

MANNA

ISSUE 81
Autumn



**Late Autumn Tress Without Fruit •
The Mountains Moses Ascended • My Constant Companion
• Whom God Uses in His Ministry (I)**

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

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Autumn

The Soil and the Seed of God's Plan

by Marian Shek

In the temperate regions of the world, autumn is a time of transition. As the air chills, the leaves turn to gold and fall from the trees. Animals begin to store food, or fatten themselves up, ready for hibernation. In times past, many cultures would store provisions to see them through the lean winter months, so a bountiful autumn harvest was crucial to their preparations.

In Palestine, autumn is the time of the early rain—showers which soften the ground after the dry and arid summer. This prepares the soil so that farmers can plough and sow their fields. If there is no early rain, the ground would be unable to absorb any heavy deluges. Once the seed is planted, the farmer only has to wait patiently for springtime, when the crops will grow. Rather than a darkening time of approaching hardship, autumn is in fact a time of hope and preparation for the future.

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. (Jas 5:7)

The writers of the Bible saw the giving of rain as a sign of God's faithfulness and providence. In spiritual terms, the autumn showers point to the depth of God's love and grace in that He has already prepared the ground for the salvation of His elect.

The roots of God's salvation plan, planted before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4), is seeded throughout the history and prophecies of the Old Testament. Without fail, many of these promises have blossomed and borne fruit in the events of the New Testament and in the end time. The rest will surely come to pass—all we need to do is trust God's word, and ensure that our faith is built on the foundation laid by Christ.

This is why, as this issue's theme article "Late Autumn Trees Without Fruit" warns, we should beware of apostates who would spread the disease of heresy, sowing doubt in God's words and causing disunity throughout God's vineyard, the church.

Everything laid down in the Old Testament was written for our learning (Rom 15:4). Part one of "The Dwelling Place Where God Has Chosen to Establish His Name" looks at Shiloh, which was the first center of worship for Israel, and sees in it the significance of finding the one church with God's presence. This, and many other articles in this issue, highlights how Old Testament examples resonate with our lives today, outlining teachings which are so pertinent for God's chosen people.

Our God is the same today, yesterday and forever (Heb 13:8), and He has clearly prepared a path of salvation and hope for us. With this comforting knowledge, we can all the more cultivate ourselves to bear good fruit for the Lord ("Now Is the Time to Bear Fruit"), and hold fast to His promises when we see winter approaching ("Be Thou My Vision").

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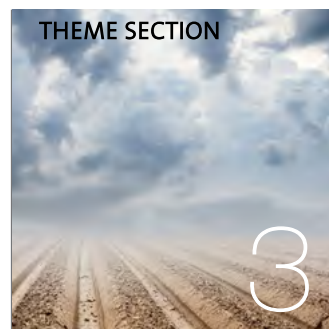
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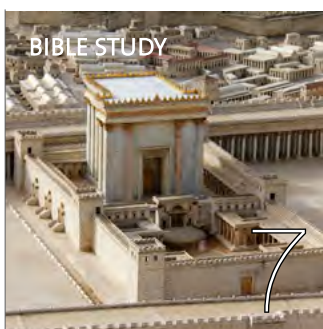
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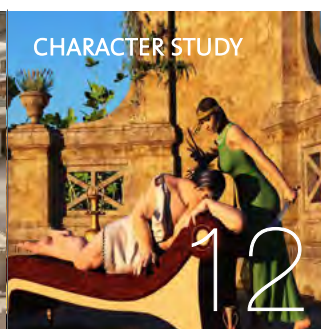
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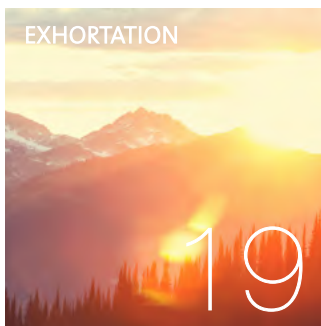


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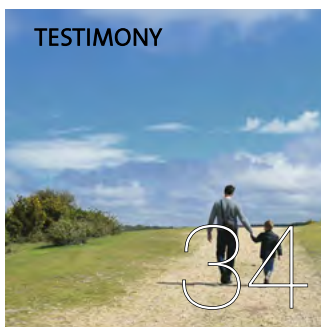


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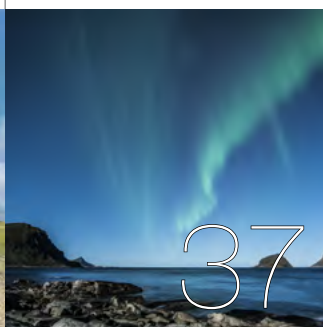


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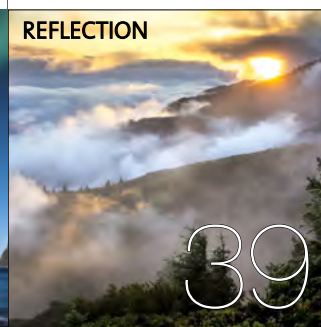


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Autumn



Late Autumn Trees Without Fruit

FF Chong—London, UK

“Late autumn trees without fruit.” This is one of the images Jude used to drive home the depravity and doom of the apostates, those who abandoned the true faith (Jude 12). This illustration has its root in the agriculture of the land of Israel. Late autumn is when fruit trees produce their fruit. Every farmer relies on this last harvest of the year to sustain themselves until the next harvest. This late autumn crop is crucial to the survival and expansion of the farmer’s agricultural enterprise.

A poor harvest is a painful and disappointing experience for any farmer, because of the subsequent hardship he will have to endure. If this happens, the farmer will do all that he can to reverse the barrenness of his trees. This ranges from the medical examination of the trees to using fertilizers. Such an endeavor costs more time, money and effort. It is a painstaking, but necessary, process to bring the trees back to full health. By doing this, the farmer hopes to reverse his situation and, by next spring, see his trees bearing fruit again.

One main cause of a barren tree is disease. When a tree becomes galled—a condition in which unhealthy growths are found on the tree—its fruit is in danger of failing to ripen. Gall can be caused by parasites, bacteria and fungi. The infected tree may go through the blossoming process, and at times even bear fruit. However, the abnormal growths block the free circulation of sap around the tree. This prevents the fruit from reaching maturity, causing it to dry up and eventually fall off the tree. Hence

the expression: “Late autumn trees without fruit.”

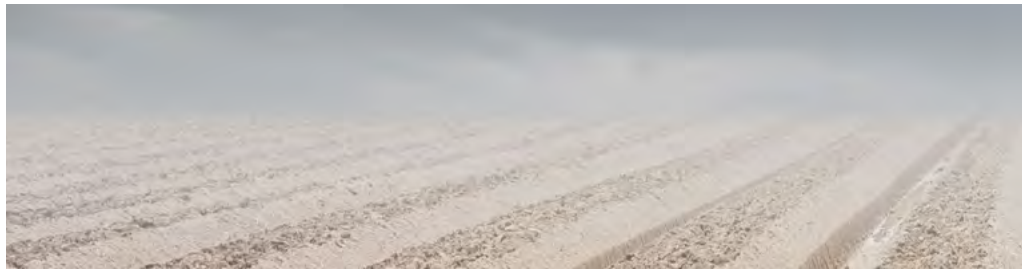
JUDE’S INTENDED MEANING

“Late autumn trees without fruit” is one of many metaphors Jude used to highlight the danger apostates could inflict upon the community of God. These metaphors, found in the Book of Jude from verses 12 to 13, were commonly known and understood during Jude’s time. He used them to describe the attempted destruction of God’s community, a community which is built on amicableness, a spirit of sacrifice, truth, productiveness, honor and order. Such destruction, if successful, would be utterly unforgiving and consumes all goodness that would otherwise nourish the church.

In Jude’s mind, apostates are destructive elements who expressly corrupt all who follow them, promoting wickedness over the goodness of God. Instead of having love for the brethren, they instigate hatred and antagonism; instead of speaking the truth to one another, they fabricate lies; instead of resolving differences, they blow things out of proportion; and instead of creating an ambience of reverence, they speak against God and His church. They are the instruments of the dragon (Rev 13:5–6).

Such false prophets are able to corrupt the innocent to their own advantage, turning them against one another. This is intended to destroy unity amongst the brethren, making it easier for the apostates to work heretically against the establishment

of the church. With ease, they build up walls and instill hostility. Following Jude's line of thought, they are like the abnormal growths on a tree, retarding the growth that would otherwise be enjoyed by a healthy and vibrant tree.



ON AN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

To fend off attacks from false prophets, we have to understand the

“We are placed in a privileged position to bear fruit for God. In fact, God empowers us to bear fruit; hence, nothing can stop us from bearing fruit for Him.”

importance of bearing fruit. First, it is Jesus who commissioned us to bear fruit. Being chosen by God comes with the mandate to bear fruit:

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain. (Jn 15:16a)

This command cannot be ignored; it must be carried out. The word “appointed” indicates the divine authority and sovereignty of the One who appoints. No servant in God's house can violate his appointment without facing the wrath of God's judgment.

At the same time, being “appointed” implies the honorable status that we have in Christ Jesus. This appointment is granted only to those who are baptized into Christ. We are placed in a privileged position to bear fruit for God. In fact, God empowers us to bear fruit; hence, nothing can stop us from bearing fruit for Him. God has not given us a task that is beyond our strength and capability, but a duty that all who believe in Him can fulfill.

Jesus instructs us not only to bear spiritual fruit, or perform good deeds, but to ensure that the fruit remains. This is a challenging task. In a physical sense, every ripe fruit will eventually perish. Likewise, for a good deed to remain, under all circumstances, would prove to be impossible for most. In the majority of cases, the

good deed fades away. And if the situation turns volatile, the person who bore the spiritual fruit will be worn down until their ability to bear fruit is diminished (see Gal 6:9).

If there is sin and animosity, the durability of spiritual fruit is shortened; a good deed can rarely be done in a hostile environment. For instance, the act of care can hardly be performed when the carer is subject to abuse. As with a fruit-bearing tree, when the environment is good, the tree will bear much fruit. However, no ecosystem can remain absolutely plague-free. Natural disasters can strike at any time. When the tree fails to fight against the onset of disease, its fruit will certainly fall off prematurely.

But God has shown a way for His chosen to overcome such circumstances—by removing the gall. There are two parts to this. On our part, as God's chosen, it is imperative to have the will to bear fruit and to keep the fruit sustained. In the context of John, the will to bear fruit is the will to love one another (Jn 15:17). On God's part, He is love, the source of and motivation for all good works. With the power of love, we are able to surpass and overcome any adverse situation in which we find ourselves. For love cancels out differences, defuses animosity, and tears down walls of division. It enables the continuous performance of good works—bearing fruit unceasingly.

To maintain a perfect state is virtually unattainable, but God empowers those who have the will to do good. Even when the desire to perform good works seems to subside and wane, God will strengthen us, as long as it is in line with His will. This is why we should be confident not in ourselves but in God. It is comforting to know that the Lord will always aid us in our good works. This thought drives us on, believing that whatever we do for His delight will bear fruit worthy of the Lord.

ON THE COLLECTIVE FRONT

The church is featured prefiguratively in Isaiah's vineyard song (Isa 5). Here, God works on the vineyard tirelessly. He expects the entire vineyard to bring forth good grapes. God desires the whole church, not just a few people, to bear good fruit and reach the standard He expresses in the Bible. This is the underlying principle of God establishing His church. He calls for all to put off the old nature and attain to the level of Christ, who is all and in all (Col 3:11). This is a case of bearing the fruit of light (or Spirit) in abundance (see Eph 5:9).

Since the body—the church—is one, whatever we do has a direct bearing on the rest of the body. Each member of the church must be conscious that his actions can damage the good works that the entire church has done. An action that damages the church is a rotten apple that spoils the barrel. It is like a dead fly that putrefies the perfumer's ointment (Eccl 10:1). It tarnishes the good works in which the church has toiled. Instead, of bringing glory to God's name, it brings shame.

We are often totally unaware of the workings of our mind, and we cannot comprehend why we are inclined to



the deeds of the flesh, especially when we do not receive a swift reminder. One reason is our resistance to correction, which removes the fear of the Lord (Prov 15:32–33), giving rise to wickedness. When this takes place, it stifles the good work that we have done, sending out negative signals that detrimentally impact upon the church. What good work can come from such a state?

Since we, believers and ordained ministers alike, have human shortcomings, keeping watch over one another's spiritual wellbeing becomes even more important. Our life in Christ cannot be lived in

subtle. In exposing the work of false prophets, Jesus states that their fruits must be carefully observed. The reasoning Jesus gives is that grapes cannot be gathered from thorn bushes or figs from thistles (Mt 7:15–20). The grapes and figs, though they are types of fruits, must not be taken solely to mean charitable deeds or actions of love. False teachers are more than capable of showing charity, pretending submission and faking humility. Jesus' words provide another shade of understanding: thorn bushes and thistles represent a state of being cursed. They represent falsehood and heresies.

With the power of love, we are able to surpass and overcome any adverse situation in which we find ourselves. For love cancels out differences, defuses animosity, and tears down walls of division. It enables the continuous performance of good works—bearing fruit unceasingly.

isolation. To reach maturity, the state of bearing abundant fruit, we must accept constant correction. This practice creates a spiritually healthy church, providing a strong base for all to know their own spiritual state. Through genuine reflection, we come to know our own heart and motive with greater clarity, which gives us the opportunity to eliminate any corruption. Step by step, the church will bring forth the virtues of God in believers' lives.

GUARD AGAINST FALSEHOOD AND FALSE TEACHERS

If we are not alert to false prophets, the good works of the church are in danger of being destroyed. The work of false prophets is, however, often

For us today, it is not so much about despising teachings, but more about learning to be discerning (1 Thess 5:20f). The words uttered by a person reflect his character. Likewise, the teachings of a person provide a good indication of his beliefs. If we compare these teachings to the pattern of sound words that we have received in the Bible, we can discern whether he is a true or false teacher. For instance, love rejoices in the truth (1 Cor 13:6b). Some would boast that love, being the greatest (1 Cor 13:13), is more important than truth. However, love and truth cannot be compared on the same level. Truth is a modifying attribute that qualifies virtues such as love. Thus, it is not that love is more important than truth, instead it is

whether one has true love, true faith and true hope. "Love," unqualified by truth, cannot be placed above the truth in the church, since the action of love cannot, and must not, exceed the boundaries of the truth.

Paul has elaborated on the various aspects of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22): the fruit is borne with the power of the Spirit. We know that the Spirit is the truth and the truth is the Spirit (cf. Jn 6:63) because the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:17; 16:13). Therefore, the divine attributes of the Spirit's fruit cannot be separated from the truth. One is able to exercise self-control by the work of the Spirit, simply because he has been taught in the truth, and will not blatantly go against the commands of the Lord.

When Paul listed the works of the flesh, which defy those of the Spirit (Gal 5:17, 19–21), he included "heresies" (the last element stated in verse 20). Heresies directly contradict the work of the Spirit, which is outlined by the truth. The conclusion is indisputable: he who preaches falsehood or tampers with the truth does not have the fruit of the Holy Spirit. When Jude warned of the infiltration of heresies into the church, he unreservedly stated that those who divide the church do not have the Spirit (Jude 19).

The Spirit's fruit contains three key elements: "the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth" (Eph 5:9). "Goodness" refers to the essence of God, as only God is good (Ps 34:8; Nah 1:7; Mt 19:17). It sums up the virtues that Jesus has shown on the cross. "Righteousness" is used as a contrast to sin (1 Jn 3:7f). Every manifestation of righteousness, or portion of work for God, must have nothing to do with the work of the flesh and sin. "Truth" is the standard of Christian practice. Furthermore, it is the foundation of the church.

With this overview of the Spirit's fruit, we can see that the work of false teachers goes against the very essence of the Holy Spirit. In evilness, they divide. But in God's goodness, Jesus unites all who believe in Him. To

”To reach maturity, the state of bearing abundant fruit, we must accept constant correction.

achieve their goals, false teachers seek to eliminate the unity within the church, using every perverse means possible. But, through righteous means, by dying for all, the Lord saves from perversion those who believe in Him. With falsehood, the false teachers infiltrate the church to lure believers away from the path of God. In truth, Jesus leads man to God for salvation. The apostates destroy the good works of the church, but Jesus instructs that the fruits must remain.

THE HARMFUL EFFECT OF FALSEHOOD

Jesus prophesied there would be an unprecedented rise in the number of false teachers spreading falsehood before His second coming (Mt 24:5, 11, 24). This is because Satan knows that his days are limited (Rev 12:12, 17). Satan creates confusion in the church and blinds the spiritual eyesight of believers, to distract them from following the right path of salvation. In most cases, the falsehood is promoted in a way that is difficult to distinguish from the correct gospel.

The gospel is the power of God that transforms the nature of believers. When the true gospel is blended with falsehood, our God-given nature will turn corrupt. It becomes impossible for us to have good and godly behavior. The reason is simple: upholding the truth (the correct gospel) ensures the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in our life. When the truth is deserted, the Spirit of truth will not work in us, but the spirit of error will. Our fruits will not remain; and more crucially, we shall be deprived of the capacity to bear fruit.

There are three aspects to the fruit of light, or the Spirit, namely goodness, righteousness, and truth (Eph 5:9). These three qualities are inseparable. Together they form the essence of good fruit. From Paul's arrangement of the three qualities, the truth is the foundation for bearing

fruit. When the truth is replaced with falsehood, we can no longer live righteously before God. Our life is, in effect, far from the governing authority of the truth. Our deeds can never be right before the Lord—we can no longer bear good fruit.

Straying from God's righteous principle has only one consequence: the good that we have cultivated in the truth of God will gradually fade away. Thereafter, what comes out from us is nothing but evil. Any goodness we show is done in pretence, with a view to deceive. We are no longer capable of doing good works. Every simple deed has evil at its source (cf. Lk 6:45). Surely, these are not good fruits but bad ones, which go against the very nature of God.

CONCLUSION

A real Christian bears fruit (Jn 15:1–9; Gal 5:22–24; Eph 5:8–11). However, if he is “diseased,” his capacity to bear fruit will diminish. This is like a diseased fruit tree, whose fruit withers and drops prematurely. The consequences can be doubly severe when a Christian is confused by falsehood, since he leaves the foundation of the truth in exchange for an aberration. This, in effect, renders a person incapable of good behavior, since the absence of truth in his life has also caused God to depart from him.

