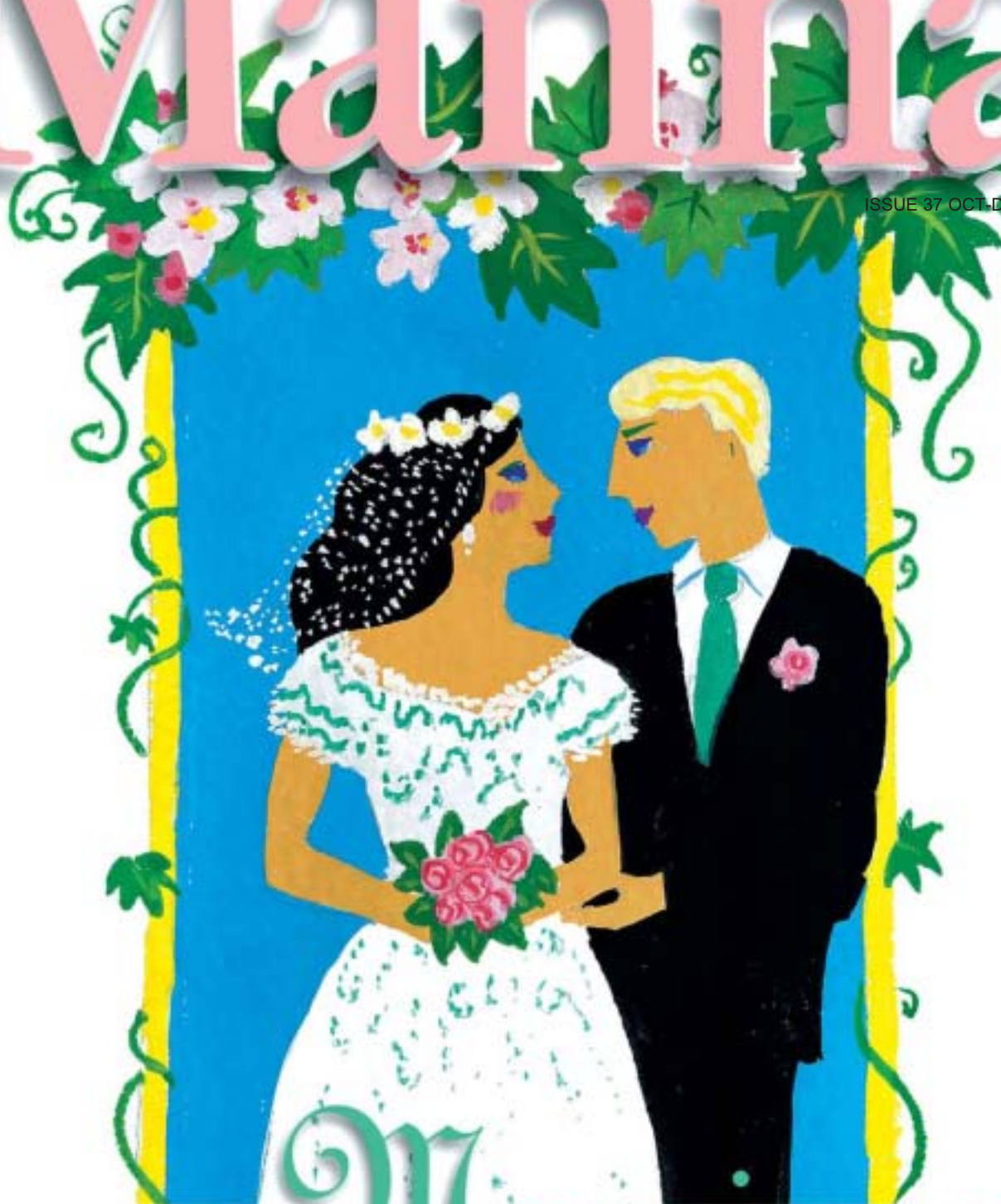


TRUE JESUS CHURCH

Manna

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THE MIRACULOUS GRACE OF GOD

Huei-Huan Tien—TAIWAN

MY FAMILY BELIEVES IN JESUS



My family was introduced to the True Jesus Church by my maternal uncle. In the early 1960s, my uncle came down with a severe case of tuberculosis and was coughing up blood, an indication that he was in the terminal stage of the disease. His illness soon confined him to a wheelchair.

