

MANNA

ISSUE 68

Succession: Generation Next

Passing and Receiving the Baton of Faith

Step by Step into the
Family of God

The Image of a Christian
in the Digital Age

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

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Succession

EDITORIAL

Commit to Faithful Men

by Peter Shee

“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Tim 2:2)

The World Delegates Conference in 2011 aptly chose *Succession* as its theme, reflecting the increasing consciousness that the True Jesus Church has come of age and is fast approaching her centennial in 2017. Adopting the same theme in this issue, three articles examine the intricacies of “passing the baton” and a fourth presents a case study of passing on the faith in the context of a local church.

Two veteran ministers share their views on succession. “Identify-Equip-Handover” outlines the approach of one writer. He highlights important traits of successors, emphasizes on training standards and finally notes that handing over is in itself an exercise in obedience. But succession is not just about passing on. As pointed by the second writer, it is about safeguarding the legacy of faith and ensuring the next generation are rooted in their beliefs and remain faithful to the truth. From the perspective of a younger minister, the exemplary conduct of his seniors must be matched with anchors in his generation, who like the biblical Isaac are obedient but not passive. The case study, replete with quotes from interviewees, opens to our view the uniting potential of faith in transcending generational and cultural barriers. Heart-warming and insightful at the same time, the study uncovers gaps and concludes that succession requires planning.

Articles complementing this issue’s theme include the Bible Study on 2 Timothy as well as insights from a young man who has just entered the secular workforce and is starting to understand what it really means to serve God.

Many forces work against proper succession. While inertia and indifference result in lack of successors in the spiritual workforce, unbridled ambition stands at the other end of the spectrum. “Thief of Hearts” offers a timely reminder to us as subjects of the Kingdom, that “God is the Ruler yet.” No one takes the place of God, no one should allow his allegiance to shift from the Divine to any human, and no one needs to lose heart. In the grand scheme of things, the heirs of God are those that are truly in Christ (Rom 8:17; Heb 6:17). No subversion will overthrow succession in the place where God reigns.

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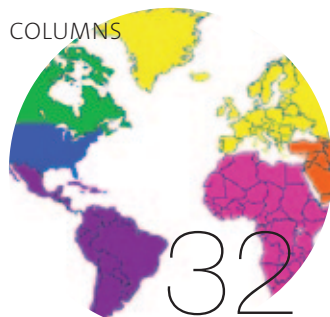
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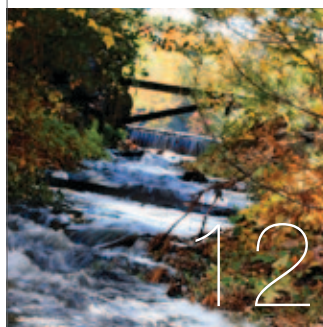
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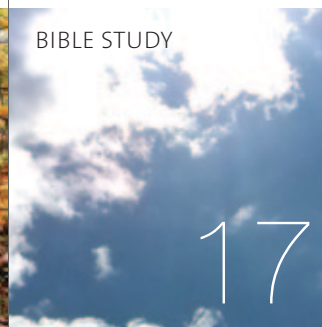
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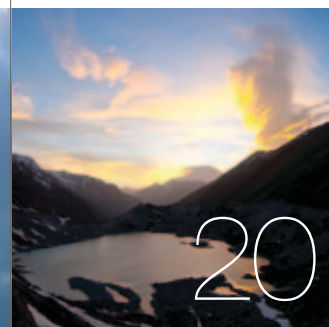
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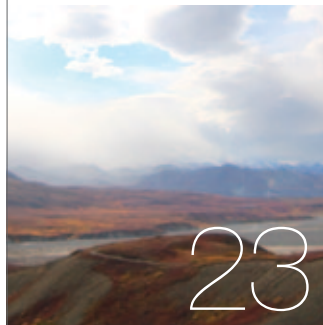
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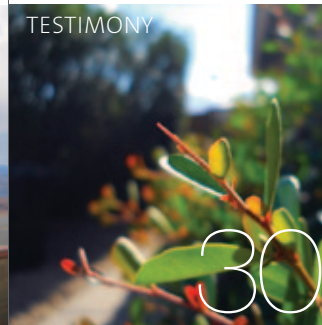
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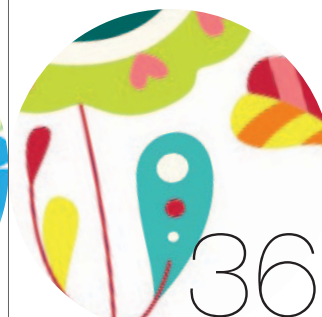
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Succession



Passing and Receiving the Baton of Faith

Vuthy Nol-Mantia—Dallas, Texas, USA

In a 4x400 meter relay, there are usually four runners. By default, the first runner is the second fastest, the second and third runners the third and fourth fastest respectively, and the last runner is the fastest. He is also called the anchor person.

When I was in high school, I often ran the 4x400 m relay. I didn't really like it because I was usually the second or third runner who had to receive and pass on the baton, which meant more work. As such, I had to study exactly how fast the first person was running because he had to pass the baton within a certain zone or we would get disqualified. When I saw the first person running toward me, I would start running, without worrying where the baton would come from. However, with the baton in hand, I had to think how to pass it to the next person. For this reason, a relay is quite a demanding race.

Today, the church is running a challenging spiritual relay to pass on the baton of faith. But how can we run this race successfully? How did the people in the Bible pass their faith to their descendants?

Abraham successfully passed down his faith to Isaac. Although the Bible does not explicitly say how Abraham instructed Isaac in the faith, we can learn much from Abraham's actions and his relationship with God.

BUILD A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

"Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, 'Abraham!'

And he said, 'Here I am.'" (Gen 22:1)

God knew Abraham by name because Abraham had a good relationship with Him—Abraham heard the voice of the LORD and was called the friend of God (Isa 41:8; cf. Jas 2:23). Genesis 22 tells us that Abraham quietly listened to God when He spoke, responded to Him and obeyed the LORD's command.

What about us? Do we have a good relationship with God? Do we listen to God's voice? Do we respond to Him, practice and obey His teachings?

Abraham not only listened to God, he also had an open ear for his son Isaac. When Isaac addressed him, "My father!" he answered him in the same way he answered God (Gen 22:7, cf. Gen 22:1).

Sometimes the young and old in church may not get along very well. That is because we do not have a good relationship with God and often find ourselves weak in faith and lacking in personal experiences with Him.

Whether young or old, we need to cultivate ourselves to draw closer to God. Once we have a good relationship with God, we will also have good relationships with one another.

SET THE EXAMPLE OF LOVE

"Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love ..." (Gen 22:2)

Just as Abraham loved his son Isaac, we too need to show love towards our younger generation. Just as Isaac was precious to Abraham because he was born of promise, our next generation should be precious to us because they are the ones who will receive the baton of faith.

Just as Abraham loved his son Isaac, we too need to show love towards our younger generation. Just as Isaac was precious to Abraham because he was born of promise, our next generation should be precious to us because they are the ones who will receive the baton of faith. So, we need to show our love and care for them.

Our youths need our love so that they can grow in faith and glorify God's name. Some youths do not receive love at home. Their hearts are empty and they pursue after the things of the world. If they come to church and do not receive love either, they will easily drift farther away from God and may even become lost. However, when we love and care for them, they can personally experience the love of Christ and be strengthened in their faith.

Sometimes we may find it difficult to show love towards the younger generation. Yet consider Abraham: although he loved Isaac, he loved God even more. With the love of God in him, Abraham knew how to love his son, for God Himself is love. When we love God, we will know how to love others because His love will overflow to everyone around us.

Ever since I stepped into the True Jesus Church, I have received much love from brothers and sisters, especially from the older brethren. This love has touched me deeply and sustained me whenever I felt discouraged.

When I was still a trainee preacher, I spent some time at Pacifica church in the United States. I often felt lonely at that time because I was by myself and there was nobody to talk to. Members there generally live quite far away from church, so seldom would anyone stop by outside of worship services. After service, brethren usually leave early because

they have to drive far to get home.

But sometimes, after service, I would find a bag of cookies in front of my door. I knew that the brethren had put it there. Although they did not have much time to talk to me, this seemingly small gesture showed their love towards me.

When I served in Hawaii, there was an elderly sister who knew that I love fish head soup. When I visited her, she cooked the biggest fish head I have ever seen (bigger than my head)—that's how big her heart is!

SET THE EXAMPLE OF DILIGENT SERVICE TO GOD

So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he split the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

(Gen 22:3)

Although Abraham loved Isaac, he loved God even more. He arose early to do the will of God and sacrifice Isaac.

Today, we too must be diligent in serving God. We need to set a good example because our actions speak louder than a thousand words.

While I was in theological training, I attended a ministers' workshop. There was an elder who was in his nineties, yet he would take notes during every sermon, even when theological students were speaking. Moreover, he would kneel down with us to pray for one hour every morning, although his knees would stiffen and we would have to help him get up after the prayers.

Just like Abraham, we must be diligent to do the will of God. In this way, the younger generation will see our diligence and follow our example.

SET THE EXAMPLE OF FAITH

And Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you."

(Gen 22:5)

After a three-day journey, during which Abraham had time to think things through, they finally arrived at Mount Moriah. Abraham had probably thought much about God's will and, by faith, had finally concluded that God would be able to raise Isaac from the dead (Heb 11:19).

So Abraham told his servants, "the lad and I will go yonder to worship, and we will come back to you," showing his great faith in God.

Today, as the older generation, we need to have Abraham's faith. How else can we expect the younger ones to have faith?

Once I went to Ghana with a senior minister. During the first three days after our arrival, we didn't have any water because the whole city's water supply had been cut off. In the middle of the first night, a fire suddenly broke out, and we could not escape through the front door because there was too much smoke. The only way of escape was through the window.

However, instead of breaking the window, the senior minister started to disassemble it piece by piece, because he did not want the brethren to incur additional expenses. In the midst of life-threatening circumstances, he was still thinking of others!

By God's grace, the water in the city was suddenly turned on for about thirty minutes that night—

We too must be diligent in serving God. We need to set a good example because our actions speak louder than a thousand words.

just enough time for our brethren to extinguish the fire and to bring a ladder, so that we could climb out of the window. Through this incident, I learned a great lesson of faith from the older minister.

Just like Abraham, we too need to set an example of faith to show our younger generation that the God we worship is a true and living God.

ABRAHAM AND ISAAC WALKED TOGETHER

So Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and the two of them went together.

But Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." Then he said, "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" And Abraham said, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering." So the two of them went together.

(Gen 22:6-8)

Abraham not only passed down his faith to Isaac, he also involved him in his work for God. As Abraham and Isaac went up the mountain, they each carried some of the materials and utensils. The Bible records that they "went together." In other words, they worked together in unity. So how did Abraham and Isaac walk together?

Abraham Laid the Wood on Isaac

Just as Abraham asked Isaac to carry the wood, we should give the younger generation a chance to serve in church. Although Isaac did not know exactly what was happening, Abraham was able to involve him in the work, which was to offer him according to God's command.

Today our youths may be inexperienced, but we still have to involve them in the holy work. We should not be afraid to let the young ones work with us; rather we should train and guide them, as eventually

we will pass the baton on to them.

Abraham Carried the Fire and a Knife

When Abraham went up to Mount Moriah, he prepared everything that he needed to sacrifice Isaac. Apart from wood, he also brought fire and a knife. Today, we too need to equip ourselves with the spiritual fire and knife. We need to be prayerful and ask the Lord to fill us with His Spirit. We also need to sharpen our spiritual eyesight through God's word. Only then can we fearlessly face the challenge of passing on the baton.

Today our youths may be inexperienced, but we still have to involve them in the holy work. We should not be afraid to let the young ones work with us; rather we should train and guide them, as eventually we will pass the baton on to them.

Isaac—Obedient, but Not Passive

Isaac was quiet along the way to Mount Moriah, yet he was not inactive. He carried the wood that his father gave to him and obediently followed Abraham. Along the journey, Isaac did not say anything other than asking one question, "Where is the lamb?" This shows his attentiveness. When his father told him that God would provide the lamb, Isaac simply accepted the answer.

Later, Isaac did not resist or try to run away. Instead, he allowed his father to bind him and place him on the altar (Gen 22:9). Sometimes we say too much, do very little, and are not obedient enough to the older generation. However, have we ever considered that the older generation has to give an account to God? Have we considered that they must have thought things through? For this reason, we should be obedient to them in the Lord (cf. Eph 6:1).

Joshua too was obedient when Moses sent him to fight against the Amalekites. He went to fight without bargaining with Moses because he

knew that Moses would be praying for him. So just like Joshua and Isaac, let us do our part.

Being the younger generation, we are the "anchor" of this spiritual relay as the end-time draws nearer. This means that we need to do greater things. We must prepare ourselves: be humble, open-minded and teachable. Let us equip ourselves with the fire of the Holy Spirit and the sword of God's word, just as the older generation has set the example for us. Then we will finish the race of faith, save more souls and pass the baton of faith to our next generation.

In the end-time, the church must continue to be glorified. This will only be possible if we continue passing down the baton of faith and the baton of God's work. Therefore, young and old alike must strive for a better relationship with God and work together in unity, walking side by side to fulfill the will of God. Only then will this mountain become the highest mountain and this church the most glorious church. ★





Pass on the Mission

Derren Liang—Irvine, California, USA

THE IMPORTANCE OF SUCCESSION

As the revived apostolic church, the true church has her great commission clearly set out by her Lord. First, she is to love the souls of men, anxiously preaching the gospel because she is unwilling for any to perish. Second, she is to love the Lord's sheep, tending them faithfully so that there is true transformation in their lives.

The power and might of God abides with us when we do His work and fulfill His commission. However, on our parts, we need three critical conditions to be in place. First is clarity of purpose—we must know what we need to do. Second are competencies—we have to equip ourselves to do what needs to be done. Third is continuity—we should strive to ensure that God's work will perpetuate.

John the Baptist is an excellent example. He clearly understood his mission—to pave the way for the Lord Jesus. During his ministry, he worked tirelessly for God. But once he had done his part, he knew that he ought to wind down his service: "He must increase, I must decrease" (Jn 3:30). Subsequently, we see a

seamless transition between John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus.

Look around your church today. Alarm bells ought to ring if we see youths sitting around with nothing to do whilst older members carry out all the work. We need to entrust specific tasks to the younger ones, while we continue to do what they cannot yet do. This is "passing the baton." The younger generation must be concerned over the church, step up to serve with their God-given potential and be nurtured as they serve. Once they have reached the required maturity, they can serve as council members, and subsequently can be ordained as ministers in the church.

Many large successful multinational companies take succession planning very seriously. They know that the founder's or first brilliant CEO's efforts will all be in vain if they cannot find a good successor. Similarly, we must place great emphasis on succession in church. A church with a pool of well-equipped, zealous and God-fearing youths has a bright future.

PRECIOUS HEIRLOOMS

Continuity is indeed an important

goal for the church. To achieve this goal, the current generation of leaders must identify the precious heirlooms that they have to safeguard, so that the mission of the church can be passed on to the next generation of leaders. What exactly should we pass on to ensure that the great commission continues to be carried out? The Scriptures point to the following:

Continuity of Life

An important part of life consists of growing up, getting married and establishing a family. But for God's people, there is more. The Bible instructs us to be fruitful, multiply and seek godly offspring in both the physical as well as the spiritual sense, which is to lead others to Christ (cf. 1 Cor 4:14–15). These, and especially the latter, are what make our lives really meaningful and will continuously bring new life into the church.

Continuity of the Faith

In Exodus 3:6, God introduced Himself to Moses as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." These were

three people from three separate generations, each with their distinct relationships with God, but they shared a common achievement—they successfully bequeathed their faith to the next generation.

What is the most important bequest that we can give our children? Good physical health? A good education? Or good faith? While the first two are important, faith is clearly the most indispensable, for God is our eternal inheritance. The Israelites lacked nothing in the wilderness, all because God was with them. If we understand that God is our inheritance, we will not worry over any lack, even if our lives are harsh. So we must focus on ensuring that our God becomes the God of our offspring. But how?

If we want to ensure that our faith is effectively bequeathed to our children, we must place heavy emphasis on Religious Education (RE) at home. We must not regard RE as the sole responsibility of the church, blaming the church if our children turn out to have poor faith. Church RE classes are very important, but it is only a supplement; it cannot replace religious education at home. Deuteronomy 6:4–9 reminds all parents of their duty to secure their children's faith:

"Hear, O Israel. The LORD our God..." (Deut 6:4)

We must first be very sure of our own identity—"I am one of God's chosen people." This is a precious status that will not change with time. Our lifestyle choices must then reflect God's will and Christ's image.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." (Deut 6:5)

The most basic work of family religious education is teaching by example. In everything we do, do it out of love for God. Then our children will learn indirectly to give God priority in everything.

"...these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to

your children." (Deut 6:6–9)

We must diligently teach our children the word of God.

If we have done all that is listed in this passage and have constantly prayed for our children, we shall be able to bequest to our children this legacy of faith through the guidance of God. We must thus resolve to create a unique environment of faith and reverence at home so that our children will have the opportunity to grow up in the word of God.



Continuity of the Truth

The truth is the doctrine of salvation that we teach. In his ministry, Paul preached the gospel and, particularly in the latter part of his life, defended the truth. So today we must preach Jesus to those who do not believe in God, and for those who already believe in God, we preach the truth as captured in the True Jesus Church's ten articles of faith and five essential doctrines.