The harm caused by false prophets can be devastating. The church is therefore tasked to teach her believers not to fall into any deceptive traps. These apostates have barren lives, when they should be fruitful. They are like the barren fig tree (Lk 13:6–9). By their fruit we will recognize them (Mt 7:20). They feign goodness, but their good deeds cannot pass the test of goodness, righteousness and truth, the constituents of the fruit of light. By the truth, their deception shall be fully exposed. ★





The Dwelling Place Where God Has Chosen to Establish His Name (I)

KC Tsai—Toronto, Canada

The Israelites reached the plains of Moab, east of River Jordan, on the first day of the eleventh month of the fortieth year after they had departed from Egypt (Deut 1:3). They had arrived at the threshold of the promised land. Around 70 days later, on the tenth day of the first month, they would cross the river to reach Canaan (Josh 4:19). Moses knew that he was nearing the end of his life, and would not be able to cross into the land with them (Deut 3:23–27). The people would obtain the promised land of God under the leadership of Joshua.

Faced with a multitude—the number of men alone was about 600,000 (Num 26:51)—who had followed him on the long journey through the wilderness, Moses inevitably had many instructions for them. But where was he to begin? He was an old man of 120 years old.

What words should he leave this young multitude at such a crucial moment? Moses chose to reiterate the laws of God (Deut 1:5), earnestly and repeatedly exhorting God's people. After all, they were about to enter a new land—a land in which they would settle and leave behind the tent-dwelling, nomadic life.

The nations of Canaan had pagan traditions and idol worshipping practices that were worse—and more evil—than those of Egypt (Deut 18:9–13). These were challenges to the faith of the Israelites, who would be allocated throughout the land of Canaan, with two and half tribes residing east of River Jordan. If they were to live among these nations, how would they avoid adopting and assimilating pagan customs into their own culture? Would they be able to uphold their faith like they did in the isolation of the wilderness? Naturally,

Moses was worried. Against the backdrop of integration with the Gentile nations, the passing down of the Israelite faith from generation to generation would have seemed like a mammoth challenge.

For this reason, Moses reminded the people of the laws and ordinances that they were to observe in the land God had given them, and he instructed them of these:

1. *"These are the statutes and judgments which you shall be careful to observe in the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth. You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place. You shall not worship the LORD your God with such things."*

(Deut 12:1–4)

“One needs to examine oneself according to God's yardstick. What man deems to be right may not necessarily fulfill the moral requirements of God. For this reason, Moses warned the people not to act according to what is right in their own eyes.

2. *"You shall not at all do as we are doing here today—every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes... Observe and obey all these words which I [Moses] command you, that it may go well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God."*
(Deut 12:8, 28)

3. *"But you shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go... Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see; but in the place which the LORD chooses, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I [Moses] command you."*
(Deut 12:5a, 13–14)

Unfortunately, after the people entered Canaan, they did not obey Moses' commands to drive out all the inhabitants (Judg 1:19–35). Hence, the Canaanites, along with the way they worshipped their gods, remained in the land. These Canaanites and their practices became the thorns which hindered the Israelites from keeping the pure faith, as Joshua forewarned: "[T]hey shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the LORD your God has given you" (Josh 23:13b). Sadly, not only did they confuse the Israelites' faith in the one true God, they eventually became the key cause for the fall of the nation.



Teaching 1: Doing What Is Right in Your Own Eyes

In the absence of God's words, today's moral standards promote the idea of "every person doing what is right in their own eyes" as the pinnacle of human society. The rationale is that if everyone acts according to their own conscience, evil and anti-social acts will reduce. However, in the kingdom of God—where we have God's guidance—conduct based on one's conscience alone is insufficient. One needs to examine oneself according to God's yardstick. What man deems to be right may not necessarily fulfill the moral requirements of God. For this reason, Moses warned the people not to act according to what is right in their own eyes.

After they entered Canaan, the Israelites did not act as Moses instructed—instead of wholeheartedly learning and practising what was right in the eyes of God, every man did whatever was right in his own eyes. They forsook God's principles, established in accordance with the law. This affected the substance of their faith, their attitude in service, as well as the relationship between the tribes.

The Book of Judges records the history of the twelve judges established by God for His people, in the generations following Joshua's death. It also recounts how the people's faith fluctuated over a 400-year timespan (Acts 13:20), and how they were almost blind in their

knowledge of God. God was their King (1 Sam 12:12), but the Bible repeatedly states, "In those days there was no king in Israel..."¹ By establishing His tabernacle at Shiloh, God wanted them to come before Him and be subject to His sovereignty, but they did not do so. Since they were unable to acknowledge God as their King, they judged and made decisions based on their own standard, and the Book of Judges concludes with the phrase: "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg 21:25). This is exactly what Moses had warned them against before his passing.

It is no easy task for the church to uphold the principles of biblical truth amidst a sea of diverse philosophies and declining moral values. This is why the church needs to cleanse herself continuously with the word of God and be sanctified by the truth (Eph 5:26; Jn 17:14–19). Then, she will be able to view worldly conventions in accordance with biblical truths. When it comes to evangelism and pastoral work, the church should not rely on worldly wisdom, in thoughts, words, or

¹ Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25.

Teaching 2: In the World, But Not Of the World

Entering the world and living with its people will, more often than not, weaken one's determination to uphold the words of God, leading one to assimilate and adopt worldly practices. However, the true church of salvation is not isolated from the world. Rather, she participates in society as the light and salt of the world, acting out of love to care for the souls of the world, and guiding them to receive grace.



actions (1 Cor 2:6). Instead, she is to adopt spiritual foresight, and with her consecrated believers, strive after heavenly wisdom in one accord (Jas 3:17–18). Only then can the church overcome the corruptions of the world, belong to the Lord Jesus and become His glorious true church.

I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.
(Jn 17:15–17)

Here, the Lord Jesus said that His disciples—and by extension, His church—are not of the world, just as He is not. The Lord does not take them out of the world, but He promises that He will protect them from evil. If the church wishes to

preserve the believers from evil, sermons spoken on the pulpit should not only focus on affectionate love (Greek, *phileo*), and in the process, compromising the truth with worldly values. On the contrary, she should emphasize the upholding and teaching of the truth, so as to guide people on the correct path of salvation. She should all the more abide by the new commandment of the Lord—to love others out of concern for the salvation of their souls (Greek, *agape*). This is a higher level of love, for it bears responsibility for the salvation of man, according to the truth.

Only when the church can practise this higher level of love—bearing responsibility for the salvation of man—can she truly become the true church described in the Bible. Believers will not lead their own lives of faith as they deem fit, neither will they make

decisions based on personal sentiments and preferences. Rather, they will seek to do what is good and right in the sight of God, striving to abide by His words.

THE CHOICE IS GOD'S

"But you shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go... Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see; but in the place which the LORD chooses, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you." (Deut 12:5, 13–14)

Through His laws, God not only taught the people how to worship and serve Him, He also specified where they were to do so. They did not have the freedom to choose where to offer sacrifices to Him—it was God's choice. He chose a place in which to establish His name, a place where He would dwell with His people.

“It is no easy task for the church to uphold the principles of biblical truth amidst a sea of diverse philosophies and declining moral values. This is why the church needs to cleanse herself continuously with the word of God and be sanctified by the truth.”

Teaching 3: Finding the One Church Where God's Spirit Abides

There is a plethora of churches and denominations in the world today. Many Christians believe that it does not matter which church they attend, since all churches preach Jesus. Hence, they tend to choose a church close to home, or where the members are warm and friendly. But when one is seeking Jesus, the key consideration should be whether that church is the dwelling place of God—where He abides through the Holy Spirit, and has chosen to establish His name. This is what God clearly stated in the Book of Deuteronomy—that His people were to offer burnt offerings only in the place He has chosen, where His name is, where His Spirit abides.

After the Israelites entered Canaan, they were distributed throughout the land. It became necessary for the teaching of the faith to be centralized, and consistent in content, so that the knowledge of God would not decline. Hence, God chose a place in which to establish His name, where the people would gather during festivals to offer sacrifices and learn to always fear the Lord God (Deut 14:23).

Teaching 4: The Common Faith

The true church today, although scattered across the surface of the earth, should share in the same faith. When the faith is passed down, all instructions must adhere completely and consistently to the truth. We should not select the substance and method of our worship according to personal preference. Even though the church of God is located in many countries, the believers must serve God with a common faith (Tit 1:4).

The instructions on offerings and worship that Moses delivered to the people before they crossed River Jordan offer us direction for our own service to God. There are many Christian faiths throughout the world which preach Jesus, but they differ in their beliefs. For instance, some view the observing of the Sabbath as part of Mosaic Law, and thus unnecessary to keep under the new covenant. But, in fact, the Sabbath was established before God's proclamation of the Ten Commandments through Moses, and even before His covenant with Abraham (Gen 2:1–3). The Lord Jesus Himself said that the Sabbath was made for man (Mk 2:27). Since it was made for man, how can man ignore the Sabbath? As the consequence of Adam's sin, the ground was cursed. God said: "Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life...In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread." Man was doomed to toil all the days of his life. However, God had established the Sabbath on every seventh day before man had sinned, so that man could enjoy a day of rest on every seventh day (Gen 3:17–19). Hence, the Sabbath was made for man. Before the Old Testament laws, God had already commanded and disciplined His people to observe and enjoy the Sabbath Day, through the matter of manna collection (Ex 16:23–30). This was a perpetual covenant and everlasting sign between God and His people (Ex 31:12–17), and also the prophecy of Prophet Isaiah. According to Isaiah, this was a covenant that the true church in the last days, comprising many Gentiles who would come to believe in the Lord, must abide by (Isa 56:6–8).

Another example is baptism. Many Christian denominations baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as Jesus stated to His disciples before His ascension. However, the disciples knew that the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is "Jesus." Hence, the Acts of the Apostles records how they were sent forth by the Holy Spirit to baptize men, and each baptism was carried out in the name of Jesus.² Man can only receive forgiveness and salvation under the name of Jesus.³ Therefore, the true church of salvation must carry out baptism in Jesus' name, just like the apostolic church.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Eph 4:4–6)

The church is Christ's body (Eph 1:23), of which there is only one—the saved true church, chosen by God. This is the place that God establishes His name, where His Spirit dwells. The members of this church share a common faith (Tit 1:4), which includes one type of baptism, in accordance with the Bible.

² Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5.

³ Acts 10:43; 22:16; 4:12.

SHILOH CHOSEN

Under God's guidance, Joshua led the people to capture the cities of Canaan, bringing the land under subjugation. After this, the entire congregation gathered at Shiloh, where the tabernacle of meeting was erected (Josh 18:1). It was here, before the ark of covenant, that God met with and spoke to His servants (Ex 29:42; Num 17:4). At this time, God had chosen Shiloh to be the center of worship for His people—the dwelling

place God had chosen to bear His name. It was also the nation's administrative center, where people cast lots for their inheritance (Josh 19:51). This was where the festivals of God would be observed annually (Judg 21:19), and where sacrifices would be offered.

Following the death of Joshua, throughout the 400-plus-year period of the Judges (Acts 13:20), until the era of Eli the priest, the people continued to journey to Shiloh each

year to offer sacrifices to the Lord of Hosts. This was where Samuel's father travelled to annually to offer sacrifices, and where his mother made a vow to offer her son to God to become a Nazirite all his life (1 Sam 1:3, 11).

Although Shiloh was the center of Israelite faith, it did not play a leading role in the spiritual life of the people. During the period of the Judges, the people were influenced by pagan practices and customs, causing their faith to go through cycles of corruption

and revival. When Eli became high priest, and his two sons Hophni and Phinehas served as priests in the tabernacle of meeting, the people faced an even greater crisis of faith. Instead of serving in purity, Eli's sons became corrupt—they did not know God and carried out deeds of blasphemy before the altar (1 Sam 2:12–22).

SHILOH FORSAKEN

The servants of God did not have God in their hearts, so Shiloh lost its spiritual and symbolic significance. It was a spiritual center in name only, for God was no longer willing to abide there. As stated in the psalm of Asaph:

“The servants of God did not have God in their hearts, so Shiloh lost its spiritual and symbolic significance. It was a spiritual center in name only, for God was no longer willing to abide there.

“He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent He had placed among men, and delivered His strength into captivity, and His glory into the enemy's hand” (Ps 78:60–61). This refers to the time when the Israelites took the ark of God into battle with the Philistines, where they were defeated, and the ark captured. At the same time, Hophni and Phinehas died on the battlefield. When their father heard that the ark of God had been captured by the Philistines, he fell backward off his chair—symbolically falling from his position as high priest—and died (1 Sam 4:11, 18). With these events, God drew a line—He had completely forsaken His dwelling place in Shiloh (Jer 7:12–15).

When the Philistines possessed the ark of God, many calamities fell on them; they had no choice but to send it back to Israel. The people of Kirjath Jearim took the ark and placed it in the house of Abinadab on the hill, and consecrated his son Eleazar to keep it (1 Sam 7:1). It was here that the ark remained quietly throughout the era of Samuel and Saul. After forty years, when David ascended the throne to

become the king of Israel and Judah, he remembered the ark of God. But it was after many setbacks that David finally managed to bring the ark into the city of David, the stronghold of Zion.

COMPARISONS WITH THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

After the ascent of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit descended to establish the apostolic church. While the apostles were still on earth, the church was continuously cleansed by the salvation truth, as taught by the Lord Jesus, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As such, she remained holy and dwelled under the loving grace of God. And,

He did during the Old Testament period, moving men to serve God.⁵ But He did not abide with men, until God poured down His Holy Spirit once again to establish the true church in the last days (Isa 2:2–3; Hos 6:1–3).

To be continued... ★

4 1 Timothy 1:3; 4:1; 6:3; 2 Timothy 3:8; Titus 1:10–14; 2 John 7–11.

5 Numbers 24:2; Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 14:19; 1 Samuel 10:10; 16:13; 1 Chronicles 12:18; Luke 1:67.

just as the Lord promised, she preached the truth throughout the Gentile lands (Acts 1:8).

However, from the apostolic epistles, we see that in the latter stages of the apostolic era, towards the end of the first century, heresies began to erode the church's foundation of the truth.⁴ The church also became increasingly secularized (2 Tim 4:3–4). Following the passing of the apostles, at the beginning of the second century, the Holy Spirit gradually departed from the church. The church began to compromise on the salvation truth and to concede to heresies; she no longer upheld the pattern of sound words which she had received from the beginning (2 Tim 1:13–14). After the middle of the second century, records of praying for the Holy Spirit, and the downpour of the Holy Spirit, became rare. God eventually left the tabernacle that He established among man, just as He once departed from Shiloh.

During the period after the apostolic church and before the revival of the true church in the last days, the Holy Spirit might have come upon men as



What Happened to Samson?

Jachin—Singapore

INTRODUCTION

Samson is often called “the strongest man to have ever lived.” He was a man born for greatness, but as we know, his life was defined by failure rather than victory. Where did he go wrong? Let us take a look at three parts of his story: his birth, his downfall, and his redeeming final moment of faith.

SAMSON’S BIRTH

Background

The story of Samson is recorded in the Book of Judges. During Israel’s early history, the judges did not sit in a court of law. They led the Israelites into war against their oppressors and, for judges such as Deborah, settled disputes as a mediator between two parties. However, Samson did neither of these things.

Samson was a very different judge, and his life story is unique. Not only is he the twelfth and final judge recorded in the Book of Judges, his story (recorded in chapters 13 to 16) is also given more space than any other judge. Most pertinently, he was specially chosen by God before his birth to deliver the Israelites.

“Even though Samson was to be consecrated his entire life, he failed to adopt the Nazirite lifestyle. He would, instead, pursue the pleasures of the flesh.”

The Birth of Samson

Samson’s birth was a miracle. Manoah’s wife was infertile, but the Angel of the Lord appeared to her and announced the birth of Samson, as well as the manner of his life (Judg 13:2–5). He would be a Nazirite from birth, and his hair was to remain uncut.

Numbers 6:1–21 describes the Nazirite vow in detail. It could be taken by any Israelite man or woman for a predetermined amount of time. During the period of the vow, a Nazirite was forbidden to cut his hair, drink wine, and to have anything to do with the grapevine, from the seed to the skin. A Nazirite was not allowed to touch a dead body—if he did, he would have to purify himself and re-start the period of his vow. These processes might seem troublesome on first reading, but that is the exact purpose of the Nazirite vow. God wanted the Israelites to learn total and absolute consecration to Him.

The Angel who foretold Samson’s

birth repeated God’s instructions from Numbers 6, but with two important differences. First, Manoah’s wife was to also abstain from unclean foods (Judg 13:4). This instruction was given explicitly because Israel had fallen into such a bad state that eating unclean food was deemed socially acceptable. Second, unlike a normal Nazirite vow, Samson’s Nazirite status was to last a lifetime.

Even though Samson was to be consecrated his entire life, he failed to adopt the Nazirite lifestyle. He would, instead, pursue the pleasures of the flesh.

Were Manoah and His Wife Godly Parents?

We may wonder why Samson failed to live out his Nazirite status—perhaps his parents were ungodly and failed to raise him according to God’s instructions. But Judges 13:8 tells us otherwise. Manoah was absent when the Angel appeared to his wife, so he prayed to God to re-send the Angel to

teach them how to raise the child. He asked, “What will be the boy’s rule of life, and his work?” (Judg 13:12b). We see that this couple cared how Samson was to be raised. How many of us would actually pray to God asking what we should do for our child, or what our child’s rule of life will be?

The time of the judges was a dark age for Israel, as they had fallen into the vicious cycle of sin. Whenever the people’s lives became comfortable, they would turn to sin and idolatry. God would then punish them, prompting them to call out to Him. Each time, God would deliver them from their oppressors, only for them to sin again. Samson was born during another of these sinful periods, for “[a]gain the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD” (Judg 13:1a).

