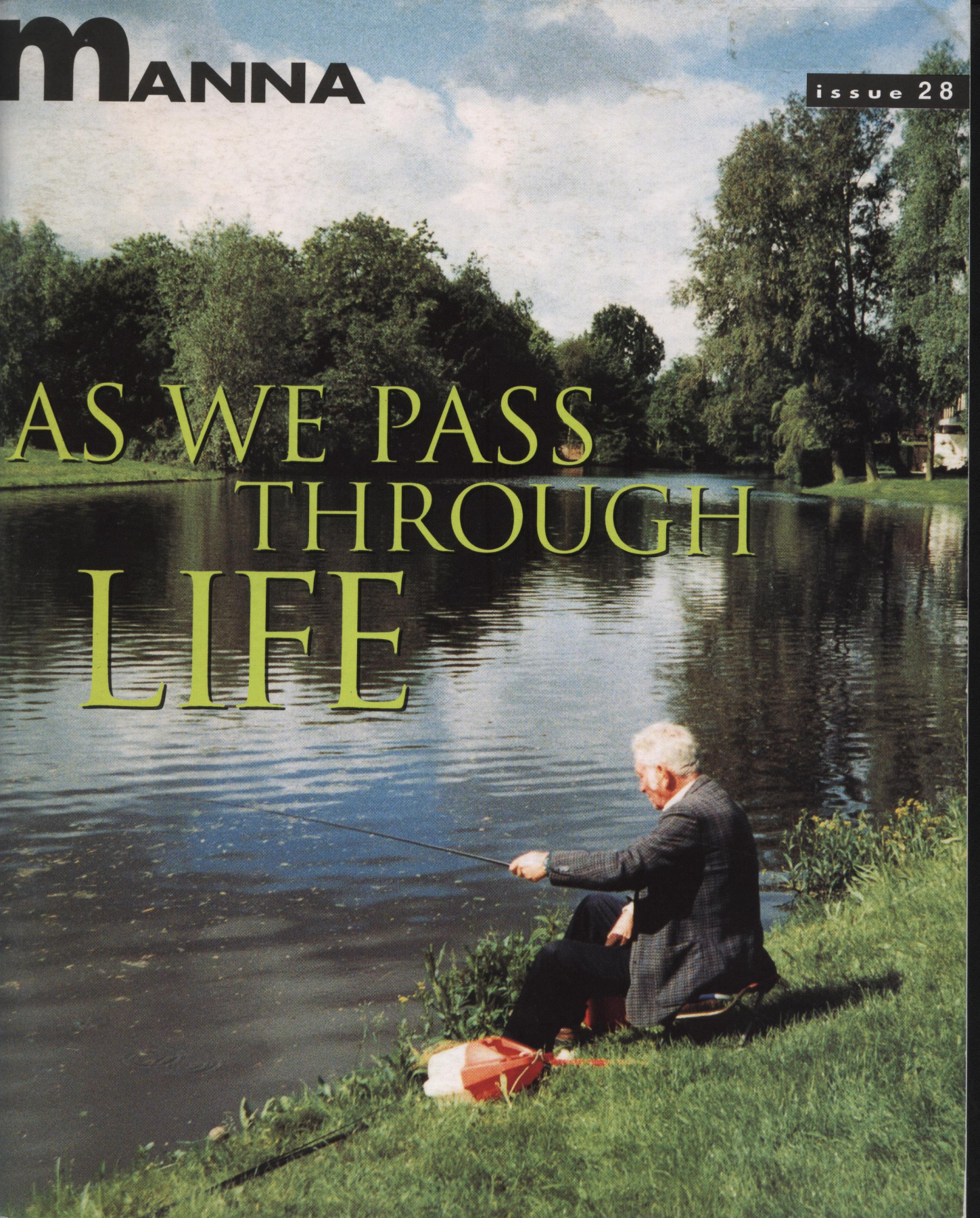


# AS WE PASS THROUGH LIFE



# MANNA

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## from the **editor**

**S**hakespeare says that all the world is a stage, and we merely players. As we pass through life we go through several stages. Beginning with the infant in the nurse's arms, then the whining school boy, creeping unwillingly like a snail to school. And then the lover, burning with passion. Next comes the career-seeker, fighting like a soldier in his ambition. Success and affluence follow as a reward for his labour. Before long, age sets in and he has need of glasses for his dimming eyes. Finally he enters the second childhood, "Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything".

Thinking about life, brings one quite naturally to death because the eventuality of life is death. When God created the world there was peace and harmony in the Garden of Eden. There was no death until Adam sinned against God. Then, death came into the world and spread to humanity.

Moses, man of God, viewed human life as short and full of trouble. He said, "The years of our life are threescore and ten, or even by strength fourscore; yet their span is

toil and trouble; they are soon gone and we fly away".

Yes, life is indeed short and full of trouble. Without God, it is meaningless. But in this short span, if we are able to fear God and keep His commandments, life can be earnest, real and meaningful.

This issue has three feature articles. "*Contemplating Life*", the author uses Ecclesiastes to point out that life is a heavy burden that God has laid on men. It begins with crying and ends in tears. Only if one fears God and keeps His commandments will it be meaningful. The second feature focuses on "*Phases Of A Christian Life*". Three important ones are religious education, marriage and working for God. And "*As We Pass Through Life*" urged us to look beyond ourselves to see the needs of those around us because we are uncertain whether tomorrow belongs to us.

Other interesting articles include "*The End And The Beginning*", adapted from Pr Chin Aun Quek's sermon during the recent annual spiritual convocation in Singapore. Pr Chin reminded the congregation

to review their past actions and make their resolutions for the future to work for God if they had neglected the privilege in the past. Pr Chin also exhorted the members, in particular the younger ones, to be more filial to their parents. As a minister, Pr Chin has had to conduct many funerals. He noted that, on such occasions, the most common words uttered by bereaved children are words of regret for not having spent more time with their parents. Do not miss reading it.

God has a unique way of saving souls. In the case of Sis Susan Estrada, the path to salvation was by no means easy. In the course of her belief she has had to brave many storms. Yet, during those times, she also experienced God's love acted out through His people. Indeed her article, "*Thank You*", will strengthen each of us.

Also presented are three wonderful testimonies. One of them tells us how the mighty hand of God operated on a sister suffering from a brain tumour. The other two tell us how a brother and a sister came to be baptised in our church. Praise the Lord.

# *As we* CONTEMPLATE LIFE



*Life is the time that a person exists on earth, beginning with birth and ending in death. This journey varies in length from person to person; comprising sorrow and joy, tears and laughter.*

CHEN HENG TAO  
[TAICHUNG, TAIWAN]  
TRANSLATED FROM CHINESE

This life-long journey is like a ride on the train. Whoever gets on board has to alight at some point. Some board before others but alight later; there are also those who board late and yet alight early. Regardless of the length of the journey, its duration is the length of life. Some people busy themselves once they get on the train, working hard all the way until they arrive at their destination. Some indulge in eating and drinking, ignoring the beautiful scenery outside and wasting their lives in a drunken state. Yet others sleep through their entire journey, sunk in their day-dreaming until the end...

Life manifests itself in as many patterns as there are people. Some lives are ordinary, some are wasted, some are abundant. Some people live long lives but accomplish nothing, while others, in their brief lifespan, achieve a great variety of goals, earning themselves peer approval and admiration. What is your life like? Satisfying? Or do you sigh in vain? Here are my personal reflections on the Book of Ecclesiastes which I duly share with you for encouragement.

## LIFE IS A BURDEN

Solomon said, "I applied my mind to seek and to search out and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with" (Eccl 1:13). "I have seen the burden God has laid on men" (Eccl 3:10). Such a burden lasts throughout each man's lifetime. Life begins with crying and ends in tears. All the burdens and sorrows of human life are

summed up in this saying. Men and women — from birth to death, during a lifespan punctuated with illness and ageing — have to labour, some with their physical strength, some with their minds and hearts, in agriculture, industry or commerce. None is spared from such a burden.

## LIFE IS EMPTY

Solomon said, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (Eccl 1:2). "Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent doing it, and behold, all was vanity and striving after wind; there was nothing to be gained under the sun" (Eccl 2:11). In his view, the more wisdom, the more sorrow and sadness, and this too was vanity (Eccl 1:16-17). He wanted to pursue enjoyment, merry-making and indulgence in wine, had grand mansions built and vineyards cultivated for himself; fruit trees



## Feature article

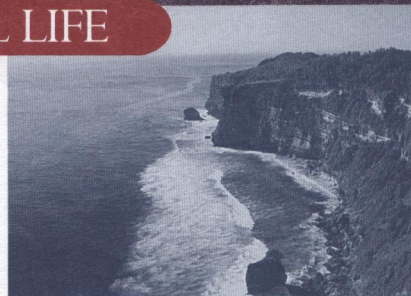
were planted, reservoirs made, slaves and servants purchased for him, solely for his enjoyment, yet in the end he found that these were meaningless as well (Eccl 2:1-11). He had amassed great wealth and accumulated innumerable talents of silver and gold, but when he died all these were in vain (Eccl 2:18-25; 5:10-17). Death is the end for everyone; no one can avoid this strife during their life time (Eccl 7:1-2; 8:8).



## A TRUE, GOOD & BEAUTIFUL LIFE

Solomon said, "Behold, what I have seen to be good and to be fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life which God has given him, for this is his lot. Every man also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and find enjoyment in his toil — this is the gift of God" (Eccl 5:18-19). Through their belief in God, Christians can enjoy good health and happiness, a harmonious family life and stable livelihood, plus a regular pace of life — these are luxuries which make life good. Christians have light in their hearts and shun evil doings, uttering no evil words and harbouring no evil thoughts. By God's grace they are generous and giving, active in preaching the Gospel and saving souls, living valuable lives (Eccl 3:12; 11:2,6).

Solomon said, "Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun" (Eccl 9:9). Beauty is to cherish love from within; the most beautiful person is a loving one. In the brief decades that make up a person's life, matrimony is God's gracious providence. Husband and wife should love, respect and care for each other. This is the most beautiful life. God is love, and without love nobody can know God. By God's love, Christians love others, their families and themselves. This love makes life beautiful. A good and beautiful life comes from God. God is the source of all good, and He is the ultimate in love and beauty. Solomon thus concluded in his book, "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments;



for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl 12:13). God is the God who made heaven and earth; He is also the Maker of all men. He is in charge of the whole universe and the fate of all men. He is the Starter and the Finisher (Eccl 12:1). The current chaotic state of human affairs has its roots in man's deviance from God and the lack of fear for God. If we all sincerely worship this Master of the universe, obey His commandments and teachings, lead a life of respect for Him and love for men, in our brief, burdened and meaningless lifetimes, we will find lives that are true, good and beautiful. ■

# phases of a christian life

TAY ENG GUAN  
[SINGAPORE]

Sixteen year old May Lee stormed out of her house in suburban New York cursing and swearing. She had just quarrelled with her mother over her smoking of cigarettes.

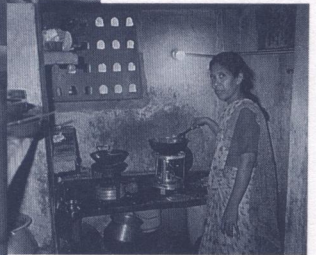
Now Serene Lee was worried where her daughter would spend the night. Would that it be at least a girlfriend's house! She quickly called her best friend Kim and told her what had happened. Kim was Serene's age but had two adult daughters. Serene trusted her because of her greater experience and also because Kim was a trained psychologist.

"Don't worry, Serene," she said. "It's just a phase that they all go through."

Half a globe away in Madras, India, Meenachi was serving dinner to the family. Just fifteen, the girl had finished her schoolwork and was doing what came naturally to children in India.

