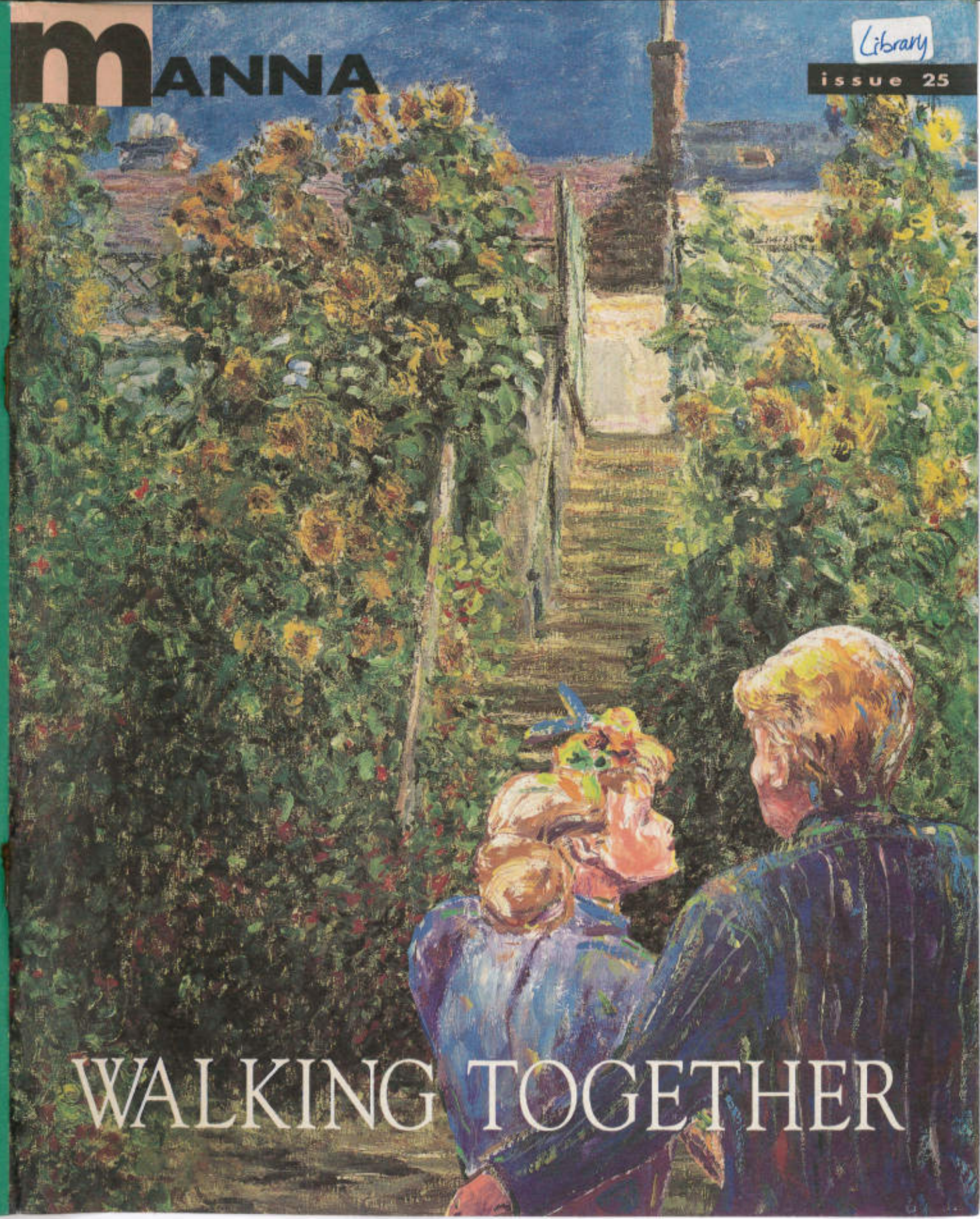


“What therefore God
has joined together,
let not man put asunder”

Mt 19.6



WALKING TOGETHER

Feature article

Walking together 3

Exhortation

Product of faith 10

Dimensions of love 14

*God's love: Perspective of the prodigal son
and his older brother* 21

Temptation or test? 25

Practical christian living

Lost sheep 30

The blessing of having a campus fellowship 32

Comfortable Christians 34

Bible study

Parable of the labourers in the vineyard 36

Testimonies

The Lord gave me back my child 40

Calling of God 41

A heart of flesh or of stone 43

Respondents on full-time ministry

Elder John Yang 45

Preacher Thomas Kam

Newly-ordained preacher

Evangelism

The ministry in India 47

Marriage, an honourable and holy estate, was first instituted by God at the time of Man's innocence in the Garden of Eden. After God had created everything on earth, He saw that it was good except that Adam was alone and so God said, "I will make him a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:18). So God made woman from one of Adam's ribs while he was asleep and He brought her to him. Adam was delighted on seeing the woman. "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh". The Bible goes on to say that for this reason a man leaves his parents and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Marriage was ordained by God for three purposes:

Firstly, for the procreation of godly offspring to be brought up in the fear of the Lord and to the praise of His name (Mal 2:15ff). When God had created Adam and Eve, He blessed them saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it." (Gen 1:28).

Secondly, to satisfy our natural passions without sinning against God. This is especially so for the majority of us who do not have the gift of celibacy. Believers who find their passions too strong should

marry to keep themselves as undefiled members of Christ's body. This is Paul's advice, "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it well for them to remain single as I do. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion" (1 Cor 7:8).

Thirdly, for companionship and mutual help, both in prosperity and adversity. Wives should submit to their husbands as they submit to the Lord; while husbands should love their wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Eph 5:22, 25).

Since marriage is instituted by God, there is to be no divorce. The Bible in recording the words of Jesus is uncompromising about this:

"What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mt 19:6).

"And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery" (Mt 19:9).

Divorce in the Old Testament was tolerated by God because of the hardness of man's heart.

There are many reasons why marriages land on the rocks. They range from infidelity to incompatibility, financial strain to family strain and personality clashes to personality disorders. Much of these can be traced to love growing cold. Where forgiveness and tolerance smoothed things over in courtship days, misunderstandings, the exchange of unkind words and cold wars put an unbearable strain on the marriage. This has led many to separation and then divorce. The Christian must know that marriage is for life. All the reasons mentioned above, except for adultery, are not grounds for divorce. Since divorce is not a Christian

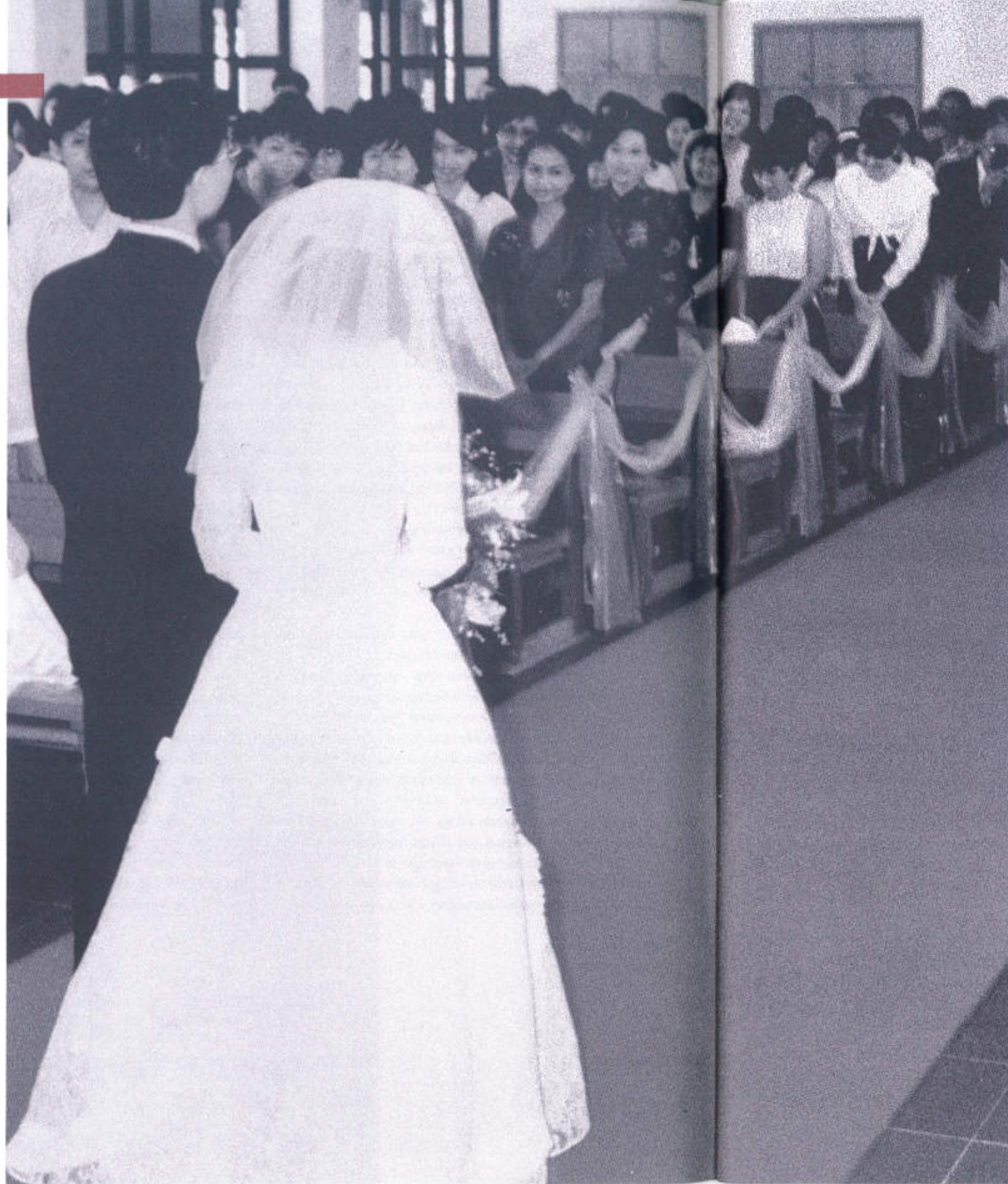
option, Christian couples must work very hard to maintain their first love. We must honour and hold our marriage for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death.

In the feature article of this issue, *"Walking Together"*, the writer asserts that success in marriage is more than just finding the right person. Being the right person is even more important. For it is not the tangible things that you may bring to marriage that will make it a success. Rather it is the everyday things that you do which is crucial. The author asserts further that in order to make marriage successful, the two parties must apply the biblical golden rule in their relationship: "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so them". Under Exhortation, *"The Product of Faith"* tells us that if you are a man of faith, you can overcome doubt, overcome worry and overcome fear. In *"The Dimensions of Love"*, the author expands on Paul's call to understand the breadth, the length, the height and the depth of the love of Christ. In *"Temptation or Test"* the writer says that temptation is provided by Satan for "God tempts no one". There are two approaches to overcome temptation: by direct confrontation and by avoidance with prayers to God for guidance. Under Bible Study, *"The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard"*, the author provides a rare treat in hermeneutics for readers. Under Testimonies, *"The Calling of God"*, the writer testifies of her own calling and pre-baptism ordeal, and recounted a miracle she saw – that of a dying baby Moses, who greeted her with sparkling eyes and rosy cheeks after baptism.

Pleasant and prayerful reading!

This is the 5th issue since the revamp of Manna. We do sincerely hope that readers would give some feedback of the magazine. Your comments or suggestions would be most welcome.

*The happy couple
walked down the
aisle together, and
they lived happily
ever after.*



WALKING TOGETHER

How many times have you read this fairy-tale ending in story books? Is marriage really so idyllic? In real life, can a couple really 'live happily ever after'?

To address these questions, we have to return to the Bible, and read the creation episode in the Book of Genesis. As the author testifies, when God saw that Adam was alone, He decided that this was not good for him, so He created Eve, as a "helper fit for him" (Gen 2:18). And when God had completed His creation, the Bible says that "God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was good." (Gen 1:31). In other words, God concluded that all His works, including the liaison between Adam and Eve, were pleasing to Him. This being so, we could say that marriage as an institution is not only endorsed but also favoured by God. It should then follow that life after the wedding should be one of joy and happiness.