We must bequeath this God-inspired truth that has been given to us from the beginning. Hence, it is crucial for us to have the correct view

of the True Jesus Church and to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us, so we can discern the truth. In order to leave a legacy of unadulterated truth to the next generation, we must cultivate ourselves to hold fast the "pattern of sound words which you have heard from [the apostles], in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 1:13).

Moreover, we need to learn from Moses who took Joshua up Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments (Ex 24:12–13). To ascend the mountain means to receive the word of God. This is a requirement to become a person of God. So when Moses died, Joshua followed the path that Moses set. He did not alter it.

Today, we are in the True Jesus Church because we know the doctrines of this church, and we know that salvation can be found here. The Holy Spirit gives us this clarity, which allows us to lead the church in the right direction. As the older generation, we must take the younger generation up the mountain so they can be rooted in the doctrines; as the younger generation, let us be faithful to the truth, upholding what has been entrusted to us.

Continuity of the Gospel

When we preach to a person, and he or she comes to believe in Christ, this same person must also reach out to another. Imagine how the church will prosper if everyone can reach out to just one more person. In reality, many of us only receive the gospel and stop there. So we have to instill in our new believers that they should strive to bring another soul to God. Only when a seed dies, will a new fruit or plant grow from it. Preaching the

Today, we are in the True Jesus Church because we know the doctrines of this church, and we know that salvation can be found here. The Holy Spirit gives us this clarity, which allows us to lead the church in the right direction. As the older generation, we must take the younger generation up the mountain so they can be rooted in the doctrines; as the younger generation, let us be faithful to the truth, upholding what has been entrusted to us.

gospel is a sacrifice indeed; but those who sow in tears shall reap in joy!

Continuity of Service to the Lord

Another key legacy to bequeath to the future generation is the need for continuity of service to God. Jesus prayed and found twelve disciples at the beginning of His ministry on earth. Likewise Moses identified Joshua as his successor soon after he stood up to lead the Israelites. So in the church, we must identify and cultivate successors and give them the opportunity to serve.

Moreover, we need to cultivate our next generation's zeal to work for God. Society's focus on material well-being has resulted in a decline in our zeal to serve God. Consequently, our spiritual life has been relegated to second place. So even during the busiest times in our lives, we must set the example and continue to serve God zealously. Only then can we be considered faithful servants of the Lord.

Passing Down Spiritual Experiences

Many of us can draw from a rich portfolio of spiritual experiences after many years of serving God. These experiences have taught us how to have faith and rely on God. Today we must pass down these experiences, so that the younger ones amongst us know how the older generation came to Christ and relied on God throughout their lives.

As we share these experiences with them, the focus should be on God's almightiness, not on the person who received God's grace. More importantly, our experiences should stir up the next generation to rely on God in their own service to the Lord. It is easy to impart knowledge and skills to the next generation of workers, but they also need to

experience God for themselves.

The battle at Rephidim was a good opportunity for Joshua to experience God while serving Him. As he fought in the battlefield, Moses prayed on the hilltop. Joshua learned that his victory was not the result of his fighting prowess. Each time Moses raised his hands in prayer, victory was with the army of Israel. But each time Moses was tired, and he let down his hands, the enemies won (Ex 17:8–13). As we serve God, we must rely on Him through prayer. If we do so, we will serve God joyfully, as His presence will be amongst us.

CONCLUSION

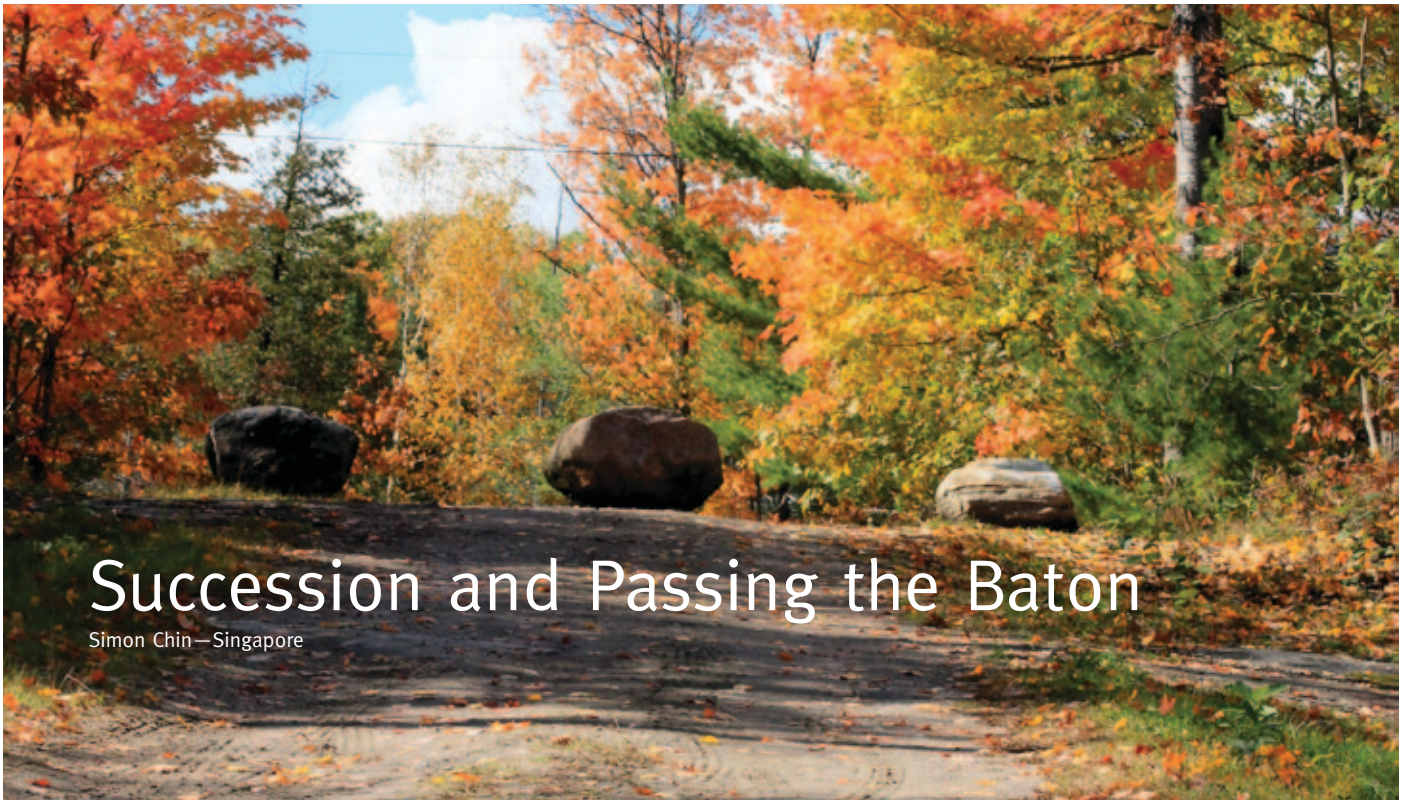
For many people, succession planning is understood as identifying successors, briefing them and letting them observe us for a period of time before they take over completely. Our focus tends to be more on handing over the work. While this is necessary, it is not enough. We must also help prepare our successors by equipping them with the faith to resist the tide of the world and by nurturing their zeal to serve God. This is no easy matter for it is a battle for the souls of men.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

(Eph 6:12)

Therefore, before handing the work over to the next generation, we must first guide them in their spiritual growth. In this manner, the commission of the church will continue to prosper until the Lord comes again. ★

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Succession and Passing the Baton

Simon Chin — Singapore

The preacher Solomon in the Book of Ecclesiastes wrote, “One generation passes away, and another generation comes but the earth abides forever.”¹ He was speaking of the vanity of things done by man in his life on earth. Every man will die and disappear. The human life span is short in contrast with the earth’s existence, which seems to abide forever.

Realizing the mortality of man and the cyclical nature of each passing generation, it is important for the present workers of God to give thought to the matter of succession and passing the baton. This ensures continuity and enables church work to prosper when the next generation takes over the helm to drive the ministry.

Passing the baton of the ministry at the right time with godly reverence is a duty of faithful workers of God. This should be done with the fear of the Lord and love for the church, undertaken out of concern for both the successors and future progress of the ministry of the truth. If the passing of the baton is done reluctantly and poorly, the church’s future ministry will be impeded. Succeeding workers who are ill-equipped to serve the

church may affect the faith of the congregation. In short, if we do not undertake succession or do it inadequately, we are unfaithful to the Master Jesus Christ.

HOW SHOULD SUCCESSION BE DONE?

Identify potential successors while serving in the ministry

Moses identified Joshua as a potential successor to the work of leading the Israelite nation. He took Joshua under his wing to serve the LORD.² Apostle Paul brought Timothy into the ministry at Lystra during his second missionary journey, after he saw that Timothy had faith, being taught the word from childhood by his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice, and was well spoken of by the brethren at Lystra and Iconium.³ Apostle Peter considered Mark his son⁴, and he shared with Mark the experience of his three-year discipleship under the Lord Jesus Christ: the miracles of Jesus he had witnessed and the teachings he had heard. Mark subsequently recorded these in the second Gospel.⁵ Mark was also deemed by Apostle Paul as

useful to him for the ministry.⁶

Joshua, Timothy and Mark were identified for their spiritual qualities which later enabled them to become exemplary leaders and faithful stewards in the house of God.

Joshua feared the LORD and was a man of truth who hated covetousness. He was faithful, waiting for Moses to descend from Mount Sinai even after forty days and nights. He did not depart from the tabernacle to return to the camp of the Israelites.⁷

Timothy shared Apostle Paul’s sincere concern for the state of the brethren. Unlike others who sought their own, Timothy sought the things of Christ Jesus. With a proven character, he served with Paul in the gospel as a son with his father.⁸

Although Mark left Paul and Barnabas in Perga, Pamphylia during the first missionary journey and returned to Jerusalem, he later traveled with Barnabas to Cyprus to minister the word. Paul subsequently found him to be a useful worker in the ministry. He had the quality of persistence, and his earlier failure did not discourage him but strengthened his determination to serve the Lord.⁹

Hence, effective succession

Passing the baton of the ministry at the right time with godly reverence is a duty of faithful workers of God. This should be done with the fear of the Lord and love for the church, undertaken out of concern for both the successors and future progress of the ministry of the truth.

planning requires preachers, elders, deacons and workers to keep a lookout for believers with the potential to serve the Lord. They need to identify those with spiritual qualities of faith, good reputation, holiness, spiritual wisdom, patience and endurance, and who are filled with the Holy Spirit, fear the Lord and hate covetousness.¹⁰

Equip potential successors with knowledge of the faith, spiritual character, skills of administering church work and the ability to serve the Lord with humility

Purity of faith in the word of God, obedience to the commandments and submissiveness to the church of the Lord are essential qualities for every church worker. Besides being filled with the Holy Spirit, these successors must be pure in their devotion to Jesus Christ and to the word of truth according to the teachings of the Bible.¹¹ They ought to hold fast to the pattern of the sound words, which they have heard from their predecessors.¹² They ought to be humble and ready to be taught,¹³ willing to endure hardships, and determined to imitate those who live as examples for them¹⁴. Moreover, they have to undergo training, formally through seminars and informally by observing workers in the field. Such training must be given over a period of many years before the baton can be passed to them.

Such a training approach can be seen in the Bible. Timothy followed Paul to foreign lands, enduring hardship and suffering when the apostle ministered the word of truth to the Jews and the Gentiles in Macedonia, Achaia and Asia.¹⁵ He heard the sound words from Paul and was nourished in the word.¹⁶

After his conversion, Paul went to the desert in Arabia¹⁷ where the Holy Spirit taught him the mystery of Christ and the word.¹⁸ He then returned to Damascus where he confounded the Jews proving that Jesus is the Christ.¹⁹ He exhorted Timothy to fight the good fight of the faith and guard what had been committed to his trust; he urged Timothy to avoid profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what was falsely called knowledge.²⁰



Moses was trained in the wisdom of Egypt until the age of forty²¹; this was followed by forty years of molding in the wilderness of Midian by the hardship of life as a shepherd looking after the flock of his father-in-law, before God used him.²² In fact, Moses' training started from childhood when his mother Jochebed nursed him and taught him the faith in the LORD. At forty, he fled from the fleeting pleasures of sin in Egypt.²³ After killing an Egyptian,

Moses escaped to the wilderness in Midian. Though safe, he led a life of self-denial and indignity, for he was known as the Egyptian who had fled from his land and the refugee married to Zipporah. The flock he was tending belonged to his father-in-law, and his sons were known as the sons of Zipporah.²⁴ Consequently, at the age of eighty, the LORD called him and commanded him to return to Egypt to bring His people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt. Moses said, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt."²⁵ Still, Moses went. In the last forty years of his life, he served the LORD as a faithful servant in His house.²⁶ Moses underwent eighty years of training to serve for only forty years. At the point of his death, he was 120 years old, but his eyes were not dimmed nor his natural vigor diminished.²⁷

In the same way, successors ought to be trained in the knowledge of the word and in spiritual character, nurtured in the spirit to love the Lord and His church with a pure heart. They have to be molded into faithful servants of God who are able to endure sufferings and hardships, filled with humility to serve Him. They must imitate Christ who came to serve, not to be served. The length of such training should not be too short, so that when these successors take over the work, they are spiritually equipped to serve.

Implement succession with reverence for the sovereignty of God and absolute loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although Moses had identified Joshua as his potential successor, when the time to hand over the baton had come, Moses acknowledged the

Successors ought to be trained in the knowledge of the word and in spiritual character, nurtured in the spirit to love the Lord and His church with a pure heart. They have to be molded into faithful servants of God who are able to endure sufferings and hardships, filled with humility to serve Him.

sovereignty of God and spoke to the Lord, saying, "Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd."²⁸

And the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him, set him before Eleazar the priest and before the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. And you shall give some of your authority to him that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. He shall stand before Eleazar the priest who shall inquire before the LORD for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him--all the congregation." Moses obeyed, as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. And he laid hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.²⁹

From the inauguration of Joshua, the man who succeeded Moses to lead the Israelites across the Jordan and take possession of the promised land of Canaan, we learn that succession and passing the baton is carried out in full submission to the sovereignty of God. There should be no nepotism or favoritism when identifying potential workers and appointing successors. Spiritual conditions and factors of faith as well as suitability of the persons according to God's will should be the only considerations when successors are appointed, trained and inaugurated.

Nadab and Abihu, the two sons of Aaron, were consumed in fire when they offered profane fire.³⁰ They did not succeed their father in the priesthood. Joel and Abijah, the sons of Samuel, were judges in Beersheba, but they did not walk in their father's way. They sought after dishonest gain, took bribes and perverted

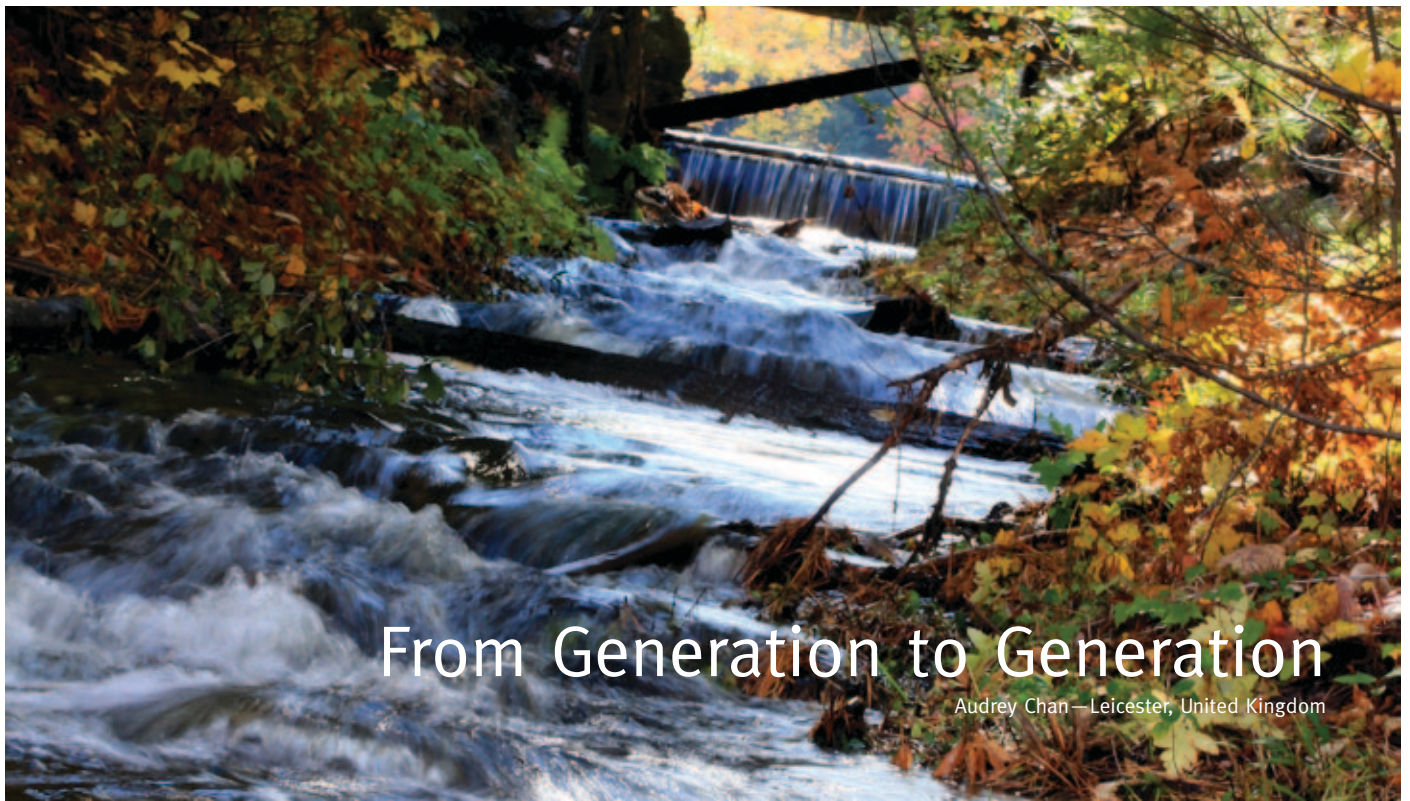
justice. They did not continue to be judges over the people.³¹ The LORD permitted the Israelites to choose a king for themselves instead.