Furthermore, Manoah belonged to the tribe of Dan, a tribe that stands out as one of the least faithful to God. Judges 1 records that many Israelite tribes failed to drive out the Canaanites from the land, as God had commanded. But the Danites fared worse than the rest—they themselves were driven back into the mountains by the Amorites (Judg 1:34). Another incident is recorded in Judges 18, where the Danites took the idols of Micah’s house and worshipped them as if they were the Lord God of Israel.

In the midst of Israel’s spiritual depravity, the Danites proved to be the weakest in faith. Yet, here is a Danite couple who was intent on going against the grain. Manoah prayed to the Lord, enquired about how to raise the boy, and, with his wife, offered a young goat with the grain offering to the Lord (Judg 13:8, 12, 19). If we consider the godless times in which Samson’s parents lived, and the fact that they had every intention to raise the child according to the Angel’s instructions, we can infer that they were, indeed, godly parents.

God’s Blessings and Abidance

Not only was Samson born into a godly household, God was also with him as he grew up: “So the woman bore a son and called his name

“Sin is like the lion’s carcass that defiles, but it also has its moments of pleasure, like the taste of honey. This represents Samson’s fatal flaw: he would always choose to eat sweet honey over preserving his holiness. Throughout his life, he did not concern himself with keeping to the restrictions of the Nazirite vow. In fact, he never chose to be a Nazirite, it was forced upon him from birth. He was a Nazirite by name, but not in spirit.”

Samson; and the child grew, and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to move upon him at Mahaneh Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol” (Judg 13:24–25; emphasis added). God was with Samson so that he could consecrate and dedicate his life as a Nazirite for the work of God, to fulfill his calling.

At this point of the story, Samson was a man whose birth had been twice announced by the Angel, he was consecrated by God as a Nazirite from his mother’s womb, brought up by godly parents, and blessed by God’s movement. Could a servant of God have asked for more? In fact, the root word for the name Samson means “sun,” which is apt for a man who was to shine as bright as the sun, and had all he needed to accomplish this. But why did he fail so spectacularly?

SAMSON’S DOWNFALL

As Samson’s story unfolds, we see a man dedicated not to his calling, but to satisfying his flesh. One example of this is when he attempted to marry a Philistine woman in Timnah.

In Judges 14:1–4, Samson told his father, “I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife.” Of course, Samson’s godly parents objected to his demands, but their objections fell on deaf ears. Samson was adamant: “Get her for me, for she pleases me well.” The New Living Translation¹ translates this as, “Get her for me! She looks good to me.” When Samson later spoke to her, again, he was well pleased (Judg 14:7).

Samson was clearly a man of the flesh. It did not matter that God had

forbidden the Israelites from marrying the Canaanites (Deut 7:3–4). Worse still, his consecration as a Nazirite meant nothing to him. Samson saw what he liked and took it. He did whatever was good in his own eyes—the same pair of eyes that would be gouged out at the end of his story.

Honey in the Lion’s Carcass

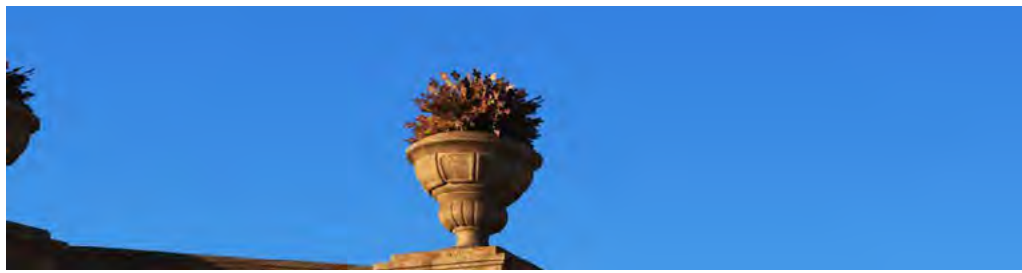
On the journey down to Timnah, a young lion attacked Samson out of nowhere (Judg 14:4–6). Of course, Samson would not be deterred, and God’s word that he would eventually deliver the Israelites would surely come to pass. The Spirit of God came upon Samson and, for the first time, we read of his incredible strength—he tore the lion from limb to limb. He then rejoined his parents as if nothing had happened.

Some time later, he returned to see what had happened to the lion’s carcass, perhaps to admire his own handiwork (Judg 14:8–9). He found a bee nest inside the carcass, and took some honey to eat. He then gave some to his parents without informing them where it had come from.

Now, let us remind ourselves that the Israelites were forbidden from eating anything unclean. The lion was an unclean animal, and anyone who touched the carcass of an unclean animal would be defiled (Lev 11:24–28). An unclean animal could not defile an Israelite while it was still alive, but when it died, whatever came in contact with it would also become unclean (Judg 11:32). Hence, the honey from the lion’s carcass was unclean. Samson not only defiled himself, but his parents too. Worse, Samson and his mother had been explicitly prohibited by God from

eating anything unclean. But Samson did not consider any of these things. The sweetness of the honey outweighed the fact that he would be defiled by the carcass.

The image of the honey in the lion's carcass neatly encapsulates the phrase "the passing pleasures of sin" (Heb 11:25). Sin is like the lion's carcass that defiles, but it also has its moments of pleasure, like the taste of honey. This represents Samson's fatal flaw: he would always choose to eat sweet honey over preserving his holiness. Throughout his life, he did not concern himself with keeping to the restrictions of the Nazirite vow. In fact, he never chose to be a Nazirite, it was forced upon him from birth. He was a Nazirite by name, but not in spirit.



his literary gift to compose psalms to praise God, Samson used his gift for his own ends. He posed the riddle to the Philistines to win himself thirty sets of clothing. And he composed the poem not to praise God for giving him a miraculous victory, but to glorify himself for killing a thousand men with only a donkey's jawbone.

and had to pay up. He set the Philistines' fields on fire because his father-in-law had given his wife to his best man. He killed yet more Philistines because they had burned his wife and her father. Everything he did was based on the flesh and on impulse. In fact, he had every intention of marrying the Philistine woman, but God would not allow him to consummate the marriage. As a result, Samson grew angry, and Samson killed. Through this, Samson delivered the Israelites and fulfilled the will of God.

With regards to sexual sin, some believers go to the edge without thinking of the consequences. It is only after they have indulged their flesh that they ask, "Is this a mortal sin?" Unfortunately, some go so close to the edge that they inadvertently fall off.

Samson's Literary Gift

Although Samson was immensely blessed by God, he only used God's gifts to satisfy his own desires. In fact, Samson was not only blessed with brute strength, but also with a gift for words. He posed this riddle to the Philistines: "Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet" (Judg 14:14). Clearly, Samson had the brains and the brawn. Later, he composed another poem on the spot after killing a thousand Philistines:

*"With the jawbone of a donkey,
Heaps upon heaps,
With the jawbone of a donkey
I have slain a thousand men!"*
(Judg 15:16)

What is poignant here is that God blessed Samson with such potential. Samson could have been a much greater man—perhaps even a precursor to David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel. But unlike David, who used

Did God Cause Samson to Fall in Love with the Philistine Woman?

When the Bible describes Samson's desire to marry the Philistine woman, it adds: "But his father and mother did not know that it was of the LORD—that He was seeking an occasion to move against the Philistines" (Judg 14:4). Hence, one might ask, is this entire incident from God? Actually, we have to understand that God did not approve of Samson's actions. Rather, God was using Samson's freely made decisions to fulfill His will.

Indeed, God had told Manoah's wife that Samson would deliver the Israelites. However, Samson was not like Moses, who was moved to deliver the Israelites when he saw them suffering. Samson simply acted on his desires impulsively. He wanted to marry the Philistine woman because he was attracted to her. He posed the riddle because he wanted thirty sets of clothing for free. He killed thirty Philistines in Ashkelon because he was angry that he had lost the wager

The Spiritual Decline of Samson

From a spiritual viewpoint, Samson had complete disregard for the word of God. Throughout his life, he only pursued Philistine women, those whom God had expressly forbidden the Israelites from marrying. In Timnah, Samson was unwilling to marry any Israelite, but was adamant on marrying a Philistine woman just because she "looked good" to him. Later, he saw a prostitute in Gaza and paid to sleep with her (Judg 16:1). Finally, he fell in love with Delilah, and lived with her out of wedlock. Samson had no qualms with defiling his body, whether it was paying a prostitute or cohabiting with Delilah, to satisfy his fleshly desires. This failure to resist the honey in the lion's carcass ultimately led to his demise.

As far as his Nazirite status was concerned, Samson violated one restriction after another with wanton disregard. He ate unclean food—the honey from the lion's carcass. He also threw a wedding feast at Timnah, where it is likely that he drank wine (in Hebrew, the root word for "feast" is, literally, "drink.") Now, the only Nazirite restriction left unbroken was



the prohibited cutting of hair. And this is the area where he played dangerously close to the edge.

Going to the Edge

In Judges 16, we read that the Philistines paid Delilah to seduce Samson. Indeed, she asked him directly about the source of his power, saying, “Please tell me where your great strength lies, and with what you may be bound to afflict you” (Judg 16:6). Samson must have realized what Delilah was doing, because each time he disclosed his supposed weakness, she would use it to try to subdue him and allow the Philistines to attack. And yet, Samson was not concerned; he continued to play with fire by engaging with Delilah’s game. He did not realize that he was drawing closer and closer to the edge. First he said “bind me with seven fresh bowstrings” (Judg 16:7); then, “bind me securely with new ropes” (v. 11); then, “weave the seven locks of my head into the web of the loom” (v. 13). He finally caved in and confessed, “If I am shaven, then my strength will leave me” (v. 17). This was the straw that broke the camel’s back. When the Philistines attacked, Samson did not realize that he was powerless, and that God had already departed from him (v. 20).

It is just as the proverb warns: “Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?” (Prov 6:27) When it comes to sin, man likes to play with fire. We like to go to the edge and test the boundaries, thinking that we can always turn back in time.

With regards to sexual sin, some believers go to the edge without thinking of the consequences. It is only after they have indulged their flesh that they ask, “Is this a mortal

sin?” Unfortunately, some go so close to the edge that they inadvertently fall off. They realize, too late, that the Lord has already departed from them. This is what happened to Samson—he lived his life so close to the edge that he fell off, and the Lord departed from him.

THE SILVER LINING IN SAMSON’S LIFE

Finally, we come to the last part of Samson’s life—the silver lining of his story. His sins had finally caught up with him, and the very eyes he had lived to satisfy had been blinded by his enemies. He had used God’s strength for his own purposes, and now he had to use his own strength to work as a grinder in prison. He had always gratified his flesh and its desires, but now he had to indulge the desires of the Philistines by performing for them. Yet, Samson was like the man Jesus healed, who said, “[T]hough I was blind, now I see” (Jn 9:25b). Samson’s physical eyes were blind, but his spiritual sight was finally clear.

When the author of Hebrews lists down the Old Testament heroes of faith, Samson is included (Heb 11:32). Some find it puzzling that Samson is mentioned, while others explain it away by saying that he demonstrated *some* faith throughout his life. But let us not forget, Samson was able to achieve his final victory only because God answered his prayer. Samson called out: “O Lord God, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one blow take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes” (Judg 16:28). As Isaiah says, it is our iniquities that separate us from God (Isa 59:2). Samson’s sins had alienated him from

God. Would God have answered his final prayer if Samson had not truly repented?

The same God who had left Samson in the Valley of Sorek would again strengthen him, one last time. With one push, Samson brought down the temple of Dagon and killed 3,000 Philistines, including many prominent leaders. This victory was to be Samson’s greatest, but it was also his last. He died along with the Philistines. And after a lifetime of living with the Philistines, Samson was brought back to his own people to be buried in his father’s tomb (Judg 16:31).

Samson’s end reveals to us the power of God’s forgiveness. The greatest victory lies in overcoming our past sins, and repenting with a broken and contrite heart (Ps 51:17). For this is when God hears and answers our prayer.

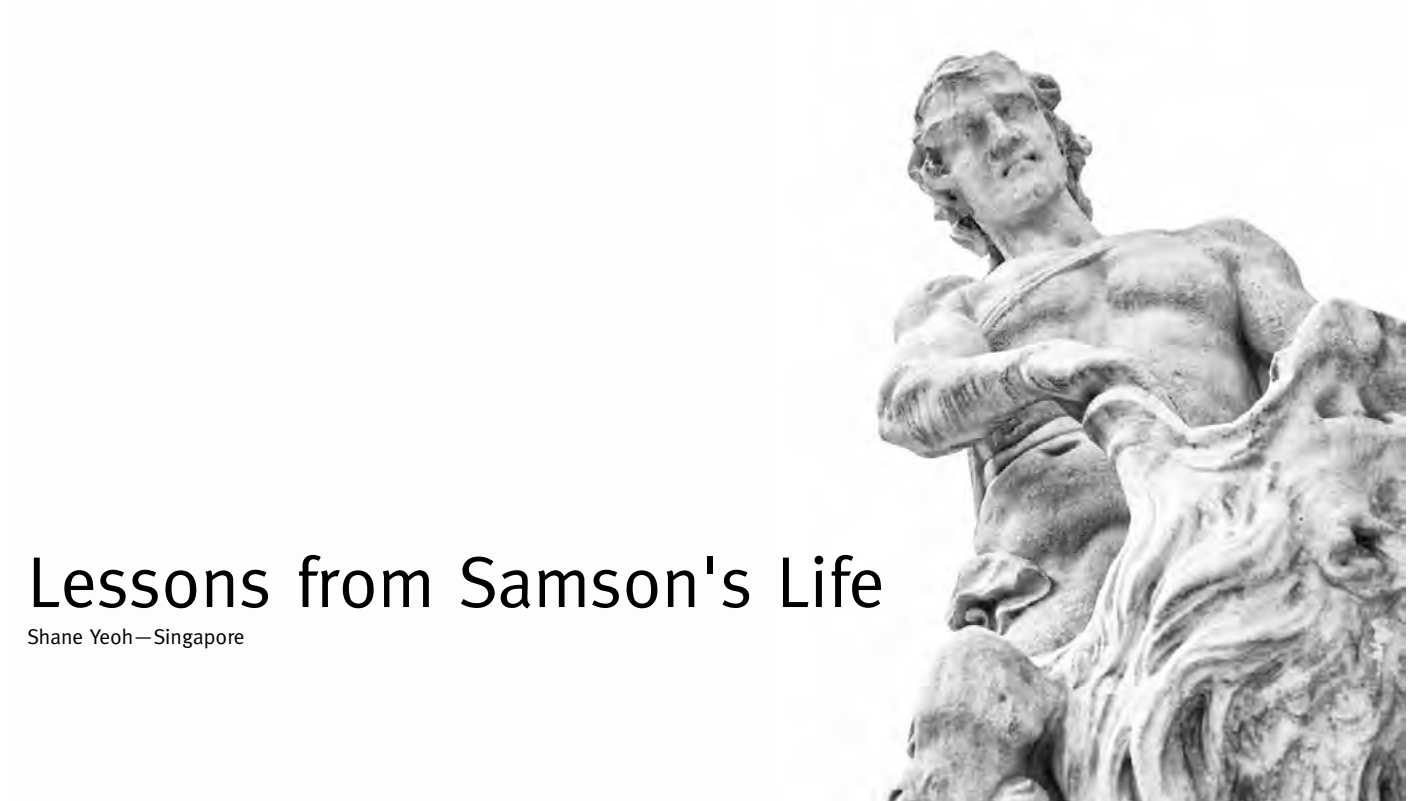
CONCLUSION

Samson is like the worker who “will be saved, yet as through fire” (1 Cor 3:15b). The conclusion of Samson’s story is tinged with sadness. We see his unfulfilled potential, like so many athletes who show brilliant talent in their youth, but indulge in the party lifestyle and fizzle out before their prime.

Samson was a man who simply indulged his flesh, used God’s gifts for himself, and trampled his Nazirite calling. He could have accomplished so much for God, but his life ended with many regrets and what-ifs. He failed to live up to his name; he failed to shine as bright as the sun.

The question for us to ponder is: What about us? Will our Christian life be one of regrets and tragic waste? Let us learn from Samson’s mistakes and seek to fulfill our potential. If we embrace our calling and use our gifts to shine for God, then we can do mighty and victorious works for Him. ★

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Lessons from Samson's Life

Shane Yeoh—Singapore

The story of Samson is one of paradoxes and contrasts. It is the simple story of a man who hopes for greatness, and in whom great hope is placed. Yet he consistently disappoints, just as he is himself disappointed. Importantly, however, within these paradoxes lies the clear answer to a notoriously difficult question: What does God want from me?

The answer can be summed up in several key lessons from the life of the lion-slaying, jawbone-swinging judge of Israel. And it is one that is especially pertinent to Christians in the True Jesus Church (TJC) today.

SPECIALLY CHOSEN OR CHOSEN TO BE SPECIAL?

The first paradox in the Samson saga lies in the circumstances of his birth. Through it we see the crucial difference between being specially chosen and being chosen to be special. Acknowledging the potential gulf between these two ideas leads to a better understanding of what it means to be a TJC Christian.

Samson's birth was an intensely cinematic affair. In the Bible, God (or His messengers) rarely visited unsuspecting parents-to-be to inform

“Samson's tragedy teaches us that our consecration does not guarantee a life of walking with God, it merely permits it. It remains our imperative duty to continue to “work out our salvation” with diligence and loyalty to Christian principles. We cannot take our election for granted—too much is at stake.

them of a child's imminent birth. But when such a visit did happen, these children would go on to do great things and eventually be immortalized in the pages of the Bible as spiritual heroes. Examples which come to mind are Isaac and Jesus Christ. On this basis, the Angel's visitation of Manoah and his wife immediately placed Samson within the ranks of the great workers of God. Furthermore, the divine demands of strict sanctity imposed on both Samson and his mother affirm our suspicions that God had incredible plans for Samson's future.

Great things were expected of this child.

It is here that the paradox surfaces. While Samson's birth and childhood were closely supervised by both God and his parents to ensure that this chosen child would realize his Nazirite

destiny, to be pure and mighty before God, Samson's adult life was everything his birth was not. As seen in the previous character study, Samson was, through and through, a worldly man driven by impulse and vice.

What are we to make of this?

