, I am different from this world. This reminder empowered me to live according to His words, and it continues to empower me today.

God's Cure

I was born with a disease that is much akin to what we know today as Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE), a disorder of the immune system. The symptoms are like an allergic reaction to winter.

Every time the season rolled around, all my joints would swell up to the point where I was physically unrecognizable. I was a frightful sight because of the swelling, perhaps worse than an ogre, and I would scare myself whenever I looked

into the mirror. The swellings in my joints would turn blue and green, and they would itch and hurt.

My parents took me to the doctor when I was four, and the only inclination they had at the time pointed to a problem with my blood circulation. The chance of survival for the required operation was only fifty percent at best, and the operation itself only had a success rate of fifty percent. The expense was also very high so we didn't go through with it.

He had a very kind look—a look that I was drawn to approach, which said, “I love you. This is what it took for Me to save you.”

This disorder would plague me about twice a year, and it took about one to two weeks for the swelling to die down before I would return to normal. My parents still insisted that I go to school during those times, and I would lower my head as much as possible during class or when I walked down the halls. The kids would even call me “little monster.”

I had heard testimonies about how baptism not only washes away sin, but God could also cure people of their illnesses during their baptisms. After I got baptized, I still had the disease and I wondered why God didn't cure me.

In the same year I was baptized, we also moved to the United States. And in 1993, during the winter student spiritual convocation, the allergies struck again and I felt my joints swell up. I was scared that people would be frightened at the sight of me, so I called my mom to pick me up.

My mom knew how serious it can get, so she drove to Garden Grove Church in the pouring rain. She testified to me later on that while she was driving to the church, she cried to God, “My daughter has had this disease since she was little and we can't help her. Lord, You are the

mighty God and You can cure her right now.”

She picked me up from church and we went home and prayed. My mom pleaded to God saying, “I entrust her into Your hand. With man it is impossible, but I hope in You because with You all things are possible. If You want to cure her, please stop the swelling.”

She told me what she prayed about before I went to sleep, and I knew that it was an impossible request because, for the past thirteen years of my life, it always took at least one week for the swelling to go down, and there was no way for things to go back to normal the very next day.

Surely enough, after I had gone to bed, God really cured me by the next day—just as my mom had prayed. Twelve years have passed since that incident and the illness never returned. Praise God!

God's Will

Five years ago, when I was about to apply for college, I was under International Student status in the U.S. and still without a green card. So if I went to college, I would have to pay international fees, which everyone knows is triple the amount of what local students would pay.

My mom said to me, “Because of our status and the fact that your younger brother and sister will also be going off to college soon after you, we will have to pay a lot for tuition at the same time.” My dad also told me that there was a miscalculation, as they thought that we would have gotten our green card by the time I was ready to go off to college.

My parents asked me to consider going back to Taiwan for my degree and my immediate reaction was, “There's no way that is an option for me. I am not going back to a place I have no recollection of anything else besides stinky tofu.” My mom responded, “So does that mean you won't go to college?”

I was very mad at my parents for not being able to send me off to college. I was also complaining to God, “You want me to study hard, and I did. I applied and I got

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into good schools. Why are You so unfair to me?"

I headed straight for my room after that emotional conversation with my parents, and I proceeded to pack for UCSD (University of California San Diego), where I was accepted for school. I even moved all my stuff there—waiting for school to start.

That week, which was a week before classes began, a thought occurred to me. Even though I forged forward with everything as planned, I had an uneasy feeling that what I was doing just didn't sit well inside.

I asked myself, "Am I walking in front of God with this decision, when I'm supposed to follow and listen to Him instead?" After a week of soul-searching, I decided to apply for a year of absence, and I packed my stuff and went home.

My mom told me that it's not absolutely necessary for them to send me back to Taiwan, but this would be the only way I could comfortably finish my undergraduate degree without fiscal uncertainties. At the same time, they were also planning to send both my brother and I back to Taiwan together.

My mom told me to pray and entrust everything to God. In that year that I took a leave of absence, I was studying at a community college in Southern California while awaiting my brother to finish high school.

I kept praying to God about how I really didn't want to go back, and I was also very lackadaisical with the application papers for the schools in Taiwan. I actually didn't even bother asking for application deadlines and my parents took care of everything.

The only thing I said to them was that I would only go back if I got into the top two schools in Taiwan. I knew I wouldn't be able to get in. I was just giving them a hard time and trying to find a way out for myself. I told my parents that I would work fulltime to support myself and that I wanted to stay in the U.S.

My mom asked, "Aren't you testing God with the way you are handling all this?" But I shot back, "There's nothing that will convince me to go there." She asked my brother the same thing, but both of us asked for the impossible so we didn't have to leave.

While we were waiting for the results, and through my prayers, I learned to start trusting in God more. In front of me there seemed to be no way, and I slowly began to realize the meaning behind the saying: "When God closes the door, somewhere He opens a window."

Those were four very hard years, but every step I took was sweet because I knew that God was with me.

I wanted to get a good education and to graduate, but there seemed to be no way of achieving it. So I started to learn to trust God in my prayers, and I asked Him to give me wisdom and faith, and to prepare me to walk in the way that He would show me; most importantly, for me to submit and to follow His will.

Six months after that, the results came in and I found out that I got into the best school in the country. I left for Taiwan after that and stayed there for four years.

The first semester, while students were preparing for midterms and finals, I had to start a month ahead because I had to memorize the whole textbook. I still remember my first midterm, when I was taking the test and I couldn't remember the Chinese characters. I either had to leave it blank or write something down, so I decided to use Chinese phonics to spell out the words for the professor. When the test results came back, the professor made this little speech about how he was appalled at the deterioration of the students' writing skills. But thank God, I passed the test.

Those were four very hard years, but every step I took was sweet because I knew that God was with me. This is the confidence that we have in approaching God—that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us (1 Jn 5:14).

James 4:14-15 also reminds us that we don't know what will happen tomorrow. We are simply a mist that appears and disappears, and in our life we should say and do whatever it is God wills for us.

I feel that for peers my age, we often think that we have experienced a lot, but some adults will tell us that life is only starting for us and we are only beginning to face the wearies and challenges that lie ahead. But I believe that as long as we keep on obeying and trusting, we will learn the lesson that God wants to teach us and we won't ever feel in lack.

We can either learn to trust Him more, or we can let the things we face in life be our stumbling block on our way to heaven. The decisions may be ours to make, but the power and the will come from God.

For what it's worth today, if we are willing to entrust all things to the Lord, He will bless us beyond our own expectations. May all the glory be unto His holy name, amen. ★



The Lord Is Always with Me

Dih-Yih Chen—Grenada

This testimony is something I've been working on for a few years. I recently turned thirty-one, and when you turn thirty-one, you want to look back on your life and consider the roads you've taken, and how you've changed over the course of that time.

I finally realized in a big way that I had become a full-fledged adult when I turned thirty. We may be legal adults at eighteen, but we are still children living in our parents' house and we don't have that much responsibility. In our twenties, we

start living on our own and we tread the waters to get a feel of what it's like to be independent.

But for many people in this day and age, it's only when we turn thirty that we start to know the reality of full independence: we are no longer dependent on our parents. This can be quite a daunting epiphany.

Having said all this, my reflections are not about my physical life but about my spiritual life, and I feel the same aforementioned sentiments for the latter as I do for the former, because we have to grow up spiritually for our faith to also gain the same independence.

My Doubts Set In

After I graduated from college, I had a lot of time to feel depressed because I was done with classes and had no job offers. But God provided an opportunity for me to go to Philadelphia to further my studies and I was truly grateful.

When I got there, I offered myself completely to Him and threw myself into all aspects of church work, which boosted my faith. I really touched God in those days and He showed His magnificence and glory to me. So I carried that faith with me until I finished grad school.

After I graduated I found a job in Philadelphia, which allowed me to stay behind and to continue serving God. I thought I would do that for a couple of

years and then apply to medical school, but I got rejected from every school during the first round of application. I thought to myself, “So this is just the way things are.” It destroyed my confidence but it didn’t ruin my faith.

I kept on working and went through a second round of med school applications, then a third round, after which my faith also began to crumble. At the same time, I felt that I was stagnating at work and really held back because there were so many things I couldn’t control.

For example, either my boss didn’t pay much attention to me or their references in the process of my medical school application kept getting lost. Things kept dragging on and on and I began to question: “Isn’t God responsible for all these, and isn’t He responsible for making sure that these things wouldn’t happen? Isn’t He supposed to help us with the little things that are out of our control?”

I started to question God, and at the same time I looked at all my friends and saw how their careers were taking off and how they were slowly building a family and succeeding in society. And here I was—stuck in a mundane job and doing my best to excel yet feeling that something was keeping me back in everything I do. I began to seriously doubt God.

That’s when I realized my faith was changing and the questions kept on firing: “Why is this happening to me? Does God still love me? Did I do something to displease Him?” I couldn’t find any answer. And if He doesn’t help me, why am I working so hard in church? Is it even worth it to keep the Sabbath?

When these thoughts started to pop into my head, it shocked me because I’ve never sunk to that level before, and that started me thinking. I questioned what my faith was based on, and fortunately for me, even though I had become weary of continuing with church work, the process

of doing it was what kept my faith afloat and not sink completely.

Doing church work forced me to do more Bible reading and to meditate on God’s word more than I would’ve on my own, and it was through this that I was able to come up with some conclusions that helped me get through this rough patch in my life.

So what did I learn?

Point of Peace

I used to think that God will answer whatever it is I pray about or ask for, but I think there is a more important aspect to this—that God blesses us with all things because He loves us. We ask because we are His children but it is up to God’s decision whether He blesses us according to our prayers or not. It depends on His blessings and His time.

God is not like an ATM machine, where you punch in the numbers and the money rolls out. He is much more than that. Without lowering His status, He came in human form and He wants us to develop a relationship with Him. He has feelings. If we take Him for granted, like when I expected an immediate response in prayer, it hurts Him.

This opened me up to an aspect of God that I did not see before. I realized that God blesses me according to what I need, but I had to wait this time. Sometimes, He blesses us with steaks and sometimes with cabbage, and we need both in our lives. When I understood this—that there really is a purpose to my suffering—I also understood that it won’t be forever.

One of the verses that came to me and helped me put things into perspective is the account of how God took away King Nebuchadnezzar’s sanity and made him live like an animal (Dan 4:34-37).

When I read this story, I began to see what King Nebuchadnezzar must’ve seen—that God is almighty, and within His

hand is the authority to give and to restrain.

Who are we to question His motive, why He does this or that, or why He withholds His blessings from us but lavishes them on others? They don’t go to church, they are not as holy, and they don’t obey God’s commandments like we do. We cannot question Him because He is far beyond our understanding.

There is a refuge and a sanctuary within that God gives us when we face life and all the things that come with it.

God did not allow me to continue on this path of downward spiral and failure, and there was a point of peace where I was able to look back, reflect, and glorify Him.

Awaiting His Reveal

After some reflection, I feel very ashamed that I felt so much anger and resentment towards God when I thought He had completely ignored and left me. But the truth is that He was always there. That was a period of time for me to grow and to realize that I cannot be a child forever.

