

MANNA

ISSUE 59 | April–June 2009 | **Technology and Entertainment**

Striving for a Perfect Faith • Together in Heaven
Worship and Devotion in the 21st Century

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

Dear Reader,

As an international magazine, Manna strives to include the experiences and perspectives of members all over the world. It is both informative and interesting to read about the different cultural and social issues we face and how we resolve them while adhering to biblical principles.

In this issue, members from the US, UK, and Asia wrote about their unique experiences in learning how to live according to God's will. A common theme running throughout this issue reminds us that we will always encounter difficulties and obstacles in our lives, but we can overcome them through our faith.

Sometimes our problems are of the “that's life” variety, while at other times they may be a direct result of the conflict between our faith and the world around us. No matter the source, no matter the place, God is always there to guide our way.

THE EDITOR

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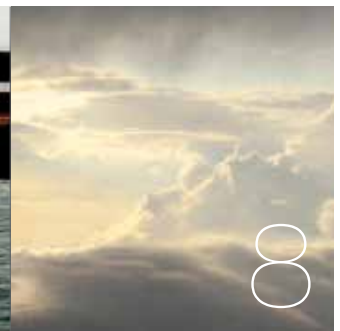
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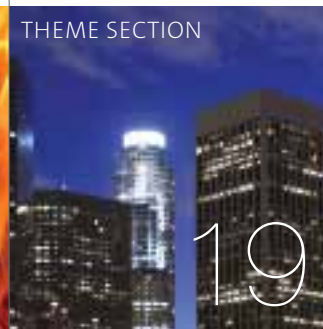
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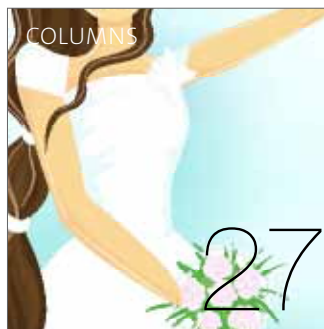
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Together in Heaven

Lemuel Leong—Sabah, Malaysia

*Precious in the sight of the LORD
Is the death of His saints. (Ps 116:15)*

At 5:00 am on June 21, 2007, Masneh Singkui was admitted to the emergency ward, unconscious and in critical condition. The brothers and sisters by his side immediately contacted other members to pray for him.

That night, Masneh was transferred to Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Kota Kinabalu, where doctors confirmed that he was brain dead due to excessive brain hemorrhaging.

Concerned members throughout Sabah and West Malaysia offered fervent prayers of intercession, and some even fasted and prayed for God to show mercy on Masneh.

However, on June 23, a Sabbath day, he returned to the arms of the Lord. The grief at his passing was deeply felt by members and relatives alike. Yet, in our sorrow, we accepted that his death was according to God's will.

GOD'S ABUNDANT GRACE

Masneh was born in September 1978, and was diagnosed with a hole in his heart just nine months later. He received monthly treatments until he turned twelve years old.

For most people, dealing with this condition and the constant treatments would have probably affected their growth and limited their everyday activities, but it was not so for Masneh. He was a dynamic person and diligent worker.

However, after undergoing an appendectomy in January 1999, doctors discovered that the right valve in his heart was badly damaged. It was so severe that doctors predicted that without immediate treatment he would only live for five more years.

In May 2001, Masneh traveled to the National Heart Institute for surgery to replace the damaged valve. During the journey, he decided that if the operation was successful, he would dedicate his life to serving the Lord.

The surgery was a success and he recovered well from it. But in November 2002, he was admitted to the hospital. He was on warfarin, a blood-thinning medication, because of the heart valve transplant, but the amount he was taking was too strong and had caused an overdose.

Doctors warned that he might never be able to walk again because the nerves in his feet had ruptured as a result of the overdose. Yet, by the grace of God, he recovered within two weeks—he had no problems walking and was back to normal.

SERVING THE LORD

Masneh's promise to serve God was fulfilled when he became a full-time religious education teacher in 2002. He was appointed as a full-time teacher by the General Assembly, serving in the areas of greatest need in Sabah.

Apart from teaching, he trained other teachers, established religious education

classes, and assisted in preaching and pastoring. Living and serving God in Telupid and Penangah was difficult because of their isolated locations, but Masneh's faithful spirit and strong character were gifts from God that helped him overcome such challenges and difficulties.

In 2004, Masneh became a theological student, and the three-year program gave him many opportunities to serve the Lord and visit the churches throughout Sabah.

In June 2007, he was assigned to practical training in Bingkor with Pr. Seraya. Although he had a fever and muscle pain, Masneh did not want to postpone the trip. He followed the itinerary and stayed in Bingkor from June 2 to 16. He returned to his home on the 16th to attend to other matters and traveled back to Bingkor two days later.

He delivered a sermon at the evening service on the 20th despite being noticeably unwell, declining Pr. Seraya's offer to substitute for him. They went to bed at midnight, but at 3 am Pr. Seraya woke up and saw Masneh tying a blanket around his head to relieve the pain. After they prayed together, Masneh took some painkillers, but instead of getting better, he began to retch continuously.

He became very weak, so Pr. Seraya decided to send him to the hospital. By the time a member was able to come and help bring him to the hospital, he had already slipped into a coma.

COMFORT IN THE LORD

Even though it was difficult for everyone to come to terms with his sudden passing, our merciful Father gave members visions and dreams that brought hope and comfort to everyone.

Vision One

Lourence, Masneh's older sister, had a dream in mid-June. She saw Masneh and Pr. Seraya standing at the top of a mountain with a group of people dressed in white shirts and black pants. Some

were standing and some were sitting, as if posing for photographs.

Suddenly she heard a voice say, "Brother Masneh has to rest for a while because he is in extreme pain and his body is exhausted from work." She could not tell who said these words, but the dream ended and she woke up. She pondered the word "rest" and became worried that it meant death, so she knelt down and prayed before going back to sleep.

A few days later, when she heard that Masneh was admitted to the hospital, she immediately thought of the dream. When he passed away, she understood that the dream had been God's way of telling her what would happen.

Vision Two

During a special prayer session for Masneh at Tinuhan Church on June 21, a sister saw a vision. In the vision, a group of church members visited Masneh at the hospital. He was lying down, covered with a blanket.

After the visitors stopped praying, she saw Masneh's spirit come out of his body, wearing a long white robe and with a white cloth tied around his head. He was smiling and looking around.

She was filled with sorrow and heard a voice say, "I am going to take him." The vision ended and she continued praying. She prayed that God's will would be done but that He would bring comfort to Masneh's fiancée.

Vision Three

During the prayer after the evening service on June 22 at Tinuhan Church, a sister saw a vision. Masneh was wearing a long white robe and his head was tied with a white cloth. He was sitting on a square cushion with twenty people sitting on the ground around him. Masneh was slowly lifted up to the sky, smiling and waving his hands as he went.

The sister believed that this vision meant the Lord would call Masneh home.

Vision Four

A special service was held at Masneh's home in the afternoon of June 23. During the concluding prayer, a sister saw a vision. She saw people walking up to a high place that was shrouded in clouds and mist. They were all dressed in long white robes and appeared to be on their way to a wedding. She saw Masneh dressed in a suit, as if he were the groom. His face was radiant and joyful.

She was comforted by this vision because it convinced her that Masneh was in the most beautiful place.

WAITING FOR US IN HEAVEN

From a human perspective, Masneh's passing ended a life still in its prime and left many loved ones to deal with his premature death. However, we accept the will of God with faith and thankfulness, for His will is good, pleasing, and perfect (Rom 12:2).

Further, we can find comfort in Revelation 14:13:


"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on....that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

Masneh's health would not have permitted him to continue serving the Lord as he was enduring a lot of pain. He accomplished the work that God entrusted to him and is reaping the fruit of his labor. Great is his reward in heaven.

God's grace is abundant; the love that He showed to Masneh assures us of how He loves everyone in his family. We no longer have Masneh with us, but we did not lose him—he just went ahead of us and is waiting for us in heaven.

We can all find hope and strength from the visions that were seen of his joy at being called back home.

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Rom 15:13) ★



Finding Hope and a Purpose

Wun-Chiao Cheung—Queens, New York, USA

NEVER HAPPY

Before I came to know Jesus Christ, I was a typical teenager. I went to school every day and hung out with my friends after school. I cursed, gossiped, told a lot of lies, and more. I was a very wild and active person.

But because my family was very strict, I wasn't allowed to do many things that my peers were doing. I lied so that my parents wouldn't find out that I had disobeyed them. After telling one lie, I would have to tell more lies to cover previous lies.

My family had a lot of problems, and one of the worst was my parents' fighting. They constantly argued. Because this was the environment I grew up in, I was never really happy.

Another reason why I wasn't happy was because I felt that I was the only child who wasn't loved.

In traditional Chinese families like mine, sons are favored over daughters, and this is especially true for a firstborn son.

So between my older brother and me, I always felt slighted. Since my sister was the youngest child, she was always taken care of and protected.

As the middle child, I always ended up taking care of chores and other household matters while bearing the brunt of my parents' frustrations. I started to believe that my parents hated me and that they took care of me because it was their responsibility and not because they loved me.

I didn't believe in God because I felt so much suffering, sadness, and depression because of the fighting and unhappiness in my family. I often took refuge in the bathroom because that was the only place where I could cry. I would just look at myself in the mirror and shed tears.

When I was in high school, I was so depressed one day that I thought about committing suicide. I was crying nonstop in the bathroom and thought that, since my life was miserable and every day was

just the same as the previous day, I should just end things right away.

But I didn't go through with it because I worried that I would have to go to the hospital if my attempt failed. I didn't want that to happen so I just went on with life because there wasn't anything I could do to change it.

A PLACE I COULD BELONG TO

In the summer of 2002, my cousins from New Jersey came with their parents for a visit the way they had done every year. But this time, they started to preach to us.

Our family followed traditional ancestral worship, but my cousins had recently been introduced to the True Jesus Church. They told my sister and me that we should believe in God because He's great. But every time they preached to us we would say, "No."

As a Gentile, I just couldn't believe the words they preached. I was a teenager who would use God's name in vain

and laugh at religion because of the preconception that God could never be truly real. I always thought that I would never believe in God or be a churchgoer.

Despite our refusals, they invited us to attend Student Spiritual Convocation in August. I didn't go because it sounded strange to me, but my sister went. When she came back, she seemed different—I got the feeling that she wasn't a part of the world anymore but already belonged to God.

I asked her what she thought of it, and she told me that she liked it and that it was fun. Our relationship improved from that point on, and we became close like sisters usually are.

I started to be more interested in going to church, so my uncle came and drove my brother, my sister, and me to Elizabeth Church in New Jersey for Sabbath service. On that first visit, I saw a lot of youths there who were all so friendly. I felt that I could belong to this place, too.

Before the morning service started, a sister explained prayer to me because visitors often got scared by it. I wanted to see what it was like before I started to pray, so I looked around at the beginning. I wasn't scared at all like the sister had warned me about. Rather, I thought it was amusing.

Nonetheless, I innocently followed her instructions on how to pray. I thought that it was a nice experience because I was somehow able to express the deepest thoughts and feelings in my heart that I could never tell anyone. From that time on, I continued to pray often.

My sister and I attended services regularly at Elizabeth Church after that first visit. My uncle drove out to New York every Friday night so that he could bring the two of us to church on Saturday morning with the rest of his family. In April 2003, I was baptized into the True Jesus Church.

The Only True Church

After baptism, I began to see the importance of God and His commandments. Every week I couldn't wait for Fridays and Saturdays to come because Friday night was rest, and I really enjoyed going to church on Saturday.

I thank God my parents weren't opposed to me and my sister going to church. My relationship with my family improved because I saw how my suffering had built up a strong character. I also reminded myself that I shouldn't blame my parents and that I should forgive them now that I had found the truth.

A few months after I was baptized, I started to get really busy because I was preparing for college examinations in addition to studying for school. Eventually, it became difficult for me to observe the Sabbath every week. It was especially difficult because I had to wake up early on Saturday to go to church in New Jersey.

I didn't know what to do because I heard in religious education classes and in sermons how important it was to keep the Sabbath, but commuting so far every week was very hard. During my senior year in high school, I suddenly thought of looking up True Jesus Church online. I found out that there was a True Jesus Church in Queens, so I asked my dad to drive me there one Sabbath.

I knew that it was wrong to worship at another church because members at Elizabeth Church had explained that we were the only true church. For some reason, I thought that they meant that Elizabeth Church was the only true church. So even though I had found Queens Church, I wasn't sure that it was okay to observe Sabbath there.

I told myself that I would leave if they didn't do things the same way as in Elizabeth. As the service progressed, I saw how everything was the same. I found out soon after that "only true church" referred to True Jesus Church and that there were many locations around the world.