First, our calling does not guarantee our salvation. The phrase “born into the church” is common TJC parlance, articulating a widely shared experience of having been baptized as an infant and subsequently raised as a church-going Christian. For many of us, we did not find the church, the church *found us*. All we had to do was follow the lead of our parents and guardians. Even those who came to Christ later in their adult lives may have experienced being nudged to embrace the truth when they had not been diligently seeking a god to believe in.

They, too, feel that God had *found them*. Those in this category enjoy the Samsonic privilege of having God's calling thrust upon us—without merit, without effort. However, Samson's tragedy teaches us that our consecration does not guarantee a life of walking with God, it merely permits it. It remains our imperative duty to continue to “work out our salvation” (Phil 2:12) with diligence and loyalty to Christian principles. We cannot take our election for granted—too much is at stake.

Secondly, raising the youth of our church requires vigilance and effort from the entire church. Manoah and his wife could have easily yielded to the apostasy and degeneration of the Israel they knew. But Samson's parents remembered the God of their fathers. They were incredibly attentive to the instructions of the Angel, displaying no doubt, challenging no order. Samson's time—when walking according to God's way seemed futile and outdated—is no different from the time in which we now live. The church, the religious education teachers, and the family must thus work together to secure the child's election and calling. Every child of God is precious. We must take our consecration as seriously as God does.

darkness, and the salt of the earth (Mt 5:13–15). Samson's failure resulted from his conviction that he was a “specially chosen” and invincible Hercules, destined to take everything he wanted with his strength. But in reality, he was “chosen to be special”—a son of God destined to save others with God's strength. Our election is not a convenience, but a commission to bless the lives of those around us for as long as we are able to work.

THE FOLLY OF THE POWERFUL

Samson's adventures also teach us about using our talents for God.

Firstly, we can only achieve true and lasting happiness if we offer our talents in service to the Lord, instead of scheming to use our gifts to buy ourselves fleeting moments of bliss.

This is the second paradox: Samson the polymath wore many hats—strongman, sage and poet, among others. How did a man of unequalled strength, quick wit, literary creativity, and boundless courage end up leading a life plagued by disappointment, loneliness, and despair?

It was because Samson the Nazirite—a man dedicated to God from birth—was more dedicated to pleasing himself. Every time he made

of our talents for divine service. On honest introspection, it is often the case that God can have what is left over when all is said and done. We still harbor the happy delusion that we can safely navigate between the kingdom of God and Satan's domain, and have the best of both worlds.

Paul punctures this delusion in his letter to the Ephesians, declaring, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). To attain a true sense of fulfillment and joy, we must not solely invest divinely conferred gifts in the fleeting ventures of the world. Only when we commit our talents to blessing those around us and bringing souls to Christ can we experience the otherworldly joy that comes from knowing that we have fulfilled our true calling as God's elect.

Samson's tragedy shows that the road of self-indulgence leads straight to the cliff of self-destruction.

THE POWER OF THE FOOLISH

Lastly, we examine the third major paradox of Samson's life. Throughout the Samson saga, the Israelite champion used his great might to antagonize and defeat the Philistines, Israel's arch-nemesis. Yet, he won his greatest victory over Israel's foe not by virtue of a dramatic feat of strength. Instead, Samson's greatest victory was achieved as he leaned weakly against pagan pillars, blinded and alone, the resident clown of his sneering Philistine captors. Once upon a time, the heaving, mighty Samson felled hundreds. In his final moments, after a murmured prayer, the dying, sightless Samson felled thousands.

And that is how God likes to work.

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty.
(1 Cor 1:27)

God is not concerned about what we *can* or *cannot* do. It is what we

“Only when we commit our talents to blessing those around us and bringing souls to Christ can we experience the otherworldly joy that comes from knowing that we have fulfilled our true calling as God's elect.”

Samson believed that he was “specially chosen.” Taken wrongly, it may cause one to labor under the self-indulgent and misguided notion that one is somehow better than others. God's calling for the true church today, as it was for Samson, was a “choosing to be special.”

We were elected for a purpose. Our membership of the true church is not a privilege for us to bask in during our earthly lives and then brandish at the gates of heaven. It is a call to be different to the world, to be special, to be the city set on a hill, a light in the

a decision, Samson asked himself: *What would make me happiest?* In a sense, Samson had made himself his own god; he used his God-given capabilities to indulge his fleshly desires.

Today, most of us, if not all, have been blessed with many advantages: a strong family, a caring church, loyal friends, and talents of all stripes. The temptation to use our gifts solely for the purposes of office politics or outperforming our rivals is difficult to resist. Many of us think we have struck a happy balance if we use some

will or *will not* do for Him that matters most. The True Jesus Church had humble beginnings. A hundred years later, we still do not have many rich, powerful or influential members. When others look at us, they see a church not charismatic enough, not fast enough, not sophisticated enough. But these attributes matter little to God. All God needs are hearts that are willing enough. Just like Samson's at his end.

It is interesting to note that in his final prayer, Samson called upon God using three different terms. First, he invoked *Jehovah* (YHWH), the

name: obedience. All three paradoxes of Samson's life point towards this one thing. Samson squandered a consecrated life of promise because he did not obey his vows. He perennially sought, but never found, happiness, because he did not obey. Only at the very end, when he finally learned to trust and obey, did he redeem himself.

To truly participate in what God has in store for the royal priesthood, i.e. the True Jesus Church (1 Pet 2:9), we have to be weak and foolish before God—to always obey, and always trust. The summary lesson of the life of one of the mightiest men in history—it is when we are weak that we are truly strong (2 Cor 12:10). ★

”*God is not concerned about what we can or cannot do. It is what we will or will not do for Him that matters most.*

covenantal name of God, the name revealed to Moses as God promised the deliverance of His people. Then Samson uttered *Adonai*, referring to God's authority and ownership over all things. Lastly, Samson cried out to *Elohim*, the plural of *El*, meaning "Strong One."

We can infer from this sequence that, first, Samson remembered the covenant of his birth—his original destiny as performer of good works. Second, the great and mighty Samson—one of the strongest men to have roamed the face of the earth—finally acknowledged that God was the ultimate Sovereign in all creation and that He was the true source of all strength, including his own. Finally, after everything that he had been through, Samson called upon a God that he finally fully understood. In doing so, Samson also came to fully understand himself. All that was asked of him, and all he had to do, was to trust and obey.

CONCLUSION

What does God want from us? The same thing He wanted from Samson and anyone else who calls upon His





The Mountains Moses Ascended

Philip Shee— Singapore

The life of Moses has many precious lessons for modern-day Christians like us. Among the many highlights in his life, the mountains that Moses ascended represent critical turning points for him. These events can provide important insights for us as we navigate our own journey of faith and service. Over time, our life may become mundane, and our faith, lifeless and sterile. If this happens, we need to break away from the hustle and bustle of life and ascend the mountains, as Moses did. On higher ground, we can quieten down to reflect, re-align and rejuvenate, and to re-establish our ties with God.

MOUNT HOREB

Re-acquaintance with God

Horeb marked Moses' re-acquaintance with God after forty years in the wilderness. As a young man in Egypt, Moses had been full of passion and ideals. He had a strong sense of mission and, on his own initiative, visited his own people, the Israelites. He courageously attempted to lead them, intervening when he witnessed two of them fighting. He even killed an Egyptian who was mistreating one

of them. But despite his good intentions, the Israelites rejected him. In utter dejection and confusion, Moses withdrew to Midian, where he settled into a life of peace and contentment. He found himself a wife, became a father, and took on the job of tending the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law (Acts 7:22–29).

The turning point came forty years later, when Moses led his flock to the back of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There, the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire, in the midst of a bush. The burning bush¹ was somehow not consumed, which prompted Moses to take a closer look. It was then that God called him from within the bush. In the dialogue that followed, God corrected Moses' misconception that God had deserted His people in Egypt.

In fact, God had seen the oppression of His people, and had heard their cries. His grace had seen them through their trials in Egypt, and that was why they had not been annihilated, just as the bush was not consumed. On the contrary, the Israelites continued to grow in might and in number. God then revealed that He would send Moses to Egypt to deliver His people and lead them to the promised land, a land flowing with milk and honey (Ex 3:1–10).

God's Timeline Revealed

At this time, Moses was no longer the same young man full of energy, passion and ideals. He had settled down, and was content with a quiet and comfortable life. He was certainly not seeking any thrills, excitement or disruption to his current way of life.

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After all, he was already eighty years old. He had gone about his own business for the past forty years while God was silent.

It is no surprise that Moses was reluctant and raised a number of questions, but God had an answer for each one. This encounter at Horeb was to be the defining moment in Moses' life—it was when he became re-acquainted with God. He now understood God's grace, and how God had been with the Israelites throughout their suffering in Egypt. More importantly, Moses realized that the first forty years of his life in Egypt was to equip him with the best knowledge and wisdom of the leading civilization at that time. This provided the necessary training required to lead a nation.

The second forty years of his life, spent in Midian, was equally important. It was to cultivate his nature. During this period, alone in a vast expanse with only sheep for company, Moses learned meekness and humility. He learned to slow down, stay calm and operate in solitude. The rugged environment equipped him with the skills necessary for the subsequent wilderness journey, where he would endure criticisms and loneliness. With his previous impulsive character, he would not have been able to endure Israel's repeated rebellions.

After eighty years of learning and cultivation, Moses was now ready for the final third of his life. This period was to be the fulfillment of his life's purpose, the very reason God had placed him in the world. He had left Egypt with the mindset of a man who perceived himself as an undisputed leader, who "supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand" (Acts 7:25). He was confident with his fists, ever ready to fight and kill. He returned to Egypt forty years later with the mindset of "Who am I?" (Ex 3:11), feeling ill-equipped even to speak, let alone fight (Ex 4:10). Moses finally understood that this was God's mission, not his own. It was God who would deliver His people through His



power, not through Moses' abilities. With this understanding, Moses now returned to Egypt with nothing but the "rod of God in his hand" (Ex 4:20).

Rediscovering Our Life's Purpose

Moses' meeting with God at Horeb leaves us with some key points for reflection. Our lives may become so routine that we operate on autopilot. We wake up, go to work or school, return home at the day's end, and do exactly the same things before we retire to bed. Every weekend, we also have a routine: reading newspapers, grocery shopping, housework, taking an afternoon nap. Life is ordinary and monotonous. But we want no more and no less, as we view the status quo to be a blessing.

approach—not by his own might, or his own fist, but with the rod of God in his hand. Indeed, we need to take stock of our life and faith.

If we find ourselves being like Moses in Midian, just counting sheep every day, we really must climb Mount Horeb. We need to unleash the last burst of fire within us. In fact, Moses' real value was proven in the last third of his life. The first eighty years merely prepared him for the final forty years of work. Today, what have we left undone in this world? Before we go and meet our Lord, should we not journey to Horeb? Should we not get out of our comfort zone and leave Midian?

As Egypt symbolizes the world without God, we should return to Egypt and take God's people out of it.

“This encounter at Horeb was to be the defining moment in Moses' life—it was when he became re-acquainted with God.”


Like Moses, we were zealous when we were young. We had a strong sense of purpose and mission. However, as we approach middle age, the disappointment of failed ideals, the practicalities of life, and the commitments of career and family have worn us out. We are resigned to our unfulfilled lives, and are satisfied to relax into our comfort zone of inertia. At this point, like Moses, we need to ascend our Horeb. We need to rediscover our life's purpose. Have we forgotten what we are meant to fulfill while we are still alive? Or do we feel that we can no longer do it? Moses was eighty when he found meaning in his life. He returned to his original mission, but with a renewed

THE MOUNTAIN AT REPHIDIM

Later, after Moses had led the Israelites out of Egypt, the Amalekites attacked them at Rephidim. In response, Moses instructed Joshua to lead some able-bodied men into battle, while he would climb the mountain at Rephidim to intercede in prayer. He did not go alone; he took Aaron and Hur with him.

Victory through Teamwork and Unity

This incident at Rephidim presents some precious teachings for our service to the Lord. As Moses led the people through the wilderness, he could decide when to lead from the front, and when to support from behind. He knew where he could



“We need to rediscover our life’s purpose. Have we forgotten what we are meant to fulfill while we are still alive? Or do we feel that we can no longer do it? Moses was eighty when he found meaning in his life. He returned to his original mission, but with a renewed approach.”

complement and add value to whatever the Israelites needed to do at the time. He was not at the front line battling the Amalekites. But he was able to provide critical contributions away from the limelight. As we can see, whenever Moses lifted his hands, Israel prevailed, and whenever he became tired and dropped his hands, the Amalekites prevailed. But Moses recognized his limitations, and had brought Aaron and Hur with him to the mountain so that they could support him (Ex 17:8–13).

As we serve the Lord, we must learn the lesson of Moses ascending the mountain at Rephidim. There is no room for individual ego or heroic exploits in the ministry of the Lord. Victory is not the result of any one person, but that of teamwork, with each playing his role. Moses on the mountain might not have been visible to those fighting, and yet his presence was absolutely critical to the battle. Aaron and Hur were even less prominent, but their supporting roles were equally critical. There are certain areas for which we are best equipped, and hence, each of us needs to find the spot in the Lord’s battle where we can contribute our utmost. After all, we are all fighting for one common purpose.

MOUNT SINAI

In Exodus 19:20, the Bible records the incident of Moses ascending Mount Sinai at the instruction of God. The next few chapters record the close communion Moses enjoyed with God, as he directly received the Ten Commandments and many other instructions. These formed the foundation of his understanding of the truth, and the basis of his teachings to the people. When he left the mountain, after interacting with God, Moses’ face shone (Ex 34:35). He was clearly spiritually uplifted.

Having Communion with God

In our journey of faith, we must find time to have close communion with God. We seem very busy in this modern world, and we often lament that there are not enough hours in the day, yet we can, somehow, still find time for other things—be it to read the newspapers, log on to social media, or check messages and surf the net with our smartphones.

“But as Christians, do we dedicate any time each day for a quiet moment with God in prayer and Bible reading? And particularly on Sabbath days, do we have close communion with God? In fact, if we have the heart to draw near to God, finding time is not that difficult.”

But as Christians, do we dedicate any time each day for a quiet moment with God in prayer and Bible reading? And particularly on Sabbath days, do we have close communion with God? In fact, if we have the heart to draw near to God, finding time is not that difficult. We might find it difficult to spend forty consecutive days communing with God, like Moses did. But if we can devote a specific time each day to get on our knees, and calm ourselves to reflect on God’s words and our lives, we will surely be spiritually uplifted. It will make all the difference in our lives.

MOUNT NEBO

Mount Nebo was the final mountain Moses ascended. From that vantage point, God showed him the entire promised land, which He had sworn to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This was God’s special concession to Moses, who was not allowed to enter the land because he had previously disobeyed God. Instead of commanding water to come out of the rock, Moses had struck the rock twice and rebuked the people in anger. As a result, God punished Moses by prohibiting him from crossing the river into the promised land (Num 20:1–12). Moses pleaded with God but was rejected. Instead, God instructed him to go up to the top of Pisgah (Deut 3:23–26).

On one hand, it seems that God was very harsh. Moses had made one mistake, and yet was denied his lifelong dream of crossing the river into the promised land. But God had His reasons. In His righteousness, God requires a price to be paid for sin and disobedience. And yet, while Moses could not cross the river, God had special grace and love in store for him.

Moses' Final Moments with God

As we read the account of Moses' final moments (Deut 34:1–7), we cannot help but feel touched by God's personal send-off for His faithful servant. No one else was there apart from Moses and his God. On this mountain, God showed Moses a panoramic view of the entire promised land. This special concession God made for Moses was a far superior experience to crossing the river. At the crossing, Moses would have only been able to see a limited area of the

will we, like Moses, ascend Mount Nebo? Will God be there with us? Will we have the privilege of reflecting with God on the completion of our mission and the fulfilment of our purpose? Will our promised land be in sight? We may have a list of things we want to do before we die—places to visit, things to see, experiences to savour. But when we get to our final moment, do all these things really matter? We should learn from Moses on Nebo. In our final moment, nothing else really matters other than having God right there by our side. What a blessing it would be for God to acknowledge that we have fulfilled our purpose on earth, and finally welcome us into His eternal rest. ★

“All of us will reach the end of our lives one day. When that time comes, will we, like Moses, ascend Mount Nebo? Will God be there with us? Will we have the privilege of reflecting with God on the completion of our mission and the fulfilment of our purpose? Will our promised land be in sight?”

land. He would have had to travel and battle for a number of years before he could see the land in its entirety. But from the vantage point of Mount Nebo, his eyes were able to savour the whole land. God's grace had preserved Moses so that, at 120 years of age, his eyes were not dim and his body was full of vigour. He did not die in pain or sickness. He had simply finished his mission and fulfilled his purpose on earth, and it was time for God to take him back. Even more touchingly, only God knows the location of Moses' grave, because He buried him personally. This was the final private moment Moses spent with God. Who else on earth could have that privilege?

All of us will reach the end of our lives one day. When that time comes,

¹ The burning bush signified the suffering of the people. God speaking from the midst of the burning bush reinforced His message to Moses, which is that He had been with His people all along.





Now Is the Time to Bear Fruit

Adapted from a sermon by Barnabas Chong—Singapore

Gardening can be a very fruitful pastime, whether you are planting, watering, or waiting for fresh flowers, fruits, vegetables, or herbs to grow. Before planting a fruit tree, you will make sure it is a fruit you like and hope to, one day, harvest and enjoy. To see the end product takes time, however, and after years of nurturing, watering, pruning and harvesting, it is very disappointing when the fruit turns out to be bitter or sour. Your time and effort has been a waste, and you might be tempted to cut the tree down.

In fact, our Christian life can be likened to the planting of a tree, an image Jesus spoke of in the Gospels. But we need to understand why we ought to cultivate our faith, why we must bear fruit, and how to do both.

We know that spiritual cultivation is important and, for that reason, many of us attend spiritual convocations. In such an environment, we hope that we can nurture ourselves to bear good fruit. Whilst this is good, it is also important to examine ourselves: I believe in Jesus, I attend services, yet how much effort do I put into nurturing my tree of faith? Does my tree have any fruit on it and, if it does,

is it sweet and beautiful, or bitter and dry?

THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD: ACT NOW, NOT LATER

In Luke 13:6–9, Jesus spoke a parable concerning a man who came to his vineyard to seek fruit from his fig tree. Unfortunately, the fig tree had no fruit on it. He did not just come once; he visited the vineyard three years in a row and still the tree bore no fruit. If you were the owner of this vineyard, how would you feel about the fig tree? The owner wanted to cut it

ourselves, "I will bear fruit for Jesus later, when I have time." However, think about it from Jesus' perspective. After some time, He will look at your tree of faith and, if there is no fruit, He will want to cut it down. He will not look at the excuses you might give. Instead, He will give you a year, two years, three years. If your tree of faith bears no fruit, it proves you are wasting the ground, wasting time, and wasting the efforts of others and yourself. At this point, "When I have time," will be too late.

As Christians, when we are planted

"I believe in Jesus, I attend services, yet how much effort do I put into nurturing my tree of faith? Does my tree have any fruit on it and, if it does, is it sweet and beautiful, or bitter and dry?"

down—after all, it was wasting nutrients from the land, as well as the time and effort needed to tend it. Put in a similar situation, we would also cut down the tree to plant other, better, fruit-bearing trees.

This parable tells us that the Lord Jesus views each and every one of us like this fig tree. It is easy to say to

in the vineyard, we must start producing fruit—this is the main point of the parable. However, thank the Lord, God still gives us a chance if we do not. In the parable, the vineyard keeper delayed the owner from cutting down the fig tree and asked for one more year's grace to see if, with more nurture and care, the tree

might bear some fruit. Despite our unfruitful nature, God still gives us a chance, today, to start producing good fruit for Him, and we must grasp hold of this opportunity with all our heart, mind, and soul.

After acknowledging and realizing our need to bear fruit, we can turn to Jesus who, in John 15:5, tells us, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." Jesus is the true vine; we are the branches. This connection is very special and very close. When we (as branches) are connected to the vine (Jesus), our source of life and the ability to bear fruit comes from Jesus. This is what it means to abide in the Lord Jesus: to bear fruit for Him. However, this abidance can be difficult to understand if you look at it in physical terms. Jesus is no longer with us, in the flesh. How can we abide in Him? In John 15:7, Jesus says, "If you abide in Me...My words abide in you" (emphasis added). Today, if we want to abide in Jesus, we must not search for a physical connection. True abidance comes from abiding in God's words—meaning, believing in Jesus and keeping His word in our lives.



occupy an important position in our life anymore, we will not listen to it.

Conversely, if a manager at work speaks to you, his words will seem especially significant because they might result in a promotion. You will, therefore, pay more attention and take his advice. When you communicate with others, you might even find yourself echoing his words, and the manner in which they were said to you, because they have become important to you.

So how much do you esteem God's word today? Attending services on a regular basis does not necessarily mean you hold God's word as a priority. Of course, the more you attend services and listen, the more likely you will be exhorted by His word, but this is not always the case. It also depends on your heart to listen.

great harvest of hundreds upon hundreds.

The seed is the word of God, and the four types of ground represent our hearts. Which is your type of ground? It is important to always ask ourselves whether we have truly listened to the word of God. After studying Jesus' explanation, we must acknowledge how we receive God's word, and make a change.

Let us look at the seed that fell by the wayside. Jesus explained that when a person hears the word of God but does not understand it, Satan will snatch it away. Not understanding God's word has nothing to do with the language it is spoken in, or whether you understand the vocabulary. Jesus used simple language, and preachers and teachers in the church will explain the truth slowly and clearly. Not understanding the word of God, therefore, means having a hardened heart. When we walk on a path, soil that has often been trampled underfoot is hard, and nothing will grow on it. Similarly, those whose hearts are hardened do not understand God's word, not because it is difficult, but because they do not wish to understand. When your heart becomes hard, nothing will enter, no word will reach you, and nothing will grow.

The second lot of seeds fell on stony ground. They had a chance to grow, but what happened? A person may encounter difficulties in life, hear God's word, and immediately receive it with joy. However, when he meets with more difficulties, he may not endure, and give up on God. Many Christians are like this. Perhaps you received Jesus, looking for grace and mercy. After being moved to be baptized, you notice the difficult areas

Despite our unfruitful nature, God still gives us a chance, today, to start producing good fruit for Him, and we must grasp hold of this opportunity with all our heart, mind, and soul.

ABIDE IN JESUS: GOD'S WORD

The next question we can ask is: How do I view the word of God? Does His word move me? Does it compel me to act, to transform myself, to bear fruit? Sometimes we attend services and feel as though the speakers preach nothing new. We find the verses have been often cited, we become distracted and sleepy. When it is prayer time, it is hard to pray earnestly after listening to a "boring" sermon. Perhaps the speaker is at fault. However, more often than not, the way we view God's word affects how we receive it. If God's word does not

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER: UNDERSTAND YOUR HEART

In Matthew 13, Jesus gave us the parable of the sower. He compared those who listen to God's word to four different types of ground. The first seeds fell by the wayside, and the birds came and devoured them. The second fell on stony ground, but because there was not much earth, the roots grew superficially and, when they sprouted, immediately dried up. The third fell among thorns, and as they grew, they became choked by the thorns. The last of the seeds fell on good ground and grew, reaping a



in your life are still there, with no improvement. Joy turns to murmuring against Jesus, and you forget God's words of comfort and strength. When your heart forgets God's word, what has grown will become weak and wither away.

The third lot of seeds fell among the thorns. As well as difficulties, a person may encounter the riches and deceitful pleasures of life. As Christians, are we affected by worldly values when we receive God's word? In many affluent societies, we are taught from young to pursue after our individual desires, and that nothing is more important than putting yourself first. This can be seen from the need to gain top marks at school, or to get that parking space, or to win a promotion ahead of others. When this value system becomes more important than the humility and servitude God teaches us, we must beware, lest the cares of the world choke our hearts.

Lastly, the fourth lot of seeds fell on good ground and bore fruit—thirty, sixty, and a hundred times more than expected. A Christian whose heart is like this good ground is someone who accepts the word of God and allows it to grow in his heart. Today, that is what it means to have a grounded faith: when faith takes root, it will bear fruit. Moreover, good ground is cultivated when weeds, stones, and obstacles are removed on a daily basis, in order for the fruit to grow healthily. Likewise, in order for us to bear fruit, we must remove the carnal desires that have no place in a godly heart. Paul reminds us, in Romans 7:4–5, that "when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death." If we want to bear fruit that is sweet,

acceptable to Jesus, and worthy to be harvested, we must beware not to produce fruit grown from our own sinful desires.

PREPARE TO BEAR FRUIT: REMOVE CARNAL DESIRES

Carnal desires are the selfish and overwhelming passions that cause a person to sin. Before living a life in Christ, we would have been subject to these passions. However, after baptism, these passions have been "crucified" on the cross with Christ (Gal 5:24), freeing us from their control. Ideally, as Christians, we ought to live without these desires after receiving the cleansing of water baptism. Otherwise, how can we live truly victorious lives?

The reality is that many of us are unable to crucify the flesh with its passions and desires. This is not because Jesus' baptism is ineffective; rather it is because we have taken these desires from the cross and kept them close to us. We have treated them as something pleasurable and precious, causing us to continue sinning. Yet, we thank the Lord for His merciful grace! Paul encourages and reminds us that when you "[w]alk in the Spirit...you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal 5:16).

The Lord Jesus has given us the precious Holy Spirit, who allows us to put to death our flesh with its passions and desires. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit reminds and helps us to put these lusts and desires back on the cross. Without the Spirit, we will not be able to do this.

ABIDE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT: BEAR FRUIT

Upon self-examination, ask yourself the question: Do I really want to bear

the fruit of salvation? Am I really putting in the effort to battle against my carnal desires? Instead of falling back into our old ways and half-heartedly following God, we must acknowledge that a weak or lazy attitude will not bear acceptable fruit for Jesus. Today, we must resolve to get rid of excuses, and make the concerted effort to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

By regularly attending spiritual convocations, by encouraging one another and having fellowship often, we can help each other to overcome our sins and abide in the Holy Spirit. That is why the author of Hebrews reminds us to meet together often. Stir one another up to do good works, to overcome weaknesses, and bear

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good fruit. On a practical level, during spiritual meetings, take the opportunity during breaks to share our faith with one other. Pray together after meals, which will encourage other brothers and sisters to join in. Talk about the teachings we have received, and how we can implement them in our life. Reflect over God's words during teatime, and sing hymns together whilst washing up or cleaning the church.

HOW TO BEAR GOOD FRUIT: TRIBULATION AND DISCIPLINE

Lastly, we also bear fruit when we endure tribulations and God's discipline. Peter encouraged the members, saying:

Though now for a little while, if

need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

(1 Pet 1:6–9)

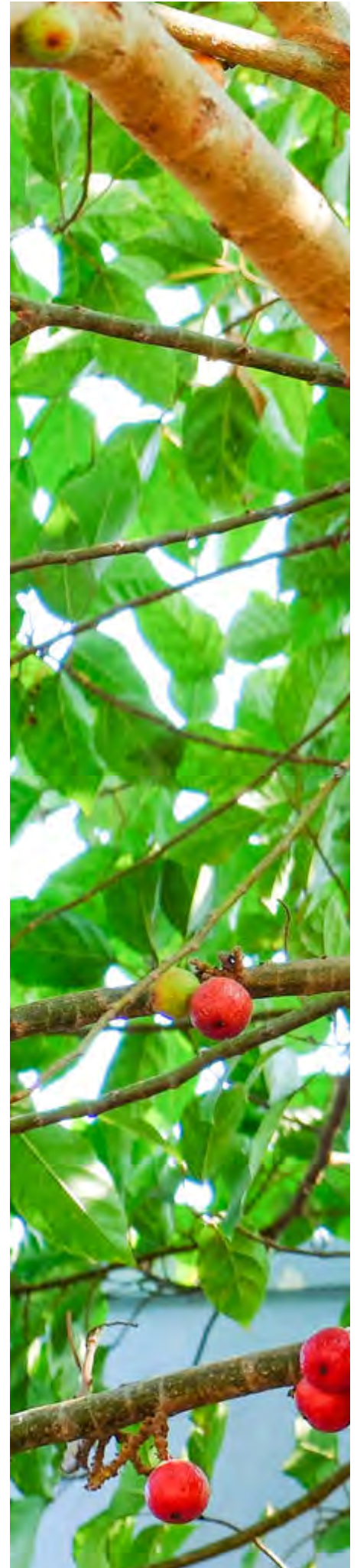
“Through tribulations, God refines us and our faith to be purer and more genuine. As a result, we will become the perfect ground which will bear fruit for the Lord. Knowing that this end result is good, we must have a positive attitude when facing trials.

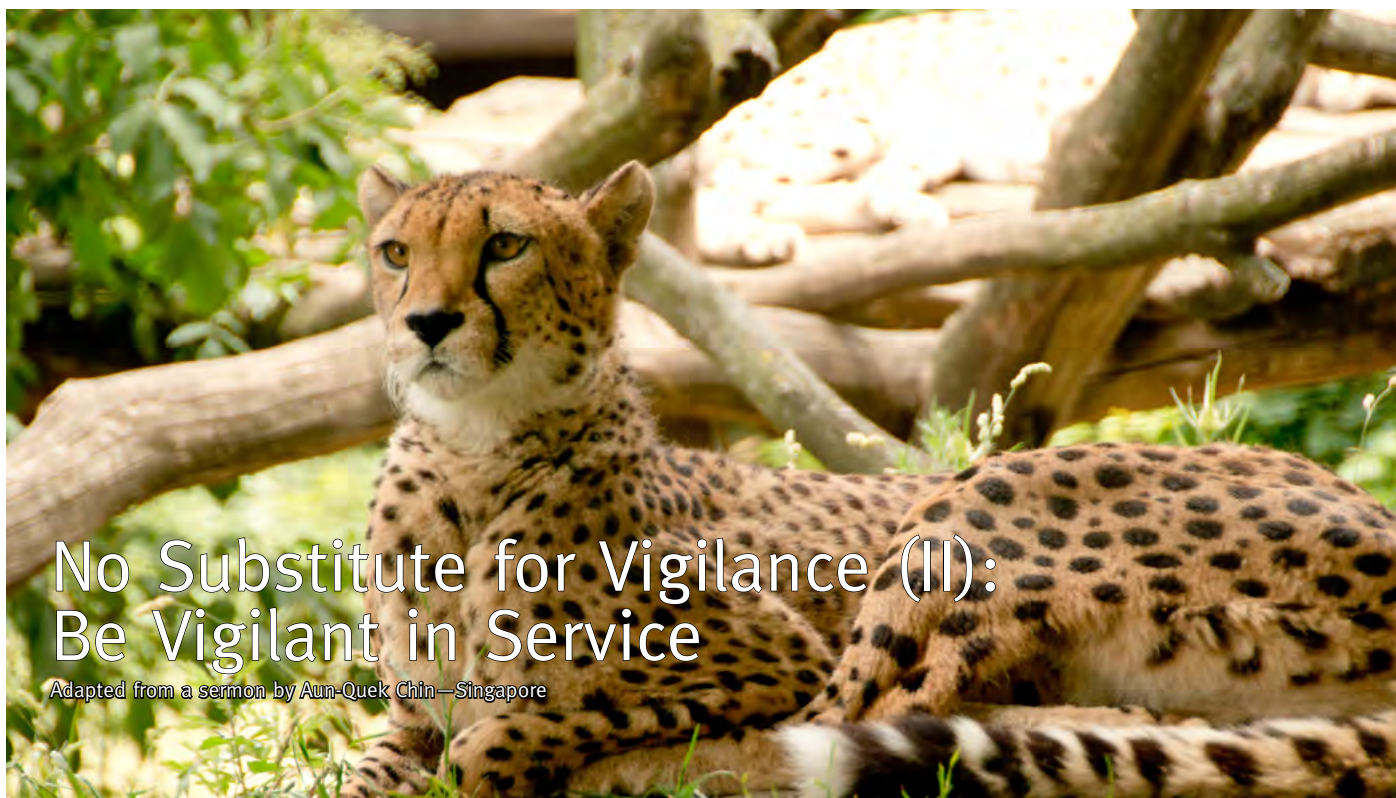
Although none of us would wish to face trials and tribulations, Peter explains that it is a must for the salvation of our souls. Through tribulations, God refines us and our faith to be purer and more genuine. As a result, we will become the perfect ground which will bear fruit for the Lord. Knowing that this end result is good, we must have a positive attitude when facing trials. Instead of murmuring against God, blaming Him for not helping us, or being frustrated at our lack of understanding, believe in the good will of God, that these trials perfect us in His eyes.

Moreover, sometimes God also disciplines us. Hebrews 12:11 tells us that “no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” At times, when needed, our heavenly Father acts like an earthly father—disciplining us when we have turned the wrong way. This is painful for us

to accept, but by accepting and by enduring, we bear the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

In conclusion, we must examine the quality of the fruit that we bear—is it sweet and pleasing to God? If we do not want to be cut down, then we must bear good fruit. We can only do this by being connected to the true vine—by living our lives according to God’s word. In order for the word of God to grow, we should cultivate the soil of our hearts, so that it is unhardened, and unaffected by the stones of tribulations and the thorns of worldly cares. If we remove our carnal desires and leave them on the cross, then, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we can yield much good fruit for Jesus. And even when we face trials, tribulations, or punishment from God, we can rejoice that God is giving us the opportunity to bear the fruit of righteousness. Therefore, whilst the owner of the vineyard has granted you the time to change, *now* is the time to bear fruit, before it is too late! ★





No Substitute for Vigilance (II): Be Vigilant in Service

Adapted from a sermon by Aun-Quek Chin—Singapore

“Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD.”

What sweet words to hear. Yet, as we have seen in the first installment in this series, just as being reckless in our faith can distort our worship of the one true God, so can such sweet declarations be the source of spiritual corruption.

This article will continue to draw on the story of Aaron to show three more ways the service of Israel's first high priest was corrupted, and how we ought to prepare ourselves so we do not follow in his footsteps.

MISTAKE ONE: ADULTERATING THE TRUTH

Aaron's first mistake was that he corrupted his service by adulterating the truth of the Lord: he not only taught the people evil, but did it in the name of God.

And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. Then they said, “This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!” So when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD.”
(Ex 32:4–5)

“Often, we invoke the name of the Lord or borrow religious language and ideas to justify our actions and mistakes, sometimes even to convince ourselves of the righteousness of our sins.”

There are two lessons we can draw from this.

Firstly, on the face of it, by having people worship God with a feast of remembrance, Aaron seemed to be doing a good thing. However, this was actually a guise—a justification—to commit idolatry and practise evil. What he did was an abuse of the Lord's name.

This is a temptation many Christians fall prey to today. Often, we invoke the name of the Lord or borrow religious language and ideas to justify our actions and mistakes, sometimes even to convince ourselves of the righteousness of our sins. For instance, some Christians, fully aware of the paganism and sinfulness of certain modern festivals, still insist on participating in these celebrations. They may defend their practices with a variety of purposeful misinterpretations of the Bible, though

it is likely that their true motive is a more base desire to ingratiate themselves with society and to avoid appearing irrelevant and backward. The habit of applying biblical teachings to one's life is always highly encouraged. However, we must be careful to examine our true intentions for doing so as we may unknowingly be appropriating the word of God to vindicate our sinfulness.

Secondly, judging by Aaron's boldness of speech, it appears that he did not think his actions to be wrong, despite having heard God's clear commandments against idolatry (Ex 20). This is a type of corruption that is not self-aware—perhaps the most dangerous sort.

Many of us struggle with our sinful addictions and vices daily. But the fact that there is a struggle is a heartening sign. It means that the Holy Spirit still has a hold on our conscience and our

souls, and that some part of us is still determined to defend our faith and relationship with God. Furthermore, even if we yield to sin at certain moments, if there was a struggle, then contrition and remorse usually follow soon after. These emotions are often the first steps toward refining our Christian character. As David rightly reflected after he sinned with Bathsheba: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise” (Ps 51:17).

