

MANNA

ISSUE 74

Standing Firm

**A Faith That Is Never Compromised •
Jacob's Pillars • A Symphony of Grace: Committing Our
Lives to God**

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

MANNA
ISSUE 74 Vol 38 No. 4
Publication date: December 2014

Editorial

by FF Chong

Standing Firm

Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. (1 Cor 15:1–2)

During the time of the apostles, the believers were often fiercely persecuted. While the persecution did not cause the church to crumble entirely, it did give rise to irreversible damage, especially towards the turn of the first century. Satan made use of man—false teachers, to be precise—to undermine the church.

There were two types of false prophets. One type comprised people from outside the community of faith; the other was from within (Acts 20:29–30). Concerning the latter, the deceivers disguised themselves in order to infiltrate the church with their destructive heresies. They went on the offensive, using trickery and deceitful plotting (Eph 4:14), causing the church to be scarred (cf. Gal 1–2; Col 1–2; Rev 2–3) and the believers to be unsettled (Acts 15:24; Gal 1:7). The greatest challenge for the apostolic church became a test of faithfulness to God’s word.

The moral from history is the need to stand firm. It entails being rooted in Christ and in His word. God is more than able to save us to the end—to grant us the salvation of our souls. However, we must do our part: we must continuously yield to the word that we received in the beginning and keep it to the end (1 Cor 15:1–2). Standing firm becomes all the more pertinent as we know that Satan has been thrown down from heaven and is attacking the church of God (Rev 12:12) prior to the second coming of Christ.

Aside from Satan’s attack, secular influences also pose a similar, if not equal, threat to the church. The effect is corrosive and has the potential to corrupt the mind of simplicity we have for Christ Jesus. We therefore need to create a godly environment for ourselves and our children, and preserve ourselves with the word of God and constant prayer.

Imagine how sad it would be for an athlete on course for a hundred-meter victory to stumble at the last hurdle. It is for good reason, then, that Paul says that our faith journey would be in vain if we suddenly turned our backs on God; we would be the most pitiable of people.

We thank the almighty God for touching many members to put their thoughts into writing for the edification of the church. Their articles, which appear in the themed section, exhort believers to hold on to the truth that was given to the church once and for all, and remind them to resist subtle worldly allurements.

Let us pray for the Spirit’s empowerment so that we can hold on to our initial faith to the very end.

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Manna (ISSN1528-8617) is published quarterly by the True Jesus Church, IA Department of Literary Ministry, 21217 Bloomfield Avenue, Lakewood, CA 90715 USA.
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U.S. Postmaster: send change-of-address forms to 21217 Bloomfield Avenue, Lakewood, CA 90715 USA.

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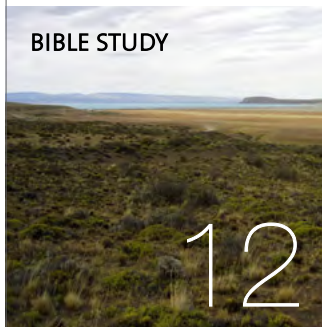


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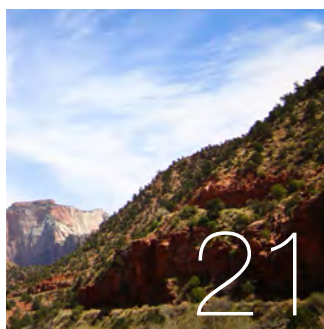


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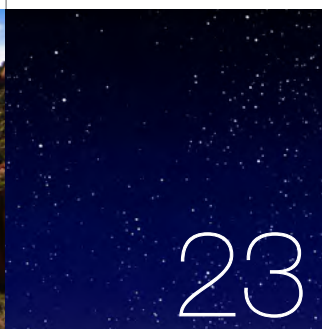
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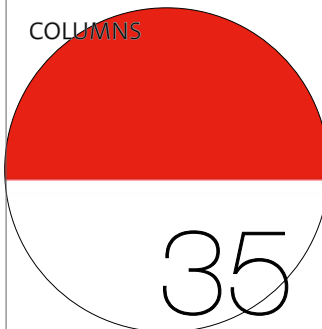
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Standing Firm



A Faith That Is Never Compromised

Based on a sermon by Wen Chuan Yeh—Pacifica/Sacramento, USA

Compromise: A way of reaching agreement in which each person or group gives up something that was wanted in order to end an argument or dispute.¹

Based on this definition, compromise seems to be quite positive. It helps us to end arguments and to live together in harmony. In fact, we often need to compromise in our daily life—with our colleagues, classmates, friends, and family members.

Some people pride themselves on their ability to deal with different types of personality. This is indeed not easily achieved, and society needs people who know how to compromise. But in our faith, we cannot compromise.

*Oh, that you would bear with me in a little folly—and indeed you do bear with me. **For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he who comes preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted—you may well put up with it!***

(2 Cor 11:1–4)

Paul reminds us here that we have to be faithful to Christ. We can only

have one God, just as we can only have one spouse. In our faith, we must be devoted to this one true God and the only true gospel, for only they can lead us to eternal life.

However, living in this world, we often face many types of pressure, such as from our peers, our colleagues, or even our family members. This pressure can cause us to compromise our faith.

The ancient saints, such as Moses, Daniel, and Paul, also encountered such pressure. Even Jesus was faced with the temptation to compromise. But we find that they did not succumb, no matter how great the temptation. Even when their lives were threatened, they still held on to their faith. So how did they handle such situations?

MOSES

God had commanded Moses and Aaron to lead the Israelites on a three-day journey into the wilderness to worship God. Moses asked Pharaoh's permission to leave with all the Israelites—men, women, and children—together with their livestock.

But Pharaoh repeatedly tried to negotiate with Moses: first, he tried to convince Moses to sacrifice to God in the land (Ex 8:25); second, he allowed them to go, but not too far away (Ex 8:28); third, he permitted only the men to leave (Ex 10:11); and finally, he commanded that they leave their livestock behind (Ex 10:24). Although Pharaoh was one of the most powerful men in the ancient world, with the authority to

kill anyone at any time, Moses and Aaron insisted that not a single hoof should be left in Egypt (Ex 10:26). The Israelites had to completely depart from Egypt, the land of bondage. We do not know whether Moses and Aaron were afraid, but we do know that they stood firm in upholding God's instruction. They did not yield to fear or weakness.

Likewise, we must not give in to our weaknesses at the cost of God's commandments. Sometimes we may feel especially tired, and we tell ourselves that it is okay to skip service once. But the following week, we might have the same excuse. Although this seems to be a valid reason, we must have faith that God will bless us if we keep His word and put Him above our own needs. Jesus Himself has set the example: during His ministry on earth, there were times when He was very hungry or tired. Yet He continued to preach the gospel, to heal, and to pray.

DANIEL AND HIS THREE FRIENDS

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. (Dan 1:8)

When Daniel and his three friends were taken captive to Babylon, they were given an education and a daily portion of the king's delicacies and wine. But the four young men determined not to eat the king's food, because it included things that were unclean according to the Law.

Although good things were placed before them, they did not compromise. Instead, they only ate vegetables and drank water. Yet God took care of them so that they were healthy and beautiful in appearance. God also gave them wisdom, which exceeded ten times that of the Babylonian scholars. Today, if we do not compromise in our faith, God will look after us.

There was a member in the United States who used to work at a hotel. Most hotels require their staff to work on Saturdays. Not long after he came to believe, he was laid off. While he was job hunting, he had many opportunities. But the jobs offered to him required him to work on Saturdays. Since he knew the importance of the Sabbath, he declined these offers.

One year passed. He still could not find a job that did not require him to work on Saturday. Some people might start to panic in such a situation. But this brother continued to hold on to God's commandment and did not compromise his faith.

After a year and a half, he found a job that allowed him to keep the Sabbath. The salary was already quite good, but three weeks into his new job, his employer told him that he had miscalculated his salary—he was given a pay raise! If we truly hold on to our faith, we will honor God as number one. And even though it seems as if we are losing out sometimes, God will take care of us.

Later on, Daniel's three friends were faced with the threat of execution if they did not bow down to the image King Nebuchadnezzar had made (Dan 3:13–15). This was a life or death situation. If they bowed down and worshiped the golden image, their lives would be preserved. But if they did not, they would be thrown into a fiery furnace to be burned alive.

If we were in their shoes, would we bow down and worship? Maybe we would pray to God, "Lord, I will just worship this once and then never do it again. I am very reluctant, but there is just too much pressure."

Although their lives were at stake, Daniel's three friends insisted that they would not worship the image, because they feared God (Dan 3:16–

18). They believed that the God whom they worshiped would deliver them from death, and even if they were to die in the burning furnace, they would accept their fate. Their resolve was unshakeable.

They were thrown into the furnace, but God protected them and they suffered no harm. Their clothes did not even smell of smoke. If we fear God, we would not compromise our faith, even when threatened with death.

PAUL

During Paul's ministry, there were people who preached that Christians also needed to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses to be saved. Many Jewish believers, some of whom were very influential, agreed with this concept. But Paul openly withstood them, because he knew that this was contrary to the truth. He debated with the Jewish converts who tried to teach the brethren in Antioch that circumcision and the Mosaic Law were necessary for salvation (Acts 15:1–5). He also rebuked Peter for being hypocritical and not eating with the Gentile brethren when the Jewish converts were around (Gal 2:11–16).

Although these were his brethren and kinsmen, Paul did not keep quiet or compromise just to maintain peace or to please everyone. Instead, he stood up for the truth and preached the gospel of salvation until he breathed his last, because he knew that only the truth can save souls (cf. Gal 5:1–12; Tit 1:10–16; Acts 28:30–31).

JESUS

After Jesus had fasted for forty days and nights, Satan came to tempt Him. At that time, Jesus was physically weak. When we are hungry and tired, our willpower is also weakened. The

If we truly hold on to our faith, we will honor God as number one. And even though it seems as if we are losing out sometimes, God will take care of us.

When Jesus was tempted, He resisted Satan with the word of God. Although the temptations were great, He firmly withstood them because He had God's word in His heart. Likewise today, our faith has to be established on and be rooted in the word of God.

devil offered Jesus solutions to satisfy His hunger and tempted Him with wealth and fame. Yet Jesus did not compromise. Instead, He resisted the devil with the word of God (Lk 4:1–13), for He knew that Satan would only draw Him away from God.

A FAITH THAT IS NEVER COMPROMISED

Both Jesus and the ancient saints in the examples above were faced with great pressure either from the people around them or from the circumstances they were in. Yet they did not compromise their faith, because they feared God and firmly believed in His word. Today, how can we stand as firm in our faith as they did?

Through God's Word

When Jesus was tempted, He resisted Satan with the word of God. Although the temptations were great, He firmly withstood them because He had God's word in His heart. Likewise today, our faith has to be established on and be rooted in the word of God.

To achieve this goal, we need to diligently study the word of God through attending services and daily Bible reading. Sometimes, this can be challenging, especially in today's fast-paced society where everyone is so busy. Hence, we must be self-disciplined. Set service attendance and personal spiritual nurture as priorities in your daily life; make them must-dos on your schedule, as you would your daily meals and going to work or school.

As we learn God's word, we must remain prayerful, humble our hearts, and seek to truly understand what God wants to teach us through His word. Only then can the truth take root in our hearts; only then can we bear fruits for the Lord; only then can

we resist the pressure that the world puts on us to compromise our faith.

Through Prayer

Throughout His ministry on earth, Jesus spent much time in prayer. Before He was tempted, He fasted and prayed in the wilderness for forty days and nights. Hence, when Satan tried to tempt Him, Jesus remembered the word of God and could use it to resist the devil.

Daniel was a prayerful person too. The Bible tells us that he prayed three times daily, even when the king had decreed that nobody should petition any god or man for thirty days. When Daniel did not comprehend the prophecies and visions he received, he prayed for understanding from God (Dan 2:17–23; 9:20–23).

Today, we may be studying the Bible or learning the word of God through sermons. But if we do not pray, we may not be able to understand or remember God's word.

*[N]o one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.
(1 Cor 2:11)*

The guidance of the Holy Spirit is key to understanding and being inspired by God's word (Jn 16:13). Therefore, we must pray continually and ask the Lord to reveal the truth to us. If we meditate on God's word in our prayers, He will open our spiritual eyes to know His will and give us the strength to practice His word.

By Practicing God's Word

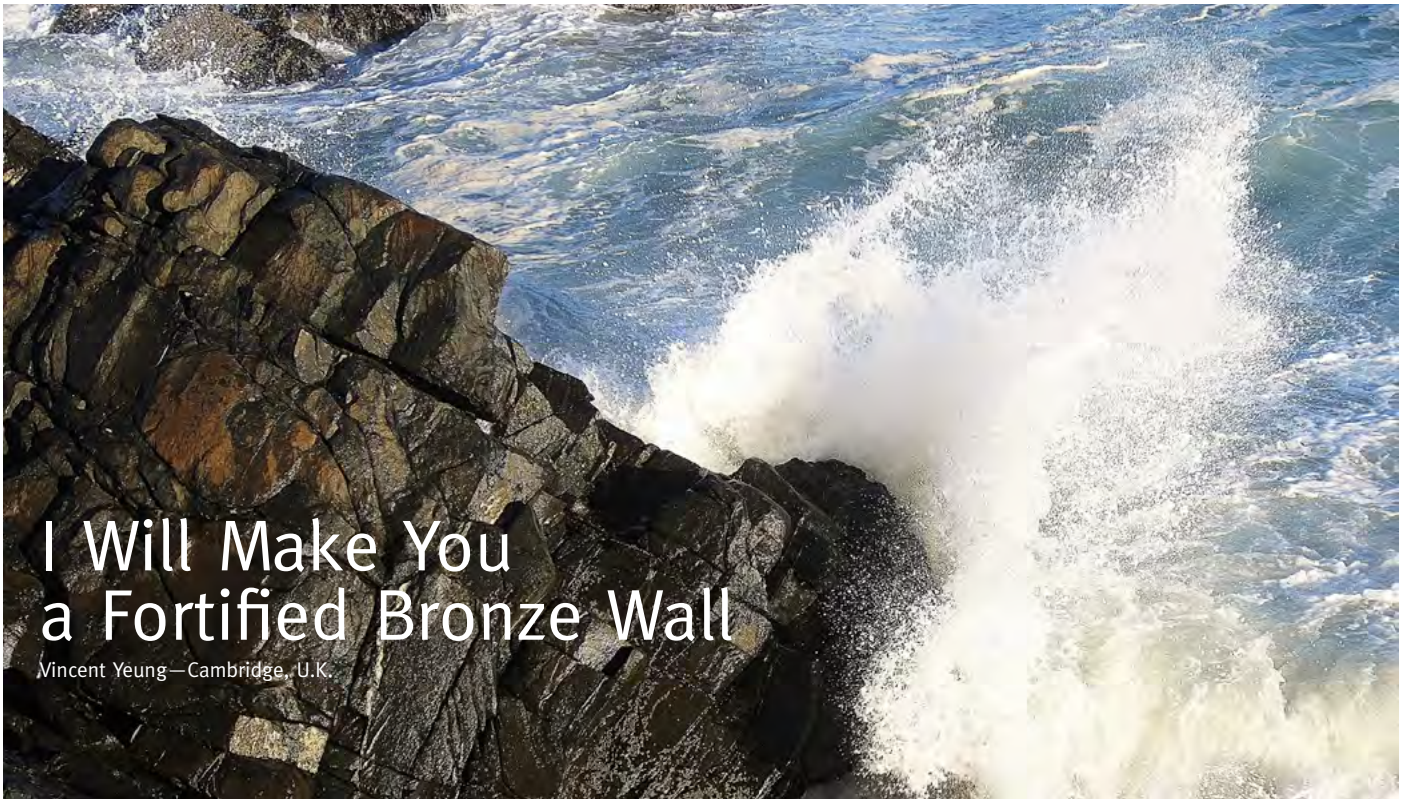
Once we know the word of God, we need to put it into practice. Just as Paul stood up for the truth when it was challenged (cf. Acts 15:1–5; Col 2), we too must stand up for our faith. Then, we will experience the Lord's grace and be strengthened even more in our faith.

CONCLUSION

In our life of faith, we need to constantly draw near to God, immersing ourselves in His word and praying more in the Spirit. If we seek Him with all our heart, let His Spirit and word dwell in us richly, and become doers of the truth, we will never lack in personal experiences with the Lord.

These experiences will in turn strengthen our faith and trust in Him. His Spirit and word will grant us spiritual wisdom and courage so that we can truly know whom we have believed in and stand firm in our faith until the very end. ★

¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/compromise>, 08/20/2014



I Will Make You a Fortified Bronze Wall

Vincent Yeung—Cambridge, U.K.

*"You are but a poor soldier of Christ if you think you can overcome without fighting, and suppose you can have the crown without the conflict."*¹

This statement illustrates how human beings naturally tend to avoid conflict: we often prefer to go with the flow and keep our head down so that life will be easier.