DETERMINED TO RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

My sister and I started to attend services at Queens Church instead of Elizabeth Church. By that time, I had already been baptized for about one year, but I still hadn't received the Holy Spirit.

When my cousins came on a visit, they suggested that we pray together. Only one of my cousins had the Holy Spirit at the time. But while we were praying, I heard two voices speaking in tongues.

I was very surprised, especially when I realized afterward that my sister was the other person with the Holy Spirit. I didn't know that she had received it. When she confirmed that she had received the Holy Spirit, I started to really pursue it because it reaffirmed to me that the True Jesus Church was the true church.

I thought about attending the National Youth Theological Seminar (NYTS) in 2004 because I would have a lot of time to pray and study the word of God. However, I was afraid that my parents wouldn't let me go because they didn't like the idea of me staying overnight somewhere else.

Also, I would have to fly out to California, and I knew that they wouldn't like me traveling so far on my own. I decided that I would ask for permission to go the next year because I would be a year older and they might be more open to letting me go.

I innocently followed her instructions on how to pray. I thought that it was a nice experience because I was somehow able to express the deepest thoughts and feelings in my heart that I could never tell anyone.

Over the next few months, I felt very moved every time I turned to read the Bible during sermons and in religious education classes. I felt my faith increase and my depression lessen as I learned more about the Bible. I was particularly encouraged by Matthew 17:20:

So Jesus said to them, "Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."

So I started to pray a few months before I asked my parents about going to NYTS. I prayed to the Lord knowing that if He could move mountains, He could help me go to NYTS. Thank God, when I asked if I could go to NYTS, my parents said it was okay. My faith increased after this because I saw how my prayers were answered.

My Mission at NYTS

Before going to NYTS in 2005, I made it my mission to receive the Holy Spirit by the end of the two-week seminar. I felt so close to God and wanted to do a lot of work for Him, but I couldn't do much because I didn't have the Holy Spirit. So

I told everyone at Queens Church that I really wanted to get the Holy Spirit this time.

It was already more than two years since I received baptism, yet I still had not received the Holy Spirit. I had heard many stories of other members' experiences, how some had received it on the very last day of NYTS, how some people prayed for forty years before receiving it, or how some received it the very first time they prayed in church.

I was so determined to receive the Holy Spirit at NYTS that year; I fasted every day and prayed with all my heart in every prayer session. It felt like the hardest thing I had ever done.

At the end of the first week of NYTS, some members from Queens came to cook for the participants. One of the sisters asked if I had received the Holy Spirit yet. I was feeling a little discouraged, but she comforted me and told me to keep trying.

I knew that the Queens members and my group members at NYTS were praying for me, so I tried not to be so down on myself. I thought that if I continued to be downhearted that God wouldn't give me the Holy Spirit.

In my prayers, I thought about the creation:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (Gen 1:1, 2)

I thought how I was like the earth and filled with darkness and God's Spirit was hovering over me but not yet in me. I knew that it was my pride that hindered God's Holy Spirit from entering into me because I always used my own strength to make it through life. I needed to let go and understand that it was God who controlled everything; God was the one whom I could rely on and place my worries and burdens upon.



I felt so lost in the past—I didn't know what would happen to me, and I had no idea what my future would be like. Now I know that there's a purpose for all of us.

This struggle for the Holy Spirit was a test of my faith, and I told God that I wasn't leaving NYTS without the Holy Spirit. I wanted to go to heaven with the brothers and sisters. I wanted to go together with them to see our Lord.

The day before NYTS ended, a pastor's wife told me that I was very close to receiving the Holy Spirit and that all the pastors agreed that I just had to pray a little harder and I would get it. So I was even more encouraged after that.

I prayed to God that if He would give me His Holy Spirit, I would serve Him for the rest of my life. I would give Him my all because I owed Him everything.

After the morning prayer of the last day, a pastor told me that I had received the Holy Spirit. I hadn't noticed my tongue moving, so I didn't think that I had received it. I told a sister that I wasn't sure because I didn't notice anything different when I prayed, but she told me not to doubt because God might take the Holy Spirit away if I doubted.

I went up to the front to pray during the concluding prayer of NYTS. I decided not to doubt but to believe that I had the Holy Spirit, and I felt my tongue rolling. I knew that I really had received it. I was so thankful and filled with joy.

I am now a very different person compared to who I was before coming to Christ. I used to shed so many tears and was constantly unhappy. But now I understand that for Christians, even though life is not easy and sometimes we

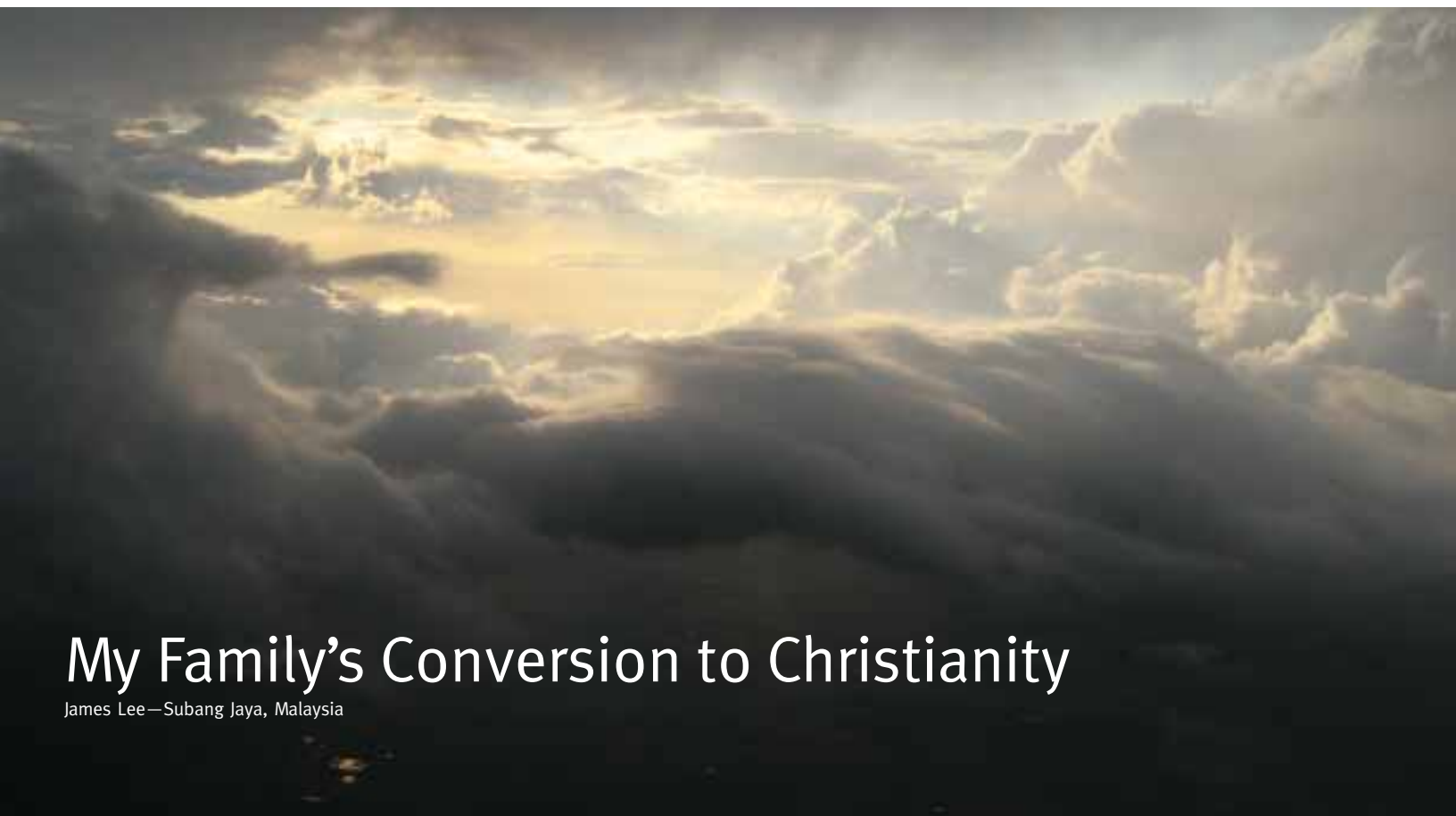
shed tears because of our suffering, we still have hope.

Without God, I wouldn't be here today. I felt so lost in the past—I didn't know what would happen to me, and I had no idea what my future would be like. Now I know that there's a purpose for all of us. As for me, my purpose in life is to serve my Lord, my Master.

I have experienced so much grace from God and am very comforted knowing that there is a Creator who understands me. I used to feel that no one could ever understand my pain and suffering because they weren't in the same position as me. But now, whenever I pray, I know that God is there and He sympathizes and knows exactly how I feel when I cry out to Him.

Knowing that God understands me gives me strength to live day by day. I have nothing to fear because God has already told me that He is my God and will be with me.

*"So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right
hand." (Isa 41:10) ★*



My Family's Conversion to Christianity

James Lee—Subang Jaya, Malaysia

FOLLOWING TAOISM

Twenty-eight years ago, my family lived in Sitiawan, a small town in the state of Perak, Malaysia. Most of the Fuzhou settlers from China immigrated to Sitiawan and adopted Christianity.

However, we were Taoists and worshipped our ancestors. My mother never failed to place the daily portion of food on the altar.

As a young boy, I did not dare to go near the altar because I was afraid the gods would punish me if I disturbed them. I was terrified by the way the idols looked, and I only worshipped them because I was afraid they would punish me for neglecting them if I didn't. What irony! I knew of this other god called Jesus, but I thought that He was only for Westerners.

One day in June 1981, my mother was on her way to the market, as had been her routine for many years. While she was riding her bicycle, she felt very dizzy all of a sudden. She had difficulty continuing

because it was so severe. When she finally cycled home, she was very tired and soon lost her appetite. She immediately went to see a doctor, but he was unable to diagnose her illness.

My father, a staunch follower of the teachings of Taoism, went to the temple to consult a medium. He said that my mother had met the ghost of a man believed to have committed suicide forty years ago by jumping into a well in front of our house.

According to the medium, it was possible that she met the ghost while she was drying clothes in front of our house. He said that my mother became ill because of the ghost, and he gave my father a talisman to be burned and then mixed with water to drink. He told my father that this would cast the evil ghost out of my mother's body.

My father carefully followed the instructions of the medium and gave my mother the burnt talisman. However, it

did not do her any good. She felt more miserable, could not sleep well, and felt very cold all the time. Her heart always felt like a piece of ice.

During this period of illness, she often felt compelled to call up to the heavens to help her. She did not really know whom she was calling to, but sometimes she would just cry out, "God, please help me!"

After being ill for three months, my mother could no longer perform most of the household chores. I had to help out with washing the dishes and sweeping the floor, chores that a seven-year-old does not like to do. My father was very busy managing a tapioca plantation, so we decided to ask my grandmother to come stay with us.

COMPLETELY HEALED

My maternal grandmother was living in Sungai Siput, a neighboring town, but she did not have a telephone. My father had

to call my aunt in Sungai Siput and ask her to pass on the message.

It happened that my aunt was a member of the True Jesus Church. When she learned of my mother's illness, she asked whether she could bring a few deacons to pray for her. Desperately in need of help, we agreed even though we believed that Jesus was a god of the West.

A few days later, my aunt came with two deacons. They prayed for my mother for half an hour and also laid hands on her. At first, we felt uncomfortable because they were praying loudly in tongues, but we ended up praying along with them anyway.

Right after the prayer, we could see that my mother's countenance had changed. She was no longer pale. She even invited the deacons and our aunt to stay for lunch.

During the meal, she finished everything that was served. From that day on, after only one prayer, my mother was completely healed and able to lead a normal life once again.

BAPTIZED INTO THE TRUE CHURCH

Our family continued to pray to the almighty God and began to attend services at the True Jesus Church in Kampung Koh, the nearest church to Sitiawan. My younger sister and I started attending religious education classes, and I enjoyed listening to Bible stories and singing children's songs.

After attending services for about three months, my mother decided that we should all get baptized. My father was very interested in receiving baptism after the miracle that had happened to my mother; however, he felt it was his duty to uphold the rituals of ancestor worship and be a filial son to his parents. He had reservations because his mother objected to his conversion to Christianity.

My aunt encouraged us to attend the year-end spiritual convocation in Singapore and be baptized there. We

The day before we were all to be baptized, my mother received the precious Holy Spirit. The joy that she felt when receiving the Holy Spirit was indescribable, and she felt great peace in her heart.

took a bus to Singapore to attend the three-day spiritual convocation, leaving my father back in Malaysia.

Our baptism was scheduled for Sunday morning. On Friday, during the first evening session of the spiritual convocation, my mother started feeling ill again.