Yet, in reality, the facts may tell a different story. We may know of friends, even Christian friends, whose marriages are on the rocks. If marriage is endorsed by God, surely it will work. What went wrong? Of course there are a thousand and one reasons why



**“God saw everything
that He had made,
and behold,
it was good.”**

BY LEE JIN [SINGAPORE]

things do not work out, and it is unrealistic to even try to list them all. However, in many instances, the problem lies with our attitudes and our expectations in a marriage.

For a start, we have to realise that success in marriage is more than just finding the right person. Being the right person is even more important. Ask most people and they will tell you what ideals they are looking for in a spouse. Very few will think about the kind of person their 'ideal' spouse will be getting. Have you ever asked yourself, if you are looking for specific biblical qualities in your spouse, are these qualities found in yourself? It is not the tangible material things that you may bring to a marriage that will make it a success, it is you as a person—the way you act and behave in your everyday life—that is crucial. So whatever spiritual qualities you want in a spouse, make sure that you have developed them too.

In many ways, marriage is a 'give and take' commitment; you must be willing to give what you aspire to receive. In the early years of marriage, this principle is even more important. When two parties begin their lives together, each will discover new things about the other. When these are things that please

you, you may give thanks to God; but what if your partner exhibits traits that displease you? The 'give and take' principle must apply. You have to recognise that your spouse is only human, just as you are. Accepting the other's quirks, occasional forgetfulness, and change of moods just shows that you have acknowledged that your spouse is as human as you are.

When two persons enter into marriage, it is also the blending of differences, usually in terms of backgrounds, personal histories and catalogues of experiences, into a single unit. If these differences are not talked over, they can lead to misunderstanding and conflict. This leads us to another important practical element in a marriage, namely, communication. Marriage means sharing and a key feature of sharing is being able to communicate in order to learn more about each other and in so doing, under-

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stand each other better. And communication is two-way; talking and listening. The second facet, listening, is often ignored. We may prefer to speak as this enables us to assert our positions, viewpoints, ideas and feelings to our spouses, but we may not like to be on the receiving end to listen to those of our spouses. The fact that God gives us two ears but one mouth is significant. The Bible also reminds us to “be quick to hear, slow to speak” (Jas 1:19). The extroverts among us especially have to ensure that we are not guilty of talking too much and not listening enough.

In addition to the above practical considerations, a successful marriage is one where the two parties can apply the Biblical golden rule in their relationship: “whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them” (Matt 7:12). Let's take a practical example. “My wife does

Marriage means sharing and a key feature of sharing is being able to communicate in order to learn more about each other and in so doing, understand each other better.



not show any interest in what I do,” the husband may complain. Yet, he never asks himself whether he shows any interest in what his wife does. How often does he compliment her on her efforts or enquire after her activities at church or at her workplace?

Does he notice how tired she looks sometimes and ask if she is all right? Likewise, the wife may mourn, “my husband does not love me any more.” But she never stops to think whether her actions show her husband that she does care for him. Has she become so engrossed in trying to be a good mother that she has forgotten to be a wife? And when was the last time she actually told him that she loved him? If, over time, she has changed, is it fair for her to expect the same degree of love and affection from her spouse?

The Lord Jesus tells us that we should do to others what we expect others to do to us. Applied to marital relationships, it means that when you expect affection from your spouse, you ought to show affection to your spouse first; when you want your spouse to support your endeavours, you ought to support his or her endeavours first. If both of you just wait for the other to take the first step, you could waste

“**Ultimately, a successful marriage is one where both parties can walk in the Christian path prescribed in the Bible; where together, they live a lifestyle that distinguishes them as the salt of the earth, the light of the world**”

your whole married life waiting in vain.

Ultimately, a successful marriage is one where both parties can walk in the Christian path prescribed in the Bible; where together, they live a lifestyle that distinguishes them as the salt of the earth, the light of the world. Often, when we marry within the Lord, we expect the rest of our lives together to be happy, and we cannot understand why our marriage is not working. We may still face numerous problems and have countless arguments, perhaps even more than our non-believing friends. Surely, since we have married within the Lord, which is what God requires, our lives together ought to be blissful. But what we fail to realise is that despite marrying a church member, we have not applied the words of God, as given in the Bible, as the sole guiding principle in all that we do. We fail to fear God and keep His command-



ments. If our daily actions are no different from those of non-Christians, and we continue to indulge in worldly pleasures, show little concern for the welfare of the church and do not put God as the centre of our lives, how can we then expect God to bless our marriage life? Whether we are single or married, as long as we are Christians, we have an obligation to live lives befitting our status, and more than that, to live our lives not for ourselves, but for Christ.

Taking this a step further, marriage is more than just the union of two persons as one. When two Christians marry, God must always remain the head of their household, and play a major part in every decision that they make. For example, if you emigrate, will you consider how the move may affect your service for the Lord? Will you still be able to serve Him

in your new country of residence?

If you change to a job with better career prospects, will you still have time to attend services, participate in church ministry and do your daily Bible reading and prayers?

In fact, Christian couples ought to make it their aim to have the serving spirit of Aquila and Priscilla, who together played active roles in the ministry of the early church. The “two are better than one” concept has to be taken beyond just a union between husband and wife in terms of their personal lives; it has to encompass the Christian lives that they lead in serving God. In other words, husband and wife ought to team up in offering their service to God, and together they ought to ensure that they spend the rest of their lives as faithful and loyal servants of the Lord. Today, we often say that just as God had created Eve as a companion (since it was not good for Adam to be alone) and a helper to Adam, we are companions and helpers to our spouses so that together, we will not grow old alone and be without help. But what is even more important is that we are also companions and helpers in our spouses’ journey of faith and in

The “two are better than one” concept has to be taken beyond just a union between husband and wife in terms of their personal lives; it has to encompass the Christian lives they lead in serving God.



their service to the Lord. We need to be mindful of this, and constantly examine ourselves to see if we are supporting or hindering our spouses’ faith and service.

If you were to ask married couples their reason for marriage, many would tell you that they married for love. Yet, if you were to continue to ask them how they would define this elusive term, the answers you get will not be the same. Physical attraction, compatibility, enjoying each other’s company, can’t live without the other, and the list continues. But I believe that we, as Christians, have to return to the Bible to truly understand what love is all about. First, Apostle Paul has this advice: to the husbands, “love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her”, and to the wives, “be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church, His body” (Eph 5:21-25). And this advice provides the clue to the Christian concept of love between husband and wife. As Paul says, Christ loved His church to the extent that He was willing to sacrifice His own life in order to open the door of salvation to her. This is the extent

to which husbands ought to love their wives. And just as the church, being the body of Christ, has to be guided by Him and have all her actions directed by Him, wives are to practise submissiveness in their dealings with their husbands, who are, after all, the heads of the families. This is not to say that wives are less important in the eyes of God, or that they are inferior. It is just that the role played by each party is different. The important thing to note is that just like the physical anatomy, both the head and the body need each other in order to survive. One cannot function without the other.

Next, when we talk about love, we need to measure this against the famous definition given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13. Take a quiet moment, search your heart, and ask yourself if your love for your spouse exhibits the following attributes:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no records of wrongs... It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails (1 Cor 13:4-8 <NIV>).

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It always protects,

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Love
never fails



The Lord Jesus says, "from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder." (Mk 10:6-9). In other words, marriage is for life. From the time we walk down the aisle together with our spouse, it signifies a new beginning, a new life together, upholding the marriage vow "for better for worse, in sickness and in health, till death do us part". We now have to invest time and effort to make our marriage work, and leave no room for regret. As Christians, we have the assurance that marriage is an institution sanctioned by God Himself. As long as we live up to the teachings of the Bible and strive to be a good partner to our spouse, the Lord will bless our marriage, and we can 'live happily ever after'. ■

Exhortation



the PRODUCT of FAITH – Without Doubt, Without Worry, Without Fear

The Gospel of Matthew records four occasions on which Jesus chided the disciples for lacking faith, calling them "men of little faith". On two occasions, He was referring to their doubt (Mt 14:31; 16:8). The third occasion saw Him focusing on their needless worry (Mt 6:30-31); and the fourth incident found Him rebuking them for their unfounded fear (Mt 8:26).

The disciples had been following Jesus for three years. They had seen Him perform many miracles. Sadly though, none of them was commended as a man of faith. Instead they were all called "men of little faith". Even Peter was not spared, which goes to show that cultivating faith is not an easy task. But once we have faith, we shall overcome every doubt, worry and fear.

■ Overcoming Doubt ■

One night Jesus walked on the sea towards the disciples. The disciples were terrified, convinced that they had seen a ghost. But immediately, Jesus identified Himself and told them not to be afraid.

Then Peter answered saying, "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water." Jesus replied, "Come." Peter then got out of the boat and walked on the water towards Jesus. However when he saw the wind, he became afraid and as he started to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus instantly stretched out His hand and caught him, saying "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Mt 14:25-31).

After we have believed in the Lord, all may seem fine initially and we run the heavenly path with faith; but when afflictions appear, our faith may be shaken and we begin to doubt the salvation of God. We wonder why, after believing in the Lord, we meet with disasters instead of peace. Our faith starts to waver. If at this moment, we can call out like Peter "Lord, save me!", and pray earnestly, we may once again experience the grace of God and increase our faith.

On another occasion, the disciples forgot to take some bread along when they went out. Jesus told them, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." They discussed amongst themselves and concluded, "We brought no bread."

Jesus, aware of this, said, "O men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? Do you not understand nor remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered?" (Mt 16:5-9). The disciples' discussion about bread reflected their weakness of faith.

In Matthew 6, the Lord considers those who ask, "What shall we eat?", "What shall we drink?", "What shall we wear?" as "men of little faith". While it is true that food and clothing are necessities of life, many have over-emphasised their importance.

The two incidents above teach us that one who has no faith doubts and that the reason for doubt is the lack of faith, for "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). One whose hope is assured (having faith) will have no doubts, for such assurance would be as good as the actual possession of the thing one hopes for.

■ Overcoming Worry ■

In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life?



And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day." (Mt 6:25-34).

When I was still a new believer having the "first confidence" (Heb 3:14), I would cry each time I read this passage about the promise of God. As time went

by, I began to experience moments of weakness during which I would worry about my livelihood. Earning a living is the most common worry in a person's life. A man slogs daily in order to secure a livelihood. But if he has faith, and believes that God will provide as promised: "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things – what we shall eat, what we shall drink and what we shall wear – shall be ours" (Mt 6:33), what is there to worry about?

Besides our livelihood, there are many other worries in life. Sickness, bereavement, children – the list is endless. But a man of faith remains composed even on the verge of death. He will be like Paul, who welcomed death with much delight (Phil 1:21-23; 2 Tim 4:7-8) or Peter who, though imprisoned and about to be brought before Herod, could sleep peacefully between two soldiers, bound with chains (Acts 12:5-6).

The Holy Spirit gives us faith and fills our hearts with God's love (1 Cor 12:9; Rom 5:5). As long as we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will be able to enjoy heavenly bliss whilst on earth. Why then should we worry? Paul said, "For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17). Believers often equate receiving the Holy Spirit with gaining heaven. This leads them to neglect prayer life subsequently. As a consequence, they are not filled with the Holy Spirit, do not get to experience joy in the spirit, cannot get rid of sin through the power of the Holy Spirit, or lead a sanctified life (Rom 8:2; 2 Thess 2:13). There is little difference in their lives before and after receiving the Holy Spirit. This thus makes them doubt the power of the Holy Spirit. They do not realise that it is only through prayer that infilling can be experienced, and the power realised. Those who wish to have the joy of the spirit should pray to be filled.

■ Overcoming Fear ■

"And when He was entered into a ship, His disciples followed Him. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves. But He was asleep. And His disciples came to Him, awoke Him, saying 'Lord, save us! We are perishing.' And He said to them 'Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?' Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm." (Mt 8:23-26).