We do not want to upset others, be it at church, at work, or with our friends and family. We find it easier to preach to strangers: we can simply walk away if they do not like to listen, knowing that we will not see them again. In contrast, when we preach to loved ones, we fear rejection and opposition, and worse, we cannot escape; we have to continue to live in their midst.

When we see wrongdoings among our friends and colleagues, we just keep quiet, not wanting to rock the boat and offend others. Once we have raised the issue, we do not want to repeat it, as we do not wish to be seen as troublemakers. Sometimes, certain situations at church may require that we speak the truth in love. Yet, when we do so, we are often criticized and rejected by others.

Now we have to make a choice: do we regress to our passive stance, compromise to make peace, give up totally, or do we stand firm for what is right in God's eyes? A passive approach contradicts the active stance of the Bible, which reminds us that we "are the light of the world" (Mt 5:14); that we should "make disciples of all the nations" (Mt 28:19), "contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude 3), and "speak [the] truth with [our] neighbor" (Eph 4:25). The actions of shining, making, and contending inevitably lead us on to a collision course. When speaking the truth, divisions between friends and within the family may become inevitable (Lk 12:49–53). Prophet Jeremiah knew this dilemma all too well, as he faced enormous challenges during his ministry.

DELIGHTED YET DEPRESSED

Jeremiah was targeted for speaking the truth (Jer 18:18). When he preached God's message of judgment and repentance, people retaliated and mocked him (Jer 20:7,10). He became a reproach to the people (Jer 20:8). His friends waited for his downfall (Jer 20:10), and his own

family mistreated him (Jer 12:6). He was told to speak no more, or his life would be threatened (Jer 11:21).

Jeremiah rejoiced in God's word (Jer 15:16), and yet became dejected. He asked God for deliverance (Jer 15:15), yet he cursed his own birth (Jer 20:14,15) and lost hope, claiming, "My wound is incurable" (Jer 15:18a). He also questioned God's faithfulness, contending that God was an "unreliable stream" (Jer 15:18b). The God whom he had once trusted became a potential "terror" (Jer 17:17) and one who would put him to "shame" (Jer 17:18). He derided his own ministry for being in the wrong place and at the wrong time. He lamented that it was filled with labor, sorrow, and shame (Jer 20:18). The juxtaposition between fear and hope, elation and sorrow, faithfulness and accusation, illustrate the contradictions of the human mind.

Jeremiah typifies believers who want to follow God's words and partake in His ministry. When they encounter difficulties and setbacks, they suppress their emotions, believing they can cope. But there comes a point when they can no

longer contain the build-up of feelings, and they vent their anger. It is normal to feel angry when we have been mistreated or wronged, especially when we are in the right. However, waiting for the wrong to be put right can be frustrating. Hence, Jeremiah accused God of filling him with “indignation” (Jer 15:17). With such a negative mindset, we may find that we are no longer able to continue to practice God’s word and to serve Him: we may retire to our mundane life, or else persist with bitterness.

ROAD TO DELIVERANCE

Jeremiah was troubled by the same question that plagued many ancient saints. He asked, “How long?” (Jer 12:4). Promises were made by God, but they did not materialize in Jeremiah’s lifetime. God’s reply was to question Jeremiah’s strength, which was based on his own ability. If Jeremiah was wearied by mere men, how could he overcome horses (Jer 12:5)? And if he could not cope with the little suffering in a “peaceful” Jerusalem, how could he cope with the plain of Jordan, where the lions hid around willows and shady banks, ready to pick their prey (Jer 12:5)?

Rely on God

Jeremiah proclaimed his trust in God, yet God questioned his wholehearted devotion. Jeremiah’s reliance on his own strength had adulterated his trust in God. He was fighting his own fight, with his own ability, tenacity, and strength. Ultimately, he became worn out by the opposition. Today, Satan and his forces are constantly aiming at the heart of believers, ready to strike secretly (Ps 11:2). We need to withstand this constant onslaught by relying on God.

Jeremiah had veered off course and was overwhelmed by the terrors that surrounded him. It is ironic that Jeremiah committed the very mistake that he had rebuked Israel for: “You have forsaken me; you have gone backward” (Jer 15:6).

Persist by God’s Strength

Even so, God offered him a way back; but Jeremiah had to take the first step. God said, “If you return, then I will bring you back” (Jer 15:19a). The way of return required him to stand firm and not compromise: “[Y]ou must not return to them” (Jer 15:19b). Similarly, it is only when we trust in God (Jer 17:7) that we can endure and have “no fear when heat comes” (Jer 17:8). When we persist in doing God’s will, His promises will follow (Heb 10:37–38).

Purify Our Hearts and Minds

The second condition for Jeremiah’s return was to “take out the precious from the vile” (Jer 15:19), that is to purify himself. Jeremiah was holding grudges against man and against God. His bitterness was both open and insidious, manifesting through the words that had been hidden in his heart.

God searches our hearts. The impurities in our minds are like filth that poisons us and prevents God’s word from working in us. We should be truthful to ourselves and search out the impurities that we pick up consciously or subconsciously in our daily life: the grudges we hold against others (Mt 5:22–23), self-righteousness (Job 40:2–4), jealousy, and anger (Gal 5:20–21)—all these prevent us from drawing near to God. Like Jeremiah, we should remove the vile from our heart—the source of all uncleanness (Mt 15:19).

SERVICE WITH PEACE AND JOY

We do not want to share in Jeremiah’s plight, having to dig ourselves from the nadir of faith. When we suffer for the sake of God and encounter obstacles, we should be aware of warning signs: doubt, mistrust,

anger, and the loss of joy. Do we feel lonely, thinking that no one is able and willing to help us? Do we feel frustrated because no matter how hard we try, we do not get the right response or outcome? Have we lost the will to fight and find it hard to continue?

We should realize that God’s work is not about us—success or failure does not depend on our abilities or reputation. We are only God’s instrument—an instrument of righteousness—created to do good works for His glory.

Elijah was hiding in a cave, feeling lonely and frustrated because his great work was not recognized (1 Kgs 19:1–3, 9). He thought he was the only prophet in Israel (1 Kgs 19:14). This self-centeredness blinded him from seeing the bigger picture.

On the opposite end, the apostles rejoiced because they were counted worthy to suffer shame for Jesus’ name (Acts 5:41). Paul considered himself to be merely a fellow worker; he was happy to build and leave it to God to give the increase (1 Cor 3:5,6,9). He was neither worried about how others saw him (1 Cor 4:3) nor perturbed by their motives; he rejoiced as long as the gospel was preached (Phil 1:18). Paul’s clarity over his position and mission defined his ministry. He did not preach himself (2 Cor 4:5), and he understood that the power was not his own but came from God (2 Cor 4:7). Whether he experienced glory or dishonor, good or evil reports, riches or poverty, Paul could rejoice. Even when his troubles, the conspiracy against him, and his own fears remained, he was exceedingly joyful and took comfort in the Lord God (2 Cor 7:4–6; 11:28). He could rejoice because he had the right mindset to do all things through

Jeremiah proclaimed his trust in God, yet God questioned his wholehearted devotion. Jeremiah’s reliance on his own strength had adulterated his trust in God. He was fighting his own fight, with his own ability, tenacity, and strength. Ultimately, he became worn out by the opposition.

Christ who strengthened him (Phil 4:11–13).

When Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin, he remained at peace (Acts 6:15). He was not perturbed by the crowd and the uncertain future that confronted him. He neither shrank from speaking the truth (Acts 7:51) nor was he upset by the recalcitrance of his accusers. He peacefully accepted his fate and forgave those who inflicted pain on him (Acts 7:55, 60).

Paul and Stephen followed the path of passion laid down by Jesus (1 Pet 2:21); they willingly suffered for righteousness' sake, without fear and trouble (1 Pet 3:14), because they relied on God.

We do not openly object to God's commandments, but past unpleasant experiences have deterred us from doing the right things. Out of fear, mistrust, and indignation, we fail to uphold the truth and to persist in our ministry. Only when we remove the vile from our thoughts, stop our backsliding, and start to rely on God, can we truly overcome the challenges that we face in our faith and service.★

God's work is not about us—success or failure does not depend on our abilities or reputation. We are only God's instrument—an instrument of righteousness—created to do good works for His glory.

STAND FIRM

God promised to make Jeremiah a fortified bronze wall (Jer 15:20a)—a wall so strong that it could not be breached by his enemies. This strength would not be based on Jeremiah's ability, tenacity, and strong will; it would come from God, for He said, "I am with you" (Jer 15:20b).

This promise of divine presence is the assurance of victory, reminiscent of God's words to Joshua: "[D]o not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go" (Josh 1:9). This assurance is reiterated throughout the ages and before every great mission (Josh 1:6,9; Mt 26:19,20). This power is from above. No matter how hard we try, we cannot outrun or outwit our enemy; only God can open the way to help us stand firm.

Many of us know what God wants us to do, yet we procrastinate because we are afraid to fail, to be marginalized by our peers, or ostracized by society.

1 John Chrysostom



Hold Fast to the Truth

Based on a sermon by Aun-Quek Chin—Singapore

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.
(2 Tim 1:13–14)

When Paul wrote 2 Timothy, he knew that this would be his final letter. In his parting words to the leaders and the believers of the church, he urged them to hold fast the pattern of sound words. He himself was more than qualified to give this exhortation: for the sake of upholding the truth, Paul surrendered the status he once had in the Jewish community and the privileges it conferred; he lost his friends among the Pharisees; and eventually, he even lost his life. Yet Paul never regretted the course he took and was able to boldly proclaim at the end, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness” (2 Tim 4:7–8).

What about us? Can we hold fast to the truth that we have received? Can we finish the race, fight the good fight, and face our Lord, blameless like Paul?

PATTERN OF SOUND WORDS

Today, every Christian claims Jesus as their only Lord and Savior and upholds the commandment to love one another, which are certainly important aspects of the truth. But how many hold fast to the Lord's commandment to be baptized, have our feet washed, and partake in the Holy Communion? Not that many.

In the early church, the apostles—Peter, Paul, and John—preached the same truth of salvation, a common set of beliefs that all the churches adhered to. However, before long, others began preaching a different gospel. This was why Paul wrote to encourage Timothy, as well as the other believers, to hold fast the pattern of sound words that they had heard.

To Titus, a true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior. (Tit 1:4)

Paul says that Titus was a true son born of the gospel and emphasizes that he came to believe because of their “common faith.” The latter would have gone beyond just

believing that Jesus was their Savior and keeping His command to love others. We know this to be the case because we see Paul asking the believers in his days, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” (Acts 19:2), and “Into what [baptism] then were you baptized?” (Acts 19:3). We also see that he instructed the church in Corinth to partake the Holy Communion in a worthy manner (1 Cor 11:27–29). All these matters were core elements of the common faith preached and meticulously perpetuated by the early workers.

THE UNCHANGING AND COMPLETE TRUTH

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen. (Mt 28:19–20)

From Jesus' words, we understand that Christians of all generations have to obey Jesus' teachings. He further teaches that not all those who

call Him, "Lord! Lord!" will be saved, but only those who do the will of the heavenly Father and keep the Lord's command (Mt 7:21).

The phrase "to the end of the age" tells us that the truth cannot be changed. Nothing can be added or taken away to fit a new era or to please a new generation. Christians should continuously adhere to the teachings that the apostles had received from Jesus. Hence, Jude reminds us "to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3).

Yet today, many Christians do not completely obey the Lord Jesus and His commands relating to baptism, Holy Communion, footwashing, and receiving the Holy Spirit because they consider these as "mere" doctrines. To them, it is the gospel, not the doctrines, that saves.

However, we must understand that the apostles preached what the Lord Jesus had commanded. The Lord commanded them to conduct baptism (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15–16), Holy Communion (Lk 22:14–20), footwashing (Jn 13:1–17), and to pray for the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–5). He set an example for them in keeping the Sabbath holy (cf. Lk 4:16; 6:6,9,5). Hence, the gospel of the cross includes all the teachings and doctrines that Jesus commanded through word and deed. We cannot separate the gospel from the doctrines, for they are one. So we need to ask ourselves: do we believe in the complete gospel and preach it?

Today, the five doctrines preached by the True Jesus Church are the commandments of Jesus. These were the words that the apostles had been preaching and keeping, and we should do likewise to the end of the age.

HOLD FAST TO THE TRUTH WITH FAITH

(a) Follow the Word of God and Not of Men

How do we maintain this pattern of sound words? Paul encourages us to have faith in Christ Jesus. This means

that we have to establish Jesus Christ as our foundation and obey His words. The challenge is, if the words we hear from people around us differ from Jesus' teachings, whom will we listen to?

The Lord says, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mk 16:16).

But people may say, "Belief is the most important thing, because it is your faith which saves; whether you are baptized or not is irrelevant."

The Lord says, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me" (Jn 13:8).

People may say, "The Lord did not wash the apostles' feet so that they will have a part in Him. Rather, it was to teach them to wash their feet so that they will be humble and will forgive one another."

The Lord says, "You have to pray for the promised Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:4–5). When you receive the Holy Spirit, you will speak in tongues (cf. Acts 2:1–4). And speaking in tongues is the evidence that you have received the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 2:14–21). The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our inheritance in heaven (cf. Eph 1:13–14)."

People may say, "When we believed and at the point of baptism, we have already received the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues is just grace upon grace. If you can speak in tongues, it is good, but it is not necessary to enter heaven."

When faced with such counter-arguments, will you have faith in Christ Jesus?

O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babble and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge – by professing it

some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace be with you. Amen. (1 Tim 6:20–21)

In the concluding verses of his letter to Timothy, Paul reminded Timothy to guard what was committed to his safekeeping, as some people were already straying from the truth. Today, when the church faces such a situation, can we too be good custodians of the truth?

(b) Pass on a Pure Faith

Upholding the pure truth is so very important because failure to do so means that we can no longer pass on a pure faith to the next generation. If we cannot even hold fast to the truth, then what we pass on will no longer be a pure faith. Such faith can save neither us nor the generations after us. This is how devastating a heretical faith can be.

(c) Commit the Pattern of Sound Words to Faithful Men

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)

Just as Paul instructed Timothy to commit the truth to faithful men who can teach others, so the church today needs to do likewise to ensure that the believers are not led astray by errant teachings.

For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain. (Tit 1:10–11)

How do we maintain this pattern of sound words? Paul encourages us to have faith in Christ Jesus. This means that we have to establish Jesus Christ as our foundation and obey His words. The challenge is, if the words we hear from people around us differ from Jesus' teachings, whom will we listen to?

Paul was not referring to matters outside the church. There were people in the church who taught “things which they ought not,” subverting whole households. If this happens within the church today, ministers have to deal with such matter.

(d) Stewards Must Defend the Truth

For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

(Tit 1:7–9)

It is important for a steward of God to have good conduct. But more crucially, he must be able to “hold fast the faithful word as he has been taught” (Tit 1:9) and to teach it to others. And should the truth be challenged, he must step forward to defend it. How should ministers of the church handle such situations?

... that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort ... (Tit 1:9)

When someone has been deceived by deviant teachings, ministers should use sound doctrine to admonish him so that he can come to differentiate truth from falsehood. Ministers must also “convict those who contradict” (Tit 1:9b), telling them clearly that their teachings are wrong.

Ministers ought not shy away from such duties and keep silent, lest the congregation think that the deviant teachings are acceptable. Those who contradict are not subject to the truth. They think that the truth is wrong, hence the need to convict them. Their errors must be corrected.

In addition, Paul encourages ministers to execute their authority as God’s stewards. If believers are no longer willing to subject themselves

to what is right in the house of God and spread deviant teachings, ministers have to use their authority to stop them.

This may lead to unpleasant backlashes, but as God’s faithful stewards, they need to stop wrong teachings. Therefore, Paul stresses that the Lord’s servants must faithfully fulfill their duty. They must exhort those who are deceived, convict those who contradict, and put a stop to the actions of those who are insubordinate.

If anyone continues to teach heresies that destroy the faith of the church, then ministers ought to put a stop to his mouth (Tit 1:11) and not allow him to continue to preach. In Titus 1:13, Paul even says, “Therefore rebuke them sharply.” Such harsh action is necessary given the far reaching impact, which adversely affects the salvation of several generations.

Thus, members need to understand the role and responsibility of God’s stewards and why they have to exhort, convict, and silence those who spread heresies. Their duty is to shepherd the flock of God and protect their faith; if they shirk this responsibility, how would they give an account to the Lord? When we understand these facts, we will not assume that ministers are abusing their power. Instead, we will work in one accord with them to overcome deviant teachings and to stand fast in the truth.