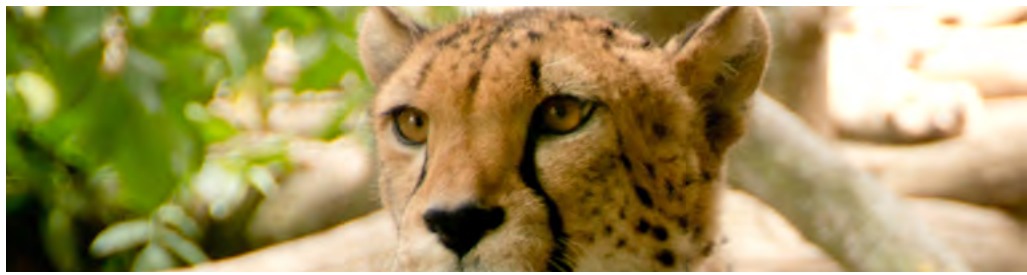
Alas, as we can see with Aaron, there are those who sin without being conscious of it in the slightest. These sinners are insulated from their own conscience and the advice of others; they simply cannot allow themselves to be aware of the error in their wrongdoings. From this we learn that while we may find ourselves in sin, in the process of our recovery, our baptism of fire needs to be sparked by knowledge and awareness, the enemies of willful ignorance and obstinacy. We must never allow ourselves to adulterate the truth and co-opt it abusively for personal gratification.

MISTAKE TWO: REFUSING TO ADMIT FAULT

Aaron’s second failure as a leader was to refuse to take responsibility for his actions and accept the blame for having misled the Israelites, who were put under his charge.

And Moses said to Aaron, “What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?” So Aaron said, “Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. For they said to me, ‘Make us gods that shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ And I said to them, ‘Whoever has any gold, let them break it off.’ So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out.”

(Ex 32:21–24)



Aaron’s choice of words is revealing. When defending himself in the face of Moses’ interrogation, Aaron always placed himself in a passive position, while the Israelites were the active parties in the sin they collectively committed. In fact, Aaron even implicitly accused Moses, tacitly suggesting that if he had not tarried so long on Mount Sinai, the people would have had no opportunity, or

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need, to construct an idol. In short, Aaron chose to find blame in everyone but himself.

Yet, clearly knowing that the people were “set on evil,” he did not think to rebuke or correct them. Not only that, he even aided them in their transgression against God. A very possible reason could be that Aaron was fearful—fearing the consequences of not complying with the loud demands of an impatient, resentful mob; the prospect of losing the respect of his friends, being ostracized or even physically harmed. Aaron’s calculations were not just based on cowardice, but a selfish cowardice. It was selfish because Aaron feared for

his own wellbeing, not the terrible fate he knew awaited the Israelites if they committed idolatry. He put himself before the truth and his brethren.

For the modern Christian leader, having the courage to accept responsibility for the church work we are entrusted with is an essential virtue that we must not overlook. It goes beyond taking the blame for when things go wrong, seeing as church workers rarely focus on seeking out culprits to punish. Accepting responsibility for church work is so crucial because it is equivalent to accepting responsibility for the spiritual wellbeing of our brothers and sisters in Christ. When we are made accountable to our brethren, we learn to be more vigilant in our service, and to better appreciate the significance of the work we have been called to do to serve the living God. Leaders, in any capacity, should adopt the principle Aaron lacked: the belief that the decisions and faith of our spiritual family in church is of utmost concern to us. We are obligated, as their brethren, to be vigilant even if they are not, and to be strong in truth when they are weak.

Furthermore, as a leader, we must not be afraid to act on this sense of accountability. Being a Christian leader is different from being a secular one. As a leader in church work, you do more than influence people’s opinions and motivate action. A church leader has a duty of selflessness towards his brethren. In basic terms, this translates to prioritizing the spiritual growth of church ministry and the faith of others above our own comfort and convenience. But selflessness also means that we are unafraid to correct the mistakes of our



brethren, even if our well-intentioned counsel offends them and our cherished relationship sours. It is putting our desire to maintain an all-positive, uncontroversial relationship with everyone second to our duty to care for the purity and strength of their faith. Of course, we must take every care to be gentle and tactful, and to mend broken relationships with our brothers as Jesus tells us to.

“When we are made accountable to our brethren, we learn to be more vigilant in our service, and to better appreciate the significance of the work we have been called to do to serve the living God.

What is necessary for a leader, as was necessary for Aaron, is the firmness of character and principle. Good examples include Phinehas, who did not hesitate to stop the evil of adultery among his people (Num 25), and Paul, who did not allow his friendship with Peter to prevent him from pointing out the latter's mistakes. We are similarly duty-bound, to God and to His children, to influence others by His word instead of being influenced by the dictates of the world.

Lastly, on this note of accountability, we must ensure that we are not passive accomplices to the sin of our brethren. Even by opting to do nothing when we see our brethren committing sin, we are guilty as well. Take Moses' mistake for instance:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and

give drink to the congregation and their animals.” So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, “Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?” Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out

abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.”

(Num 20:7–12)

At first sight, it seems unreasonable for Aaron to have been reprimanded by God; was this not a fault that fell purely on Moses' shoulders? Indeed, while Moses was the primary sinner in this case, Aaron was guilty for choosing not to remind and correct him of his error, perhaps before he had hit the rock the second time. Ultimately, we are all accountable to

God for both the actions we take, and those we do not. Vigilance is the underlying quality we must have to safeguard our personal faith and that of our precious family.

MISTAKE THREE: PLAYING POLITICS

Aaron's third mistake was to allow envy and personal ambition to corrupt his divine service. In Numbers 12:1–2, it reads:

Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. So they said, “Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?” And the LORD heard it.

Aaron and Miriam, the two leaders who were appointed by God to support the ministry of Moses, spoke out against Moses. To be sure, Moses was wrong. By taking for himself an Ethiopian wife, he had disobeyed God's commandments to maintain purity among God's chosen. Thus it seems right to us that Aaron and Miriam would express their displeasure with Moses for what he had done. In fact, should we not laud Aaron for bravely pointing out the wrong of his brother? Why, then, did God reprimand Aaron and punish Miriam, even questioning why they were unafraid to speak against Moses?

It was all about intentions. Aaron and Miriam seemed to forget that God could see into the deepest crevices of their hearts and minds. When Aaron spoke out against Moses, he did not do it out of concern for his brother, hoping to help him improve and grow. We know this because Moses' marriage to his Ethiopian wife happened years before, and Aaron only brought this up years later in order to gain leverage to try to

“Ultimately, we are all accountable to God for both the actions we take, and those we do not. Vigilance is the underlying quality we must have to safeguard our personal faith and that of our precious family.

“When it comes to church work, we do our best and place all in the hands of God, trusting Him to do what is best for the church. When the church prospers, we all prosper.

oust his brother as leader. Aaron and Miriam had become power-hungry opportunists who resented how Moses seemed to be the focal point of God’s plans while they remained on the periphery.

For us Christians today, servitude to God must not include the ruthless and senseless politicking rampant in the offices, governments and schools of the world. While it is difficult to escape politics whenever people have to work in teams, we should never forget to hold ourselves to a higher standard of moral conduct as Christians, especially when we do church work. If we believe that the Holy Spirit guides the church in her ministry and that, in His infinite wisdom, God appoints certain people to do certain work, we can be assured that we need not manipulate relationships, slander, or buy over other people to rise up the ranks. When it comes to church work, we do our best and place all in the hands of God, trusting Him to do what is best for the church. When the church prospers, we all prosper.

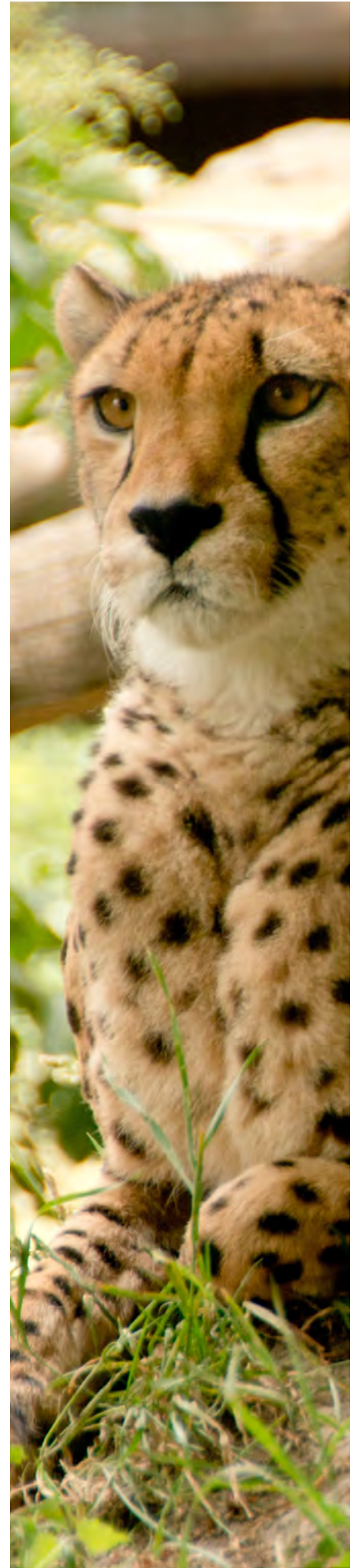
“In order to protect the truth, keep politics out of the church, and learn genuine, loving accountability for one another, the Christian must never let his guard down.

presenting temptation after temptation before us. That many of these temptations arrive at our doors in the guise of religion and “correct” Christianity is more perturbing still. That is why the True Jesus Church (TJC) has always, and will always, take pride in the fact that we rely fully on the pure, unadulterated word of God to live our lives, to run the church, and to spread the gospel. However, because of these three vulnerabilities—adulterating the truth, shirking responsibility, and playing politics—which plague the modern leader, as they did Aaron, having Bibles open before us is insufficient. Vigilance must accompany doctrine. In order to protect the truth, keep politics out of the church, and learn genuine, loving accountability for one another, the Christian must never let his guard down.

“And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother,” God lovingly told Moses, “for glory and for beauty” (Ex 28:2). Aaron sinned gravely, yes, but God still loved him. There was still work for Aaron to do. But Aaron could not wear those garments into the promised land because of his lack of vigilance. We have all been called to God today in the TJC. We have been gifted equally beautiful spiritual garments. Let us work with vigilance and diligence for the Lord, so we can don these garments of glory as we enter the kingdom of heaven. ★

CONCLUSION

Remaining a faithful and principled Christian is increasingly difficult in this age of rapid secularization. As we have personally experienced, the world and the devil are tireless in





Becoming a Fully Baked Christian

Colin Shek—Sunderland, UK

My recent experience of clay pigeon shooting was a very satisfying one. Take aim, follow the trajectory of the clay, shoot, and—bam!—watch it blow up in mid-air. The key is aiming correctly. If the clay is moving in an upward trajectory and hangs in the air, then you cover it with the tip of the barrel. If it is travelling away from you at speed, then you have to aim ahead of it.

The act of aiming for a goal is something we all do in various facets of life. Busy professionals have sales targets and deadlines to meet. Students have grades to achieve. Entrepreneurs have profit margins to maintain and deals to make. Parents have milestones to monitor their child's development.

When we think of our faith, how often do we aim for spiritual objectives? How much do we direct our lives towards God? And even when we aim for God, how often does our aim go askew?

Chapter 7 of Hosea contains several messages which illustrate these conundrums, and causes us to reflect on them for ourselves.

GOD WANTS US TO DIRECT OUR LIVES TOWARDS HIM

*They return, but not to the Most High;
They are like a treacherous bow.*
(Hos 7:16a)

During Hosea's ministry, the people of God tried to aim for God, but they did not turn fully towards Him. They turned, but not upwards towards God. God likened His people to a treacherous bow. Imagine shooting with a treacherous bow. You take aim at the target and shoot, only to see the arrow fly into the ground. Similarly, the people of God, like a faulty bow, missed the target completely. They exhibited the signs of repentance and yet failed to wholeheartedly redirect their entire lives towards God.

Humans tend to be like this. We aim to turn to God as our Savior and Provider. We start off with much

energy and zeal. But over time, we end up veering away from God.

How many of us have made commitments to read the Bible from beginning to end, for instance? How many of us have found the stories of Abraham, Joseph, and Moses extremely exciting, only to see our interest dramatically tail off when we hit Leviticus? (We need only to look at which pages of our Bibles are the most worn to confirm this!)

Think of how many people start and fail various dieting plans. How many people sign up to expensive annual gym memberships, and stop going after two months? Starting is the easy part. Staying on course until the end is much more difficult. This is especially true of our faith.

What God desires is for us to stay on target towards Him. Of course, this is not always easy. When I was shooting clays, for example, I would

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miss the target whenever I felt tired. You would not think that shooting things could be so tiring, but it is—focus causes mental strain. And yet when I put in the extra effort to concentrate and zone in on my target, I had the great satisfaction of seeing the clays smashed to bits in the sky.

That is why the Bible encourages us to be vigilant at all times, and to take our faith seriously (Mt 26:41; 1 Pet 4:7). This takes effort and stamina (1 Cor 9:24; 2 Tim 4:7). But we can persevere because we have the grace and mercy of God propelling us along. The end result will be worth it: we will have the ultimate satisfaction of being counted worthy to stand before God (Lk 21:36). The end of a thing is always better than the beginning (Eccl 7:8).

We read in the Book of Hosea that there are a few specific ways in which God wants us to be fully directed towards Him. One of them is holiness. Do we aim for complete holiness in our lives? Do we give our whole lives to be cleansed by God? That is one area that the people of Israel struggled with.

“Like a well-baked cake, it takes time and effort to become holy before God, to be set apart from our sinful ways and the godless culture around us, to be dedicated to God and belong to Him.

BEING FULLY BAKED

Ephraim has mixed himself among the peoples;

Ephraim is a cake unturned.

(Hos 7:8)

I do not bake, but from what I understand, a cake unturned will be burned on one side, and doughy and uncooked on the other. No matter how you look at it, it is inedible. Just imagine biting into a cake that is half-burned and half-raw! Israel was just like this cake—neither a fully holy nation nor a fully pagan nation. They were similar to the church in Laodicea in the Book of Revelation—they were neither hot nor cold. In Hosea, it was



because the people of God had assimilated themselves into the nations around them (Hos 7:8).

As a result, Israel was unfit for purpose. They were supposed to be set apart for God, and set apart from the nations around them (Num 23:9); they were supposed to be holy, as God is holy (Lev 18); they were supposed to glorify God to the surrounding nations (Isa 49:3). But the more Israel became like those nations, the less they could shine for God.

We see that God does not like half-baked Christians. We are called to be holy through and through. Of course, we are all a "work in progress." Like a well-baked cake, it takes time and

effort to become holy before God, to be set apart from our sinful ways and the godless culture around us, to be dedicated to God and belong to Him.

So do you want to become a fully baked Christian in the eyes of God? To be Christ-like through and through? There are a few basic principles that we can follow to realize this:

Abhor sin (Rom 12:9; Eph 5:3–5; Deut 7:2; 12:2–4; 20:16–18)

God tells us to really hate all uncleanness (the godless television shows that we watch, the godless media that we engage in, the lustful thoughts that we have), and to really hate all covetousness (the desire for

more and more, the envy of others). The Bible tells us to put to death, by the Spirit, such sin. In the eyes of God, these acts are an abomination. The key to this is to hate sin itself, and not merely hate the shame that sin brings (see Gen 3:7–8). That is, to hate the gratifying nature of sin, rather than hating the guilt it brings afterwards.

Adore God, and really aspire to be more like Him (Mt 5:48; 1 Pet 1:15–16)

We should appreciate just how amazing our God is. And with this in mind, we should strive for the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13), and put on the new man created in God's image (Eph 4:23–25). This requires continuous effort to imitate Jesus (Eph 5:1; 1 Cor 11:1). The world constantly pressures us to improve our appearance (to be more beautiful, slimmer), to advance our career (to gain more status, responsibility, pay), and improve our personality (to be more confident, witty, happy). But chasing after these ambitions is like half-baking a cake. God wants us to be even more ambitious—He wants us to be more like Him, because we are created in God's image (Gen 1:26–27).

Our call to holiness is not a call to a life of boredom and repression, but a call to joy, satisfaction, and fulfillment. Do we have the faith to see this? If not, then the ideals of the world would seem a better option to pursue. Our value, our worth, does not come from what is on our CV, or payslip, or online profile. Our value comes from being cleansed by Christ, by being redeemed by His blood, and being made holy in Christ (1 Cor 6:11; 1 Pet 1:18–19; Ex 39:30).

Once this mindset of complete holiness is embraced, we can have a



fully baked attitude like that of Paul:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

(Gal 2:20)

Fully Baked Evangelism

Have you ever been attracted to the smell of freshly baked cakes and freshly ground coffee? Our Christian lives can have a similar effect of attraction on others. If we set our mind on becoming a fully baked Christian, then we allow the aroma of Christ to diffuse through us (2 Cor 2:14–15). But if God's people are mixed with the other nations of the world, then it becomes difficult—the aroma that is diffused is not of God, but of the world. Or worse, the aroma of God becomes mixed and contaminated with worldly ones, which gives those who come in contact with it the wrong impression of God. Therefore, we do not need to be concerned with how to be trendy or how to fit in. Our focus should just be on being a well-baked Christian.

Israel was a half-baked cake. God wants us to be fully baked, fully holy, fully cleansed, and fully His.

HAVING A SETTLED HEART TOWARDS GOD

Ephraim also is like a silly dove, without sense—

They call to Egypt,

They go to Assyria.

Wherever they go, I will spread My net on them;

I will bring them down like birds of the air.

(Hos 7:11–12a)

Israel was like a silly dove: totally flaky, never settling down, never committing. Sometimes Israel went to Egypt to form an alliance, other times they went to Assyria. All the while they ignored God as their true Provider and Protector. Because of Israel's adulterous ways, God brought His net of judgment upon them, wherever they decided to go.

We are sometimes just like Israel. We, too, have our idolatrous tendencies. We, too, can be quite flaky before God, never settling our hearts on Him. Instead, we go from one idol to another, never fully putting our trust in our true God. Often we try to find fulfillment and security by worldly methods: pursuing the latest trends, money, career, self-image, fleshly gratification.

As a result, we become like a silly, senseless dove flying from one thing to another. The world tells us that we need more—more money to have a better quality of life, more possessions and entertainment to enjoy life, more status to be respected, more trendiness to fit in. But the Bible tells us that we need less. It tells us that our life is not judged by the possessions we accumulate (Lk 12:15). It tells us to be content (1 Tim 6:6–8). If there is anything we do need more of, however, it is trust in God (1 Tim 6:17).