Jesus was in the boat with His disciples. But because He was asleep, the disciples lost their faith. Similarly when our prayers fail to produce immediate results, we lose faith and become disheartened, and may even stop praying altogether. One who has faith would believe that in everything "God means it for good" (Gen 50:20) and "it is good for me that I was afflicted" (Ps 119:71). He would be without doubt, without worry and without fear; he would constantly give thanks to God for His beautiful will, whether in chastisement or during trials. If we are still fearful, we need to pray even more earnestly and, like the disciples who managed to rouse Jesus from sleep, be persistent till our prayers are answered. ▶



Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and they came to the shore of the Red Sea. When they saw the Egyptian army approaching, the people became afraid and blamed Moses. But Moses remained undaunted and calm, telling the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be still." (Ex 14:9-14). How could Moses remain unperturbed at such a critical hour? Where did he find the strength to comfort and encourage the people? It must have been through his great faith in God - after all, he had performed ten miracles through the power of God before he was able to lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

Paul had no one to help him during his internment in Rome; many even left him. But he could feel the Lord by his side, strengthening him, so that he was able to preach the gospel to the Gentiles and be rescued from the lion's mouth. He said, "The Lord will rescue me from every evil and save me for His heavenly kingdom." (2 Tim 4:16-18). The sense of the divine presence added to his strength. Despite the adverse circumstances he was in, he was able to proclaim the message of God to the Gentiles. This was because of the faith that had been generated in him by the abundant grace he had received from the Lord.

The Bible records, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love cast out fear." (1 Jn 4:18). Such kind of love has to be cultivated with faith. John reiterated "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." (1 Jn 4:16). "All who keep His commandments abide in Him, and He in them. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us." (1 Jn 3:24; Rom 5:5). We know

also, that the love of God is poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, for those who have received the Holy Spirit, as long as they pray constantly, there is nothing to fear.

■ Conclusion ■

Paul wrote, "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love." (1 Cor 13:13). Faith, hope and love are the three elements one must not lack. Even though the greatest of them is love, faith comes first. Only faith can produce hope and love. This is why faith precedes hope and love. Paul also wrote, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." (Rom 15:13). From this, we can see how important having faith is - it fills us with joy and peace. Is not joy and peace that which everyone desires? But we do not realise that joy and peace can only come through our faith. We fail to receive many blessings of God because we do not have enough faith to meet the message of God we hear (Heb 4:2). Without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb 11:6). It is no wonder then that even the apostles asked the Lord to increase their faith (Lk 17:5). ■

BY HSIEH CHUNG KUANG
[TAIWAN]
TRANSLATED

THE DIMENSIONS OF LOVE

"How much do you love me?" the murmuring Christian asked.
Jesus stretched out His hands and said, "This much."
And then He died.

Love is the virtue many desire and expect of others while believing that they themselves have already given in great measure. It is the core of music and poetry, and in this world where the pop icon earns more than the ordinary head of state, it has become the fashionable morality.

Singers sing of love and the world echoes in chorus. They mouth cute homilies on children being our future while being pregnant out of wedlock. And then they slip in the notion that the greatest love of all is to love oneself. Meanwhile, another sings to all the girls he had loved before, who had travelled in and out his door. It does not surprise anyone that this balladeer has been called The Great Lover.

To the most feral, love means sex. To many others, love means attraction, friendship, compatibility and family. For dreamers, love is fireworks, laughter and tears and that ultimate display of sacrifice. Their paragons range from Valentino to Mother Theresa to Oskar Schindler.

In colonial times, honour was the virtue in trend. During other eras of our world's troubled history, enjoyment, knowledge and achieve-

ment have taken their turn at the head of the list. I suppose, as Christians, we should be happy and comfortable that love has taken its rightful place in the thoughts and imagination of the people today.

And yet, no one can really feel comfortable looking at the world today. Or see what the Bible says: *And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold*¹.

And then again, men's love will grow but how?

*But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress, for men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, ..., lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God*².

Love is the greatest abiding virtue³ but the perversion of true love has become the greatest deception to humankind. It has literally spawned millions of illegitimate babies, spoilt innumerable children, released thousands of savage criminals with but a light reprieve, sustained the immoral and extravagant lifestyles of music and movie stars, attacked justice and discipline, and compromised the doctrines of the Bible. ▶

Today, more than at any other time, we need to know what true love is.

... that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend ... what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God ⁴.

We want to speak of the dimensions of love so that we can measure against them what purports to be love.

BREADTH

Too often, people speak of love but mean it in a very narrow and selfish way. The dejected or perhaps, rejected lover finds that he cannot love anyone else, not even himself and finding life meaningless as a result, kills himself. Such is the stuff of romance a la Romeo and Juliet. The suicide victim cannot understand the anguish he has caused to his family and friends. Children may get orphaned or even murdered as a result of their parents' suicide pact.

Jesus lived and died for *all* humanity ⁵. That surely is the greatest breadth we can imagine that love can take. He died for both sexes, all nationalities, all races, all people of all time.

How broad is your love? Does it only encompass one, yourself? Here's a simple test. When you say, "The church has no love!", do you mean no one cares about you? Because if you had loved others in the first place and not just expect others to love you first, the church could never be without love – it has yours!

The ever-broadening circle of love begins with ourselves, then our family, our friends, going on to the brethren in church, then those

who are not saved, climaxing with our enemies; and all the while our love for God is increasing and becoming our motivation ⁶.

Are we so easily fooled by a pop star giving of his abundance to the children of the world while all the time, the TV cameras are rolling and the press hordes pressing closer for a better picture and quote ?? But still, that is something compared to the majority of superstars and religious leaders who speak of love to their poor worshippers while they themselves live in the lap of luxury. Check ourselves to see if our acts of charity and offerings are merely to salve our conscience or for publicity. A truly loving person finds it hard to spend lavishly on himself while others are suffering.

There is another area of concern that bears looking into. In showing hospitality to visitors from other countries, every local church needs to analyse whether a disproportionate amount of effort has been channelled to tourist groups while students and foreign workers who stay for longer periods are neglected. Priorities and scope of loving others must go hand in hand.

LENGTH

Time heals all things. Equally, time can destroy all things. Many a perfect love-match has disintegrated with the passing of years. Similarly, many a Christian has noticed that his initial burst of ardour for the Lord has somehow faded away but how or when it went, he cannot for his life figure out ⁸. The answer is simple – Time has taken its toll.

God said "I have loved you with an everlasting love."⁹

This is no empty boast. Consider this. After Adam and Eve sinned, God made coats of animal skin for them, providing for their protection from the elements and symbolically providing for the spiritual salvation of humankind in the future through the sacrifice of Jesus. Then He maintained a chosen group to be His light of truth for the world throughout the generations, beginning with Seth, Noah, Abraham, the Israelites and finally the Christian church. He sent prophets to tell humankind His will. He sent writers to pen His Word for our instruction. He sent Himself to die for our sins. All this, for at least 6000 years, in spite of the sin and rebelliousness of humanity, in spite of rejection and unfaithfulness, in spite of personal suffering, humiliation and risk.

*A love true
Is like pure gold
It won't wear out
Because it's old.*

Today's celebrities often have pre-nuptial contracts with their intended spouses for fear that they may lose a substantial amount of their fortunes if (when?) they divorce in the future. The irony of such contracts is that the participants proclaim true love for each other. The message seems to be – true love in the world is for the moment, ever lusting but not everlasting.

Divorce and adultery will never be Christian options if individually, we strive to keep our marital vow of true love. There will be quarrels between a couple. Yet, if we realise that when we say "I love you", we mean it for life, we will work on our marriage. We will not justify straying eyes or companionship of the opposite sex in times of loneliness or of being misunderstood. We will not say that our love has died a natural death and feel no guilt about it.

True love stands the test of time. It cannot die while the couple is still alive ¹⁰.

In church, let us also ensure that our display of love is lasting to be genuine. Let not love be showered only to someone who is new. Granted that such need more love, there still cannot be a sudden total neglect after a person is baptised, for instance.

In like fashion, the church should not proceed with a project if she knows that she cannot or if she has no intention of sustaining it. Of that kind of image-building and report-enhancing programmes, the Lord of love has no need ¹¹. ▶

HEIGHT

Possibly, the most visible aspect of love would be the great deeds that are associated with it. The earnest young man will dare to climb the highest mount, swim the deepest ocean and fight the fiercest beast for the hand of his beloved. A mother will brave the flames to rescue her child and a patriot will not betray secrets even under torture for the sake of his country.

Monuments whether attesting to great deeds, heroes or wealth are often high structures to amaze the eye and capture the heart. The power of true love is such that it will raise its own monument. Though the great flood covered the whole earth and left no mountain visible, the Song of Songs says - *Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it*¹².

It was a man-sized cross on a small hill in a small country. But the wrenching drama of the Man from Galilee was the greatest act of love the world will ever know.

*Who has believed what we have heard?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? ...
He was despised and rejected by men;
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
He was despised and we esteemed Him not.
Surely He has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed Him stricken,
smitten by God and afflicted.
But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
upon Him was the chastisement that made us whole,
and with His stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned everyone to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on Him
the iniquity of us all.
He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
yet He opened not His mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb,
so He opened not His mouth.
By oppression and judgment He was taken away;
and as for His generation, who considered
that He was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?
And they made His grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in His death,
although He had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in His mouth.
Yet it was the will of God to bruise Him;
He has put Him to grief;
when He made Himself an offering for sin,
... because He poured out his soul to death,
... He bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors*¹³.

*Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*¹⁴.

~ Jesus Christ ~

Learning to love yourself is the greatest love of all.
~ Whitney Houston ~

The world has strange messages for the unsuspecting and the wayward. The great monuments of love such as filial piety, patriotism, religious sacrifice, love for God and love for our neighbour have been brushed aside by the banner of individualism and freedom, behind which hides simple selfish love.

Go to the rescue of a man being attacked in a restaurant? Oh, no! I've got a family to look after. Who's going to feed them if I should get hurt?

Do more work in church? Oh, no! I've got a family to look after. I've got to earn as much as I can to make their lives as comfortable as possible.

Is there any great act of love that you can lay claim to? Can God see your love? In God's eyes, is our monument of love an Eiffel Tower or a miniature representation of our own condominium block? Is there any great act of love that your local church can lay claim to? We think that all of us must toil to be worthy of the cross of Christ.

DEPTH

A tall building needs a firm foundation, the deeper the better. Some great deeds of love when carefully scrutinised have been uncovered as fakes or to have come from a quite different persuasion. Soldiers may have died for their countries simply because they enjoy the exhilaration of mortal combat. A philanthropist may have donated a largesse to ensure the memory of his name, etched in concrete on some building in some university.

An iceberg stands one-tenth of its mass out of the water. That is to say, what you don't see under the frigid waters is nine times the hulk visible above the water. True love is deep and in relation to its deeds, is always more than any single one of them. It has great potential for more great deeds and it has also accomplished many other unseen works. True love does not boast of itself¹⁵ and so very often what you see is not everything that it has done or that it is capable of.

*A little girl came up to her Mummy one day and handed her a list.
"What's that, honey?" Mummy asked.
"It's the money you owe me," the little girl replied.
Mummy took the list and her heart ached as she read:*

DEPTH

For clearing up the toys – 20 cents.

For washing the dishes – \$1.

For putting baby brother to sleep – 50 cents.

Altogether – \$1.70

Mummy put aside her apron and started to write a list of her own.

"May I see what you have written, Mummy?" the little girl asked.

She took the note from her and read:

For carrying you nine months in my tummy – Free.

For keeping awake at nights to feed you and when you were ill – Free.

For wiping your nose when it ran – Free.

For hugging and comforting you when you were sad and in tears – Free.

The little girl's eyes filled with tears and quietly she took her list from her Mummy.

She scribbled on it and returned the note.

Over the list was written – PAID IN FULL.

We have already said that the sacrifice of the Lord on the cross was the highest act of love of all time. Yet, the immense depth of that love continues to astound and move anyone who has searched and whom the Spirit has moved to understand. What Jesus gave up for us¹⁶, what daily sufferings He bore, the abject passion when the Father forsook Him on the cross¹⁷, death itself¹⁸, all these were not as visible as the physical and verbal abuse He suffered for us on the cross. But the love that carried Him through all that was deep and strong indeed.

How deep is your love? Love makes the most shallow existence meaningful but if that love were shallow also, how bleak such lives must be!