HOLD FAST TO THE TRUTH WITH LOVE IN CHRIST

Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father’s who sent Me.” (Jn 14:23–24)

We may claim that our love for Christ has never changed, but is our attitude towards the word of God

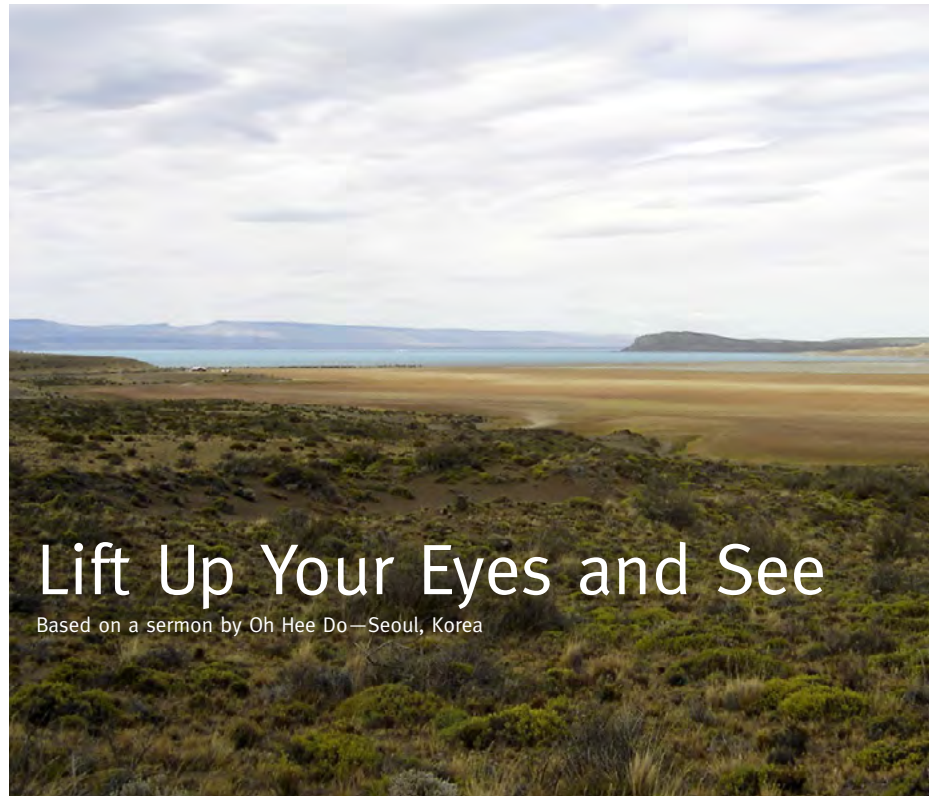
the same as before (1 Jn 2:24–26)? Apostle John said that if we hold fast to what we have heard at the beginning, we are in Christ, because our love towards Christ has not changed. Conversely, if we listen to the words of man and are drawn away by wrong teachings, we are no longer faithful to the Lord or to His words that we had received at the beginning.

CONCLUSION

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

(Acts 20:28–31)

In this farewell address to the Ephesian elders, Paul warned against men who would rise up from within the church to destroy the faith of the believers. Today, we must constantly watch and pray, and ask God for discernment. We must hold fast the pattern of sound words to safeguard not only our own salvation but also the salvation of future generations. ★



Lift Up Your Eyes and See

Based on a sermon by Oh Hee Do—Seoul, Korea

Genesis 13:10–18 relates the account of Abraham as he gave way to Lot and received blessings from God, and of Lot choosing for himself a land that was pleasing in his eyes. After studying the passage closely, we will learn from the contrasting attitudes and actions of these two family members.

“LIFTING THE EYES”

And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. (Gen 13:10)

And **the LORD said to Abram**, after Lot had separated from him: “**Lift your eyes now** and look from the place where you are--northward, southward, eastward, and westward;” (Gen 13:14)

In Genesis 13, both Abraham and Lot “lifted their eyes.” But if we analyze the two verses closely, we see that there are nuances that differentiate this apparently similar action.

Lot lifted up his eyes on his own accord (Gen 13:10). In fact, Lot’s “lifting of his eyes” was not purely an action; it arose from a desire in his heart for that land; his actions merely manifesting the desire already present in him.

There are many things in our lives that will stir up our desires, causing us to lift up our eyes. Reflect and ask ourselves what causes us to lift up our eyes. The latest model of phone? The latest episode of a popular TV show or reality show? Social media posts? Or the word of God?

In contrast, Abraham only lifted up his eyes when God instructed him to do so. He acted in response to God’s word. He did not act of his own accord; he waited for God.

Does our faith also begin with God in our hearts, with our actions reflecting God’s will for us? Learn from Abraham: he lifted his eyes to see only the things God wanted him to see. This is a very important starting point for our faith. We should only lift up our eyes to see what the Lord wants us to see. Only then will we have the right focus in our faith and receive blessings from God.

“SEEING”

Verse 10 states that Lot lifted his eyes and saw. Likewise, verse 14 records God’s instruction to Abraham to lift his eyes and to look northward, southward, eastward, and westward.

Again, Abraham and Lot performed similar actions, but with completely different motives. Lot set his eyes on the plain of Jordan because his heart was already inclined towards that place. In Genesis 3:6, when Eve sinned, she “saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes” A simple gesture of seeing—the lust of the eyes—resulted in an action that has devastatingly impacted humanity forever.

Today, we are also always drawn to look at things that are pleasant to our eyes, things that we desire. However, these may be the very things that are not beneficial to us and may even harm us.

Conversely, Abraham did not take the initiative to look at the things of the world. He would only lift up his eyes when God instructed him to do so. Quite often, what we seek to look at in our life reveals our value system. In the book of Psalms, the psalmist often refers to looking at the temple of God and rejoicing at the temple. What about us today? Do we have that same yearning for the church of God? Do we share the psalmist’s sentiments and rejoice when we come to the church of God? (cf. Ps 26:8; 122:1)

Abraham only looked at those things that God wanted him to see. Hence, his act of seeing led to an outcome that was very different to Lot’s.

“THE LAND”

And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was

well watered everywhere (before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. (Gen 13:10)

... for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever. (Gen 13:15)

Quite often, what we seek to look at in our life reveals our value system.

Although “land” is mentioned in both verses, it has different meanings in each respective scenario. What Lot saw was the physical land, the whole plain of Jordan, even up to Zoar, which was well watered. Lot believed that this land would benefit him and allow him to lead a blissful life. He also likened the plains of Jordan to the garden of the LORD and the land of Egypt. But are they really the same? Is the garden of the LORD really like the land of Egypt? In Lot’s eyes, he viewed these two places as the same, and such thoughts illustrated his spiritual immaturity.

The same may apply to us if we are spiritually immature. The garden of the LORD is completely different from the land of Egypt. In today’s terms, the church is completely different from the world. Yet some believers may equate both to be the same, and worse, may even reckon that the world is better than the church. They will reluctantly come for services and eagerly rush out to be entertained by the attractions offered by today’s Sodom and Gomorrah. If we view the world to be the same as the church, we have to examine our faith.

Sometimes when we travel abroad, we might meet our own countrymen. Yet we may not feel as close to

them as to our brethren from the local church, whom we have just met. Despite language barriers, we experience the spirit of one family, as we are all members of God’s household. Therefore, if we find that our hearts are more connected to the people in the world rather than our own brethren, we ought to reflect and introspect.

Despite the wickedness of the nearby cities, Lot was attracted by the plains of Jordan because his spiritual eyes were not mature. Instead of consulting Abraham and seeking God’s advice, he took it upon himself to examine the land that was well watered and made a bad decision. Often, people who make decisions as Lot did, believe that their choice is right, but such a choice will not benefit them.

Unlike Lot, Abraham did not decide for himself; instead, he chose to listen to the word of God.

... for all the land which you see... (Gen 13:15)

The land that Abraham received from God might not have been the land that he was naturally inclined towards; however, God had arranged for Abraham to receive this land and spiritually speaking, this land is the Promised Land. Even though Abraham did not receive this land in his lifetime, he believed in God’s promise to give this land to his descendants forever.

Seeing this spiritual Promised Land should also be our focus. We should not fret over physical land but look towards the Promised Land: heaven. When we mature spiritually, just like Abraham, our eyes will be focused on the promise of God. Do we see this Promised Land? Do we hope to reach this Promised Land some day?

THE CONSEQUENCE—“THEN”

Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot journeyed east. And they separated from each other. (Gen 13:11)

What Lot saw was the physical land, the whole plain of Jordan, even up to Zoar, which was well watered. Lot believed that this land would benefit him and allow him to lead a blissful life. He also likened the plains of Jordan to the garden of the LORD and the land of Egypt. But are they really the same? Is the garden of the LORD really like the land of Egypt?

Then Abram moved his tent, and went and dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and built an altar there to the LORD. (Gen 13:18)

Both verse 11 and verse 18 begin with the word “then,” which indicates the consequence of Abraham and Lot’s choices. Both of them performed the same action of moving to the respective lands they had chosen, yet the result was very different.

After Lot journeyed east, he and Abraham separated (Gen 13:11). Very often when our eyes are attracted to something, we will move towards that something. However, it is important that we do not go so far as to separate ourselves from the community of faith. “Separation” here refers to complete separation in both the physical and spiritual sense. There are some believers whose hearts are inclined towards the world. They move towards the world and eventually separate themselves from the church, placing themselves in a precarious situation. This serves as a warning for us: we may move house, but we must be careful not to separate ourselves from the church.

Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. (Gen 13:12)

After their separation, Lot gradually pitched his tent closer and closer to Sodom until he eventually settled there. As Christians, we should never move to Sodom. We should not draw near to, let alone enter, Sodom. Consider the implications: where would families that do not keep the Sabbath move closer towards—heaven or hell? There are believers who do not like to read the Bible but like to watch TV instead—where will this take their faith? Moves that separate ourselves from the church do not take place overnight, but gradually. We must be vigilant so that this does not happen to us.

Then Abraham moved his tent and went and dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and built an altar there to the LORD. (Gen 13:18)

What a contrast to Lot’s action! Whilst Lot moved closer to Sodom, Abraham was moved to build an altar to the LORD. Although Abraham did not receive the Promised Land, he obeyed God, sought His promises, and worshipped Him with thanksgiving in his heart.

From the story in Genesis 13:10–18, we understand that Abraham’s actions were all prompted by God. The only action that Abraham took out of his own accord was to build an altar to the LORD (Gen 13:18). This action was an act of reverence and worship—an important reason why God blessed him. Today, this should be the initiative we take—to attend services, desire to pray, read the Bible, and worship God.

CONCLUSION

In these end times, many things in the world will compete for our attention. Sometimes, the world appears like the well-watered plains of Jordan, but instead of craving material blessings that only provide short-lived satisfaction, let us fix our eyes on God’s Promised Land. It is there, and there alone, that we will find true eternal blessings. ★



Conquest of Canaan—Jericho (Part 1)

Caleb Lee—Singapore

Jericho was the city conquered by the Israelites after God had allowed them to cross the River Jordan on dry ground. According to military experts, it was Jericho's location that made it so important. Being right in the middle of the land, it was an invaluable entry point to Canaan. The conquest of Jericho and Ai would effectively split the land of Canaan into the northern and southern regions. Indeed, this was exactly what would happen as the Israelites went on to undertake their northern and southern conquests.

Apart from how and why Jericho was conquered, this event is also significant because of the people involved: Rahab, the inhabitants of Jericho, the people of Israel who went out to fight this war, and Joshua. This article considers the first two antagonistic perspectives—Rahab and her compatriots.

RAHAB

Now Joshua the son of Nun sent out two men from Acacia Grove to spy secretly, saying, "Go, view the land, especially Jericho." So they went, and came to the house of a

harlot named Rahab, and lodged there. And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, "Behold, men have come here tonight from the children of Israel to search out the country." So the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the country."
(Josh 2:1–3)

At first glance, it would seem that these two spies were not very wise. They had chosen to lodge with a lady of dubious virtue; a person who, many of us expect, would betray friends and acquaintances for money or when under threat. When the king of Jericho learned of the spies, he sent his soldiers to hunt for them. Their search led them to Rahab's house. She had to quickly decide what to do.

At this crucial juncture, Rahab chose to hide the spies on the roof of her house and deceive the soldiers (Josh 2:4–7). In the process, she told two lies. First, she claimed she did not know their origins although she did (cf. Josh 2:4,9). Second, she told the soldiers the men had left although they were still hiding at her place

(cf. Josh 2:5,6). The first lie was to protect herself and the second lie was to protect the Israelites by sending the soldiers off on a wild goose chase.

Eventually, when the Israelites captured Jericho, Rahab and her family were spared. An analysis of this event would show that Rahab was not saved because of her lies, but because of her faith which was demonstrated through her immediate action. New Testament authors attest to this:

By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace. (Heb 11:31)

Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? (Jas 2:25)

What then are the critical elements of Rahab's faith?

(1) Recognition of God and His People

After she had sent the soldiers away, Rahab told the two spies, "I know

Today, we have heard the truth. But are we anxious for our family members and the people around us who have not yet received salvation? Is this matter of highest priority for us such that we are prepared to try all ways and means to bring the truth to them?

that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you" (Josh 2:9).

Rahab's words showed her faith and belief in the true God. How did she come to have this kind of faith?

For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. (Josh 2:10)

The events that Rahab were referring to had happened about forty years apart. It was not surprising that she had heard about the more recent annihilation of the two Amorite kings, Sihon and Og. But somehow, she had also heard about the Israelites' miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, which took place four decades ago. And critically she did not stop at just hearing about it; she also thought deeply about it. She did not dismiss the Red Sea miracle as fanciful legend. In fact, after analytical reflection, she correctly concluded that the Lord God was with the children of Israel and that He had promised them the land of Canaan.

Faith comes by hearing. From careful and thoughtful hearing, Rahab was able to recognize the Lord God and to understand who His chosen people were.

(2) Concern for Loved Ones

The second element of Rahab's faith can be seen from her deep concern for her family (Josh 2:12–13). Having heard of the miracles accompanying the Israelites' military campaign, she put two and two together; she

realized that her city was doomed because they were up against the God of heaven and earth and His people. Not one to labor under feelings of misguided patriotism, her immediate thought was to secure salvation for her family.

Today, we have heard the truth. But are we anxious for our family members and the people around us who have not yet received salvation? Is this matter of highest priority for us such that we are prepared to try all ways and means to bring the truth to them? Rahab's faith was demonstrated through her compelling need to ensure the safety of her family.

(3) Obedience and Action

The third element of Rahab's faith is that, having heard and believed, she obeyed and took immediate action. Rahab's plea for the deliverance of her entire house had met with this response: "Our lives for yours, if none of you tell this business of ours. And it shall be, when the LORD has given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with you" (Josh 2:14).

The two spies promised to spare Rahab and her relatives under two conditions. First, Rahab and her family were not to tell anyone else about the coming of the spies (Josh 2:20). Second, Rahab had to tie a scarlet thread to the window of her house, gather all her relatives in her house, and ensure that nobody left the house (Josh 2:17–19).

The scarlet thread was to indicate the house of Rahab to the invading children of Israel. This was the only way by which the people within the house would be spared. It was a very severe warning. Anyone who left the house and went into the street would have only himself to blame if he were to be killed.

The scarlet thread has often been said to mean the blood of Christ. It represents entering into Christ and into the house of God to escape the coming destruction. We enjoy the safety of being in God's house today. But is our family safely ensconced in God's house too?

After the spies had stated their conditions, Rahab agreed and complied immediately (Josh 2:21). Faith without works is dead (Jas 2:26). In our context, after we have heard and believed, we must not procrastinate. We must do whatever God has commanded. And like Rahab, we must do so immediately.

THE PEOPLE OF JERICHO

Scholars have classified Jericho as one of the oldest cities in the world. By the time Joshua sent the spies, it had a ruler, an army, and strong fortifications, suggesting a certain level of sophistication and prosperity. So the city would clearly have had many more inhabitants apart from Rahab. Many would have been richer and of higher status than she.

What all these inhabitants of Jericho shared was a great terror of the Israelites. They had all heard how the LORD had helped the Israelites cross the Red Sea and destroy the Amorites (Josh 2:10). However, their fear drove them differently. It was in this that the people of Jericho provided a stark and tragic contrast to Rahab.

After the spies had stated their conditions, Rahab agreed and complied immediately (Josh 2:21). Faith without works is dead (Jas 2:26). In our context, after we have heard and believed, we must not procrastinate. We must do whatever God has commanded. And like Rahab, we must do so immediately.

will surely deliver us and our loved ones if we act by faith. ★

The tragic end of the people of Jericho is a warning to us modern believers not to step out of the love of God. There is a boundary that we must never cross. Once we cross this boundary, there is no turning back.

Rahab's fear developed into faith, prompting her to take action to help the spies and then negotiate for her family's deliverance. In contrast, the king of Jericho's fear drove him to pursue the two spies. What could he have done to stop the imminent invasion even if he had caught the spies? Joshua could have sent more. So while Rahab's fear turned her to God, the rest of Jericho only tried to wait out or delay the inevitable.