Nepotism in appointing potential workers and successors to church leadership, with little consideration given to their spirituality, faith and character, is tantamount to dishonoring God and defying His sovereignty. Such an approach will impede the spiritual growth of the church and greatly disrupt the work of the ministry. It may even weaken the faith of the church.³²

In conclusion, for continuity in spreading the gospel of salvation and tending the sheep of the Lord, succession and passing the baton ought to be given priority. Critically, succession planning and implementation must be undertaken with fear of God, love for the church and consideration for the faith of the brethren. ★

- 1 Eccl 1:4
- 2 Ex 17:9-13; 24:13; 32:17; 33:11; Num 27:18-23
- 3 Acts 16:1-3; 1 Tim 1:5; 3:15
- 4 1 Pet 5:13
- 5 Peter was Mark's primary informant when the latter wrote the Gospel of Mark. Most scholars agree that Mark wrote his gospel in Rome under Peter's supervision, for Mark was with Peter in Rome around AD 60-62 and may have returned around AD 65 at Paul's request.
- 6 2 Tim 4:11
- 7 Ex 18:21; 32:17; 33:11
- 8 Phil 2:19-22
- 9 Acts 13:4-5, 13; 15:37-40; 2 Tim 4:11
- 10 Ex 18:21; Acts 6:3, 5; 1 Cor 4:2; 2 Tim 2:22
- 11 2 Cor 6:4-6; 1 Tim 1:5
- 12 2 Tim 1:13
- 13 Isa 50:4
- 14 2 Tim 1:8-9; 2:3; 3:10-12
- 15 Acts 16:4-12; 17:1; 18:5, 22-23; 20; 5-6, 13-16; 21:1-8, 17
- 16 1 Tim 4:6, 12, 15-16; 2 Tim 1:13
- 17 Gal 1:17
- 18 1 Cor 11:23; Eph 3:2-6, 8-11
- 19 Acts 9:18-22
- 20 1 Tim 6:12, 20
- 21 Acts 7:22
- 22 Acts 7:29-30; Num 12:3
- 23 Heb 11:24-26
- 24 Ex 2:19-22; 3:1; 18:2
- 25 Ex 3:11
- 26 Heb 3:3, 5
- 27 Deut 34:7
- 28 Num 27:15-17
- 29 Num 27:18-21
- 30 Lev 10:1-2
- 31 1 Sam 8:1-5
- 32 1 Sam 8:1-5





From Generation to Generation

Audrey Chan—Leicester, United Kingdom

Editor's note:

The following article is a case study, which aims to help readers reflect on succession in their own church. Although each church has different backgrounds and needs, we hope that the article can encourage and inspire.

INTRODUCTION

The year 2011 was a turning point for the church in Leicester, UK. After more than fifteen years of searching for new premises with varying disappointments along the way, we finally purchased a large four-story building in a prime location at the city center. It has been beyond our expectations—all due to God's wonderful timing and arrangement.

With this blessing in mind, we reflect on God's grace by looking back over the journey that has led to this point, taking stock of our current situation and thinking ahead to the future. The move to the new building is significant because it prompts us to consider how we can serve God more and how to ensure that the next generation is fully on board.

PAST JOURNEY

Not Forgetting Our Roots

"One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts." (Ps 145:4)

Sometimes during our annual Religious Education (RE) Day in Leicester, an elderly deacon is called upon to deliver words of encouragement. Last year, as in previous years, he fixed his gaze upon the youngsters sitting in the front pews and asked them in Chinese, "What did your family use to do?" The children smiled broadly at this familiar question and gave their reply. This well-rehearsed dialogue then continued with the deacon reaffirming their answer in broken English, "Fish-a-man," to rapturous laughter from the congregation.

The point of the deacon's question? Well, it was obvious that he did not want the children to forget their humble roots. Also, he did not want them to forget God's grace: how He has been unceasingly shepherding us from past years to this day.

Profile of the Congregation

The profile of the congregation in Leicester, as in many parts of the UK, is an interesting one. The majority of the members hark back to a tiny island

in Hong Kong called Ap Chau. It was here that they and the generations before them eked out a subsistence from fishing. After the gospel reached the island, the islanders experienced the power of God and their faith became strong. Church attendance and service to God became central to their lives. Even though they were poor materially, they were rich spiritually.

Aside from the Ap Chau islanders, there are also members in Leicester who come from other parts of Hong Kong, mainland China, Taiwan and Malaysia. There are also second and third generation members who have been born in the UK. For some families in Leicester, three and even four generations come together to worship in church each week.

Thank God, the church in Leicester is a harmonious one. It is predominantly made up of family units, a few individual believers, and a small number of overseas students. The young and the old come together for services, and attendance has been consistently high over the years. This

is indeed a blessing at a time when many churches in the wider Christian community are bemoaning an absence of young people, or are even closing their doors due to dwindling membership.

Lost and Found

Many of the first generation Leicester members came to the UK in the 1960s and 70s. When they first arrived, they had nothing more than a suitcase, a few pounds in their pockets, and little or no grasp of the English language. Yet, they had a great desire for a better life and a strong work ethic. As such, they were willing to toil long hours in the tough and demanding environment of the catering industry. Not only did they manage to make a living, they also raised families and established their own businesses.

In the early days, the members worked hard, but neglected to gather for services. Many also recall bad habits: smoking, drinking and gambling. The turning point was a pastoral visit by a deacon from Scotland in 1975. His words of encouragement spurred the members to start holding Sabbath services. They gathered first in a member's shop in the city centre, and then, as the congregation grew, in a rented hall in a local Anglican Church.

In 1983, the church purchased its current place of worship on Humberstone Road, a Victorian building that was formerly a Methodist chapel. Finally, the members had a permanent place of worship.

In hindsight, we see how God used the first generation members to lay the foundation for His church in Leicester. Many of these members are still active in the church today, working alongside a new generation of workers to undertake the next

phase of God's work.

CURRENT SITUATION

In this section, we will look at how well the older and younger generations relate to each other, focusing on issues such as communication, working relationships and the generation gap. Local members were asked to contribute their views.

Communication

Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

(Rom 12:16)

The congregation in Leicester reflects all age groups, and there is a slow but steady increase in the number of young families with babies. Most of the members are related in one way or another, and the younger ones generally greet their older relatives when they come to church.

We say, "Hello", or "good morning." If you're related to them, you'll talk more...If you know they've been on holiday, you'll ask, "When did you come back, did you have fun?"

Intermediate Youth, Senior Youth & Teacher Training Class

However, not everyone has family members in the church, and for one or two people, there is a different perception.

The young people don't notice the old people...no one does. They need to respect the older people.

Retired Sister

An issue may be that members of

a similar age group quite naturally gravitate towards each other, and this can give the impression or lead to a sense of physical segregation.

You can see at tea time—the youngsters sit on one side, the old people sit on the other.

Retired Brother

I don't think the younger people speak to the older people. At tea time, you see the younger lot standing up, the middle-aged sitting with the middle aged...

Intermediate Youth Class Student

It may seem like segregation, but it's not intentional...more of habit.

RE Teacher

Some members also mentioned a language barrier.

You have to speak in a way that they understand. There's a language barrier.

Senior Youth Class Student

The old people talk in their Ap Chau language and the grandchildren speak English. They each have their own homes and don't spend much time together. They can't really talk at a deep level, to say what's on their mind. In the past, the older generation shared testimonies about God's grace. If they [i.e. the different generations] have lived together, the relationship is different.

Deaconess

Inter-Generational Working Relationships

Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.

(Rom 12:10–11)

In Leicester, the opportunities for joint-working between the generations include things like leafleting, choir, cleaning, cooking and preparing for special events such as convocations and weddings. Most recently, the different age

The new and the old generation have different cultural backgrounds, but it is not a problem ... In church, it does not really matter whether you come from a western or eastern culture, there should not be any distinction. You should have a new culture, which is Christ's culture—the teachings of the Bible.

groups have come together to do the planning and the practical work relating to the refurbishment of the new church building.

By and large, the different groups work harmoniously together. Sometimes, there are differences of opinion, but these occur within and between the age groups; it does not appear to be an inter-generational issue. Moreover, thank God, these differences do not lead to conflicts.

The church board is also quite harmonious. It comprises members in their thirties, forties, fifties and above, and three out of the nine board members are sisters. The good working relationship is evident during meetings: there are constructive discussions, dialogue is respectful, and the meetings are generally quick and efficient. The more experienced members are happy to help the new ones fit into their roles.

You don't hear any big arguments. Those who can take part [in the church work] take part. Others don't have many opinions.

Deaconess

Is There a Generation Gap?

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing—Life forevermore.

(Ps 133:1–3)

The backgrounds of the older and younger generation could not be more different: one has had limited educational opportunities, experienced poverty, and toiled for most of their working lives; the other has grown up with a comfortable standard of living, a good education,

and by God's grace, a future of endless possibilities. Therefore, to say there are no generational differences would be untrue. However, what is striking is that there is no discernible impact. In other words, there is no unbreachable gap. This observation is supported by the following views:

Thank God, in Leicester, the old and the young get on together.

Retired Sister

At home, I get on very well with my grandchildren.

Retired Brother



The new and the old generation have different cultural backgrounds, but it is not a problem. The older generation is open-minded—it's not like they don't accept new things (they do). The younger generation is also good. They understand why the older people think like they do. In church, it does not really matter whether you come from a western or eastern culture, there should not be any distinction. You should have a new culture, which is Christ's culture—the teachings of the Bible. We should have that culture. So, if there is something in the western culture that does not fit with the Bible, we can reject it; likewise for the eastern culture. In that way, we can live a Christ-like

life. It's like the Israelites, when they left Egypt, they had to leave behind the culture. And when they entered Canaan, they had to be careful not to be affected by that new culture. They had to be holy and separated out to God.

Deacon

The situation in Leicester is very blessed, but we must be careful not to take it for granted. All of us need to be diligent in our spiritual cultivation, to learn from the gentleness and lowliness of Christ (Mt 11:29); to respect and to forbear (Phil 2:3; Col 3:12–13) one another; and most important of all, to be filled by the Holy Spirit so that we bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23). In this way, there will not be any dissensions, and everyone can enjoy an environment that reveals the culture of Christ.

NEXT GENERATION SUCCESSION: WORK IN PROGRESS

And the Lord, He is the one who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed.

(Deut 31:8)

In Leicester, we could probably benefit from a proper strategy for succession planning. Nevertheless, we can see progress in a couple of areas.

Training for Service

In Leicester, the weekly RE classes, Youth Fellowship and Campus Fellowship provide most of the training opportunities for the young members. It is there that they develop the skills and confidence to serve God: leading hymnals, playing piano, training sessions in interpretation, leading activities, and leading Bible studies. These forums also act as spring boards, enabling the young to get involved in other areas of church work, such as choir and leafleting.

The believers are being trained from young in RE. So, if they attend services, the church can train them to serve and give them opportunities to do so. It takes time.

Deacon

Sermonizing

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching.

(Rom 12:6–7)

Due to a dwindling number of middle-aged members who remain active sermon speakers, the church board has, in recent years, been looking to the working-age youths to take up this area of work. With the help of preachers, a number of youths have been trained to deliver sermons. We thank God that this is making good progress, which means that the church now has more workers to help in this area.

The church board has also been assigning brothers and sisters to lead the first Sabbath service—putting them in at the deep end, as it were, since these are their first attempts at pulpit ministry. Some have been responsible for conducting hymnal sessions, while others lead Bible studies and talks. We thank God for their added input and the application of their gifts that benefit the church.

Family Bible Services

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and

fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:42)

Another opportunity for members of all ages to serve God is in the Family Bible Service groups. In Leicester, members are allocated to one of a number of groups, depending on where they live. Once a month, members gather in each other's houses or in the church to study the Bible. Those who are willing and able lead the sessions in rotation. The younger members are often called to lead the pre-service hymnals and to play the piano. The Family Bible Services have been going on for a number of years now and have proved to be a good opportunity for members of different age groups—from children to grannies and granddads—to worship together in informal settings, have fellowship, practice hospitality and learn the word of God. Over time, we have witnessed the members growing together: in their knowledge of God, in their confidence to serve Him, and in mutual understanding.

Evangelism Planning

"Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mk 16:15)

For over ten years, Leicester has had an Evangelical Planning Group (EPG). It plans and organizes the bulk of the church's evangelistic activities—publicity, leafleting, programs for evangelistic services, and follow-up. Although the membership has changed over time, the group has always comprised a small core group of working youths. As necessary,

they enlist the help of other members of the congregation, but again, the majority of the volunteers, apart from the speakers, are youths. This is particularly evident during leafleting sessions.

The EPG is very active, and the members do their work faithfully and consistently. It is a good example of succession in practice, for the youths have really taken ownership of this work. If anything, the rest of the congregation—and specifically the older members—need to get more involved to complement their efforts. After all, evangelism is everyone's responsibility.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: WHAT COULD WE DO BETTER?

Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father, the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, the younger as sisters, will all purity.

(1 Tim 5:1–2)

Improve Communication

By God's grace, Leicester has a lot of positive points. However, there are also some areas for improvement. One area is communication between the generations—to go beyond the polite greetings to have more meaningful dialogue, for example, on how to progress the church work and on God's grace in our lives. The sharing of testimonies in particular will serve as a lasting legacy for the new generations.

We also need to show special regard for those members with few or no family ties in the church, irrespective of their age. In this way, every member can experience the joy and comfort that comes from being one spiritual family in Christ as we gather each week (1 Cor 12:12; 1 Pet 2:5). To achieve this, we need to be willing to break out of our comfort zones.

Develop a Succession Strategy

During one group discussion, I asked a group of RE students, "Do you think the next generation is being

In Leicester, the weekly RE classes, Youth Fellowship and Campus Fellowship provide most of the training opportunities for the young members. It is there that they develop the skills and confidence to serve God: leading hymnals, playing piano, taster sessions in interpretation, leading activities, and leading Bible studies. These forums also act as spring boards, enabling the young people to get involved in other areas of church work, such as choir and leafleting.

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adequately prepared to take up the church work?" One of the Senior Youth Class students asked, "Who's the next generation?" She wondered if I meant people like her RE teacher—those in their late twenties and thirties. This anecdote perhaps highlights a need for the church workers to let all the RE students know they are the next generation.

Also, the church may not be doing enough to get RE students involved in the church work early on, or at least not in the areas that they are interested in.

I've heard from other churches that they start quite young, doing evangelistic planning work, whereas in Leicester they start quite old.

Senior Youth Class Student

Sometimes, you don't know who to approach about evangelistic planning work and other things, like interpretation.

Senior Youth Class Student

This omission needs to be addressed, as there is potentially a pool of willing members that the church is not mobilizing. Moreover, if the RE students are not involved in the church work from an early age, an opportunity may be lost in fostering a deep sense of commission, and it may also be harder to motivate them later on—especially as other priorities come along.

One solution is to develop a strategy for succession, so that the church is clear on what types of workers are needed in the medium to longer-term, and how we should provide the necessary training. Part of that strategy might look at options such as shadowing and mentoring by

experienced workers.

A couple of the older members who were interviewed happen to be regular cooks in the church. They said that they were more than happy to share their skills and wanted to see more young members getting involved in this area of the church work.

It's good for the young people to help and to learn from the cooks. The most important thing is that they are humble enough to learn and accept, and also not to be lazy. The work should be passed from one generation to the next. You can't expect those in their eighties to do the cooking. I hope that the young people will cook for me in the future. If they don't know what to do, they can ask.

Retired Brother

In terms of succession planning, we have a good example in Jesus Christ, who at the start of His ministry, chose twelve disciples and trained them to minister in God's kingdom and to succeed His work. Jesus not only imparted spiritual knowledge, He also allowed the disciples to gain experience by sending them out to preach the gospel, heal the sick and cast out demons (Mt 10:1, 5–8)—a true apprenticeship in today's terms.

PASS ON ELIJAH'S MANTLE

So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him.