One day, a member of the True Jesus Church in Taichung preached to him. My uncle was curious about the church so he attended a spiritual convocation. During that spiritual convocation, he received the Holy Spirit and was baptized.

After the baptism, he miraculously walked back to the hospital without his wheelchair. He was cured of his disease, and he was released from the hospital and went home.

At that time, my mother was a member of the Presbyterian Church. One day, she visited my uncle, and he showed her two Bible passages that moved her to tears and prompted her to study the truth preached by the True Jesus Church. The first passage explained the baptism of Jesus Christ (Mt 3:13-16), and the second emphasized the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our inheritance (Eph 1:13-14).

Later on, she received the Holy Spirit during prayer, and she, my younger brother, and I were all baptized in the True Jesus Church. Because she suffered persecution from my father and his family, we moved back to my mother's hometown, away from my father's family but in the same vicinity. My mother prayed for my father from the day she was baptized until the day our Lord Jesus led him to church.

During this period of time, my mother brought us to church regularly. I remember how I used to play outside the church before every Sabbath service.

And when the service was about to start, my father would come and stand by the church road. In his hand he would hold out an apple, bribing me to skip Sabbath. I love apples, but I did not give in to him.

One day, one of the deacons came out and saw my father standing on the road. He went over and invited him to attend the service. At first he refused, but later he reluctantly decided to come and sit in the last row.

During the service, he was very moved by the message, and in the final prayer, he received the Holy Spirit. Its power was so great upon him that his knees elevated off the ground. After my father studied the Bible for a few months, he was baptized in our church during a spiritual convocation.

Not long afterward, a police academy tried to recruit my father at the same time our church's theological seminary was recruiting students. Along with my mother's encouragement and his own desire to work for God, my father enrolled into our church's theological academy and eventually became a full-time minister.

SAVED FROM A POISONOUS SNAKE BITE



One summer day when I was ten years old, I went into the mountains to collect wood. As I gathered the pieces of wood, I noticed some luscious berries on the ground. When I went to pick the berries, something bit me on my right hand. As I reached out to pick some more, I saw that it was a snake, and it bit me a second time in the same area. After the second bite, I felt faint and had difficulty breathing.

I went back home and told my mother that a snake bit me. My mother, sister and I knelt down and prayed to God right away. After the prayer, my

mother bound my right arm with some cloth to try to stop the poison from circulating into my bloodstream, but it didn't help. Then they took me to a clinic, but the doctor didn't know which snake bit me so they couldn't prescribe any medication.

By then, many people from the county heard what had happened and came to the clinic to help me. They tried to see if they could suck out the poison, but no one had strong, healthy teeth to do so. They tried drawing out the poison by putting my hand over the fire. My skin turned black, but the poison did not come out. Someone else suggested using a heated knife to cut out the poison. Nothing worked.

Later, when we got home, my mother was very nervous but she told us not to worry, saying that we would pray to God. Slowly, my arm started to swell. Then it became paralyzed and I had difficulty breathing. That evening, all of the members of our church came to my house to pray for me. Though my arm was in great pain, I was able to sleep.

At 3 a.m. the next morning, my mother and uncle carried me and walked for six hours to catch a bus to Taichung. At that time, we had no telephone, and transportation was very primitive, so we couldn't contact my father. He was preaching on the east coast of Taiwan, so he didn't know what had happened to me.

We finally arrived at Taichung and went to one of the best hospitals there. By then, my vision was failing and my whole arm was black. The discoloration extended through my entire arm to the right side of my chest. My breathing slowed and my pulse was less than twenty beats per minute (the pulse of a healthy person is about seventy beats per minute).

The doctors said, This child is dying; we cannot accept him. They

said that I needed to go to Taipei. My mother said, He will die if we try to take him to Taipei. At the time, there were no highways or airplanes that flew from Taichung to Taipei.