For some, it is understandably an issue of security, like Israel looking to the other nations for protection. We might think, *If I had a bit more income, a smaller mortgage, a better pension, then my future will be secure.* And yet, Jesus said that the rich man who stored up his riches was a fool, since that very night his life would be taken from him (Lk 12:20).

As Christians, we can be over busy.

We work hard for the treasures in heaven, but we also work hard for the treasures on earth. We want to worship God, but we also want to worship the gods of this world. We end up flapping like a senseless dove. God is waving infinite joy and salvation in front of us, and yet we are more interested in gratifying our lusts and desires in the dirt of life. God is giving us everything, and yet we are constantly distracted by what is on offer from Egypt and Assyria.

And yet, idols are false satisfiers. True satisfaction can only be found through God.

Being a true Christian in a consumerist culture today means having faith, and believing that we will find true fulfillment, joy, and identity in God and nothing else (Phil 3:8–9). God does not want us to be like a senseless bird. Rather, He invites us to settle in His kingdom and find rest, to trust in Him from day to day.

CONCLUSION

God desires that we strive to direct our lives towards Him. This takes effort and sustained focus. But by the grace of God, He will always guide us. May we redirect our lives towards Him and become fully baked Christians—fully cleansed and holy. May we seek to be fully settled in the arms of Christ, rather than being distracted by the godless culture around us. And let us rejoice that, in Christ, we have infinite joy and salvation. ★

My Constant Companion

Zhang Guo Hua—Singapore



In Manna issue 73, Sister Fui Khin Wong shared how her son, Guo Hua, was diagnosed with hemophilia, a hereditary blood disease, at just a few months old. In this issue, Brother Guo Hua shares with us his own story.

Pain is my constant companion.

CHILDHOOD

When I was a baby, I was diagnosed with Hemophilia A, which is a deficiency in blood clotting factor VIII. This means that the slightest knock or cut will cause me to bleed more than normal. The most dangerous thing is what the eye cannot see—the bleeding could be internal. Not only that, the bleeding can start spontaneously.

Though there is no cure for hemophilia, it can be controlled with regular infusions of the deficient clotting factor or a transfusion of blood plasma extract. As factor VIII infusions are expensive, most of the time, my parents just relied on prayers to get through my bleeding episodes.

When I was five years old, in 1980, my mother brought me and my brothers to live and be educated in Singapore. I recall a childhood of

frequent trips to the hospital because of bleeding in my knees. The damage to my knee joints and knee caps was debilitating, and walking became difficult. Whenever I suffered from a bleeding episode, I would be unable to walk for a long period of time, which also caused my knee ligaments to shrink. Eventually, I lost the ability to walk altogether, and my mother had to start carrying me around all the time.

It just so happened that when I was at primary school, all the lessons were conducted in one classroom. If we had to move around at all, I had a few good friends who would piggyback me. Given my regular bleeding episodes, I missed almost one third of my time at school.

ADOLESCENCE

When I entered secondary school at the age of thirteen, I was worried about how I would get around as the lessons were in different classrooms,

and some classrooms were on upper floors. We had to move around depending on the subjects we took. It just so happened that I was in the same class as a few of my friends from primary school, and they continued to give me piggyback rides between lessons. From Secondary Year 2 onwards, I had a group of good friends who constantly piggybacked me around until we graduated from secondary school four years later. In fact, one of them even wanted to attend the same junior college (JC) as I did as he was worried about my mobility. My mother and I convinced him not to let my situation influence his choice of JC.

I can still vividly recall some major bleeding episodes I had as a teenager. The first is "the pizza incident," which happened when I was thirteen. This was definitely the worst case of an isolated bleeding episode. After eating pizza, my left elbow started to swell. It became so bad that I started having

“Eventually, I lost the ability to walk altogether, and my mother had to start carrying me around all the time.”

a fit. My parents quickly called an ambulance and rushed me to hospital. I awoke two days later. The diagnosis was food poisoning. However, we later learned that eating certain foods, such as mushrooms, can thin the blood and increase the severity of any bleeding.

Another incident was when my friend slipped while he was piggybacking me; I fell off and sprained my ankle. It immediately swelled up, and I had to go home. The swelling was not as bad as the pizza incident, but it lasted for a long time. Even after the swelling subsided, I would still wake up at night in pain for many months afterwards.

Another time, during an exam, I had internal bleeding and my right palm became so swollen that I could not even hold a pen. I was given extra time, but had to use my left hand to write. I just barely passed because the teacher who marked the paper had great trouble deciphering my bad handwriting.

Even though I had so many painful bleeding episodes when I was young, I was never depressed or felt like giving up on life. Whenever the pain disappeared, I was back to my old self (for better or worse). My chronic illness did not really motivate me to be a better person—it was my mother who motivated me in that respect. I had no sympathy whatsoever with those who took their own lives. My young mind reminded me that every bleed would eventually stop—I simply had to endure and embrace the pain in order to beat it. Once that pain was gone, I would be happy again.

ADULTHOOD

At university, getting around was a much bigger problem because of the size of the campus. In those days, universities were not designed to be wheelchair friendly. But it just so happened that another wheelchair user from my JC was also enrolled to study in the same department as me. Her father complained and petitioned the university's Estate Development Office to make the campus more wheelchair accessible. Within a year,

the computer science department, where I studied, had ramps installed everywhere, becoming the first department in the university that had full wheelchair access. Later, it became university policy that every new building would have disabled toilets, lifts and ramps.

During my undergraduate years, it just so happened that I made many good friends who helped me and pushed me around in my wheelchair. I still had bleeding episodes, but they became less frequent and less painful as I grew older. In fact, undergraduate life was one of the times when I felt physically at my best.

My young mind reminded me that every bleed would eventually stop—I simply had to endure and embrace the pain in order to beat it. Once that pain was gone, I would be happy again.

One of the major incidents I had during this period was when I had bleeding in my urinary tract. There was no pain, but I was passing a large amount of blood in my urine for a few days. After going for an isotope trace, the doctors still could not figure out what the problem was. As it turned out, after some time, this went away completely.

The Cycle of Pain and Depression

After my undergraduate studies, I worked for a while and then returned to university to do my PhD. This was a dark and difficult time for me. I had problems with my research, and the stress was compounded by bleeding problems with my right shoulder. Up until then, I had never had any problems with my shoulder joints. The first time it happened, it was so severe that the blood collected in the joint and forced a dislocation. I was in excruciating pain. That kicked off a cycle of right shoulder bleeds that lasted for a few years. Even getting clotting factor infusions proved to be a problem as my veins were hard to locate. Sometimes the doctors took many attempts to get it right. Once, the doctor took thirteen attempts to

successfully administer the injection. Even being treated for my condition became a real ordeal in itself. I consulted a specialist and, after careful consideration, his best advice was to just try to live with this development.

As it turned out, my supervisor was understanding and sympathetic to my physical condition. I was allowed to rest whenever my shoulder bled. However, my research went nowhere for a long time, and, along with my seemingly endless shoulder troubles, this resulted in a spiritually low period for me. I even started to despair, just like those people I thought were so weak when I was younger.

After a few years, however, as it turned out, things did get better. After what seemed like ages, I completed my PhD and the bleeding in my right shoulder stopped. Since then, I have rarely had any major bleeding episodes. I also started working full-time at the university, and that is pretty much where I am today.

Seeing My Condition in a New Light

In 2015, during one of my bi-annual visits to my hematologist, he remarked that I was doing better than most hemophiliacs—I did not use much factor VIII, and the damage to my joints was not as extensive as that suffered by many people with my condition. I only required one or two injections a year.

I thought my bleeding had diminished because my joints were so damaged and fibrous that there must be less blood vessels, and that being in a wheelchair restricted my movement. But my hematologist corrected me. Many hemophiliacs are in worse condition than me. In fact, he had recommended many knee replacement surgeries, especially for wheelchair users whose joints were so

“Now it is time for me to come before God, to thank Him for all He has done, and let Him lead the way while I follow from behind, with my eyes fully focused on Him.

damaged by bleeding that they were in constant pain. In the worst cases, patients would develop immunity to factor VIII and absolutely nothing could be done for them except to prescribe painkillers. This sometimes leads to an addiction to painkillers, and their dependence on drugs can make it hard to find work and support themselves financially.

What he said struck me. I thought that everything that had happened to me was just a case of "it just so happened," or "as it turned out." I had thought my condition could not get any worse. But that is not the case at all; I had not seen rock bottom. My life was not just a series of events that could be explained by "it just so happened" or "as it turned out." I did not overcome my problems by just enduring, fighting, and embracing the pain. Things could have easily turned out differently and I would not even be here now. Then I realized, while I was so focused on the pain, on my struggles with my studies, and on working through my pain, God had been there all along.

Yes, though I had walked through the valley of the shadow of death and had stumbled along its rocky road, complaining now and then about the tough journey, I had failed to notice that God had removed all the falling boulders, which would have certainly crushed me to death.

Even if I had run into a fowler's snare (Ps 91:2–3), I would not have noticed because God would have made an escape for me to run through. Not just in terms of my physical condition, but the friends who have helped me all these years, the circumstances that made it possible for me to live as normally as I could, none of this was mere happenstance. It was only because God has always been there!

Walking with God as My Guide

Most of the time, I saw God as a blurry figure, because I was too focused on dealing with the pain. But more so than the pain, it is God who has been my constant companion. Now it is time for me to come before God, to thank Him for all He has done, and let Him lead the way while I follow from behind, with my eyes fully focused on Him.

Let me end with these verses that remind me of God's presence in my life:

So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. (Deut 8:3)

And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.

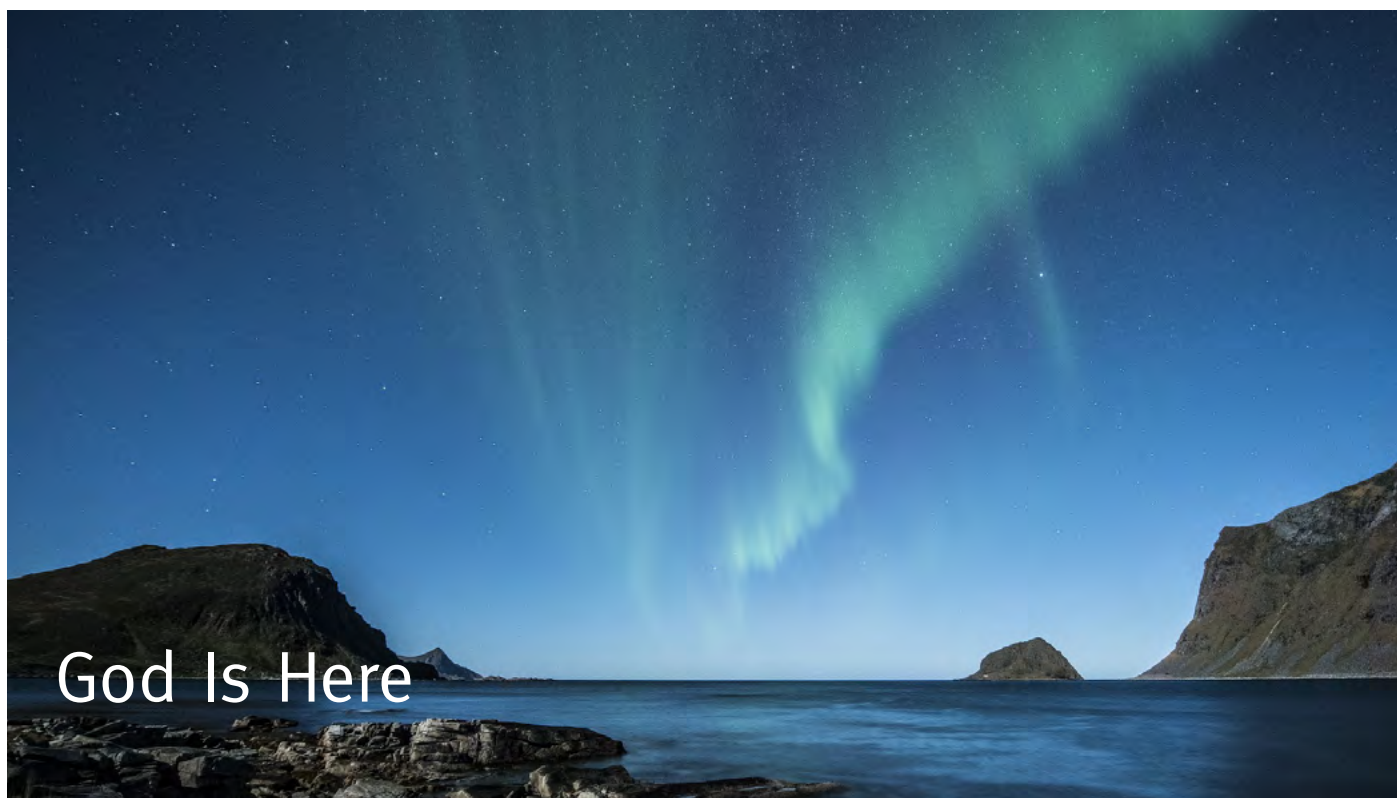
(Acts 17:26–27)

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

(Rev 3:20)

My God, my Lord, my Christ, is my constant companion! ★





God Is Here

If we attend services regularly, we may start to see it as part of our routine, and take these services for granted. We perform this Christian duty without giving much thought to our actions and attitudes. These short testimonies by our young sisters show how God is always present in our worship, at church and in our homes.

GOD'S PRESENCE IN MUSIC MINISTRY

*Praise the LORD with the harp;
Make melody to Him with an
instrument of ten strings. (Ps 33:2)*

*Serve the LORD with gladness;
Come before His presence with
singing. (Ps 100:2)*

Testimony 1: Christie Ivy Thomas (20 years old*)—Tinuhan, Sabah, Malaysia

In the name of the Lord Jesus, I would like to share a testimony to proclaim the glory and grace of God. This miraculous event occurred on August 8, 2015, during a fellowship visit by True Jesus Church (TJC) brethren from Nan Ao and Bai Lan in Taiwan.

In Tinuhan TJC, fellowship visits usually have music-based programmes, featuring choir and instrumental presentations. It was no different during this visit by the Taiwanese brethren. After a few welcome speeches and a testimony by a sister from the visiting group, there was an *angklung* presentation. The *angklung* is a type of wind instrument made from bamboo. The musicians presented three hymns: *Fairest Lord Jesus*, *Shout to the Lord*, and *Majesty*. As usual, these presentations were instrumental, without singers. I did not notice anything out of the ordinary until the second hymn, when I suddenly became aware of sweet singing accompanying the music. I turned my head left and right, but I could not find the source of this singing. I looked at my cousin Dorcas Leong, who was seated beside me, but it soon became apparent that I was the only one hearing the singing. However, after a while, I noticed Dorcas looking perplexed and looking around as I had done. I felt that the angels of God were surely with us, singing spiritual melodies alongside the musicians. I thank God for such a beautiful experience.

Testimony 2: Dorcas Leong (15 years old*)—Tinuhan, Sabah, Malaysia

In the name of Jesus, I would like to add to the testimony of Sister Christie Ivy Thomas. When Christie turned to me and asked whether I could hear voices singing, I said no. I was focused on watching the *angklung* music presentation. Not wanting to be distracted, I closed my eyes to immerse myself in the music. It was then that I heard many voices, like a large choir, singing. The voices were coming from the left side of the church through to the right side, where a seldom-used piano was located.

The voices were sweet and melodious, growing louder and louder. It seemed as though the pulpit was full of voices, proclaiming, "Shout to the Lord." It was as if I was in the presence of a magnificent, grand choir; it was so marvelous that it gave me goose bumps. I now understand that even if we only play instrumental music to praise God, it still pleases Him, and His angels join in to sing God's praise.

Praise be to the Almighty, who deserves all our love and worship. May this sharing bring glory to His name.

GOD'S PRESENCE IN EVANGELISTIC SERVICE

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Mt 5:16)

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

Testimony 3: Anna Leong (12 years old*)—Tinuhan, Sabah, Malaysia

In the name of Jesus, I testify. This miraculous event occurred during the evangelistic service on the first night of the Tinuhan TJC spiritual convocation, on September 3, 2015.

During the sermon by Preacher Yosua Gusti, I witnessed a very bright light enveloping him. I have had previous visions, but this one was different. I asked my two church friends beside me whether they could see the bright light, but they replied in the negative. When the preacher was explaining the concept of the one true God, and how He is not three persons merged into one, the light became even more dazzling and began to rise upwards.

Once the sermon was over, Preacher Yosua came down from the pulpit and the light disappeared. When the next speaker, Deacon Daniel, came up to the pulpit to introduce the Hosanna Choir, the bright light once again appeared. It seemed to follow the movements of the deacon. During the first hymn, however, my older sister interrupted the vision when she asked me to help take care of our baby sister. Standing in the audio control room, I could no longer see the light.

But soon, I saw the dazzling light again, descending on the choir. Every single member was enveloped in its brilliance. Whenever their voices rose to a crescendo, so too would the light rise. This continued until the end of the final hymn. It is truly a blessing to worship in the church of God, for He is very much present and pleased by our praises and thanks. May

everlasting glory and honor be to Jesus Christ our Savior.

GOD'S PRESENCE IN RE STUDENTS' BIBLE SEMINAR

But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven." (Mt 19:14)

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Lk 11:13)

Testimony 4: Phoebe Chin (14 years old*)—Singapore

I had this experience at a Junior Youth Bible seminar, on June 21, 2015. During the last prayer session, I prayed earnestly to be filled by the Holy Spirit. I also asked God to give the Holy Spirit to my friends who had not yet received Him and were praying at the front of the hall to receive the laying of hands.

At that moment, I saw blinding bright lights, though my eyes were closed. I saw an angel standing in front of each of my friends who were praying in front. It took me a while to realize that the angels were laying hands on them! The rest of us were praying behind them, as if we were interceding for them to receive the Holy Spirit. The vision only lasted for a few seconds, and then the bell rang to signal the end of the prayer. Praise the Lord!