I began to see God in a different light. When we are children, we look to our father as the provider for whatever we ask and need. Now, when we grow up, our father is still our provider, but he is also our educator and the one who helps us grow and mature.

Likewise, while we are young, God is our heavenly Father who gives us what we ask because we need those blessings to grow. But when we mature, He adjusts His role and His blessings.

Thank God, I eventually went on to med school and He provided me with that opportunity in the Caribbean. I only asked for one thing before I went, which was for God to come with me. And He did.

How do I know that He came with me? When I got there, God provided and took care of so many things that helped me transition into the new environment. To name a few, He blessed me with great lab groups, and He sheltered me from a massive hurricane that hit the island of Grenada, where I studied and where ninety-five percent of the island was deserted by the storm last year.

During that dangerous period, I felt peaceful and calm and without worry. Those with me just waited out the storm and nothing happened to us, save for a broken window in my room. I can't describe it well—the great destruction outside but the deep sense of peace within while waiting out the storm. There is a refuge and a sanctuary within that God gives us when we face life and all the things that come with it.

My message in all of this goes back to my realization of the preciousness of a time for maturity and a time for growth. And even though there are moments when things seem bleak and dark, God is always there. Even if He doesn't respond, we have to walk with the faith that He will soon reveal Himself to us. ★

2006 pocket calendars are here!



The 2006 pocket calendars are here! The church name and the web site are printed on the calendars, so it's a great way to let your friends know about the True Jesus Church. Be sure to get some from your local church and start sharing your faith with others!



Accept and Trust the Lord

Anessa Liew—Cambridge, United Kingdom

Unexpected Trouble

Although I knew that back problems ran in my family, I never thought they would affect my life or my faith in the way that they have.

I suffered my first prolapsed disc at the age of fourteen. I rolled out of bed one morning to find that I couldn't move. An excruciating pain shot down from my lower back to my right leg. Shocked and scared, I literally crawled out of my bedroom to find my mother.

Since she used to be a nurse, I trusted that she could explain to me what the pain was. She calmed me and explained that one of my discs had probably slipped out of place. I thought, "How? I'm so

young! This kind of thing only happens to really old people!"

Despite the pain of moving around, my body was young and within two weeks the pain dissipated and I was able to continue with my daily life. I didn't understand the medical ins and outs of that experience, but I felt that as long as my family was looking after me, I didn't need to.

That back episode, however, was the first of four—each one more painful and more difficult to recover from, as my body weakened under the wear and tear the prolapsed disc was causing.

By the time I went to university, I had completely forgotten about the painful experience. One evening in my first year, I

was walking to my student flat and heard a distinct 'pop' sound in my lower back. Suddenly that area in my back became stiff, forcing me to hobble slowly. I wasn't worried and that night as I lay in bed, I confidently prayed and felt that God would undoubtedly heal me as quickly as before.

But some things don't turn out the way we expect them to. After a week, I was bedridden and reliant on painkillers. I couldn't move, sit or stand for the pain and eventually had to leave and defer my first year at school.

The journey home with my mother, aunt and sister was torturous. For three hours I cried continually in the car and there was nothing my family could do for

me. I couldn't believe I was leaving university after all the excitement of going and the courage I had mustered leaving my family behind in the first place.

Once at home I became depressed. I refused to eat or drink and weakened physically and spiritually. My prayers, which at first were strong, became fewer and far between. I often lost the will to pray and I felt that God had closed Himself off from me. Some days were easier but most days I even lost the will to live.

I was bedridden for three months before I started to make a slow recovery. One day my sister said to me, "Move, get out of bed—otherwise you'll stiffen up so much you'll be paralyzed." She almost shouted the words at me, and something in her voice and what she said jolted me out of my self-pity.

Slowly and painfully I started to move a bit each day until the pain gradually lessened. Eventually, after another three months, my back improved and I was ready to return to school. Moreover, my spiritual self had also recovered and I no longer indulged in the self-pity and hopelessness in God that had previously pulled me down.

Incredibly, a few weeks before returning to university, my back gave way again and my mind raced with fear, shock and disbelief. Determined to see through my first year of school, I decided to go back despite my condition. Although I couldn't attend lectures or seminars, I somehow managed to write the essays and take my exams, getting good grades along the way. And through the support of some church friends who happened to be nearby, my spirits stayed high.

After a successful first year I was looking forward to a pain-free and fresh start to my second year. That feeling of

confidence I had become used to, however, fast faded. After my second week, one small movement stiffened my body. The same familiar pain spread through my lower back and right leg. For the third time shock and disbelief washed over me.

I hobbled to the doctor's while fighting back tears. I was prescribed bed rest and painkillers. The rest of that semester passed similarly to my first year. But my church friends had moved on to other places, so my housemates looked after me as much as they could. So many times I felt like shouting to God, "Why are You playing with me? What do You want? Don't You realize I can't take this anymore?"

Diagnosing My Faith

Even though I battled inwardly between self-doubt and trust in God, I believe my family suffered as much as I did. The helplessness of my physical situation and the sheer length of recovery time put strain and pressure on my family. Frustration turned to anger and often family fights

would break out between me and my siblings.

Although no one said anything directly to me, I found out that some church members had suggested maybe God was punishing me because of sins and that my faith in God's power was weak. Their words hurt because they questioned my relationship with God. Not only that, I knew that my situation had now begun to reflect badly upon my family.

Moreover, my grand-aunt would continuously relate testimonies about miraculous recoveries from illness and the power of faith and prayer to me. At first they were comforting, but after a short while they simply became irritating.

Instead of being encouraged, I felt they patronized my situation.

Although I was initially angered and hurt by the judgments and criticisms I subtly received from others, it was soon replaced with self-evaluation. Had I sinned so terribly that God was punishing me? Was my faith so weak that I couldn't touch God to heal me?

Whether or not their judgments were right, they planted in me a seed of doubt—spurring me on to reflect on my past behaviors and my faith. I started to think about the state of my relationship with God.

Looking back, I now understand my tribulations opened a way for me to re-evaluate where my faith was going. Self-evaluation may not have helped my physical condition but it was the start towards my spiritual healing.

Having said that, though, I also realized that it ought not to have taken a prolapsed disc to jolt me into self-reflection. Whatever situation we're in, it doesn't cost us anything to examine ourselves and be honest with God about our faith in Him. Only by opening up our doubts and fears to Him can we start to renew and rebuild our faith.

Road to Recovery

I vacationed in Malaysia during the winter break of that school year. It was during my stay there that I got an MRI scan, which was the first time I had visuals of the inside of my body.

The scans were both enlightening and difficult to accept. They showed two severely prolapsed discs that almost cut off all nerve supply in my spinal canal. Major surgery involving a two-month recovery time to relearn how to walk was strongly recommended. In truth, the news terrified my family and me. Moreover, surgery could have adverse effects and I could suffer permanent nerve damage or worse, paralysis.

Self-evaluation may not have helped my physical condition but it was the start towards my spiritual healing.

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After returning home, I felt stuck in a bit of a dead end. What did God want me to do? I knew it was Him who guided me to get the scans done in the first place, but did that mean He wanted me to go ahead with surgery?

It so happened that after I returned home and while I stayed with my sister in London, we came across some chiropractors in a shopping mall who were promoting their treatment. I had nothing to lose so I quickly made an appointment for an examination and x-ray. The x-ray showed more bone complications: not one but two vertebrae had slipped forward causing more complications in my pelvis and legs.

The chiropractors explained that through a series of bone manipulation, they could normalize the function in my lower back and legs. I felt hope for the first time in eight years. Finally an answer seemed to open for me. I believe that from getting the scans in Malaysia until then, God had been nudging me towards this cleaner, safer treatment. Since then, thank God I have not suffered any relapses.

There Is No Quick Fix

Although my suffering was long and painfully endured, this is not to say God was never by my side—it's just that more often than not, that is how it felt. There are times when God doesn't work in the ways we expect or want Him to. I now realize that God wanted me to go through the suffering I experienced.

For me, a quick miracle may not have been the best way for me to heal or reconcile myself to God. Because when it comes to whatever pain we may be suffering at the time, God knows how much we can handle and how much we can't. Even though I was tempted many times to give up on my faith and on life, He delivered His promise:

...God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but

with the temptation will also make way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (1 Cor 10:13)

Like my physical recovery, my spiritual restoration was also long and arduous. Little by little, slowly and gradually, my faith progressed and my relationship with God strengthened. But like anyone going through physical, emotional or spiritual pain, a journey of restoration can be riddled with relapses, and our path to renewal with God doesn't happen overnight. There is no quick fix for broken faith. Just as my back took time to heal, so did my faith.

Now that I am physically better, it doesn't mean that I take a break from strengthening my faith and renewing myself. Often when we achieve our goals or when we come through tribulations triumphantly, we feel as though we can reduce our need and fervor for God. The danger though, is that if we do fall back into tribulations, we can also easily fall into a spiritual regression.

It is important to be patient and understand that we may only be able to walk through our spiritual recuperation, not run. It can be at times very long and very painful. But just like a father to his child, God will be with us every step of the way.

Accepting and Trusting

During my illness I often oscillated between acceptance and trust. Sometimes I could accept my physical state yet I didn't trust God to heal me. Other times I trusted that God had the power to relieve my pain yet I refused to accept why I was suffering.

The result was frustration both at myself and at God. What I didn't realize then, but do now, is that acceptance and trust are intrinsic to each other. We can't separate them because if we do, what results is a vicious circle and dead end for spiritual healing.

To accept really means understanding whatever is happening to us is for a good reason, and that if we trust God then we will have no need to worry. Likewise, to trust Him means that we know we can leave everything in His hands, which allows us to accept our situation with comfort and peace.

Paul also experienced great physical suffering. In 2 Corinthians, he writes that despite his prayer to God to relieve it, God chose not to. And instead of losing faith, Paul trusted God's will and accepted his pain by remembering Jesus' words to him: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9).

He turned something negative into something positive, realizing that in weakness, he could be strengthened. His faith in God refreshed a peace within him that allowed him to praise and glorify God.

So even though we feel we want to give up at times, or God isn't sending us fantastic miracles, we need to remember that He will never allow us to be tempted more than we can handle. Whatever the trial, we can always find comfort in knowing that God's grace will carry us to the other side.

Though the journey may be long and arduous, He is able to heal our broken selves back to Him. So let us surrender to His will with trust and acceptance, and let us allow God's peace to enter our hearts and strengthen our failing faith and weak wills. For He has promised us that He will be with us always. ★



The Reign of Asa

Wendy Leacock—Leicester, United Kingdom

Background

Personality profile of Asa

Home:

Jerusalem

Family:

The son of King Abijam of Judah

Occupation:

King of Judah for 41 years
(910-869 B.C.)

Best known today as:

The first King to bring reform to Judah

After spiritual and political decline under Rehoboam and Abijam, the southern kingdom of Judah reversed course under the reformer, Asa. His main contribution was a campaign against idolatry that went so far as to banish his grandmother Maachah, who was a notorious worshiper of the Canaanite fertility goddess, Asherah (1 Kgs 15:11-15).