One test of depth is constant thought for the beloved¹⁹. People who are deeply in love always think of each other, cherish precious memories and plan pleasant surprises for each other. How much do we think about God or about the church? It is difficult to say that we

love the brethren if we hardly ever hold them in our thoughts or prayers. We cannot say that we love our parents if we often ignore their feelings and claim that we alone should decide our course of action.

The depth of our love should be plumbed so that we can better understand our present situation and then, humbly and prayerfully, improve on it. Similarly, the breadth, length and height of our love need to be measured, for a more complete appraisal of our condition.

In the same way, love in the True Jesus Church ought to be measured. We should not solely compare our love with certain aspects of warmth and care in other churches and then proceed to bash ourselves for our lack of love. In many places such remonstrations have done nothing to improve the church but instead have demoralised members and led to attrition and decline.

The True Jesus Church has done admirably in some dimensions of love. We have conscientiously preached the gospel to all, excluding

none based on race, nationality, occupation, health or social status.

Some people initially complain about the lack of warmth in our church (this may be a result of the Oriental reserve and aversion to exhibitionism and insincere backslapping rather than a lack of love). But upon staying longer, the same have agreed that their earlier impression had been wrong and that believers actually warm up to a newcomer as time passes.

Believers in the Taiwanese hill tribes offer out of their poverty to build beautiful church buildings for the Lord while their own homes remain modest shelters²⁰. Members in the United Kingdom and continental Europe are famed for their warm hospitality and concern for visitors and backpacking tourists²¹. In Singapore, members frequently donate blood at hospitals for our sick as well as for non-believers²². What about the steadfast love of the believers in the Philippines who hold on to the truth in spite of their poverty? Or the sacrifice of the intellectuals from the United States who gave up well-paying jobs in industry and universities to become full-time workers? Indeed in every land where the True Jesus Church is, there are monumental examples of the heights that true Christian love has achieved.

And what of our depth? Dare we question those who have died for the Lord in the religious persecution of Communist China? Or the integrity of our preachers who have given all and compared to other churches, work for a pittance?

It is wrong to boast of ourselves but we are not doing so here. If anything, we boast of the grace that God has given us²³. We list our achievements out of God's love so that those

who denigrate the church of God may be put to shame and be exposed for their own selfish versions of love and harm to the church. For he who criticises and lays burdens on others without lifting a finger to help is the real Pharisee of today²⁴.

We also list our achievements so that we can measure them against the dimensions of love discussed above. We should not blindly follow any other model of love that the world is so ready to provide. To do so would be to build a skewed version of the love that God intends for us.

In addition to our achievements is the acknowledgment that we still have far to go to reach the standard required by God. Still, the direction we must take is that of building on the correct dimensions of love. The Lord has demonstrated the extremes of love and though we can never equal Him, we should steadily strive to extend the limits of the dimensions of our love.

With this true model of love, we shall escape the deception of this world and live to glorify God and benefit humanity. ■

BY TAY ENG GUAN
[SINGAPORE]



Luke 15:11-32 records the all too familiar story of the prodigal son. This parable, following on from the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, completes the answer our Lord Jesus gave to the Pharisees and scribes who complained about His association with sinners. It is hence a story often cited during baptismal services, with the "lost and found" subject matter being highlighted – Jesus came to save lost souls. But this parable should not be restricted to the realm of celebration of one new addition to the church register. It also points to a problem we have in our church today, that of members leaving the fold.

The first half of the parable is focused on the younger son. He asked for his portion of the family inheritance, went on a spending spree, met with famine and finally resorted to becoming a famished swineherd. Put in today's context, the son typifies those among us who have "backslided". Such believers were brought into the fold and had tasted the goodness of being in the Father's house. Somehow, in a moment of weakness, they fell into the temptations of the world. It would not have been difficult. This world, like the faraway country the prodigal son went to, simply has far too many attractions. We would have needed plenty of faith, self-control and reliance on God's help to have resisted. Often a mere second glance at those attractions is enough to make us surrender to the snares of this world. Farther and farther we wander away from the Father's house. Spiritually, we know we are starved, for apart from the Lord, there is no goodness to speak of (ref: Ps 16:2).

For many of us, we may not be as far gone. But there are times when we feel like a prodigal son. There are times when we find ourselves doing

something we know that we should not have done. Scores of sermons we have heard tell us it is wrong. We can perhaps even quote ourselves the very Bible verse that records the commandment we have transgressed, or the Christian virtue we have failed to uphold. We wish so much to undo what we have done. We wish so much to turn back the clock.

I am not suggesting that we treat our transgressions lightly or think nothing of it. We must however beware, for such guilt-ridden pressure we place upon ourselves can turn us away from God. We blame ourselves so much that we veil ourselves from the forgiveness of God. Naturally, we feel that God is far away.

Although we find ourselves prodigal sons, many of us fail to take the right course of action which will reconcile us with our Lord. This is unlike the prodigal son who sought to be reconciled with his father. *When he came to himself, he said, "I will arise and go to my Father ..."* And he rose and came to his father. After the realisation that his father was the ultimate source of goodness there was no more hesitation. He picked himself up and headed home. That was the turning point of his life. If only more of us today were like this prodigal son! Instead, many of us simply choose to wallow in our weakness. When concerned brothers and sisters ask about us, we put up our defences, refusing to interpret it as a call from the Father. Unconsciously, we indulge ourselves in feelings of guilt and self-condemnation when the right thing to do is simply to brace up and turn back.

On one occasion, a sinful woman was brought before our Lord. Instead of condemning her, Jesus told her to "go and sin no more" (Jn 8:3-11). This should be the message to keep in mind. Our Lord is

BY LIM SIOK HONG
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While the prodigal son

typifies the members

who have wandered off,

his older brother typifies

the unapproachable

judges many of us are

towards the weaker

ones.

not a high priest who cannot sympathise with our weaknesses.

We should come boldly before His throne of grace (Heb 4:16). As long as we have not committed sins leading to death, we trust that our Lord is faithful and just, and He will forgive us (1 Jn 1:9).

Within the outer narrative frame of the return of the prodigal son, there is another episode revolving round the older brother. He was the ever-faithful son. For years, he obeyed his father in all things. He served his father without complaint and had never thought he deserved any special favour. He was the direct opposite of his brother.

While the prodigal son typifies the members who have wandered off, his older brother typifies the unapproachable judges many of us are towards the weaker ones. We fail to give them the much-needed little nudge or support to come back to the fold. Haven't there been times when we assure ourselves that we are not like the weak ones? We do

not want to be like the weak ones. We will attend church services regularly. We are not enticed by the world. We will continue to faithfully serve in our Father's house; there is so much in the Father's house that has been entrusted to our care. Far too often, we are so engrossed with our noble spiritual aspirations that we forget our brother is away. Where is the prodigal brother? Like the elder brother, we do not go in search of him. We may even assume that our Father has given up on the wanton son.

Many times, we are even stricter than God. In the biblical incident cited earlier, where an adulterous woman was brought before the Lord, it is easy for

We fail to give them the

much-needed little

nudge or support to

come back to the fold.

us to visualise the gleeful looks of expectation on the faces of the on-lookers. They had gathered merely to await Jesus' judgement. Are we of their kind? Do we realise that while everyone who does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God, neither does one who goes *beyond* it? (2 Jn 9) Have we, knowingly or otherwise, made the course of coming back to the fold a difficult path?

When the brother returned, the older brother did not even know, for he was busy in the fields. When he heard that a feast was prepared, he became

Man's love is given to whom he deems fit,

and as much he thinks is deserved.

But God is different,

And that is why there is still so much about love

that we, as Christians, as God's children and as

recipients of His love, have to learn.

angry. How could father still love the prodigal son? Has father forgotten that he squandered away much money? For years, I have been working and have never even requested a young goat. Now, a fatted calf has been killed to welcome him! He simply could not comprehend it. No, he would not join in the feasting.

The older brother's sentiment is characteristic of the myopic view of humans about love. The abundance of God's love is hard to fathom. How could a prodigal son warrant so much fuss and attention? He went away of his own accord; he no longer deserved the love which he had earlier rejected. Often, we do not see that such a great love is precisely the reason why our Lord is to be praised. It is because of this love that we are all still living. Our Lord God is merciful and gracious. He is slow to anger. He will not keep His anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins (Ps 103:8-10). Man's love is almost always conditional. Man's love is given to whom he deems fit, and as much he thinks is deserved. But God is different. And that is

why there is still so much about love that we, as Christians, as God's children and as recipients of His love, have to learn.

In the parable, the father watched the prodigal son return from a great distance. He ran towards the son to receive him (Lk 15:20). Towards the older son, he was the same loving father who took the initiative. When the elder son, with his self-righteous indignation, refused to enter the banquet hall, the father came out to plead with him.

Jesus spoke this parable in response to queries about His association with sinners. Whether we are the prodigal son or the older brother, let us look to the love of Christ, for the gift of love is the greatest of all. ■

“
... let us look to the love
of Christ, for
the gift of love is
the greatest
of all”

temptation *or* test?

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted with evil and He Himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death

[Jas 1:13-15]

Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing

[Jas 1:2-4]

Have you ever been in a situation where you felt that the forces against you were so overwhelming that you could just give in at any moment? Two paths lay ahead, to obey God or not, to remain true to Him or not. Moses once said to the children of Israel, "See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil." (Deut 30:15). If only things were always so clear! Why does good and evil often seem to merge so maddeningly before us, so that we are left in confusion, so that what is wrong might be right if it were just looked at from another angle, or if we shut our eyes to what

we know ought to be?

James, who was gifted with a rare wisdom, perceived that we often do not possess sufficient knowledge of ourselves and of the situations that we find ourselves in. This leads to weakness and eventually spiritual defeat. In the worst case, not being able to see a temptation for what it is, or not being able to perceive a test with all of God's higher will behind it, could mean the difference between spiritual life and death. Since the stakes are so high, we had better take a close look at the spiritual realities of temptation and test.

what is temptation?

Temptation is evil, and tempts us to evil. James uses a reverse definition, by first telling us what it is not, and where it does not come from. Lest some believers accuse God of leading them to fall through temptation, James says that God "cannot be tempted with evil and He Himself tempts no one." The very definition of God precludes the possibility of evil. Jesus, as is well known, could not be tempted to sin. And correspondingly, God will not tempt His children. James describes God as "the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (Jas 1:17).

Where, then, does temptation come from? Temptation comes when a person "is lured and enticed by his own desire." This brings us closer to the heart of temptation, and hence the heart of evil's origin. Because each of us has a fallen nature inherited from our forebears, who first sinned, we have the inclination within us to do evil, just as we have the aspiration to do good. We are pulled in both directions, and often succumb to evil.

Ultimately, temptation can be traced to Satan, who has been called in the Bible, the Father of Lies, the Accuser, the Evil One. All these are simply titles, and the Bible portrays Satan in a number of guises, from serpent to dragon. Whatever the form, what is being represented is the sheer force of evil, all that is not of God and that works towards sin and death; not just death of the flesh, but of the Spirit.

Evil gives rise to inclinations, and then to action. Paul says, "Now the works of the flesh are plain; fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sor-

Temptation comes when a person "is lured and enticed by his own desire."

cery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like, I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." (Gal 5:19-21).

Although the above may seem to be a list of things that obviously none of us would ever do, think again, for sin does not originate in the act itself, but somewhere further back. Perhaps it seems innocent to read a certain book, watch a certain movie, talk to certain friends. Yet often, it is from these small actions of ours everyday that we allow ourselves to move on to situations where we see, hear and think things that are contrary to Christian beliefs. These are not harmless, but like tiny viruses, they implant within us the tiniest tendencies to consider committing sin. If we do not constantly examine ourselves and purify ourselves through prayer and the Word of God, these tendencies will lead to sin,

perhaps only years later. That is why Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, cautions us not only not to kill, but not even to hate; not only not to commit adultery, but not even to think lustful thoughts. As James says in his letter, there is another insidious type of evil – the good we have neglected to do. In Jesus' chilling parable of the sheep and the goats, He chastises the goats, or those whom He has condemned, not so much for the sins that they had committed, but for the good had they failed to do:

"... I was hungry, you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not

welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me ...

Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me."