That night she had a dream. She was in a dimly lit room and suddenly felt like vomiting. She used both of her hands to cover her mouth when she vomited, and she felt something in her hands. She walked towards the light to see what it was. To her surprise, she saw the Taoist talisman she had taken months ago when she had first fallen ill.

After that dream, she was no longer sick and was again convinced that Jesus Christ was real and alive. She was confident that the True Jesus Church was indeed the true church.

On Sabbath, the day before we were all to be baptized, my mother received the precious Holy Spirit. The joy that she felt when receiving the Holy Spirit was indescribable, and she felt great peace in her heart.

The next day, my mother, sister, and I were baptized into the True Jesus Church. Even though I was only seven years old, I felt that I was a new person after baptism, no longer filled with sin. It was wonderful to feel such joy.

OVERCOMING TRIALS IN PEACE

Months went by after our baptism, and my mother's sickness never recurred. We attended services regularly.

Because my father was still reluctant to be baptized in fear of severing his relationship with his mother, my mother

continued to preach to him. She would tell him that the True Jesus Church is indeed the true church where God could be found and that it would be a waste if he were to leave this world without being baptized since he already believed.

Every day she urged him to convert. After three years, my father decided to get baptized despite strong objection from my grandmother. I was very happy when my father was baptized because our whole family was finally in the Lord.

The joy that we felt after my father was baptized was dampened whenever our extended family gathered together.

I remember vividly that, during reunion dinners, my grandmother would deliberately offer all of the best dishes to the ancestors before serving them at the table. Very little food was left for the four of us to eat.

During All Souls Day (also known as Tomb Sweeping Day), my uncles and aunts would insult my parents, accusing them of being unfilial children because they did not participate in the pagan rituals. Coming from our relatives, such accusations and treatment were very hurtful. However, by relying on our Lord Jesus Christ, we were able to find peace despite the persecution.

As it says in John 14:27,

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

After some years, my grandmother was diagnosed with senile dementia. She started to lose her memory and could no longer take care of herself. At first, each

of her nine children took turns to take care of her for three months at a time, but after only one rotation they felt it was too much of a burden.

Disregarding the many times that my grandmother had humiliated her out of resentment for bringing our family to Christianity, my mother patiently took care of her as her own mother. She looked after her every need for four years, up until my grandmother's last breath.

My uncles and aunts were touched by the true filial piety my mother showed my grandmother. From then on, they no longer persecuted us.

I thank God for guiding my whole family through such difficult times and giving us the strength and peace to continue with our faith. As Peter encourages us,

[Have] your conduct [be] honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Pet 2:12)

It is truly a blessing from God to be a part of the true church, and I am happy that I grew up with the truth. The heavenly road is never an easy one, but by relying upon our almighty God we will be able to tread with patience so that we will finally inherit the crown of righteousness and glorify His name.

May we all treasure our status as children of God and preach the good news. ★

How to Usher



Ushers are responsible for opening and preparing the church premises for worship. Jesus taught us to show our love, care, and concern to strangers as well as our neighbors (cf. Mt 25:38-40). Ushers should have a caring attitude when fulfilling their duties. Ushers provide the first exposure and impression of the church to visitors.

Objectives

- Prepare the house of God for worship services
- Prepare others to enter into the house of God
- Tidy up the house of God at the conclusion of worship services

Prior Preparation

- Spiritual Preparation: Pray for a heart of love for people, a sincere attitude, a courteous demeanor, a heart of reverence, and, most importantly, God's guidance and direction.

- Physical Preparation: Make sure to get enough rest the night before your ushering duties. Ushers need energy and stamina to welcome the congregation properly and provide for any needs that they may have.

- Preparation of one's appearance: Because ushers give the first impression to people about our church, dress and groom yourself accordingly to serve God and represent the church.

At Church

- Arrive 30-45 minutes prior to the first service.
- Unlock the gates and doors to the church.
- Wear the usher badge.
- If applicable, set up and test audio/visual equipment (microphones, speakers, projector/slides).
- If your church has a nursery, check to make sure the trash cans are empty and there are enough supplies (tissues, paper towels, baby wipes, etc.).

Preparation on the Hour

- Ensure that the lobby, the restrooms, and the chapel are clean, orderly, and presentable.
- Turn on the chapel lights, check the temperature, and make sure the sound system is ready for worship services.
- Make sure there are enough Bibles, hymn books, publications, and visitor welcome kits readily available.

As People Begin to Arrive for Service

- Greet members and visitors with a smile, addressing them by name (if possible) and shaking their hands. If necessary, ushers should hand out or direct members to Bibles and hymn books, hearing aids, and church bulletins, handouts, or publications.
- If new visitors arrive at church, ushers should guide them to the reception desk to fill out a visitor welcome card, provide them with a welcome kit, and give them a prayer card. If the visitor came to church by himself/herself, arrange for a brother/sister to sit with him/her.
- Ushers are also responsible for ensuring members and visitors are seated politely, courteously, and in an orderly manner. Members may not need as much direction regarding where to sit. Set up portable chairs if the pews are filled.
- As people arrive and service begins, keep a watchful eye on people who seem suspicious. Also, periodically check outside the building for anyone loitering on or near the church premises.

- Update the Service Record Book (sermon title, hymn numbers, speaker, interpreter, and attendance during the final prayer session).

At the Conclusion of the Service

- Give visitor cards and other pertinent information to the minister or appropriate church council member. This should be done before announcements are made.
- Scan the aisles, pews, floor area under the pews, pulpit area, and windowsills for loose items. Items left behind should be placed in the lost and found. Bibles, hymn books, and other church materials should be returned to the bookshelf. Note: If this is done at the end of the Sabbath, a cleaning team may already be assigned to do this.
- Make sure the lobby, restrooms, and nursery are presentable throughout the day and have been thoroughly cleaned at the end of the Sabbath.
- Ensure that visitors are accompanied during lunch and/or breaks, and have someone to speak with if they have questions.
- Provide literary materials to people on request.
- Clean up portable chairs.

After Completing Your Ushering Duties

- Make note of anything particular that occurred, such as new visitors, absentee members returning, etc.
- Contact the ushering team coordinator or the following week's ushers to inform them of any special needs (e.g., restock visitor's kits, periodicals, etc.).

Additional Pointers

In all circumstances, be prepared to handle any emergency that may arise. Keep your eyes and ears open for sights and sounds that indicate an emergency is at hand. In an emergency, there are some things you can prepare for:

- Be prepared to act
- Know emergency telephone numbers (police, fire, ambulance)
- Know the location of telephones, fire extinguishers, and first-aid kits
- Be calm. Ushers must remain calm in order to respond to emergencies quickly and appropriately.

Questions and Answers



What characteristics does God have?

God exists absolutely.

All things are limited by basic needs for existence and survival that they cannot provide for themselves, but God is not bound by such needs. As the creator of all things, He must exist. Because there is no difference between what He is and that He is, He exists absolutely. Thus, God said, “I AM WHO I AM” (Ex 3:14).

God is limitless.

The universe includes space, time, and all things. As the creator of the universe, God must exist before and beyond it. Therefore, He exists outside of space and time and is unlimited (Isa 40:28).

God is one.

God has sovereign power; hence, there cannot be more than one God (Deut 32:39).

God is spirit (Jn 4:24).

All matter is subject to change. God is constant and therefore immaterial.

God is transcendent and immanent: He is “above all, and through all, and in all” (Eph 4:6).

God exists independently from His creation, the universe. Yet, God sustains all creation; all life exists because of Him. Thus, God is omnipresent, filling heaven and earth, and dwelling among us (Jer 23:23, 24; 2 Cor 6:16).

God is wise.

God reveals His wisdom in His creation. As Creator, God has complete knowledge of all things (Ps 147:5).

God is good.

As giver and sustainer of life, God is infinitely good (Ps 145:7-9). Being wholly good, He cannot tolerate evil; He is holy (Lev 11:44), just (Isa 45:21), and true (Jn 17:17). He is also loving (1 Jn 4:8) and merciful (Ex 34:6). His perfect goodness is manifested in Jesus Christ, through whom He fulfills His requirement for justice and demonstrates His boundless love.

Why does a good God allow suffering?

Goodness is not equivalent to kindness, for “[i]f goodness meant only kindness, a God who tolerated pain in his creatures when he could abolish it would not be an all-good God.”¹ Because His nature is perfectly good and just, however, God cannot tolerate sin. Having sinned and turned away from God, we are subject to His divine wrath. And if our souls are alienated from God, our bodies, too, are alienated and no longer under His protection. God gave humankind authority over nature (Gen 1:28), but when humanity rejected God’s authority, we rejected the authority He gives to us: “If you rebel against the king, his ministers will no longer serve you.”² Therefore, we suffer both physical evil from the natural world (disease, famine, earthquakes) as well as moral evil from the sins we commit (hatred, envy, deceit).

Why, then, do the righteous suffer? We cannot always equate suffering with wrongdoing, as Job’s friends were too quick to do. When Jesus’ disciples asked why the man He healed was born blind, He replied, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him” (Jn 9:3). Suffering ultimately reveals to us God’s sovereign power. Through suffering, our faith in God grows as we come to realize our limitations and learn to turn, instead, to Him. Thus, God allows suffering for our own good so that, in the end, “the genuineness of [our] faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:7).

1. Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 140.

2. *Ibid.*, 135.

Facts, Stats and **Syntax**



Did You Know?

The Bible was not systematically divided into chapters until the early 13th century, circa 1227. The first Bible to use both chapters and verses was the Geneva Bible published in 1560, 51 years before the King James translation.

Can you imagine trying to find “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” in uninterrupted text, rather than flipping directly to Philippians 4:13?

Polls and Statistics

A chronology of the establishment of True Jesus Church in various countries since 1990:

New Zealand: 1990
Samoa: 1990
Spain: 1991
Myanmar: 1992
Holland: 1992
Belgium: 1993
Fiji: 1994
Austria: 1995
Russia: 1995
Brazil: 1996
Vietnam: 1996
Kenya: 1996
Bolivia: 1996
South Africa: 1997
Dominican Republic: 1997
Benin: 1998
Chile: 1998
Northern Ireland: 1998
Uganda: 2000
Togo: 2001
Southern Ireland: 2003
Sierra Leon: 2004
Tanzania: 2004
Congo: 2004
Tonga: 2004
Cambodia: 2005
Paraguay: 2006
Lesotho: 2007
Zambia: 2007
Dubai, United Arab Emirates: 2007
Rwanda: 2007
Macau: 2008
Italy: 2009

Word Study

In the Bible, “Ebenezer” is used three times, twice to refer to a city (1 Sam 4:2, 5:1). 1 Samuel 7:12 records, “Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer, saying, ‘Thus far the LORD has helped us.’” Ebenezer comes from the Hebrew phrase *Eben ha-Ezer*, meaning “stone of help.”

In the hymn “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” the second verse begins, “Here I raise my Ebenezer.” Raising Ebenezer is a way of thanking God for the grace and mercy He has bestowed upon us.



Burning Silver

Zion Delight—Baldwin Park, California, USA

A silversmith holds a silver ingot with his tongs. He slowly places it above the furnace. He must carefully monitor and regulate the silver ingot's time over the fire and the proximity to the heat. Too long a period or too close to the fire, and the silver will melt away and vanish into the red-hot embers. Too short a period or too far from the fire, and the dross will remain, diminishing the value of the ingot. The craftsman's eyes are focused on the piece of silver, and his hands hold it with just the right amount of pressure. He waits patiently for the impurities to be burnt away. He knows the silver is ready when he can finally see his reflection upon its surface.

In the same way a silversmith purifies a piece of silver over the furnace, so God refines us over the fire of affliction (Isa 48:10). In the midst of suffering (whether it is warranted by our actions and thoughts or not), we may often wonder why God allows us to go through such an unpleasant process. If He indeed loves us, why must we undergo such painstaking struggle?

In Psalm 139:23, 24, King David asked to undergo this process of refinement. He found great value in being purified by God. Let us examine these verses in detail and discover what we can learn from David's prayer.

OUR HEARTS

Search me, O God, and know my heart

What makes God's observations different from our own self-examination? God searches through our inner being. In His wisdom and mercy, He can see us more objectively and compassionately than we can ourselves. He explores and examines every corner of our minds, hearts, and souls.

Let us consider for a moment what lies within our hearts. The Hebrew word for heart, *lebab*, represents our inner being and our soul. It includes everything that makes up our sense of self: our understanding and our knowledge, our reflections and our memories, our conscience and our courage, our inclinations and our resolutions, our emotions and our passions.

We can picture our hearts as unique, multi-faceted jewels. We comprise motivations, feelings, determinations, agendas, dreams, worries, and troubles. Unfortunately, we may discover that our gems are not as beautiful or as perfect as we would like them to be.

The purpose of the process of refinement is that once God has removed traces of the wicked alloys, we are free to become more and more Christ-like—perfect, precious, pure.