Asa also strengthened his country's defences by refortifying its walled cities

(2 Chr 14:6-7). His military won a decisive victory over Zerah the Ethiopian when the "fear of the lord" came upon his troops (2 Chr 14:9-15). The army also took fortified cities and booty during periodic forays against the northern kingdom through the help of Ben-Hadad of Syria (1 Kgs 15:16-22; 2 Chr 16:2-4).

However, this reliance on a foreign government seemed to suggest that Asa no longer felt a need to rely solely on the Lord. He was rebuked by the prophet Hanani, but instead of listening, he had the seer imprisoned (2 Chr 16:7-10). Towards the end of his life, Asa developed a severe disease in his feet. Yet again he failed to rely on the Lord for healing, and he never recovered (2 Chr 16:12).

His Good Beginning

(2 Chr 14:2-15:15—*Asa initiates a reformation*)

What did Asa do to make his reformation and what can we learn from him?

He followed the way of the Lord and not his own way or that set by his two predecessors, who were said to have done evil in the sight of the Lord. The way of man, which often seems right to many, will not lead us to please God but will result in death and destruction (Prov 14:12; Jer 10:23).

Asa prayed to God for defence against the Ethiopians (2 Chr 14:9-15). Some people think of prayer primarily as a last resort, an act of desperation to try when all else fails and we are faced with overwhelming odds. But the example of Asa shows that while prayer ultimately is the best defence, it also is the best offence—a discipline that should be practiced long before trouble strikes.

Faced with an army more than three times the size of his own 300,000, a man force, Asa cried out to God for help. He humbly acknowledged that the Lord, not military might, was his ultimate defence (2 Chr 14:11). The Lord responded by defeating the Ethiopians. This incident

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showed that what matters in battle is not the size of the armies but trust in the Lord. And as always, what counts with God is faith.

Yet, Asa's trust in God was not just a "foxhole faith," motivated by fear. He was able to pray as he did because he had been praying, worshipping, and honoring the Lord for years (2 Chr 14:3-7). In fact, his reign had reversed many of the sins initiated by his great-grandfather, Solomon.

So it is similar with spiritual warfare today. God wants to see whether we respond in faith when circumstances overwhelm us. But He also is interested in the quality of our faith before tragedy strikes—when things are going well. Either way, in calm or in crisis, we need to pray to the Lord in faith (1 Jn 5:4).

He destroyed idolatry and its various manifestations and drove out perverted persons from the land. Perverted persons are sodomites referring to homosexuals. Ritual acts of homosexuality were often associated with pagan idolatry and this is one reason why they were condemned in the Old Testament, along with idolatry in general (Deut 23:17-18).

Do we have idols today? Covetousness is a form of idolatry (Col 3:5), and so is anything that takes the place of God in our hearts and separate us from Him. Therefore, we must keep ourselves from any idol that would stand between us and God (1 Jn 5:21). Beyond this, we also learn from Asa that doing what is right in the sight of the Lord means opposing all evil and sinful practices (Eph 5:11; 2 Jn 9-11).

In addition, Asa did not let family ties keep him from doing right. He removed Maachah his grandmother from being queen mother, because she had made an obscene image of Asherah. And Asa cut down her obscene image and burned it by the Brook Kidron (1 Kgs 15:13).

He did not allow physical relationships keep him from serving God. Today, we must hold firmly to our confession of

Christ as Lord even during severe persecution by close relatives, so that the Lord will also acknowledge and receive us. We must uphold our faith in God. Our love for the Lord must come before our love for all others (Mt 10:37).

Finally, Asa restored proper worship to his kingdom, and "[he] brought into the house of the Lord the things which his father had dedicated" (1 Kgs 15:15a). As part of God's church, we need to make sure that we are worshipping according to the teachings of Christ (c.f. Jn 4:24).

Because of these fine attributes, Asa started his reign well.

His Mistakes

(2 Chr 15:16-16:10—A treaty with Syria)

What mistakes did Asa make and what reminders can we learn from it?

There was a war between Asa and Baasha, who was fortifying Ramah to embargo Judah. So in an attempt to protect his kingdom, Asa removed gold and silver that was from the treasuries of the house of God and made a treaty with Ben-Hadan, the King of Syria, who dwelt in Damascus (2 Chr 15:18-19).

Asa trusted in political alliances for defence rather than in God. We must never rely upon political methods in our fight for the faith because "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal" (2 Cor 10:3-4). We should not use any other means to defend the truth apart from what God gave us, and that is the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph 6:17).

Asa also made another mistake. According to the parallel account in 2 Chronicles 16:7-10, when God sent a seer named Hanani to rebuke Asa for this political move, the King was angry and

put the prophet in prison. He did not like the message so he decided to get rid of the messenger. When the Jewish leaders didn't like the truth that Stephen spoke,

they were also determined to get rid of the messenger by stoning him to death (Acts 7:51-60). Even today, there are people of this sort.

We may hear specific sermons containing messages that we do not like because it indirectly relates to our conscience or current lifestyles. But we know that the truth

will always sound harsh but is good for the soul, whereas sweetened words may sound pleasing to our ears but will not benefit us.

For example, it may be hard to receive sharp rebuke at first, but it can help subdue or quiet our hearts because, in the long term, we realize and accept there was wisdom in what we heard. Though rebuke seems unpleasant or hurtful, we are taken towards helpful understanding aided by a humble attitude.

The ear that hears the rebukes of life will abide among the wise. He who disdains instruction despises his own soul, but he who heeds rebuke gets understanding. The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom, and before honor is humility (Prov 15:31-33).

His End

(2 Chr 16:11-14—Illness and death of Asa)

What was Asa's horrible fate and what can we learn from it? Asa met a very unfortunate end.

...but in the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet. So Asa rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in

Yet, Asa's trust in God was not just a "foxhole faith," motivated by fear. He was able to pray as he did because he had been praying, worshipping, and honoring the Lord for years.

the city of David his father.... (1 Kgs 15:23-24).

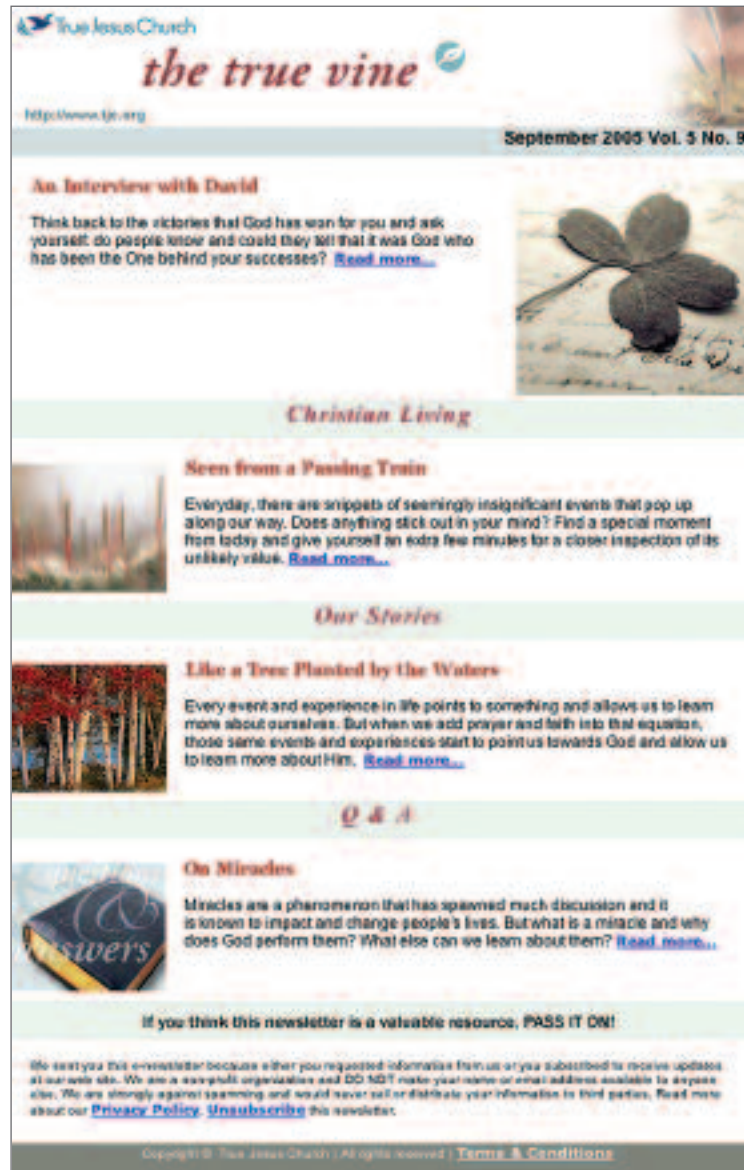
If we refer to 2 Chronicles 16:12 we realize why he suffered such terrible end: "...yet in his disease he did not seek the Lord but the physicians."

This doesn't mean that it is wrong to go to the doctors, but Asa tried to seek help without God. The Lord wants all of us to seek Him throughout our lives because His ways are better than our ways (Isa 55:6-9).

At one time, Asa was a faithful child of God, but he did not continue to seek the Lord and thus lost a correct relationship with Him. Therefore, we must all the more stand fast and be vigilant, lest anyone of us should think we're strong enough (1 Cor 10:11-12).

We must always strive to do what is right in the sight of God (Mt 7:21), and we must trust in Him and in His will rather than the ways of men (2 Cor 1:21). For how tragic it would be if we lost Him to our own folly because we insist in our own ways and our own wills. ★

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After God's Heart

The most intimate of relationships is marked by the union of two hearts. One party knows the other's mind, empathizes with his feelings, and endeavors to meet his deepest desires.

Likewise, building an intimate relationship with God involves first learning about God's heart—His will, His thoughts, His feelings, and His ways. As we grow in our love and understanding of God, we learn to manifest more of His divine nature and claim His heart's desires as our own.

The following theme articles offer us some insight on how we can be a person after God's heart. In particular, we are called to consider more closely God's sorrow and His jealousy for us, and how embracing these attributes as our own is beneficial to our spiritual growth.

As we continue to understand God's heart, we also knit ourselves with the Lord until we are approved and acceptable to Him.



Embracing God's Heart

Having the right heart is basic to how we live out our faith in the Lord. It means the difference between a grudging compliance and a joyful submission, between a callous heart and a sensitive conscience, and between a selfish apathy and a selfless fervor.

What does it mean for a Christian to have the right heart? Put simply, it means having God's heart as our own. It means thinking, feeling, and doing what God would think, feel, and do. Only when our hearts are centered on God's will and desire can our life and service be acceptable to God and bring blessings to others.

Spiritual Renewal

Our God is holy and just. He wants His children to be like Him and share in His

holiness. He gives us His commandments and laws so that we may discern what is good and evil and do what is right in God's eyes.

But obeying God can be a burden if our hearts do not first undergo a change. Without the inner desire to carry out what is right, we grumble when we suffer for doing good and we lose heart when we are not immediately rewarded for obeying God. Carrying out God's word brings no joy, but only pain.

However, if we have God's heart in us, we will approve the good things that God approves of and detest the evil that He detests. We will see right and wrong from God's perspective and not our own. We will

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delight in God's laws and shun all wickedness.

Under God's old covenant, doing what is good in God's eyes was a matter of adhering to a strict code of law. But such superficial observance could not truly keep a person close to God. That is why the Israelites' loyalty to God was always short-lived.