(Mt 25:43-45)

We can be tempted to sin. We can also be tempted in the way of being lulled into inertia, being smug and thinking that all is well, when in fact we may be like the lukewarm church that Jesus rebukes in the Book of Revelation and threatens to spew from His mouth.

what is a test?

"In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may rebound to praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:6-7).

Tests strengthen us in who we are spiritually. Although they come in the form of suffering at the hands of others or at the hands of general circumstance, tests from God do not originate from our own inclination to evil. Rather, they may arise precisely at the moment when we are doing right in the eyes of God.

We may be tested in all kinds of things, but the important point to note is that they ultimately rebound to our benefit if we can persevere. There is always a lesson that can be learnt. Enduring the company of an unwelcome companion may bring forth the fruit of patience. Suffering an illness may bring us closer to seeing what is important in life – God and the work of the kingdom, rather than our

own material gratification, to seek God's will rather than our own. Just as God tested Job to reveal his self-righteousness, He will give each of us tests according to what is most needed to be improved within us.

Let us note a relationship between temptation and test which is quite subtle. The case of Job is a good example to illustrate how closely these two often operate. Satan intended to tempt Job. God intended to use Satan to test Job. Job saw only the evil that was happening to and all around him. If what had happened within him had appealed to his weaknesses in the flesh, the desire for bodily comfort or wealth, for example, he would have produced a situation where he would be tempted to forsake God. Succumbing to that temptation, he would have been rejected by God. If, on the other hand, he was able to persevere, and let the evil remain external to himself rather than spring forth from within him, then he would have turned the situation into a test, from which he could, with God's help, emerge victorious. It can be the case that one person's test is another person's temptation.

how to overcome temptations and pass through tests

"No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure" (1 Cor 10:13).

The cardinal principle here is that God will not allow us to fail. Certainly, we have the inclination for both good and evil. This is known as *yetzer* in Hebrew, meaning the root of good and root of evil, which inclines us sometimes towards one and at other times towards the other. But God has promised that as long as we have the will to walk in the path of the good, He will see to it that we succeed. We must have this kind of faith, always.

**... God will not allow us to fail.
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good, He will see to it that we succeed.
We must have this kind of faith, always.**

Secondly, when we are faced with a difficult situation, whether temptation or test, we just need to get ourselves out of that immediate situation to a place or state of mind where we can reflect and, more importantly, pray for guidance.

In Genesis 39, when Joseph was being tempted by Potiphar's wife, he first directly repudiated the evil by saying, "... how can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" However, there is a point beyond which direct confrontation is useless. Joseph knew this, and thus at a later point, he simply fled from the scene so that he would not be subjected to further

temptation. The example of Joseph shows us two approaches, one of direct confrontation, the other of avoidance. Both are necessary, and we just need to know when to use which.

The next step is to pray to God for guidance. God can renew our strength to resist evil or endure suffering. God can show us the way that He wants us to tread. Of course, we should not only resort to prayer in dangerous situations, we should be building the habit of daily prayer as a preventive measure, as a bulwark against situations that we cannot foresee. As a well-loved hymn goes,

*"Oh, how prayer rests the weary,
Prayer can turn the night to day.
So, in sorrow and in gladness,
Don't forget to pray."*

Thirdly, when the situation is past, let us ask, "What can I learn from this situation? What can I

**... pray for God's guidance. God can
renew our strength to resist the evil or
endure suffering. God can show us the
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learn about my own weakness, and how can I overcome it? What can I learn that will add to my spiritual character and help me thrive in the future?" If we do not learn from our mistakes, we will only face the same situation again some time down the road. ▶

We are like empty vessels which may be filled with good and evil. If we remove something that is evil, we need to make sure that we are always filled with the good.

Finally, all of the things we have been discussing have been in a more negative vein. Avoiding temptation. Overcoming tests. But the mere absence of evil in our hearts is not enough. For as nature abhors a vacuum, so does spiritual nature. We are like empty vessels which may be filled with both good and evil. If we remove something that is evil, we need to make sure that we are always filled with the good. If a person quits smoking, for example, he suddenly has extra time and energy in his hands. Why not put them to good use, such as making a commitment to exercise or taking up a hobby? In the same way, we must strive to replace our spiritual weaknesses, one by one, with spiritual virtues. As a contrast to the works of the flesh, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5:22-23).

We need to have a rich spiritual life. This includes our daily prayers and study of the Word of God, belonging to the body of Christ, the church, and striving to manifest God's love in our lives. It is not enough for us to simply not be evil, or simply be a benign presence in the world. It matters who we are, and what we do makes a difference.

... we must strive to replace our spiritual weaknesses, one by one, with spiritual virtues

May God guide us in our Christian life, giving us the wisdom to discern what is temptation and what is test, and strength to overcome both. Whatever may come our way, we will strive to reach ever higher towards the perfection of our spirit to the glory of our Lord. Amen. ■

BY JULIUS TSAI
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LOST SHEEP

Growing up is not easy. And the added pressure of growing up in a society with so many distractions can most certainly be a trying experience for any adolescent Christian. It is during our teenage years that our outlook on life and many of our opinions on various social issues are consolidated. Whilst this period is an important landmark in our lives, it is the time when our faith can be fragile.

During this transition from childhood into adulthood, we begin to be able to make the decisions which affect our own lives rather than having them made for us. For many of us, a whole wealth of opportunities is placed before us (for example, the experience of studying away from home) and

we find ourselves faced with many choices (for example, we may ask ourselves just how important it is to study in an institution near a church). It is during this time also that our faith wavers the most. Thus, in many instances, the steps we choose to take in our teenage years will have great effect on the rest of our lives (for example, our choice of studies may determine the career we pursue). Taking the wrong step will have detrimental consequences on our spiritual lives. This period is critical in deciding whether one becomes yet another lost sheep.

Many see the years of youth as a time where they are entitled to guiltless hedonism. They do not feel that they have to be committed to things such as religion. There is

also constant pressure to be accepted by peers and to be popular. Thus, if their lifestyles do not conform to those led by the majority of youths outside the church, they may feel like outcasts and suffer low self-esteem. To ease such self-doubt, they conform to the social norms of youth culture, taking alcohol and exploring night-clubs, etc. Attending church and believing in God are seen as typically 'uncool' by their non-believing peers. Soon they get totally immersed in the ways of the world and inevitably become another lost sheep.

There is another option open to us. It is however, not an easy one. It requires effort and commitment. Because it is during our youth that our views are formed, we must



Youths of Portsmouth, U.K.

use this time to develop self-control in dealing with temptations and to be willing to decline wayward offers. We should heed the words in Ecclesiastes 12:1

"Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them' ..."

Furthermore, we should exercise caution over our leisure activities. These are often determined by the company we choose to keep. Although we must establish close friendships in the church, it would be too sweeping to say that we should not have friends outside church. However, as Christians, we ought to follow God's guidance when choosing our friends. It may not be evident at the time, but what we see as an abundant social life, may leave us too engrossed to even give a second's thought to

church anymore. If we are all able to interact more in church, (for example, organising social events for Youth Fellowship) then there will be less need to look for outside distractions. While we still have the option, we must equip ourselves properly to deal with the temptations we face during our youth, so that we will never displace God as our highest priority and turn our attentions to the world.

If we are confident that we will never become a lost sheep, beware of being complacent; instead, continually ask God to preserve our faith. In addition, we must have mutual concern and help prevent brothers or sisters from falling by the wayside. Quite often, we have the tendency to come to church just for services, barely speaking two sentences to each other. This may be taken as hostility even though it is totally unintended. Worse, you may not even have noticed the brethren who have phased themselves out of church

because they do not feel any love from the members. Do not feel inhibited in showing your love and concern if you feel that any brethren are in need. After all, one of the fundamental messages of Christianity is to love one another – wouldn't we be reducing ourselves to mere hypocrites if we cannot show this love even to our own brethren?

If there are any brethren that we know of who seem to have turned their backs to God, do not give up on them. Even though a person's faith is very much a personal thing between God and himself, there is nothing to stop us from remembering him in our prayers or contacting him. Your persistence will eventually pay off and he will appreciate the fact you have not forgotten him. It is through our love and prayers that the lost sheep can find their way back to the fold. We can all be the shepherds who obey Jesus' commandment, "Tend my sheep" (Jn 21:16). ■

BY CINDY HO
[PORTSMOUTH, U.K.]



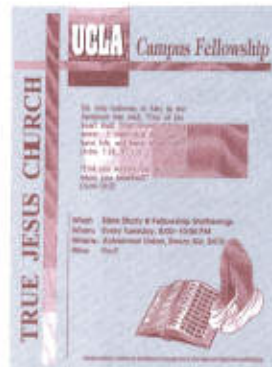
The blessing of having a campus fellowship

When I entered the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) as an undergraduate freshman in September 1990, I had no idea how my life was to be changed in the course of higher education at this institution. With no acquaintances or friends, I was placed in a new environment where I had to make a new beginning. I was alone, like a lost lamb in the midst of wolves. I felt that in order to survive, I had no choice but to also turn myself into a big bad wolf. I began to build a wall around myself, by wearing the latest fashions, growing a long tail on my hair, and by speaking a language unknown to my parents, my church friends and all those who cared for me. I thought a wolf could find direction among wolves; instead I completely lost my identity. I did not know who I was, could not sense any pain, and did not feel any love.

At my most despairing and desperate moment, the love of God found me a brother from Taiwan who, being a new graduate student at UCLA, contacted me and asked if I would be interested in having a Bible study with him. I suddenly realised I was not alone, that the love of God had always been by my side, only I was too blind to realise this. I soon

learned that there was also a sister attending UCLA. Thanks to God's arrangement, our first Bible study at UCLA took place in the cool breeze under a big palm tree on the lawn. I began to experience the love of brothers and sisters in Christ again through our fellowship. As I merged myself with the words of God, supported by the encouragement of the brothers and sisters, I was determined to change my life to one that was worthy of God's love.

In the course of time, as the size of this fellowship increased, I continued to receive much help and love from the brothers and sisters. God had arranged for us to be at UCLA for mutual support as we went through the manifold difficulties of academic life. For instance, in spring 1991, just before a Bible study meeting, I misplaced my wallet. My student ID, some cash, credit cards and other important IDs were all gone. Seeing my distress, a brother at the meeting asked me what had happened. Upon hearing my story, he immediately handed me all the cash he had on him. He prayed with me about this matter and told me he would return the next day. Thank God for that brother's love and care in the Lord, my wallet was found and was returned to me the next morning. ►



In the summer of 1993, two brothers and I decided to be roommates. This became yet another turning point of my life. While staying

with these two brothers, we were able to pray without the interruption of any non-believing roommate, to sing hymns with joy and thanksgiving, and to study the Word together. During this period, I developed the habit of daily spiritual cultivation. I felt the abiding presence of God everyday at school and I enjoyed a closeness with God.

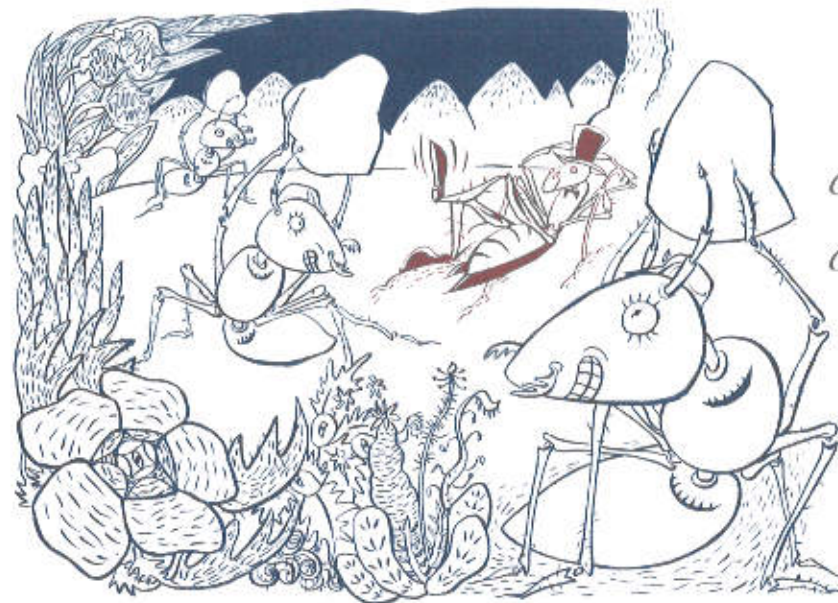
But alas, living in the abundance of God's grace, my watchfulness later began to lax and my faith began to decline. I began to indulge in whatever pleased me; I strayed from God and followed my desires. One day, when my roommates asked me to pray with them, I discovered that the precious Holy Spirit of God had left me. I tried very hard to speak in tongues but my effort was futile – I had lost the Holy Spirit! I became very frightened in that prayer; I felt that God was no longer with me. I cried and pounded on the floor, hoping that the Holy Spirit would return. But the Holy Spirit did not return. After that prayer, one of my roommates asked me what was wrong. Trembling, I said I had lost the Holy Spirit. He told me that we should pray again. He also suggested that I should reflect on my actions and repent before God. We knelt down to pray together. Even though I felt spiritually weak and my prayer was desultory, this brother prayed for me earnestly. After the prayer, he told me that we should fast and pray over this matter, and that through our faith in God's love, he believed that God would forgive me and grant me His Holy Spirit again. Thank God that with my roommate's constant words of comfort, encour-

agement, and his incessant intercession, by God's mercy, I was given the Holy Spirit again three days later.