Our motivations and practices often fall short of our ideals. We aim to rise above the world but find ourselves sinking in sin time and time again. We may wonder what impurities distort our brilliance.

We may not know, but God is keenly aware of what truly lies within our hearts: our skewed motivations, conflicting emotions, proud determinations, secret agendas, overwhelming anxieties, silent sorrows, and invisible idolatry (Ps 44:21).

There are many impurities that can plague our hearts. He knows how they

came about and why they remain. God understands the best way to eliminate them altogether, which is by burning them away with trials of fire.

TESTING AND REFINEMENT

*Try me, and know my anxieties;
And see if there is any wicked way in me*

The Lord looks closely at our true selves. He inspects our hearts as a scientist examines a microbe under a microscope. God observes what we do and say in public and in private. He discerns our underlying motivations and emotions. He is pained by the evidence of evil, sorrow, and unfaithfulness hiding within us.

Because of His love for us, God proceeds to test and refine our hearts (Ps 66:10; Prov 17:3). He tests us with the affliction of those we love, or with the criticisms of those we dislike. He refines us by placing responsibilities on our shoulders, or by taking away our accomplishments. He tests and refines us to see if we truly love Him and hold fast to Him in spite of changing circumstances.

Testing and refinement involve resistance and struggle, as well as pain. However, God regulates the type and the degree of struggle, not pushing us beyond what we can bear (1 Cor 10:13). It is a battle between who we are now and who God knows we could be.

This constant battle requires us to push past the obstacle of our weaknesses and soar on the wings of God's strength. We can avoid hindrances by stepping onto the springboard of God's word.

God's voice whispers through the pages of the Bible, piercing our hearts,

helping us recognize our shortcomings. By looking into its pages on a daily basis, the Scriptures serve as the mirror through which we can see ourselves through God's eyes, know God's will for us, and receive God's blessing by following His instruction (Jas 1:22-25).

We can withstand and win the battle through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Counselor equips us and strengthens us so we can practice righteousness in our daily lives. Its abidance within us helps us to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God (Mic 6:8).

The presence of the Holy Spirit descends through humble and sincere prayer and intensifies with the choices we make in our lives. When we are torn between telling a lie that would benefit us or telling the truth that could benefit others, God's Spirit grants us the courage to speak honestly. When we see someone in need, the Holy Spirit inspires us to let go of selfishness and give willingly, generously, and joyfully.

Testing and refinement make us clean, holy, acceptable, faithful, obedient, and righteous (Job 23:10; Ps 51:10; Isa 1:25; Mal 3:3). We also bring glory to Christ by being victorious over our shortcomings (1 Pet 1:6, 7). Because of His immeasurable love for His children, God is willing to exchange a short period of tribulation for an eternity of bliss.

PATIENTLY PERSEVERE

And lead me in the way everlasting

Psalm 139:23, 24 shows us a pattern of God's caring intervention in our lives: "Search me...try me...lead me." David invited God to be an active participant in the process of his refinement. Through trial by fire, God found what was wrong, cleaned what was dirty, and guided what was good.

The purpose of the process of refinement is that once God has removed traces of the wicked alloys, we are free

to become more and more Christ-like—perfect, precious, pure. We no longer need to focus on *our* success, *our* generosity, and *our* talent. We can serve with *His* humility, help with *His* love, resist with *His* power.

As we patiently persevere through our time “in the fire,” we can gradually assimilate His qualities. We will find that God patiently guides us along the path to eternity at His side. He not only points out the right direction through His word but also shares in every step of the journey. We are constantly accompanied by His Spirit, which holds us by the hand and comforts us along the way.

God holds a human heart in His hands. He slowly places it in the midst of affliction. He must carefully monitor and regulate the length of time and the severity of the trial. Too long or too severe, and the heart will be lost to sin or despair. Too short or too light, and the evil will remain, rendering the heart useless to God. The Father's eyes are concentrated on the heart, and His hands hold it firmly but gently. He waits patiently for the impurities to be burnt away. He knows the heart is ready when He sees Himself in it at long last.★

Five Loaves and Two Fish

What Is Godliness?

"Godliness": A genuine reverence toward God that governs one's attitude toward every aspect of life.

To attain godliness requires us to share (by repent and believe in God). It is accompanied by a humble attitude and genuine repentance. For example, when God appeared to Moses and talked to him, Moses hid his face down (Gen 32:1-4).

Exodus 3:1-12

Then He said, "Do not show your face. Take your sandals off your feet for it is a place where you stand to holy ground." Moreover He said, "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.

That same night Moses took off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. Moses stayed and covered his face. God is our friend, but He is also our sovereign Lord. To approach Him usually shows a lack of respect and humility. When you come to God in worship, do you approach Him casually or do through you see an invisible guest before a king? Remember Lord Jesus' parable in which he said, "But when the king came to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, 'If he is, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless" (Mt 22:11, 12). We must have the right attitude when approaching the Holy God.

Exodus 3:13, 14

Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! For God has come to test you, and what He hears may be before you, so that you may revere Him."

"His fear may be before you, so that you may revere Him." As the Israelites, the numerous display of lightning and the smoking sea to show before God's great power and authority. God wasn't trying to test or tell people. He was showing His mighty power so that the Israelites would know He was a true God and not just another idol.

"Fear of the Lord": A loving reverence for God that includes a willingness to be limited in order to be the servants of His will.

To fear the Lord is to recognize Him for who He is: holy, mighty, righteous, pure, all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-wise. When we recognize God for who He is and where we (sinful, weak, and needy), then we will see God's grace as Power. 28:12 is said, "Who is the man that fears the Lord?" then said He shall be the way He chooses."

How can our prayer reach God? He is good person. Psalm 4:3 says, "But know that the Lord has not heard for Himself from what is good; the Lord will hear when I call to Him."

Five Loaves and Two Fish is the True Jesus Church weblog where you can share God-given inspirations and reflections with others for mutual edification and God's glory. Let the blessings of God flow through you to our site visitors so they can be encouraged to draw closer to God. Don't hesitate to offer your loaves and fish to the Lord today.

Visit <http://blog.tjc.org> and start reading and contributing!



Technology and Entertainment

Invention and advancement have always been a part of human life. And ever since electricity became a standard household feature, technology has been a fact of life, even for areas of the world that do not have reliable sources of electricity.

Not only do we use technology in our personal lives, but it is practically impossible to be a student or employee without it. There is nothing inherently bad about technology; the problem is when our use of it starts to conflict with our faith.

The theme articles take a closer look at the effect technology and entertainment have on our life of faith. We need to realize how romantic entertainment media sends us the wrong message about love, and what we can do to turn our focus back to God. We also need to remember to worship Him without being overly reliant on technology. May God guide us when we seek Him with a pure heart.



Worship and Devotion in the 21st Century

Enoch Chang—Hillsborough, New Jersey, USA

TECHNOLOGY AND FAITH

To say technology has impacted our lives would be an understatement. In fact, there are very few places where the internet, cell phones, TV's, computers, satellite technology, and many other gadgets have not reached. With these gadgets, we are able to stay in touch more easily and are provided with instant access to all kinds of people, information, and media.

Even more astounding is that some of the newer devices can do all of these in one! It's no wonder that given all of the benefits 21st-century technology provides, it has become integral not only to business productivity but to our personal lives as well.

The same is true in the church. Cell phones, e-mail, teleconferencing, and the internet have enabled holy workers to coordinate across the globe. Instant messaging and web logs allow members to keep in touch and to share their faith in between the occasional seminar or visitation.

Sermons from around the world can be downloaded on demand, and live sermons can be streamed. Even online Bible studies using webcams are held regularly. Without a doubt, the church has gone digital.

As we have moved towards an instant access- and technology-oriented life, how has it impacted our spiritual life? Specifically, what effects are they having on our worship of and devotion towards God?

Our cell phones, smart phones, laptops, radios, and other devices that we bring into the church have invisible strings attached to them. They are conduits that link us to the world when we ought to be setting ourselves apart.

SABBATH WORSHIP

I'm sure if you look around your local church, you'll see that on any given Sabbath, the service itself hasn't changed. Yes, some churches have replaced white boards with projectors, and, yes, there are audio/visual systems, but the worship structure is largely intact. What has changed, however, are the people worshipping.

Many members now bring cell phones, smart phones, and laptops to church regularly. There's nothing wrong with this—as mentioned earlier these are beneficial tools.

However, we use these exact same tools every day in our working and personal lives. By bringing them with us to church, do we subconsciously lose our reverence when worshipping in service? In other words, do these ever-present gadgets make sitting in the chapel feel as though we were in our office, at home, or out with friends? Can this cause us to feel too casual at church?

When Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, He often repeated God's words, "Let my people go so that they may [worship] Me," to Pharaoh (Ex 8:1, 8:20, 9:1, 9:13, 10:3). We have to remember that God delivered the Israelites because He heard their groaning and remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex 2:23-25). The people needed to be delivered from Egypt so that they could have peace and rest.

In the same way, God knows that we need rest from our toil and labor. As the Israelites needed to depart from Egypt physically and mentally in order to obtain rest, so we, too, need to depart from the world and enter into God's presence on the Sabbath.

In Nehemiah 13:19-22, we see that Nehemiah shut the gates to the city on the Sabbath and told the Levites to "cleanse themselves, and that they should go and guard the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day."

What this means is that there needs to be a separation between us and the world on the Sabbath. We need to guard the gates of our heart. In order to truly worship God in spirit and in truth, we need to be able to focus on God by setting aside our worldly tasks. This is the same concept as God setting aside a day, sanctifying it, and resting on it.

Today, this physical and mental barrier is in jeopardy. Our cell phones, smart phones, laptops, radios, and other devices that we bring into the church have invisible strings attached to them. They are conduits that link us to the world when we ought to be setting ourselves apart.

In many cases, they can become virtual portals that bring our minds out of the church even though we are physically present. And now, at younger ages our children are doing the same.

But other questions loom: Do we even have to bring these things to church? And why are they on during service? What if we only turn them on during break time?

Sabbath Delight

I recently purchased a smart phone, which is essentially a mini-computer. The first Sabbath I had it with me, the temptation to fiddle with it, text message, surf the web, or play games during service was stronger than I expected.

After I thought about it, I realized the temptation was so strong because using the device was discrete and non-intrusive.

It wouldn't disrupt the service in any way. More importantly, I realized there was a bigger issue confronting us today: technology addiction.

Do we sometimes say we're bringing our laptops to church to take notes, that we're bringing our cell phones for emergency use, and that we're doing AV to help with church work, or are they really excuses to keep us near our gadgets? Do we text message other church members during service and justify doing it because they are church members?

Since we use technology so much in our lives, it's hard for us to get by without it. If we bring our gadgets to church on the Sabbath in order to give us something to do, it's not because the sermons are too dry; it's because our hearts are too empty.

Isaiah 58:13, 14 says:

"If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Living in this world, it's inevitable that at some point we may feel weak or empty. Since we are confronted with the same pressures that the rest of society is faced with, it's important to cast our burdens on God and take up His yoke.

The Sabbath was designed with us in mind. God knows we are flesh and need to be recharged physically and spiritually, which is why He challenges and promises us that if we call the Sabbath a delight and do not do our own will, He will cause us to ride on the high hills of the earth and will feed us with the heritage of Jacob. This means He will fill our hearts and give us rest.

But first, we have to call the Sabbath a delight. We have to look forward to receiving rest on the Sabbath instead of viewing the Sabbath as a chore and a burden from God.

If we're not receiving spiritual rest on the Sabbath, if our cell phone is the one always going off during service, if during break time we find ourselves surfing the internet or messaging others instead of having fellowship with the brothers and sisters right before us, or if seeing another member with a new electronic device spurs envy in our heart or the desire to get something better, then perhaps we need to make a change in our lives.

Perhaps we are addicted to the technology that is supposed to help us. To help us focus on worship, we can turn off our electronic devices or leave them in our cars on the Sabbath.

If we realize that we're really bringing our gadgets to church to provide us relief from boredom on the Sabbath, then we will never receive true rest or fulfillment. Let's make a determination to set our minds on delighting in the Sabbath, and put aside all of the things that may distract us so that our hearts may be filled!

DEVOTIONAL LIFE

Another aspect of our life which has significantly benefited from technology is our devotional life. This is the time we spend outside of the Sabbath drawing nearer to God and cultivating ourselves. It's the effort we make to study the word of God, to practice the word of God, and to pray.

In this regard, technology and media have made substantial direct contributions. For example, there are Bible programs and websites that help us keep track of our daily Bible reading. Furthermore, multiple translations of the Bible are at our disposal to help us better understand what we're reading. We can even access maps, historical references, and relevant pictures using different search tools. As we study the Bible, there

is a wealth of resources just a mouse-click away!