A phase is a state of being that is repetitive and/or unavoidable. So we talk about the "phases" of the moon and say comfortably that puberty is a "phase" in human life. But some of us would react uncertainly when some forward-thinking parent says that his rebellious teenager daughter is just going through "phase" of growing up. Do all teens rebel? Do all young men sow their wild oats? Must all teenagers date when they are young? Or are phases culturally bound? Though May Lee and Meenachi are fictitious characters, they are representative of girls growing up in different parts of the world. We have to accept that people in different parts of the world go through quite different phases in life. And so it would not be right to universalise a particular phenomenon such as teenage rebelliousness in America to every other part of the world.

To a Christian, the influence of culture should not be



paramount because we are "not of this world" (Jn 17:14); moreover, we are to walk as children of light (Eph 5:3-10), putting off the old nature which belongs to our former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts (Eph 4:22-24).

Being human, a Christian goes through different phases in life. But it is as yet unclear to many whether a particular state is a phase (i.e. an unavoidable situation) or an aberration of what God has intended for us. Some youths stop attending all services except for Sabbath when they start their families. Their reason? This is a natural phase of life. After all, they had done their share when they were younger. It is now time for the younger youths to take over. But did the people of God in the Bible go through early retirement?

We have to turn to the Bible to understand what God expects of a Christian life. We must not fool ourselves into

## Feature article

leading a life contrary to God's will under the mistaken notion that it is a natural phase that all must pass through. To delude ourselves is to hurt ourselves and the Lord who died for us.

### Consider the following phases in the life of a Christian from birth:

1. Religious Education (RE) class (Deut 6:6,7)
2. Personal experience of God (Job 42:5)
3. Working for God (Rom 12:11)
4. Marriage (Gen 2:24)
5. Bringing up children in the Lord (Eph 6:4)
6. Trials and tests by God (see the lives of Joseph, Moses, David)

### For the convert the following should hold true:

1. Personal experience of God (Acts 9:3-6)
2. The baptism period — persecution, hindrances, joy (compare crossing the Red Sea)
3. Independence in faith i.e. not totally relying on others (Jn 4:39-42)
4. Working for God
5. Marriage
6. Bringing up children in the Lord
7. Trials and tests by God

Some of these phases overlap and we remain in some of the phases for as long as we live. In this article we shall discuss three of these phases and their aberrations or deviations so that we may learn to grow in the Lord according to His will and avoid the pitfalls of what man thinks is but natural.

## RE Class



Children born to church members and baptised as infants are loved by the Lord. It is the responsibility of believing parents to teach their young the Word of God. If, in the first place, parents are not strong in the Word, it would not be surprising that their children do not know the Word well either. For this reason, most churches conduct RE classes for children from nursery school right up to pre-university level.

A Christian who has been taught the Word of God properly, whether at home (see the life of Joseph) or in RE classes, will grow up joyfully in the knowledge and love of God. He will have a stable and true set of moral values to guide him in life. Further, because he has been taught to pray, he would have established some relationship with God early in his life. Although this may be a simple faith, it is exactly the kind of basic foundation that is so necessary for the future complexities of life. In joy, he will thank the Lord; in sorrow and pain, he will turn to the Lord in prayer. He knows how to ask God for forgiveness when he

has done something wrong and very importantly, he would have learnt what is sin and its consequences.

The value of good RE cannot be underestimated.

However, some children skip RE classes, perhaps because their parents do not attend church regularly or perhaps they think that the classes are boring. In secular education, there are always the recalcitrants who skip school despite the displeasure of teachers and their own parents but these are often difficult, perhaps even maladjusted, children. The same is not true in church because there is no compulsion to attend class and so a large proportion of our children do not have the benefit of a comprehensive RE. This is an aberration in this phase of Christian life.

There are at least three states of knowledge — knowing, not knowing and not knowing that one does not know. It is sad that many children who attend RE classes irregularly or who do so without a sincere searching faith grow into adults who think that they know all there is to know about God when actually they lack so much. Some of these adults even reject God in later life, certain that their conscience is clear because they had given God a chance and God ha' failed! It is a result of deficient RE that many adults today do not know that they do not know the Bible.

Some Christians go through a sub-phase where they question the exclusive nature of our religion and our church. But the enlightening nature of the truth is such that *all who continue to question sincerely and prayerfully will be satisfied* (Jer 29:13). We do not see good children leaving the True Jesus Church after assiduously attending RE classes and living out the Word of God. One's deviation from the church can often be traced to intellectual pride and a lifestyle that is against the teachings of the Bible.

Charles Ow is an example of one who has stumbled for these reasons. A favourite with the lecturers at the Youth Theological Seminar, Charles' future as a useful and even influential worker of God seemed assured. He

studied hard for tests and was often top in the class. He spoke well in preaching practice and he even took to wearing the garb of preachers at that time — short-sleeved white shirts untucked over dark pants with a heavy Bible carried on the right hand.

But then Charles went to study in one of the best universities of the world. A few years later, he openly stated that he did not believe in the one true church nor did he believe that baptism was necessary for salvation. Still, he had no intention of leaving the True Jesus Church because his family was still part of the church. Anyway, he reckoned that the church would still be one of the many churches which could be saved. (A notion gaining popularity in some quarters of our church today and which, if left unchecked, would harm many in due time.) Friends were surprised and saddened by this turn of events and they continue to pray to God for his return before it is too late. His lifestyle confirmed the true reason for his fall. He boasted that he had drunk in every bar in that university town in one drinking binge — a total exceeding 20! Today, he continues to be in church but the zeal and fervency of the early days are no longer there.

## Working for GOD

Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work" (Jn 4:34). If we had to divide life into exactly two phases, it would be apt to label them as childhood and adulthood; the difference between them being that one centres around play and the other, work. A child finds fulfilment in play while the adult finds fulfilment in meaningful work. ►

A Christian must work for the Lord. Be it preaching to others, teaching in RE classes or keeping the church compound clean, one must do these in some part of one's life and then again for a significant period of time. How long is that, one may ask. How long does an adult work? If he retires at 55, at least 30 years. Two common aberrations in this phase of Christian life are total lack of service to God and premature retirement.

The first problem occurs when people view the church as a *cinema*. They put in their offerings (buy a ticket), listen to the sermon (watch the show) and then leave the church, often with comments on whether it was a good sermon or not. This perception of the church changes every once in a while to that of a *hospital*. This happens when one has the peculiar faith of the nine lepers who knew how to turn to God in times of great distress (Lk 17:12-19). Some of us were once like this because we were ignorant but God has called us to better things. If we open our ears to the call of God in sermons and in personal Bible reading, we shall understand how God wants us to work for Him. For example, as sisters, we may be moved to commit ourselves to the raising of children in the Lord. In the process, we free our husbands to work more zealously in the front-line positions of church work. As brothers, the scope is enormous and calls for sacrifice especially in the areas of our secular work and home time.

The second problem is more acute simply because it is harder to eradicate. Perhaps this is what God meant when He said in Rev 3:15-18 that He preferred one to be cold rather than lukewarm. We have seen many older youths and younger middle-aged members shirk their responsibilities in church because they had served time in their younger days. Church service in this perception is likened to military conscription or *national service*. You may call me back for reservist duty but even then, I would be unhappy because this takes time from my career.

If a church faces the constant struggle of having to inspire the youths to love God and man, then training them in the Word, next, helping them overcome

relationship and emotional problems, and finally teaching them to lead others, only to find these same youths "retiring" at this small peak of achievement in the Lord, the evangelistic and pastoral work will remain at a standstill. While the call for full-time workers must not diminish, it is time to realise the importance of creating and mobilising the second wave of soldiers for the Lord — lay members who are totally reliable when it comes to church attendance and service to the Lord all the days of their lives. Meaningful work must be found for the sustenance of this group of people. Short spiritual meetings should be conducted at convenient times. Church facilities should cater for their young children so that they can concentrate on the work to be done.

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Members have to be constantly encouraged to make sacrifices in their careers for the sake of the gospel. Nowadays there is a constant emphasis on the need for

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and if it entails forgoing  
fleeting pleasures of  
life, it **must** be done.**



## Marriage

financial support. An offshoot of this is the call to members who “have the ability” to earn money for the Lord. We think that there is no necessity to encourage the direction that carnal man would naturally be attuned to. Why, for the sake of the one or two who would actually offer big bucks to the church, should we grease the way to condemnation for the many others who would slip along the way of riches? Is there any justification to put finance alongside the power of God and manpower as the three forces needed to spur the work of God in the Last Days? It is clear from Zech 4:6 that the Spirit of God is most important yet it is common to hear this verse being quoted with the qualification, “BUT money is important, too”. It is wrong to put money as equal to the power of God in importance. God’s Spirit is first, then most likely comes manpower and perhaps, at a distant third, will be money. For that reason, it is important to teach believers that the Christian phase of working for the Lord directly in the saving of souls is a life-long quest and premature retirement is an aberration of God’s will for us.

Marriage is such an important phase of a life with God that He made rules for the Israelites about whom they could marry (Deut 7:1-4, 22:30; Lev 21:7). Adultery continues to be a serious sin in God’s sight. There is even a quaint law that frees a man from military service for a year from the day that he marries so that he may “be happy with his wife whom he had taken” (Deut 24:5).

Marriage takes adjusting to and who knows this better than God the Creator? God’s original plan was that a woman would be a helper fit for a man (Gen 2:18). The two shall become one and this unified force is meant to be a help in the direction originally set out by God, which is to do His will. Yet, for many, marriage is the signal for both to retire from church work and to set off on a new direction of “happy ever after” away from the crowd.

This is the aberration most common in this phase of Christian life. Many believers do not know that shirking one’s responsibilities in the larger family of God is wrong. The problem is compounded in a modern society where both parents work and the line between the father provider-leader and the mother sustainer-supporter is blurred. Both pursue their respective careers, come home tired and share the housework. It is not surprising that the new family has no time for God.

As in the previous section of working for God, the solution lies in understanding the will of God and asking Him for strength to carry out what really is best for us. Sacrifice is necessary and if this entails forgoing fleeting

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pleasures of life (condominiums, big cars, overseas holidays), it must be done. If two incomes are necessary for subsistence, then the wife should fulfil her role as a helper to her husband in the work of God.

The church of God will move ahead in its God-given duty of saving the world if it moves as an entire unit. In the days of the Exodus, Pharaoh tried to bargain with Moses. He proposed releasing only certain portions of the population but Moses rightly refused (Ex 8:25-28; 10:8-11, 24-29). Today, those in the prime of life are usually the ones missing from the great work of God. The reasons are often the obstacles caused by a secular career and the perversion of marriage.

Attitudes towards this important group of people must change. There was once a group of youths who tried to persuade their seniors who were then in their thirties to help in the youth group. The reasons given by the older group for their unwillingness were that the younger ones were better than they and that they had young children to look after. They went on to imply that the younger ones did not understand their difficulties and that they would soon do the same when they came to a similar point in their lives. A minister even asked the younger group to get off the backs of the older ones because he sympathised with the latter's situation; he felt that they were trying to change what was a natural phase in life. These youths have grown up and are now parents of young children. By the grace of God, they continue to attend all services in church as well as help in church work. Some of their secular careers may have suffered along the way but then again,

some have had their secular careers blessed by God. Whatever it may be, what is important is that they and their families have not starved and they are doing the will of God. This happy state can be attained if we allow ourselves to be led by God. In fact, the church must have people in the prime of life together with youths, children and elders to forge the way to the Kingdom of God.

What is essential from this article is for the reader to review common perceptions on what is a natural, unavoidable and so acceptable, phase of life in the light of the Bible. Then we shall soon realise that some of these perceptions have been sown by our adversary, the devil, to lure unsuspecting Christians into a false sense of security and inertia in the important work of God. Being a lost sheep is not a phase of Christian life. It is an aberration that results from falling into temptation and failing the tests of God because of a lack of proper religious education and experience. Feeling left out after baptism is not a phase in Christian life. It is an aberration brought about by one's inability to move on to the next phase of an independent personal relationship with God coupled with the inability of a weak under-manned church to provide fellowship during the transition period.