Their inability to do right is a reflection of the weaknesses of the sinful man. Because of our fallen nature, our flesh desires what's contrary to God's commandments, and it is only natural to feel that God's law is a burden.

But today, God has enabled believers in Jesus Christ to obey Him in a completely new way.

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more." (Heb 8:7-12)

Whereas God had to always take the Israelites by their hand to lead them, under God's new covenant with us, He wants us to obey Him out of our willingness. God enables us to do so by first

With such a personal knowledge of God's heart, we will not need to be prodded constantly to obey God. We will gladly live by God's laws because we have made them a part of our hearts.

changing our heart. He cleanses our conscience by the blood of Jesus Christ through baptism. And He writes His laws with His spirit on our hearts so that we can personally know God.

This is the new man that God has created in Christ (Eph 4:23). We are to put on this new man, renewing our hearts and minds daily through God's word and spirit. Then we can "prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Rom 12:1). In other words, if we constantly open our hearts to spiritual renewal from God, we can eventually understand and fully embrace God's will and His ways.

With such a personal knowledge of God's heart, we will not need to be prodded constantly to obey God. We will gladly live by God's laws because we have made them a part of our hearts.

A Truly Righteous Heart

"Therefore all Your precepts concerning all things I consider to be right; I hate every false way" (Ps 119:128). The Psalmist has fully embraced God's laws and makes them his own. All that God thinks is right he also considers to be right, and he hates everything that is contrary to God.

Unless our hearts are renewed to be like God's, we remain ignorant and dull to sin. When we have done wrong, our hearts would not rebuke us and we feel no contrition. We may have strayed far from God but we would not realize it.

In fact, without God's heart in us, we may be doing wrong even when we think we are keeping God's law. This was the problem with the Pharisees and scribes whom Jesus reprimanded. Outwardly, they were careful to observe the regulations of the law and even taught others to

observe them. But because their hearts were far from God, they often completely missed God's intentions behind His laws. Worse still, their zeal was unacceptable to God because it was based on their misguided beliefs.

In his epistle, Paul calls a heart of repentance toward sin "godly sorrow." This expression literally means "sorrow according to God." It can also be translated "sorrow as God would have it." In other words, repentance means feeling grief over sin in the same way that God grieves over sin. This is the kind of sensitivity that we need to have in order to see where we have strayed and to keep to the right path.

Nehemiah was a righteous man. One thing that characterized his righteousness was how his heart reacted to the sins of the Israelites and their great distress.

So it was, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned for many days; I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. And I said: "I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned. (Neh 1:4-6)

Nehemiah's soul was tormented by the suffering of God's people, and he knew that it was because of their wickedness that they were suffering. Likewise, if we share God's abhorrence of evil, we would also be grieved by every evil

practice and turn from our ways. This should be the trait of every godly person. Through continual communion with God we examine our thoughts, motive, and actions from God's perspective. Then we can be in tune with God's heart.

The contrasting difference between a man like Nehemiah and the Pharisees is that a truly righteous person takes after God's heart and reacts to sin the way God would react. Both understood very clearly what was right and wrong, but their response reflected whether or not they truly embraced God's heart.

A person without God's love in him would not possibly feel this divine jealousy over other believers and vigorously fight to guard their faith.

Motivated by Love

Having God's heart in us also motivates us to love others and to love them in the way that God would want us to love.

One reason we are not motivated to spread the good news of salvation is that God's love is lacking in us. God desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1Tim 2:4). For God so loves the world, that He gave His Son to be the ransom for all. He does not delight in the death of a sinner, but rejoices over a sinner's repentance. This is the heart of God. If we have this heart in us, we would pray for all men and feel the strong urge to share the gospel with others. Without this heart of love, any effort in preaching would only be out of reluctance.

Once, Jesus entered a village of the Samaritans but they did not receive Him. When His disciples James and John saw this, they asked the Lord, "Do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?" The Lord rebuked them, saying,

"You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them" (Lk 9:51-56).

The two disciples' attitude showed that they lacked God's love in them. Their feelings toward the Samaritans were not in sync with that of the Lord. Whereas Jesus was concerned about saving lives, the disciples only saw how these Samaritans deserved to be punished.

God taught the same lesson to the prophet Jonah, who was angry that God had spared the city of Nineveh from destruction. God showed him what was missing in his heart, and how he needed to learn to love the Ninevites the way God loved them (Jon 4:10-11). This lesson still rings true for all of us today. God wants us to love everyone with His heart.

It is evident that God's love was the driving force in Paul's ministry to the believers. He longed for the believers in Philippi with the affection of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:8). He cared for the Thessalonians as a nursing mother cares for her own children (1Thess 2:7). To the Galatians, who have strayed from the gospel, he wrote, "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you" (Gal 4:19). He was able to love the believers the way that Christ loves the church because he had adopted the heart of Christ.

When writing about the threat of false teachings, Paul said that he was jealous for the believers with "a godly jealousy," or literally "a jealousy of God." Paul became jealous with God's jealousy when he saw how false teachers were enticing them. God's love was burning within Him. A person without God's love in him would not possibly feel this divine jealousy over other believers and vigorously fight to guard their faith.

The love that God has for His children had been planted in this apostle. So he could not help but long for, care about,

and be anxious for the flock. If we can also learn to develop a divine love in our service, our ministry will go so much further and be pleasing to the Lord.

Do we know what's in God's heart? Do we know what God would think, feel, and do about a particular matter or situation? Do we live and serve with His love? We need to search for these answers through the study of God's word and the teaching of the Holy Spirit, and learn from God Himself—the source of righteousness and love. Embracing His heart as our own, our life and service will become acceptable to God and bring blessings to others. ★



Godly Sorrow

Derren Liang—San Jose, California, USA

For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. (2 Cor 7:10)

Worldly Sorrow Leads to Death

In the letter that Paul wrote to the Church of Corinth he mentioned two kinds of sorrows—worldly sorrows and godly sorrow, and the origin of these two are vastly different. Worldly sorrow comes from the world but godly sorrow is of God, which leads to salvation. But the conclusion of worldly sorrow is death.

So is it good for Christians to have sorrows? On our spiritual journey, it is inevitable that we will encounter both kinds of sorrows. However, we must avoid sorrows that enchain us to worldly burdens. And we must embrace the sorrows that are of God—sorrows that incline us toward divine goodness and

away from wrong, which will improve our spirituality.

When God first created Adam and Eve, they lived in the sinless place that was the garden of Eden. God spent a lot of time with Adam and Eve and it was probably the most complete and perfect existence filled with peace and joy. But their curiosity and lust led them to disobey God's command by eating from the tree that God specifically forbade them to take fruit. Their costly mistake exposed their shameful nakedness and caused them to go into hiding in great fear of the Lord.

It came to pass that the Lord arrived at Eden in search for the couple and He called out, "Where are you?" The all-knowing God had no need to search for them, but He gave them a chance to repent and to come out from their shame.

God opened a door for Adam to get out of his troubles: "Have you eaten from

the tree I commanded you not to eat from?" God did not convict him right away but asked him whether he did something that the Lord had told him not to do. If Adam felt sorrowful towards his own sin and repented at that moment, God probably would have responded to him differently.

But Adam showed no sign of remorse for his earlier actions. Instead, he blamed the woman that God put in the garden with him as the cause of his predicaments. "Today, I ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because it was the doing of that woman, whom You designed." Here lies a very serious problem—Adam was bold enough to go against God's instruction but felt no need to own up to his wrongdoings.

God also gave Eve a second chance: "What is it that you have done?" In reality, God already knew what she did,

but He opened a way for her to admit to her mistakes, to feel sorrowful of her actions and to repent. But she firmly took her stance before she looked within herself. "The serpent deceived me and I ate."

Since these were the best confessions they could offer, God cursed them and from then on, Adam and Eve suffered from a different a kind of sorrow that was not of God but of the world, which came from the consequences of sin and led to their spiritual death. And this sorrow also condemns us today because it results from our stubbornness to repent for our mistakes, until finally, we lose God's abidance completely and the anguish overflows.

This was not the intent of God's creation. He does not want us to be consumed with the sorrows of this world. Instead, He wants all of us to live peacefully and with joy. But we often refuse to feel somber towards our own sins and we painfully burden ourselves with sorrows that lead to death.

Godly Sorrow Leads to Repentance

You sorrowed in a godly manner... (2 Cor 7:11)

Paul described the progress of the Church of Corinth, which we should all embrace as our own personal progress.

Though there were many eloquent members in the Church of Corinth, there were also many problems among them. One major issue was the disharmony and divisions among the believers, who identified themselves to belong to either Paul or Apollos or Christ. Paul wrote and called them unspiritual infants.

Even though the church was filled with talent, chaos abounded because of the lack of order. Though they had knowledge, they stained themselves with their idolatrous ways. Over time, their sins

fermented like yeast and ruined the believers.

The church is the body of Christ and Christ is the head of church. He is in heaven but His body is on earth. So the body of Christ is the same as the head in heaven. When there is sin in the church, Christ in heaven is sorrowful because His body is stained. This grieves the heart of God, whose sorrow also came into Paul's heart.

And what is the heart of God? There are many manifestations of having the heart of God, and one of them is having sorrow towards sin. So Paul wrote this letter and warned the Corinthians to change their ways. If they didn't change, then he would come with whips and rebuke. Paul had the authority because God was with him. Not only did he have stern words for the believers, his words came with God's power and justice. And when they received the letter, they felt exceedingly contrite (2 Cor 7:8).

Paul said that he at first regretted writing the letter because he felt that its content was harsh. He had no intentions to hurt them but to instruct them with love and truth. But when Paul saw that the Corinthians were immediately inflicted with sorrow, he was glad and no longer regretful of his words.

When we examine the mistakes of Adam and Eve, we see that the consequences of their sin lasted an entire lifetime. But the sorrow of the Corinthians was instant and temporary because it led them to repentance, and so Paul was glad of their response to the rebuke.

There were so many problems in Corinth and the faith of the believers was dwindling, but they were able to rise up from their backsliding. And that turning point was when they received Paul's letter and when their spirituality took flight.

In today's society, there are believers who never feel the need for regret and are complacent with themselves. I have a

great personality, I don't slander, I do not wrong others, and I live harmoniously with everyone. In this case, there is no apparent reason for sorrow. But if we want to elevate our spirituality, we must experience godly sorrow.

How come I still cannot change myself despite having believed so many years? How come I can never have self-control to turn off this sinful television program? Why do I waste so much of my precious time on useless activities? How come I've done nothing for God all these years while He loves me so much?

When we are compelled by His love and He lives in us, we often feel the guilt of owing much to the Lord. This is the sorrow we identify with because we see ourselves plainly and realize how much we come short of all that our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. If we feel this, our spirituality will start to grow and improve, and the results of such sorrow are good and edifying for us.

The Blessings of Godly Sorrow

In the book of Revelation, John wrote to the seven churches, one of which was the Church of Laodicea. This church felt that they had everything and was not in need of anything, and that was the reason why they couldn't grow. They felt that they were pious but they were oblivious to their spiritual maladies. So to God, they were wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.