Some context would help us understand Jericho's state of mind. The people in Jericho were possibly Amorites. In Abraham's time, God had revealed part of His future plan to Abraham. He told Abraham that his descendants would become slaves; but in the fourth generation, they would return to the land where Abraham dwelt, i.e., Canaan. Their slavery would last for four generations because the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet complete (Gen 15:16).

In other words, God had been very patient with the Canaanites for a long time. God knew of their sins, especially of the people of Jericho. But these people continued to remain hard-hearted. Hearing of the mighty works of the God of Israel had evoked fear. But there was still no repentance.

Ultimately, when the people of Jericho heard how the Israelites crossed over the river Jordan on dry ground, they knew that there was no more hope. So, with a fearful expectation of judgment, they sat tight, doing nothing except weep over their impending destruction.

The tragic end of the people of Jericho is a warning to us modern believers not to step out of the love of God. There is a boundary that we must never cross. Once we cross this boundary, there is no turning back. What is this boundary?

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. (Heb 10:26–27)

According to Hebrews 10, if we sin willfully, we can only wait fearfully for judgment, because there is no more forgiveness of sins. Sinning willfully generally refers to mortal sins, such as adultery, murder, or apostasy. But there are other “minor” sins that may also fall under the category of sinning willfully. For example, we sin willfully if we say that continuous lying is okay. If we continue to lie without guilt and still think we have committed no egregious error, then we have already crossed the boundary. Like Jericho, we would only be waiting for judgment and destruction.

CONCLUSION

Rahab and the people of Jericho provide us with two instructive contrasts of faith versus faithlessness, of obedience versus recalcitrance, and of active action versus passive apprehension. Grace came upon a woman with a sinful occupation who started with nothing. She was saved and had a part with the Messiah (cf. Mt 1:5). God was moved by her faith, which was born through a thoughtful analysis of what she had heard of the Lord God and demonstrated through her immediate action. In the time of judgment, no wealth, status, learning, or weapons could help the other inhabitants of Jericho. They were destroyed because of their stubborn refusal to change. Hence, we need to be watchful, keeping in close communion with God, lest we fall prey to sin. And if we do step out of the love of God, then let us return to God immediately. Like Rahab, God



Jacob's Pillars

Based on a sermon by Rong-Yu Ho—Singapore

In his life, Jacob erected a pillar on three occasions. These were built at different places—Bethel, Mizpah, and a place close to Bethlehem. These pillars not only commemorated God's grace but critically symbolized new beginnings for Jacob. Jacob erected the first pillar as a runaway from home, the second as an exile who desired to go home, and the third as a new widower. These three accounts show us the progression of Jacob's life, providing invaluable teachings for our journey of faith.

1) THE PILLAR AT BETHEL: LEAVING HOME (GEN 28:10–22)

Jacob left home because of the favoritism practiced by his parents, Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac favored Esau, Jacob's elder brother, while Rebekah favored Jacob. This led to a struggle for inheritance between Jacob and Esau. First, Jacob traded red stew for his brother's birthright. Later, when Isaac wanted to bless Esau, Rebekah tricked Isaac into blessing Jacob instead. Thus Isaac and Rebekah's biased love for their respective favorites resulted in the tussle between the brothers.

In the end, both Jacob and Esau

suffered. Esau, angered from missing out on his father's blessing, resolved to kill Jacob. To save Jacob, Rebekah got Jacob to leave until Esau's anger had subsided. In any case, Isaac also wanted Jacob to leave so that the latter could get a wife from Rebekah's home.

Hence, Jacob left home and arrived at Bethel where he decided to stay for a night. On that night, God appeared to Jacob; he saw a ladder upon which God's messengers ascended and descended. God, who was beside the ladder, blessed and promised Jacob:

Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you. (Gen 28:15)

When Jacob awoke, he was in awe: "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it" (Gen 28:16). This was such a new and deep experience of faith for Jacob that he took the stone that he had slept on, and erected a pillar. He then poured oil on the pillar, consecrated it, and named it Bethel—"the house of God." He vowed then:

If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God. And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.

(Gen 28:20–22)

It is not difficult to see why Jacob was awestruck by this tremendous experience. He had been brought up to fear the LORD God. But in the comfort of home, God was just some vague presence. Now he was a scared fugitive needing assurance. And God gave this to him in a spectacular fashion. So God was not only at home, God was with him in this place! Immediately, the God of his father became a much more personal God.

This pillar of Bethel was a pillar of faith. Not only did it mark the beginning of Jacob's experience of God, it would go on to be the symbol of his lifelong engagement with the Creator. Later in his life, whenever Jacob faced difficulties, God would

remind him of this pillar that he had erected in Bethel.

Subsequently, Jacob stayed with his uncle, Laban, for twenty years. In time, Jacob realized that Laban had become less well-disposed towards him. God then told Jacob to leave (Gen 31:1–3). But when Jacob was about to go home, his daughter Dinah was violated by Shechem, a Hivite prince (Gen 34). Two of Jacob's sons, angered by the violation of their sister, sought to avenge her by killing all the males of that city. This put Jacob's entire family in danger because the native Canaanites and Perizzites then sought revenge. At this critical moment, God appeared.

Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother. (Gen 35:1)

Once again, when Jacob had come to the seeming end of his tether, God was there. God reminded him of the pillar in Bethel, even introducing Himself as the God of Bethel to remind Jacob of his experience there. For Jacob, this pillar of Bethel had remained with him throughout his life. In his twilight years, Jacob recounted to his son Joseph how the God whom he met at Luz had always abided with him.

The pillar that Jacob erected at Bethel was thus his pillar of faith, a pillar that cannot be taken away and a pillar that supported Jacob throughout his life, enabling him to worship God. It is also important for us to have such a pillar of faith, a pillar that represents our first belief, our true belief. It would be a pillar that represents our beginning and shall also be our end. When we face an impasse in life, we need to think of this pillar and remember that tests in faith are temporary. Recall how we first came to believe and take comfort that the pillar of faith we have erected will follow us throughout our lives.

Importantly, even as the pillar abides with us, we must abide with the pillar for life. This means holding on to our first belief and first love to

the end. We must remember how we first resolved to serve Christ and maintain this zeal. Only then can we have a part in Christ

For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end. (Heb 3:14)

2) THE PILLAR AT MIZPAH: SEPARATION (GEN 31:45–50)

After twenty years at his uncle Laban's place, Jacob knew it was time for him and his family to leave. However, he did not inform Laban of their departure. When Laban found out, he immediately pursued them. After catching up with his son-in-law, Laban virtually accused Jacob of kidnap and theft (Gen 31:26,30). Determined to prove his innocence, Jacob allowed Laban to search through all his possessions. Although Rachel, Jacob's wife, had indeed stolen the household idols, her father Laban did not find these.

Feeling the injustice of having been unfairly accused, Jacob lost his temper. A frustration that had been suppressed for twenty years boiled over:

What is my trespass? What is my sin, that you have so hotly pursued me? ... These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock. That which was torn by beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. ... In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes. (Gen 31:36–40)

The pillar that Jacob erected at Bethel was thus his pillar of faith, a pillar that cannot be taken away and a pillar that supported Jacob throughout his life, enabling him to worship God. It is also important for us to have such a pillar of faith, a pillar that represents our first belief, our true belief. ... When we face an impasse in life, we need to think of this pillar and remember that tests in faith are temporary.

Jacob was not some pampered rich scion who had found the work of shepherding too difficult. But Laban, his own uncle, has exploited him beyond reason. He was given little opportunity for physical rest or peace of mind. Laban even tricked him into serving fourteen years to marry the woman he loved, and another six years for Laban's flock. In the process, Laban changed Jacob's wages many times.

As everything Jacob said was true, Laban could only lamely reply, "These daughters are my daughters ..." (Gen 31:43). To make partial amends, Laban then made a covenant with Jacob. To ratify the covenant, Jacob took a stone and set it up to as a pillar. Laban called it, "Jegar Sahadutha," which means "heap of witness." Laban wanted to ensure that his daughters and grandchildren were safe, and instructed Jacob to be faithful to his wives (Gen 31:50). Laban also did not want any more fights between them and so suggested that the pillar be used to demarcate their respective territories (Gen 31:52). In other words, this pillar separated Jacob and Laban; Jacob could now truly set up his own household. He would no longer be a worker or a sojourner under Laban.

Furthermore, the place was to be called "Mizpah," meaning "watch" and "the LORD be our witness."

May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from another. (Gen 31:49)

To Jacob, the pillar went beyond just delineating territory; it was the marker of separation between success and failure. As Laban himself confessed, he could have harmed Jacob. Had God not intervened to

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protect Jacob, Laban would have taken away all that Jacob had (Gen 31:29). Jacob understood that his well-being was the direct result of God's preservation (Gen 31:42). If God had not appeared to Laban, he would have been left with nothing.

Hence, Jacob's success really lay in the type of pillar that he erected between Laban and himself, as revealed in its name. Success and failure were equally likely outcomes. Had Jacob not looked toward God as his witness, he may have been deprived of everything he had gained; he would return home empty-handed.

God's care of Jacob was in fulfillment of His promise to Jacob. At Bethel, God had told Jacob that He would be with him. So when Jacob was treated unfairly by Laban, God won back Jacob's portion for him. Without God's help, Jacob would have left Laban's place as a failure.

The pillar that Jacob erected at Mizpah thus represented God's watch and God's judgment. God helped Jacob and was with him because he was the special chosen one of God (Isa 41:8,12–13). Today, God is also watching over and watching out for us, the spiritual descendants of Abraham. Even though we may face much injustice in life, all things are fair at Mizpah; we can find God's judgment there. Even if we suffer loss, God will compensate us.

Knowing this, we must thus redefine "success" in life. Success is not about enjoying material blessings or wealth. A much more important possession is God's presence, for if God does not abide with us, we can lose everything in a moment. Jacob knew very clearly that had it not been for God, he would have been a failure. We too must share

this realization—only with God's perpetual presence can our life be a true success.

Jacob's name means "grasp" and in the first part of his life, Jacob plotted, deceived, and grasped to get what he wanted. But he lost whatever he gained. Only what God gave him became what he truly owned. We should not just use our two hands to grasp secular possessions, thinking that these are the absolute measures of success. Instead, we must remember the pillar at Mizpah and its precious lesson that true success can only be achieved if God is with us.

3) THE PILLAR AT BETHLEHEM: DEATH OF LOVED ONES (GEN 35:16–20)

The final pillar was at Bethlehem. This pillar marked a sad period in Jacob's life, as his beloved wife left before him. Jacob set a pillar on Rachel's grave to remember the place where she died. He was bothered by the fact that he could not bury his wife properly. Two other people close to Jacob also died—Deborah, Rebekah's nurse (Gen 35:8), and Isaac, Jacob's father (Gen 35:29). In fact, his other wife, Leah, had died earlier. To Jacob, all these were major sources of pain; hence, the grave and the pillar were his way of remembering.

All of us have experienced such moments of intense grief. But this is part of life—there is a time to weep and a time to laugh (Eccl 3:4). There are happy times but also sad times. We enjoy the sense of accomplishment from work and family, but we are sad when our loved ones leave before us. There is also a time to be born and a time to die (Eccl 3:2). We will not be on this earth forever. No matter how high we have flown in our careers and how much we own, in

the end all we get is a "pillar"; the tombstone and a memorial for our relatives to remember that we had once been alive. But as a generation comes and another goes, would we even be remembered three or more generations on?

What is thus of the greatest importance is not how busy we are when we are alive, but what we have been busy over. For whom do we labor? If we do not labor for Jesus, then the tombstone we get at the end will not be worth much. Conversely, if we labor for Jesus, our death will be meaningful.

For what and for whom do we labor—these are key questions for our constant reflection; equally important, these are opportunities that we need to seize before we die.

CONCLUSION

Leaving home, returning from exile, and death—these were the significant moments marked by three pillars in the life of Jacob. At the end, what mattered most was the pillar of faith, i.e., the presence of God in Jacob's life from the beginning to the end.

We too may have many milestones in our journey of life and faith. Most critically, we must all strive to have the pillar of God in our lives. Only then can we see the face of God. ★



Our Unchanging God

James Liu — Newcastle, U.K.

We live in a world of rapid and perpetual change. From history, we see how millennia of agriculture were replaced by centuries of industrialization, which were in turn supplanted by decades of technology, and subsequently, by our present age of information and networks. We have also seen fads come and go, how capricious the weather is, and even how people can be unpredictable and unreliable.

Yet in such a world defined by sudden and accelerating change, there is one who remains absolutely constant. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8). Such is Jesus, the God whom we worship today. He is the God who created the heavens and the earth from nothing at the beginning of time. He is the Lord, who comforted the disciples in their anxiety.

Why is this knowledge important? Since God does not change, the Bible’s account of Him is a completely reliable guide to what He can do for us who worship Him today. So how does the Bible describe God?

THE GOD OF THE PAST

From the end of the earth I will cry

*to You,
When my heart is overwhelmed;
Lead me to the rock that is higher
than I.
For You have been a shelter for me,
A strong tower from the enemy.
I will abide in Your tabernacle forever;
I will trust in the shelter of Your wings.*
(Ps 61:2–4)

When David’s heart was weighed down in the midst of difficulties or sorrows, God was his strength and his refuge. God was David’s rock, his salvation, and his defense (Ps 62:6–7). Whether as shepherd boy or king, David knew he could always turn to God for help. No one else and nothing else is so absolutely dependable (cf. Ps 62:9–10).

Abram was another recipient of God’s steadfast and bountiful grace.

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.” (Gen 15:1)

This was how God introduced Himself when Abram began to worry about not having a child in his old

age. The LORD reassured Abram that He would be both his shield and his reward. As a shield, God would watch over and protect him. As a reward, God would not only defend him but also bless him. If Abram believed and trusted in God, he would be rewarded accordingly. In the end, God did indeed reward him with a son and an inheritance for his faithfulness and diligence in following God.

Today, we may have trusted friends or close family members, but they may not always be there for us; even if they were, their ability to help us out of dire straits is often limited. In contrast, the experiences of these two ancients are evidence that God is not only always there for us, He is always able to help us. When we are sad, He can comfort us; if we are in danger, He can protect us. In the same way that He sheltered David, God shelters us too. And although the challenges before us are seemingly insurmountable, there is nothing that He cannot do.

THE GOD OF TODAY

The author of Hebrews declares that God rewards those who seek Him and have faith in Him (Heb 11:6).

However, we modern believers sometimes feel that God does not respond when we call on and put our trust in Him. It appears that God has changed and that the God we worship is different from the God in the Bible.

But the prophet Isaiah is adamant that God truly does not change: Although we may have forgotten His blessings, perhaps even His existence, He will never forget us.

But Zion said, "The LORD has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me."

"Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb?

*Surely they may forget,
Yet I will not forget you."*

(Isa 49:14–16)

Why then does it seem that God is ignoring our supplication?

Deeper reflection will reveal that the problem lies with us. God may have spoken to us, but as we were not consciously listening, we think He is silent. Or God has answered our prayers, but as it was not the answer we liked or were waiting for, we conclude that He is ignoring us.

There are several reasons why God does not grant us what we are praying for. First, it may be because we are only focused on getting our own way without considering what God's will is. In effect, we are imposing our will on God. Second, it could be that our faith has changed (cf. Jas 1:6–8). Unknowingly, we have allowed doubt to creep into our hearts. We pray but we do not quite believe that God will work everything for good.

In other words, God has not changed, but it is we who have changed in our willingness to obey. We neither see nor hear God, because we have turned away. Frighteningly, we may not even

Modern believers sometimes feel that God does not respond when we call on and put our trust in Him. It appears that God has changed and that the God we worship is different from the God in the Bible.

realize that we have changed. Living in a rapidly changing world, we are unconsciously influenced by new ideas and trends, which are counter to the values that we have been taught from young. And instead of distancing ourselves from activities and precepts that contradict our faith, we begin to distance ourselves from our faith, concluding that it is too rigid for the practical world, and faith should change to suit the times.

Therefore, we must always remind ourselves that our God is the same God who helped David, Abram, and all the ancient saints in the Bible. He has never changed. And so we in turn must hold onto our first love for Him. We must constantly examine ourselves to ensure that we have not changed in our faith and distanced ourselves from God. We must learn to truly humble ourselves before Him and to fully turn—or re-turn—our hearts to Him.

THE GOD WHOSE PROMISES DO NOT CHANGE

Not only does God's unchanging nature remind us to examine ourselves, it also offers us comfort. Since God does not change, His promises remain valid and applicable to all generations. Everything that He has said will surely come to pass. There is no doubt that a heavenly inheritance awaits us if we hold firmly onto the truth.

In particular, we have the blessed assurance that, whilst on this earth, God will indeed give the Holy Spirit to us to help us hold onto Him and His teachings. All we need to do is to ask Him (Lk 11:13). However,

some of us have long been praying fervently and consistently but have yet to receive the Holy Spirit. This may have understandably caused us some niggling doubt or to wonder why God heeds others but not us. In moments like these, we need to remind ourselves—repeatedly, if necessary—that the God who poured His Holy Spirit on the apostles and the brethren around us is an unchanging God. In His time, He will also pour His Spirit abundantly upon us. In the meantime, we only need to have faith, trust in His word, and remove all doubt from our hearts (Jn 7:38–39).