"Love never fails" (1 Cor 13:8) – the love of my brothers and sisters at UCLA never failed me. In July 1994, I had a very bad flu. For about three hours, my body temperature increased to about 40°C. Although my head was burning with high fever, my limbs were cold. My tonsils were so severely inflamed that even swallowing a small sip of water was very painful. Being away from home, I could only lay in bed helplessly. To my surprise, when they learnt of my illness, the brothers and sisters of the campus fellowship visited me, brought my favourite food, flowers and other things to cheer me. They prayed for my quick recovery. I was again showered with their love in the Lord.

During those few years, the brothers and sisters of the fellowship were always around to help me with my needs. Not only this, they also became my closest friends whom I have learned to love and trust. Indeed, the TJCCF at UCLA has not only transformed my life, it has also touched the lives of many others. In TJCCF, I reestablished my personal relationship with God, and I experienced the love of the brothers and sisters in Christ. I realise now that as much as I have received through this campus fellowship, I must reciprocate the great love of God by loving and caring for all those who are in need. Because if God's love can be shown through Christian fellowship to one as unworthy as I, it can be gloriously magnified in the lives of all those who truly love Him. ■

BY JACKSON JENG
[LOS ANGELES, USA]



*comfortable
christians*

*"How long will you lie
there, you sluggard? When
will you get up from your
sleep? A little sleep, a little
slumber, a little folding of
the hands to rest — and
poverty will come on you
like a bandit and scarcity
like an armed man."*

(Proverbs 6:9-11)

I remember reading this proverb for the first time almost ten years ago in my religious education class. I didn't truly understand what it meant but I memorised it anyway because we would be tested on it the next lesson. At that time, I was about ten years old, and I certainly could not see the connection between getting some rest and becoming poor.

Now, reading the words in this old, familiar proverb, a new understanding has dawned. The sleep mentioned here refers not only to a physical rest, but a deep, spiritual hibernation into which some of our languished souls have fallen. Many of us long-time Christians have settled into comfortable cycles of bedtime prayers, reading our one chapter a day of the Bible, and attending services. We do this because we believe that in doing so, we fulfil our duties as Christians. We self-righteously give ourselves a pat on the back, saying to ourselves that we are doing more than most.

There may be the little difficulties we encounter in our everyday lives, but life is generally *comfortable*. But somehow, in this comfort, we have lost sight of what is to come, and more importantly, of our responsibilities in the present. The Lord is telling us through this proverb to wake up from our world-induced sleep, so that Satan will not rob us of our eternal inheritance.

It is not to say that prayer, reading the Bible, and attending services are not important. In fact, these are the building blocks of our faith. Yet some of us comfortable Christians have forgotten the commission that the Lord has entrusted to us, the true church of the last days. Jesus has said, "Not

everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Mt 7:21). What is the will of the Father in heaven? The Father, manifested in the flesh as Jesus Christ, has given us a two-pronged commission to fulfil: to preach the good news to all creation and to pastor His sheep.

God has entrusted to us, the true church, the precious gospel of truth. We are the gatekeepers of eternal life. Jesus Christ has said, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Mt 16:19). What then shall we do with this awesome power? Shall we abuse it by sitting idly while souls are walking down a path straight to hell? We will indeed be called to account for these souls.

"To the person who has been given much, more will be demanded, from the person who has been given little, less will be demanded." We have been entrusted with much, but along with this responsibility comes much work. Let us not hide this responsibility in the ground and pretend that it does not exist. Otherwise, we might be in danger of becoming the lazy servant the Lord spoke about in the parable of the talents. (Mt 25:14-32).

Just as that lazy servant stood condemned by preserving his one talent in the ground, preserving our own faith is not enough. When we stand before the Lord on Judgment Day, we may be able to dig up our own life which we have preserved in the ground, but even that will be taken from us. The Lord has said, "For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." (Mt 25:29). Therefore, instead of regarding this great commission with levity and ease, we should handle the responsibility with fear and trembling.

The other part of the commission is to "feed the sheep." We can no longer afford to have brothers and sisters who are spiritually weak and sick. Each one of us is a part in the body of Christ. Shall the body of Christ be weak and sick? The strong must help the weak – carry them to Jesus if they must, as did the four men with the paralytic. Then, after learning to stand on their spiritual legs, they will be able to contribute their talent to gain more talents. No one should be found with empty hands before the Lord on the Day of Judgment.

Let us not be satisfied with our one talent hidden in the ground. Otherwise, we will condemn ourselves to the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, because we took a little time to "slumber, and fold our hands to rest". Let us not be comfortable, but instead be anxious for the souls of this world who have not yet tasted the grace and mercy of God. Nor should we keep from them the gospel of salvation, for they might never experience the goodness of God otherwise. Let us not rest, for we might become poor. And a terrifying poverty it will be, for it will be the poverty of not having an eternal home, a heavenly Father, and even life itself.

Therefore, let us do with all our might whatever our hands find to do. When the Lord comes to collect His talents, let us with a clear conscience and good faith offer to Him the other talents we have gained. Then He will say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servants! ... Come and share your master's happiness!" (Mt 25:23) ■

BY ANGIE SU
[SAN JOSE, USA]

Bible study

The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard

There are many parables in the Synoptic Gospels. They are in most cases story-like. They have a setting, contain characters, and proceed according to a plot, albeit a simple one. But unlike ordinary stories, they are told not to entertain the audience. Rather, they express deeper meanings that go beyond the surface of the narratives. Very often their endings contradict common sense and startle the listeners. Materials used in the stories, mostly drawn from daily life experiences, thus become significantly loaded, heavily impress the audience, and compel them to think more deeply.



Parables are a form of literary device which Jesus formulates to illustrate the kingdom of heaven. Jesus often starts a parable with such a beginning: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to ..." (Mt 13:24) or "The kingdom of heaven is like ..." (Mt 13:31, 33, 44, 47) Then he goes on to tell a story. The intention is that by grasping the gist of the parable, one could

analogically understand the kingdom of heaven. Since the kingdom of heaven is the main theme of Jesus' gospel as well as the goal of our spiritual quest, parables deserve our serious attention. The parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Mt 20:1-16) is hence worthy of our keen interest, although it may be hard to comprehend. ▶

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard" (Mt 20:1) – Jesus thus begins a strange narrative. The owner of the vineyard first hired some labourers to work for him at approximately 6.00 a.m., agreeing to pay them a denarius as the day's wages. He went out again about 9.00 a.m. Finding that some other men were "standing idle in the market place," (v. 3) he hired them immediately and asked them to work in the vineyard. He did not reveal what kind of price he would pay this group of labourers but simply said that he would give "whatever is right" (v. 4).

The householder went out twice again, about 12.00 p.m. and 3.00 p.m. respectively. The story does not tell us why he went out of his vineyard so regularly. Perhaps, seeing that the work field was huge and yet workers were few, he needed more hands to finish the job. But it is also likely that as a master he was quite at his own liberty to stroll around his estate for pleasure. On these two occasions, he hired some more workers he happened to meet outside the vineyard and agreed to pay, presumably, "whatever is right". What is more interesting is that he went out of the vineyard again about 5.00 p.m., only one hour to sunset. This time he found, to his surprise, some more men still standing at the street corner. Out of curiosity he asked, "Why do you stand here idle all day?" (v. 6) This sounded more like a rhetorical question because from his previous encounters on the same day, he should have known why they were standing there idle. "Because no one has hired us" (v. 7) was the reply in unison, a reply intended less to remind the vineyard owner than to impress on the parable-listeners these men's plight. The owner, without a second thought, hired them right away, a dramatic decision which perplexes our common sense. It would seem unlikely that he needed these additional hands in order to complete the work; at least the story does not hint



that this is the case. The householder was, at any rate, free to do whatever he liked, and, calling this company into his vineyard almost at the day's end, he certainly has his own plan in mind.

The second half of the story grows more incomprehensible as Jesus' parable continues. When the day became dark, the owner of the vineyard instructed his steward to pay all the workers their wages, "beginning with last, up to the first" (v. 8). We wonder why the order of the payment was arranged in such a way. Why was the owner more eager to pay those who came last than those who first entered and worked in the vineyard? Were the former worthier than the latter? In what way? More than that, not only the sequence of payment is illogical, but the amount of payment to the different labourers is contradictory to our wisdom. No matter how long they worked in the vineyard, they received equal wages, a denarius! (v. 9-10) Unfair indeed was this kind of treatment! No wonder those who laboured the longest "grumbled at the householder" (v. 11). They protested that the final batch worked only one hour while they themselves bore "the burden of the day and the scorching heat" (v. 12). If the owner were wise enough, he would not have incurred such resentment, one which appears

justifiable at least on the surface. And if he were shrewd enough, he would not have spent his money so unnecessarily. His way of thinking and doing things really bewildered the audience.

The owner of the vineyard, seeing the reactions from the grumblers, responded composedly. He maintained that in dealing with his hired hands, he did not make any mistake. He did observe what had already been agreed upon between the two parties



(v. 14). If there was anything unusual about his distribution of wages, that was nothing but his generosity (v. 15). And with respect to his character, it should not be taken as an object of complaint but should be welcomed as a laudable virtue. The labourers' antagonism towards it reflected their psychological state, either greedy or envious, more than the owner's wrong decision. The owner rhetorically asked why he should not have the right to dispense whatever belongs to him. It was an authority he quickly claimed to quell the complaints. Jesus thereupon ends His parable with "the last will be first, and the first last," a

maxim which reverberates in some other verses (cf. Mt. 19:30; Mk 10:31; Lk 13:30).

The story does not tell us whether the grudging labourers accepted the vineyard owner's explanation with ease. Neither do we know, more interestingly, what the last labourers' reactions were when they received payment beyond their expectation. As audience, however, we are left puzzled after hearing the story. The questions still are: why was the owner so generous to those who worked for him less than a full day? Maybe he had the right to deal freely with his own money as he claimed, but from what kind of consideration did he derive the principle of wage distribution? Most importantly, if Jesus intended to relate this parable to the kingdom of heaven, what was the real message concealed within it?

It is obvious that the vineyard owner was not a worldly-wise man whom the captains of industry would praise. Any man imitating the owner's administrative methods would certainly go out of business sooner or later. (We are sure that the audience realised this while Jesus was telling this parable, for who in the world would run his business in this manner?) That the owner needed labourers to work for his vineyard and therefore hired some for this purpose was a scenario common enough. But it seems that he did not calculate at the outset how much manpower he needed in order to finish the entire job. That was something very uncommon. Recruiting new employees without considering the total budget and the schedule of progress would certainly result in failure.