This wretchedness should be reason enough for the Laodiceans to feel godly sorrow, but they were ignorant and couldn't improve themselves. So John wrote them a letter and revealed their true spiritual condition with the hope that they would change. Otherwise, if they continued being lukewarm, God would spit them out. Therefore, having godly sorrow motivates and calls us to improve upon our spirituality.

The Lord wants every one of us to feel godly sorrow towards our own weaknesses, and He teaches: "Blessed are

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those who mourn for they will be comforted" (Mt 5:4). This is the second beatitude, and the mourning mentioned here comes from the first: "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

Those who are humble are the ones who are poor in spirit, for they feel they are short of God's expectations. If we feel poor in spirit we will open our hearts and receive God's words, and we can also

Having a sorrowful heart is a manifestation of being humble and lowly, and God wants to revive the spirit of such an individual.

accept the suggestions and criticisms of others.

If we are humble in heart, God's spirit will fill us when we pray. When His spirit moves us and His words enter into our hearts, His light will penetrate deeply. That is the moment that our sins are revealed and we realize that we are not much better than the Pharisees.

On the surface, we look to be God-fearing and humble, but deep down we have so many sinful thoughts. Once these sins emerge and are revealed, we will begin to understand this mourning. So this is actually how God sees me—I'm actually like this.

Once we have such a lowly heart and feel the need to repent and change ourselves, we will become one who is very gentle. That is why those who mourn are also meek, because we will rebuke ourselves and feel the heart of repentance. Those who are strong and stubborn often lack this mournful heart.

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Luke 8 records the prayers of two people. One of them was a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. Looking at the Pharisee, the first thing he did was to count what sins he did not do, which was why he felt

he was better than others. He then counted all his accomplishments—he fasted twice a week and gave a tenth of all that he received. From these things, he was obviously better than the tax collector.

But let's look at how the tax collector prayed. He stood at a distance, unwilling to look up at the heavens, and he asked for mercy for the sinner in him. He knew all the sins he had done and he knew that among the people he robbed were widowers. He rebuked himself gravely.

How did God view these two men?

Towards the tax collector, who mourned with godly sorrow, God justified and showed mercy. God accepted him and He was willing to elevate such a person. If a person deems himself as righteous and thinks of himself as flawless and belittles the sinners, he is nothing before God. Those who are humbled will be exalted, and those who are exalted will be humbled.

"For thus says the High and Lofty One—I dwell in the high and holy place" (Isa 57:15a). God is the one who is high and holy, and He has thousands of angels praising Him and glorifying Him. Compared to God we are merely tiny particles of dust.

But such a holy and majestic God is willing to abide with lowly people like ourselves, and what is the condition for His abidance? He wants us to be contrite and lowly in spirit. Having a sorrowful heart is a manifestation of being humble and lowly, and God wants to revive the spirit of such an individual.

David's Sorrow

When David broke three of the Ten Commandments, he thought no one knew of his wrongdoing. So God told the prophet Nathan to reveal David to his own sins, and David was grief-stricken by his mistakes. His heartfelt repentance can be found in Psalm 51.

David also knew that God could not be bribed with offering (Ps 51:16-17). Just because we offer Him some money or objects doesn't mean that our sins are immediately atoned for. Does God, who created the heavens and the earth and owns everything, need what little things we can offer?

What does God want, then? He wants our hearts; specifically, He wants a heart that recognizes unrighteousness and a heart of repentance. If we have this mournful heart and we repent, God will forgive us because He wants to accept us.

When David was younger, he experienced the joy and sweetness of God's abidance, but he lost that closeness with God because of his sins, which daily rebuked his conscience. He also wanted to revive his spirituality and he asked God, "Create in me a pure heart O God..." (Ps 51:10).

David beseeched the Lord because he wanted to live a favorable life in God's eyes, and he needed to have a pure heart and steadfast spirit to do so—neither of which comes easily to any person. For we carry the sinful nature of the flesh, and even if we want to do good it will be hard because the flesh is weak. It is not until we receive God's help will our hearts be pure and our spirit steadfast.

David asked God to not forsake him and to allow him to be before the Lord, "[R]estore to me the joy of Your salvation" (Ps 51:12). David also knew very clearly the lifestyle of a sinner (Ps 51:13), but he determined that he will teach transgressors and turn other sinners back to God, so that they can experience the joy of the Lord.

This is the good result of the one who has godly sorrows. We should not hide our sins, and the best and right way is to come before God to repent with mourning.

If a person commits sin and doesn't admit or refuse to admit then this is very dangerous, because his conscience is dead and the fate of such a man is very frightening.

Lot's Sorrow

The Bible also tells us the story of a man named Lot and the cities Sodom and Gomorrah. The people in these cities committed great sins that were violent and adulterous, so God burned the cities into ashes so they can be a living testimony and reminder for the generations to come. In fact, many cities around us today are probably equivalent or worse than Sodom and Gomorrah.

God is looking for people like Lot, whom He called righteous, and when God finds such a person he wants to save them. Lot was one who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men. When he saw the wickedness of the men of Sodom and Gomorrah he felt sorrowful towards them. When you see the sins of another, do you grow numb and desensitized by their ways? Lot was often tormented by the sins of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (2 Pet 2:8). Living among them, Lot was beset in his righteous soul.

What does it mean to have a righteous soul? Part of having a righteous soul is to have a pure and sinless conscience. Everyone has a conscience but how come some people are not aware of sin? If a mirror is covered with dust, how can we see our reflection through it? If our conscience is covered by sin we will not realize our wickedness and our conscience is useless.

Today, how can we have a righteous soul? We must have our conscience cleansed by the power of the Holy Spirit. If a person commits sin and doesn't admit or refuse to admit then this is very dangerous, because his conscience is dead and the fate of such a man is very frightening.

Long for a Higher Spirituality

Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub, where it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed with linen, who had the writer's inkhorn at his side; and the LORD said to him, "Go through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it. To the others He said in my hearing, "Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were before the temple. (Ezek 9:3-6)

Here mentions that God's glory is about to depart from Jerusalem because the sins of the people living there were more frightening than the sins of the people in Sodom and Gomorrah. Their hearts were so stone cold that there was no understanding of right and wrong, and no godly sorrow for their own sins.

They even persecuted and killed all the prophets that God sent to warn them to turn back from their ways. This was the final straw, after which God's anger poured down like fire.

But before the great destruction, God sent angels into the city to put marks on the foreheads of those who grieved and lamented over the detestable works and deeds of the people. The killing started with those without a mark, and the angels began with the unmarked elders because they were the ones who led the people away from God to worship idols. So they were the first to face punishment and justice.

Each one of us needs to take these as warning for ourselves. The way of salvation has been opened for us and every day that we live in this wicked and crooked generation, we are susceptible to the wielding and manipulations of Satan. Temptations and opportunities to sin will come from every side, so we must remain alert and pursue after spiritual growth.

We must mourn with godly sorrow at the sinfulness of this society and keep ourselves somber. We must also fill ourselves with the Holy Spirit and thirst for it to empower us. If we see the degeneration of those around us, then we must sigh and grieve for them and pray to God. And if we have been seduced by sin, we must return to the Lord in all lowliness, confess to Him and cry for His mercy.

Whatever the state or condition of our relationship with God, we must long for a higher spirituality and look to the Lord to give us the joy of His salvation. Only by returning to God will our faith be renewed, and we can once again receive His blessings and taste the sweetness of being close to Him. Then when we are strong we can pray for others, teach them, and turn sinners back to the Lord.

May the Lord empower us and give us strength. ★



Godly Jealousy

Derren Liang—San Jose, California, USA

Jealousy is an unsettling emotion that can dwell in our hearts for a long time and eat us up. When Saul and David returned from defeating their enemies, the women welcomed them and sang of Saul's thousands and David's tens of thousands. This resulted in many nights of insomnia for Saul, who could not accept the fact that he was a king but received a much lesser praise than David, who was only a child.

This incident was such a small matter, but it was enough to plant the seed of jealousy in Saul's heart, and it gave a foothold for the evil spirit to enter into him. From that day on, Saul looked for every opportunity to be rid of David. Most people are familiar with this kind of jealousy, which is the result of the absence of love, and something we ought to strive to avoid.

But there is a second kind of jealousy, which is of God and is the result of the fullness of His love for us. It is the complete opposite of the jealousy that destroyed Saul's life and crushed his spirit.

For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one

husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. (2 Cor 11:2)

Paul had the heart of God, and when he saw the conditions of the Corinthian Church, he was filled with godly jealousy within him. So Paul says that there are many who want to be teachers, but there aren't many who are willing to be fathers. For the Corinthians were born out of the gospel, and towards them Paul had much of God's love and expectations and treated them as such.

Betrothed as a Chaste Virgin

Marriage is instituted by God, and so if we are building such an institution, we have to use God's words as the measure. We have been betrothed to one husband and presented to Christ as a chaste virgin, so our relationship with God is like that of a marital relationship.

And we know that jealousy is always present in a marriage, because a husband and wife share in oneness and intimacy with one another, and anything or anyone that poses a threat to that relationship will drive our spouse mad.

If one day you got married and your husband comes home without a word to

you, but he has lots of conversations with female coworkers, will you give thanks to God? You will be jealous, for this is a marriage and there is no room for a third party.

For the same reason, Paul accused the Corinthians because their marital relationship with God was infiltrated with other parties, and he was filled with godly jealousy towards their unfaithfulness.

Before marriage, the most precious thing is a person's chastity and virginity. That means that no consummation can occur prior to marriage. We often feel the church is too conservative, but the church only wants to help us avert from getting into temptation. If you ask where in the Bible does it say that you can't go on a date, or you can't hold hands, or you can't indulge in kissing before marriage, you probably can't find it.

We are discouraged from doing these things so that we can avoid falling into temptations that we are powerless to overcome. If in our behavior we try to preserve our chastity, our lives will be much improved. And we must not overlook the smallest gesture of purity.

In the same way, when we are already given in marriage to the Lord, we must make sure to separate ourselves from all forms of infidelity great or small that will jeopardize our devotion to our God. We must protect our marriage.

The Bible says that we are betrothed to a husband, Jesus Christ, and this betrothal takes place at the time of our baptism. But how do we know we are given to Jesus?

His Spirit Claimed Us for His Own

When a man and a woman get married, they exchange rings as a symbol of devotion. Likewise, Christ gave us the Holy Spirit as a sign and covenant from the Father that He has accepted us. And with His spirit in us, we profess that we will love Jesus and nobody else.

But this was not the case with the believers in Corinth, who were on the road to corruption. The Scriptures say that they were corrupted by the simplicity that is in Christ (2 Cor 11:3-4); after the Corinthians received the gospel from Paul, someone else came to preach to them a different message.

If we accept another gospel, it will be as though we have received another Christ and a different spirit, and Christ our bridegroom will not tolerate or accept such a betrayal. We must make our choice because we cannot have both.

But which one is Jesus and what is a different kind of spirit? 1 and 2 John gives us a few criteria.

1. Jesus Christ is the Word that became flesh. He is God Himself and He came in the likeness of a man to live in our midst and is full of the Holy Spirit. We know the spirit of God only if the spirit confesses that Jesus Christ came in the flesh from God. If the spirit doesn't confess that Jesus is of God, then it's not the same.
2. Other religions cannot believe that Jesus is God having flesh. So they give the experiences of another spirit,

and they also have different kinds of power for people to experience. But their recognition of Jesus is different, which means the spirit is different.