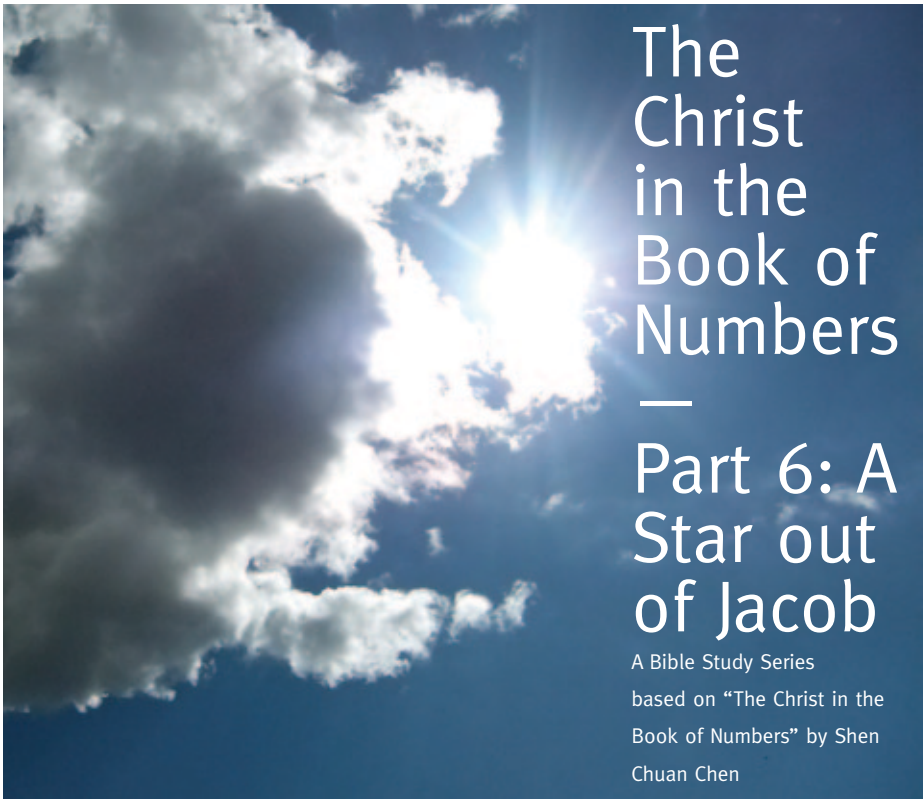
(1 Kgs 19:19)

Succession planning is vital for the future of the church. The church workers today have a responsibility to create the right conditions for succession, which, at a basic level, entails promoting good communication and positive relationships across all age groups. They should also plan more systematically in order to nurture

and train the next generation. In this way, young members will have a better opportunity of growing up with a sense of commission and be equipped to take on the mantle of service and leadership in the future.

May God guide all the churches to make this a reality. ★

DOCTRINAL & BIBLE STUDIES



The Christ in the Book of Numbers

— Part 6: A Star out of Jacob

A Bible Study Series

based on "The Christ in the Book of Numbers" by Shen Chuan Chen

Chuan Chen

From the ten plagues that heralded the departure of the Israelites from Egypt, to the signs and miracles that took place during their forty-year journey in the wilderness, news of these earth-shaking events of the Israelites reached the surrounding nations, inciting great fear (Josh 5:1).

As the Israelite army approached the land of Moab, King Balak became "exceedingly afraid of the people because they were many, and Moab was sick with dread because of the children of Israel" (Num 22:3). For Balak, not only was the sheer magnitude of this nation a fearful prospect, but also the fact that they had defeated the mighty kings of the Amorites and Bashan (Num 21:21–35). Therefore, having decided that he had no hope of defeating the Israelites, he sent messengers to summon Balaam, the renowned prophet from the land of Pethor by the Euphrates. Balak wanted him to use his powers to curse this formidable enemy. Despite God's warning, Balaam set off to meet the king.

Although the Israelites were an unruly group whom God had to occasionally punish, they were

His chosen people nonetheless. For this reason, He was willing to protect them: He stopped Balaam from uttering a curse and instead made him give a blessing. With this blessing came the prophecy "A Star shall come out of Jacob, A Sceptre shall rise out of Israel" (Num 24:17).

When Balaam realized that the Israelites could not be cursed, he proclaimed their special status: they were a chosen race, a people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations (Num 23:8–10).

In the end, the covetous Balaam was killed by the sword (Josh 13:22). However, he left behind an amazing story of how God prevented him from uttering a curse and, instead, made him give a blessing and prophesy about the Star of Jacob, namely the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who would manifest in the flesh (Num 24:17).

PREFIGURATION OF CHRIST

The Bible often uses stars as a symbol for angels and saints (e.g. Gen 37:9; Job 38:7; Isa 14:12; 1 Cor 15:41; Rev 1:20). However, the Star of Jacob in Numbers 24 is unique as a symbol of the Messiah: "...A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Sceptre

The church is to serve as a bright light in the darkness, bringing the Lord's salvation to humankind and providing access to the living fountain for the forgiveness of sin (Zech 13:1).

shall rise out of Israel" (Num 24:17). This particular prophecy depicts how Jesus Christ would appear to the world: as a Star out of Jacob, coming in the flesh to bring salvation to mankind (Mt 2:2; Lk 1:78–79), and as a Sceptre—denoting authority and sovereignty—rising out of Israel to judge humanity (Mt 24:29–31; 1 Thess 4:15–18).

A STAR SHALL COME OUT OF JACOB

Two thousand years ago, God heralded the birth of Jesus Christ with a bright star (Mt 2:1–2). His incarnation became a testimony that enabled the world to see the great plan and work of God.

The Prophecy

Balaam, the son of Beor, was an evil prophet who "loved the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Pet 2:15) and walked on the erroneous path for profit (Jude 11). However, God obstructed his plan to curse the Israelites and made him speak four beautiful oracles. In the first oracle, he proclaimed the Israelites to be a consecrated nation (Num 23:7–10); in the second, that they had the abidance of God (Num 23:20–24); in the third, that they possessed the fountain of life (Num 24:4–9); in the fourth, that Christ would come forth from the line of Jacob (Num 24:16–19).

Concerning the fourth oracle, we know that Jacob was the grandson of Abraham, the son of Isaac and the progenitor of the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen 30). Indeed, up until the time of the prophets, the name Jacob was synonymous with the nation of Israel (cf. Isa 27:9; 58:14; Ezek 20:5; Obad 17).

When God chose Abraham, He revealed seven great promises (Gen 12:1–3), which were at the core of

His salvation plan and signaled the coming of the Messiah from the house of Jacob (cf. Gen 28:3–4, 14). Hence, Luke notes, "Now Jesus Himself began His ministry at about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, the son of Heli...the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham..." (Lk 3:23, 34).

The prophecy concerning the Star of Jacob was proclaimed some 1000 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. In the eyes of man, Jesus was the son of Joseph the carpenter, the descendant of Jacob, Judah and Abraham; in the eyes of God, He was the Savior promised since the time of creation—the fulfillment of the divine plan.

In the apostolic era, many Gentiles converted to Christianity, and so, when Paul wrote to the church in Galatia, he pointed out,

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

(Gal 3:27–29)

From Paul's words, we appreciate that, as Christians, we have received special grace: we have been baptized into Christ and put on Christ. Therefore, not only do we belong to Him, we also have a right to the promise that God made to Abraham.

We are thus part of a great nation, with Jesus Christ as our king. We can look forward to our spiritual inheritance in the heavenly kingdom.

The Wise Men Who Followed the Star from the East

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." (Mt 2:1–2)

On discovering the star in the east, the wise men embarked on a journey to Palestine to find the King of the Jews. Arriving with hearts of reverence, they paid their respects to the baby Jesus and offered Him their best gifts (Mt 2:1–12). This demonstrated their true wisdom—one that was duly rewarded; for having followed the star, they found the door to salvation.

Within the story of the wise men is a lesson for Christians, which is the importance of pursuing both wisdom and the truth. Without truth, a "wise man" is devoid of real wisdom. Hence, Paul makes this observation:

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

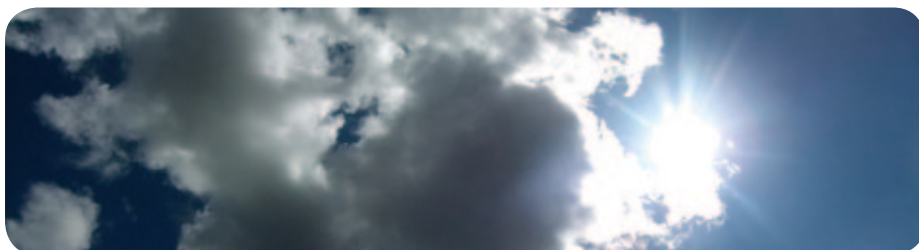
(1 Cor 1:20–21)

The wise king Solomon also taught, "The fear of the LORD

Jesus Christ does not only shine as a guiding light of salvation; He will shine right into the hearts of men through the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit appears, He will illumine darkened hearts, enabling them to understand the truth.

is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov 9:10).

The world is full of so-called wise men: intellectuals and scholars who pursue knowledge. But what are they really striving for? Fame and status, perhaps? Yet if they cannot emulate the wise men from the east to search for salvation in the Lord, their learning is in vain. No amount of academic study can bring about solutions for man's uncertain future. The prophet Isaiah says, "...For the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden" (Isa 29:14). Only wisdom that is based on God's truth is everlasting.



The Bright and Morning Star

Before daybreak, there is usually a profound darkness over the earth. It lasts until the morning star appears in the sky, shining brightly to herald the arrival of dawn. The Lord Jesus is not only the Star out of Jacob, He is also the Bright and Morning Star (Rev 22:16), providing humankind with a guiding light that breaks the darkness (Isa 60: 2, 3).

In his epistle to the Ephesians, Paul teaches that the church is the body of Christ, "the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph 1:23). The church is to serve as a bright light in the darkness, bringing the Lord's salvation to humankind and providing access to the living fountain for the forgiveness of sin (Zech 13:1).

This present age is one of darkness, where sin is prevalent. Cruelty, violence, deceit, love of money and sexual immorality abound. The level of wickedness in this generation surpasses that of previous generations. It is a clear sign that the end of the world is imminent. But what is worrying is that many

Christians still do not realize the need to consecrate themselves, and to watch and pray (1 Pet 4:7). As such, there is a danger that some will be swallowed up by the darkness.

However, since we know that Christ is the Bright and Morning Star that brings salvation, and that the true church is the light in this world, we should resolve to rid ourselves of sin and fleshly desires and submit to the will of God, so that we can lead godly lives. The church as a whole should endeavor to remain upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets and to have Jesus Christ as her cornerstone (Eph 2:20). She should uphold the truth, promote righteousness, and strive after peace.

The Star in the Hearts of the Believers

We also have the prophetic word made more sure, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.
(2 Pet 1:19)

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
(2 Cor 4:6)

Jesus Christ does not only shine as a guiding light of salvation; He will shine right into the hearts of men through the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit appears, He will illumine darkened hearts, enabling them to understand the truth.

Ezekiel already prophesied:

Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh,

that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.

(Ezek 11:19–20)

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

(Ezek 36:26–27)

Here, the "stony heart" refers to a heart that is hard, cold and callous, while the "heart of flesh" is a heart that is gentle, warm and humane. Today, many people have stony hearts. However, when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, even these will be transformed into hearts of flesh. This means that man will submit to the law of God and the darkness of their hearts will be replaced by light.

Paul says:

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

(1 Cor 2:12–13)

When the Morning Star shines into the hearts of men, the people of the world will be able to understand even the spiritual matters of God.

CONCLUSION

In the Book of Numbers, we find the earliest biblical reference to the star from the east. It records a prophecy spoken by the prophet Balaam concerning the Star of Jacob, pointing to the birth and salvation work of the Messiah. Jesus would emerge from the house of Jacob, coming to the world as the Bright and Morning Star, shining His light upon the world and illumining darkened hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit. ★



Thief of Hearts

Philip Shee—Dubai, UAE

“So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.” (2 Sam 15:6)

This tragic turn of events in the history of Israel is a sober reminder that one of the biggest threats to the church and our own faith could come from within the church, rather than from outside. By the special grace of his father, King David, Absalom was allowed to return to Jerusalem from exile. He even received the king’s pardon despite murdering his brother, Amnon (2 Sam 14:33). Yet this kind gesture was unappreciated. Instead, Absalom reciprocated by hatching a treacherous plot to usurp his father’s throne, even to the extent of seeking his life. But how did Absalom manage to steal the hearts of the Israelites and turn them against David, the king who was ordained by God?

GOING THE EXTRA MILE TO GAIN PERSONAL POPULARITY

Absalom’s evil plot started with his special effort to gain personal popularity.

First, Absalom rose early and positioned himself beside the way to the gate so that he could intercept and meet people who were bringing

lawsuits or grievances to the king for judgment (2 Sam 15:2). Making the special effort to rise early, he was willing to make a personal sacrifice, to be inconvenienced in order to achieve his aim. Such sacrificial spirit would be well received by people who had no reason to look beyond the surface at his underlying intention.

Second, Absalom listened to the people’s grievances and opined that their “case is good and right; but there is no deputy of the king to hear you” (2 Sam 15:3). This was a subtle but very effective way to take a bigger stride into their hearts. People with grievances long for someone to be on their side. Absalom knew what they wanted to hear and he made sure he told them! Such empathy naturally won him their favor.

Having gained a foothold in the hearts of the people, Absalom then promoted himself more directly, indicating his desire to serve them, promising to give them justice if he were made judge in the land (2 Sam 15:4).

Then, Absalom took the final step and appealed to the emotions

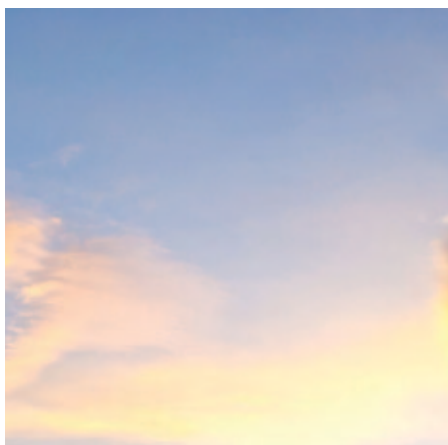
of the people by extending a more personal and intimate touch to the relationship. For anyone that came to him, he would not only give his judgment, he would also offer his hand and kiss the person (2 Sam 15:5).

By this time, the people had been completely deceived and as described by David’s messenger, “the hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom” (2 Sam 15:13).

STAGING THE REBELLION

As the number of people defecting to him increased (2 Sam 15:12), Absalom sent spies throughout the tribes of Israel and instructed them to declare Absalom as king as soon as the trumpet sounded (2 Sam 15:10).

Absalom’s operation was both deliberate yet covert. As a result, in Jerusalem, David remained in the dark and unable to stand up against this assault. Soon, David was forced to withdraw from Jerusalem, knowing as he did the ruthlessness of Absalom and wanting to avoid bloodshed in Jerusalem. David recognized that Absalom would have no qualms in striking the city with the sword (2 Sam 15:14).



RECOGNIZE THE DEVIL'S PLOY

It is sad that the enemy in this case was not a traditional external party, such as the Philistines, the Ammonites, the Assyrians, or any neighboring tribes, but rather from within Israel. Even more tragic was that it arose from within David's own household. Instead of uniting against external enemies, the energy of Israel was spent in internal struggle, in dealing with treachery.

This incident provides a glimpse into the work of the devil and the potential damage it can inflict on the church and on each one of us. Just as Absalom rose from within Israel, the evil one is likely to use the same ploy today. After all, this ploy had been used several times before.

In the wilderness, Korah managed to steal the hearts of enough people amongst the children of Israel to rise up against Moses. This incitement included a sizeable two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, men of renown (Num 16:1–3).

We also see a similar ploy in the generation following Solomon's reign. Jeroboam made a deliberate effort to steal the hearts of the people of Israel. He was concerned that their hearts would turn away from him to Rehoboam and the house of David, if they continued to offer sacrifices in the temple at Jerusalem (1 Kgs 12:26–27). Hence, he made two calves of gold and persuaded the people that it was too troublesome to travel all the way to Jerusalem to worship. He introduced an easier alternative and suggested the calves of gold to be the gods of Israel who delivered them from the

land of Egypt. He even took pains to set one in Bethel and one in Dan, build shrines on high places, establish a system of priests from every class of people who were not of the sons of Levi, ordain a feast like that in Judah, and offer sacrifices in Bethel (1 Kgs 12:28–33). On the surface, unlike the harsh Rehoboam, Jeroboam was the ideal leader who understood the people's difficulties and needs. It was no wonder that he appealed to the ignorant and subsequently stole their hearts. Jeroboam was only interested in gaining political support from the people and was even prepared to turn them away from God and His institution in Jerusalem.

GUARD AGAINST DANGERS IN OUR MIDST

It is natural for us to be attracted to charismatic people and be drawn to

People with grievances long for someone to be on their side. Absalom knew what they wanted to hear and he made sure he told them! Such empathy naturally won him their favor.

their passion, their empathy, their talent, their eloquence, and often, their personal touch. If such members or workers were indeed to inspire us to be even closer to God and His church, it might prove beneficial for our faith.

However, the examples above soberly remind us of the need to be constantly on our guard. The following are areas where we have to exercise our vigilance:

1) Are we being drawn closer to any charismatic individual within the church while being alienated from others? Have we unknowingly started to hero-worship or take sides?

Paul pointed out clearly the carnal nature and spiritual immaturity of the Corinthians when they started to

align themselves to individuals, with some claiming to be of Paul, some of Apollos, and some of Cephas (1 Cor 1:12; 3:1–4). It is natural and healthy that we have relationships within the church and we will also inevitably be closer to some workers or believers.