And so in the case of May Lee from New York, Christian parents must not see this as just a phase of life but as an aberration caused by sin. The psychologist will say that such a child will probably snap out of her lack of filial piety. The Bible roundly condemns such behaviour (Ex 21:17). Who would you put your trust in? ■

# AS WE *pass* THROUGH LIFE

**L**ife has been described in many ways. The Bible compares it to mist that appears and soon disappears. It is also like the grass and flowers that soon wither and fall away. The message is clear: life on earth is temporary and transient. Each man and woman lives for a little while and then dies. The earthly stage remains but different actors are constantly passing through it. That is why the psalmist prayed to God to let him realise how fleeting his life was — a mere breath — so that he would know how to number his days and spend it wisely. We need to make this petition before God too, so that we can lead a worthwhile life.

As we pass through life, we need to periodically introspect, to see how we are faring in our spiritual

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But this is not what life  
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cultivation. “I am busy” is a prominent theme of modern day living. We rush through our days, busy with our studies, families, careers, businesses, and even with church activities. Day in day out we juggle with the various

demands, and over time these govern our lives; we just follow the routines without second thought. But this is not what life is all about. As Christians, we need to regularly quiet down our hearts and introspect; perform “reality checks”; ask why we are doing certain things, what our motives are, and where our priorities lie.

Many of us have been believers for a long time. We have not grown cold in our faith and we remain an integral part of the church. We attend church services regularly and we take up church work assigned to us. But in terms of our faith, have we really progressed? Are we closer to God now than before? Do His words still “burn within us” when we listen to sermons or read the scriptures? Do



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we still feel a stir in our hearts when we sing those familiar hymns telling us to “stand up for Jesus”, not to leave this world “empty-handed”, to “take everything to Him in prayer” and many more. How much importance do we place on service attendance? Have they become a mere monotonous weekly event where we settle comfortably into our seats and rest our eyes? In fact, service attendance is a form of worship where we show reverence to our Creator, to thank Him for His bountiful grace. We should not abuse this privilege, despite the passage of time.

Spiritual cultivation forms an essential part of a Christian’s daily living. Regardless of how busy we may be, we have to find time to pray

and study the Bible. We are of the kingdom of God. If we do not have close communion with our Father in heaven and understand His will for us, we cannot possibly lead a life worthy of our calling and be assured of our salvation. We may be participating in the Lord’s ministry actively, but if we remain as spiritual babes, we may discover with dismay at the end of our journey that our efforts have been in vain. For this reason, Jesus warns that not all who acknowledge Him as Lord and who serve Him in their lives will enter His kingdom. Only those who bear good fruits and do His will will be rewarded (Mt 7:21). If we do not diligently pray and read the Bible daily, how can we ever know what His will is? Let us take stock and ask ourselves whether our spiritual nature has matured with time. The longer we procrastinate, the more difficult it will be to change, because as time passes, we will become so set in our ways that we are incapable of changing for the better.

As we pass through life, we have to learn to look beyond ourselves, to lift our eyes and see the needs of those around us. It is easy for us to be so engrossed in our own cares and worries that we forget to care for one another. I know of people, non-TJC members, who practise charity, who show concern over the welfare of those less fortunate than they. As TJC members, we should surpass them,

*As we pass  
beyond  
those around  
own cares and*

not for our own glory but for the Lord’s. After all, we call ourselves true Israelites, the children of God. We have to live up to this status. The question is, do we?

A beautiful testimony of caring is found in our church in Accra, Ghana, with membership of around 100. Because of the poor economy, only a small percentage of our members are employed, and even then, with meagre wages. In spite of this, these brethren use their wages to subsidise the church’s needs and to cover the basic necessities of the unemployed members. It would seem that we who live in affluent societies have a lot to learn from them.

Let us stretch out a helping hand toward our brethren in need,

through life, we have to learn to look ourselves, *to lift our eyes* and see the needs of us. It is easy for us to be so engrossed in our worries that we *forget to care* for one another.

especially those who live in war-torn or under-developed countries. One such country is Liberia. Our church in Liberia was established in 1986 and the last recorded membership figure was 200. Civil war has thrown the entire country into social and economic chaos. Many have fled the country for Ghana, our brethren from five different places in Liberia among them. Their lives are full of suffering. When we see news reports of the refugees' plight, we ought to realise that our brethren, members of our spiritual family, are among them. How can we not help them? At the very least, we who enjoy material abundance should offer financial assistance.

Time is not on our side. Apart

from the imminent second coming, we are in reality very vulnerable — not even certain whether tomorrow belongs to us. But very often, whilst we acknowledge that of course we have to care (and can even quote Bible verses and relate Bible examples to support this fact), we have our own problems to solve now. Therefore we murmur regretfully that caring for others belong sometime in the future, when we find a less stressful job, when our children are older etc. But such reasoning fails to account for an important factor, death. Recently, I learnt of the death of a three-month-old baby, terminal illnesses striking a four-year-old boy and a youth in his early twenties; I have even attended the wake of a twenty-year-old sister.

All this is enough to bring home the point that death can knock on our doors at any time, perhaps when we least expect it. That is why "it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting; for this is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to heart" (Eccl 7:2). The irony is, many of us already understand this teaching. Deep in us we know that we can die at any time. We can be knocked down by a car, we can suffer a stroke, even the food that we consume can be potentially harmful. But like the ostrich that hides its head in the sand, we push such morbid thoughts away, and rush through a life that bears few good deeds. It is time that we face up to the certainty of death, and live each day as

if there were no tomorrow; stretching our hands to help those less fortunate than we.

As we pass through life, we have to turn our youthful aspirations into positive actions. When we were in our teens, many of us had the zeal for service. We looked at the church condition and told ourselves that when the time comes, we would do even better. We also resolved that when we were older and less dependent on our parents, we would be more active in the local evangelistic and pastoral ministries, join preachers in their overseas missionary trips and if the Lord willed, offer ourselves for full-time ministry. Time passed. We have become older, but have also acquired responsibilities, cares and worries. Now we still have the zeal, but again we tell ourselves that we should wait till we have sorted out our problems first. Little do we realise that these problems are likely to plague us for the rest of our lives. If we continue to simply hold on to our aspirations but not turn them into actions, we may leave this world a sad person, empty-handed before God.

The Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu once said, "I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand." If a preacher were to relate to you the joy of experiencing God's guidance in missionary trips, you may forget. If he were to support his facts with photographs of miracles

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of healing during the trip, you may remember. But you will only truly understand the joy when you participate in the ministry yourself. Time and tide wait for no man. We have to act now and not later. Then we will have truly lived a worthwhile and meaningful life.

We are familiar with the Lord's saying that the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Is this not the case today? How long shall we wait before we respond to the call? If we are one of those who are still considering, just quietly think about what the Lord has done for us; visualise the bruises on His body, the scars on His face, His pain and agony on the cross, a sinless man freely offering His life in exchange for the lives of sinners. Whilst we still can, we ought to start living our lives for Him, and not for ourselves.

As we pass through life, let us

“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ”  
(2 Pet 3:18)

“be a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful to the master of the house, ready for any good work”  
(2 Tim 2:21)

LEE JIN  
[SINGAPORE]

# the end & the beginning

# 1996

Time, by definition, is precise. There are 12 months in a year, each month (with the exception of February) comprising 30 or 31 days, each day comprising 24 hours and each hour 60 minutes and so on. Yet our individual perception of time may vary. During difficult periods, time seems to pass ever so slowly. On occasions when we are happy and having fun, time seems to fly. Our age too influences our perception of time. Ask a child and he will tell you how time seems to drag, especially when he is waiting for something exciting to take place. But ask a person in his forties, and he will lament over lost time, on how it seemed like only yesterday that he was in his twenties. 1996 is coming to an end. In a few days, a new

year begins. Now is an appropriate moment to review our past actions, and make our resolutions for the future.

### **Make up for wasted time**

If in the past year we have wasted the time that God had entrusted to us, we should now learn to cherish the time ahead. Typically, the young, believing that they have the whole future in front of them, will recklessly spend their days until they reach a certain age. Only then, when they realise that time is in fact their life and that it is finite, will they start to cherish it. We should not wait till we reach a certain point in our lives before that realisation strikes. We ought to understand the significance of time now. The

### **The greatest regret in life is the failure to fear God and live a life worthy of His calling...**

children. Besides, we justify ourselves, we have already given them ample cash to live comfortably, surely they cannot expect more! These are oft-heard comments. Perhaps we too have uttered such words. But the irony is often when we realise we ought to show greater filial piety, our parents may no longer be around. As a minister, I have had to conduct many funerals and wakes. The most common words uttered by many bereaved children are words of regret — for not having spent more time with their parents, for failing to respect and to love them when they were still around. Let us not wait till we stand at our parent's funeral before we realise the importance of filial piety.

The greatest regret in life is the failure to fear God and live a life worthy of His calling. The rich fool ate and drank throughout his life. He may have worshipped God, but he failed to glorify Him in his daily living. Hence, he had to spend his eternity in torment (Lk 16:19-31). We ought to resolve not to lead a life like his. In the new year, we must learn to fear God, to offer our time for Him. Quiet our hearts and ask ourselves why we always claim to be so very busy. Are we pursuing the elusive rainbow of material well-being and enjoyment? Or are we busy in the Lord's work? And this evaluation is vital if we desire to be in that category of saints referred to in Rev 14:13, who "rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them." We know that we will die one day, and after death, comes the Lord's judgement when we will meet the Lord. But will we meet Him empty handed? In this new year, let us resolve to live a life of service to God and man.

Amen. ■

**Quiet our hearts and ask ourselves why we always claim to be so very busy. Are we pursuing the elusive rainbow of material well-being and enjoyment? Or are we busy in the Lord's work? And this evaluation is vital if we desire to be in that category of saints referred to in Rev 14:13, who "rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them."**

ADAPTED FROM A SERMON BY CHIN AUN QUEK,  
[NEWCASTLE, UK] IN SINGAPORE



# death

## a christian's viewpoint

**L**ife is but a short journey. Death seems to be the inevitable destiny. No one has ever loved me more than my grandmother had. She always remembered my birthday. She would always take me to church.

I can never erase the memory of the day she suddenly collapsed and went into a coma.

A few days later she was called to be with the Lord.

It was then that I had my first faint inkling of what death is.

I had previously attended several funerals without any feeling of sorrow.

Time has certainly deepened my understanding of life — and DEATH.

When I touched the dead, it did not respond. Lying silently, it appeared as though everything had come to a mysterious standstill. It would soon vanish from the face of the earth. ►

## Exhortation

The person I loved and respected had left me.

And then from my innermost being tears flowed.

When shall we meet again?

It is said that the world is a stage and all men actors. Like shooting stars, they dazzle the eyes for a moment and are then seen no more.

Some prefer to be stage props, hoping to remain on stage for a while longer.

There are different types of people, each trying to discover his own identity but the tragedy of it all is that many of them do not know who they are!

A Christian is fully aware of the fact that the actors on stage will leave the scene sooner or later. And those who leave cannot return to tell of their experience.

Yet a Christian is not afraid.

Paul said, "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens... We are of good courage, and we would be rather away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor 5:1,8).

Death promises better things for a Christian. It is the door to a brand new world devoid of sufferings.

It is eternal felicity to a Christian.

For this reason, Paul was confident enough to declare, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labour for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to part and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account" (Phil 1:21-24).

While alive and able, we should do what is proper and in whatever our hands find to do, do it with all our might. Our utmost is for the Highest.

Live therefore for the good of others and for the eternal heritage.

And so if we live,  
we live for the  
Lord; and if we  
die, we die for the  
Lord.