3. The Bible tells us that the spirit that comes from above relates to things from above, and any other spirit relates to things of the world and the world hears them. If the manifestation that you have of the spirit is entirely of the world, then this is a different kind of spirit, even if people like to listen to it.
4. If the spirit is willing to accept the criteria for salvation, then it must be coming from God, for God's spirit and His teachings are two sides of one face. So if it is from God, then the spirit's teachings will be congruent with the Scriptures.

We are of God and those who are of God hear the teachings that we impart.

...if we have lost our clarity in God it is the work of the devil. And if we do recognize our adulterous ways and we do not repent, then this marriage will fall apart.

Hearing means how the gospel is manifested in us and how it is manifested in salvation. Therefore, we need to be alert, as the teachings of another spirit might change our recognition of God. God is an all-knowing and all-powerful God; otherwise, He is not the same God as written in the Bible.

Paul rebukes the Corinthians, who had already lost the heart of chastity because they decided to receive a different Christ, gospel, and spirit. By choosing and following another Jesus and another spirit, we commit spiritual adultery and incur God's jealousy.

Just like the serpent deceived Eve with its craftiness, if we have lost our clarity in God it is the work of the devil. And if we do recognize our adulterous ways and we do not repent, then this marriage will fall apart. So in our relationship with God we must be faithful and simple, and we must receive and accept the everlasting teachings.

Do Not Love the World

The Bible tells us that friendship with the world is enmity with God, and the Spirit will yearn jealously (Jas 4:4-5). Here, the elder James talks about adultery but he doesn't refer only to fleshly adultery. It also has to do with enmity with God and spiritual unfaithfulness.

And what causes us to be in enmity with God?

Lust of the Flesh

When a person grows up and wants to get married, this is perfectly normal and is from God. But for a man to be married to another man, this is beyond the teachings of the Bible, and such unions are lustful actions of the flesh. And it is the same for a woman who wants to marry another woman. If you want to be with someone who is already married, or if you sleep with someone before marriage—these are also borne out of lust.

All these are examples of what is of the world, from the devil, and things that will incur God's intense anger. We must not succumb to the lust of the flesh and give ourselves over to things from which God has set clear boundaries for us to keep away from.

Lust of the Eyes

Our God is a creative God, and if we are creative this is a gift from God. If, for example, we buy and enjoy beautiful clothing, this is a good thing that God has given us. But what is the lust of the eyes? It is when this enjoyment goes beyond what is in His teachings and becomes more important than God. Soon, we find

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ourselves working over time just to make money to afford material things.

Another example would be going to the cinemas. If you take out violence and sex from movies, what else is there to movies? How much money have you spent to subscribe to premium cable? Aren't you luring Satan with money and inviting him to come right in to your own home to tempt you? Satan is there waiting for you. If you see what you should not see, you will invoke God's wrath. If you keep watching, God will depart.

Pride of Life

In this world, we are obsessed with trying to outdo our peers and show ourselves better than others. This is the pride of life. If we want to build a building we have to build the tallest. We don't just want any tower; we want the tower of Babel. If our structure come short by two floors, that's just not good enough. We are mere humans but we want to be like God and to be respected the way people might respect God. Of course God will become jealous.

We are no bigger than a speck of dust, but we want to stand like the Almighty. How pitiful we are in the sight of Him! He created us and bought us with His precious blood. If God wants to go against us, it is just too easy.

But when we behave miserably, God's contempt does not come in the form of our destruction the way people destroy each other. His contempt comes in the form of jealousy and rebuke that is borne out of His great love—hoping that we will reawaken, turn back and live no longer in the ways of the wicked.

If we become enemies of God, then there will be no division between us and Satan's dominion. If our hearts chases after the world, then we are divided—standing on the opposite side from where God stands. But what is so agonizing about this situation is that we are already betrothed to Christ!

I have died for you. I used my precious blood to purchase you. I have given you the Holy Spirit to keep awakening and reminding you. But why in your life have you walked to the other side? Why do you make yourself my enemy?

What are Our False Gods?

Ezekiel 43 talks about how we incur God's jealousy when we bring idols into our hearts, because the presence of idols can sever our relationship with God. Ezekiel kept on reminding the people until the glory of God departed from the temple. For the heart of every person in Jerusalem was full of idols.

When we read about this incident, perhaps we think the Israelites deserved their just punishment. But we should first look into our own lives and think of what are the things that have become more important than God. When we can identify that object or person, then we have identified our false god. Let's look carefully at ourselves and assess whether God takes first place in our hearts.

Examine our perspective about money. If we realize that our wealth comes from God, then we would offer tithes with a glad heart, because tithes manifest our love and thanks towards Him. But if we aren't willing to give tithes, then we make ourselves our gods since we spend it all on us.

If we recognize that God is the true God, then we would put our money on Him. For our heart is where our money is. If our heart is on material things, then most likely our money will be spent on clothes, computers and gadgets, or other possessions. But if our heart is on God, then our money would be spend on things for the church or on things that is beneficial for our faith.

Power, opportunity, life, and all such things come from God. Without any of these we cannot accomplish much. If you are married and you buy everything for yourself and eat for yourself but you are unwilling to give the same to your spouse, how can that be considered love?

If you have money but you don't give to the Lord what He gave you, won't you incur His wrath? God allows for all the things we have but we are unwilling to repay His grace. Of course God would be jealous!

This is the same with our perspective on time. If you love your wife, but because of your worldly pursuits you don't have time for her, then why did you get married? You might as well marry the world. Despite how busy we are in life, time sustains our life line and it is the most precious. And if you cannot take that time to say I love you, then it is useless. If a father professes to love his child but has no time for that child, this is not love.

We profess to love God and we even know that time is from God, yet we have no time for Him. How ironic is this unfortunate truth. Similarly, the Sabbath is from God and made for us, and it is the day He wants us to enjoy and to be close to Him. But in order to earn a few extra dollars we would rather work than go to Sabbath, then money is actually the one we worship.

It's not that we cannot be successful. Daniel, for example, was very successful but he prayed three times a day. His success came as a result of finding and

If our hearts chases after the world, then we are divided—standing on the opposite side from where God stands. But what is so agonizing about this situation is that we are already betrothed to Christ!

Order online now!

holding onto and choosing God first. His success was a by-product of his solid relationship with God.

But if for worthless false gods we compromise our faith and spirituality—or worse, we lose God completely—then this is sheer foolishness on our part.

In a marriage, we always strive to make our spouse happy and we avoid doing anything that would aggravate that relationship or cause jealousy in our spouse because he/she is the dearest person to us. In the same way, this is how we should create a blissful marriage with God—we give to our Betrothed the love, devotion, and faithfulness we promised at the altar. ★

www.tjc.org



BIBLE STUDY GUIDES

Whether you are studying the Bible on your own or leading a small-group Bible study, the Bible Study Guide helps you focus on individual passages, discover God's truths, and apply the teachings to life. By going through the exercises and questions in each lesson, you and your study group can study the Bible in-depth.

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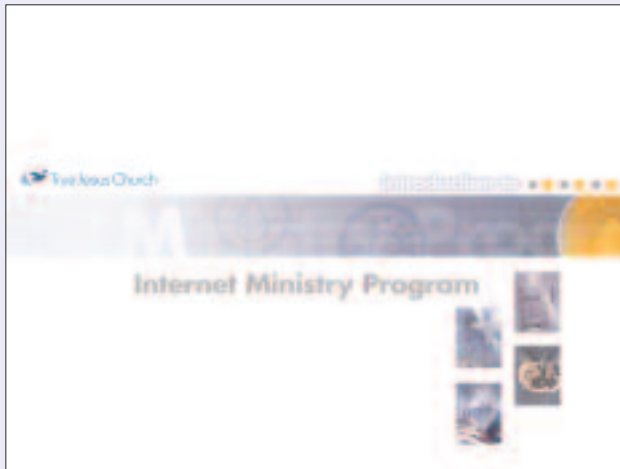
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7. Holy Spirit: Helper and Counselor
8. Holy Communion: Remembrance of the Lord
9. Sabbath day: Holy Day of Rest
10. Church: Body of Christ
11. Coming of Christ: Judgment Day

Introduction to Literary Ministry (Part 2): Internet Ministry

In the first part of this article, we gave an overview of literary ministry as well as introduced the print presentation of the written content. In this second part, we focus on the web presentation—a medium through which the church can share content and communicate with users worldwide.



WHY CONDUCT THE MINISTRY ON THE INTERNET?

The internet has a wide reach

There are now over 880 million internet users. That is about 14% of the world population! And the number of internet users continues to grow.

The internet presents a great opportunity for outreach

A study done on American internet users indicates that 30% of internet users in America have looked for religious or spiritual information online. Although the percentage would probably vary if applied to internet users worldwide, it gives us insight into the great opportunity for sharing the gospel on the internet.

The internet is 24/7

Anyone anywhere in the world who has internet access may visit the church sites. In that sense, the doors of the church are always open to visitors.

The internet offers an interactive experience

Users who visit a site can easily pick and choose the content that interests them most. They can also search for a specific piece of content, submit questions and comments, and have a dialogue with representatives from the church.

The internet facilitates information sharing

From the International Assembly down to local churches, members and workers in the church can share all sorts of information online, such as news, prayer requests, reports, guidelines, contacts, and meeting minutes. This greatly facilitates communication, increases mutual support, and reduces duplication of work.

INTERNET MINISTRY PROGRAM (IMP)

The International Assembly, seeing the importance of the internet as a tool for conducting church ministry, began an initiative in the late 1990's called the Internet Ministry Program, a.k.a. IMP. The intent of this global initiative was to mobilize True Jesus Churches around the world to extend their ministries to the internet. In reaching this goal, the IMP team needed to address some challenges and define clear objectives.

CHALLENGES

Lack of unified presence

Within a few short years, the world wide web quickly became one of the most popular publishing medium for businesses and organizations. Many fervent and technically savvy general assemblies, local churches, and individual members wasted no time and launched sites to evangelize and to share information about their respective churches. Most of them had similar content but widely different designs. Soon, it became obvious that the True Jesus Church as a whole needed to have one single unified presence on the web to avoid confusion for online visitors and to establish a strong global identity for the church.

Uneven resources

Although churches with sufficient technical and financial resources were able to build robust sites and online tools, churches that had no such means could not even begin building a simple site. Consequently, sites were available only in languages represented by stronger churches (such as English, Chinese, and Korean sites) while language sites that were just as needed (such as Spanish, German, and French sites) were absent.

Duplication of effort

When local teams worked independently, not only did the sites lack a unified identity, much time was wasted. Countless hours of programming and content-creation turned out to be duplication of work because there was no global collaboration.