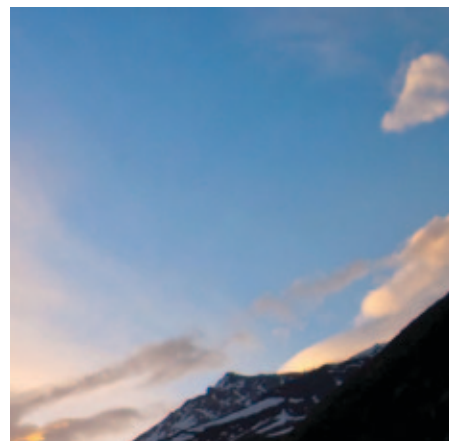
However, it is important that we do not allow this relationship to develop into animosity with others. Likewise, we must be careful not to be blind to the faults of members close to us while magnifying the faults of others.

The principle: We should draw from Paul's guidance, that even workers like himself and Apollos were merely ministers through whom we believed (1 Cor 3:5). Perhaps, through the sharing of a good friend, we have come to believe, or perhaps a particular church worker inspired and revived our faith. Notwithstanding, we must recognize that the real target of our worship should be Christ, and Christ alone.

2) Have we allowed any charismatic church worker to turn our hearts against God's church?

A true worker of God will be particularly conscious about turning people towards God and His church, rather than to himself. Paul was not flattered when he realized that some Corinthians had claimed to be "of Paul" and not of others. On the contrary, he corrected them:

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say



As our relationship with God develops, it should also draw us closer to His church, where we continue to be edified and at the same time, contribute to her growth.

that I had baptized in my own name.

(1 Cor 1:12–15)

He further remarked:

Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.

(1 Cor 3: 5–7)

The church, comprising members still on the journey of spiritual growth, is clearly not perfect. Likewise, ministers are also imperfect. Hence, it is possible to find faults within the church or among ministers. In our interactions with members close to us, we must be extra careful that we do not end up stirring negative sentiments about the church.

The principle: If we encounter members who are unhappy with the church, and they attempt to stir up division, we must strive to bridge the gap and to unite rather than divide. Also as a part of the church, we need to pray and positively work towards the improvement of the church, just as Paul encouraged the Ephesians to “endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3).

3) Is our relationship with God built only upon the inspiration from an individual and not from the church herself, through whom God had intended to make known His manifold wisdom (Eph 3:10)?

We have to recognize that God’s design is for His ministry to be led by an organization as opposed to any one individual. As the apostolic church grew, it continued to operate

in an organized and institutionalized fashion. When Philip successfully converted the Samaritans and baptized them, word reached the apostles in Jerusalem, who sent Peter and John to help him (Acts 8:14). Even though Peter was moved by the Holy Spirit to preach to Cornelius, he explained his actions to the church in Jerusalem and to the other apostles (Acts 11:1–18). Although Paul was an apostle, and a very gifted worker, he did not operate alone. He subjected himself to the Antioch church to be dispatched elsewhere (Acts 13:1–4). When there was a dispute over the matter of circumcision, this was discussed at the council in Jerusalem, after which the decision was dispatched to the churches throughout the region (Acts 15:1–2; 23–31; 16:4–5). This is consistent with biblical teachings of the church being the body of Christ, which comprises members playing different functions, yet working together and integrated as a whole (1 Cor 12; Eph 4:11–16).

The principle: As our relationship with God develops, it should also draw us closer to His church, where we continue to be edified and at the same time, contribute to her growth. This then aligns with God’s intention of establishing the church, where “He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some pastors and preachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:11–13).

In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul wrote:

...that Christ may dwell in your

hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height – to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

(Eph 3:17–19)

May our hearts not be stolen by any one individual, but rather let it be the sole dwelling place of the love of Christ. ★



Fulfill Your Ministry—A Study on 2 Timothy (I)

Based on Bible Study Guide: Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus

Published by the True Jesus Church.

INTRODUCTION

According to the testimony of the early church, Paul was imprisoned in Rome a second time and put to death by the Roman Emperor Nero. It was during this second Roman imprisonment (A.D. 66–67) that Paul penned the second epistle to Timothy. The writing style of this epistle is personal, reflecting Paul's farewell address to his fellow worker and "beloved son" (1:2). This is also Paul's last epistle, written at the end of his life.

Paul urges Timothy not to be ashamed of the testimony of the Lord but share with him in the sufferings for the gospel. Knowing that false teachers will rise to resist the truth, Paul stresses the importance of holding fast the pattern of sound doctrine and instructs Timothy to be strong. He gives Timothy the solemn charge to preach the word and to endure afflictions. With these last words of exhortation, the apostle passes on the legacy and the divine commission to his son in the faith.

Below are some of Paul's invaluable messages to Timothy, which are equally applicable to us.

DO NOT BE ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL

In the opening chapter, Paul encouraged Timothy to press on in the calling and ministry of God even in the face of adversity.

Remember God's Blessings

"I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience." (1:3)

The early church was undergoing great persecution when this epistle was written, and many saints had already been martyred. Paul himself had been imprisoned and knew that he had reached the end of his life. In the face of great persecution from the authorities, the presence of false brethren within the church, heresies clouding the truth, workers leaving the ministry and faithful workers being martyred, Paul continued to give thanks to God when he remembered Timothy's genuine faith, which dwelt first in Timothy's grandmother and mother. Timothy's genuine faith in God serves as a source of comfort and encouragement to Paul.

In our journey of faith, we must continue in fervent prayer and give

thanks to God, irrespective of our environment. This is possible only if we always remember the good things God has done for us and deeply trust that God has His purpose behind the adversities that befall us.

Stir up the Gift of God

"Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands." (1:6)

God has enabled Timothy to have an excellent legacy of faith (1:5). Because of this precious legacy, Paul reminds Timothy that he must put this faith to good use. He must not neglect the gift of the ministry he has received (cf. 1 Tim 4:14), but must stir up this gift.

Likewise, for us today, we ought to constantly examine and revive our zeal and our commitment to the Lord's ministry. It is easy to become disheartened and give up when we meet with difficulties in our ministry. But we cannot let circumstances defeat us and put out the flame that God has placed in our hearts. Instead, we need to stir up the gift that is in us

and serve the Lord with even greater vigor.

Spirit of Power, Love and Sound Mind

"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind." (1:7)

This is an apt reminder for us living in the last days. God has given us power so that we may do what seems humanly impossible and carry out God's will (cf. Acts 4:33; 2 Cor 4:7–11; 10:4–5; 12:9–10; Eph 3:20; 6:10–20; Phil 4:10–13; Col 1:9–11; 2 Thess 1:11; Heb 11:32–34). With the spirit of power in us, we can be strong and we do not need to be afraid of hardship or difficulties.

Having the love of God in our hearts, we will be motivated to live for Christ and bring the gospel of salvation to others (2 Cor 5:14–15). This spirit of love gives us the courage to overcome all obstacles in the way of our service. When we only seek our selfish interests, we will fear suffering for the gospel. But if we are selfless, then we will not hesitate to sacrifice ourselves for the gospel.

A sound mind, or self-discipline, enables us to act with composure and wisdom (cf. Ex 14:10–14; 1 Sam 30:6; Acts 7:54–60). Instead of panicking with fear, we can trust in God and be prudent in our actions.



It is easy to become disheartened and give up when we meet with difficulties in our ministry. But we cannot let circumstances defeat us and put out the flame that God has placed in our hearts. Instead, we need to stir up the gift that is in us and serve the Lord with even greater vigor.

Know Whom You Have Believed

For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.
(1:12)

In this famous conviction statement, Paul shows total trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul does not say, "I know what I have believed," but he says, "I know whom I have believed." His knowledge is not just in a set of creeds, theories, or philosophies; rather, he has come to know Jesus Christ personally. He knows Jesus Christ as his Savior, who loved him and died for him, the chief of sinners (1 Cor 2:2; Gal 2:20; 1 Tim 1:15–16). He knows Jesus Christ as his Lord, to whom he has dedicated his life (2 Cor 5:15; 1 Tim 1:1). He also knows Jesus Christ as his Defender, who has always stood by him, and his Deliverer, who will not forsake him but will deliver him from every evil work and preserve him for His heavenly kingdom (2 Tim 4:18).

As believers who have already accepted Christ, our knowledge of the Lord must grow and deepen. This knowledge comes about when we live a new life in Christ (2 Cor 5:16–17). As members of Christ's body, we can grow in our knowledge of Jesus Christ through mutual edification with the truth (Eph 4:11–13). In our personal lives, we may grow in our knowledge of Christ by diligently conforming to Christ's likeness and obeying Christ's commands (Eph 4:20–24; Phil 3:8–10; Col 1:10; 3:8–10; 2 Pet 1:2–8; 1 Jn 2:4; 3:6). We also need to pray for the fullness of the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that our knowledge of God may continue to grow (Eph 1:17–18;

3:14–19).

The Lord is trustworthy. Those who believe in Him will not be put to shame (Rom 10:11). Because Paul knows that the Lord he trusts in is dependable, he is not ashamed of the testimony of the Lord. God is able to keep what the believer has committed to Him until His return. The believer's deposit in Christ includes his salvation, his walk of faith, and his service.

Be Rooted in the Truth

Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.
(1:13–14)

The word "pattern" means prototype. The gospel that the apostles preached is the prototype to which Timothy and all preachers of the gospel must conform (cf. Eph 2:20). This also applies to us who are entrusted with the same "pattern of sound words". We have to be deeply rooted in the truth and guard the faith, the ministry, and the sound doctrine that the Lord has entrusted to us.

This is to be done through constant prayer in the Holy Spirit and heeding the Spirit's voice, as the Holy Spirit is a sword through the word of God (Eph 6:17). He enables us to wage the good warfare, combating all false doctrines.

A GOOD WORKER OF JESUS CHRIST

In the second chapter, Paul teaches Timothy how to be a good worker of God. The attributes of a good worker can be broadly classified into three aspects: endurance in hardship,

faithfulness to the truth, and godly character.

Be Strong

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

(2:1–2)

In this context, to be strong means to have the courage and the endurance to face hardship. This strength is not based on human courage, but on the grace of Christ Jesus. In other words, it is by depending on the gracious help of God rather than on self-confidence that we can truly be strong.

Apart from serving God faithfully and fulfilling our ministry, it is important that we pay attention to searching out faithful men to whom we can entrust the word of God and the ministry. These faithful men themselves must also be able to teach others in order to ensure continuity of the word and the ministry. This principle applies to all areas of church work where we need to consciously nurture successors.

Endure Hardship

"You therefore must endure hardship..." (2:3)

Paul uses analogies of soldier, athlete and farmer to illustrate this point. A soldier needs to endure hardship. He has to be absolutely focused on his mission and not entangle himself with civilian affairs. An athlete needs to push himself to the limit in training and competition, and he must also exercise self-discipline and integrity in following

It is by depending on the gracious help of God rather than on self-confidence that we can truly be strong.

rules of the competition. A farmer has to labor and endure physical fatigue from dawn till dusk. He also needs to wait patiently for the time of harvest.

All three metaphors illustrate the physical and mental endurance that a good worker of God must have. In order to carry out the Lord's commission, we need to persevere and not shrink from hardship. Just as the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer do not labor without a purpose, our endurance has a purpose, as it achieves for us the reward in heaven. As we press on toward this reward, we must be focused, disciplined, and diligent in the ministry.

The secret of the ability to endure hardship is to focus on Jesus Christ's resurrection, the foundation on which the gospel and the ministry stand. Because Christ is risen, our faith and our message are not in vain. We serve and preach the risen Savior, so our work is most noble. Christ's resurrection also signifies the victory that Christians will have (1 Cor 15:51–58). Hence, just as Christ initially endured in suffering but emerged victorious eventually, we will likewise be victorious if we continue to endure.

Be Faithful to the Truth

Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness.

(2:14–16)

Learning the word of God helps us to understand the will of God and edifies the listeners. It should not be turned into a debate on semantics. As an evangelist, Timothy has to be circumspect in speech, and refrain from participating in gossip and useless chatter or proclaiming popular ideologies. He must stay away from everything that is contrary to sound doctrine and godliness.



Because of the serious influence that false doctrines can have on believers, Paul "delivered such false teachers to Satan" (1 Tim 1:19–20). John also teaches us not to even greet such people or receive them into our house (2 Jn 10).

Just as important, Timothy must also be diligent to present himself approved to God. A teacher of God's word should faithfully proclaim the word of God so that he has no reason to be ashamed when his work is tested. He needs to have a clear understanding and be able to discern between truth and error. He must be filled with the Holy Spirit in order to interpret the truth correctly (1 Cor 2:12–14; Jn 16:13) and the courage to make a clear stand for what is right. Instead of preaching messages that are both "yes and no," he will truthfully and faithfully speak according to God's will (2 Cor 1:17–20; Mt 5:37).

Depart from Iniquity

Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

(2:19)

The foundation of God denotes what God has established, including God's election, the truth, and the

church on which the truth stands (cf. 1 Tim 3:15). The foundation has been sealed, which means it has been established by a divine decree and therefore cannot be changed. The inscriptions on this seal are "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

Just as a shepherd knows his sheep, the Lord knows who are truly His (Jn 10:14). A believer who truly belongs to God will be acknowledged and accepted by God, regardless of how others view him. When Korah and others challenged God's election of Moses and Aaron as the leaders, the Lord showed the assembly of Israel who belonged to Him. In the same way, the Lord will eventually reveal who are His.

Therefore, we should simply trust that God knows and will keep those who belong to Him. Conversely, God also commands everyone who names the name of Christ to depart from iniquity. While God is the ultimate judge of who truly belongs to him, we need to examine ourselves to see

Today, if we desire to serve Him, we have to strive for holiness. Only then can we be useful and well pleasing to our Lord.

if we can stand before God with a clear conscience. Our part as people who profess the name of Christ is to make sure that we depart from iniquity.

Be Holy

But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.

(2:20–21)

Here Paul explains that when God uses a person, He does not look at the person's skills or intelligence because God can easily grant these to whomever He chooses to use. Instead, God chooses those who cleanse themselves from iniquity, are pure in heart, and who faithfully teach and practice the word of truth.

Likewise today, if we desire to serve Him, we have to strive for holiness. Only then can we be useful and well pleasing to our Lord.

(To be continued....) ★

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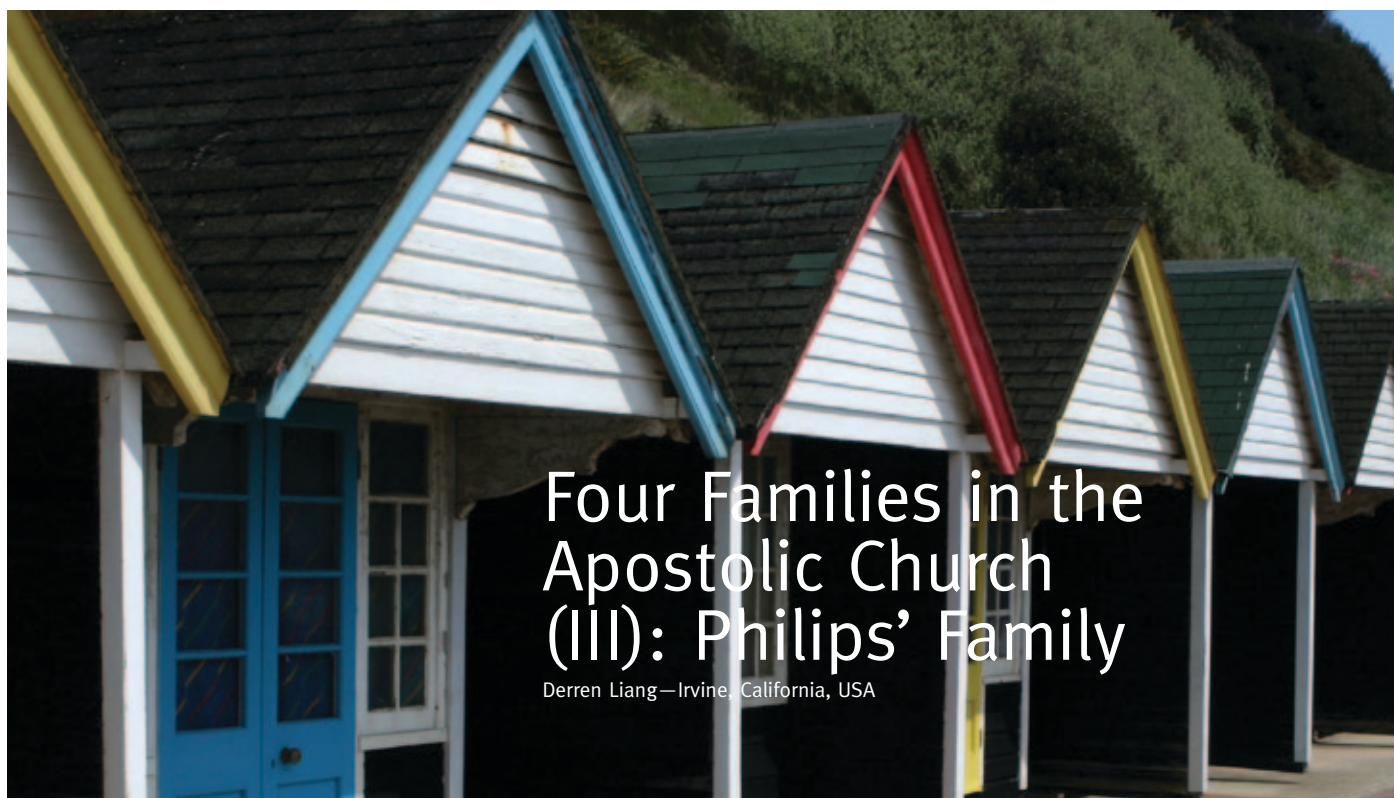
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Four Families in the Apostolic Church (III): Philips' Family

Derren Liang—Irvine, California, USA

PHILIP'S FAMILY—SERVED GOD

On the next day we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who prophesied.