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# faith & fear

**T**he conflict between faith and fear can be seen in various incidents recorded in the Gospels. The reassuring words “It is I; do not be afraid” instilled such *faith* in Peter that he was ready to go down from the boat to join the person whom he had previously *feared* was a ghost, to tread upon no sure foundation but sea water<sup>1</sup>. But when he saw the wind and became *afraid*, he began to sink. His cry for help was met with Christ’s gentle rebuke, “O thou of little *faith*, wherefore didst thou *doubt*?”<sup>2</sup> In another seafaring episode, a storm so threatened their lives that the disciples asked their sleeping Master if He cared not that they perished. Jesus’ reply was: “Why are you *fearful*?” Have you not yet *faith*?”<sup>3</sup>

A vivid portrayal of the relationship between faith and fear can be seen in three incidents recorded in the fifth chapter of Mark.

## the gerasenes encounter

The coming of Jesus had just brought great blessing to the demoniac who had been possessed by a legion of demons. It was indeed no small thing that a man who had been out of his mind, unrestrainable, living in tombs, crying day and night, and cutting himself with stones was at an instant put into his right mind. Such a miracle should have been met with immense appreciation and gratitude by the surrounding people. Alas, “they came to Jesus, and beheld him that was possessed with demons sitting, clothed and in his right mind, even him that had the legion and they were *afraid*.”<sup>4</sup>

Before long, the entire country was gripped with a horrifying fear and “they

began to beseech Him (Jesus) to depart from their borders”.<sup>5</sup> Fear had placed them in a wrong disposition, and disabled them from viewing things in their proper perspectives. Their attention was focused on the disturbing fact that some 2,000 swine had gone dashing to their death.

This event, though momentary, was so horrifying to them that they forgot the horrors they had gone through with the demoniac all those years. More importantly, they failed to notice the peace and tranquility of the former demoniac; the peace of God which surpasses all understanding.<sup>6</sup> If only they had, they would not have been fearful. ►

## the woman in the crowd

A woman sick and desperate, and with no money left, heard news of a great healer passing by. After being disappointed countless times by many physicians, this news could still excite her. Though she had spent all her money on physicians who could not even improve her condition, she never for a moment thought that perhaps this time would be another failure. Unlike many modern day seekers of healing who would only “give it a try”, she pressed on, finding her way through the crowd with the firm conviction: “If I touch even His garments, I shall be made well.”<sup>7</sup>

When at last she touched just the hem of His garments, she felt a stream of healing

flow through her body and was cured at that instant. But she was not the only one to feel the healing touch, for Jesus, her great Healer turned and asked, “Who touched Me?” The woman, “fearing and trembling ... came and fell down before Him, and told Him all the truth”.<sup>8</sup> What godly fear! What a different kind of fear from the Gerasenes! The faith that led to her healing told her that surely the One who possessed such great healing power would have known and could even have singled her out from the crowd. And she could do nothing but bow down and worship the One who had bestowed such great grace the likes of which she had never known before.

## the ruler of the synagogue

The chapter has thus far revealed, on one hand, horrifying fear which wipes out all possibility of faith and on the other, godly fear which ensues from faith. We examine further, from Christ’s dealing with Jairus, another category of fear.

Jesus was on His way to heal Jairus’ daughter when He

was interrupted by the woman with an issue of blood.

Immediately after witnessing a great miracle, Jairus’ faith was to receive a great blow, for his servants came from his home reporting, “Your daughter is dead, why troublest thou the Teacher any further?”<sup>9</sup>

Arrested by fear of losing his beloved daughter, his newly-

enhanced faith took a plunge and would have reached its ebb if not for Jesus’ assurance, “Fear not, only believe.”<sup>10</sup> Doubtful fear breaks down the fabric of faith. It can be overcome only by believing. We have no other solution but to plead with the Lord, “I believe; help my unbelief.”<sup>11</sup>

SHEE TSE LOONG  
[SINGAPORE]

## the city above

Inch by inch, the case is gingerly lowered into the pit. The base disappears from view. And then the flowers atop the lid sink as well, their fragrance still lingering in the air. A final thud. The ropes are removed, and the earth is piled in. Tears are shed as we bid good-bye.

"Why did grandma leave us?" a little girl sobs.

"She didn't leave us, dear," her mother whispers as she wipes the glistening tears from her daughter's cheeks. "Grandma has gone before us. She is now in the city above. One day, we'll meet up with her there."

The Bible says that it is better for us to go to the house of mourning rather than the house of feasting (Eccl 7:2). I am again reminded of this verse during a recent memorial service. As I watch the abysmal descent of the casket, it reminds



me that, one day, I will have to confront death alone, like it or not. We often push away such thoughts, morbid you may say, but that does not mean death will not strike. Death comes to everyone, young and old alike. As Christians, we know we will go to heaven, for the Bible says so. But still, deep down inside, we are scared. Scared to leave this familiar world. Afraid to be cut off from our loved ones. Fear of entry into an unknown world. After all, we are human still, no matter how much faith we claim to possess. We all hope to live in this world as long as possible. It makes me wonder too, when will it be my turn? When will my soul be required of me? When will my body be made to lie in a box, and be buried into oblivion in the earth beneath?

### The earthly tent

Oftentimes, in life, we find that we are merely sojourners in this world. We are constantly wandering and in search of, but never finding, the true meaning of life. We find ourselves caught in the mundane routine of life, living day after day in a monotonous existence. So predictable. So boring. We seek for “permanence” in our friendships. We hope to secure a “permanent” job. We wish to “live happily ever after” with our newly-wedded spouse. We work hard to service the mortgage of a “permanent” house to raise our children. We have an endless list of wants, wishes and desires. It seems that security in life is measured by all these material things, and that our anxiety will be replaced by happiness once we become “successful,” so to speak. Yet in the grand scheme of things, we know that nothing is permanent in this world, for there are many factors in life that are way beyond our control. We become frustrated because we are held captive by the curse of mortality. Though we

seem to possess freedom and liberty, yet in fact, we are wrapped up in a cocoon of worldly obligations and false hopes.

Since we live a life characterised by transience, what then, is the true hope of our life? The apostle Paul exhorts,

*For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling, so that by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee (2 Cor 5:1-5).*

Our true home is not this earthly tent we now dwell in, but rather, it is in the eternal mansion above. That is where our souls yearn to dwell forever. But for us today, how can we see this invisible city, the city “whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:9)? The author of Hebrews says that it is “by faith” in God that we can see. For we “look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal” (2 Cor 4:18). As Christians, “we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7).

Praise the Lord! If God did not mercifully raise us to new life through faith in Jesus Christ, we would have nothing to look forward to but death. As we pass through life, our outer person may be aging everyday, but as Christians, we have assurance for we know whom we have believed (2 Tim 1:12). Our hope is in the living God — Jesus Christ — the Lord of Resurrection and Saviour of all humankind. Only in Jesus is the way to the heavenly kingdom, for He is the way, the truth, and the life (Jn 14:6). God has given us the precious Holy Spirit — His Spirit — so we know for sure that heaven exists in reality. The Holy Spirit is our pledge for entering the heavenly city. Therefore, we have full confidence of our heavenly inheritance (Eph 1:13-14).

**Do we, the members of the True**

**Jesus Church, realise that the Holy**

**Spirit is our utmost treasure in life?**

### **Jesus dwells among us**

**T**oday, the Lord Jesus makes His abode among us by the Holy Spirit He gives us. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Himself; He is the “river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High” (Ps 46:4). The Holy Spirit is mercifully showered on the True Jesus Church — the “city of God” in this world. Individually speaking, the Holy Spirit dwells within each member. He is our Counselor and Helper as we journey in life. Do we, the members of the True Jesus Church,

realize that the Holy Spirit is our utmost treasure in life?

Let us learn from the parable of the ten virgins (Mt 25:1-13). Five of them were wise. Not only did they take flasks of oil with them, they continued to trim their lamps as they awaited the bridegroom. They were ready and their lamps were found shining when the bridegroom came. Thus, they made it to the wedding banquet.

Today, are we like these five wise maidens who constantly watch over the level of “oil” within ourselves? If we have yet to receive the Holy Spirit, do we feel the urgency of fasting and praying for it? Are we convinced that we can no longer live another day without the Holy Spirit, and will not stop pleading to God until He fills us? For those of us who have been anointed with the Holy Spirit, what is the level of “oil” within us? Is it boiling hot, at room temperature, or freezing cold? Are we truly praying for the Holy Spirit to fill us completely, or have our prayers become mechanical, devoid of feeling, just another one of those daily routines? Can we feel the vibrance of God’s presence at work in us, and with us? Let us not be like the five foolish maidens. God cannot be mocked (Gal 6:7). He knows. He knows those who are true to Him.

However, salvation is not just about working on ourselves, it also entails working for the salvation of those around us. God wants us to love our neighbours as ourselves; this is the reason why He preserves our lives today. God desires that we deny ourselves so as to spread

the life-saving gospel to the world. We have a lot of work to do. "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few" (Mt 9:37). Let us not waste our lives. Our dollars will not buy us a mansion in the celestial city above. Our Mercedes Benz will not drive us to the heavenly gate. Our Ph.D. degree cannot even be a piece of wastepaper on heaven's spotless streets of gold. If you truly think about it, all these material pursuits that you strive after is only good for this worldly life. Let us not be too attached to them. Be wise. For when death knocks we have to put down everything. At that moment, only one question remains: Am I saved? Am I ready to face my Lord Jesus, the Lord of judgment?

**We do not deserve our**

**eternal rest in heaven unless**

**we have toiled hard enough for**

**our Lord in this world today.**

**How can we face our Lord if**

**we have not won any souls to**

**His kingdom?**

But then again, death does not come easily to Christians. We do not deserve our eternal rest in heaven unless we have toiled hard enough for our Lord in this world today. How can we face our Lord if we have not won any souls to His kingdom? Really, how can we deserve to die unless we have lived? Therefore, "if we live we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Rom 14:8). And no wonder Paul yearns with all

his heart: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain ... My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better" (Phil 1:21-23). Where does Paul gain his confidence over death? From knowing that God's promises are true, since he had been transported to the third heaven and "heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter," because they were too sacred (2 Cor 12:4). The city above is holy, for God is holy. And in order to be a citizen of this Holy City, we have to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12).

With this mindset, we ought to realise the true meaning of our existence in life which is to sow the seed of the gospel of salvation, and to save the many "homeless" souls out there. We have no excuse, for we are equipped with the tools that God has given us — His word, His blood and His Spirit. Therefore, in church, let us not bury the talents that God has given us. He has granted us individual gifts to help out with the work in church. If we cannot identify what we can do for God, we can at least pray. Each and everyone of us plays a significant role in church. Let us be faithful and humble servants as we work together to glorify the name of our dearest Lord. Let us help one another as we climb the stairway to heaven together, for we have a glorious city above that is awaiting our entry.

### The city above

The city above is the temple of the Holy Spirit, a spiritual city existing beyond the three-dimensional realm (Rev 21:10-22:5). She is the city of the eternal sabbath, the abode of supreme peace, serenity and tranquillity. She embodies the peace that is attainable with one's complete

**She is the city of the eternal Sabbath, the abode of supreme peace,**

**serenity and tranquillity. She embodies the peace that is attainable with**

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submission to God; a haven for those who have overcome the storms and tides of the earthly pilgrimage. She will be made ready for the inhabitation of the faithful ones whose terrestrial pilgrimage culminates in a place where "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Rev 21:4). Every weakness that entangles and burdens the frail body is discarded and every wound of the soul is healed. Evil no longer reigns and all wretchedness of the soul is entirely gone. "And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa 51:11).

In his book *The City of God*, Augustine (A.D. 354-430) makes a distinction between two cities:

Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from men; but the greatest glory of the other is God, the witness of conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own glory; the other says to its God, "Thou

art my glory, and the lifter up of mine head." In the one, the princes and the nations it subdues are ruled by the love of ruling; in the other, the princes and the subjects serve one another in love, the latter obeying, while the former take thought for all. The one delights in its own strength, represented in the persons of its rulers; the other says to its God, "I will love thee, O Lord, my strength." <sup>1</sup>

Jesus is the crown of all our unceasing vision, endless love and tireless adoration. He is the consummation of all joy and paean of praise. Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the sole love of our life and the strength of our days. As Christians, we live for Christ, and we die for His kingdom. We are no "wandering sojourners" who know not where to go, nor do we lead a "mundane existence" in this world. Ours is "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that we may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet 2:9). This is where we stand.