If the parable is an illustration of the kingdom of heaven, principles of doing things and dealing with people must be very different from what we com-

monly assume. The householder was a man related to the kingdom of heaven, as Jesus affirms at the beginning of His parable. Since he was not an ordinary man, what he did reflected a quality rarely seen in our human world. The parable tells us that when the owner saw some men standing idle in the market place, he, without the necessary negotiations, immediately called them to work for him (v. 3-4). He seemed to care more for their joblessness than whether they could really make contributions to his vineyard. This strong sense of care was the motivation behind his hiring. So when dusk approached, finding that there were some more men unhired, he nonetheless asked them to go into the vineyard as he had previously done (v. 6). He realised how little time was left, not for himself but for those unhired. "No one has hired us" (v. 7) was a disheartening reality which would have brought the temporary labourers and their whole families into misery. No job today meant no bread tomorrow. The men standing idle at the corner knew this cruel reality experientially, so did the owner of the vineyard.

The owner's genuine concern extended to the way he paid wages to the labourers. The order of payment, "beginning with last, up to the first" (v. 8), indicates the master's care for the least fortunate. He did not mean to be unfair to those who had worked hard and long for him. Actually he did not mistreat them in any way. He just preferred to be more gracious to those who were either less capable or more afflicted. He knew clearly how many hours each labourer had put in for him, and those who had worked only one hour certainly did not deserve a full-day's wages. But the principle of human relationship in the kingdom of heaven is not based on meticulous calculation; rather, it is rooted in love and concern. The owner paid his labourers not according to how much they had done for him but how much they needed for the day's subsistence. His way of payment was altruistic; the denarius was indeed a free gift.

Parables are simple stories composed out of ordinary things, just as the vineyard, the labourers, and the householder are common scenes and characters in the living context of the listeners. They are also uncommon stories, because they read like riddles or puzzles which challenge our common sense and disturb our value system. With a subtle twist, what we consider normal or reasonable turns out to be inadequate or even a mistake against the measuring scale of the kingdom of heaven.

When Jesus tells a parable, He creates a new context into which He invites His audience. Only those who carefully listen and cheerfully understand are eligible as participants, whereas those who misunderstand or reject are excluded. It is this radical element, comprising true understanding and willing acceptance, which is perplexing and annoying. Thus to receive citizenship in the kingdom of heaven requires special identification. On the one hand, the listeners are asked to identify themselves with the labourers. They have to think that they are jobless and penniless and standing idle in the street waiting to be hired. Their miserable plight can be relieved only by a generous and merciful master who comes to the street at regular hours. Upon hearing the call, they should grasp the opportunity and go right into the vineyard without hesitation. It is an invitation, free and bountiful. On the other hand, the listeners should identify themselves with the householder, too. Just as the vineyard owner's magnanimity demonstrates, one should not treat one's subjects or employees as inferior and thus exploitable. In the new situation of the kingdom of heaven, the rich and the powerful should take others' misfortune into serious consideration and give away what one can possibly provide. As far as this radical ethic is concerned, love and care reign supreme. ■

BY YEN-ZEN TSAI
[TAICHUNG, TAIWAN]

Testimonies



The Lord gave me back my child

On 1st April, 1987, my wife and I were overjoyed with the birth of our firstborn – a son we named Lai Zhen Seng. However, our joy was short-lived. When the nurse gave him his first feeding, he could not take in the milk. Every mouthful of it was thrown up. Upon thorough examination, the doctor discovered that certain parts of his internal digestive tract were not properly connected and the milk could not reach his stomach. We were told that the baby had to be operated upon immediately or he would die. He was less than 24 hours old! How could this tiny life survive this cruel ordeal? However, thank God, the Holy Spirit comforted me and gave me strength to entrust this little life into the hands of the Almighty – the Lord and Giver of Life. Medical science may be highly advanced but a doctor still cannot give life to a dying patient. Only the Lord Jesus can do so. Having been strengthened by the Holy Spirit, my wife and I wholly entrusted the life of our child to the Lord.

The doctors operated on him the next day. When he was brought out from the operating theatre, he was hardly the figure we knew. His little head was bandaged and numerous tubes of various sizes were protruding from his body – he was buried in a mass of entangled tubes. He looked

more like an alien from outer space! It was a heart-wrenching sight and my heart bled with compassion for him. When one preacher saw our baby, he shook his head and advised us to be prepared for the worst. Other brothers and sisters said the same thing. The baby was in the intensive care unit for a few days. He was fed through two tubes; one fixed to his neck and another to his abdomen – a pitiful sight to all who saw him.

Our neighbours advised us not to believe in Jesus any longer and to turn to idols instead for help – or the baby would surely die! However, we held fast to our trust in the Lord and did not waver in our faith.

Praise the Lord for His mercy and bounteous grace that through the prayers of our brothers and sisters in Christ, our baby gradually recovered after 28 days in the hospital. Now he is an active, adorable and healthy eight year old boy. Praise and glory to the Almighty God!

*Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life."
[Jn 11:25]*

"No man has the power to retain the spirit, or authority over the day of death." Eccl 8:8

BY LAI SWEE FATT
[KAJANG, MALAYSIA]

Hallelujah! I thank God for His immense grace that enables me to relate my personal testimony of how Jesus called me to enter His fold. With His tender love and abundant mercy, my Lord Jesus Christ weaved the scarlet thread of salvation through my life. May all glory be given to the holy name of Jesus, our Almighty God in heaven.

In October 1987, I was brought to the True Jesus Church at Telok Kurau, Singapore. Immediately upon crossing the threshold of the gate, I sensed an overwhelming peace that

was a special prayer session for the Holy Spirit. Those who wished to receive this precious heavenly gift were to step forward for the laying on of hands by elders and deacons. I went forward and knelt down humbly. I did not know how to pray, and kept repeating "Hallelujah, praise the Lord!" Nevertheless, deep within my heart, I was calling out to God, "O God! What is the Holy Spirit that I am praying for right now? Are You the Holy Spirit? Please bestow on me this gift so that I may believe in You completely."

the mysteries of the Holy Spirit. Praise our Almighty God!

After understanding the basic doctrines of the True Jesus Church, many concerned church brothers and sisters encouraged me to receive water baptism on December 27, a week after the Evangelistic Meetings. Since my family was going to emigrate to Canada a few months later, I ought to grasp hold of the precious opportunity to be baptised. However, my Buddhist parents adamantly forbade my conversion to Christianity. There was much discord in my family.

was awestruck. How could I, a wretched sinner, stand before this holy light? Never before had I beheld such a resplendent light, a light that belonged to the heavens and not this profane world. It was the True Light. All the lights of this world paled exceedingly in comparison. They were only shadows of the True Light above. Peace replaced turmoil in my heart and I understood His divine message.

We crept out silently leaving our sleeping parents and our home on the 23rd floor of the condominium. We started

the elevator door opened slowly on the 17th floor. We dashed out in great trepidation and charged down the entire flight of stairs to the ground floor, in escape from the snares of Satan.

When we reached the church, I was overwhelmed by the security and peace that embraced me. Reflecting on the vision of the cross and the abnormal event of the elevator, I decided to receive water baptism for the salvation of my soul. The calling of my heavenly Father beckoned me lovingly, and I could no longer hearken to the faint echoes of my

my sins. As I emerged from the water, my heart was soaring and my steps were effortless as I began my walk with Jesus. My Lord had washed away my sins completely with His precious blood and gave me an eternal life so new and pure that I felt completely reborn!

After the water baptism, the newly-baptised members received the sacraments of the Washing of Feet and the Holy Communion. When the service was over, I went around the church in search of the newly-baptised baby boy, and I was

T H E C A L L I N G O F G O D

hovered in the air. Strangely, I felt that I had come home. It was my first encounter with the entire congregation praying in tongues and it sounded to me as if many angels were conversing joyously. When I first sang the melodious hymn 296, tears welled up in my eyes as I beheld the church partaking the Holy Communion. I was deeply touched by the love and kindness that was manifested among the brothers and sisters in the church.

My third visit to the church occurred during the Evangelistic Meetings in December 18-20, 1987. I pondered over the underlying messages inherent in the various sermons concerning salvation. On the last evening of the Evangelistic Meetings, there

Suddenly, a tremendous power descended upon my being and immediately my heart was set aglow by flames of indescribable joy! A channel of space was carved out between heaven and earth while I could feel God embracing me ever so tenderly in His bosom of love. The oil of the Holy Spirit kindled the inert spirit within me, and the meteoric flames of God set my soul ablaze to white heat. Immense joy came forth like torrential tidal waves that sprang from the depths of my heart. My body began to shake involuntarily, and my tongue rolled away in a language foreign to me. It dawned on me that God had answered my simple prayer as my inner eye was opened to

I was torn between obeying my parents and receiving my salvation. It was only through prayers that I found solace for my wretched soul.

By the glorious morning of December 27, 1987, my inner struggle reached its peak. Finally, I told my two younger sisters of my decision to delay my water baptism to a later date. However, my heart was laden with utter sorrow. Before we left home for church, I looked up toward our iron gate while my anguished heart cried out to God, "O God! Please tell me what to do." Immediately, I saw a glorious cross that radiated from the iron gate with an ethereal light, both brilliant and pure! The vision diminished in a split second and I

pressing away frantically at the elevator buttons, fearing our parents might suddenly appear behind us. However, the three elevators that were usually so reliable were somehow stranded on the ground floor that Sunday morning. We panicked but much to our relief, one of the elevators began to rise. After we rushed into the elevator, a strange event followed. The elevator that we were in stopped at every floor; the doors would open and close slowly but no one was waiting to use the elevator! Fear took over as we felt trapped in space within the suspended elevator by an unknown dark force. "Sis... the devil is trying to stop us..." uttered my sister in a trembling voice. "Let's get out!" I cried as

earthly father. On that morning, among those of us who were to be baptised was a dying baby boy. He was suffering from a critical heart problem which was said to be beyond medical help. His eyes were dilated and he had to be fed intravenously. His parents were clinging to the last strand of hope, hoping against hope that Jesus would save their child. The entire congregation said a special prayer for them.

The water baptism was a significant turning point in my life. As I trudged heavily into the sea water, my heart was weighed down by all the sins of my past life. I revealed myself as a wretched sinner before God, totally unworthy of His immense grace and I bitterly repented of all

dumbfounded by the living miracle that I saw! The dying baby of that morning greeted me with sparkling eyes and rosy pink cheeks while his sobbing mother fed him porridge. They named him Moses. The mighty healing power of Jesus had manifested before our eyes and this greatly revived the faith of all the members present. I was thoroughly convinced by then that God had indeed guided me to the True Church. Hallelujah!

"One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple."

Psalm 27:4

**BY CONSTANCE LIN
[LOS ANGELES, USA]**

(Editor's note: Moses is now a healthy eight year old boy, living in Kulim, Kedah, Malaysia)

a heart of flesh OR of stone?

BY ALICE JUNG
[LOS ANGELES, USA]

"I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek 36:26).

When God gave me this verse in my prayer, He not only allowed me to experience it but He also permitted me to understand its meaning.

One morning, I sat down to read three Psalms of David. Through these words of praise, I could sense how King David put his total reliance on the Lord even in the most desperate situations. I understood why David, despite his faults, was pleasing to God. Oh, how I longed to have David's heart – one so pure and ready to please his Almighty God. As I knelt down, I concentrated on praying to God with the same sincerity and passion as that of King David.

“How can I praise God or
do good deeds if I do not
keep my heart pure and holy”

"Give me too, my God, this heart of obedience and total trust!" I prayed, "Let only wonderful praises of You proceed out of my mouth because You will fill my heart with fountains of joy!"

As I prayed, I began to feel a strange sensation in my left hand. This was a feeling I had experienced many times before: the hand of the Lord Jesus. When I first received the Holy Spirit, God allowed me to experience His large left hand holding my tiny right hand. Since then, once in a while, especially when I needed comfort or special guidance, I could experience His hand firmly taking hold of mine. Each and every time, His hand would turn my sorrow to joy, despair to hope.

This time, however, instead of the usual sense of security which I always felt when I held my Lord's hand, the sensation was different. This time, a feeling of heaviness extended from my left hand,

spread to my left arm and then to the entire left side of my body. It was as if my left side had been turned to stone – heavy, hard, and cold. Frightened by this unusual feeling, I continued to pray, "If this is from You, my Lord, please remove this feeling from me." To my surprise, the stone-like phenomenon persisted. Then, I realised that God was about to teach me a lesson.