(Acts 21:8–9)

Philip was one of the first seven workers in the apostolic church who were appointed to take care of the daily necessities of the church (Acts 6:1–6), a man of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. He had four daughters who prophesied. Prophecy is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to edify the church (cf. 1 Cor 12:7–11). In this context we can infer that Philip's daughters spoke sermons. So we can see that Philip and his family were not believers who were content with merely fulfilling the minimum requirements of gathering for Sabbath once a week. Instead, they were faithful believers filled with the Holy Spirit who diligently served God together as a family.

Today, we have many God-fearing families in church who never fail to attend Sabbath services, but not all

of these families have every member actively serving God. This occasionally becomes a source of family conflict. The less active members feel neglected while the active party, in turn, feels aggrieved at the lack of support from those closest to him/her. Or one may feel lonely that there is no one to share the occasional frustration that arises in the process of our divine work.

In contrast, when everyone in the family serves the Lord together, there is "a quiet understanding." There is mutual support and intercession for each other and ample opportunities for sharing of ideas when family members serve together in different ministries. Hence, we should not be content merely being faithful servants of the Lord on our own. Instead, we ought to encourage our whole family to serve Him and guide our children to serve from young—in a sense, we are offering "family service" to the Lord!

Inculcating the virtue of serving the Lord as a family is just the first step. Eli and his sons are an oft-cited warning of the tragic consequences of service without spiritual nurture. On reflection, the egregious transgressions of Hophni and Phinehas were almost inevitable given that the faith and service of their father had hit rock bottom (1 Sam

3:1–2). However, the prophet Samuel seemed to have fared no better. Though he had been exemplary from young and faithful throughout his life, and he also "encouraged" his children to walk in the footsteps of his ministry, the outcome was disastrous.

Now it came to pass when Samuel was old that he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice.

(1 Sam 8:1–3)

This is a reminder that in addition to encouraging our families to serve, we must encourage them to serve with the right heart. In this aspect, much can be learned from Philip who had a true servant's heart.

Diligent Servant: Take the Name of Jesus with You

When intense persecution by the Jews scattered the church at Jerusalem, Philip and his family landed up in Samaria. To some, the turn of events provided many reasons to "rest" from divine work. One possibility is to keep

We should not be content merely being faithful servants of the Lord on our own. Instead, we ought to encourage our whole family to serve Him and guide our children to serve from young.

a low profile just in case the fanatical Saul had contacts in Samaria. It must have been difficult for a newly-arrived Jewish fugitive to evangelize to his neighbors, given the traditional Jewish-Samaritan hostilities, and perhaps the dispersed believers had to wait for the apostles to give further instructions.

But Philip did differently. Though originally appointed by the apostles to local administrative duties such as food distribution (Acts 6:1–3), evangelism was never far from his mind. In Samaria, he plunged right in and promptly started preaching Christ to the locals. God worked with him and through him. The “multitudes with one accord heeded the things spoken by Philip” (Acts 8:6), convinced of the truth of Philip’s message on hearing and seeing the miracles he had performed.

This then is the test of the true servant: unflagging diligence regardless of locale, circumstance or stage of life (Rom 12:1,11).

It is disappointing when we see the reverse happening: faithful servants who drop off the radar screen of service and even church attendance once they move overseas for studies or work. Fervent workers may take a temporary leave of absence when marriage or kids come along. Sometimes, temporary leave turns into permanent retirement. When this happens, it is not just the person but the entire family that is affected. In contrast, Philip’s lifelong and proactive diligence must have been a sterling example for his young daughters. Persecution did not stop their family from their prayer, praise or preaching.

Therefore, wherever we go with our families, let us take the name of Jesus along (2 Tim 4:2). By planting the seed of the gospel in new fields with unflagging zeal, not only are we carrying out the Lord’s commission, we also maintain our family’s faith as well as ensure that there will be new brethren to support us in our own faith.

Humble Servant: A Quiet Understanding

Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

(Acts 8:14–15)

The amazing progress of God’s word continued. After having received the word of God, the Samaritan believers received the Holy Spirit.

But on a more personal basis, how do we think Philip felt?

Philip had a true servant’s heart. He was not territorial about the evangelistic inroads that he had made in Samaria because he had not set out to build an empire for himself. He was always clear he was making disciples of all nations unto the Lord, not to himself. He had no qualms in working with these co-workers because he knew that all of them were striving towards the same objective—not personal but the Lord’s glory. Thus, there was no quarrel over who got the more glamorous or “spiritual” portfolios because there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; differences of ministries, but the same Lord; diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all (1 Cor 12:4–6).

Philip thoroughly understood that though he had planted, and Peter and John had come to water, it was God who gave and would give the growth (1 Cor 3:6–7). And this would have been a particularly important attitude for him to teach his daughters if the four of them were to work together harmoniously and effectively for the sake of the church at Caesarea (Acts 21:8–9).

Similarly today, though we speak in church about “my project” or “your project” for administrative ease, we

must never forget that all credit and glory belong only to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are but unworthy servants blessed with the opportunity of doing the tiniest bit for the One who gave His life for us (Lk 17:10).

Obedient Servant: Have Thine Own Way, Lord

Philip was doing very well in his Samaritan divine work. The whole city was stirred and masses of people were turning to Christ. He was performing amazing miracles. Joy was palpable and pervasive (Acts 8:6–8). Then out of the blue, in the midst of these thrilling developments, the Lord sends him to a desert road!

In Philip’s shoes, we might have been bewildered... I’m doing so much good in Samaria. Why can’t someone else go? How many people could possibly be there in the desert for me to evangelize to?!

If Philip was discouraged or annoyed by the disruption, he showed no sign. We are reminded of Abram who, when told to leave his homeland, obeyed promptly without protest or demand for answers. As a result of Philip’s obedience, a soul was saved and the seed of the gospel carried even farther, all the way to the African continent.

Obedience is related to humility. This is another critical aspect that Philip would have conveyed to his daughters—that they should always submit to each other and that each should not think more highly of herself than she ought to think, but to “think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (Rom 12:3). Without mutual submissiveness, the church at Caesarea might well have broken into four branches, each led by a talented “prophetess.”

Obedience is an indispensable attribute for God’s workers. Specifically, it is complete obedience to God’s will. In order to obey, we must first know God’s will. There is no replacement for persistent and constant prayerful communion with God. This must then be complemented with a thorough grounding in God’s word because it is therein that God’s will is revealed. Divine work and spiritual cultivation are inseparable. Therefore, even as

we serve with our families, we must undertake spiritual nurture with them.

Beware of Pitfalls

It is a great joy and source of comfort when we are able to serve the Lord alongside our family members. However, examples from the Bible provide warnings of some potential dangers when family members serve together: rivalry, misplaced ambition and partiality.

(1) Intra-Family Rivalry

There is no record in the Bible of any envy or disharmony among Philip's daughters. But in the Old Testament, Miriam and Aaron's unhappiness with Moses led them to reckless remarks against his leadership. This was so displeasing to God that He suddenly summoned the three of them into His presence, furiously rebuked the two elder siblings and punished Miriam with leprosy (Num 12:2–10).

Siblings are inclined to compare. And as the family grows larger over time, there is often some unconscious (or conscious) rivalry between different branches of the family. At family gatherings, we often hear conversations that revolve around whose house/car is bigger; whose daughter or son is smarter/more talented/more influential.

A measurement mindset is not wrong for knowing where we currently are, and it helps us know how much more we need to improve. But we must measure the right things. For instance, it should not be about which family member has done more for the Lord, or which sibling has been "promoted" to deaconship or elderhood! If there is anything worth measuring, it should be about how concerned family members have been about each other's walk of faith (cf. 2 Tim 1:5).

(2) "Jewish Mother" Syndrome¹

Samuel's appointment of his sons as his successors did a great disservice to both his family as well as the people of Israel (1 Sam 8:1–3). The blatant attempt made by James and John's mother to secure a higher position for the two brothers in Jesus' kingdom was knocked back by the Lord and

infuriated the other disciples (Mt 20:20–24).

It is important and good that we enthusiastically encourage our family members or train our children to serve. But we must be very clear about motivation. We (and they) serve solely to repay the Lord for His grace and to obey His commandments. Service is not a platform to give them a "public profile" or to keep up with the Joneses. And divine service should certainly not be seen as a means to "reform" a less-than-exemplary child!

With the right motivation, we will not be troubled if the church deems that we or our family members are not yet ready for a particular ministry. Instead, we will willingly and joyfully take up whichever portfolio the church assigns to us, just like Philip on the desert road.

(3) Partiality

There are many wonderful benefits of serving together as a family. One important aspect is having someone to "tell us the truth in love," who provides a good check to ensure we are doing the right thing or doing things in the right way, for example, Jethro's advice to Moses (Ex 18:14–22) and Mordecai's counseling of Esther (Est 4:10–17).

In contrast, Hophni and Phinehas died because Eli did not rebuke quickly or sternly enough. In the apostolic era, Ananias and Sapphira died because both colluded to "lie to the Holy Spirit," a strong and clear indication of the Lord's displeasure with dishonesty and hypocrisy (Acts 5:1–2).

These examples remind us that we must be impartial in church matters which involve our family members, whether these are elections, distribution of church work or in other areas. For the good of our family members, we should honestly and openly assess their suitability for various areas of divine work. If we receive less-than-positive feedback on their conduct, let us not be defensive (cf. Lev 10:3–6). Take this as God-given opportunities for them to grow to complete maturity in Christ.

Conclusion

We work and live in a world that encourages the amplification of individual achievement and the celebration of personal quirks. Paul had long predicted the downward spiral of humanity—men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control—and urged Timothy to reject such behavior and values. Similarly, if our "family service" is to be acceptable to the Lord, we must do no less.

Why was Philip able to cultivate his four daughters into fruitful trees in the garden for the Lord? Because he was not just a servant in name; he had the true heart of a servant.

Serving the Lord together can strengthen the bond of families and help keep our family in the Lord generation after generation. So let us set an example as faithful servants of the Lord. Let us bring our families to serve Him with the most beautiful offering—our pure and clean hearts.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

(Rom 12:1–2) ★

¹ In 20th century American culture, Jewish comedians and authors often stereotyped the Jewish mother or wife as nagging, overprotective, manipulative, controlling, smothering, and overbearing. She would persistently interfere in her children's lives long after they had become adults.

Step by Step into the Family of God

Wooi Min Yong—Klang, Malaysia

Hallelujah, in the name of Jesus I testify. I would like to share how the Lord guided me step by step into the family of God, to become a member of the True Jesus Church. It is hoped that through my sharing, many more will continue to preach and bring their unbelieving family members to become part of the family of the Lord.

More than forty years ago, in 1968, my old house in Alor Star, northern Malaysia, was situated right across the True Jesus Church (TJC). Despite this, I never stepped foot into the church. I thought that faith would only result in a wrong type of mentality—that of reliance. Instead, I worshipped “Guan Gong”, a Chinese deity who used to be a famous general, and I respected him for his uprightness.

Often when church members or ministers of the TJC came over to visit us, I would pretend not to be at home. My children, however, would often go to the TJC to listen to the words from the Bible. Eventually two of my daughters believed in the Lord and were baptized. During that time, my heart was set against Christianity, and I disliked any of my family

members going to church. Actually, I was opposed to the TJC due to a lack of knowledge and understanding about the church and, in particular, about her method of prayer and worship. As time passed, my children moved to the Klang Valley in central Malaysia to pursue their careers.

HEAVENLY CHOIR

Years later, after my parents and my wife had passed away, I moved to Klang to start a new life. In 2003, my fourth daughter and her family believed in the Lord.

Beginning from 2006, I started to attend evangelistic services at the Klang TJC, and gradually began to attend church services with my daughter's family.

Although initially reluctant, I was very curious and wanted to see and experience for myself what happens during church services, and in particular, why more and more of my family members had accepted Christ and were blessed by God. Yet I did not open my heart to accept the truth and I was not zealous. Sometimes I would think of excuses for skipping services; I did not like the prayers because I felt that they were rather

long and the sound was loud.

One Friday night in 2006, when I was attending service, I almost fell asleep during prayer time. Suddenly, I heard harmonious vocals as if sung from a choir on the mezzanine floor of the church hall. These choruses covered the sound of prayer. I had never heard such beautiful voices before. I felt calm and peaceful in my heart. After a short while, the singing faded out with the prayer. Later, I asked my daughter and my grandchildren whether there was choir practice upstairs. They all shook their heads. I then realized that I was the only one who had heard the beautiful voices. Since then, I always wait with anticipation for prayer time, hoping to hear the beautiful voices again.

KIND MAN IN WHITE

In 2007, I went to the United Kingdom to stay with my youngest daughter, who is also a TJC member. A few weeks into my stay, my four limbs felt slow and sluggish. Once, out of control, I lost balance and fainted. While unconscious, I saw myself walking into a white round-shaped tent. It was decked in glorious splendor of gold and jade, and everything inside looked very luxurious. There were a few men and women wearing white gowns and I was one of them. Another man in white stood in front of me—light shone on his face and he stretched out both his hands with a kind smile. I was shocked. “Am I in heaven now?” I thought. After that, I woke up and saw a doctor standing in front of me.

My daughter then told me that I had been sent to the Oxford University Hospital's emergency ward after I had fainted and was diagnosed

with bleeding in the brain, which was a very dangerous condition. I had undergone an operation for more than an hour. My daughter also told me that the TJC members in Malaysia and UK had been praying for me.

I was very touched by the love of the church members and God's love and mercy for me by showing me a vision. The vision made me feel that God really existed, that He was with me and that I could overcome my illness with His help.

Thank God, the surgery was very successful and I am now fully recovered. During my period of recuperation, London TJC members continually prayed for me and showed their love and care for me. I cannot describe how touched I was—may God remember their love.

LEARNING TO PRAY AND ENTRUST

In 2008, the Klang Church Adult Fellowship organized a trip to visit the churches in Taiwan. My daughter, hoping that I could be edified in my faith, registered me for the trip.

One month before the journey, I developed a strange medical condition. I kept hiccupping and could only stop after sneezing. This was trying for me, as I could neither eat nor sleep well. My legs became so weak that I could barely walk.

At nights, before falling asleep, banging noises and sounds of things moving would disturb me. At the same time, there were black shadows moving around in my mind, which disturbed and troubled me greatly, and I could not sleep. However, whenever I prayed, a man in white would appear, and the black shadows and noises would vanish. Therefore, whenever I encountered this situation, I would pray immediately.

With God's protection, I could then sleep through the whole night. This weird condition, for which the doctors could not find the real cause, as well the nights' disturbances troubled me for about two weeks and then disappeared on their own.

In the end, although I did not manage to join the visiting group to Taiwan, I believed that this was the Lord's will. During those troubling times, I truly felt the love of God, learned to rely on Him and to entrust all things to Him, believing that He would have His beautiful arrangement. The experience also spurred my resolve to accept baptism.

BECOMING PART OF THE FAMILY

In 2010, I finally accepted water baptism and became part of the TJC family. When I reflect upon these few years, I really thank the Lord for His abundant grace and for all the brothers and sisters in Klang Church who have showed their love and care for me. I am particularly grateful to those brothers with “grand-fathers” status, who spend time with me after services and during the teatime breaks. Their kindness has taught me about the love of God. May all glory be given unto our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. ★

One Friday night in 2006, when I was attending service, I almost fell asleep during prayer time. Suddenly, I heard harmonious vocals as if sung from a choir on the mezzanine floor of the church hall. These choruses covered the sound of prayer. I had never heard such beautiful voices before. I felt calm and peaceful in my heart. After a short while, the singing faded out with the prayer.



Current Developments in the Western Hemisphere Missionary Work

Derren Liang—Irvine, California, USA

Editor's note: Two issues ago, we talked about the work in the Eastern Hemisphere; in this issue we will turn our eyes towards the west.

The Western Hemisphere includes the four major continents of North America, South America, Europe and Africa. The main organizational bodies within the Western Hemisphere Department of World Missions (WHDWM) are:

- the United States General Assembly (USGA),
- the United Kingdom General Assembly (UKGA),
- the Canadian Coordination Center (CCC),
- the Central and South American Coordination Center, and
- the European Coordination Center.

The responsibilities of the WHDWM are to understand the operations and needs of the various committees, provide manpower and resources, and give suggestions and coordinate activities with related committees.

LATIN AMERICA

Latin America comes under the care of the USGA. Within Latin America, the Central and South American Coordination Center is responsible

for Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Paraguay, while the Dominican Ministry Committee is responsible for the Dominican Republic.

Latin America is fertile ground for the gospel. Currently, we have a church in Argentina, prayer houses in Chile, Foz, and Sao Paulo, and places of worship in Ecuador and Bolivia. There are about five hundred members in this region. Apart from the members in Sao Paulo, who are mostly Portuguese-speaking Brazilians, the rest are primarily of Asian descent. Every year, the church holds a Youth Theological Seminar in Argentina to train the youths in Latin America. As the main language in Latin America is Spanish, we ask that God prepare more Spanish-speaking workers, so that the gospel may be spread more widely, starting from each place of worship.