OBJECTIVES

In view of the challenges in internet ministry, the IMP defined the following objectives:

Unify

- Establish a global identity for all church sites by way of standard templates
- Define basic content that represents the beliefs of and information about the True Jesus Church
- Create a standard workflow and set of guidelines for church representatives to respond to online inquiries

Empower

- Provide all churches with tools to publish content easily with little technical knowledge
- Introduce the tools to churches worldwide and train workers involved in the ministry

Consolidate

- Where applicable, centralize and share one set of programming codes to reduce duplication of development effort
- Various sites can link to content on the global sites or pull content from them, and whenever creating new content is not feasible, a team may translate existing content

SPECIAL FEATURE

A NEW GENERATION OF SITES

Starting in July of 2004, the IMP team rolled out a new generation of sites with the following features:

- Unified identity: using a template-driven approach, all language sites can now share a consistent look and feel
- User-friendly content management: authors with little technical knowledge can now publish and maintain content
- Audience specific: one set of sites (evangelical sites) for reaching out to the public, and one set of sites (members sites) for nurturing members and empowering them for service

Evangelical Sites (www.tjc.org)



Target audience

General public and people seeking for the truth of salvation

Languages

Completed: English (completed and launched in July 2004)

In progress: Chinese, Spanish, French, Japanese, Korean, Indonesian

Content

How Jesus meets our spiritual needs; the basic beliefs of the True Jesus Church; personal stories of how people's lives were touched by God; facts about and history of the church; devotionals, articles, and Q&As for readers who would like more in-depth knowledge about God and the church's beliefs; subscription offer to the church's monthly e-newsletter; contact information of churches worldwide

Current Site Statistics of English site

- Approximately 5,000 to 7,000 unique visitors per month
- 15 publication requests per month
- 30 inquiries per month
- 40 e-newsletter subscriptions per month

Members Sites (members.tjc.org)



Target audience

True Jesus Church members

Sites

- Global sites in various languages
- Country sites (sites for general assemblies and coordination centers)
- Region sites (sites for regions within a country)
- Local church sites

Languages

Completed: English global site (completed and launched in July 2004); a number of country sites and local church sites in various languages

In progress: Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indonesian, Malay

Content

Christian living articles, devotionals, testimonies, news, prayer requests, event calendar, church information, e-library of multimedia content

Site Tools

With the appropriate permissions, content contributors may share documents and pictures, create and manage lists, conduct surveys and online discussions, and publish new web pages easily

THE WORD WENT OUT

As the True Jesus Church began to share the complete gospel of Jesus Christ with the world through the internet, God also opened the doors of the gospel. Many came to know about the church and expressed the desire to learn more. We would like to share with you a few stories of God's blessings and some feedbacks from site visitors over the years.

- A pastor in Korea belonging to a particular denomination visited www.tjc.org and established contact with the church. The church sent him a copy of the "Essential Biblical Doctrines," which helped him gain a good understanding of the church's basic beliefs. Realizing that he had found the true gospel of salvation, he was baptized into the True Jesus Church.
- Tom, who lived in Oregon, U.S.A, was looking for the body of Christ that preached salvation according to the Scriptures. He was overjoyed when he found out about the True Jesus Church and visited the church site in 2002. After carefully studying the church's teachings, he contacted us.

"I came across this web site while searching to confirm some of my feelings about my present walk with the Lord... My wife and I are living in Coos Bay, Or. We are very interested in the True Jesus Church because of your simple belief in the Bible. We have just left a large apostolic org. because of our desire to follow Jesus."

Both Tom and his wife were later baptized into Christ in the True Jesus Church.

- In 2003, a pastor from Nepal contacted the church by email after visiting www.tjc.org. Through further communication and follow-up, ministers of the True Jesus Church in Malaysia were sent to bring the complete gospel message into that country. The Holy Spirit led people to the Lord, and new groups of believers from various locations also came in contact with the church.
- In 2002, a Christian group called Église de Jésus-Christ (EJC) in Congo contacted us by email, eager to embrace the complete gospel proclaimed by the True Jesus Church. After more than a year of email communication, the church sent a minister into Congo to meet with their representatives and preach the truth to their congregation. After thorough discussion of the truth with our minister, three of EJC's ministers determined to receive the correct baptism taught in the Bible. The Lord worked mightily during the missionary trip, and over 260 people were born again through baptism into Christ. To this day, the outreach work in Congo still continues.

Inquiry Excerpts

"...I have 60 pastors and 115 churches in Pakistan....We welcome you to preach and teach in Pakistan. We can arrange a crusade and seminar...."

"I wonder if there are True Jesus Churches located in Indiana? If so, where are they? I would like to attend one."

"Would you please come into Tanzania to minister for conference/crusade 2004? Also, I would like to welcome you to open your church ministries in our country very soon and I will serve as your host.... May our lord Jesus richly bless you."

(As a result of inquiries like this one, the church has been sending ministers into Tanzania to conduct evangelical services and baptize converts.)



Web form for site visitors to send inquiries



Web application for COVs to read, respond to, and track inquiries

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Purpose

What happens when people show interest in what they see on the web sites? Where do they go next? This area would be the job of the community outreach volunteers (COV). Following up with inquiries received through the site is one of the major responsibilities of the IMP, and the church has developed an infrastructure and a set of guidelines to carry out this important work.

People

Computer programs cannot answer questions about faith. So the church needs a global network of COVs—workers who are dedicated to helping seekers find what they are looking for and guiding them to the church. We are currently in the process of building and strengthening a global network of COVs to handle all inquiries efficiently and effectively.

Tools

The IMP has adopted an online system to help route and manage incoming inquiries. The system tracks the history of each inquiry, the people who have handled the inquiry, and its responses. This ensures that each seeker's questions and needs are sufficiently addressed in the process of communicating with the church.

WHAT IS AHEAD?

Provide richer content

Whether in telling the public about Jesus Christ, sharing our beliefs with people of other faiths, or providing spiritual nourishment to believers, it is crucial that the church sites continue to have inspiring and timely content. Therefore, literary ministry teams around the world are working to develop richer content for the sites.

Training COVs

As the number of inquiries from the sites increases, we will need more workers who are able to respond to them effectively. The church needs to continually equip new workers for this task.

Develop new tools

If resources permit, so much more can be and should be done through the internet. With the help of volunteers, the church hopes to further utilize the latest online technologies to help the ministry. Online members database, forums, distance-learning, event management systems, project management tools, etc will all contribute to the advancement of church work.

HELP WANTED

Prayer

Support this ministry with your daily prayers. Ask the Lord to open doors and lead more people to His fold. Pray to the Lord to touch the hearts of His people to join the ministry and to be built up by the ministry.

Content

We need writers to take part in this ministry. If you have been given the gift of writing, we urge you to contribute devotionals, articles, testimonies, etc, both to share the gospel of Jesus Christ and to strengthen the faith of believers. We also need volunteers who can create, digitize, upload, and index content of all types. If you would like to be involved in this aspect of the ministry, please email us at content@tjc.org.

Development

If you have training in computer programming or IT, the desire to serve in this area, and the commitment to dedicate some personal time to the ministry, you can become a great asset to the IMP.

Promotion

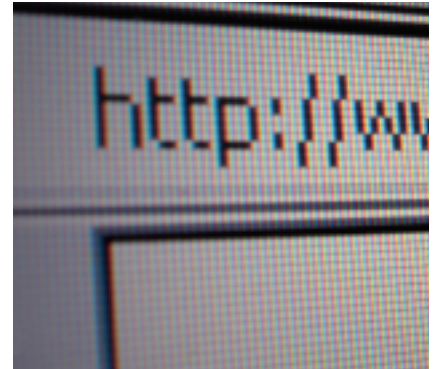
“Faith comes by hearing” (Rom 10:17). People cannot accept the complete gospel entrusted to the True Jesus Church if they do not even know about it. We need you to tell your family, friends, and coworkers to visit www.tjc.org. If you have the skills and knowledge to promote the church sites to the rest of the world, please put them to use for the Lord and let us know that you would like to help.

Finance

The funding for the internet ministry comes from God-loving volunteers who desire to take part in the ministry. We hope that you can also become one of them. Your financial contributions will help expand the ministry and pay for the high costs involved.

To contribute to the ministry, please make your checks and money orders payable to True Jesus Church and specify that the offering is for the purpose of Internet Ministry. You may also ask your local church treasurer to send the contribution on your behalf.

Send the contribution to
 Attn: Department of Literary Ministry
 True Jesus Church
 314 S. Brookhurst St. #104
 Anaheim, CA 92804
 U.S.A.
 Tel: (714)533-8889
 Fax: (714)533-0888



QUESTIONS? SUGGESTIONS?

Do you have questions or suggestions about the internet ministry? Please write to us at lm@tjc.org

Songs of Homecoming

120
1 IN MY DISTRESS I CRIED TO THE LORD, AND HE HEARD ME. 2 DELIVER MY SOUL, O LORD, FROM LYING LIPS AND FROM A DECEITFUL TONGUE. 3 WHAT SHALL BE GIVEN TO YOU, OR WHAT SHALL BE DONE TO YOU, YOU FALSE TONGUE? 4 SHARP ARROWS OF THE WARRIOR, WITH COALS OF THE BROOM TREE! 5 WOE IS ME, THAT I DWELL IN MESHECH, THAT I DWELL AMONG THE TENTS OF KEDAR! 6 MY SOUL HAS DWELT TOO LONG WITH ONE WHO HATES PEACE. 7 I AM FOR PEACE; BUT WHEN I SPEAK, THEY ARE FOR WAR.

Song of Ascent, the First

In my distress I cried...

Here I am,
O Lord,
barefaced, undisguised,
half a dozen people in one.

You see plainly
I sew no feeble fig leaf to cover
the divisive beings within me.

In my distress I cried...

Here I am:

I rage in animal anger,
I swell in dark, fierce pride,
I lust for drunk pleasures,
I hate in my jealous heart and
I curse and lie with a foul bile that's
lodged deep within my belly.

And here I am again:

a monster crouched,
a shadow supplicating.
a child of darkness
who knows his place
belongs to the night,
who should be tucked away
in unknown corners,
invisible to all,
invisible to You.

And yet,
grotesque though I may be,
I still creep out with the
far-flung hope that You will be here:
do not reject me entirely.

121

1 I WILL LIFT UP MY EYES TO THE HILLS—FROM WHENCE COMES MY HELP? 2 MY HELP COMES FROM THE LORD, WHO MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH. 3 HE WILL NOT ALLOW YOUR FOOT TO BE MOVED; HE WHO KEEPS YOU WILL NOT SLUMBER. 4 BEHOLD, HE WHO KEEPS ISRAEL SHALL NEITHER SLUMBER NOR SLEEP. 5 THE LORD IS YOUR KEEPER; THE LORD IS YOUR SHADE AT YOUR RIGHT HAND. 6 THE SUN SHALL NOT STRIKE YOU BY DAY, NOR THE MOON BY NIGHT. 7 THE LORD SHALL PRESERVE YOU FROM ALL EVIL; HE SHALL PRESERVE YOUR SOUL. 8 THE LORD SHALL PRESERVE YOUR GOING OUT AND YOUR COMING IN FROM THIS TIME FORTH, AND EVEN FOREVERMORE.

For there is
this one last
part of me
O Lord,
that urges me to
Your presence.

One last
tender part
that now whispers
my guilt to You.

Salvage this part
Save me from who I am.
For I cannot escape
the well of myself.

My heart strains,
longs to speak,

My soul yearns,
longs to breathe.