After my mother prayed, she called Elder Kuo. He knew the chairman of the hospital and rushed over there. The chairman approved my stay because Elder Kuo assured him that the hospital

have accepted your vow. I will use this child. Your son will be saved.

My mother was greatly comforted after seeing the glorious light and hearing Jesus' promise to her. When she awoke, she was happy to see that I was better. When the doctor came in that morning, he expected me to have already passed away. All the doctors were amazed that I was still alive.



My mother didn't sleep at night. She was afraid that if she did, she would lose me.

would not be held liable to the consequences of my treatment.

The doctors told me I had only two days to live. My mother said, Let's rely on prayer to God. My mother continued to pray for me, and I tried to pray as much as I could with her. She didn't dare leave me because the doctors said that I would die in two days.

She read testimonies and Bible stories to me late into the night. She never cried in front of me, but I could sense how sad and nervous she was. My mother didn't sleep at night. She was afraid that if she did, she would lose me. Instead, she just stayed beside me and continued to pray from about 10:00 pm until 4:00 am. Since there were other patients in the room, she prayed quietly.

During one of her prayers, the Holy Spirit moved her to say, He will die. I will give him to you if you save him. Then, out of sheer exhaustion, she fell asleep next to me on the side of my bed. As she slept, she had a dream.

She saw a glorious light and our Lord Jesus Christ appeared, standing next to my bed. The Lord Jesus told her, Don't be sad. Why are you worried? She said, Because my son is about to die. The Lord Jesus comforted her and said, I have heard your prayer and I

My mother told me that we would continue to pray with faith, and she said that God would heal me. I did as she said because I believed her. But my condition did not improve; instead, it got worse. My mother knew that we had to continue to pray. God was willing to fulfill His promise, but we still needed faith to go on.

That week, the doctor discovered that I was bitten by the 100-step snake, the most poisonous snake in the world. It is dubbed the 100-step snake because most people die before they walk one hundred steps due to the extreme potency of the poison. The doctors were shocked that I was still alive, so they continued to study this case.

However, my situation had not improved. The poison had spread from my hand to mid-forearm, and the skin began to turn black and rot. The doctors wanted to amputate my arm because the poison had spread throughout my arm. My mother strongly opposed this, so she prayed to God for help.

My mother believed God's promise that I would be cured. She also believed that this was a test of faith. She suggested that they operate instead and take off all the rotted flesh to extract the poison, thereby saving the arm. The doctors

agreed and spent six hours in intense surgery, trying to clean out my arm.

The next day, as they unwrapped the bandages to change them, I was so shocked to see the decay of my arm. All that was left were bones and nerves. They had cut off all of the flesh and also my little finger. I was so sad that I cried. I asked the doctors for the bones of my little finger so I could bury it.

After that I received continual treatment, and my condition improved. My mother knew that there was no need for them to amputate my arm, so she asked the hospital to release me. Even though I was not fully recovered, she relied on faith and the revelation of the Lord Jesus. Though I had lost one finger, I experienced the grace of God.



PATH TO RECOVERY

When I was discharged from the hospital, the doctors told me that I could no longer use my right arm because it was paralyzed. This devastated me because I really enjoyed sports. The discharge also coincided with the start of a new school year, and I had to learn to write and do work with my left hand.

When my father returned from preaching one day, he gave me two books: one by Mark Twain and the other the biography of Abraham Lincoln. Their stories of courage and faith encouraged me greatly. I was determined to try to regain strength in my right arm again.

Every time I tried to use it, I would pray first. Slowly, I began to have sensation in my upper arm. Eventually, I could feel and move my lower arm and my hand too. Then I began to nail things in the house and use tools to cut grass.

I was standing by a gate, and an angel came out and said, "You cannot go back."

My mother's eyes welled up with tears the first time I moved my arm. Whenever she saw me trying, she would go somewhere and secretly pray for me. But with all the progress I was making, I still couldn't wiggle my fingers. So I decided to learn how to play the piano to train my fingers.