My beloved brothers and sisters, let our spirits be set aflame by the Holy Spirit! Let us strive with all our might to multiply the citizens of the city of God in this world! Let us transcend the mortality of life and laugh in the face of death, "O death, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor 15:55). The greatest reward we can ever receive in life is when

Jesus says to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant ... enter into the joy of your master" (Mt 25:21). Such is the everlasting joy that is awaiting us in the city above where we shall forever "dwell in Thy house, ever singing Thy praise" (Ps 84:4). Our reward is to "behold the beauty of the Lord" all the days of our eternal life (Ps 27:4). While we are still in this world, let us toil for our Lord with endurance. For when the hourglass of temporality is over, we shall be clothed with eternity. As we sojourn in this world, carrying with us our earthly tents, let our eyes be focused on our Saviour, the Lord Jesus, and the glorious mansion He is preparing for us in the city above.

Jesus Christ, the Word of life "became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (Jn 1:14). Apostle John refers to Lord Jesus as the "tabernacle" of God. Jesus also referred to himself as the temple: "But he spoke of the temple of his body" (Jn 2:21). The word "tabernacle" is *miskan* in Hebrews, referring to the tent sanctuary of the Israelites in the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> The tabernacle was a portable "house of God" which was transported wherever Moses and the people sojourned in the wilderness. At that time, God assured His people of His continued presence, "I will make my abode among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Lev 26:11).

A meaningful life is one where we walk with God, "fear God and keep his commandments" (Eccl 12:13). On the other hand, a life of vanity is the lamentation of those who walk in their own ways, whose selfish pursuit of this world leads to their own destruction of body and soul. When we look at Enoch, he was transported to heaven without seeing death (Gen 5:21). The same goes for Elijah and Moses. One did not see death, as recorded in the Old Testament, while the other died and was buried by God. But both appeared with Jesus on the mountain of

**Faith never knows where it will be led, but it loves and believes in the ONE who is leading.**

transfiguration in the New Testament (Deut 34:5-7; 2 Kgs 2:11; Mt 17:3). Death is therefore not fearsome, it is merely a transition for the faithful ones of God to a more glorious place.

Faith never knows where it will be led, but it loves and believes in the One who is leading. It is a life of faith in God that makes us "go" — not intellect and reason, not wealth and status — but keeping a vision that is focused on Jesus alone. And this faith will ultimately lead us to our true home — a glorious mansion in the city above that Jesus is preparing for us (Jn 14:2,3). ■

### Notes:

1. Augustine, Saint. *The City of God*. Translated by Marcus Dods. New York: The Modern Library, 1993, p. 477

2. Freedman, David Noel, ed. *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. 6 vols. 1st ed. New York: Doubleday, 1992.

**M**any regard religion as a form of escapism from the harsh realities of life, providing nothing more than a mental crutch. But this is far from true. The end of true religion is utmost glory and an eternal homecoming.

As God's elect, our lives are enriched and we share His glory. However, in following the Lord, children of God will inevitably suffer, for "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). Since the Lord Jesus suffered to save humanity, we, too, must equip ourselves with a readiness to suffer, "...since therefore, Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought, for who ever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer by human passions, but by the will of God" (1 Pet 4:1-2).

One might ask, "Why does God allow His children to suffer?" But once we understand the cause of suffering, we shall conclude, "It is good for me that I was afflicted" (Ps 119:71).

# a will to suffer

## CAUSE OF SUFFERING

### God's chastisement

God desires His children to be holy and manifest His glory. Man, however, fails to perceive God's desire and often falls into sin. Rebelling against God, we corrupt ourselves. The infinitely loving God does not wish His children to continue in decadence. So He chastises, like parents do their wayward children, in order that they may turn away from wrong.

This is one reason why God allows us to meet with adversities — that we may turn from our erroneous ways. It is therefore important we examine our actions when our lives are fraught with problems and we are suffering. Remember these words: "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord nor lose courage when you are punished by Him. For the Lord disciplines him whom He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives" (Heb 12:5-6).

### Satan's attack

The spiritual growth of God's children is Satan's greatest source of displeasure because our blessedness underscores his failure. Thus, he raises his hands against us, and we suffer if we give way to him. He stirs up trouble, causing misunderstanding, fanning anger and even threatening our very lives. He pushes us to the brink of death and causes us to lose all we

## Compassion

Paul says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor 1:3-4).

The tears, pleadings and prayers we offer in our afflictions help us learn to obey God's commands and be submissive. Our tears also soften our nature, making us more gentle towards others and drawing us closer to God. We become more sensitive to God's guidance, motivated by His love. These changes will be reflected in our social interactions. We are more concerned about others and willing to comfort those in need.

Ps 133:1 proclaims: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!" Unity amongst brethren is pleasing in God's eyes. Many children of God cannot live in harmony because they cannot love each other deeply; the rapport that should exist amongst brethren is absent. But if we have experienced personal sufferings, and through these have received not only comfort from God but also from our brethren, we will realise the significance of

being brothers and sisters-in-Christ; we will strive to establish the family spirit of love within the community of faith. We will instinctively protect others from suffering. Once we learn to love one another, our spiritual lives will grow and we can build up the family of God. Even when misunderstandings arise, we can sincerely forgive one another.

Suffering therefore teaches us to sympathise with others. From our own experience, we learn to have compassion for the pain or difficulty others are experiencing and through this, become a more magnanimous person.

## Beholding God's glory

When we accept our suffering with determination, it is actually the beginning of God's blessing and we will surely see God's glory. When we are joyful despite suffering, we can experience peace within us.

Once, the husband of a sister-in-Christ had a serious accident. The doctor told her that her husband would not survive. She prayed because she could not understand why God let His children suffer. Then, in one of her prayers, God's words entered her heart, "Wonderful story, Jesus is mine, praising my Saviour with songs of joy; how great is His love, witness this grace, thank my Redeemer, Jesus is mine." Immediately, she felt a great sense of relief. She then understood — "the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21).

Our Lord is the merciful God: "He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will renew you in His love, He will exult over you with shouts of joy" (Zeph 3:17). When we learn to be thankful and praise Him, He will ensure that we pass our tests; when it is time, He will change the situation. As for that sister, her husband miraculously survived.

## CONCLUSION

Therefore, the sooner we are prepared to accept suffering, the better. It helps to rid us of evil and leads us to heaven. It brings glory to God and helps others and ourselves to grow spiritually. Though we suffer now for a little while, it will result in tremendous future glory. ■

Practical christian living

# RENDER TO GOD



# THE THINGS *that are* GOD'S

Some Christians still do not fully understand the true meaning of offering tithes to God. They have been taught that God is a Spirit and does not need money. While it is true that God does not need to spend money, we need to appreciate that His ministry requires funds. Christ's commission to His ministers is to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15); "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19); "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Mt 24:14). Today the Lord's ministry is of a spiritual nature — it is one of prophecy, salvation and warning. It is not directed to any single nation, rather it is a universal witness to all nations. As Christians, we have a responsibility to do our utmost to support world evangelism. We can do this by remembering the ministry in our daily prayers and by generous financial support.

To finance this powerful ministry,

*God has promised to  
open the windows of  
heaven and pour out so  
much blessing that we  
will not have enough  
room for it.*

God is using today the same approach He has used throughout the ages — His tithing system. This is God's way as it always has been. He promises great reward to those who participate in tithing. Funds received can be used for proclaiming the gospel of salvation to humanity, to make their lives meaningful and joyful in the Lord. Funds can also be channelled towards pastoral ministry, to strengthen the faith of the flock of God and to prepare them for His second coming.

Apart from manpower shortage, it is sad to hear that some countries are unable to carry out God's work of

salvation due to a lack of funds. This burden does not belong to one church or one country; rather, it is the burden of true believers everywhere for we belong to the one body of Christ Jesus. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together (1 Cor 12:26).

One of the ways to grow spiritually and to enjoy the glorious happiness of God's grace is to put your tithes and offerings — your treasure — into God's holy work. In this way true believers are laying up treasures in heaven where neither moth or rust consume and where thieves do not break in and steal (Mt 6:20). We may worry that after offering tithes, we will not have enough for our daily necessities. This is not true — God has promised to open the windows of heaven and pour out so much blessing that we will not have enough room for it. The Bible says that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). Literally, hundreds of testimonies can be cited to show that certainly God

*"From the days of your  
fathers you have turned  
aside from my statutes  
and have not kept them.*

*Return to me, and I will  
return to you, says the  
LORD of hosts.*

*But you say, 'How shall  
we return?'*

*Will man rob God?*

*Yet you are robbing me.*

*But you say,*

*'How are we robbing  
thee?'*

*In your tithes and  
offerings."*

*Mal 3:7-8*

does bless the tithe payer even in material ways. God may not always do so immediately. We may have to obey Him and exercise faith for a while. But as we serve, obey and trust Him, God will keep His part of the promise. God even challenges us to test Him. Our blessing is sure to come, and it will overflow as described in Malachi chapter 3.

It may surprise us that we can steal from God. Malachi says that we can rob God by refusing to pay tithes and offerings (Mal 3:7-8). In some cases God's holy work slows down or comes to a halt for lack of financial support.

What will happen to our churches if every one of us takes tithing seriously and offers out of our own free will? We probably will not even have to worry about balancing our yearly budgets anymore. Our churches will need someone just to take care of the finances and channel them into as many worthwhile projects as they can find. We will have to find new ways to handle the overflowing blessings.

Recently a letter was sent from the International Assembly of the True Jesus Church suggesting that all church members around the world

contribute tithes and offerings for world evangelism. As true Christians we have to do our utmost to help propagate the true gospel to the four corners of the world. We know Jesus' second coming is very near. This great commission has been entrusted to us, and we have to fulfil our obligation to the Lord. If we give tithes and offerings to God, we receive the Lord's blessings; if we do not, we are robbing God. This is one of the ways of repaying God's wonderful grace. All true Christians should render to God the things that are God's. In this way we are really the children of the Lord. ■

**JULIE WONG**  
[TORONTO, CANADA]

# Thank you

## Editor's note

*Sis Estrada's difficult encounters in life have given her not just a glimpse, but a beautiful picture of the love of God, acted out through His people. The care and concern were so genuine that they were felt by the author in a unique way. The persons that touched her life loved in a manner so consistent and personal that it felt like one single love that flowed through them. And so she addresses them in this article with a simple 'you'.*

*Her 'Thank You' is, indeed, from the bottom of her heart.*

**I**t is said that the Lord works in mysterious ways. I am inclined to believe He does. As I trace my Christian walk in the United States of America, I see how the Lord has led me into your care so that everyone of you could help me and my family grow from one year to another.

It was in 1987 when I first made your acquaintance in Northern Carolina, USA. I had begun to attend Sabbath services and my children, Felicia and Sarah, accompanied me. They were five and two, and they found sermons a trying experience and often fidgeted in their seats. And so you sat with them in the fellowship hall or out on the lawn and taught them about the Lord Jesus in a language and setting they understood and appreciated.

I could have insisted that you remained inside the chapel. After all, you had driven many miles to worship the Lord on this day of rest. But it was a new and exciting experience for me to sit in on services where English was used. Because I could finally comprehend what was being

preached from the pulpit, I could not help myself from taking advantage of your generosity. Each visit, too, was treasured because I never knew if I would be back.

My fears were confirmed in the middle of that year. Although my husband Larry shared my desire to bring up our children in the ways of the Lord, we could not agree on a church. Still when I learned that baptism would be carried out that summer, I asked if I could have Sarah baptised. Although Larry answered in the affirmative, I soon learned that I was not supposed to have taken him literally. Consequently, I lost the privilege to go to church. Larry also issued explicit instructions that I was not to have any contact with the church or have the church contact me. When he went to work on Saturdays, he sabotaged my car engine to ensure I did not make the ten-minute drive. He also telephoned from his work place to check if I was home. Meanwhile, he began looking for a church of his choice for us to attend, and he warned of repercussions

that would follow if I did not comply.