But on top of all of this, we can listen to sermon recordings from churches around the world. While we're driving or walking, our music devices give us the ability to virtually attend services and seminars on demand. What better way to pursue a holy life than to listen to the word of God, the truth, daily?

But is there such a thing as listening to too much? Is there a possibility that listening often to sermon recordings actually prevents us from spiritually maturing? There could be, if listening to sermon recordings becomes a *replacement* for studying the Bible.

A lot of times, it's easier to just play a sermon while we're driving, cooking, walking, riding public transit, and doing

other things than to set aside time to study the word of God diligently.

Ezra 7:10 says:

For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Ezra journeyed to Jerusalem after the temple had been rebuilt and dedicated in order to rebuild the spiritual lives of the Israelites. But the first thing he needed to do was "seek the Law of the LORD." In the same way, to establish our own spiritual lives, we need to seek for God and His word. This is done through studying the Bible.

Listening to sermons is beneficial and helps us to understand God's word through someone else's experience. It



can encourage and motivate us to follow God wholeheartedly. But true first-hand experience, true strength, comes by studying the word of God and searching the Scriptures.

Jesus said that He is the bread of life, and the Gospel of John tells us that Jesus is the Word. If we want to receive spiritual nourishment, we need to read the word of God. If we only listen to sermon recordings every day but do not read the Bible ourselves, then all we have is knowledge that is spoon-fed to us, which may actually place our faith in specific sermon speakers as opposed to taking root in God's word.

At the same time, without seeking out the law of God ourselves, we don't truly know it. If we don't know it, how then can we practice it or even teach it to others? How can we have anything to share during Bible studies? In many cases, we reach a point where we just want to listen to "good" sermons, much like the biblical prophecy about the world having an "itching ear" (2 Tim 4:3).

James 1:22 and Romans 2:13 exhort us not only to be hearers of the word but doers. If we think that listening to three sermons every day automatically makes us perfect and holy, then we are forgetting what kind of person we are. We have to live out the word of God and experience it. Only then, after searching the Scriptures and living it out, can we exemplify it to others.

Consider when Philip preached to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts chapter 8. The Ethiopian eunuch was riding in the chariot reading the Book of Isaiah, but he couldn't understand it. When Philip

rode with him to explain that Isaiah spoke about the coming of Jesus, the eunuch was immediately baptized.

Today, to fulfill our commission of preaching the gospel, we have to be similarly equipped. If our friends ask us biblical questions, would it be enough to just say, "Oh, I have a sermon recording you can listen to," or, "I remember hearing a sermon about that, but I don't remember where the Bible says so or what exactly was said"? Or is it more effective if we're able to speak with passion and conviction the words that we have received from God through studying the Bible?

Won't we seem more credible to truthseekers if we're able to reference the Bible and show that we're well versed? There is no reason for others to believe what we say if we don't seem to have worked out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

More than anything, however, technology can prevent us from going forth and putting the word of God into practice. Surrounded by all the comforts of technology at home, by all the information we receive, when will we go into the world and preach the gospel as commanded?

Like many other things in this world, technology is neither good nor bad. It's a tool that we can use for a wide range of purposes. As Christians, we can use it to support our ministry and the growth of the church, but let us be vigilant.

Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. While we don't know what new advances technology will bring to us tomorrow, God's standard and expectation remain the same forever.

Let us determine to pursue Him wholeheartedly and never let anything replace Him in our hearts. If at any time we realize that we have become the tool of technology, let us always return to Him, for He is faithful! ★

We have to live out the word of God and experience it. Only then, after searching the Scriptures and living it out, can we exemplify it to others.



Romance in Entertainment Media

Rebecca Yuan—Canoga Park, California, USA

To relax and take a break from our work or studies, we often turn to media entertainment, which may be more easily accessible than other hobbies or activities.

But before we decide to spend three minutes listening to a song, two hours watching a movie, or ten hours reading a bestselling novel, we need to consider what we are putting into our heart through our eyes and ears. Will our choice of entertainment help us stay pure, or will it pollute the wellspring of our life?

ENTANGLED IN FICTIONAL ROMANCE

From children's animated movies to television dramas, romance seems to be everywhere. Cartoons teach preschoolers that the prince and princess meet, kiss, marry, and live happily ever after. Teen-

oriented books constantly rehash the age-old themes of first and forbidden love. The airwaves are inundated with songs about love or lost love.

Media producers continue making romantically-themed products because they know that people naturally desire love and are willing to pay to vicariously experience the excitement of being in love.

Unfortunately, without God, many producers misconstrue true love, and the notions that they sell in their romances can really harm our spiritual health and relationships.

What are some dangers to being emotionally entangled in fictional romance? How can we protect ourselves from being spiritually weakened by too much romantic media?

Danger #1: Confusing Love with Desire

The Bible tells us that the meaning of true love is sacrifice. As 1 John says,

[F]or love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 Jn 4:7-10, NIV)

But too often the media interprets desire as love in the same way that Shechem did. Shechem was a young man who “fell in love” with Jacob's daughter, Dinah. However, to instantly gratify his

desire, he forced himself upon her. The Bible records:

And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her and lay with her, and violated her. His soul was strongly attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young woman and spoke kindly to the young woman. (Gen 34:2, 3)

Did Shechem really love Dinah? Not according to God's definition of true love. Instead of being willing to sacrifice, Shechem's love was a selfish and covetous desire that disregarded Dinah's will and purity.

Romantic storylines are not usually as violent, but they often encourage us to strongly desire, objectify, and pursue the

opposite sex in the same carnal way that Shechem did. They preach the instant gratification of desire through the thrill of pursuit (flirtation, flowers, candle-lit dinners) and physical intimacy (passionate kissing, long embraces, sexual contact).

Kissing is portrayed as an innocent act, the loss of virginity mistaken as a rite of passage, fornication justified as a consummation of love, and adultery excused as long as people are escaping loveless marriages.

In short, modern-day romantic media promote an unbridled desire that is not held back by purity, patience, commitment, or the fear of God.

If we find ourselves rooting for our hero or heroine's impure actions; if we start enjoying the sights and sounds of improper conduct in God's eyes; if we find

ourselves drawn to desire masquerading as love, then perhaps we need to reconsider what we are putting into our hearts. Let us remember that the consequence of unchecked desire is death.

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (Jas 1:14, 15)

As Christians, we simply cannot confuse love and desire because we are holy to the Lord.

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are



improper for God's holy people. (Eph 5:3, NIV)

Danger #2: Distracting the Unmarried from God

Singlehood is often the best time to serve God because it is a period with the least familial responsibilities. That is why Paul tells us:

He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife. There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world—how she may please her husband. (1 Cor 7:32-34)

Unfortunately, unmarried Christians are often distracted from God because of secular ideas of romance. Consuming too much romance causes us to awaken love before its time (Song 2:7) and seek to please the opposite sex before the proper time of marriage.

Instead of doing all we can for the Lord, we spend our time pining for that prince in shining armor or the fair maiden who will fulfill our heart's desire. Sometimes we worry so much over finding that perfect someone that we lose our focus and inner peace. As James describes,

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have.... Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. (Jas 4:1-3)

If this is the case, let us stand up to the media's message that we need to find someone to "complete us" and strive to become "perfect and complete" in the Lord (Jas 1:4). Let us also hold onto the promise that if we "seek first the kingdom

Modern-day romantic media promote an unbridled desire that is not held back by purity, patience, commitment, or the fear of God.

of God and His righteousness," God will take care of all our other needs (Mt 6:33).

Danger #3: Creating Unrealistic Expectations for Marriage

Another danger of romance in the media is that it helps create unrealistic expectations for a spouse or future spouse.

In romances, leading men are usually handsome, fit, well-dressed, charming, and attentive to every whim of his lady. Leading women have gorgeous figures, flattering clothes, flawless faces, and rarely nag. They seldom have financial problems and their houses are always clean.

If people internalize these traits of perfect husbands and wives, they may become bitterly disappointed by the discrepancies between fantasy and reality.

To counter the media's idea of marital expectations, let us focus on the spousal responsibilities given to us by the Bible:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her... let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Eph. 5:22-25, 33)

More importantly, let us remember that contrary to what the media tell us, our goal on earth is not merely finding romantic love or fulfillment. As the Bible tells us,

[W]hatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from

the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. (Col 3:23, 24)

DEPARTING FROM THE DANGER ZONE

If we are a regular consumer of romantically-themed media (movies, dramas, music, books, etc.), let us ask ourselves the following questions:

1. Do I find myself living vicariously through the romance of fictional characters?
2. Does my media consumption cause me to desire the opposite sex in a way that is not pleasing to God?
3. Do I have a hard time walking away from romantically-themed media entertainment?
4. Does my media choice distract me from being wholeheartedly devoted to God in my singlehood?
5. Do I fantasize about a fictional character and view them as my ideal mate?
6. Does my media choice cause me to form unrealistic expectations for my spouse or future spouse?

If we answered "yes" to any of the questions above, perhaps we have already fallen into the entanglements of fictional romance. What, then, can we do to escape?

Action #1: Reduce Romantic Media Consumption

If romantic media is causing us to stray from God's teachings, the most immediate action we can take is to exercise self-control and reduce our media consumption. It may be painful to lessen or forgo something we enjoy so much, but we must remember that we

are constantly in a spiritual battle (Eph 6:12).

In order to resist being eaten alive by the devil, we must be sober and vigilant (1 Pet 5:8). We must be like Paul, who said,

But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (1 Cor 9:27)

Action #2: Replace Romantic Media Consumption with More Beneficial Activities

When we make the determination to reduce romantic media consumption, we should also make plans to fill the gap in our schedule with something more beneficial to our spiritual health. Otherwise, we may feel bored, restless, and tempted to return to romance.

There are a variety of activities that will allow us to “walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time” (Eph 5:15, 16). We just need to be a little more creative.

Instead of indulging in romantic media, we can find activities that are both enjoyable and useful in our service to the Lord.

We can strengthen our bodies through exercise, refine or acquire new skills (for example, in cooking, music, languages, crafts, writing, art, computers, organization, cleaning, fixing appliances, to name a few), or help someone in need (encourage a friend, send a care package, volunteer, etc.).

When choosing the replacement activity, let us remember Paul's encouragement on what we should fill our minds with:

[W]hatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. (Phil 4:8)

Action #3: Renew Our Commitment to Stay Holy and Pure

Most importantly, as we escape the entanglements of romantic media, we need to pray to God and renew our commitment to be holy and pure.

God is holy and intends for us to be holy (1 Pet 1:13-16). He also knows our struggles because He was tempted like us (Heb 4:15). If we come before Him to ask for help, He will help us overcome our temptations.

As James tells us,

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. (Jas 4:7, 8)

May we honestly evaluate our relationship with media romance. If need be, let us make the determination to break free from its influence. Let us ask for God's guidance so we may redeem our precious time on earth and live our lives worthy of the Lord. ★



My Journey to Marriage

Suechuan G Jeng—Taichung, Taiwan

When I was young, I sketched out what I thought my other half would be like. That portrait of him changed with the passing years, but I never anticipated that I would be marrying a complete stranger!

It happened on a Wednesday. The sky was cloudy and it was cold. Friends poured into the church from miles away, not to see me but to see him. They wanted to see what kind of man I was marrying. They were amazed that a person who loved to sing about love and romance chose to marry in such an old-fashioned way.

Yet, a friend in church remarked, “This is a miracle.” She knew my history of battling to marry according to God’s will, something I had struggled with for many years.

PRESSURE TO GET MARRIED

By the spring of 1971, finding me a husband had become the number one priority in my family. My parents, who were unbelievers, feared that their daughter would pass the spring of her youth alone and forgotten. They sounded calls for help from all corners, and matchmaker after matchmaker came to our door reporting for duty.

I had been fervently studying the Bible at the time; I would read the Bible, pray, and attend church services daily. I longed to graduate quickly from a new believer to a mature and strong Christian. I told Jesus firmly at that time, “Lord, I must live for You. I will marry only if You want me to.”

Even though I continued to be introduced to non-church members, my heart remained steadfast. I participated in the matchmaking only to comfort my parents.

After each introduction, I would pray to God with the same conviction. I knew that He would not want His sheep, which took so much effort and hard work to find, to be led away by a stranger.

As time passed by, ministers and sisters at church also started talking to me about getting married. Soon, my name topped the list of people to be married off. Originally the reason was, “My mom wants me to get married.” But now, time was no longer on my side.

I reluctantly agreed to renounce myself for the greater good. Marriage it was.

Love means grasping hold of God because He is the source of love. If the love of this world is severed from Him, it becomes nothing.

Trouble from Every Side

Even though I had enough matchmaking sessions to fill a book, marriage was more like the fleeting clouds and difficult to grasp.