I paid very close attention to the sisters or elders who played the piano at church. I memorized the tunes and how they positioned their fingers on the keys. Everyday after school, I would stop by the church to pray and to play the piano secretly. Some days when I couldn't move my fingers, I would sit and force myself to play, shedding tears at the same time.

From practicing the piano day after day, I eventually regained the use of all of my fingers. Thank God, through the prayers of my parents and siblings, I fully recovered from the paralysis within a year.

One day, when there was no one to play the piano during the service, I went to play. Everyone was shocked because they all thought my fingers were paralyzed.

My missing finger is a constant reminder of God's miraculous grace in my life. From this experience, I understood that my life had been dedicated to God. From that point on, I disciplined myself strictly and vowed to keep pure before the Lord.

Although it was my mother who offered my life to God, I took this offering to heart because the Lord had given me a clear sign about my future work for Him.

A VISION OF THE END TIMES

One night, after I had graduated from college and had been working for a while, I had a vision. In the vision, I went to a prosperous, beautiful city. There were all kinds of people there, and many were doing business or enjoying themselves.

All of a sudden there was a loud noise, and the whole city shook. The heavens became dark and the stars fell. The devil appeared and began catching humans for hell. Everyone ran; they could not save themselves or others.

I also ran and ended up by the seashore. People tried to get into boats, but they would fall into the ocean and disappear. I got into a small boat in an attempt to escape, but the devil pursued me in another boat. Although I was very tired and thirsty, I tried my best to row toward a mountain. There was a river that flowed from the mountain, and as I continued to row up the river, it began to diminish until it was completely dry at the top of the mountain.

When I finally landed on dry ground, I got out of the boat, but the devil was there again, right beside me. He said to me, Go back; your friends are all back there. In my heart I said, I don't want to go back. I was standing by a gate, and an angel came out and said, You cannot go back.

I then saw a house, and in it were many people dressed in white, but none of them were smiling and on each of their faces was a black spot. I realized that these people were members of



the True Jesus Church whose hearts still loved the world. God did not accept them.

I walked to the right side of the house where there was a golden ladder that led to the second floor. At the base of the ladder was a sign that read True Jesus Church. The people on the first floor could not see the ladder because they were still in the world.

The angel said to me, Come up. As I stepped on the ladder, my shoes changed and my clothing became white. All my fear, confusion, and desires disappeared. The glory and love of God filled me.

Upstairs was a chapel and our Lord Jesus was speaking. He said to me, Come to the front and listen to Me. I was very happy and forgot about the tribulation I had just encountered. My only thought was that I must come out and work for God. It was time to offer myself to the Lord as a minister. The Lord Jesus looked at me, nodded, and smiled. Then we prayed together, and the Holy Spirit filled me.

The vision began at 2:00 am and lasted about two hours. After the vision, I was so happy and prayed for thirty minutes.

I attended our church's theological seminary and became a full-time minister. Everything I learned, I learned from our good Lord. Storing up treasures in heaven and saving souls is the most valuable work there is.

About one month after I became a full-time minister, my father passed away. His passing affected me greatly. The three days before he died, my father called me to his bedside and talked to me for a long time. He told me many things and encouraged me to be loyal to God, to work for Him the rest of my life, and to always desire God's blessing. And God will bless my family.

★

Transformed By The Spirit

Benjamin Yang—Irvine, California, USA

In the struggle between good and evil, I've come to realize that through prayer and God's grace, we can overcome the world. I truly thank the Lord for His guidance in my life. He has really opened my eyes to His miraculous ways. I'd like to share my testimony to help others overcome their own struggles with good and evil.

FIGHTING SIN WITHOUT SPIRITUAL POWER

For the past few months, I've been

trying to draw myself closer to God. I would tell myself to come to service even though I did not feel like it. I read the Bible and other church publications. I would often meditate on God and ask Him to forgive my sins and give me more faith.

Throughout this time, I came to realize how spiritually weak I was and that I sinned whenever I went out with a group of my nonbelieving friends. Even though I resisted temptation and did not go out with them, I knew I was

still weak in faith.