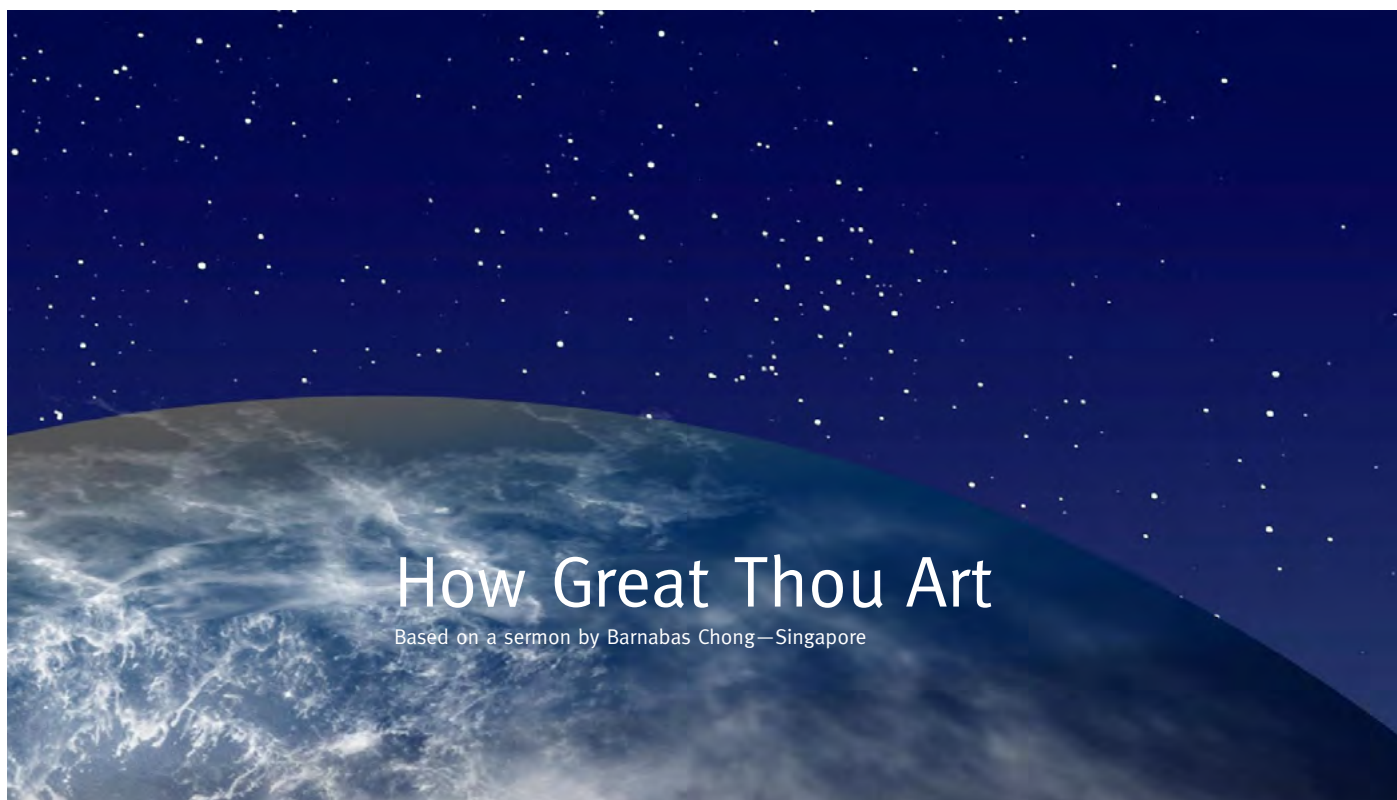
Furthermore, our unchanging God comforted, strengthened, and guided the apostles through the power of His Spirit. He will similarly comfort, strengthen, and guide us today through this Teacher and Counselor. Importantly, however, we must ensure that we do not ignore Him or resist His guidance and teaching.

UNCHANGING FAITH IN THE UNCHANGING GOD

In conclusion, let us keep our eyes firmly fixed on our unchanging God: The God who sheltered David, rewarded Abram, and helped the many saints in the Bible is the same God whom we worship and trust today. From the way He cared for His chosen people then, we can find comfort in knowing that He cares for us in the same way.

When everything else around us changes and changes rapidly, we must constantly examine ourselves to ensure that our faith has not changed. We must hold fast onto God and to the knowledge that He does not change. We must continue to trust and rely upon His word. And our unchanging God, who created all things, will surely grant us all we need. ★

God has not changed, but it is we who have changed in our willingness to obey.



How Great Thou Art

Based on a sermon by Barnabas Chong—Singapore

UNDERSTANDING GOD'S GREATNESS

*For You are great, and do wondrous things; You alone are God.
(Ps 86:10)*

These words were penned by David and came from the bottom of his heart, for throughout his life, he personally experienced the greatness of God. Such experiences allowed him to understand that it was God who had led him all along. Had it not been for the help of God, he would have fallen under the clutches of his enemies.

Importantly, David did not just appreciate God's greatness and help in times of distress; he was fully aware and appreciative of His Creator's almightiness in times of peace as well.

The heavens declare the glory of God; [a]nd the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, [a]nd night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language [w]here their voice is not heard.

(Ps 19:1–3)

David had been a shepherd since young and had spent much time alone in the fields. Perhaps, while tending the sheep, he would gaze at the skies, appreciate the clouds, admire the beautiful rainbows, and marvel at the many stars in heaven. And as David pondered, he would be astounded by the greatness of God, the Creator of this universe.

In 1996, astronomers at the Space Telescope Science Institute used the Hubble space telescope to study a patch of the sky that appeared to be utterly empty, devoid of any planets, stars, or galaxies. Some critics dismissed their endeavor as a waste of resources.

But the telescope went on to capture profound images. Every single spot, smear, and dot that we see from earth was actually an entire galaxy, each containing hundreds of billions of stars. These results point to a simple fact: no matter how impressive our accomplishments in this world, man is minute compared to the size of the universe and infinitesimally insignificant before the Almighty God.

As His beloved children, we may have enjoyed special experiences

that help us understand God's greatness. However, even without such experiences, we have no excuse to be ignorant of our awesome God. All we need to do is raise our head and look up to the starlit night sky—we shall then be presented with irrefutable proof of how great our Creator and heavenly Father is.

STAND IN AWE BEFORE GOD

Indeed, God is great, for He created all the stars in a single day (Gen 1:15) and fashioned everything out of nothing. He made all these things for each and every one of us. Therefore, we ought to stand in awe before God's greatness.

Awe is not just about being afraid of God but also having respect and reverence for God. We may fear those in power because they can pose a danger to our lives; just as people living under tyrannical rulers feared but did not revere these despots. Our God, however, is to be both feared and revered. He has the power and authority to take away our lives any time, and yet He is a God who takes care of us throughout our lives.

KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, [f]or this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, [i]ncluding every secret thing, [w]hether good or evil. (Eccl 12:13–14)

A king famed for his wisdom succinctly tells us how we should fear God. The answer is easily articulated: keep His commandments. However, the more important and difficult issue is whether we have truly kept His commandments. We may not have broken any of the Ten Commandments, but have we set out to observe these commandments with all our hearts, or do we only do it minimally and superficially? Have we kept the spirit of the commandments?

Take the example of the Sabbath day. We are commanded to “keep the Sabbath holy” (Ex 20:8). What does this mean to us? To some, this commandment is fulfilled as long as we have sat in a chapel for one and a half hours on Saturday morning (or afternoon), sung a couple of hymns, prayed twice, and listened to a sermon. And if we have an engagement on Saturday, we attend the Friday evening service instead as “replacement.” At other times, Friday night is for socializing with friends, catching a movie, or unwinding at home by watching TV. Then there are others who may not reserve Friday evenings for social activities, but they still do not attend any church services, preferring to use this time to finish their school assignments or attend to business and work matters.

The Bible teaches us that we should not work from the beginning to the end of the Sabbath day (Ex 20:8–11; Lev 23:3). It is true that we are no longer subject to the rigid demands of observing Sabbath under the Mosaic Law (cf. Lk 13:14–15). However, the Book of Isaiah reminds us that if we were to turn our feet from doing what we ourselves delight in, and did the things that God delights in, then we would have truly kept the Sabbath (Isa 58:13–14).

Many of us already recognize that God's greatness deserves thanksgiving, but how often do we actually give thanks to God, whether in prayer or quiet reflection?

We must honestly ask ourselves whether we have truly kept the Sabbath. Have we honored the Sabbath as a holy day or merely observed a “holy hour”? The Lord gave us six days to spend on our own matters. Even as we give Him thanks for His care and blessings through the six days, are we aware that the seventh day, the Sabbath day, rightly belongs to our Creator and that we ought to dedicate our lives and thoughts to the matters of God on this day?

The above example of the Sabbath illustrates the attitude that we must take towards God's commandments. We must ensure that we do not keep the mere letter of the commandment but its spirit. This is the first but crucial manifestation of a heart of reverence and fear for God—we delight in His commandments, meditate on them, and keep them willingly.

GIVE THANKS

God's greatness should also inspire a heart of thanksgiving in us. The Book of Genesis tells us that our God created the universe and the earth before He made Adam and Eve. From this we know that He made all these things for the sake of man, and that He specially takes care of us. Realizing this should make us feel extremely grateful to God.

For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” (Isa 57:15)

Isaiah describes God as the High and Lofty One, the One who inhabits eternity. Although He is the High and Lofty One, He is willing to dwell amongst man, with those who have

a contrite and humble spirit, and with those who have the desire to worship Him.

In particular, God wants to dwell in our hearts. Actually, given how dirty and disorderly our hearts are, we are no worthy dwelling for a holy God. Nevertheless, He is willing to tolerate our unholiness and to dwell in us. Such great love from our God deserves not just a momentary outburst of gratitude, but perpetual and overwhelming thanksgiving.

Many of us already recognize that God's greatness deserves thanksgiving, but how often do we actually give thanks to God, whether in prayer or quiet reflection? For some, saying “Thank God!” has become second nature. But do we really mean it? Very often, unless something special happens or we experience grace from God, we may not thank Him or thank Him as whole-heartedly as we ought to. Moreover, even after experiencing God's amazing grace, human beings are wont to be forgetful after the first gush of gratitude. The memory of God's blessings is often and easily crowded out by the anxieties of daily life.

Hence, we should make it a point to consciously count our blessings every day. We shall then begin to see and appreciate the multifarious ways in which God cares for and guides us in our daily lives. This draws us closer to Him. Conversely, the less frequently we give thanks to God and the more we take Him for granted, the more easily we will fall to grumbling about our poor lot in life. And like the stubborn ungrateful Israelites of yore, we will eventually draw away from Him.

Apostle Paul exhorts us to always give thanks to God (Eph 5:20; 1 Thess 5:18). Our awesome God is willing to dwell amongst us and, more importantly, dwell in us. Moreover, to

ensure that one day we can dwell in the heavenly kingdom with Him, He willingly gave up His life on the cross. His love surpasses even the greatest human love.

LIVE FOR CHRIST

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.
(2 Cor 5:14–15)

Paul deeply understood and felt the love of Christ for him. This understanding compelled him to resolve to live for the One who died for him. And indeed Paul lived his entire life for God, from the time he believed to the time he was martyred. His life and conduct is truly worthy of our admiration, for it shows us how we ought to live for Christ.

What does it really mean to live for Christ? If we were attending services regularly and participating in church work, does it mean we are already living for Christ?

Consider the example of a family with a disabled person who is unable to care for himself. In a sense, this person cannot live for himself, so the other family members need to live for him. The design and layout of the family home, career moves, holiday plans, future plans, etc. would all have to be developed with consideration for this family member. Yet we are willing to not only give consideration but priority, to this disabled family member because we love him or her. This is the attitude we see in a person who lives for another.

Of course, Christ is greater than we, and He is not a sick man who needs us to take care of Him. But when we are resolved to live for Christ, we will have similar considerations and give first priority to Him. Would God be pleased with what I do? If I do this particular thing, would I live up to God's standard? Would it benefit the church? If I choose to relocate overseas for work, who would bring

my non-believing family members to Christ? If I emigrate, can I sustain the faith of myself and my family?

In short, if we are determined to live for Christ because we are awed and moved by His great love for us, faith—ours and that of our family—would be our central concern.

FROM AWE TO ACTION

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour
God, to Thee;
How great Thou art, how great Thou
art!*

In the well-known and well-loved hymn, "How Great Thou Art," the lyricist describes the wonder of nature, the moving magnificence of Christ's sacrifice, and the glorious hope of eternal life. These then lead to the soaring refrain—our soul can do naught but to tell our Savior how great He is.

This should be the constant refrain of our days on earth—praising Him for great and wonderful grace. More importantly though, when we see and remember the greatness of God, let us also fear Him, keep His commandments with all our heart, give thanks always to Him, and most importantly, live for Him. ★



Growing up in a traditional Chinese family, I always thought that Christianity was a Western religion. Although I was educated in a Catholic school, all I knew about Christendom were some lovely hymns that I had learned during hymn singing classes.

In December 1980, I saw a Bible for the first time in my life. I was attending a school camp, and in order to occupy myself during free time, I read the first few chapters of the Bible. I was left wondering why it was so different from all the other books that I had ever read.

FINDING JESUS, YET DOUBTING MY SALVATION

The following year, I was invited to join a Bible study group, organized by one of the seniors from my school. I learned about Jesus and how He died on the cross to save us from our sins. I was interested to know this Jesus personally, so I continued to study the Bible with this senior. It was impressed upon me that all I needed to do was to receive Jesus Christ into my life as my personal Savior by saying the sinner's prayer, and I would receive eternal salvation. I longed to have Jesus in my life, so

I accepted my senior's guidance and said the sinner's prayer.

Despite having said the prayer sincerely and being assured that saying it once was sufficient, I often doubted my salvation. When my cousins learned of my interest in Christianity, they brought me to Sunday worship services at the Bible-Presbyterian (BP) church they attended. However, through the years, I repeated the sinner's prayer innumerable times, as I was not convinced that I was indeed saved into the arms of Jesus.

MEETING A GIRL FROM THE TRUE JESUS CHURCH

In January 1983, I underwent a major operation and had to recuperate for six months in a children's hospital. During part of this stay, my bed was next to that of another girl who was also recovering from a similar operation. We had nothing in common except that we were both Christians, so we talked about our faith in God.

One day, I asked her if she had said the sinner's prayer. She told me that she had been baptized as a child, at which point her sins had been

washed away, so there was no need for her to say the sinner's prayer. I was bewildered that she had never said the prayer despite having been a believer all her life. I expressed my concern, but she was adamant that it was unnecessary to say the prayer.

Shortly after we were discharged from the hospital, this girl invited me to her church. Out of courtesy, I accepted her invitation and joined her family for service at the True Jesus Church in Telok Kurau, Singapore, one Saturday afternoon.

The worship service was as solemnly conducted as in the BP church. One major difference was that the True Jesus Church worshippers knelt and prayed individually, though at the same time, and many prayed in tongues.

When the BP church pastor learned of my visit to this church, he was very concerned. He asked me if I didn't think it strange that they called themselves the True Jesus Church, thereby falsifying all other churches. The pastor advised that I should distance myself from this church because her teachings were unorthodox and different from mainstream churches worldwide. I had no reason to challenge my pastor, so I continued worshipping God in the BP church.

As we led very different lives, the girl from the True Jesus Church and I lost touch barely a year after we had been discharged from hospital.

STUDYING THE BOOK OF ACTS

A couple of years later, a theological student from the BP church organized a Bible study for young women on the Acts of the Apostles. I was keen to be instructed in this book, so I joined the group's weekly sessions. Given my outspoken and questioning personality, I participated vocally, albeit in a friendly manner, asking week after week why mainstream church practices have changed so much since the days of the apostles. Patiently, the Bible study leader explained to me that because Christendom today is very established, it does not require the

full manifestation of the Holy Spirit, as compared to the apostles' era when speaking in tongues, miracles, signs, and wonders were required to actively manifest the power of God.

When I enquired why the BP church baptized by sprinkling of water instead of immersion in water, as mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles, the Bible study leader answered that the mode of baptism is insignificant, because baptism itself does not save one unto God but is only a public proclamation of one's inner faith in God.

The leader explained to me that the Acts of the Apostles was documented as a historical record of the works of God in the early church. Christianity has evolved into different denominations, each imperfect on its own and practicing a variation of what is recorded in the Book of Acts. When Jesus comes again, all denominations will merge together to become the one true perfect church, which will then be brought into the eternal heavenly kingdom.