The USGA has established the Spanish Ministry Committee (SMC), which is responsible for the Spanish-speaking populations in the USA and also assists with the ministry in the Dominican Republic. The SMC divides workers into groups every

year to take care of the work in the Dominican Republic. Volunteers accompany ministers to help with Religious Education (RE) training and the establishment of the local RE system. In addition, a Spanish camp is held every summer, and the Spanish-speaking volunteers are sent to conduct street evangelism in different countries.

At this time, Latin America most urgently needs Spanish-speaking members to assist its ministry. Youths are encouraged to learn Spanish, equip themselves spiritually, and prepare themselves to serve in the Latin America ministry.

AFRICA

The African ministry is divided into English-speaking and French-speaking African countries. The African Missionary Committee (AMC), under the UKGA, is responsible for the English-speaking African countries, whereas the African French-speaking Committee, under Paris church, takes charge of the French-speaking African countries. The South African Ministry Committee, established by the International Assembly in 2008, is responsible for South Africa.

There are four hundred members in South Africa, dispersed throughout the country. Most of the members came from China after the year 2000. There is a church in Johannesburg and a place of worship in Cape Town. Regular Sabbath services are held in both places. The church in Johannesburg serves as a coordination center for the nationwide ministry.

The gospel has been preached to ten English-speaking African countries—six in central and western Africa, and four in eastern Africa. The main center of work in western Africa is in Ghana. The main center in eastern Africa is Kenya, which conducts pastoral and evangelistic work for both regions. There are approximately one hundred churches and places of worship in eastern and western Africa; each place of worship has approximately 10 to 250 members.

As with all pioneering regions, one



of the goals of the African ministry is to establish churches that are self-reliant, self-supporting and able to conduct their own work of evangelism. As such, the AMC sends workers to the various churches and places of worship annually to train and equip the local members. These workers help in different areas, for example, in religious education, and by training full-time ministers and church council members. The training of workers is important as this establishes the foundation of evangelism and is the basis for the stable development of the local churches.

In order for the holy work to progress in the long run, the AMC is also actively training youths in various countries to take over the work eventually. These youths help to train up RE teachers among the youths in Africa, and also help to set up the RE system in the African churches. In addition, volunteers also help to conduct Youth Theological Seminars (for youths over eighteen years of age) and National Student Spiritual Convocations (for those below eighteen). For example, student spiritual convocations have been held in Kenya for the last eight years, and this has helped to build up the faith of hundreds of youths. Both these events require many volunteers who can serve as counselors. In order to enhance this work, the African ministry needs more volunteers with relevant experience.

As the African missionary work requires workers with different talents, the AMC conducts an annual volunteers' training program in the United Kingdom (UK) since 2004. Volunteers from the UK, Continental Europe, America, Canada, and even Asia have attended this program. Once the volunteers are trained, they are divided into groups to accompany full-time ministers to Africa. Some

youths return to attend this training program year after year to encourage and share their experiences with new attendees. As the pioneering work expands, the need for dedicated voluntary workers to support this ministry becomes increasingly urgent.

In 2010, the AMC established the Volunteers Team (VT) to aid in the work. The VT is divided into three teams: the Religious Education Group (REG), the Religious Seminar Group (RSG), and the Recruitment Awareness Group (RAG). The REG aims to build up the religious education system. The RSG plans and manages the annual National Student Spiritual Convocation including teacher recruitment. The RAG recruits volunteers and oversees the promotion and central archiving of the missionary work. The VT also holds regular meetings to discuss ways to improve the missionary work in Africa.

If you are interested to serve as a volunteer in the African ministry, or would like more information, please contact the VT via e-mail at AMC_vt@tjc.org.

CONTINENTAL EUROPE, RUSSIA, DUBAI

The pioneering work in Russia began in 1995, and to date more than one hundred people have received baptism. However, most of these members have since returned to their homeland China, leaving only around forty to fifty members in Moscow, which has its own church building. The Russian Ministry Committee, under the UKGA, is responsible for the Russian ministry.

There are also fixed places of worship in the United Arab Emirates (Dubai), Italy, Spain, and Greece. There are a total of around two hundred members and regular services are held in these places. Most members in these countries are

from mainland China. The Care Team for Pioneering Areas in Continental Europe periodically sends workers to provide pastoral care and conduct spiritual convocations in these places of worship. The European Coordination Center is responsible for the communication and coordination among the churches, prayer houses and places of worship in continental Europe.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Currently, the UKGA and USGA provide most of the manpower and resources required for the missionary work of the Western Hemisphere. In the future, we hope that the UKGA will exclusively lead and support the work in Africa and Europe, and that the USGA will focus on the work in Latin America. Additionally, if the various coordination boards and coordination centers are able to grow rapidly, they would be able to play a much bigger role in the missionary work of the Western Hemisphere, greatly benefiting the ministry. Therefore, let us always remember this important work in our prayers.

The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. There are still many undeveloped areas in the Western Hemisphere that are waiting to receive the gospel. May God move more brothers and sisters to prepare and equip themselves, so that they will be able to join in the work of global evangelism. ★

As the pioneering work expands, the need for dedicated voluntary workers to support this ministry becomes increasingly urgent.



The Image of a Christian in the Digital Age

Charmian Chong—London, UK

In this modern day and age, social networking has become an integral part of many of our lives. Being a user of Facebook, I have often found myself automatically typing the Facebook web address into the address bar without even intending to. When we come home from our studies or from work, websites such as Facebook and Twitter allow us to continue interacting with the outside world. However, in doing so, has it ever occurred to us that we are not only communicating with others, but that we are also creating a virtual image for ourselves? Does this image conform to God's expectations of His children? As social networking becomes an increasingly significant part of our daily lives, the way we portray ourselves online is becoming just as important as the way we present ourselves as Christians in our normal lives.

ALL THAT IS IN THE WORLD

The image that the world wants us to convey—one of outer beauty, success and high status—is clearly promoted by magazines and on television. It is also referred to in the Bible:

For all that is in the world—the lust

of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.

(1 Jn 2:16)

Just as Jesus was confronted with these worldly values when tempted by Satan (Mt 4:1–11), we too are constantly being bombarded by these ideas. People set trends and the world encourages us to follow them. It is natural for us to feel more comfortable blending in with everyone else because the world pressurizes us to look, speak and behave as others do. But Jesus has already told us that the world “neither sees Him nor knows Him...” (Jn 14:17). Therefore the world will have expectations of us that are not in line with the teachings of Christ. As more and more people follow the trends of the world, there will be pressure on Christians to likewise conform.

If we think about it, social networks are also a medium by which such ideals are encouraged. What are we revealing to others about ourselves when it comes to our own Facebook profile? If someone “tags” an unattractive picture of us, we may immediately feel embarrassed, and

we can very easily “untag” ourselves. Our statuses reveal to others what is on our mind. We “like” things to show others what we approve of. Through all these actions, we build up an image of ourselves; one that we allow or even want others to see, in terms of looks, things we support and things that we think about. As a result, we must be watchful of how we conduct ourselves, not only in our daily lives, but also online.

DO NOT BE CONFORMED TO THIS WORLD

It is important for us to first reflect on the image we portray to others in our normal day-to-day lives. Do we find that we do what the world expects of us? Paul encouraged the members in Rome:

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

(Rom 12:2)

We should not conform because we are actually not of this world, merely sojourners and pilgrims (1 Pet 2:11). We must therefore remember who we are on this earth. We do not belong here, so we do not need to resemble people of the world.

Jesus explains to us how we should live whilst we are in this world:

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

(Mt 5:14, 16)

A candle that is lit in a dark room can be seen easily; it stands out and lights up the corner that it is in. When we are lost in a dark place, a torch can help us see and find our way around. What Jesus requires of us is to be different. Rather than blending in with the darkness, we should lead others to Jesus with courage and boldness, just as a little bright light can help someone find their bearings



If someone “tags” an unattractive picture of us, we may immediately feel embarrassed, and we can very easily “untag” ourselves. Our statuses reveal to others what is on our mind. We “like” things to show others what we approve of. Through all these actions, we build up an image of ourselves.

and walk in the right direction. As the light of the world, we do not need to be afraid of shining for our Lord. When others see that we are different, that we are of God, we introduce them to Jesus and in doing so we glorify our Father in heaven.

So what can we do to bring light to those around us? In our daily lives we can shine through our speech and deeds, speaking words seasoned with salt, and acting in love and kindness. For example, we can monitor the words that we speak by restraining ourselves from using inappropriate language, even if those around us freely speak such words. Refraining from certain unchristian activities, despite others taking part in them, shows that we hold on to a set of godly values. We can show the love of Christ in our actions, through even the smallest of deeds. Helping someone we see needing it, or caring for the needs of our brothers and sisters, can radiate the compassion of Jesus: a simple greeting or “how are you?” shows others that we care about them. We should therefore remember who we are on this earth and aim to diffuse Christ’s fragrance, enabling others to draw closer to Him.

ADOPT THE IMAGE OF CHRIST ONLINE

Once we know our identity, we can understand what sort of image it is we should be portraying. As previously mentioned, our Father is in heaven (Mt 5:16), so as His children, we should look like our heavenly Father, in the same way that a son looks like his parents. What were some of the attributes of Christ whilst He was on earth?

Love

Christ had the greatest love, so much so that He was willing to

humble himself to the point of death. However, this was not the only way in which Christ demonstrated His love. He also showed that He was selfless by caring for the wellbeing of those around Him. Before Jesus gave up His spirit on the cross, He asked John to take care of His mother (Jn 19:25–27). Even at the point of death, Christ thought about His mother and who would take care of her.

Jesus instructs us to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mt 22:39; Lev 19:18). This is the second greatest commandment from God (Mt 22:36–39). Jesus uses the parable of the good Samaritan to illustrate how one can love one’s neighbor (Lk 10:30–37). The Samaritan had mercy and compassion on the man who had been beaten, by not only providing immediate care by bandaging the victim’s wounds, but also by going beyond this and taking him to the inn and paying for his stay there.

Likewise, God wants us to have love for one another. We can use social networks to our advantage and show our love for others, for example, by using Facebook to check up on them during the week. A simple “Hi, how’s your week going?” or a few encouraging words can help cheer someone up. Keeping in touch with our brethren when we are not in church shows that we are still mindful of them, and they will be able to feel the love of our Father through us.

Peaceable

Whilst on this earth, Jesus did not cause disputes but made peace, despite facing much opposition. When Jesus went to the temple one morning, the scribes and Pharisees brought an adulteress to Jesus to test Him, hoping to find something to accuse Him of (Jn 8:6). Rather than retaliating, Jesus remained silent. He then spoke words of mercy

to the adulteress that shook their conscience (Jn 8:1–12). Jesus did not worsen the situation by speaking harshly and getting involved in their trouble-making.

Similarly, Paul reminds us “to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing humility to all men” (Tit 3:2). We can be peacemakers online as well as in our daily lives by speaking words of gentleness and not stirring up trouble. As the preceding verse says, we can do this by speaking evil of no one. Like Jesus, we should remain silent if our involvement in certain conversations will only cause more tension. If we find that someone posts something online aimed negatively at us, we should all the more try to remain silent. Instead of posting things that provoke or reveal our anger, we should try to use words that instill peace in the hearts of those who read them. In this way, we will surely project the peaceful appearance of Christ.

Holiness

When Christ was faced with temptation (Mt 4:1–11), He was able to resist and remained blameless. Rather than allowing the things of the world (the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life) to cause Him to sin, He was able to remain holy.

Since the days of the Israelites, God has instructed His people to be holy:

“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” (Lev 19:2)

As our heavenly Father is holy, so we must be holy in all that we say and do. The things that we post or “like” on Facebook, for example, give an indication as to what we approve of. “Like”-ing images or posts that are inappropriate can defile us and our brethren:

The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness.
(Lk 11:34)



Therefore, we should refrain from even looking at such images. Moreover, we should use words seasoned with salt, which will impart grace, rather than foul language. We must take heed to resist the things of the world so that we do not cause ourselves or our brethren to stumble.

As social networking is becoming such a large part of our lives, we should all the more strive to achieve the likeness of our Father. Although it is difficult to do this, we must remind ourselves that, though we live in the world, we are not of the world; rather, we are the sons of Christ. With this status in mind, let us be diligent to glorify God. By imitating the image of Christ, we bring His light to all those who can see us, whether this be in the real or the virtual world. ★

Serve the Lord with Gladness

Keoni Yang—Sydney, Australia



"The longer I serve Him, the sweeter He grows, the more that I love Him, more love He bestows."

(From the hymn "The Longer I Serve Him" by William Gaither, 1965)

The life of a servant is hardly appealing to any person. Yet when we were baptized and entered the fold of God, we also became His humble servants. This was not a contract or a service over a defined period of years. Instead, we chose to serve Him for our entire lives to repay His grace of salvation.

Likewise, when we first entered the workforce, it *felt* as if we would be working for the rest of our lives or at least for the next forty years. We became a servant to our society, to management; a servant to our mortgages and the lifestyle of this world.

Both secular work and service to God are necessary in our lives, but not equally so. Jesus reminds us: "No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and mammon" (Mt 6:24).

TO WORK AND TO SERVE

There were not any monumental

changes to the way I approached church service once I started working. I continued to attend Sabbath services, and completed the church duties assigned to me. My office colleagues came to know the importance I placed on Sabbath worship and church service and they respected me for it, confirming my own view that I was a faithful servant to God.

But six months later, I found myself floundering in the copious amounts of office work and church responsibilities, and unbeknownst to me, the quality of my service and spiritual worship dropped. I faced a challenge that every working Christian faces: I had hit a wall in my spiritual growth and service quality. No longer could I genuinely sing that the more I served, the sweeter He grew.

Entering the workforce marks a milestone in our lives. Not only are we able to earn our own money; we now have the means to start thinking about buying a house, starting a family and making other life decisions. These pursuits then snowball; we are enticed to work ceaselessly for that "idyllic" lifestyle,



to invest in the future of our children and even grandchildren, to build up our assets so that one day when our storehouses are full we can sit back, eat, drink and be merry.

However, the more time we spend building treasures on earth, the more our heart will focus on these pursuits instead of on God's work (cf. Mt 6:19-21). At face value, we still attend church, pray and read the Bible, but actually we face the danger of becoming habitual or even joyless servants. Worse, we may even forgo our servitude altogether.

This danger looms largest over our working brethren, which is ironical since it is this group who is the most able-bodied and ready to be used by God. Like Timothy, many of us have been fed the word of God from childhood. We have the foundation from years of religious education classes. We have the finances to offer and volunteer. We have the strength to work in the field ready for harvest. We are the equipped men and women of God. Yet all this wonderful grace from God will come to nothing, if we serve out of pure habit and without any joy. This kind of attitude will diminish our quality of service, rendering us a useless vessel, a disgruntled servant.

THE HABITUAL SERVANT

Is there anything wrong with being a habitual servant?

The fact that service becomes habitual reflects our faithfulness to consistently carry out the work entrusted to us. But at the same time habitual service faces the same danger of any other habit we hold—we view service as normal, regular and ordinary. We no longer cherish something that was given to us as a grace, uncommon, extraordinary—a precious gift that motivates us to give our best to God.

Moreover, serving God may also turn into a habit over time and with increasing experience. The longer we serve, the more “shortcuts” we know to preparing church work. Since we don't need to think much about how to complete our service anymore, it becomes a habit. Consequently,

The more time we spend building treasures on earth, the more our heart will focus on these pursuits instead of on God's work (cf. Mt 6:19-21). At face value, we still attend church, pray and read the Bible, but actually we face the danger of becoming habitual or even joyless servants.

we put less and less effort into our service.

I found myself becoming such a habitual servant soon after I started to work in society. The reverence and significance I used to hold for even the simplest duties such as recording sermons gave way to a mechanical completion of tasks. I allowed myself to continue along this precarious path of service because I saw no immediate rebuke or reckoning for my service. Children still seemed to enjoy the religious education classes, discussions that I led were still fruitful, the church still ran along smoothly, seemingly regardless of whether I served wholeheartedly or half-heartedly.

This is the lingering danger for any believer who no longer serves with the same zeal or reverence. We see no rebuke. Instead we see growth in the church, and we use this to validate that our poor-quality service is good enough for God. The habitual servant is already satisfied with the work he is doing. Such a servant maintains the status quo and thinks that others should take on more responsibilities.

But what was the example that Jesus set for us? Jesus, the ever-busy servant, never maintained the status quo. Instead, He served and preached the gospel even up to the cross.

When I was struggling with balancing work, studies and church, I still had a yearning to serve more. But there was a voice inside me that said, “Enough.” I convinced myself that it was okay for me to let go of some responsibilities, that I was “passing on the baton,” so I no longer viewed service as the grace it was. It became a duty and obligation. Subsequently, my quality of service spiraled even further downward. I became the joyless servant.

THE JOYLESS SERVANT

When we no longer view service to God as a grace and privilege, it will turn into an increasing burden. Weighed down by our heavy load, we lose our sense of joy in serving the Lord.

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth that God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor 9:7). If we offer our body, time, and strength but do so without joy or willingness—can this be a fragrant offering to God?