Amid the fears and anxieties of losing my home and marriage, I wrote to you for prayerful support. The Lord heard you and granted me the strength to believe in His Word that I had no need to be anxious about my life. Your prayers also gave me the courage to learn what it meant to be a "submissive wife" so that Larry would, in time, come to praise God.

During Jesus' ministry on earth, He said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." In January 1988, when Larry was hospitalised for a gallstone operation, I called you for your prayerful support. You prayed, but you also took time from your busy schedule to visit him in a dreary hospital room.

Presently, I received permission to take our children to church. Sometimes, we went every Sabbath and sometimes, we went once in a while. And sometimes, Larry went with us. Through it all, you supported us with Christian fellowship offered with Chinese food in the church and genuine friendship served over fresh-brewed coffee in your home. Furthermore, whenever you found an opportunity, you dropped by Larry's office to chat with him about his interest in computers.

Your love kept us in the palm of God's hands and on 1 January 1989, Larry was baptised. Six months later, he received the Holy Spirit.

Thus 1989 became an especially good year for us. We were spiritually elevated and we were equally elated about other aspects of our lives. We were all in relatively good health. Larry's career in a major oil packaging company was challenging and rewarding. We had also achieved our American dream of home ownership, and to top that, we were able to remain a traditional family where Larry went to work and I stayed at home to take care of our children. Our joy was complete.

But there is "a season and a time for every matter under heaven". In the summer of 1990, Larry was diagnosed with a rare form of abdominal cancer. Again

you supported us with your prayers so that the surgeon could efficiently remove a tumour "the size of a small basketball" and Larry was able to recover quickly from the surgery. He returned to work and, for about a year, was again in good health. However, over the next two years, we lived in fear of each new test. We fought the disease in any way we could and as hard as we could. We prayed and we fasted. We bargained for more time and we promised to be missionaries. At the same time, Larry also subjected himself to a series of surgery, chemotherapy and radiation. We even tried special diets. Truly, the disease was a heavy cross to bear.

But we were never alone for you carried our burden as well. You, too, fasted and prayed, more than we did or could ever do. You stayed with us as we sat and waited through each surgery to listen to the dreadful news of what was or was not inside Larry's abdomen. You went through the ordeal of donating blood so that your life-giving force would sustain Larry during the initial stages of recovery. You served him healthy meals, brought him flowers and sent him greeting cards. You took care of Felicia and Sarah and offered them your companionship. You invited me into your home so that I would have a place to rest for the night while Larry rested in his hospital bed with the assurance that I was only a short distance away. When there was a need for me to travel between my house and the hospital, you went out of your way to drive hundreds of miles to give me a ride.

Even when Larry was recuperating at home, your support did not waver. You prayed for him in church, at home and you also travelled many miles from around the San Francisco Bay area and from the Silicon Valley to come and pray with him. Again, you came bearing gifts of home-cooked meals and the taro or Asian pears he had requested. You also came to do the dishes, cut the lawn, trim the plants and pick up the litter. It was a difficult time for us, but because you never grew weary in your good works, you gave us the courage to "fight a good fight".

By the summer of 1993, we found that the cancer had

## our churches in the

spread to Larry's liver. We still hoped for a miracle, and Larry still continued the 45-minute commute to his job whenever he could. It was very hard on him and he confided that sometimes he felt like committing suicide on the road. But your prayers kept him safe. One late afternoon on his way home, he passed out at a shop where he had taken Felicia's new music book to be spiral-bound. His blood sugar had dropped and when he regained consciousness, he was thankful that he was not on the road when it happened.

From then on, Larry began to lose weight. He also had a frequent need to relieve himself. Next he developed more complications and then his kidneys stopped working altogether. By the end of September, he was simply too sick to go to work.

At that time, Larry had also exhausted all paid sick leave offered by his employer. He applied for government aid and although we were promised financial assistance, we needed to wait. When I told you that I was in trouble, you got together and raised funds so that we would not lose our home or means of living.

As Larry's health deteriorated, you continued your prayer vigils. Eventually, he was unable to attend to his personal needs. He also became incoherent. However, while his speech and train of thought were often unclear and illogical, his prayers, by contrast, were clear and distinct; and he spent much of that time pleading, "Oh Lord, forgive me."

Then one Wednesday evening, he called out in his sleep, "Lord, here I am." The next day, he stopped eating and drinking.

Even then, I still wanted a miracle. You understood my struggle and you continued to lend me your support. You stepped up your prayers, and you took turns to come by to assist me so that Larry would, in addition to being cared for by the nurses from the local hospice organisation, receive round-the-clock care.

The following Monday, 13 December 1993, Larry passed on. Although the nurses had prepared me for the

inevitable, you understood that it was not easy for me to let go of someone with whom I had spent almost half of my life. You also understood that I feared for Felicia and Sarah who would now grow up fatherless. And so you let us mourn while you got together to raise the funds to lay a dearly beloved brother to rest.

Now your responsibilities were over. If Larry was that one sheep which the Shepherd had been looking for, you had found him and had brought him safely home to the Shepherd.

But you did not think that way. Instead, you took upon yourselves to make me and my children a part of your lives. You knew there were assurances of financial compensations. I was to claim on Larry's two small life insurance policies, draw upon Larry's company pension, and look forward to his monthly social security cheques until each child completed high school. Nonetheless, you understood that I had many reasons to be anxious about the future. You understood that I was anxious about successfully carrying out Larry's wish to "take care of the children", specifically to feed, clothe, shelter and educate them. You saw too, that I was anxious about them losing their medical and dental coverage. You knew that I was anxious about fulfilling Larry's wish that I keep the mini van which he had purchased six months earlier. Then there were the medical and other incidental bills that Larry and I had accumulated over the last few years. I also needed to repair the termite damage to the roof and bathrooms of our house. My list seemed endless.

But you did more than just tell me you understood my anxieties. You got together and informally set up an Estrada Fund to give me a helping hand.

But I cringed at the thought of a handout. I was mad and sad. I wanted to brush off your helping hand and march out of your lives.

But you waited patiently for me to calm down. I was not easy to please, but you let me know that I was not alone. You came to offer a listening ear. You helped me move the furniture around to accommodate our new

lifestyle. You got Larry's computer running again after the hard drive crashed. You took Felicia and Sarah out for fun and play and to attend church services when I insisted that I needed a sabbatical.

Sometimes you did astounding acts like the time you visited from Germany. There was a spiritual convocation and the children had agreed that we would make a thanksgiving offering of the two hundred dollar gift that had come from the Estrada Fund that month. Before we went home, you gave Sarah an envelope with the instruction that she only give it to me when we got home. When we arrived and opened the envelope, Sarah exclaimed, "You got it back!"

Then another time, you wrote to me from Southern California. You were sick and bedridden, yet you made the effort to write and ask me to take the children shopping with the gift you had enclosed.

Meanwhile, I began to build a career for myself by going to a community college. On the day that I walked into the counsellor's office, I told her that I must find a real job so I could pay into the social security system to ensure that I would receive adequate benefits in my old age. She looked at me and asked what I wanted to do.

"Write," I replied in between sniffles. Indeed, I had wanted to write ever since I was twelve. In fact, I had begun to work toward my dream by taking a writing course for children and teenagers soon after Sarah was born. I had also tried to practise my chosen craft, and in the years following the course, I had, on a few occasions, seen my writing appear in local newspapers.

I also threw myself into the role of a 90's single mum. I returned to school and I got a job. I tried to fit my new schedule into the children's, but mostly I fitted the children into mine. We zipped in and out of the house, and if they were not in school, I dropped them off at a child care or the neighbour's. Very soon Felicia's grade point average and Sarah's test scores began to drop. I, on the other hand, maintained a perfect grade point average. I also loved my job.

Unfortunately, I noticed that I was developing a multiple personality. My job was to work with English students to improve their reading and writing assignments. When some students remarked that I worked with a smile, I squirmed inside my conscience, ashamed that my children saw very few smiles at home. Soon, I saw other mixed messages I was sending to Felicia and Sarah. One stood out in particular. I saw that while I was teaching them about putting their faith in God, I was putting mine in the social security system.

But the Lord moved you to give me a sense of direction. You were putting together a monthly newsletter called the Messenger, and you assigned me to write five-hundred-word articles on a rotation basis. I tried. You also introduced me to the editors from Living Water and Manna. Although the former is based in the east coast, and the latter in Singapore, you worked together to help me find my voice and learn how I could serve the Lord.

A year has passed since the first assignment. During this time, I have been unsure of this new path I was taking, but you assured me that it was a good one. Nevertheless, you also understood that I am not without struggle as I try to serve the God of my forefathers and you comforted me that as surely as the Lord sustained the widow at Zarephath in her hour of need, He will be as merciful.

My Christian walk began in 1984 when I came across a New King James Version of the English Bible in this country. It became a window through which I could take a peek at the ways of the Lord Jesus. He saw my curiosity and He led me to you. Jesus knew that you would make the Bible come alive for me, and you have consistently shown Him over the last ten years that He was right.

I thank everyone of you for all your good works. May the Lord Jesus reward you with His abundant grace. ■

SUSAN ESTRADA  
[PITTSBURG, USA]

# our churches in the PHILIPPINES



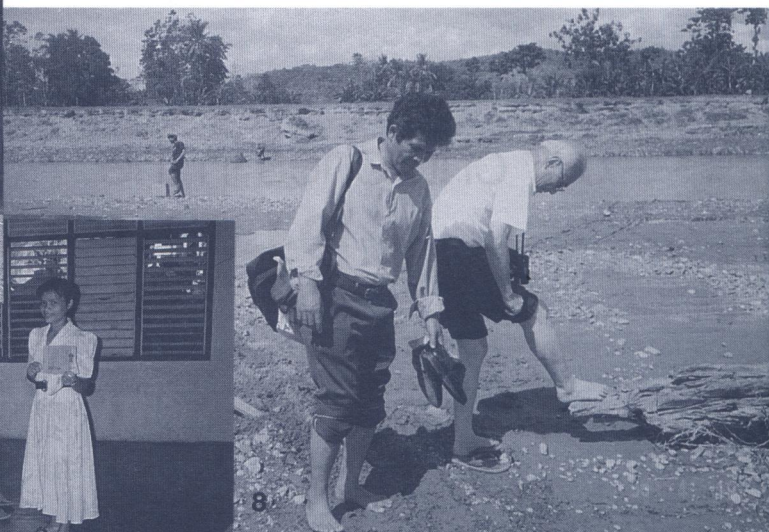
- 1 Quezon: The income from the plying of the "Jeepney" is used to pay for two workers' living allowance
- 2 Church in Quezon
- 3&4 Mansilingan: the first church in the Philippines
- 5 Church in Pagadian

## historical background

During his theological training at the United Pentecostal Church (UPC) headquarters in Manila, a young pastor from Mansilingan, Bacolod in the Philippines, stumbled upon a dust-covered parcel in a corner of the library. Out of curiosity, he opened the parcel and found that it contained the Words of Life pamphlets published by the International Assembly (IA) of the True Jesus Church. When he read the pamphlets and found they contained biblical truth, he began to distribute them to his family and church members of as well as fellow ministers of the UPC. A group of them later made contact with the English

Literature Evangelical Centre in Singapore where the pamphlets were published and requested the centre in Singapore to send missionaries to the Philippines. IA responded to their request and in June 1983, sent Dn John Chin and Pr Chin Mun Loong to visit them. And thus, our church in the Philippines was established.