My mother had trouble sleeping because she was so worried that her precious daughter would die an old maid. My father went to the temple numerous times to plead for good opportunities. The opportunities came, but they also passed.

The Bible says to be anxious for nothing but to entrust all our burdens to God. But my mother's anxiety made it hard for me to trust. Each day after work, I would kneel alone in the prayer room at church and plead with God. I prayed that my mother would not blaspheme the Jesus she did not know, because she believed that it was Jesus' fault that I was still single.

To comfort myself during those difficult times, I would read the Book of Job and Psalms. Tears would stream down my cheeks. I would think, "Either Satan has been causing trouble in front of God, or God is trying my faith."

In the past, I often said, "What shall separate me from God? Shall tribulation? Shall swords? Shall false brothers?" Maybe I was overconfident and that was why God allowed trouble to barrage me continuously. I realized that I was no better than a Pharisee and that there were many things that could separate me from God.

Even so, many brothers and sisters around me offered unceasing prayers on my behalf. It was their fragrant intercessions of love that reached the courts of heaven. It was because of their love that God did not quench the smoldering flax or break the bruised reed that I had become.

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

When a sister and a deacon initially mentioned my future husband, who lived abroad, my heart was already like stagnant water. Spiritually, I was on my last breath. Worst yet, I no longer insisted on marrying only in the Lord. In fact, I had just gone on my first date with an unbeliever.

On that date, we sat in a softly lit coffee shop while the pianist played a popular song from the musical based on *Don Quixote*:

*To dream the impossible dream,
To fight the unbeatable foe,
To reach the unreachable star...*

I talked as tragically as Don Quixote about how I came to believe in Christ, my exasperation with marriage, and how I no longer believed in romance. I also spoke about my desire to have a Christ-centered family.

My honesty did not scare him off. Instead, he became a frequent visitor at my house. My parents were elated.

During that time, dinner table conversations sometimes resulted in intense debates, analyses, and discussions on how to help me make a decision about my marriage.

My mother did not want me to marry abroad. My brother and sister-in-law told me, "It is more blessed to be loved than to love," and that made sense to me at the time.

My more open-minded father urged me to consider faith and religion. He thought that I was religious to the brink of insanity and marveled at why someone who believes in Jesus would have to go to church every day.

With each passing debate, my defense on Jesus' behalf became weaker and weaker.

Loneliness knows no bounds. Despite a new feminist movement in Taiwan at that time, I could not gather strength. I still needed to be loved.

As a result, I wrote a very long letter expressing my honest viewpoints and hopes about love and sent it across the ocean via airmail to my future husband. I asked him not to be too polite to reject me. The post office returned my letter because it was overweight.

I rewrote the letter, condensed the content, and resent it. This time, the letter was much more toned down.

At this time, a deacon shared a Bible passage that became the turning point for me. These verses came to his mother when she was praying for my marriage:

Then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. (Jer 32:39, 40)

The Lord once again shed His light upon my path.

One day, I received an international phone call. I was startled to hear my future husband's voice on the other end. He said he wasn't forced into marriage, clarifying that it was out of his own will. He boldly decided, "Okay, it's settled."

I was very moved as I put down the telephone. He was brave. How many men would choose to spend his life with a woman he doesn't even know?

At the time, I wanted to talk to Jesus. I wanted Him to tell me what my next move should be. I wanted a checkmate.

The Source of Love

Once again the Holy Spirit filled me, and I reassessed the meaning of love.

Is love the erratic beating of the heart and having someone to hold? Can love be likened to a child who sees something he likes and wants to possess it? No. That is passion. Passion is affected by time and space.

All of the romantic poems and songs I had read and listened to were wrong about love.

Love means grasping hold of God because He is the source of love. If the love of this world is severed from Him, it becomes nothing.

I finally understood that I could not lose Jesus. Had I not hoped that He would become the Lord of my household?

Ecclesiastes 7:14 says, "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider."

I thought back to the days when I was strong, the days when I went up to the temple of the Lord. The days when my heart was filled with joy. The memories threw me into deep sorrow at how far I had wandered. The penetrating pain made me once again cherish how valuable it was to be a Christian.

LAST MINUTE STRUGGLES

I met my in-laws for the first time on the day I got engaged. As for the one with whom I would share the rest of my life, I could only speculate from his picture. He looked tall and handsome, smiling in front of a chapel at his university.

I met him three days before the wedding. The deacon who introduced us brought him to my house. Although I felt a little embarrassed, everything went very smoothly. On the other hand, my friends were anxious for me. They thought that my decision was ridiculous.

On the eve of my wedding, a close friend called me. She spent more than an hour saying whatever she could to dissuade me. "You have to be decisive. All you have to do is send a letter of apology to those you have invited to the wedding," she said. "Whatever you do, don't ruin a life of happiness so hastily."

Her words of urgency resonated in my ears, and I could not sleep all night. Anguish once again surrounded me.

The night was long and painful. In the darkness of the night, I saw hideous faces flash before my eyes. They were shades of dark green and red. They laughed at me.

In a state of half-consciousness, I remembered Jesus. But why did I not have the strength to shout "Hallelujah"?

In my struggle, I suddenly saw the eaves of a roof. From it appeared two bright shafts of light that formed into a cross. Tears streamed down my cheeks. At that moment, my pain vanished.

The Big Day

I must thank my Father in heaven who abided with me. He blessed me with more than I had asked for. Not only did He give me my husband, He also gave me such kind in-laws. My parents were extremely satisfied and regarded my husband as the ideal son-in-law.

I must also thank my brothers and sisters in Christ who supported me and showed concern for me, especially Deacon Hsieh, who fought along my side throughout this journey.

On December 17, 1975, my father escorted me down the aisle to the groom who was waiting patiently and quietly at the other end. Dressed in my white wedding gown, I stood with him in the chapel. I tried to keep tears from pouring down my cheeks as my heart brimmed with thanksgiving.

As I walked into the chapel, my only regret was that I still did not know my own husband. But as long as Jesus knew him, there was no need to worry. We could start the introductions after the wedding! ★



Digging Wells: The Place of God in an Age of Job Insecurity

David Liu—Queens, New York, USA

Working life in the late-twentieth century and beyond could well be summarized as an age of job insecurity.

Books have been published addressing this new face of working life, many giving advice on how to deal with changes. The bestseller *Who Moved My Cheese?* offers this key teaching on how to deal with changes at work: “They keep moving the cheese...be ready to change quickly and enjoy it again and again.”¹

While self-help books as such have their nuggets of applicability at times, life’s problems are not as easy as simply following a few formulaic steps. Human strategies alone won’t provide the complete answer, especially if God is not in the equation.

As Christians, we need to cope with job insecurity and the even more menacing insecurity in our hearts as we face the ever-changing world by reaffirming our relationship with God. The insecurity we feel may very well be a symptom of an underlying issue of misplaced priorities.

EXPERIENCING JOB INSECURITY

I remember the first time I encountered a layoff. Our company had made a decision without announcing that they were downsizing. Throughout the day, human resources had gone from cubicle to cubicle with boxes and security escorting people out. To me, it felt like any other normal day since I was oblivious to what had been going on.

By the end of the day, a third of the company was gone. Lower-level managers were not even sure who still worked for them. Upper management sent out a clear message to us: we needed to be more productive and more profitable. More work, less people. Or else more layoffs were coming.

The reality of corporate life sank in. Companies were no longer loyal to employees—they resorted to threatening them instead. I tried to look at the bright side, thankful that I had survived a massive layoff.

But I would not be so lucky when the second round of layoffs came. All non-managerial positions were eliminated because they were being outsourced

to India. And to add insult to injury, we would spend our last few months training our replacements.

In these trying economic times, we face much uncertainty in our lives. Jobs are no longer as secure as they once were. Companies no longer provide employee loyalty because they can no longer afford it, and they often resort to downsizing and even outsourcing to cut costs.

Employees are at the mercy of the market, and many of us wake up wondering whether this is the day we will lose our jobs. Those who own homes find themselves in foreclosure due to economic downturns.

The challenge is particularly noticeable for those who are graduating and those who are starting out in their careers with little or no experience. The current market has been far more unkind towards them.

Even those who are offered positions with a company may not be surprised to find their offer rescinded. Others find themselves moving to new places to pursue jobs because they are no longer in the position to be selective about which job to accept.

DIGGING HIS WAY TO UNDERSTANDING

In Old Testament times, many saints led nomadic lives in search of a decent livelihood. Digging up wells represented a source of living and a way to sustain their household—it was staking a claim of ownership to the land. It's like buying a home, settling down, and claiming a piece of land to be yours.

The Bible records that Isaac was very prosperous and had great possessions of flocks, herds, and a great number of servants. Hence, he needed to dig a well as a source of water to provide for his charges. But for Isaac, digging a well would not be as simple as it seemed.

Issues started off with Abraham when he first moved to the land of Gerar, which the Bible described as an arid place, and they continued to follow Isaac. We

see that for both father and son, the Philistines created trouble for them while they dwelt in Gerar. There wasn't much of a sense of security for Abraham and Isaac in those days.

Trouble started for Abraham when the Philistines seized the wells that he had dug (Gen 21:25). Abraham reacted by rebuking Abimelech, but they later formed a covenant in the land of Beersheba (Gen 21:25-32). However, after Abraham died, the Philistines filled his wells up with earth (Gen 26:18).

The Philistines grew envious of Isaac. As precious as a well was during those trying times, the Philistines were willing to fill up the wells and lose the sources of water in order for Isaac to lose his claim of ownership to the land. Abimelech even had this piece of advice for Isaac: "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we" (Gen 26:16).

Despite these setbacks, Isaac did not leave the land. He did not go down to Egypt, where food was probably abundant, because he remembered God's words to him (Gen 26:2-4). Instead, he dwelt by the valley and dug more wells.

From this, Isaac was to learn more about well-digging and the place of God. The first two wells that he and his servants dug out, Esek and Sitnah, were met with conflict by the Philistines. The names carry the history of the wells, "Quarrel" and "Enmity."

In each case, we see that Isaac simply gave up and departed from the land rather than fight to retain his claim to the land. To the Philistines, it might have seemed like a cowardly reaction not to stand up for what was rightfully his. But in Jesus' teaching, we see that the meek shall inherit the earth; of course, in God's time.

Finally, Isaac dug another well that the Philistines did not contend with him for. He named it Rehoboth (or "Spaciousness") saying, "For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land" (Gen 26:22).

In Isaac's previous attempts at digging a well, he retreated each time he met with opposition. He refused to stay in a land filled with opposition and hostility. His strategy seemed simple—as long as he found a well that had a source of water and no one to contend with him for it, he was inclined to stay in the land.

We see that after much searching and digging, Isaac finally found what he was looking for. Rehoboth seemed to be the ideal place for Isaac to settle down and to start his life. He found peace there, the space he needed, and the land where he believed that he would be fruitful.

Isaac's decision of where he should stay was based upon finding abundant water and the absence of hostilities. Having dug a well that was uncontested, we would have expected Isaac to dwell there. Instead, we are told that he moved on to Beersheba, right after finding what he once set out to find.

GETTING OUR PRIORITIES RIGHT

Up until this point, Isaac's sojourn had been a reaction to his circumstances and environment. But there was now a deeper change in him that gave new direction in his life. He did not realize that finding opposition at all the previous wells and retreating each time would draw him closer to the place where God wanted him to be.

To Isaac, Beersheba was a great reminder of his father's faith and God's promises to him. Beersheba was the first

As Christians, we need to cope with job insecurity and the even more menacing insecurity in our hearts as we face the ever-changing world by reaffirming our relationship with God.



place he and his father came to after they had descended from Mount Moriah, where Abraham passed the test God set for him. It was where Isaac saw his father walk with God, and, on a deeper level, where he felt was the place God wanted him to be as well.

Previously, Isaac moved around to different places because of opposition. He tested the lands by building a well and seeing what the circumstances were. But now, Isaac was willing to be led by the voice of God.

We see that Isaac's faith was confirmed when God spoke to him that very night, reassuring him of the covenant He had made with his father:

And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham's sake." So he built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well. (Gen 26:24, 25)

Having met with quarrel and enmity at his earlier wells, Isaac's approach changed in the land of Beersheba. First, he built an altar; then he pitched his tent; and, lastly, he dug a well. The order of each activity was crucial. Having met God and heard His voice, the priorities in his life shifted, and he finally found home.

In the face of much insecurity in his nomadic life, Isaac finally found the true and only stabilizer: God. Today, we face similar instabilities that Isaac experienced, and, with the incessant flux in so many aspects of modern life, this should serve as a good guide to prioritizing things in our life.

Home is the place of God's presence, and there we should dwell. Only there may we be assured of God's provision for all of our needs. Spiritual needs take the highest priority, and material needs last. ★

1. Spencer Johnson, *Who Moved My Cheese? An Amazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work and Life* (Putnam Adult, 1998).