IN SEARCH OF THE PERFECT CHURCH

I was not confused; I just could not accept any of these explanations. I could not believe that the Acts of the Apostles had no practical value for current-day believers apart from being a historical reference. Is the Bible not the word of God? Does the Bible not say that the word of God is living and sharper than any two-edged sword? Then how can it be that this biblical book is considered a historical document only?

I decided that somewhere, somehow, there must be a church that practices all the teachings in the Book of Acts. I set out Sunday after Sunday in search of this perfect church, attending worship services at several Christian denominations. Indeed, just as the Bible study leader had said, each church practiced a variation of the teachings in Acts, but none embraced them fully. After several weeks, I decided to stop attending church altogether, because I did not want to accept a modified doctrine.

For months, I stayed home on Sundays. I missed going to church, but I was adamant that I would not go anywhere until the right church came along.

RECONNECTING WITH MY HOSPITAL ROOMMATE

One day in 1988, for no particular reason, I remembered the Christian girl who had slept next to me in hospital years ago, whose parents had once come to my neighborhood to take me to church. I recalled that their church had a different way of praying, but I could not remember its name, only that it was in Telok Kurau.

A plan came into my head: *If ever I have the opportunity to reconnect with this girl, I will ask her to take me to her church.* I was intent on investigating the teachings of that church based on what I had studied in the Book of Acts.

A few days later, this girl telephoned me. I was both shocked and excited by the call. We made arrangements and, within days, she brought me

I was interested to know this Jesus personally, so I continued to study the Bible with this senior. It was impressed upon me that all I needed to do was to receive Jesus Christ into my life as my personal Savior by saying the sinner's prayer, and I would receive eternal salvation. ... Despite having said the prayer sincerely and being assured that saying it once was sufficient, I often doubted my salvation.

to church for worship service. In the following weeks, I asked the girl many questions about the Bible, similar to those I had asked my Bible study leader at the BP church. She decided to arrange a regular Bible study so that we could discuss my questions more systematically. Every Saturday, after worship services, I diligently studied the teachings of this church with the assigned youths.

FINDING FULL ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

From the Bible study lessons and the diligent reading of church literature, I was convinced that this church is the living church that was detailed in the Acts of the Apostles. In September 1988, three months after my second visit, I was baptized into the True Jesus Church.

Before my baptism, we sang a hymn with these lyrics:

*There is a fountain filled with blood,
drawn from Immanuel's veins ...
and there may I though vile as he
[the thief], wash all my sins away ...
I do believe, truly believe, that Jesus
died for me*

My own words could not describe any better what I was about to do. At the moment I was baptized in the blood of Jesus, He redeemed me unto Himself. Through baptism in His name, with the presence of the Holy Spirit, in the living water of the open sea, I was finally certain that my sins had been cleansed by the blood that Jesus shed on the cross for me.

At last, I have the true and complete assurance of the forgiveness of my

sins and a claim to the salvation that Jesus promised to all who obey Him. I have found the truth, the redemption of my soul, the light of my salvation. Hallelujah, praise be to the Lord Jesus. ★

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A Symphony of Grace: Committing Our Lives to God

Yang Liu and I-Hsuan Tsai—Chicago, USA

Hallelujah, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we bear testimony. It has now been four years since we first came to know the living God in the True Jesus Church. Indeed, God has worked mightily in our lives to reveal Himself to us. We are blessed to be able to share these wonderful testimonies of His grace.

MOVEMENT 1 [I-HSUAN]

Encountering God

The journey of my faith began twenty years ago, in 1994, when I had just completed my freshman year at Indiana University in Bloomington, USA, majoring in Piano Performance. My sister who studied music in Germany came to visit me, so we decided to go to New York. She, being a True Jesus Church (TJC) member, planned for our first stop to be the Philadelphia church so that we could attend a spiritual convocation. Consequently, I spent the entire first day of my vacation singing hymns and listening to sermons. That was my very first exposure to God and Christianity.

The following day, we arrived in New York. After checking in at

the hotel, we stepped out onto the sidewalk, armed with our maps and ready to explore the city. Suddenly, a taxi careened onto the sidewalk and hit us from behind. My sister managed to roll away, sustaining only minor injuries. I, on the other hand, was smashed against a building's wall by the vehicle. Suspended in mid-air, my intestines, stomach, liver, and gall bladder were badly injured, my pelvis crushed, and the flesh on my right thigh was dangling from the exposed thigh bone. I looked at the blue sky and thought, perhaps, this is the moment between life and death. I wanted to lift a finger but couldn't.

The injuries were so extensive, the medics did not quite know what to do with me; so they just focused on keeping me conscious in the ambulance. On the way to the emergency room, they kept telling me they couldn't find a pulse in my leg. They warned me that I might be paralyzed; and later, given my extensive pelvic injuries, doctors told me that I might not be able to have children.

As things turned out, I underwent four major surgeries in three weeks. I spent a total of ten weeks in the

hospital, bed-ridden and totally immobile for the first six weeks because of my crushed pelvis.

Back then, I did not know anyone in the US, and my parents, who do not speak any English, could only come a week later. So during those weeks in hospital, my visitors and helpers were TJC members. I was a complete stranger to them, yet they visited and helped me. Their concern was sincere and their care, abundant; they brought me food, a compact disc player, words of comfort, and the word of God. I was very touched. I heard the word of God and learned to pray. I liked the church and the truth that I heard; I told myself that if I ever decided to embrace Christianity, this was a church I would consider.

I took a semester off and gradually recovered, graduating from the wheelchair to crutches, to finally walking on my own. Back in Indiana, there were TJC members who visited me and studied the Bible with me. While I liked the teachings of the Scriptures, I did not pursue the truth any further. In time, I lost contact with the church. I went on with my life, which continued very smoothly. I got my Bachelor of Music, followed

So during those weeks in hospital, my visitors and helpers were TJC members. I was a complete stranger to them, yet they visited and helped me. Their concern was sincere and their care, abundant; they brought me food, a compact disc player, words of comfort, and the word of God. I was very touched. I heard the word of God and learned to pray. I liked the church and the truth that I heard; I told myself that if I ever decided to embrace Christianity, this was a church I would consider.

by double Masters degrees, and my Doctor of Musical Arts. Soon, sixteen years had passed.

Searching for God

In 2004, I met and married Yang Liu. When we moved to Chicago, we had nothing in our pockets. But we were eventually able to secure professorships in different music conservatories at the same time. This was a really great blessing. Also, despite the doctors' gloomy prognosis during my accident, I conceived and bore a son, Julian Liu (I have two sons now). Overjoyed, we felt truly blessed. Life could not have been better.

Our contentment and sense of gratitude grew day by day. One day when we were reflecting on this, we realized the love in our little family was so great that it could not possibly just have come from within us. We started to trace the blessings

in our lives. Yang felt that a higher power from above had been guiding us, opening the way for us. He suggested that we look for this Being to thank Him because He had given us so much.

Since Yang has a Buddhist background, we began our search for God by visiting two temples. When we entered the first one, we were greeted by a Buddha statue, with burning incense and fruit offerings laid out before it. We saw a nun surfing the Internet and a monk walking around aimlessly. As we walked in, their expressions reminded us of businessmen expecting customers. We did not feel comfortable with this, and we certainly did not sense the presence of a higher power there, not to mention that Yang had invited the temple Abbot and some of the monks and nuns to give a speech about Zen in our lecture concert "Music and Zen," yet no one recognized us. So we left.

Next, we went to a Tibetan temple and found ourselves in a dark eerie space full of idols. Even though I had no religious background, it was extremely unnerving to have all those idols and several monks stare unblinkingly at us. We immediately turned around and left.

We then decided to try Christian churches. Up till then, I had rarely mentioned the TJC to my husband. We had visited many Catholic cathedrals in Europe but had not experienced anything there. We had also gone to various other Christian churches but were very disappointed with the message, which focused solely on material blessings and human achievements.

One Saturday, around December 2009, our family planned to visit a state park. But the feeling that something was missing gnawed at us. I realized it was because we still had not found God, although we knew there was one. Suddenly, I remembered what I had told myself sixteen years ago, that if I wanted to believe in God, I would consider the True Jesus Church.

Initially, Yang was not keen on TJC, as he had heard negative remarks about this church from one of his violin students' parent. Nevertheless, I managed to persuade him to take a look. I told him that if he did not feel comfortable in this church, I would go along with his instinct and we would leave. So we googled for the address of the local TJC and went.

We were a little disappointed when we arrived at the church location. The True Jesus Church in Chicago is quite small and resembles a residential house more than a place of worship. We entered the chapel, sat in the last pew and listened to the sermon. A sister was preaching about the Ten Commandments, declaring that adultery would lead to spiritual death. Perhaps some people may find this merciless, but because we had been so resolutely searching for the truth, Yang was moved right away.

We stayed for the entire sermon and drove home in silence. Suddenly, Yang said: "It's a bit strange; when we were in that church, I felt like I was dirty" I immediately agreed, "Me too, me too!" Such remarks from Yang were incredibly rare, as he was a very confident man. Since the age of nine, he had performed as a solo violinist with many major orchestras in the world. He had released several albums and was given a two million USD violin on an indefinite loan. His portrait had been on the home page of our university's website for years. And he had been featured in major music magazines such as "Strad," "Strings," and even the Asian edition of fashion magazine "ELLE," together with Hollywood celebrities. Yet, as we sat in the chapel, it felt as though we were in a gutter, while the brothers and sisters around us were



Sis. I-Hsuan during her recovery stage.

on a much higher plane. I had never felt this way before.

MOVEMENT 2 [YANG LIU]

God's Training

We agreed to study the Bible with the resident preacher of Chicago TJC. On his first visit to our home, I asked him "What is a Jew—is it a race, a country, a region, or a religion?" It turned out to be the right question. His reply took three hours but it gave him an excellent opportunity to give us a summary of the entire Old Testament. We fell in love with this approach of providing a thorough explanation based on Scriptural truth, rather than just a short convenient reply or one that is politically correct. My wife and I had always believed that truth comes from God and needs no compromise, decorations, or sugar coating. After this first session, we decided to continue attending this church.

In April 2010, there was a spiritual convocation at Chicago TJC. We decided to get baptized but the preacher rejected our application. He advised us to study the Bible more first. In retrospect, this was indeed God's will. At that time, my faith was still not fully cultivated. Even though we had started attending church services regularly, had learned to kneel down to pray, and I knew God was in this church, yet deep in my heart, I did not truly feel that I had to worship Him. To be honest, I was not totally convinced that I needed to kneel down to worship God the Creator. After all, I had created everything I needed in my life with my own hands.

I started playing the violin at the age of four, and by 2010, I had played for thirty years. I had

received numerous accolades for my violin performances. When I was a teenager, I performed in China, and the Chinese prime minister then came to congratulate me.

At that stage of my life, I was supremely confident that as long as I had my two hands, I could play the violin, make a living, and achieve great satisfaction in life. Plus, I always reminded myself, "There's never an end, don't be greedy." With such skills and understanding, I simply didn't see how anything could possibly go wrong in my life.

I neither saw nor understood a need for God. In fact, despite my visits to church, I did not have even an inch of faith. God was merely a romantic figure that fulfilled my religious curiosity.

One day, during dinner, I remarked to my wife that survival in our world required skills. But for me, my skills were inseparable from my two hands. Since God could not take away my hands, what is God to me?

God then taught me an unforgettable lesson. As a general rule, I practiced the violin daily. I could practice a scale at a speed of 250 beats per minute. At four notes per beat, this worked out to be 1000 notes per minute or sixteen notes per second. Doing this was the only way for me to keep in top shape.

One morning, not long after I had this dinner conversation with I-Hsuan, I started my usual practice routine. But that morning, when I took up my violin and placed one finger onto the violin string, I could hardly move nor place my other fingers onto the violin strings. My fingers felt as though they were all tied up!

I was in shock. Perhaps I had too much to drink the previous night. I used every ounce of strength to

force my fingers up and down. Every finger took me at least five seconds. I concluded that I must be sick because such a thing had never ever happened in my life before. That day, I practiced for ten hours. In the evening, it was better, so I celebrated. But come the next morning, the same thing happened. I was really anxious, but when it improved in the evening, I celebrated again. Then on the third morning, the cycle repeated itself.

After one week, fear started to enter my heart. I could not possibly turn a ten-minute warm up exercise into a ten-hour daily horror. My traveling schedule could be very tight, and ten hours of warm up would be unthinkable.

This condition continued for two consecutive months, and considering that I had to travel and play concerts during that time, it was driving me to near-insanity. I was convinced that someone was playing a prank on me, because I just could not believe my hands could do this to me. I had begun to play the violin as a toddler, in fact, not long after I had learned to speak. Playing the violin was as natural as speech to me, but here I was, my fingers 'inarticulate'!

So great was my fear and so colossal my helplessness that I soon turned to alcohol for comfort. I-Hsuan was also close to the end of her tether, hearing the same scale played over and over for ten hours a day and seeing me returning after practice, sullen, silent, and drunk. Finally, I-Hsuan pointed out to me, "I know that you believe God exists. But when you pray in church, it is just an act of superficial courtesy, because you never pray at home. God is mightier than you, but you have elevated your violin above God. Why don't you try to kneel down and pray once at home? Please, just once."

By then, I had suffered for two long months; I was utterly defeated by my ailment. I had absolutely no where to go but to take my wife's advice. I prayed, telling God, "If You are there, please stop this joke; there is just so much my heart can take"

The next day, my hands were significantly better, albeit not

I knew God was in this church, yet deep in my heart, I did not truly feel that I had to worship Him. To be honest, I was not totally convinced that I needed to kneel down to worship God the Creator. After all, I had created everything I needed in my life with my own hands.

completely. I was so excited, I prayed again that day. Over the course of the week, my fingers returned completely back to normal. I was so ecstatic, I played through ten concertos in five hours! Then, hugging my violin, I knelt down, wept, and prayed out loud, “God, please stop. I know I am wrong. I know you are mightier than I. Your power is greater than mine. What I have built in thirty years, You can tear down overnight!”

That was the very first time I witnessed the almightiness of God. “What can God do to my hands?” had been my proud challenge. God can teach us a lesson by taking away the very thing that we are most proud of. I have never dared to challenge God again.

God's Calling

In April 2010, a friend of ours called us from Europe. He asked us to drive his daughter, Laura, who was studying music in Chicago, to the airport to catch a flight home. She was nineteen years old, a pretty, intelligent, and elegant young lady who was a very good violinist. Unfortunately, she had been accused of drug abuse and expelled from school.

On the way to the airport, we learned of Iceland's volcanic eruptions and how the ash had caused airport closures across Europe. We contacted her father who told us to just leave her at the airport to catch the next available flight out. But there was an inner voice in me that urged me to take her to the hospital instead.

So contrary to her father's instructions, we did not leave Laura at the airport. Since it was a Saturday, we took her to church with us to

attend the spiritual convocation instead. She listened to an entire day of sermons and joined in the hymn-singing with us.

The next day, heeding my inner voice, I took her to the hospital. My family and I then headed to church to attend the spiritual convocation. After the church service, we returned to the hospital in the evening to pick her up. When we got there, the doctor told us that it was fortunate we had brought her in that day—she had a brain tumor of the size of a fist! This tumor was probably congenital and had remained undetected. By then, the tumor was so large that it impinged on her nerves, affecting her daily functions. Although the girl had never used drugs, the tumor made her appear to be under the influence of drugs. Had she taken the flight, the air pressure might have caused the tumor to rupture and she could have died. The doctor said: “She is extremely lucky that you guys brought her here, because she is one or two days from dying.”

The doctor then informed us that immediate surgery was necessary. Thank God, a top neurosurgeon was on duty, and the next morning, he canceled other surgeries and took her as priority! He explained her scan results to us and warned us that her survival rate was almost zero. Even if she survived, she might remain in a vegetative state, go blind, or lose her ability to walk. In short, surgery was critical but she might not be normal again.

That operation took sixteen hours. Laura's parents could not fly over because of the volcanic eruptions. Some church ministers and brethren

had come to join us at the hospital. Their presence was comforting, but I kept thinking of the agony her parents must be going through, since she was their only child. Throughout our wait, I was constantly on the phone with her parents. Knowing that there was nothing I could humanly do, I turned to God.

I prayed and told God, “I know you are an almighty God. I know that You can take away what's built over thirty years. But can you please, please not take such a wonderful girl away?” A tumor the size of a nail can be fatal, but hers was the size of a fist. I prayed earnestly, “You are the Almighty God, please don't let her become vegetative, blind, paralyzed, or lose her memory. God, if You answer my prayers, I will give you my whole life.” This was my prayer for sixteen hours.

When she was finally pushed out of the operating room, she was still unconscious. So we left for home. When we returned to the hospital the following morning, she was already up. Her first words on seeing me were, “Hey Yang, I'm so hungry! I have leftovers in the fridge, could you get it for me please?” She could see, hear, and remember everything! Three days later, she was able to go to the washroom on her own. God had indeed answered my prayers.