GOD'S PRESENCE IN OUR HOME

Testimony 5: Phoebe and Phelia Chin (13 and 12 years old, respectively*)—Singapore

Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. (Rev 4:2)

"For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." (Mt 18:20)

Phoebe

On December 1, 2014, I decided to pray in my room. I wanted to ask God

to fill me with the Holy Spirit and to remove all my doubts. My sister, Phelia, and I then decided to pray together.

During my prayer, something amazing happened. There were bright lights and, suddenly, I saw God sitting on His golden throne watching us pray, while angels surrounded us. I thought it was just my imagination, so I opened my eyes—but the vision was still there. The vision disappeared after a few seconds, and I continued praying. After the prayer, I told my family what I had seen. Phelia had also seen a vision in her prayer, and it matched mine exactly! I believe that God let me see this vision because I had doubted His presence. I thank God for giving me the promised Holy Spirit.

Phelia

On a Monday night, the day after the end-of-year spiritual meeting at church, my sister and I decided to have a fifteen-minute prayer. We went into our room, kneeled down, and began to pray.

As we started to speak in tongues, I did not notice anything unusual. However, five minutes before the prayer ended, I suddenly saw a bright flash of light. Then I saw myself, and my sister beside me, kneeling on kneeling pads. Before us was a Spirit sitting on a throne. At each corner, there was an angel. I viewed this scene from the back of the room.

However, at that moment, the alarm that we had set to end the prayer went off. I stopped praying and opened my eyes. I could not stop thinking about the vision. Our parents then entered the room and asked us about our prayer. My sister spoke first, but I was not paying attention—I was still thinking about the vision. It was then my turn to share if I had experienced anything. I told them about my vision. After I finished, everyone was in shock. It turned out that my sister Phoebe had exactly the same experience as me! ★

* At time of vision.

Be Thou My Vision

Rachel Chan—Sunderland, UK



Around the beginning of 2015, I started to become anxious. I was in my final year of university, and I was worried about my university work, my career, and my future prospects. I felt a loss of direction, and I lacked self-confidence. At the same time, all my project ideas seemed to lead to a dead end. I was reading a design course, where the course options I took would determine the direction of the work I produced—yet there was no syllabus or set course modules to guide me. I knew that, being in my final year, I had to progress quickly, and the absence of course structure, coupled with the passing of time, added to my anxieties.

DO I TRULY BELIEVE?

One night, I felt extremely restless and dejected as I pondered over my troubles. I couldn't sleep. All my life, God had led me out of every difficult situation I had ever faced. But yet, I still had so much doubt and fear in my heart. This made me feel so ashamed. I decided to pray. A little while later, a hymn came to mind—it is called "Lord, I believe." I had learned this hymn as a first year student at the youth theological training course

(YTTC), some four years before. I hadn't thought about this hymn for a long while, but the lyrics really reflected how I was feeling at the time. So that night, I sang this hymn as a prayer to God:

*Lord I believe, but help my unbelief;
I know You provide everything that I need.*

*But O Lord, I am weak and my mind
wanders far from You,
O help me Lord, stretch out Your
hand,
Help me from the mire!*

*Though the figs don't bud;
And there's no grapes on the vine.
Though the olive crop fail;
And there's no yield on the field.
No sheep in the pen;
Nor cattle in the stall,
I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in
my God.*

DO I SEE GOD AS MY VISION?

The morning came and I had already forgotten the night before. During this time, the church was preparing for a praise worship event. One of the hymns chosen by the choir was an arrangement of the hymn "Be Thou

My Vision." During our night-time fellowships, we had been discussing the meaning of this hymn, and how it is almost impossible to grasp the true depths of the lyrics if we haven't really made God our vision.

So that morning, I decided to look up the word "vision" and search for examples in the Bible. The Oxford Dictionary had two definitions for "vision":

- 1) The faculty or state of being able to see.
- 2) The ability to think about or plan the future with imagination or wisdom.

When I referred to the Bible for examples, I found Habakkuk. I had not made a decent effort to study this book before, so I decided to rectify this and read the whole book, which is only three chapters long. I truly thank God, it is a beautiful book, and I felt very blessed after reading it. It records the dialogue between God and the prophet during a period of darkness for the people of God. Prophet Habakkuk had questions—there were many things he didn't understand and he feared for the people. He saw that wickedness was prevailing and he wanted to know

why God was not taking action, why He was allowing the wicked to go free. It may seem that Habakkuk lacked faith and was murmuring against God, but at the end of his second speech, he explained:

*I will stand my watch
And set myself on the rampart,
And watch to see what He will say
to me,
And what I will answer when I am
corrected. (Hab 2:1)*

“Habakkuk was waiting for God's reply; he believed in God and knew he would be corrected. He boldly brought his fears before God and diligently waited for His word.

Habakkuk was waiting for God's reply; he believed in God and knew he would be corrected. He boldly brought his fears before God and diligently waited for His word. These actions struck my heart and caused me to reflect.

WE CANNOT SEE GOD'S PLAN, BUT THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

God then replied to him, saying:

*“Write the vision
And make it plain on tablets,
That he may run who reads it.
For the vision is yet for an appointed
time;
But at the end it will speak, and it
will not lie.
Though it tarries, wait for it;
Because it will surely come,
It will not tarry.
Behold the proud,
His soul is not upright in him;
But the just shall live by his faith”
(Hab 2:2–4)*

God gave Habakkuk a vision. This vision was the spoken word of God, which was to be written on tablets: words of warning and authority. God told Habakkuk that the vision was for an appointed time in the future, and instructed him to wait. Even if it seemed to be delayed, this vision

would surely come. So whatever fears or doubts Habakkuk felt, or whenever the people questioned God, they could see these tablets—plainly written, solid, and standing alone. This is how God reminded them that He is the Almighty God: judgment is His, and His plan is above all. Even though the dire situation persisted, and evil continued to prevail, Habakkuk could trust in God's vision and live by faith.

GOD QUIETLY REVEALS HIMSELF

Finally, at the end of the book, Habakkuk concludes with a hymn of faith:

*Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may
fail,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock may be cut off from
the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls—
Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.
The LORD God is my strength;
He will make my feet like deer's feet,
And He will make me walk on my
high hills.” (Hab 3:17–19)*

The lyrics of the hymn “Lord, I believe” are based on this passage. When I read this Scripture, my mind journeyed back to the night before, and the heaviness I had harbored in my heart. From that moment, the impossibly heavy burden I had carried suddenly became miraculously light. I truly felt the presence of God so close to me. I knew that God had heard my prayer, made in weakness. I wholeheartedly thank God for His guidance, for who could imagine that two hymns and the Book of Habakkuk could link together and resonate within me in the very moment I

needed it. The still, small voice of God is, for me, the sweetest thing. This confirms to me that the God whom I worship is the true and living God, and that His word is living and true.

WHEN THE FUTURE IS UNCLEAR, LOOK TO GOD

At times, we may not understand why certain events unfold the way they do, or we may feel anxious that we don't know what tomorrow holds. When we feel this way, we should bring it before God and diligently seek Him. If we truly seek God and earnestly wait for His reply, God will answer. God has promised the most wonderful things, and only in these do we have hope. Just like in the Book of Habakkuk, the word of God is our vision, plainly written in the Bible, as an anchor for us to hold on to. We must take the word of God and live by it—make it our hope—for the things that God has spoken will surely come to pass.

The meaning of the word “vision” is to see or plan for the future ahead. God, in His wisdom, has already planned the future, therefore we do not need to rely on ourselves—we only need to look to God. If we are willing to receive God and His word as our vision, then we will surely be able to sing a hymn of faith, as Habakkuk did. Whatever situation arises, we will be able to proclaim, “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord.” ★



Whom God Uses in His Ministry (I)

Clay Pot—California, USA

For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him.
(2 Chr 16:9a)

As part of the body of Christ, we are all called to minister to God and to our fellow members. We are His eyes, His hands, and His feet. But the question is, what kind of a person does God actually use in His ministry? The above verse says that God is looking for people whose hearts are loyal to Him. These are the people whom He seeks to help, through which He shows His great power. God is looking for people whom He can bless, honor, and use in a great way.

So we ought to examine ourselves to see whether we can be used by Him (Lam 3:40). The Bible says: "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Tim 4:16). We must carefully and continually evaluate ourselves so that we can be molded for the Lord's use. When we are refined, then we are ready to be used by God.

So what qualities make a person useable by God?

A SURRENDERED HEART

A life surrendered into the hands of the holy God is a marvelous thing. The Bible describes surrender in a very interesting way: when something is surrendered to God completely, it is described as "broken."

Used by God

When God uses a broken vessel, it represents someone who has surrendered himself totally to God.

When Jesus fed the 5,000, He took the bread, blessed it, broke it and used it (Mt 14:19; Mk 6:41). This is what God does in our lives. Just as with the bread, Jesus will take us, bless and "break" us, and use us for His purpose. The hardest part is the breaking, which happens when we surrender our heart, when we submit to God's will and say: "Dear God, whatever You want me to do with my life, I will do. Whatever You want to do in my life, I will accept."

When Gideon led an attack on the Midianite camp, God sent only 300 men out against 4,500. God told them to surround the camp, and each man to take three items into battle: a trumpet, a clay pitcher, and a lit torch to go inside the pitcher. At Gideon's signal, the men in his company blew their trumpets at the same time and broke their clay pitchers, sending the bright beam of their torches into the camp (Judg 7:19–20). The two other companies followed suit: 300 men blowing trumpets, breaking pitchers, and wielding bright torches. The enemies were thrown into mass confusion and began attacking each other. This is how God gave a tremendous victory to Gideon and his band of 300 soldiers. What would have happened if the pitchers did not break? There would have been no light, there would have been no victory.

When the woman came to anoint

"We must carefully and continually evaluate ourselves so that we can be molded for the Lord's use. When we are refined, then we are ready to be used by God."



Jesus at the house of Simon the leper, she broke the alabaster flask and poured the expensive oil on Jesus' head (Mk 14:3). When she broke the flask, the fragrance would have filled the room (cf. Jn 12:3). Unless the flask is broken, there would be no emanating fragrance.

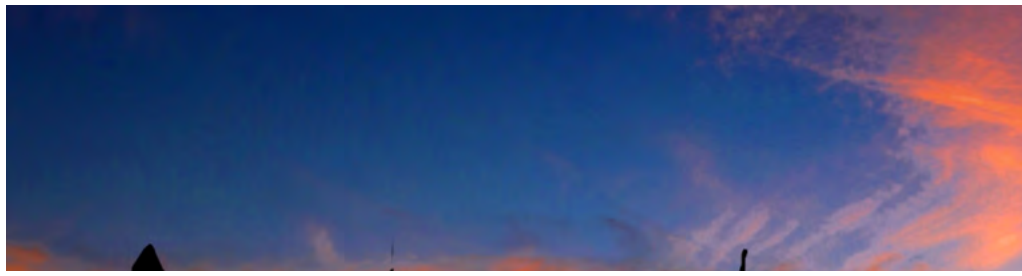
As with many things, Jesus is the supreme example. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed: "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done" (Lk 22:42). Careful study of the Old Testament reveals that the cup is a metaphor for our lives, and that it can be filled with a variety of things. Our "cup" can be filled with blessings and salvation (Ps 23:5; 116:13), or it can be filled with wrath and judgment (Isa 51:17). In fact, many Old Testament passages use the metaphor of the cup as a reference to God's fierce judgment. So as He prayed, Jesus knew the agonizing pain that awaited Him, and yet, He ended with "Not My will, but Yours, be done." This is total submission.

There will be a time in our lives when we must go through our own personal Gethsemane, a time when we feel completely lost and alone, unable to stem the flow of tears. This is when we say to the Father: "Not my will, not my ambition, not my desire, but Thy will be done." When we have broken our own self-will and our self-dependency, God will do amazing things in our life.

Sought by God

God also looks for a broken heart, but not in a romantic sense.

When David, the author of Psalm 51, committed adultery and was confronted by Nathan, he acknowledged his sins (2 Sam 12:13)



and repented, submitting himself to the word of God's prophet. Samson led most of his life relying on his own strength. After the Philistines captured him, he could no longer save himself by his own might. Strung between two pillars, the blinded Samson finally humbled himself and prayed. And that was when God answered him.

When we have committed sin against God, and we acknowledge our wrongs and repent wholeheartedly, that is when we are broken before God. Such broken hearts are sought by God. As David himself acknowledges, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise" (Ps 51:17).

Trained by God

On the other hand, being broken is not always a result of sin. Sometimes, God will break us to strengthen our faith, and train us to rely on Him instead of our own strength. The Bible describes how Jacob wrestled with God all night. Until then, his faith had not been his own. Yes, he knew of his father's faith, but he was only living out the faith of his parents; his own faith did not mature until after the wrestling match. And he not only walked away with a personal faith, but also with a permanent limp to remind him of his weakness.

How many times have we truly wrestled with God, the way Jacob

did? Do you know your God? We all need a divine wrestling match with God, and He will touch us, just as He touched Jacob's hip. We will not be the same person we once were. If we wish to be used by God, we must surrender and be broken.

A ROOTED FAITH

The second quality that God seeks in His workers is a faith rooted in Him. This is when a person believes in God's word and reflects this in his behavior. The Bible tells us that "without faith is it impossible to please Him" and "whatever is not from faith is sin" (Heb 11:6; Rom 14:23). This means that faith must underlie every action, every work, carried out by a worker of God. And with a firmly rooted faith, a worker can do great things for God.

However, we are often limited by our own unbelief. Sometimes we even have a hard time believing in God for the daily things in life. There are times when our faith tests God, rather than trusts Him. But to truly believe in God, we need to attempt things in our ministry which we know we cannot achieve on our own. Only then will we witness the hand of God in our work. If we want to do great works for God, then we need to take that leap of faith. Do not be afraid to step out on a limb. When we are doing the things that God wants us to do, we must walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7).

In my experience, I have seen how God works when we have faith in Him. Many things have happened that cannot be explained simply by human effort. One example is how God has saved many souls in my home church. A number of years ago, we started a weekly Sunday morning prayer, which starts at 9.00 am and

“It is amazing how God works and uses those whose hearts are rooted in Him. The only limit is how much faith you have in Him. What are your expectations of God? As Jesus said, “According to your faith let it be to you” (Mt 9:29).



lasts for half an hour. Whoever is willing will come to church to pray for the growth of the church and for the weak and sick members. Initially, only twenty or twenty-five members joined the prayer. But their hearts were for the Lord's work. The church council and preachers encouraged us to expect great things from God and to attempt great things for God. Soon, we were amazed by what was happening—God worked wonders in us.

Once, prior to a spiritual convocation, the church hosted a special service in a member's home, and more than thirty-five truth-seekers came. Afterward, during that spiritual convocation, more than twenty truth-seekers attended on the first night, and many of them received the Holy Spirit. We continue to pray, and God continues to work. Truth-seekers walk into church and receive the Holy Spirit. Some come to us, having sought the truth for a while, and ask to be baptized.

It is amazing how God works and uses those whose hearts are rooted in Him. The only limit is how much faith you have in Him. What are your expectations of God? As Jesus said, "According to your faith let it be to you" (Mt 9:29).

CONCLUSION

All of us have been called to work for God, but God chooses to work through those with certain qualities. If we wish to have a fruitful and powerful ministry, we need to examine whether we have the qualities God seeks.

God is looking for those who are broken and have surrendered themselves to Him. We should ask ourselves, "Have I gone through my

personal Gethsemane?" We need to come to a place in our life when we say to God, "Do whatever You want to do in my life; I surrender all to You." As we surrender ourselves to Him, we will find that God will reshape our mind and soften our heart with His love. His skillful molding will give way for greater fruitfulness in our ministry. God can do much with a surrendered heart.

God also requires His workers to be rooted in faith. Let us reflect on what we believe God can do in our lives, in our families, and in our church. Do not limit God by limiting our faith in Him. Ask God to help our unbelief and strengthen our faith (Mk 9:24). Believe that God is going to accomplish great things for us and through us, and He will use us mightily in His ministry.

To be continued... ★

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: 2500-3000 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: 2500-3000 words.

Exhortation

An Exhortation encourages and admonishes the reader in different aspects of the Christian faith.
Article length: 2000-2500 words.

Testimony

A Testimony recounts an experience in the Lord that will encourage and edify the reader.
Article length: 1500-2000 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 #83:

Topic: Spring

Articles due: January 1, 2017

"Ask the LORD for rain

In the time of the latter rain" (Zech 10:1)

The tail end of the winter showers are known as the latter rain. Rain in winter must stretch into spring before tailing off in order for lentils and grain to ripen.

Zechariah's call points to the last days (time of the latter rain) when Old Testament messianic prophecies are fulfilled and nations are brought under Jesus' rule; his exhortation to pray for rain is firstly to turn our attention to the vernal festival of Pentecost when the Spirit first descended (Acts 2), but implicit in the call is the possibility of the latter rain being withheld because of our unfaithfulness (Jer 3:3; Deut 11:11-17).

God's salvation plan has been fulfilled through the coming of the Messiah and the downpour of the promised Holy Spirit—the ultimate proof of God's faithfulness. What about us? Are we faithful to God? Are our hearts truly free from the cold and dark of sin? Are we filled with the Spirit? Have we shared the wondrous grace of salvation with others?

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.

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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<http://www.tjc.org>

International Youth Fellowship 2017

“100 Years—A Heritage of Spirituality and Grace.”

Date: June 1–12, 2017

Venue: Irvine, California, United States

With the church entering her 100th year, we invite youths from all over the world to come together to reflect on the God-given mission to the church and to encourage one another through testimony sharing and fellowship.

Registration will be open to 50 US youths and 70 non-US youths, on a first-come-first-served basis.

Brief itinerary:

- Fellowship: June 1–5, 2017 at Irvine, California, US
- Visitation and tour:

June 5–7, 2017: Southern California

June 8–11, 2017: Northern California

(returning to Southern California on June 12)

Target participants:

TJC members who are between 18–40 years old

If you are interested, please visit the International Youth Ministry website for more information:

<http://members.tjc.org/sites/en/iym/Lists/Upcoming%20Events/MyItems.aspx>.

Submit your registration form to your local church before March 31, 2017.

May the Lord Jesus Christ move you to take this special opportunity to meet and have fellowship with brethren in Christ from various parts of the world!