Fourteen Coins

How God Opens a Way for Those with Unbelieving Parents

Paulina Tse—Garden Grove, California, USA

Most of us do not realize how precious every opportunity we have to serve God is, whether that opportunity comes in the form of scrubbing toilets or sacrificing your vacation days at a church event.

Growing up with an unbelieving father, I grasped this lesson quickly. Since I was young, actions that other families in church viewed as typical posed a challenge in my family.

While many of my peers gave little thought to the pastors' constant emphasis on marrying within the church because different values lead to disagreements when raising children, I knew what they warned us about was true. Simply attending church events was a struggle, not to mention my mother allotting a portion of her income for tithe every month.

If we really have the heart to seek after God, however, He will always make a way for us. Ever since I was young, God has shown me His power to provide for His servants.

A WILD GUESS

The summer before I started third grade, my sister, mom, and I were ready for Student Spiritual Convocation (SSC)—my sister was going as a participant, my mom was going to serve as a counselor, and the coordinators made an exception for me to attend since there would be no one to take care of me at home while my mom was away.

My dad did not object to this plan until he saw us packing our suitcases the night before SSC. He began insisting that he had never said we could attend SSC in the

first place and obstinately refused to let us go.

After trying to reason with my dad, my sister tearfully stomped off to her room and slammed her door shut. Frustrated, my mom also eventually gave up and told us we could try again next year.

We were all visibly upset, and to get us to talk to him again, my dad jokingly declared that we would “let our God decide whether we could go.” If my sister or I could guess the exact number of coins in his pocket, we could go to SSC.

My sister, still enraged that my dad had so abruptly changed his mind, was further incensed, pointing out how impossible this task was. Although I was also angry, I didn't see any harm in giving it a try.

I said a quick prayer asking God to help me because I had been eagerly awaiting

my first SSC, cast one last glance at my dad's slightly bulging jeans pocket, and took a wild guess.

"Fourteen?"

My dad counted, and the jumble of dimes, pennies, and quarters miraculously added up to exactly fourteen coins. He laughed in disbelief and recounted again and again. There was no way to deny that there were indeed fourteen coins, and in the end we were allowed to go.

Thank God, it was a fruitful SSC, and I received the Holy Spirit. Many people may claim it was simply a lucky guess, but I truly believe that it was the grace and power of our Lord. If we have a sincere heart to draw closer to God, He will never fail to open a door for us.

RELYING ON GOD TO OPEN A WAY

When your unbelieving parent still rejects your plea to attend a church event even after you have just spent an hour meticulously explaining that, yes, there is adult supervision during church events; yes, the only things we do are pray and sit through classes all week; yes, we still have fun; and yes, the church does feed us, you may end up feeling hopeless and defeated.

You may even find yourself questioning whether attending the upcoming SSC is really worth all the effort you are exerting in order to sway your parent. After all, it is likely that your unbelieving parent is not only discouraging you from attending but even bribing you with new game consoles, electronics, or money if you choose to stay home.

When these nagging doubts begin to emerge in the back of your mind, when you begin to wonder if God really cares whether you go to the next church event, remember that He sees your every effort. As it says in Galatians 6:7, "for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."

This is one of the most difficult struggles with having unbelieving parents—if you falter in your faith, it is much easier to stray from the right path. When you are

It is during these predicaments, when even foolproof logic cannot persuade unbelieving parents, that you must rely on God. Only God was able to soften the pharaoh's heart to let the Israelites leave, and only God is able to soften the hearts of even the most obstinate parents.

spiritually weak, instead of encouraging and guiding you, they act as a stumbling block to your faith.

It is during these predicaments, however, when even foolproof logic cannot persuade unbelieving parents, that you must rely on God. Only God was able to soften Pharaoh's heart to let the Israelites leave, and only God is able to soften the hearts of even the most obstinate parents.

Now, nine years later, my first National Youth Theological Seminar (NYTS) is soon approaching and my dad's uneasiness is beginning to resurface when faced with the prospect of me flying across the country to attend yet another church seminar.

He demands to know why the "church events in Southern California aren't good enough," and a shadow of uncertainty flits across his face as he questions how much larger our church really is beyond the familiar Garden Grove location. When I inform him that True Jesus Church has churches in thirty-nine countries, from the UK to Congo, the uncertainty changes to suspicion, and he is done with the discussion about NYTS.

Although he can still be as stubborn as he was the night before my first SSC, I am nowhere near as agitated as I was then. Since that first obstacle, I have seen how God has worked in my family to allow

my sister and me to attend church events regularly.

As the Lord "makes a way in the sea and a path through the mighty waters," so will He blaze "a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert" (Isa 43:16, 19). I have complete confidence that if we let God fight our battles, He will make the impossible possible for His servants; He will part the Red Sea for His children. ★



Striving for a Perfect Faith

Imperfect Mom

A FAILURE

Before I had kids, I attended church services at least two times a week, a weekly small-group Bible study, and week-long seminars. I taught religious education classes, sang in choir, and was an active member of the youth fellowship. I prayed and read the Bible regularly.

I was a conscientious worker at my full-time job as a magazine editor, a friend who could be counted on to “always be there,” and a daughter who helped her mother with her invalid father once a week. Before I had kids, I managed to take a shower every day and brushed my teeth at least twice a day.

But after the kids came, everything changed.

I could barely make it to Sabbath services, and when I did, I processed

nothing of what I heard (which were two-minute sound bites in between diapers changes, feedings, picking up toys, etc.). I dropped out of *all* church work.

I attempted to do my job part-time but ended up quitting after I realized that editing was impossible because I could barely string together a coherent sentence due to getting four-and-a-half hours of sleep a night (usually broken up into ninety-minute increments).

My friends thought I had dropped off the face of the earth, and my mother saw me only when she invited me over for dinner. I no longer felt any qualms about going out in public with oily, stringy hair, and often fell asleep with fuzzy teeth.

I was a failure—from spiritual health to personal hygiene.

“What is going *on*?” I wondered. If children were supposed to be a blessing, why did my life look like it had been cursed after my kids arrived?

Then I thought, maybe it wasn’t the children. Maybe it was *me*. Maybe I was doing everything wrong. I felt inadequate as a mom because my children were not on any kind of “prescribed schedule,” and they were still not sleeping through the night even after twelve months.

I felt guilty as a Christian for dropping all forms of church work in addition to my daily spiritual cultivation. I felt like I had let down my friends, especially the ones whom I avoided because they liked to talk on the phone for too long. And I’m pretty sure I smelled bad.

My life revolved around parenting my children, and I wasn't even sure if I was doing *that* right.

THE SEASON TO FOCUS ON CHILDREN

Then one day, I came across this passage:

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply." (Gen 1:27, 28a)

Somehow, these verses penetrated my haze of guilt and failure, and I came to an important realization: The first "job" that God gave to man was to "be fruitful and multiply." In other words, the first job that God gave to us was to have children.

And with the act of having children came the responsibility of teaching them:

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children." (Deut 6:4-7a, NIV, emphasis mine)

So I started thinking that maybe I wasn't so far off track as I thought. Maybe it was okay that I was focusing my limited time, energy, and brain capacity on my children—the first and most important "job" that God had given me.

Maybe it was okay for me to quit my job, take a break from church work, and focus on my babies, who needed me and depended on my presence for their very survival. After all...

*To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to be born,
And a time to die;
A time to plant,
And a time to pluck what is planted;
A time to kill,*

*And a time to heal;
A time to break down,
And a time to build up... (Eccl 3:1-3)*

I realized that *now* was the time to build up my children; now was the season to meet their needs, to love them, and to teach them about love. This season—their childhood—would pass all too quickly, and I did not want to squander the time I had with them.

Another season would soon come when I could again do church work, perhaps go back to work, and be the reliable friend and devoted daughter that I wanted to be.

Feeling vindicated by God's word in my direction in life, I felt a sense of reassurance and peace that I was doing the right thing in focusing on my children at this point. But one thing niggled at my conscience....

"Impress them on your children..." (Deut 6:7a)

*Impress them on your children...
Impress them on your children...*

I was doing many things with my children, but I felt that I was failing at impressing God's commandments upon them—at least not in the way that I was conditioned to do.

I realized that now was the time to build up my children; now was the season to meet their needs, to love them, and to teach them about love.

MISSING THE BIG PICTURE

We were often late to Sabbath services, and sometimes we missed it altogether. My older child went to religious education classes, but she never finished her assigned homework or Bible reading,

and I didn't make her. My younger child refused to go to religious education class altogether, instead opting to do his little activity workbooks next to me as I sat in the worship service.

I tried to read a children's Bible to them at home, but the reality was that we would often go long stretches without doing anything "biblical" at home. I had invested in a huge collection of Bible cartoons, but at most a handful of them were watched. They could not tell you a complete Bible story if their lives depended on it.

Our prayers consisted of grace, "Thank you, God, for this food," and our bedtime prayers, "Please, God, don't let me have any nightmares." My children hardly participated in prayers in Spirit, and when they did, they lasted all of sixty seconds.

At one point, when I realized that this type of spiritual pursuit was missing in our lives, I began to institute changes. I "strongly encouraged" my older child to watch the Bible cartoons every morning. I began reading the children's Bible to my children every night, whether they wanted to hear it or not. I forced my daughter to finish her assigned church homework. I even tried praying in the Spirit with them.

Somehow, though, as the level of "spiritual" activity increased, so did the sense of artificiality. Yes, it seemed like we were doing the "right" things, but things felt forced. There was no genuine sense of engagement and enthusiasm from my children.

I forced myself to take a step back and evaluate the situation. What was I doing? Why was I doing it? Was it even effective? Were they learning what really mattered through all this activity?

One of my worst fears is becoming like a Pharisee—having the outward appearance of piety, but lacking its true substance inwardly.

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and

anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith." (Mt 23:23)

Somehow, what I was doing smacked of pharisaism. I felt that in all our "doing," we were missing the big picture and perhaps neglecting the "weightier matters of the law."

A CLEAR AND LASTING UNDERSTANDING OF GOD

I began to wonder how it was possible to "impress" God's commands upon my children in a way that was genuine as well as effective. One of the definitions of "impress" from the *Encarta World English Dictionary* is "to make sure that somebody has a clear and lasting understanding, memory, or mental image of something."

I began to pray to God to help me teach my children so that they could truly have a "clear and lasting understanding" of Him and be able to understand the "weightier matters" of life—to understand what really mattered. I laid out before Him all my weaknesses, my confusion, my failure, and asked Him to teach me how to teach my children.

Slowly, I began to find the way, but not without having to give up many preconceived notions of faith. I had to give up caring what people thought of my parenting and my children. I had to give up timetables and learn to trust my children and God's timing. I had to give up doing things in the way I thought best but instead rely on God to do things in the way He thinks best.

In giving these up, I found a closer and more genuine walk with God, and my children are slowly but surely developing a "clear and lasting understanding" of God and His commands.

Here, I share with you what I learned, and what worked for my family:

I began to pray to God to help me teach my children so that they could truly have a "clear and lasting understanding" of Him and be able to understand the "weightier matters" of life—to understand what really mattered.

Follow Your Child's Interest

In my research on how people learn, I came across some interesting information: unless people are interested in and engaged in what they are learning, they will not retain the information long term.¹

I thought back to my years in school and realized that explained why I retained about 2% of what I learned—I couldn't have cared less about 98% of what was taught.

I applied this bit of information to teaching my children about God. I evaluated the "spiritual" activities I was doing with my children and retained what really interested them.

My children would often ask me to read the Bible to them before bed, so I knew that they were interested in that. They also liked the comfort of praying before bed, but we no longer prayed in Spirit. They would pray in words of understanding about things that mattered to them, whether it was not having nightmares, thanking God for the fun things they did that day, or wishing a sick friend a speedy recovery.

I no longer "encouraged" my children to watch the Bible cartoons or forced my daughter to finish her church homework, which included a weekly memory verse. However, I did buy a CD with memory verses set to upbeat music, which the children enjoyed.

If something no longer interested them, I would not force them to continue but instead continually tried to find other avenues for them to learn about God.

Adding all of these activities up didn't seem like much, but I realized that this was enough for them right now. Little people have little appetites and require more

frequent meals—and perhaps this applied to spiritual food as well. I could see that my children were "digesting" these small, frequent meals of God's word and simple prayer, and changes were happening.

Sometimes in the car, my children would randomly ask me questions like, "When we die do we become angels?" Or I would hear comments like, "God is so powerful, He can do anything. He could squash a car if He wanted."

These may seem like simple things, but the important detail here was that they were talking about God out of their own volition, which meant that they were thinking about Him. They were trying to figure out who God is and His relationship with us. They were developing an interest in spiritual matters and, more importantly, were enjoying the process of getting to know Him.