MOVEMENT 3 [I-HSUAN]

Hearing God's Voice

Sometimes, God uses the same incident to edify people in different ways. Seeing her up and about, I suddenly realized how similar her situation was to mine sixteen years ago. She was nineteen years old, just as I was when I had the car accident. She was a foreign student with no parents around, and she also spent all day in church before everything happened. Like me, she was also taken care of by many TJC members whom she had never met before.

The only difference was that now I was looking at this from the other side. It was then that I realized how many intercessory prayers the church had made while waiting for me

Every one advised me to proceed with the performances, since this was about my livelihood. They said I could be baptized the following year. But my wife reminded me, “Don't you feel like you're negotiating with God if you change your date of baptism?” Truth be told, I did feel the same way, but I had just begun to establish my career in South America. It would have hurt my career if I turned down this opportunity. Furthermore, with a child to bring up, every penny counts. But to delay my baptism was like trading salvation for my career.

during my surgery. Now the church was again praying day and night for Laura, a girl they had never met; just as they had done for me.

Then I heard God's voice. This personal experience of God was so powerful that just recalling it is overwhelming. Until today, I can remember that stern voice, full of love like a Father, saying, "Take a close look. This is what I did for you sixteen years ago. I have been waiting all these years. What have you done for Me?" I felt a chill running down my spine. Looking at this young girl, I told God, "I know, I am back." This incident was like a final push in our journey of faith.

MOVEMENT 4 [YANG LIU]

Seeking His Kingdom First

We decided to be baptized on August 22, 2010. We had made all the necessary preparations when I received an email from my agent in South America, informing me that I had to perform in two concerts, one in Argentina and the other in Brazil. There was no problem with the dates when I had agreed to perform earlier. But one of the performances had been re-scheduled for August 21, while the other remained at its original date, August 25. This meant that I could not possibly be back in time for baptism. Out of

After the concert, the entire orchestra had a celebratory feast. They said they had never seen such a dramatic contrast. They noticed that I had been in terrible shape before the performance. "But when we heard you perform, you played like an angel!" They specifically used the word "angel," and in my heart, I knew that it truly was.

professionalism, I agreed to the date change without thinking. Closer to the date, I asked the conductor, a good friend, whether the dates could be shifted again. But I was told tickets were already being sold.

Every one advised me to proceed with the performances, since this was about my livelihood. They said I could be baptized the following year. But my wife reminded me, "Don't you feel like you're negotiating with God if you change your date of baptism?" Truth be told, I did feel the same way, but I had just begun to establish my career in South America. It would have hurt my career if I turned down this opportunity. Furthermore, with a child to bring up, every penny counts. But to delay my baptism was like trading salvation for my career. So I finally told the agent that if the concert had to change to August 21, I would not be able to go.

Two days after I made this decision, my agent emailed me. He said he had

never seen anything like this happen before. "The orchestra manager in Brazil doubled your fee from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per concert. You only need to stay one day in Brazil and you're done" Moreover, I only had to arrive in Brazil by August 24. "They will pay for the air ticket. Although the initial arrangement did not include accommodation, for some reason, they have put you in the best hotel and will sponsor you. All your meals and beverages are covered."

When I received this news, I knew this was God's reward. Indeed, "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Mt 6:33).

Played by an Angel

In late January 2011, after our second son, Isaac, was born, he had severe problems with his stomach. He would vomit whatever we fed him, even breast milk, until he vomited blood. This was so frequent and prolonged that we were unsure whether Isaac would even survive his first birthday. In those days, we had a suitcase packed so that we were ready to go to the emergency room whenever he vomited blood. We were in and out of the hospital, day in and day out.

In those days, I had no time to practice my violin; in fact, I did not even open the case for five months after Isaac was born—I had to stop everything just to be next to him. All we did was pray for Isaac's life. We told God to give us strength to accept it if it was His will to take Isaac away. We were very upset; I don't remember any day being sunny. I did not care about day or night, I did not dare to have a relaxed sleep. In fact, I developed the skill of being half asleep



Sis. I-Hsuan Tsai and Bro. Yang Liu with their sons Isaac and Julian.

and half alert—whenever I heard Isaac cough, I would automatically jump out of my bed to check on him. Yet, through prayers, our Almighty God gave us strength and hope to rely on His grace. Despite seeing top notch specialists and undergoing all kinds of tests, including two painful gastroscopies and endoscopies before age one, the cause of Isaac's problem remains unknown until today.

One day, my US/Europe agent called me about an event I had agreed to a year earlier but had completely forgotten after Isaac's birth. So I had not responded to her earlier calls and emails. She told me that in five days' time I would be touring in China with one of the top north European orchestras. The selected music was a fifty-five-minute concerto by Carl Nielsen. I thought about the time available for me to practice. We would be spending two days at our local church's spiritual convocation that weekend, so I essentially had three days left to practice. When I started practicing on Monday, the first time in five months, my fingers felt really rusty. I had previously performed this piece five or six years ago, but I had pretty much forgotten the piece. What's more, it was a very long concerto and technically demanding.

After practicing for three days, I lost all confidence. This was no ordinary performance. The European Orchestra was on a concert tour in China, and the first concert would be telecast live; my performance of Nielsen would be its premiere in China. Given the momentous occasion and my lack of preparation, I could only practice so much, study the score on the plane, and pray very hard. From a human perspective, playing this piece would be an impossible task.

I went straight from Beijing airport to the rehearsal. My worst fears came true. I could not even finish the entire piece. The conductor of the orchestra was a world-famous Viennese, and he looked at me in shock. He must have been wondering why such an unprofessional player had been invited to perform with his orchestra.

In fact, he told me later that he felt like punching me and returning to Vienna with his baton, feeling it would be an insult to his professionalism to play with me.

After the rehearsals, during the hour-long dinner break, I took a nap to recover from jet lag. The conductor came by fifteen minutes before the performance and knocked on my door. He heard me snoring! This probably did not improve his impression of me.

But thank God, from all the milestones in my journey of faith—God taking my violin ability away, God's guidance before my baptism and during my son's illness, God's healing of Laura—I had witnessed for myself God's amazing power. I had learned the power of sincere prayer.

During the remaining fifteen minutes, I prayed to God. I told Him that it seemed as if my career was over. The music circle is very small and everyone would surely have heard about how rusty my skills had become. I just asked Him to give me fifty-five minutes of courage to endure the humiliation I was about to encounter. I told God, "Please give me strength to bear with it. And tell me what career path I should choose after that. If You want me to fix cars, I will fix cars. If You want me to sell shoes, I will sell shoes. The next fifty-five minutes may be the most humiliating experience I will have in my life. I have no excuse, but it is my fault for forgetting I signed this contract and not practicing. Please give me the strength and peace to go through this."

And thus I went on stage, clothed with pessimism and resignation. Yet, strangely, I felt an indescribable peace in my heart. The conductor was glaring at me and his baton was shaking. This Nielsen Concerto starts with a chord from the orchestra, immediately followed by a showy virtuosic solo violin passage.

I clearly remember the scene. I braced myself. The first chord from the orchestra. Then the first note from my violin From that moment on, it was as if an angel played on my behalf. From the first till the last note,

I played with no error. The music was perfectly harmonized.

After the concert, the entire orchestra had a celebratory feast. They said they had never seen such a dramatic contrast. They noticed that I had been in terrible shape before the performance. "But when we heard you perform, you played like an angel!" They specifically used the word "angel," and in my heart, I knew that it truly was.

The first thing I did after the concert was to rush to my dressing room to pray. I rang I-Hsuan and told her to kneel down immediately and pray with me because God had showed me His almighty power again. God sent an angel to play for me!

The rest of the six concerts were plain sailing. I performed with ease. After the whole tour was over, I remembered what a preacher had once shared with me.

The blessing of the LORD makes one rich, [a]nd He adds no sorrow with it. (Prov 10:22)

My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. (2 Cor 12:9)

We had truly experienced this. Whatever we strive to get in this world with our two hands will always bring us labor and worries. However, God's blessings come with no sorrow. If we have come to know God but still want to create our own future with our own hands, He can take it away overnight.

The journey to the heavenly kingdom is long yet short, and easy yet difficult. May we encourage each other to rely on God's power, "that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" (1 Cor 2:5). Amen. ★



Introduction to the Indonesia General Assembly

General Assembly of Indonesia

In 1932, one Indonesian youth became ill three months after his marriage in China. The cause of his illness could not be diagnosed and his condition worsened. He became bedridden for six months. Despite consulting temple deities and taking a range of medication, he was not cured. His aunt advised him to believe in Jesus in the True Jesus Church, and he was carried on a stretcher to the church for prayers. Miraculously, twenty-eight days later, he was healed. Soon after, he, together with his mother and his aunt, was baptized in the True Jesus Church at Putien in Fujian, China. This brother subsequently invited Deacon (Dn.) Stephan Siau, who baptized him, to visit Indonesia in 1939.

Dn. Siau accepted the invitation and went to Jakarta, where he started to evangelize. He gathered twelve brethren from China, and together, they held services in the house of an elder from China. Through the power of God, the sick were healed, demons were cast out, and many came to believe. On February 1, 1941, the first True Jesus Church in Indonesia was established in Jakarta.

From then on, the gospel spread to other cities in Indonesia, and later

the Indonesia General Assembly (GA) was established, and the church in Indonesia was registered under the International Assembly (IA) in mainland China. The bylaws of the True Jesus Church (Indonesia) were recognized by the Indonesian government in 1952.

The early workers in Indonesia were from China and Hong Kong:

1. Dn. Stephan Siau (Putien) 1939–1955
2. Dns. Maria Chen (Fuzhou) 1947–1971
3. Dns. Yulia Lim (Fuzhou) 1953–1966
4. Dn. Guo Tze Yen (Hong Kong) 1955–1967, 1970–1983

At the IA's suggestion, the Indonesia GA established a theological training program on January 10, 1984. Its inaugural batch of students were ordained in 1988. To date, sixteen batches have passed through this seminary; with a total of forty-three graduates having completed the program, twenty-six of whom have since been ordained as full-time ministers. Currently, Indonesia GA has twenty-one full-time ministers serving the Lord.

ORGANIZATIONAL STATUS

The Indonesia GA Council comprises eleven council members, including the chairman. There are six departments: the Department of Evangelism, the Department of Pastoral Ministry, the Department of Education, the Department of Literary Ministry, the Department of General Affairs, and the Department of Finance. Each department is managed by one director, who is responsible for mobilizing the work of the church on a national level.

Presently, the Indonesia GA is subdivided into five regions: Jakarta and the surrounding area, West Java, Central Java, East Indonesia, and the Kalimantan region. Each region has a regional coordinator, who is tasked with developing and coordinating the work within the region.

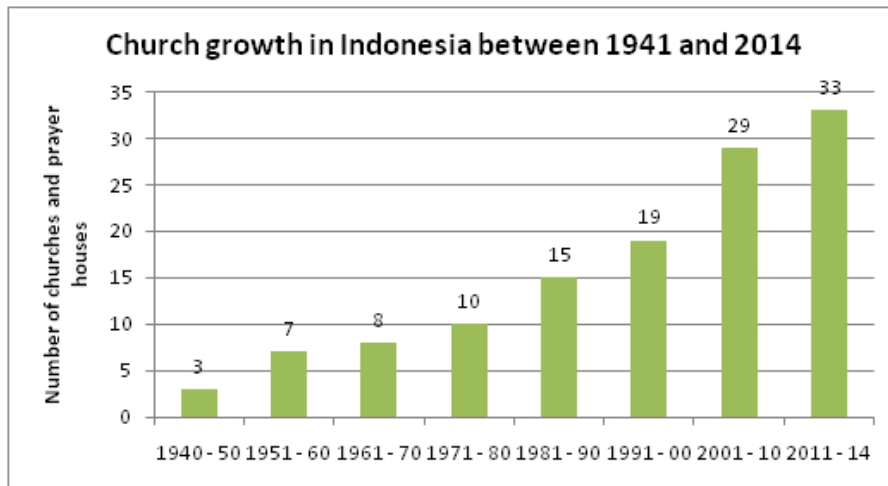
MEMBERSHIP STATUS

Church Growth

The graph below shows the number of churches and houses of prayer established since 1941. Starting from only three, the number has increased steadily over the years. Today, there are thirty-three churches and prayer

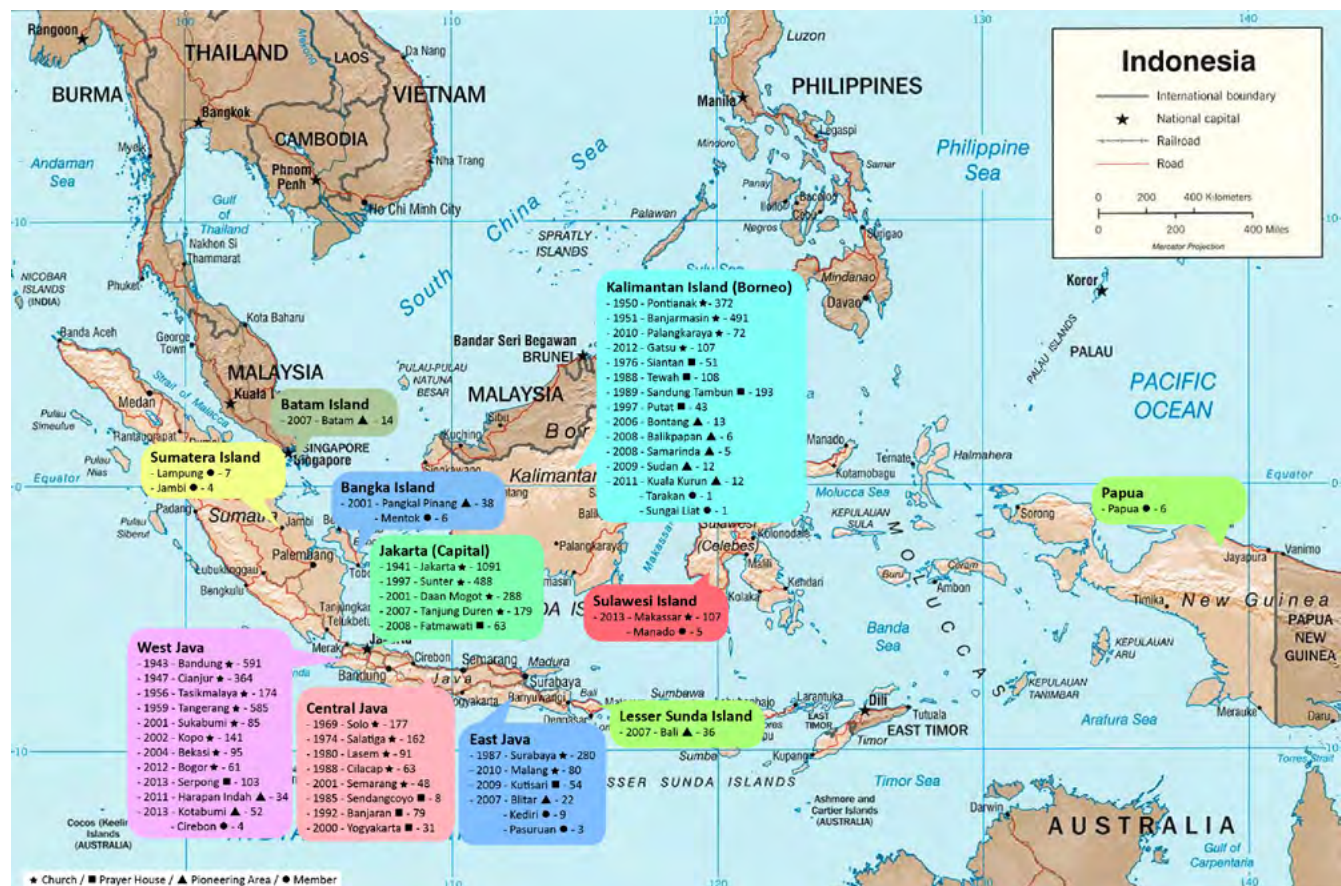


houses in Indonesia, with a total membership of around 7,115.



Geographical Distribution of the Churches

The map below shows the geographical distribution of the churches and prayer houses in Indonesia. The majority are located on Java Island.



CHALLENGES

1. Internal challenges:

- The Indonesia GA needs to strengthen members' understanding of the important role of the church in God's overall salvation plan. Members have to realize that the church is not just an organization that caters to their religious lives; she plays an indispensable role in their salvation.
- There are many members who could contribute to the ministry, but they lack training and are yet to be mobilized to serve.
- There are eight Kanaan Christian Schools, but the church has yet to maximize the opportunities to evangelize in these schools.



2. External challenges:

- Indonesia has 17,508 islands, with over four hundred ethnicities. Due to geographical spread, the churches are far apart and unevenly distributed throughout the five major islands of Indonesia.
- Although a secular state, Indonesia is dominated by Islam. Oftentimes, this has created obstacles in terms of evangelism and church building.

KANAAN CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

In 1969, the Indonesia GA approved the setting up of the True Jesus Church Foundation and the first Kanaan Christian School, managed under this foundation, was established on January 15, 1970.