The Spirit of God continues to work over the years, and during this period, the IA, and later the Southeast Asia Evangelical Centre (SEAEC), have sent a number of full-time ministers to evangelise and to pastor the congregation. ►



6&7 Church in Pagadian  
8 Knee-deep river  
crossing to Lingatan  
9 Prayer house in  
Bokong

## present situation

The Lord has guided the church in the Philippines in these past 14 years. By His grace, we now have some 715 brethren situated at the following locations:—

1. Present situation : Place		Members
I. Church :	1. Mansilingan	100
	2. Pagadian	176
	3. Raw-An (Lanao)	66
	4. Maculay	74
	5. Manila	54
II. Prayer House	1. Condunggon	16
	2. Emelda	24
	3. Bayod	27
	4. Tabina	32
	5. Laperian	38
	6. Lingatan	34
	7. Santa Babara	47
	8. Tukuran	9
	9. Aurora	10
	10. Bokong	8
Total		715

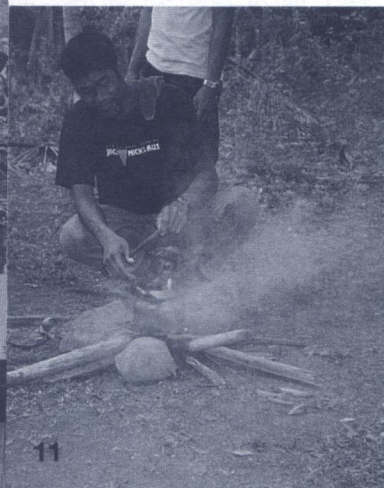
## fostership by the general assembly (GA) of sabah, malaysia

Through God's wonderful arrangement, the GA of Sabah has been given the opportunity to look after the church in the Philippines. Charged with this important mission, we need voluntary workers to help conduct seminars for religious education teachers as well as assist in spiritual convocations and evangelistic meetings. Financial assistance is badly needed in the construction of churches, religious education classrooms and training centres, in supporting the full-time workers and in providing education and welfare for the needy. The GA plans to evangelise and pastor the churches

There are currently four full-time workers in the Philippines.



- 10 Crossing the stream to the deeper end for baptism in Maculay
- 11 Maculay: Preparing to boil raisins for the Cup
- 12 Members from Maculay



through:— maintaining the present 20-minute radio program from the Radio Mindanao station; preparing and distributing more gospel tracts in the local dialects; increasing the frequency of pastoral visits from two to four visits from 1997 onwards; conducting short term theological training courses to train more local workers; and building a training centre complete with modern facilities such as classrooms and living quarters, kitchen, lavatories, bathrooms, at an estimated cost of RM200,000 (US\$80,000) inclusive of land purchase, by the year 1999. To implement the above plans successfully for the glory of God, we cordially request your prayers, and invite you to join us as voluntary workers to participate in this challenging task of evangelising and pastoring in the Philippines.

## contributions

Brothers and sisters who wish to volunteer their services and participate in the Philippine ministry can respond to IA's letter of 24 November 1996 which calls for voluntary

workers. Alternatively, they can also write directly to the GA (Sabah), at the address below.

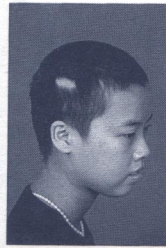
If you wish to contribute financially, please issue your

bank draft/cheque/postal order in favour of "General Assembly True Jesus Church Sabah", specifying that it is for the Philippines ministry, and forward it to the address below.

You may also wish to remit the funds directly by way of telegraphic transfer to:

**Account Holder** General Assembly True Jesus Church Sabah  
**Account Number** 392-019964-001  
**Bank** Hong Kong Bank Malaysia Bhd  
 Kota Kinabalu Branch, Malaysia

**Address** General Assembly of the True Jesus Church, Sabah  
 PO Box 10510  
 88805 Kota Kinabalu  
 Sabah, Malaysia



## HEALED FROM A MALIGNANT BRAIN TUMOUR!

I was raised in a Christian family from the True Jesus Church. Presently I am 21 years old and live in a provincial town of Fuzhou, China.

My sickness began in January 1996 with headaches which I mistook for symptoms of flu. However, as the pain became more acute, I went for a CT scan at the local City Hospital on 22 April. The results revealed a 2 x 2.5cm tumour. On 29 April, I was admitted to the General Hospital of the Nanjing Military Sector in Fuzhou for a 1.5T

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) which showed a 4 x 2.5cm tumour located at the central part of the brain. It was at the terminal stage of malignancy, and surgery was not possible. The only alternative was laser therapy, but the high cost (tens of thousands Renminbi) and the possible side effects, which included brain damage, deterred us from continuing the treatment after two futile sessions.

My condition worsened by the day. The increased swelling of the tumour pressed against some nerves, causing me to lapse into periods of unconsciousness. During the first half of May, these occurred once or twice a day, each time lasting for about 30 minutes. On 20 and 21 May, the frequency increased to more than ten times. On 22 May, I was unconscious most of the day. During the brief periods of consciousness, I was gripped by such

*“During the brief periods of consciousness, I was gripped by such excruciating pain that I kept screaming and wishing that I could just hack my head off and die.”*

excruciating pain that I kept screaming and wishing that I could just hack my head off and die. To relieve my agony, the doctors had operated twice on me (5 and 9 May) to drain out the fluid which had accumulated in my brain. What came out was bloody and purulent, filling a few small containers. The best doctors in that hospital could do nothing to cure me. I was contemplating a transfer to another hospital but a doctorate holder and authority in the specialist field of brain tumours told me that I was suffering from the worst of three incurable

pathological conditions in medical science. Moreover, the tumour was so precariously positioned that no medical technology in the world could help. Even if I were to transfer to another hospital for surgery, at best I would end up a living vegetable. “If this hospital cannot do anything,” he said, “it will be worse elsewhere.” So I decided to go home and rely totally on the Lord. When we came to a dead end, God began His work.

On 23 May, I returned home. The doctors feared that the tedious journey might put me in danger. They specially arranged for oxygen tanks to be taken along. Also, my family prepared for the worst. However, under God’s protection and care, during the journey, I experienced none of the half-hourly bouts of pain leading to unconsciousness. I felt very little pain. My family realised

that there was no cure the medical science could offer me; only by relying totally on God Almighty could we have a ray of hope. The entire family fasted and prayed. At the same time, incessant prayers were offered by many churches for me. Many brethren came to visit and prayed with me for the mercy of God.

On 24 May, at midnight, I felt someone telling me I had only four days to live, and I became frantic. This was the devil's work. On 25 May (Sabbath day), many believers were praying for me at noon when the devil appeared. He announced that he had come from Xiamen to disturb me because I had given him an opportunity through my love of the world and my weak faith. After much earnest prayer, we drove Satan away and I felt much relieved. At 2:00 pm the same day, we started praying earnestly again, and I was filled with the Holy Spirit and said, "The Lord will operate on me." At that moment I felt the tissue around the tumour being removed.

The next day, 26 May, at about 7:30 pm, the grace of the Lord came upon me. Everyone in the house had gone to church except my mother and I. I was lying in bed praying, when suddenly, a shock wave ran through my head, leaving it numbed, as if an electric current had run through it. I thought it was another seizure, and that the Lord was taking me home. So I shouted, "M-o-m, pray! Quick!" Suddenly I felt something which reminded me of being given anaesthesia. At this thought, my entire body became anaesthetised, from head to toe. Only my mouth could manage some hymns. Half an hour later, I was filled with the Spirit in prayer, and felt a force opening up my clasped hands and placing a soft round object in my palm. After that, I clasped my hands tighter, but the force opened up my hands again. This happened a total of four times. On the last time, I even tossed the object in my hand lightly a few times. Great comfort and joy swept over me.

*"Deep in my heart I  
knew that the Lord  
had sent His angels to  
perform surgery on  
me. Oh what joy I  
felt! I laughed and  
sang loudly, praising  
Jesus for His glorious  
work on me."*

It was past 8:00 pm, and I was still praying as the people returned from church. As they were about 50 metres away from my house, they heard the sound of many people praying in my room. My relatives thought that something untoward had happened to me. They rushed in but were amazed to see only my mother and me. Actually, a host of angels had been praying for me, and operating on me. They even placed the excised tumour in my palm to make this experience more vivid. On 28 May,

I could sit up by myself on the bed (hitherto I had to be supported by others) and even get down to walk. Deep in my heart I knew that the Lord had sent His angels to perform surgery on me. Oh what joy I felt! I laughed and sang loudly, praising Jesus for His glorious work on me. It was then that my mother discovered a surgical scar on the right side of my skull, shaped like an olive. This was the exact position the doctors had intended to make the surgical incision. The angelic surgeons had left this mark on me as a testimony for the Lord. Before my sickness I had a full head of beautiful hair. At Fuzhou Hospital, I was totally shaven. Now that my hair has started to grow, it contrasts with the whitish scar on my

head, attesting to the greatness of God's grace.

I can now eat and drink normally, and attend Sabbath services. Not only can I walk normally, I can even stand for an hour to testify in church. This is how the Lord personally healed me of a brain tumour. I will lift up my voice to praise Jesus, for only He is my greatest trust, and only He is able to heal me.

O Lord, You are the Almighty and Sovereign. I will follow You and bear witness for You all the days of my life. To You I pledge my faithful service and resolution to proclaim Your gospel. May all glory be given to God in heaven. Hallelujah, Amen! ■

SISTER FROM FUZHOU CHINA

# STEPHANE'S TESTIMONY

In the name of the Lord Jesus, I testify on how I found the true faith. First let me introduce myself; my name is Stephane. I am from the True Jesus Church in Paris. I have just completed my studies and am currently finishing my national service. During my studies, I met Soung Tran, who later became my best friend. When we did our last year of studies in Southern France, we did not seriously talk about religion. However, after I left France for England for six months, Soung attended church services regularly at the True Jesus Church in Paris because his mother was a member there. Soung told me that this church was a haven of peace for him particularly because of the love of the brothers and sisters there. When I returned to France, Soung then informed me that he had received the Holy Spirit which he described as a waterfall which pours down into your body, adding, "It is according to the Bible. You should come!" I trusted him, but nevertheless I became more and more anxious as the weeks passed. I wanted to check if he was in danger or had joined a sect.

In November 1995 when I first visited the True Jesus Church, I started looking for some ostentatious symbols (typical of cults), but I only saw the white wall. I checked if the church was greedy for money. I noticed no collection. I looked for the "guru", and I saw Preacher Y M Yang hiding humbly behind the Bible. I listened to the sermon and found it very serious and interesting, but I could not

concentrate during the prayer because of the noise. So I decided to attend services for three times to get a better idea. I thought that Jesus could be the God whom I had believed. (I believed in God already, but I did not know if He were Jesus.) I knew that a life without God was meaningless. In addition, I had had this feeling of being

tested by God, and sometimes I would speak alone, saying, "Angels, I know you are watching me." I had always felt that life was a learning process through the many tests and choices given by God. However, religious fanaticism, ostentatious ceremonies, collections during funerals and murders committed using the name of God had discredited Christianity in my eyes.

When I attended service the second time, I felt good in my prayer, and experienced a form of energy on my face. I saw lights and my head was flushed. I thought they had put a magnetic generator in the wall! But later, when I prayed in the air base, I still had the same sensation!

Then I thought that maybe the Bible does contain the words of God. I wanted to know this for sure so I accepted Mt 7:7, "Seek and you will find; knock, and it would be opened". I started to pray and read the Bible.

After several weeks, I was still weak in faith and prayed to God to help me. One day, as I was at my desk and putting my hands to the front of my eyes, I had a clear vision. I saw a huge geometrical figure like a beautiful net

*"I thought that Jesus could be the God whom I had believed. I knew that a life without God was meaningless."*

*"I then understood that the vision of the golden foot is a visual representation of God's message: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'"*

and a sky with thousands of blue stars, a big green star, a white star and a fiery cross turning around on its axis. I did not realise it then but understood later that the fire symbolised the Holy Spirit. That day, I felt a warm sensation on top of my head. In fact, I had this feeling each time I thought about Jesus. I still saw the lights during my prayers. In March 1996, I was baptised with Soung and a sister from Germany.