The joyless servant is one who sits beneath the shade of a plant, witnessing God's almighty work unfolding before his eyes. Yet he is unable to appreciate the grace and power of God. He can only think of his own troubles and worries, thinking himself to be alone in his burdensome service to God.

When I was faced with such dissatisfaction, I became such a joyless servant. I thought I was the only one having to make sacrifices for God. I questioned whether all this time, tears, prayers, and strength were worth the service I rendered to God. Although I knew my service was not to God's standard and displeased Him, I did not reflect or try to improve. I would only look at others, thinking that they were serving so conveniently and thus, excusing myself from pursuing further spiritual growth. I justified forgoing church activities and divine work with my heavy work and study load, when in truth I would only spend that time muddling in my own self-pity and self-righteousness. I was a servant without motivation, purpose or joy.

A FAITH AND SERVICE REKINDLED

By God's unending grace, He made me realize the dire state of my service when I saw how much my spiritual



cultivation and faith had been affected. My prayers were weak and Bible-reading was fruitless. I would listen to sermons daily, but I would only be searching for something to move my heart without putting in the effort to meditate on the word of God. So I returned to the basics of spiritual cultivation, making sure my heart was fully prepared whenever I served.

I resolved to pray more deeply and truly meditate in prayer instead of just pouring out my complaints and troubles. I started reading Proverbs and reflected on each Proverb, slowly digesting the spiritual food. I sought to remember once again my true motivation for serving God.

Paul was a leading example in serving unceasingly with the same burning desire. Every day he remembered that it was “the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Every day he remembered and reckoned himself as the chief of sinners. Through all these, I realized once again how blessed I was to be able to serve God. Humbled by God’s word, I once again recalled the sweetness of serving with joy and the pure gratitude that I could partake in His divine nature.

Once my spiritual cultivation became stronger, regular and meaningful, I once again began to view church work as an opportunity to put what I had prayed and read about into practice. I opened my eyes and began to truly observe the brethren around me. Whether they had been serving and working for many or only a few years, I realized I could learn from every servant. Removing pride and contempt from my eyes, I could see their sacrifice and strengths. Time spent with spiritual companions was no longer centered on our troubles, but on improving the divine work we were entrusted,

and on encouraging one another to serve God to our best. In this way, I regained joy in serving the Lord.

CEASELESSLY SERVING GOD WITH JOY

As working members of the society, we are particularly blessed with many opportunities to serve God. But with these blessings come responsibility and faith. So, whether we have worked one year or forty years, we need to stay focused on serving only one master: our Lord Jesus Christ. Society compels us to work ceaselessly until we retire. Yet God’s love compels us to serve Him ceaselessly for all the days of our lives.

Therefore, whether we have become habitual or even joyless servants, let us rekindle our faith in God through spiritual cultivation, remembering that serving God is a grace and an opportunity to work for Him.

Let us seek to continuously improve in our service and heart towards God, never forgetting the zeal and reverence we had when we first served.

Serving God with joy and devotion is a banner and testament of a living and growing faith. It will be a sweet-smelling sacrifice to the Lord, truly edifying others and ourselves and eventually making our service grow sweeter every day. All glory be to God. ★

Habitual service faces the same danger of any other habit we hold—we view service as normal, regular and ordinary. We no longer cherish something that was given to us as a grace, uncommon, extraordinary—a precious gift that motivates us to give our best to God.



The First Couple

Timothy Yeung—Vancouver, Canada



Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

(Gen 2:22–24)

The first union of a man and a woman in the history of mankind: What a solemn moment for Adam and Eve, when God personally put them together for life! What joy, what bliss, what excitement! What bright hopes for their future! Their hearts were so close, to the extent that Adam called his wife "bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh." There is no greater intimacy than that.

Unfortunately Adam and Eve's bliss did not last. Only one chapter after their "wedding," they sinned against God and, as a result, were driven out from the garden of Eden, away from the face of God. At the same time, they began to experience problems in their marriage. Note how Adam

addressed Eve when God required an account of him for their sin: "The woman whom You gave to be with me..." (Gen 3:12). What a contrast to his previous way of addressing her! We can imagine how much they had drifted apart from each other... all because of sin.

In fact, our relationship with our spouse is directly related to our relationship with God, for if there is discord between husband and wife, their prayers are hindered (1 Pet 3:7).

Today, we may wonder why we encounter difficulties in our marriage even though God has put us together. While it may be true that God has matched us with our spouse, we still have to make efforts to maintain and manage our marriage.

Although Adam and Eve lived thousands of years ago, the challenges and problems they faced in their marriage were quite similar to those we face today. For this reason, it is worth looking into their mistakes to learn how we can preserve and manage our own marriage.

FREE TEMPTATION

Now the serpent was more cunning

than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' " Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

(Gen 3:1–5)

Initially, Adam and Eve never thought about eating the forbidden fruit because there were so many other fruits to eat in the garden of Eden. They were satisfied with what they had. However, when the serpent told Eve about the benefits of the forbidden fruit, her desire was aroused and she ate of the fruit.

Many marital relationships break down due to temptation. Just as Satan made use of the serpent to change the relationship of the first couple, he offers many temptations in the outside world to husbands and wives today.

There was once a brother who had a beautiful female colleague. He loved his wife, so he didn't give any thought to this colleague. However, over time, he became attracted to her because he had to work very closely with her and they could communicate well with each other. When he realized that he looked forward to going to work everyday because of her, he knew that he was in danger. In the end, he changed his job to escape from this temptation and to protect his marriage.

Hence, if we are faced with temptations from the opposite gender, we must run. We may also need to share this with our spouse and ask him or her to pray for us. Eve did not flee from the source of temptation; she even talked to the serpent—in the end, this caused her downfall.



FULFILL YOUR ROLES

When God put the first husband and wife together, He wanted them to become one flesh. Yet He assigned different roles to them.

God created the husband to be the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church (Eph 5:23). As such, the husband should provide leadership to his family, especially in spiritual matters. For example, he should take the initiative to bring his family for church services and in building the family altar. Furthermore, he should correct his family members when they are about to go against God's commandments.

However, we see that Adam did not lead his family during a time of need (Gen 3:6–7). When his wife became weak, ate of the forbidden fruit and even gave it to him to eat, he did not stop her; instead Adam listened to her and compromised his own spiritual life.

When God formed Eve, He wanted her to help Adam tend the garden of Eden (Gen 2:18, 15) and to be his companion. In fact, this companionship was for both Adam and Eve, and should not be merely physical but should extend into the spiritual realm. Just as husbands have the responsibility to bring their wives before God, wives have the responsibility to keep their husbands close to God. Instead of doing this, Eve gave the fruit to Adam to eat, leading him away from God (Gen 3:17).

In our life and faith journey, we will inevitably meet with trials and setbacks. At such times, God wants husbands and wives to support each other.

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion.

(Eccl 4:9–10)

Abigail left us a good example. When her husband Nabal risked losing his life because he had reviled David's messengers, Abigail stepped in. She took up the responsibility for not meeting David earlier and appeased him with her gift of food and wine. She fulfilled her role as her husband's helper and supporter, without blaming Nabal for his own folly.

IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

(Gen 3:6)

When Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, the Bible describes only actions; there was no communication between her and her husband. Eve acted on her own without consulting her husband, and was subsequently deceived.

This goes to show that there must be communication in a marriage. Quite often, we lack communication with our spouse because there are too many distractions. After a busy day at work, we often want to relax by watching our favorite television program, surfing the web or playing a computer game.

However, the less we talk to our spouse, the colder our relationship will grow because there will be less and less common ground between us. We need to remove these obstacles to our communication. Instead of doing our own thing all the time, let us try to share quality time together—even if it is just by switching off the TV and talking to each other over dinner.

COME BEFORE GOD TOGETHER

When God looked for Adam and Eve

after they had sinned, they withdrew from God and hid themselves (Gen 3:8). But did this solve their problem?

When we encounter problems in our marriage, we tend to think that this is due to personality differences, communication problems or temptations. Quite often, that causes us to repeat Adam and Eve's mistake: they blamed each other and the serpent (Gen 3:11–13) instead of looking at themselves.

In reality, our marital problems are often linked to our relationship with God. Perhaps we are too stiff-necked and unwilling to change our bad habits or listen to our spouse's opinion. That indicates a sense of pride; yet God has said that He resists the proud but gives grace to the humble (Jas 4:6).

Maybe we are so busy pursuing our careers or caring for our children that we have forgotten about our spouse's needs and neglected to draw near to God. Yet God has said, "do not worry about your [or your children's] life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on... For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Mt 6:25,32–33). Therefore, we need to examine ourselves and our relationship with God.

Moreover, we need to come before God together with our spouse. If both husband and wife draw near to God, they will also grow closer to each other; for the Lord Himself will bridge the gap between us.

The importance of having a family altar cannot be underestimated. In fact, it is vital to establish our own family altar from the start of our marriage. When we study the Bible together, we can discuss and understand each other's weaknesses and encourage each other with the word of God. We will also experience the joy of sharing with each other.

When we pray together, we can experience the strength of two people praying together. And as we allow the Holy Spirit to constantly fill

Companionship should not be merely physical but should extend into the spiritual realm. Just as husbands have the responsibility to bring their wives before God, wives have the responsibility to keep their husbands close to God.



When we pray together, we can experience the strength of two people praying together. And as we allow the Holy Spirit to constantly fill us and work in us, we will be able to forgive and support each other, as well as to face the challenges in our marriage together.

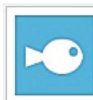
us and work in us, we will be able to forgive and support each other, as well as to face the challenges in our marriage together.

Let us therefore draw near to God with our spouse in the garden of Eden...the place where God first blessed mankind with the joy of marriage. ★

Five Loaves and Two Fish

One True Church

November 20th, 2012 — by YHC



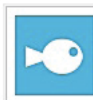
How many times have we been asked the question, "Which church do you go to?" And how many times have we mumbled back the answer? So why is it so hard sometimes to tell people that we are from the True Jesus Church?

The implicit meaning in the church's name is that it is the true church. And therein lays the issue. Nowadays, it goes completely against the grain for any church to claim to be the rightful church of God. The popular ecumenical movement would argue that such exclusivity is simply not acceptable because all Christians and all churches make up the one body of Christ. Any individual church that claims otherwise is viewed at best as odd and, at worst, as fanatical and extremist. It is hardly surprising, then, that we may try to shy away from drawing attention to ourselves. Continue reading »

[Comment »](#) | Bible & Truth, Church, Exhortation

Don't Think If Only

November 14th, 2012 — by libajia



One time when we were on vacation, we passed by a souvenir shop with a sign which read: 30-100% off sale. Being curious about what this meant, we wandered inside to find out. It turns out that you had to shop first and then draw from a deck of cards at the cash till. This card would determine your discount, which ranged from 30 to 100% off the ticket price.

In other words, it was a mystery or "surprise" discount.

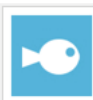
There were many beautiful items in the shop which ranged in price, from a few dollars to a few hundred dollars. After spending a long time at the shop, the church sister I was with finally picked out a \$10 T-Shirt (because her husband kept nagging her to not spend money on souvenirs). So she went to pay and we suddenly heard the cashier exclaim, "Congratulations! You get 100% off!" Everyone at the shop heard this and felt delighted for her and for the actual possibility of getting 100% off.

As we exited the shop, her husband was beaming and we jokingly said, "If only you had picked out a more expensive item! It would have been free!" Continue reading »

[Comment »](#) | Personal Cultivation, Reflections

Loving and Gifted

November 8th, 2012 — by burninglamp



In a family there are people who are gifted in different ways. God's family is more so, for He composed the body. We need more than head hunters; we need those who can spend time in the midst of the flock to show love. I say love comes first because that's what Paul put as priority: "Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts" (1 Cor 14:1).

About

A place where we can nourish our souls and offer the little that we have. May God feed all who pass this way.

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FIVE LOAVES AND TWO FISH

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An Admirable Faith

Hain-Lee Hsueh, East Bay, California, USA

After Moses died, Joshua led the Israelites into the land of Canaan, and won victory upon victory over many of the nations inhabiting the land at the time. Joshua 12 lists thirty-one kings that the Israelites conquered under Joshua's leadership, with an army that had never seen war prior to entering Canaan. Sometimes we take this for granted because we have heard the stories many times, but if we really think about it, that's simply amazing. Joshua was the man! And what did God have to say about Joshua's victories?

Now Joshua was old, advanced in years. And the LORD said to him: "You are old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed."

(Josh 13:1)

If we were Joshua, how would we feel? In this society, we are taught to develop our potential, to be the best that we can be, to do something impactful, so we can be acknowledged for our achievements and endeavors. How would we feel, if at the end of a prosperous career, our boss doesn't say, "Good job," but instead says, "You're already old, man, and look how much there's left to do"? Wouldn't we want to burst out and say, "Look at all I've done! Don't I deserve some commendation and recognition?"

From Joshua there was no such outburst, and it is from this that we can learn something about true faith. To us, God's words may seem discouraging, but Joshua continued to obey God as he had before. And before he died, he even earnestly urged the Israelites to continue to serve God and no one else. There is something that Joshua understood about faith that we often subconsciously forget—God's plan is bigger than us.

We often think of faith in a self-centered, personal sense, always wondering, "What is God's plan for me? How can I please God?" But do we have faith in God's plan beyond how it relates to ourselves? How concerned are we about the part of God's work that is still to be done after us?

Many of God's workers in the Bible, such as Joshua, have set the example for us. They were not out to show the world that with God they could do great things and live glorious lives. They understood that they were merely vessels, pilgrims carrying out God's plan and passing it down to those who followed. They understood that they were just unprofitable servants (Lk 17:10). Joshua's silent and continual submission proves that he understood that.

Hebrews 11 mentions many such workers, all of them playing just a small part in God's plan and many of them concerned with the future. Think Abraham, who obeyed God without seeing his descendants become as numerous as the sand. Isaac, who blessed Jacob and Esau "concerning things to come" (Heb 11:20). Joseph, who "made mention of the departure of the children of Israel" (Heb 11:22) from Egypt. Moses, who "suffered affliction with the people of God" (Heb 11:25), leading them to a promised land that he himself could not enter and enjoy. All these people acted by faith—a faith that had vision.

God's plan extends much further past our own lives, but sometimes we live as if it didn't. We may even have this attitude of serving God to accumulate enough brownie points to go to heaven. But at the end of our lives, we should not glory in all the labor we have done for God, but work to ensure that the service continues after us.

From the Bible we know the goal of God's plan is salvation. May our faith cover not just our own salvation, but the salvation of those who follow us. May we add to our faith, vision.

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

(Heb 11:13)

國際青年聯誼會 2013

International Youth Fellowship

The International Youth Fellowship is a two-week event with a youth symposium and fellowship activities such as visiting and sightseeing.



Hosted by UKGA in Newcastle, UK, and themed

"The Mission of TJC Youths in the End Time",

participants will have the opportunity to discuss and share about youth ministry on a local and global level.

Before and after the symposium, we will visit scenic and famous sites in Edinburgh and London. Don't miss this unique opportunity to fellowship with youths from around the world!

DATE & VENUE

Symposium

June 12–16, 2013 in Newcastle, UK

Visiting and sightseeing

June 9–11, 2013 Edinburgh to Newcastle

June 17–20, 2013 Newcastle to London

*If you would like to join the visiting and sightseeing, please arrive in Edinburgh on June 8 and leave from London on June 21, 2013.

Target group

TJC members who are between 18 and 40 years old

Registration period

From December 2012 to March 31, 2013 (first-come-first-serve basis).

For more information, please contact your local youth committee/local church.

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.

Please direct any questions to manna@tjc.org or Fax: +1-562-402-3190

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 #70:

Topic: Discerning the Truth

Articles due: February 15, 2013

The truth is the foundation of our faith. It shows us the path to salvation. Hence, it is vital that we hold fast to the truth (cf. 1 Jn 2:24-25). Yet, as we live in the end time, we will increasingly encounter false christs and false prophets—teachings that compromise the truth, and ultimately cause us to lose our salvation. How do we guard against this deception? How can we preserve our hearts and let the truth abide in us?

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 in its latest edition.

True Jesus Church

Articles of Faith

Jesus the True God

Jesus Christ, the Word who became flesh, died on the cross for the redemption of sinners, resurrected on the third day and ascended to heaven. He is the only Savior of mankind, the Creator of the heavens and earth, and the only true God.

Holy Bible

The Holy Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is inspired by God, the only scriptural truth, and the standard for Christian living.

Church

The True Jesus Church, established by our Lord Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit during the time of the "latter rain," is the restored true church of the apostolic time.

Baptism

Water baptism is the sacrament for the remission of sins for regeneration. The baptism must take place in natural living water, such as the river, sea, or spring. The Baptist, who already has had received baptism of water and the Holy Spirit, conducts the baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the person receiving the baptism must be completely immersed in water with head bowed and face downward.

Holy Spirit

Receiving the Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues, is the guarantee of our inheritance of the kingdom of heaven.

Footwashing

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 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 can have eternal life and be raised on the Last Day. This sacrament shall be held as often as possible. Only one unleavened bread and grape juice shall 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 salvation and with the hope of eternal rest in the life to come.

Salvation

Salvation is given by the grace of God through faith. Believers must rely on the Holy Spirit to pursue holiness, to honor God, and to love humanity.

Last Day

The Lord's Second Coming will take place on the last day when He descends from heaven to judge the world: 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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