This enjoyment and interest would be the very thing that would help develop that "clear and lasting understanding" of God and His commands.

Focus on Biblical Principles Rather than Biblical Knowledge

Sometimes I think we as parents are tempted to stuff our children with biblical knowledge so that we can assure ourselves that we are doing our jobs teaching them God's word. It is something that we can measure, something we can test.

But in so doing, are we neglecting "the weightier matters of the law—justice, mercy, and faithfulness"? Are we neglecting the principles of God's laws in favor of the vehicle in which they are delivered? Because isn't that what these Bible stories are—vehicles to teach us what really matters—living out God's

We need to live out God's principles in what we choose to do with our hands and what we choose to think about in our heads. We need God's teachings to be the framework of our family and our communities.

command to love each other, to act justly, to show mercy, to be faithful to God in our daily lives?

Sometimes, children are not ready to learn Bible stories or memorize Bible verses, but *all* children are ready to learn the principles of the Bible. A child can learn the biblical principle of love when someone wants to play with his favorite toy. He can learn the principle of kindness when he sees a lonely child on the playground. He can learn the principle of obedience when a parent asks him to do something he does not want to do.

God's name may never be mentioned and a Bible verse never quoted, but in these situations, a child is learning about God all the same. In a way, this is an even more important learning opportunity, because it has to do with real life. It has to do with living out God's teachings, and that is ultimately what God wants us to do—to convert our faith into deeds.

I learned to not be too concerned if my son could not get the story straight about Jericho or if he couldn't tell me how many loaves and fish Jesus used to feed 5,000. However, I am very concerned about each and every situation my children encounter that may test their character and teach them how to live out a biblical principle.

Be Patient

It's not to say that it is not important to know the Bible, to go to religious education class, or to pray in Spirit. All of this is very important. However, it may not happen in the timetable that you wish.

In raising my young children, I had to admit that I didn't fully comprehend what was going on with them—developmentally, emotionally, spiritually. When I tried to expose them to something

new and they balked, I had to trust them and trust that somehow they were not yet ready for it.

When my younger child turned three, I was so happy that I could finally send him to kindergarten class at church and I could enjoy my Sabbath worship in peace. But he absolutely refused to go.

Every week I encouraged, cajoled, and bribed him to go, to no avail. Other kids (many who were even younger than him) were happy as a clam, going to not just one but both sessions of kindergarten class. But no, my child stubbornly refused.

Finally, I gave up. For a year and a half, he spent every Sabbath at my side in the adult worship service with a little workbook and coloring pencils.

Then one day (finally, at four and a half years old), ten minutes before the worship service started, he stated, "I am going to class today." My husband dropped him off in class, and since then, he has been an active participant and enjoyed every single class.

There's no telling what clicked in that brain of his, but somehow, it was time, and he was ready.

What I learned is that even though your child may not be interested in something now, it doesn't mean that he will *never* be interested in it. Even though your child may not be interested in Bible stories, or praying, or going to class, it does not mean that this will always be the case.

Sometimes, he may not be developmentally, emotionally, or spiritually ready. In that case, you can still focus on reinforcing biblical principles in daily life and expose him to whatever you think might be edifying to him, following his interests.

Live God's Teachings

Another bit of interesting information about how people learn: I have read that 90% of what we learn is through example.

This information was actually very disconcerting to me, knowing how much I struggle with my own faith and my own character. My children would be in a very sorry state if 90% of what they learned indeed came from my example.

But this did make me realize how important my actions were in my teaching. Our children are learning important principles every time they see us operate, from the words we speak, to how we treat others, to how we spend our time. If the studies are right, then our actions in our daily lives will teach them more than our words ever will.

Maybe that's why God said,

"Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." (Deut 6:7-9, NIV)

In other words, we need to live out God's teachings in our daily lives—in our homes (how do we treat our family members behind closed doors?), in our cars while we're on the road (are we cursing at the guy who just cut us off?)—from the time we get up to the time we lie down.

We need to live out God's principles in what we choose to do with our hands and what we choose to think about in our heads. We need God's teachings to be the framework of our family and our communities.

Yes, sometimes our faith is tested by huge, fiery trials. I've found, though, that more often our faith is refined in the crucible of daily life.

This is really the most important and effective way that we can teach our

children, but this is also the hardest, because our children see us day in and day out—our strengths and our many weaknesses. I know that many times, I have been compelled to try harder, not because of my own desire for piety, but because I know that I need to become a better person for the sake of my children.

I have had to admit to my children that I was wrong and to tell them not to follow my example. This is important to show them the consistency of God's teachings—that it applies to everyone, and that there are no double standards.

Interestingly enough, instead of undermining my children's respect for me, admitting my wrong has actually increased their respect. Perhaps it is because somehow, as young as they are, they implicitly understand that it is harder to admit wrong than to pretend that you're right. Or perhaps, they realize that we are all in this together, striving for perfection in this imperfect body.

Love Your Child

What better way to teach your children about God's love than to love them with the love of the Lord?

If it is true that people learn from example, then the best example is to love our children. Spend this season with them, because it is so short. Impress upon them the word of God through our love for them and through our daily lives. Fill them up with love and build them up on God's teachings, so that they in turn can love others and build others up in God's teachings.

Perhaps one day, when they are mature Christians, they will look back and say, "I learned to strive for perfect faith through my imperfect parents."★

1. *Memory and Liturgy: The Place of Memory in the Composition and Practice of Liturgy*. Atkins, Peter. Ashgate Publishing, 2004.

Subscribe now!



The screenshot shows the layout of the 'the true vine' newsletter. At the top, it says 'True Jesus Church' and 'the true vine' with a logo. Below that is the URL 'http://www.tjc.org' and the date 'June 2009'. The main content area features several articles with accompanying images:

- Lessons Learned from My Trip to Korea**: Accompanied by an image of white orchids. The text describes a trip to Korea and includes a 'Read more...' link.
- Christian Living**: A section header.
- Thanksgiving**: Accompanied by an image of a street lamp. The text discusses reflections on life since last Thanksgiving and includes a 'Read more...' link.
- Our Stories**: A section header.
- Overcoming Leukemia with God**: Accompanied by an image of a blue flower. The text describes a personal experience with illness and includes a 'Read more...' link.
- Q & A**: A section header.
- On Jesus' Baptism**: Accompanied by an image of a book titled 'Answers'. The text asks a question about Jesus' baptism and includes a 'Read more...' link.

At the bottom, there is a call to action: 'If you think this newsletter is a valuable resource, PASS IT ON!'.

If you would like for us to send you a monthly supply of spiritual encouragement, please subscribe to our e-newsletter, The True Vine! You will find helpful articles and testimonies to uplift your faith, and this electronic version is both easily accessible and available for your convenience.

So log on to www.tjc.org and join our online community today!

Return to Me and I Will Return to You

Sister in Christ

I

Eager hands open the clasp of my childhood Bible
Words float easily before me
A simple step away from bed, I kneel and close my
eyes
I speak the prayers on my mind
And God's touch is sweet.

The strong voice of the preacher on a Sabbath day
Plucks a harmonious melody
That warms and satisfies my soul.
The harvest is plenty but the laborers are few;
I willingly put up my hand and offer what I can.

My service begins with a simple melody as the
congregation sing
It moves on to a short Bible study as those around me
share;
I start the clock and I stop the clock.
From seminar to seminar knowledge increases:

I've read this particular passage many times
You don't know what it means?
Let me tell you and listen to my wisdom.
I too can pursue with maturity
That's what you and you expect.

II

A seed falls effortlessly from a blackened mind and
lands
In the centre of my heart;
I let the seed stay
Small fragile thing
I let it stay.

My voice gets louder
My hands work faster and feet run harder
In the house of the Lord, I begin to dry myself out
with

*cleaning, cooking, preparing, organizing,
speaking, leading, guiding, explaining,
writing, reading, praying, singing...*

My breath is caught in a tangle of works that clutch
determinedly around a weary heart
And I'm tired.

I will do the work because it needs to be done
I will do the work because I know how it has to be
done
I will do the work because that's what should be done
I do the work.

Hands avert their hold from the tattered Book on the
floor
Knees refuse to bend and touch the worn carpet
Eyes only close to the call of sleep and not to the call
of prayer.

III

Tentatively I place my hands on the floor and rest on
 apprehensive knees
 My left hand finds my right hand and they anxiously
 grasp one another
 Warily, I shut out the light and close my eyes
 I try and reach out to You.

Faint words fall dryly from proud, demanding lips
 I turn from left to right - I can't seem to see my God
 anywhere
 There are no whispers from Your mouth
 Just echoes from noises that issue from my lips
 Dreadfully I search for You and the path seems so
 unfamiliar.

What is this selfish wall that looms in front of me?
 We are separated
 I am alone

In the dark and far away.

IV

I search for You in the Book You gave me
 It is placed irregularly on the floor, dusty and neglected.
 My hand shakily turns the pages: where are You?
 Where are You?
 My hand stops, eyes rove along a multitude of verses
 No longer an echo, Your voice begins to whisper:

I speak to you through bars
I speak to you through high fences
I speak to you through pride's sinful wall
that has captured your pitiful heart.
Break through.
Disentangle your feet.
Return to Me.

His words flicker before my darkened eyes
 He's showing me the way
 He's giving me strength to see my wrong
 I see and comprehend.

I built that wall, O foolish heart
 Those wild weeds were watered by my vanity
 Those fences wrought by my unsteady hands
 Those bars fashioned out of pride and immaturity.
 Careless heart, so easily seduced, I cannot look at you
 anymore.

It is time for me to take you down
 Piece by sinful piece;
 It is time for me to break free.

V

My voice grows faint and You grow dim
How can I be sure it's not a dream?
My knees shake and agitate, my body rocks distressingly
My prayer is weak, I cannot cry
And weeds wrap around my feet
Oh small black seed, I let you grow too wild.

I take Your words in both hands and hold them close
to me
The tighter my hold, the more it hurts
My heart begins to bleed repentantly.
With tears I cut away at roots
I fight my way through high fences
I cry and shout through bars that obstruct me
I reach the wall and sink Your words into the center of
my separation

Return to Me and I will return to you

Your holy words blaze through my soul, engulf and
sear my heart.

A final tug
An excruciating pull
Heart beating faster, body trembling
My hands rest on the floor
Tears stick to my burning cheeks.
And then all I see is You
You fill my vision and

I am overwhelmed.

VI

*I am here, I am here.
I've been waiting for you for so long.*

*Can you feel Me flutter around you, as you shake and tremble?
Let Me circle you and wrap your damaged
Tear stained soul with soothing ribbons of peace
Talk to Me, confess to Me, speak to Me your heart
I'm listening.*

I am before my God, naked and shameless, stripped
of the sin that bound me
He faces me, His ears are open.
Lips part and streams of Spirit words tumble-fall out
At first they splutter and choke and then there's no
stopping
They go on and on and on.

Unburdened and light I float free and easy
Time stops and all healing balms wrap tenderly around
me so smoothly;
I don't know when I stopped crying.

VII

Racing heartbeats are smoothed and steadied.
Shoulders stand upright and tall
Eyes slowly open and floods of familiar surroundings bring me back to earth
Hands unclasp, balance, and firmly push me from the floor.

My body is light; I am weightless.

The sun beams through a window and warms my face
Outside, bright green grass and cerulean skies
Flash so brilliantly, I squint
And dimple my cheeks in broad smile.

I pick up the Book and smooth the cover flat
Holding it close to my chest—
Wisdom revealed herself to me in the smallest of words
Flipping from page to eye and she stays tucked
In the deep folds of my heart;
Lined pages of my service to God are open on the desk before me
Fingers excitedly touch pen marks and ink spots and I

Am so happy!

Because the Lord has reopened the door for me
And it's time for me to walk through.
This time, however,
He shows me where to put my feet because He is in front of me
And I begin
One foot in front of the other.

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

Christian Living

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

Bible Study

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

Doctrinal Study

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

Exhortation

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

Testimony

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

Creative Writing

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

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

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

Manna

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

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

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

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Author Guidelines and Editorial Calendar

Issue #63:

Topic: Music

Articles due: December 15, 2009

Music plays a big part in our lives. We listen to it while we work, while we travel, while we study. We hear it in stores, restaurants, television shows, and movies. Music is also an important part of worship services in the church. With all the different ways we encounter music every day, how does it affect us? Do our music choices affect our faith? What can we learn from the references to music in the Bible?

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

GENERAL WRITING GUIDELINES

CONTENT

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

GRAMMAR/STYLE

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

True Jesus Church

Articles of Faith

Jesus the True God

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

Holy Bible

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

Church

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

Salvation

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

Baptism

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

Foot Washing

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

Holy Spirit

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

Holy Communion

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

Sabbath Day

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

Judgment Day

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

TRUE JESUS CHURCH CONTACT INFORMATION

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

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