I began to preach to many people around me, but it did not seem effective. After pondering, I realised it was because I still had not received the Holy Spirit and was not a witness of Jesus. So I repented and stopped preaching. And I had another vision. I saw a golden foot, but I did not understand the message. One week after I stopped preaching, during the Sabbath, I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit at home. I then understood that the vision of the golden foot was a visual representation of God's message: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" Therefore, we should not hesitate to preach as long as we have the truth! I took up personal evangelism again and as my friends in the army began to express interest, I felt God using me. He was opening the hearts of people! One friend asked me to pray with him.

He could feel the movement of the Holy Spirit, and now he often cries in his prayers. Later we had five people from the air base joining us for Bible study and prayer. Two have already accepted the faith.

I really thank God for all He has given me since I was born and for having opened His door of salvation to me.

In France, we have only one church which is located in Paris, with only fifty-five members. The True Jesus Church *must* save more souls. Please remember all the churches in your prayers so that we may become fishers of men. May God send more reapers.

To the only wise God be glory forever more through Jesus Christ. Amen! ■

STEPHANE PELARD - GUILLAUME  
[PARIS, FRANCE]

# THE STAR

## THAT BROUGHT ME TO THE TRUE JESUS CHURCH

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**M**y name is Lim Sook Imm. I was born in 1959 and grew up in a devout Taoist family where memories of my early childhood comprised episodes of religious worship and devotion. Here is an account of how I came to believe in the Lord.

One day when I was still in primary school, my teacher told us a story of a man called Jesus who lived long ago in the city of Bethlehem. He performed many signs and miracles, and healed many who were sick, including the lame, paralytics and even the demon-possessed. However, some of His compatriots did not like Him. So they crucified Him to death on the cross.

I listened to the story attentively. It was the first time I had ever heard such a story. When I heard that He was put to death, somehow I had sympathy for Him. On that very night I had a dream. I saw a kind-looking man in a brown robe standing on the clouds. His head was swathed in a piece of cloth and with a staff in His hand, He slowly descended from the air. I fell on my knees and looked at

*“I fell on my knees  
and looked at Him  
intently. The man  
said to me, ‘I am  
Jesus. You must  
believe Me.’”*

Him intently. The man said to me, “I am Jesus. You must believe Me. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it” (Jn 14:14). After this, I woke up from the dream but kept this message in my heart.

My father was the sole breadwinner in a family comprising ten children, my mother and grandmother. I was the eighth child. The stress of life often led to quarrels between my parents. I still recalled how, on one occasion, in a heated argument, my father smashed a rice jar to vent his anger. Seeing the whole place strewn with rice, I quickly collected the rice with my bare hands

and put it into a basin. I was afraid that I would have no food to eat. I saw for myself how my parents suffered hardships despite their piety towards the idols. My mother was so devoted to her deities, yet she did not receive even the most basic of protection from them. I resolved that I would not worship these idols placed in the house. Instead, I would go to pray to Jesus to protect my family.

When I was 15, one of my classmates invited me to the True Jesus Church. I mistakenly thought that I was going for free tuition in the church, so I sought permission from my parents on this basis and they consented. But even after I realised there was not going to be any free tuition, I was still delighted with the invitation. After all this time, at last, I would have a chance to know more about Jesus whom I had dreamt about, the Jesus my former teacher had talked about. So I joined my friend for a Sabbath service at the True Jesus Church in 1974. Being a total stranger, I could only observe. But I heard the prayers of the

congregation which sounded like many waters, just as described in the Bible (Rev 19:6). I attended services for 15 months, during which I learnt about the basic beliefs of the True Jesus Church. From the Bible I also came to know that — (i) Jesus was the Word who became flesh and He died on the cross for the remission of the sins of mankind. He resurrected on the third day and ascended to heaven. He is the only Saviour of mankind, God of the universe and the one true God (Jn 1:14; Mt 20:28; Jn 20:1-8; Lk 2:8-11); (ii) water baptism is a sacrament for the remission of sins (Jn 3:5; Acts 2:38); and (iii) to believe in Jesus is to fear God and love man (Mt 22:34-40).

Attending church services brought me many benefits, but I also met with trials and temptations. Believing in Jesus was considered a violation of family order by many of my family members. The love of my grandmother, the tears of my mother, the severity of my father and the rebuke of my siblings became a powerful force to oppose my decision to believe in the Lord. Faced with such formidable opposition, I began to waver. One night I decided to pray to God for guidance. Lord, which direction should I take? Then I had a dream. This time, I saw a bright star from my backyard. Fascinated, I wanted to pick it. I went towards the star but it suddenly moved — going from my backyard to the main road, passing many places until finally stopping before the True Jesus Church in Telok Kurau! There, the

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star shone even brighter, so much so that I could not open my eyes.

Finally, I found myself in the church hall before I woke up. This reminded me of the event of Jesus' birth, when wise men followed the star from the East until it came to rest over the place where the child Jesus was (Mt 2:1-12).

In spite of the differences in time and circumstance between me and the wise men, I am truly convinced that the Lord Jesus had listened to my prayers and shown me the direction to take.

By His grace, I was baptised into the Lord in December 1975. ■

LIM SOOK IMM  
[SINGAPORE]

**exhortations**

**bible study**

THIS PAGE COULD HAVE BEEN FILLED BY YOU FOR HIS NAME

**doctrine**

**practical living**

**testimonies**

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THE END OF THE MATTER;  
ALL HAS BEEN HEARD.  
FEAR GOD, AND KEEP HIS  
COMMANDMENTS; FOR THIS IS  
THE WHOLE DUTY OF MAN.

ECCL 12:13

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have. His objective is to make our lives so miserable that we leave God. From the sufferings of Job, we see how Satan can afflict a child of God. But it is only with the permission of God. If we remain on God's side, we shall ultimately see the blessings of God — the fruits of our suffering.

### God's training

Suffering trains us to rely on God's strength. It is only when we feel weak that we will turn to God, and learn to lean on Him. Thus, it is in our weakness that we can manifest God's power and grace (2 Cor 12:7-10). God wants us to serve Him effectively, and He trains us through suffering so that we are purified from the ignoble, becoming a vessel for noble use, consecrated and useful in His house. He also wants us to know Him even better, to experience Him and to be spiritually mature. To achieve this, He needs to put us into the

"furnace" to refine us. Prov 17:3 says, "The crucible (refining pot) is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the Lord tries hearts." Joseph's slavery and the injustice he suffered in Egypt were all part of God's will. Later, he rose to become a man of high position in Egypt. Truly, his past sufferings had been transformed into future glory.

Irrespective of the type of suffering we undergo, if it is from the Lord or if the Lord allows it, then it is part of His wonderful plan. We pray that God will enlighten us so that in the midst of sufferings, we can still say with conviction, "we know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28). The Lord has promised that if we suffer together with Him, we shall also receive glory with Him. Through our suffering, God makes us acceptable for His kingdom.

## BENEFITS OF SUFFERING

### Perfection

The Lord Jesus left us a good example in the matter of suffering: "For it was fitting that He, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering" (Heb 2:10). In other words, His perfection was revealed through suffering. If we seek to be perfect, we too should undergo the purging

fire of suffering. Ordinary people are prone to love and enjoyment but adverse to suffering. Yet, a person who has triumphantly passed through "the valley of the shadow of death" becomes a better, stronger person — mentally and spiritually. As he has received the Lord's strength in the dark moments of his life, he becomes more appreciative of the Lord's love for him. Looking back, he

understands suffering as God's way of re-shaping him to become more pleasing in His sight, to come a step closer to perfection. Therefore, when we are suffering, we ought to pray: "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead in the way everlasting" (Ps 139:23-24).

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psalmist stresses the importance of reaching this realisation, by comparing our days to only a few handbreadths, to a mere breath (Ps 39:5).

As Christians, we are not afraid to die, nor do we wish to die, but we have to understand death. This is because we can only live life on earth once; we cannot put the clock back. Moreover, we do not know how many days we have ahead of us. James remarked on a foolish man who boasted of many plans, not knowing that death could call on him the very next day (Jas 4:13-15). This is why we have to realise the purpose of our life on earth. Why are we here? What are we waiting for? Where are we striving towards? As Christians, are we running towards the crown of righteousness that awaits us, or are we still wasting our time?

Many of us struggle and toil in this life, busy with many things and tied down by many commitments. But are our toil and labour really that necessary? Look at the buzzing bees that collect nectar from flower to flower to make combs of honey only to have these combs taken by men. Consider too the forward-thinking squirrels that diligently collect fruits in the summer to prepare for the cold winter,

not realising that these fruits may rot, and they may just succumb to the deadly cold. We claim we are the most superior of God's creatures, yet are we not leading lives just like these bees and squirrels? We labour to prepare for our future, never contented with what we have. When we possess one dollar, we wish to have a few extra, "just to be on the safe side". With this mindset, even when we have accumulated thousands, we will still be striving for more, "just in case"! We will be caught up in this vicious cycle, endlessly pursuing more, until the day we die and leave this world empty-handed. Material wealth may promote physical comfort, but it cannot secure an endless life. This is why Jesus reminds us not to be anxious about our food and drink; after all, man does not live by bread alone.

So what should be the purpose of our life? Paul tells us it is "to gain Christ". With this goal in mind, he was able to forget what lay behind and strive forward to what was ahead (Phil 3:8,13). We are Christians, just like Paul, but are we able to boldly claim that we are living a life that seeks to gain Christ? Also, the psalmist reveals that "his hope is in God". Today, where have we placed our hope? In our stocks and shares, our unit trusts and other secular investments? Or on Christ? As the year comes to a close, let us search our hearts and find our answers. Let us resolve to cherish the time we have and use it to strive towards the kingdom of God.

### **Repent of our past misdeeds**

If in the past year we have submitted to our indulgences and failed to live up to the standards expected of God's children, now is the time for repentance. Elder Peter warns us that we ought not live a life of evil desires.

**So what should be the purpose in our life? Paul tells us it is “to gain Christ.” With this goal in mind, he was able to forget what lay behind and strive forward to what was ahead.**

Rather, we have to be clear-minded, self-controlled and prayerful. The end of all things is near, and on that day, we will be judged according to our deeds on earth.

In other words, God gives us the freedom to do whatever we want, but this also means that we are accountable for our actions. We have to overcome our evil desires, exercise self-control and resolve not to repeat the mistake. We note Jesus' comment when He forgave the adulterous woman, “do not sin again” (Jn 8:11).

But the above is often easier said than done. To ensure that we will not sin again, we need to be equipped with spiritual qualities. As humans, we have lusts which can be aroused. When this happens, we have to subdue them immediately, before we are enticed, and tempted to commit sin (Jas 1:14-15). To do this, we require spiritual discipline to control our thoughts and overcome temptations.

The Lord instructed the house of Israel, “cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against Me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die? ..., O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of any one, says the Lord God; so

turn (i.e. repent) and live” (Eze 18:31-32). We who are of the spiritual house of Israel, let us take heed of this message too and resolve to let our past transgressions remain in the past. In the new year, let us repent, change for the better and start anew.

### **Make amends**

We may have done much in our life. But there are still many things which we have failed to do.

If we are students, we may not have been diligent in our studies. In this past year, perhaps we have played truant and have not been attentive in class. Consequently our grades suffered. We fail to realise that the lack of proper academic qualifications will not get us very far in life. By the time we realise it, it will be too late. Thus in the new year, we ought to study diligently.

If we are in our twenties, finding a life partner may be uppermost in our minds. To this end, we set high standards, and have many “selection criteria”. We would like the person to be educated, good-looking, with good career prospects, the list continues. Unfortunately, we fail to realise that the main criteria should be to marry within the Lord so that our spouse can be our companion in our journey of faith and a helper in our service to the Lord. We must have the correct attitude and understand the biblical concepts of marriage. In the new year, let us examine our hearts.

In the matter of filial piety, where do we stand? In this hectic 20th century, neglecting parents is common. We are always so busy, we lament. How can we be expected to spend time with our parents? Besides, they can be so absent-minded at times, asking us the same things over and over again. And our mothers nag and still treat us like