I beg You,
Lord,
will You be my Lord?

Teach me your ascent.

Song of Ascent, the Second

I will lift up my eyes to the hills...

Quickly, softly
Be before me now,
O Lord,
Be before me now.

Be in my sight and heart's vision
Be in the shadowy slopes of the distance, in
the layered stretches of varying green, the
trees that reach up, the
roots that push down, the
warmth of the primitive soil.

Allow my eyes to
scale these heights, to
plumb these depths.

Allow my heart
to witness
Your infinite latitudes of creation.

I will lift up my eyes to the hills...

And trace out a road
climbing and curving,
winding up to You and
Your holy temple.

I know this road,
journeyed upon it once, and
these are my former travels:
when I saw that
my steps had become routine,
my prayers, an empty ritual, that
I was no more
than a mime of devotional acts,
constantly roving in gesture, but
stationary in that thing called faith,

I stepped back once,
then I stepped back again.

And before I recognized
the direction of my feet,
I found myself alone
and faraway on the
foothills of Your holy place.

I look on now.
The hills are at a distance and
I find myself drawn back,
searching for the ascendant road,
for the meaning within the hills,
for a place to begin my journey.

I will lift up my eyes
and remember that
though I have strayed,
You have preserved for me the
inheritance of the hills, and
they are here and ever-present.

Therefore, as I lift up my eyes,
Be before me now,
O Lord,
Be before me now—
lest I miss the path
lest I lose my course—
Lead me to these hills once more.

1 I WAS GLAD WHEN THEY SAID TO ME, "LET US GO INTO THE HOUSE OF THE LORD." 2 OUR FEET HAVE BEEN STANDING WITHIN YOUR GATES, O JERUSALEM! 3 JERUSALEM IS BUILT AS A CITY THAT IS COMPACT TOGETHER, 4 WHERE THE TRIBES GO UP, THE TRIBES OF THE LORD, TO THE TESTIMONY OF ISRAEL, TO GIVE THANKS TO THE NAME OF THE LORD. 5 FOR THRONES ARE SET THERE FOR JUDGMENT, THE THRONES OF THE HOUSE OF DAVID.

6 PRAY FOR THE PEACE OF JERUSALEM: "MAY THEY PROSPER WHO LOVE YOU. 7 PEACE BE WITHIN YOUR WALLS, PROSPERITY WITHIN YOUR PALACES." 8 FOR THE SAKE OF MY BRETHREN AND COMPANIONS, I WILL NOW SAY, "PEACE BE WITHIN YOU." 9 BECAUSE OF THE HOUSE OF THE LORD OUR GOD I WILL SEEK YOUR GOOD.

Song of Ascent, the Third

I was glad...

In a subterranean way
as I neared the hills and
lingered at the edges of God's presence.

My steps were slow and halting for
the lost traveler finding home
knows not how to enter and
wonders if there is a back way in.

Still, *I was glad*
in a slowly-wakening, deep-unfurling way, as
I stood looking on,
remembering old joys in these old places
that have long been locked in the
lost chambers of my memory.

By the edges of the hills
I waited
until voices called out to me:
Let us go into the house of God.

My heart leapt and froze.
I was afraid to enter—

The House of God
Immutable law.
The House of God
Place of reckoning.
The House of God
Eternal judgment.

A throne
A temple
filled with holy smoke and the
train of Your majestic robe.

I was afraid for
You know,
O Lord,
I am no Isaiah.

I will not go up, I decided,
But the voices kept calling
Let us go into the house of God.

And the voices echoed and ushered me forth
and the voices of praise led me on.
I followed though I knew
Here is no place for one like me.

CREATIVE WRITING

My thoughts slapped my conscience and
spitefully told me to go back and hide.

But the singing urged me on
urged me on
And I continued
as one who knows no other way.

To You,
they lead me
O Lord,
the voices of singing, the voices of praise
To You, they lead me.

I will go, but I will not speak,
I determined in my heart.
My mouth is not like others that
praise with a blameless and burning zeal.

Yet the voices drew me on
drew me on
And they said,
Peace be within you.

I listened and
those words shook
every string of
my untuned heart.

Peace be within me?
I peered into myself—
and it was evident,
peace was not meant for
hearts such as mine.

But they repeated,
Peace be within you.

—I do not know how to believe.
—I do not know how to disbelieve.

But of peace
I will dream
And of peace
I will hope.

And gradually,
I became glad
in a growing way,
in the way a mute thought
somehow takes song.

I was glad
In a soft but audible way
As I whispered,
Peace be within you too,
my brothers and sisters.

1 UNTO YOU I LIFT UP MY EYES, O YOU WHO DWELL IN THE HEAVENS. 2 BEHOLD, AS THE EYES OF SERVANTS LOOK TO THE HAND OF THEIR MASTERS, AS THE EYES OF A MAID TO THE HAND OF HER MISTRESS, SO OUR EYES LOOK TO THE LORD OUR GOD, UNTIL HE HAS MERCY ON US. 3 HAVE MERCY ON US, O LORD, HAVE MERCY ON US! FOR WE ARE EXCEEDINGLY FILLED WITH CONTEMPT. 4 OUR SOUL IS EXCEEDINGLY FILLED WITH THE SCORN OF THOSE WHO ARE AT EASE, WITH THE CONTEMPT OF THE PROUD.

Song of Ascent, the Fourth

Unto You I lift up my eyes
O You who dwell in the heavens.

Unto You I bow my knees,
O You who formed the earth.

Unto You I clasp my hands,
O You, designer of man.

Unto You I direct my heart
O You, searcher of the soul.

Unto You...
I turn my body
O You,
Lord of all life.

And You, my Lord,
will You turn to me?
And if You do,
what will Your eyes behold?

I cannot hide my ugliness
Nor do I wish for any cover.

Let me lay bare
all of what I am and
I beg You,
Search me and
Know me whole.

And if you can love me,
Love beyond the seeming me and
Love me whole, too.

Gaze upon my hidden selves and see:
See how I have reviled my neighbor,
See how I have doubted You, and when
doubt was impossible,
See how I have gritted my teeth and
clenched my fist at You
In wild defiance.

See it all
But see also
my heart
This very moment:
For unto You I strive
to center my acts and thoughts.

Unto You I strive
Unto You
I strive,
pulling forth my energies and
my innermost being as
an offering before Your eyes.

I cannot say,
Here I am, Lord,
Your servant forever.

For part of me fears I will depart
and return and repeat and sing
this heart-wrought song
of homecoming again.

I can only say
I am weak,
standing on a sliver of faith.

I am feeble,
but sincere in my
present pursuit of You.
My offerings are scattered,
O Lord,
my offerings are scant.

And though I know
I have no right,
I ask for you to come.

Come, Lord,
Whether it be
in hazy cloud,
consuming fire,
smashing thunder,
tender hand or
still, small voice.

Come as You may, but
Come.

For unto You
do I turn my whole being.

See me, hear me, search me,
O Lord, and
Come,
Meet me in my pleas.

124
1 "IF IT HAD NOT BEEN THE LORD WHO WAS ON OUR SIDE,"
LET ISRAEL NOW SAY— 2 "IF IT HAD NOT BEEN THE LORD
WHO WAS ON OUR SIDE, WHEN MEN ROSE UP AGAINST US,
3 THEN THEY WOULD HAVE SWALLOWED US ALIVE, WHEN
THEIR WRATH WAS KINDLED AGAINST US; 4 THEN THE
WATERS WOULD HAVE OVERWHELMED US, THE STREAM
WOULD HAVE GONE OVER OUR SOUL; 5 THEN THE
SWOLLEN WATERS WOULD HAVE GONE OVER OUR SOUL."

6 BLESSED BE THE LORD, WHO HAS NOT GIVEN US AS
PREY TO THEIR TEETH. 7 OUR SOUL HAS ESCAPED AS A
BIRD FROM THE SNARE OF THE FOWLERS; THE SNARE IS
BROKEN, AND WE HAVE ESCAPED. 8 OUR HELP IS IN THE
NAME OF THE LORD, WHO MADE HEAVEN AND EARTH.

Song of Ascent, the 124th

I *f it had not been [for] the Lord*
Who was on [my] side,

I would have kept to
the thousands of paths that lead away from
Your holy hills.

I would not have found my way to
Your mountain.

I would not have followed the voices of praise.
I would not have turned towards Your presence.
Surely, You have guided my steps.

If it had not been [for] the Lord...

The unbearable throbbing of
stacked-up, tedious days
would have enclosed me.

The thick, dark void that had
 so long been creeping towards me
 would have covered my soul and
 eaten bit by bit any good, any
 living part still within.

A final glance around
 would have finished me off—
 Hurt inflicted by those I loved and
 my own failures and evils.

Then, I would have dissolved
 In the misery that was all my own,
 in the tears I could not dry by night,
 in the tears I could not stem by morning.

If it had not been [for] the Lord...
 How could I have looked up to the hills?
 How could my feet have found direction?
 How could my heart have had hope enough to
 continue?

It is, indeed, a mystery of the deep,
 how You work within the heart of man.
 I cannot trace nor understand Your ways.

Tell me the story then
 of how I came,
 how You brought me.
 Tell me how You pulled at my heart
 in Your soft and gradual way
 until I found my heart yearning,
 my eyes searching, and my feet moving
 towards You.

Lord,
 The silver cord
 You forged between us,
 has not been broken.
 Pull it yet closer and
 Renew its strength.

I await you still,
 O Lord,
 My Lord.

Thus far have You held me,
 Thus far have You guided me.

May this song be my Ebenezer
 in the faint light of the morning,
 in the secret depth of the night.

I will search for You.
 I will await You.

Come,
 Lord,
 For by Your will,
 I am here.



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

Christian Living

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

Bible Study

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

Doctrinal Study

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

Exhortation

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

Testimony

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

Creative Writing

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

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

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

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

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

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

Call For Articles

Author Guidelines & Editorial Calendar

Issue #51

Theme: One True Church

Articles due: February 28, 2006

What does the Bible say about the manifestations of the one true church? How do we know we are the true church? And what steps must we take to build up this church as we wait for the second coming?

Issue #52

Theme: Spiritual Renewal

Articles due: May 31, 2006

How do we become spiritually renewed, and what is the process of becoming a new creation? What does the apostle Paul teach us about renewing our spirit, and why is it so important in these last days?

Issue #53

Theme: Dealing with Calamities

Articles due: Aug 31, 2006

How do we deal with the possibility that calamity may strike us at any time? What lessons or messages does God want us to learn? How do the people in the Bible resolve their calamities?

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

GENERAL WRITING GUIDELINES

CONTENT

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

GRAMMAR/STYLE

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

True Jesus Church

Articles of Faith

Jesus the True God

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

Holy Bible

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

Church

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

Salvation

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

Baptism

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

Foot Washing

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

Holy Spirit

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

Holy Communion

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

Sabbath Day

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

Judgment Day

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

TRUE JESUS CHURCH CONTACT INFORMATION

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

True Jesus Church
314 S. Brookhurst St, #104
Anaheim, CA 92804 USA

Phone: +1-714-533-8808

Fax: +1-714-533-8878

info@tjc.org

<http://www.tjc.org>