"I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek 36:26). God gave me this verse as I pondered over what this experience meant. Then, the meaning slowly dawned on me. I pleaded with my Heavenly Father, "Please take this heart of mine which is as cold and loveless as a stone and give me a new heart of flesh!" This was God's reminder to me of how I had had a heart of flesh when I first believed.

By God's wonderful grace, I received the Holy Spirit and water baptism in the summer of 1986. In the period immediately following, I could hardly contain the joy, zeal, and compassion as the Holy Spirit overflowed within me. It had greatly puzzled me then why many of the long-time believers were so cold and uninterested in constant prayers. I thought that the Spirit would fill me and make me stay fervent for ever. Little did I expect that years later, after God had blessed me with a comfortable and peaceful life, I would gradually become just as cold as those long-time believers I once judged. What happened to me? I thought that all was well and I never suspected that anything was wrong with me. I had certainly fooled many people, even myself; but the Lord looks at the heart (1 Sam 16:7). The Almighty God knew that my heart was turning to stone.

I understood what God was telling me in the experience – unless I removed my stony heart, I would not have room for the heart of flesh that the Lord had prepared for me. How foolish of me to

“I may appear to be doing the right
thing outwardly to please men,
but I know I can never fool God
because He sees my heart better
than even myself”

ask God to give me a heart like that of David's, when I continued to cling on to my old and stubborn heart. Now, it was time for God to remove my own deceit.

Praise and thank God that when He had revealed the meaning of it all, the feeling of stone left me. Once again, I felt the large and firm left hand of the Lord Jesus clasping my feeble right hand. It was as if a worried father had found his long-lost playful child among the crowd. My Father in heaven took my weary hand and looked into my tearful eyes, saying, "I have been waiting for you, my child. Where have you been?" I could not tell whether the tears that covered my face were of joy or shame, or of both. Joy flooded my heart because my merciful Father welcomed me back with His warm embrace. Shame overwhelmed me; because of my disobedience and pride, I had let go of His hand and wandered away. I was joyous because I realised how much He loved me. I felt ashamed because I had done nothing worthy of His love.

After this precious experience, I learned the importance of constant "heart-checks." No, I do not need to go to the doctor for a diagnosis. Rather, I check with the best Physician in the world – Jesus. Now, I often warn myself in my prayers, "Be watchful, oh my heart, lest you turn to stone again!" Jesus had expounded on the importance of the heart, "For out of the heart come evil thought, murders, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander" (Mt 15:19). How can I praise God or do good deeds if I do not keep my heart pure and holy? I may appear to be doing the right things outwardly to please men, but I know I can never fool God because He sees my heart better than even myself. ■

OUR Lord Jesus once said, the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few. When we compare the number of full-time ministers with the demands of the church's ministry, the Lord's statement is true indeed. We believe that an insight on the motivation and experiences of the current ministers will help to inspire, direct and encourage more of you, our Manna readers, to at least consider serving the Lord on a full-time basis. It is with this in mind that we have designed this simple questionnaire for our ministers to share their testimonies with you.

Elder John Yang, California, USA

Period of Ministry: 54 years
Areas: Asia, Europe, Africa, America, Oceania

1. What made you decide to offer yourself as a full-time minister?

Ans: I was critically ill from a lung disease and the Lord healed me. I offered myself to repay the grace of the Lord.

2. In your ministerial work, what experiences have you encountered that left a very deep impression?

Ans: (a) The pioneering believers from the native hill tribes of Taiwan. During the Japanese occupation, they defied the Japanese authorities and secretly worshipped the Lord. Also, they relied on the Holy Spirit and kicked their bad habits such as drinking, smoking, visiting prostitutes and fighting.

(b) The simplicity, submissiveness, kindness and love of the brethren in the UK and Sabah.

(c) The churches in Mainland China – they kept their faith even when forced to go underground and continued to boldly testify of the Lord, advancing the divine work.

3. What are your aspirations/hopes for the True Jesus Church?

Ans: Take up the commission of our Lord to swiftly preach the gospel of the kingdom, i.e. the gospel of salvation (Mt 24:14; Eph 1:13-14) to the whole world and to await the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus. Hence, every believer must realise his commission and repay the Lord for His salvation and for granting him life. We must use our various gifts to contribute to the great work of saving souls.

**Preacher Thomas Kam
Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia**

Period of Ministry: 1977 - 1995
Areas: South-East Asia, India, Australia & New Zealand

1. What made you decide to offer yourself as a full-time minister?

Ans: (a) I made a vow to the Lord in 1966 to serve Him if He healed my father who was very sick.

(b) Persistent encouragement from Eld John Yang whom I had worked with on many occasions.

(c) God's chastisement in two incidents which nearly cost me my life, viz., a car accident in 1975 and when I almost crashed into a moving train which I neither saw nor heard.

2. In your ministerial work, what experiences have you encountered that left a very deep impression?

Ans: (a) Praying for rain at Bamban Church during a Youth Spiritual Convocation. There was a heavy downpour even before the prayer ended, thus solving the water shortage problems caused by a severe 5-month long drought. Besides, two brothers received the Holy Spirit during that prayer that lasted about 40 minutes.

(b) On 3 October 1980, the third day of the Spiritual Convocation at Kudat Church, two brothers and four sisters saw the wonderful vision of halos of glorious light around the preachers' heads during the sermon. Two sisters also saw the two tablets of stones and the rod of Aaron, one on each side of the pulpit, and lots of white patches of manna on the pulpit rostrum.

(c) I was struck by a sudden force which made my whole body, especially the limbs, numb and cold after I laid hands on a sister whom I later discovered to be an adulteress. I would have fallen on the spot if I had not caught hold of the pulpit rostrum. In any case, I suffered from backache for quite some time after that.

3. What are your aspirations/hopes for the True Jesus Church?

Ans: (a) More should be done to encourage the youths to come forward and serve the Lord full-time.

(b) Rich believers should realise the roles

they can play and contribute more toward world evangelism.

(c) There should be more English publications for English readers.

Newly-ordained preacher (Malaysia)

Period of Ministry: Ordained in June, 1995
Areas: West Malaysia & Singapore

1. What made you decide to offer yourself as a full-time minister?

Ans: I was working in the Kentucky Fried Chicken as an Assistant Restaurant Manager. Though I loved my work very much, yet deep in my heart I felt what I have achieved in life was but vanity. Then I decided to put God in the first place and so I signed up to be trained as a full time preacher to serve the Lord.

2. In your ministerial work, what experiences have you encountered that left a very deep impression?

Ans: We are but vessels for God's use. God's abidance and working through us are what matters. The experiences that I have encountered that left a very deep impression are reflected in 2 Corinthians 12:9f which says: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (The scripture coming alive in us.) We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

3. What are your aspirations/hopes for the True Jesus Church?

Ans: That each and every member in church attains to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to be a perfect man; to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.



the ministry in india

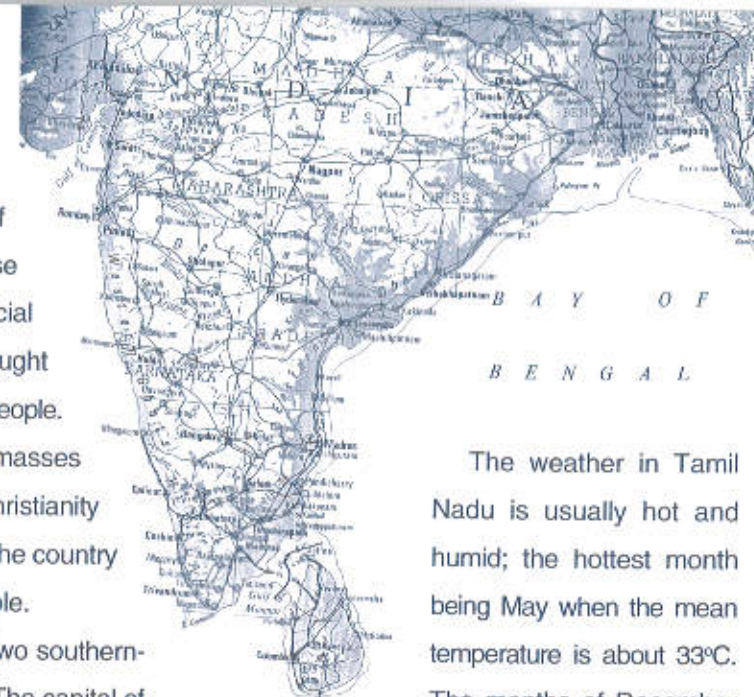


TRUE JESUS CHURCH in india

general

India is a country with a population of more than 800 million people of diverse languages and religions. Hindi is the official national language but English is also taught in the schools and widely spoken by the people. Religious tolerance is enjoyed by the masses with Hinduism being the main religion. Christianity has a long history in its establishment in the country and is well accepted by some of the people.

There are 24 states in India and the two southern-most states are Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The capital of Tamil Nadu state is Madras, the 4th largest city in India, and the capital of Kerala state is Trivandrum. In Tamil Nadu, the people speak mainly Tamil and in Kerala, they speak Malayalam.



The weather in Tamil Nadu is usually hot and humid; the hottest month being May when the mean temperature is about 33°C.

The months of December and January are the coolest with a mean temperature of about 24°C. The state of Kerala, however, has a tropical climate which is hot and wet throughout the year.

historical background

The truth was preached to Madras, India by a few deacons from Malaysia in 1969. Church centres were established at Pammal, and at Ambathur in Madras (1969). Later the church was pioneered at Kerala state (1977). The initial few years saw the Indian workers setting up many places of worship with the support of the International Assembly (I.A.). They were administered from the three centres; PAMMAL,

AMBATHUR and KERALA.

Over the years, I.A. has been sending preachers for pastoral visits there to provide intensive training for the workers and to conduct seminars on the Basic Doctrines. A few of them were selected to attend intensive training in Singapore. Church growth in India was and is impeded by weaknesses in organisation and difficulties in imparting the Word to the brethren. Other groups such as

the Roman Catholics, the Church of South India, Evangelical Church of India and the Pentecostals exert great influence and the pressure to conform is tremendous. Praise be unto the Lord Jesus Christ that 25 years after the truth was first preached in India, many believers and workers continue to have strong faith despite poverty and many hardships. This is because God loves them and the Holy Spirit works mightily in them. ►

14th SEAECC councillors' meeting

At the 14th Meeting of the South East Asia Evangelical Centre Councillors held on 30-31 October 1994, a review of the ministry carried out in India was made. Subsequently it was resolved that the General Assembly of Malaysia and Singapore (GAMS) look after the church in India for the next three years from 1995 to 1997.

GAMS, being the adoptive General Assembly of India, is to be responsible for the planning and management of the divine

work in India. GAMS presented a three-year plan for discussion and it was approved at the Meeting. It is hoped that with the blessings of God, the divine work in India shall progress further under the supervision of GAMS. Prayers are requested to support GAMS in its contribution to the ministry in India. Assistance in fund-raising and in promoting awareness as well as in recruiting more personnel for the vast ministry in that country is needed.

Assistance needed

- To supply
 - Bibles
 - Hymnals
 - Religious education textbooks
 - Evangelistic tracts
 - Periodicals such as Words of Life, Manna & Essential Doctrines
- To train workers
- To finance construction of church buildings

TRUE JESUS CHURCH IN INDIA

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KERALA CENTRE

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South India

PAMMAL CENTRE

4 churches (Pammal, Veppur, Otteri and Ponneri) and 14* prayer houses

AMBATHUR CENTRE

4 churches (Ambathur, Thirunilai, Thiruvethiyur, Chengalput) and 5* prayer houses.

KERALA CENTRE

10 churches (Thetticode, Puthukadai, Maylady, Zion Hill, Nadarkonam, Vellarada, Vazhichal, Horeb, Bethelpuram, Kottarakonam) and 21* prayer houses.

OTHER STATES

Karnataka
1 prayer house (Bangalore)

Andhra Pradesh

2 prayer houses (Kallavalapalli*, Indlaseru*)

* Needs further verification

INDIA MINISTRY FUND (IMF)

The International Assembly of the True Jesus Church has set up the India Ministry Fund [IMF] specifically for development of the divine work in India. Members are encouraged to contribute to this Fund. All remittances are to be sent to

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