In 2000, the foundation established the first Kanaan Global School, which was a play group located at Daan Mogot Church. In 2002, this school was merged with the Kanaan Global School at Taman Surya in West Jakarta. The Kanaan Global School teaches the country's national curriculum in the English language and employs local teachers as well as teachers from overseas, such as the United States, Canada, Lebanon, Bulgaria, China, India, and the Philippines.

Through the Kanaan Schools, many students, teachers, and parents have learned of Jesus, were baptized in the true church, and are now involved in the work of the ministry. In fact, a number of the ministers and veteran church workers are former Kanaan School students.

Kanaan Christian School Ministry

Religious education (RE) is mandatory in the Indonesian school system, and the Education Ministry requires that two religious education classes be taught weekly. Since the Kanaan School is a Christian school, it is also subject to this requirement.

At the Kanaan Schools, only church members can be the religious education teachers. On top of RE classes, the schools conduct weekly services and daily morning services

In the past four years, the Kanaan Schools have worked together with the church to promote evangelism. On Saturdays, Kanaan Schools in various cities hold Sabbath classes for their students. Parents willingly send their children to these classes, as they prefer them to attend the classes than to spend their time playing at home and watching TV.

of twenty to thirty minutes before lessons start. Teachers also attend daily morning prayer sessions. Every year, events such as faith counseling sessions, student spiritual convocations, and parent spiritual convocations are held. There are also optional weekly fellowships and Bible classes for the students.

All teachers are familiar with the basic beliefs of the True Jesus Church, and the Indonesia GA has assigned a preacher to pastor several schools. At these schools, currently about thirty students from elementary to high school levels voluntarily assemble to pray together before the start of lessons and after lessons end, and some students often ask the preacher to help them pray for the Holy Spirit.

Sabbath Gospel Class

In the past four years, the Kanaan Schools have worked together with the church to promote evangelism. On Saturdays, Kanaan Schools in various cities hold Sabbath classes for their students. Parents willingly send their children to these classes, as they prefer them to attend the classes than to spend their time playing at home and watching TV. The classes are conducted by the schools' teachers together with our church's RE teachers. In Jakarta alone, more than sixty RE teachers and volunteer members from the churches in Jakarta, Sunter, and Daan Mogot are involved in this project. God's grace is evident from the high

attendance: 200 students in Jakarta, 180 in Banjarmasin, and 296 in Pontianak. Nationally, 1,013 students from our Kanaan Schools attend these Sabbath classes. This brings joy to the hearts of the believers and encourages them to strengthen their evangelistic fervor.

A Fertile Field Waiting to Be Ploughed

God has indeed blessed the Kanaan Schools; as of June 2014, we had six Kanaan Christian Schools and two Kanaan Global Schools located across seven cities, with a total of 233 classes and a student population of 5,445 students. Five percent of the students and around twenty percent of the teachers and other full-time employees were True Jesus Church members.

The harvest abounds, yet there are few workers. We hope that Manna readers will pray for the fertile God-given fields of the Kanaan Schools so that God will move more of us to participate in the evangelistic work in these schools.

The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. (Lk 10:2)

Amen. ★

Editorial note:

In our last IA column, we made a mistake in the total membership in Taiwan as of 2013: the correct total membership is 55,221.

1 Source: <http://www.indonesia.go.id/en/indonesia-glance/geography-indonesia>



Virtues of Counselors (III) — Be Able to Build Relationships

Based on a lecture series by Vuthy Nol-Mantia—Dallas, Texas, USA

In the earlier two installments of this series on Christian counseling, we established that counselors should have the image and likeness of Christ, maintain a close relationship with Christ, know the spiritual weapons available, and be filled by God's love. This third and final installment of the series explores how counselors can build relationships of trust with those who turn to them for advice.

BE ABLE TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

As Christian counselors, we must be able to build good relationships with all the brothers and sisters who turn to us for advice. But as humans, we often relate to certain people more than others; or we tolerate certain idiosyncrasies but not others. Hence, we must first be close to God and be filled with His word, Spirit, and love. Only then can we overcome our personal biases and accept our brethren just as God accepts them. As we go forth to build relationships with our brethren, there are a few points that we should note.

By Recognizing That Everybody Is Unique

First, we should recognize that God has created us as unique individuals. Since everyone is unique, we should accept people for who they are, unless they brazenly lead sinful lives. We should then understand that people react differently to similar

situations; thus, accept one another as we are.

Accepting each other is the foundation of any good relationship. Within the close-knit community of faith, it is quite natural that we form expectations of brethren with whom we worship or serve. However, understanding that people are different and appreciating these differences will help us manage our expectations of others. For example, members gifted in evangelism may think that those who do not evangelize are not exemplary brethren. But we are all different members of one body, and this body cannot consist of only an eye or a mouth. The person we have dismissed as “lazy” because he or she does not evangelize may be one who is the first to volunteer for visitation work. Therefore, let us always remind ourselves that God has given us different talents, and we ought not to jump to conclusions about our brethren's commitment to God based on our personal standards.

By Listening and Maintaining Eye Contact

Second, we must listen well, for listening is undoubtedly the most important element in developing a relationship. Any husband who knows how to listen to his wife is a good husband; any friend who can listen attentively makes a good friend. In any relationship, if we are good and attentive listeners, the other party will have no qualms talking to or confiding in us. This quality is especially precious in our modern attention-deficit world. Life is so hectic and people so burdened by a range of anxieties that they generally have no time to listen to others anymore. Therefore, if we seek to be good counselors, we must first be good listeners.

So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.” (Jn 8:7)



On one occasion, the Pharisees and scribes caught an adulteress red-handed. They took her to Jesus, intending to test Him. These Jewish leaders cited the Mosaic Law and asked Him whether the woman should be put to death (cf. Jn 8:5). Instead of answering immediately, Jesus sat there, wrote on the ground, and simply listened to the accusers. He knew that without listening to them, He would never be able to give them suitable advice. Similarly, if we do not listen to the complete story in any matter, we will not be able to give sound advice to our counselees.

Besides listening, good counselors also need to communicate with their counselees through their eyes. It is often said that the eyes are the window to one's soul, as they reveal much about a person's state of mind. Hence, we need to maintain appropriate eye contact with our counselees. By maintaining eye contact and angling our bodies towards our counselees, we convey to them our genuine interest in them and our willingness to give undivided attention to their concerns.

By Repeating, Remembering, and Asking

Third, in order to communicate effectively with the counselee, it is essential for counselors to be able to digest, acknowledge, repeat, and remember what the counselee has said. In communication between spouses, the proof of proper listening is always when one party can paraphrase what was said by the other party. A husband who can answer his wife's question is a good listener. If this husband can repeat and paraphrase what his wife said, or even what she had said but forgotten, he is superb.

We should recognize that God has created us as unique individuals. Since everyone is unique, we should accept people for who they are, unless they brazenly lead sinful lives. We should then understand that people react differently to similar situations;

Likewise in counseling, it is important to build a relationship of trust with our counselees. This starts with us exhibiting genuine interest in whatever they share with us, remembering that they have plucked up great courage to do so. One way to demonstrate our interest is by asking questions, an essential component of active listening. Asking gives us the opportunity to paraphrase and clarify what was shared. More than this, it allows us to have a proper conversation with the counselee; asking the right questions prompts the counselee to share further and pushes the counseling session forward.

Further, our ability to remember what was shared with us one week or even one month later indicates a deeper level of genuine care and concern. This can be very comforting to the counselee. If we desire to be good counselors to our brethren, we ought to maintain continuity in the relationship by following up on what was shared previously: *"How was last week? What about the suggestion that you shared with me last week?"*

LEARN TO LISTEN

As noted earlier, active listening is an integral part of good communication in any relationship and a powerful weapon in the counselor's arsenal. It is important to reiterate the following aspects of listening.

Listening Is Not Agreeing

Although Jesus listened to the scribes and Pharisees in the incident recorded in John 8, it did not mean that He agreed with them. In other words, although we need to provide a listening ear for our counselees, it does not mean that we have to agree with everything they say. A

good counselor does not allow his feelings to shut his ears. Instead, he continues to listen without showing any overt expression, positive or negative. Critically, disagreement or disapproval is never registered on the counselor's face.

For example, if the counselee talks about something hurtful or painful that is happening in his life, we must be particularly alert that our body language does not betray our personal thoughts. Maintain a caring but professional demeanor and continue listening to the counselee without shutting off our ears and our heart.

Whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard. (Prov 21:13)

This is crucial for counselors to note—if we are unwilling to listen, then the counselee may also not listen to us. Quite often, this happens when adults attempt to counsel the young. Even though they have clearly much more experience, and know more than youths, a good counselor should allow young counselees to express themselves fully before they give appropriate advice.

In short, listening and agreeing are two separate matters. Counselors may or may not agree with everything that they hear, but they withhold agreement or disagreement while the counselee is speaking. Only after listening thoroughly to the counselee, do counselors offer appropriate advice.

Listening Is to Understand What Is in Their Hearts

Listening to our counselees does not only help us to understand their situation, but more importantly, it should help us to understand what is in their hearts.

Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted



In any relationship, if we are good and attentive listeners, the other party will have no qualms talking to or confiding in us. ... Therefore, if we seek to be good counselors, we must first be good listeners. ... Listen intently not just to their words, but to their hearts. Then, point out the better portion to them in order to lead them to Jesus Christ, the chief Counselor.

with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me."

(Lk 10:38–40)

In this incident, Jesus visited the house of Martha and Mary. Martha was distracted with much serving, so she approached Jesus with her disgruntlement. What exactly was Martha feeling? Perhaps since Martha was the older sister, she may have felt responsible for serving the Lord and therefore interrupted Jesus to exert her dominance over Mary.

But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.
(Lk 10:42)

From Jesus' response to Martha's complaint, we know that Martha did not recognize the importance of listening to Jesus. By pointing out the right and more needful choice to her, Jesus addressed Martha's feelings of disgruntlement by applying the balm she needed. He understood what Martha really intended to say, what was in her heart, and what she really needed, because He listened to her with love and concern for her soul. Therefore, He allowed her to interrupt Him and air her grievance, withholding His (dis)agreement, before He eventually pointed out to her the better and more beautiful option.

Similarly, in all our counseling work, we should do the same for the brethren whom we are counseling. Listen intently not just to their words, but to their hearts. Then, point out the better portion to them in order

to lead them to Jesus Christ, the chief Counselor.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, effective Christian counselors do not just process cases by churning out standard platitudes as advice. Importantly, they invest time to build relationships by recognizing each individual's uniqueness, underlining this recognition through the willingness to listen attentively and follow-up. During the counseling session, allow the counselee to speak first. Maintain a neutral expression while listening and only express our agreement/disagreement after having a complete understanding of the situation. Most essentially, point out the more beautiful portion to our counselees.

May our Lord Jesus give us the wisdom, the heart, and these virtues to be a counselor for Him. Amen. ★

International Youth Fellowship 2015

Hosted by Malaysia General Assembly, with the theme “Equip Oneself, Succeed the Ministry,” the International Youth Fellowship 2015 provides participants with the opportunity to share ministry-related issues on a local and global level. There will also be fellowship and testimony sessions, and a rare opportunity to join the local medical mission work in the state of Perak. The program also includes a tour of three major cities in Malaysia. Don’t miss this opportunity to meet and get to know youths from other parts of the world!

Date & Venue:

- Fellowship:

June 4–7, 2015 at Olive Garden, Port Dickson, Malaysia.

- Sightseeing and medical mission:

June 8–12, 2015: (1) tour to Melaka, Kuala Lumpur; (2) medical mission in Perak; (3) tour to Penang.

Please note: Participants are to arrive at Kuala Lumpur International Airport on June 4, and depart from Penang International Airport on June 13.

Target group:

TJC members who are between 18 and 40 years old.

Registration period:

December 2014 to March 31, 2015
(first-come-first-serve basis).

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



Precious Father, Lead Me Home

Jordan Kwok—Newcastle, U.K.

Head rests,
Eyes fall upon the starlight,
Thoughts like billows,
Swell in reflection,
Expand in contemplation.
 How could I have once been so foolish?
 So foolish ...

Lost—
I was lost in the world,
Away from home,
 Drawn to the luminosity.
Adrift,
Unanchored upon the symphony of the city
Where sin
 and lust
 and desire
 thrived.

Like a bee,
 Drawn to the bait,
 Enticed by the fields;
The efflorescence of temptation
To relieve the pain of loneliness.
 How could I have been so blind?
 So blind ...

Exhilaration,
 pushing the boundaries,
Daring,
 thriving on the adrenaline,
Driving through the rules
 trying, testing, teasing.
The intoxication surrounded by the ungodly.
 They were so fun.
 I'm just having fun, tasting life to the
full.
Drunk with laughter,
 Craving for more,
 Distracted for the night.
Limitless,
Confident,
 What was I doing wrong?
 So wrong ...

Yet
Behind closed doors
Guilt.
Overwhelming excess of guilt.
Overpowering emptiness.
 I needed more
 I felt so lonely
 I was unsatisfied
 Still in pain ...
 Where were my friends then?

Something is missing.
In the far corners of my mind,
There whispered
 God.
 God was missing ...

What happened to me?
My knowledge of the Scriptures;
I, who once taught the young and aided the
elderly;
I, who once burned with zeal;
 What happened?
 What happened to me?

Naive
Careless
Complacent
Deluded by the canopy of dark.

In the hours when I needed You most
I turned to the world.
The allures that offered but a moment of satisfaction
I turned to them.
 Where was I?
 Where were You?

But

You were always there.
Even at my darkest,
Even at my most lost.
You preserved me,
You carried me.
I, who sinned against You
I, who was careless
I, who am so undeserving.
 How can I come back?
 So shameful ...

I reached
 In repentance I reached towards You, my Father
 And You heard me, You saved me, You
 brought me back,
 You reminded me of Your love.
 Like a father, You hugged, cradled me, whispered to me:
 Child, I will never leave you
 Child, I am here
 My child, come home.
 You gave me a second chance,
 You told me to change,
 You gave me the strength—
 Are You sure Lord?
 I've missed You, Lord ...

I bowed.
 In desperation, I bowed.
 I was wrong, Father
 I was wrong.
 I needed You, not them.
 In my darkest hour, I needed You.

But I am here now.
 You brought me home, into Your arms, and
 You held me.
 You understand me.
 As I poured my heart, You listened to me:
 Father, can I come home?
 Child, come home.
 A boundless sea of peace pours within me,
 Joy transcends my doubt,
 River currents gush from my eyes,
 I long to reunite,
 I long for sweetness,
 I surrender, Father.
 I want to be with You, not them.
 I will change, to be with You,
 I will change and not go back,
 Because You have accepted me.
 Despite my errors
 Despite my sin
 You paved a way back;
 I love You, Father.
 I love you too, child.

My life
 now has meaning.
 His love in contemplation
 has changed me in appreciation.
 It brings me tears
 when I remember His love;
 It brings a meaning to my service
 when I remember His love;
 It brings me to talk of Him
 when I remember His love;
 Through the dark, and now into the light
 He loved me, and
 He loves me.

Head rests,
 Eyes fall upon the starlight.
 I lie in sleepy tranquility,
 Heart filled with praise,
 Acknowledging reconciliation,
 Drifting into the peaceful wake of a new dawn.
 Precious Father,
 Lead me home. ★

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 #76:

Topic: **Commission**

Articles due: February 1, 2015

Before Jesus' ascension, He commanded His disciples to preach the gospel to the end of the world (Mk 16:15–16) and instructed Peter to shepherd the church of God (Jn 21:15–17; also cf. Acts 20:28). After the disciples received power from on high through the promised Holy Spirit, they zealously went forth to fulfill their commission, witnessing in Jerusalem, Samaria, and to the ends of the world, teaching the believers to observe the Lord's commandments. What motivated them was the love of Christ (2 Cor 5:14–15) and a deep conviction based on their personal experiences with the Lord Jesus (1 Jn 1:1–3).

Today, do we share the apostles' evangelistic fervor? Over time, do we still have that initial zeal to proclaim the salvation grace of God to our families and friends? How can we consistently maintain the zeal to preach and share the complete gospel?

We may play different pastoral roles in church, but what does pastoring the flock of the Lord entail? Do we really care for our brethren? Or are we just duty-bound to discharge our pastoral tasks? Are we shepherds or are we hirelings? Apostle Paul genuinely cared for his brethren; anxious for their spiritual well-being, he watched over them and prayed unceasingly for them (Acts 20:31; Col 1:9; 2 Thess 1:11; 2 Cor 11:2–3). Do we have Paul's mindset?

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 sacrament of footwashing enables one to have a part with the Lord Jesus. It also serves as a constant reminder that one should have love, holiness, humility, forgiveness, and service. Every person who has received water baptism must have his/her feet washed in the name of Jesus Christ. Mutual footwashing may be practiced whenever is appropriate.

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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