One night, I succumbed and went out with the same group of friends but, thank God, He kept me from sinning against Him. When I arrived home in the early morning hours, I felt a deep sense of emptiness. As I got out of the car and was about to open the door to my house, part of me was reluctant to go in. For some unknown reason, I was compelled to go to church instead.

When I arrived at church, I went up to the second floor, above the

chapel. As I sat there, I thought about all the sins of my life.

ENCOURAGED BY THE LOVE OF A SISTER

While I was thinking about the things I had done a few hours earlier, I heard the sound of prayer coming from the chapel. I went to see who it was and there I saw a sister praying. A while back, she encouraged me to pray for the Holy Spirit. She even offered to pray with me, saying that she came to church every day at 8:00 a.m. to pray. I said I might join her, but I never intended on doing so.

When I saw her praying there, I felt ashamed for not joining her. I knew that she had probably seen my car in the church parking lot and would've wanted me to pray with her. So I went and joined her. As I knelt down in prayer, I was moved to tears. I started to repent of all my sins and asked God to forgive me. I made a resolution to stay at church that day until I received the Holy Spirit. But realizing there was a truth seekers Bible study that morning,

I used to think it was okay to be proud, as long as I did not act proud.

I left church for home at 10:00 a.m.

Around noontime, before I was about to go to sleep, I felt compelled to write down all the shortcomings I wanted to get rid of. I had this burning desire to change myself, so I wrote down my weaknesses: PRIDE, SELFISHNESS, UNKINDNESS, IMPATIENCE, and LAZINESS.

Lying there on my bed, I pondered how I needed to be more at peace and to have more love toward church members. Suddenly, I had an overriding urge to get up and pray. For reasons I couldn't explain, I immediately felt the

need for God, so I got up and started to pray. As soon as I knelt down, tears poured down my face. I felt a deep sense of sorrow and pain within as I thought about my life of sin up to that point. I am not the type of person that cries often but during that prayer I cried like a child.

RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

During that prayer, my Hallelujahs were getting louder, and I began to wonder whether I was disturbing my neighbors. At the same time, I started to think about King David. Despite being a king, David was unashamed to offer praise to God in front of others. Even though he seemed very foolish to the people, he humbled himself before God and disregarded what others thought about him.

Just then, I realized how I cared too much about what people thought about me. What was truly important was what God thought about me. So I determined to disregard man's acceptance and seek after God fully in prayer. Once I disregarded my face and focused on God, my hands began to tingle and my arms began to shake. But I started to doubt if this was the Holy Spirit. I thought, Why would God still love and forgive a sinner like me?

Whenever I doubted, the Holy Spirit's movement went away and I would ask God for more faith and the strength to not doubt Him. I truly felt like I was in a spiritual tug-of-war. As I struggled with my faith, I also asked God to help me and forgive me. Suddenly I felt my hands shake. There was tingling and heat on my head. I began speaking in tongues. God wanted me to have complete faith in Him, without any form of doubt.

In that prayer, I felt as if I was nothing and wondered why I was so proud before. I used to think it was okay to be proud, as long as I did not act proud. Now, I understand that God does not like any form of pride within our hearts.

I had to bow and worship God with my face to the ground because I couldn't face Him directly. I was filled with so much joy because God still loved a great sinner like me. I asked God to never let me forget my iniquities and to always let me remember His wonderful grace.

I can't explain it, but I truly grasped the full height, depth, width, and length of God's great love. How great and awesome is God! In the past, I often heard the words of the Bible, but I never felt like I understood or truly grasped them until I experienced God for myself. He opened up my spiritual eyesight and many things in the Bible suddenly made sense and came alive for me. It became very clear to me that nothing in this world is more important than God.

THE POWER OF PRAYER

I truly feel that every prayer to God, every thought of Him, and every utterance of Hallelujah add up. As long as we put forth the effort, He will see our heart and help us through our dark days. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you (Jas 4:8).

Before I received the Holy Spirit, I had been trying for months to be good. But at the lowest point of my spiritual life, I felt like God uplifted me.

I used to constantly think about my stock investments, driving a nice car, and getting married. When I received the Holy Spirit, all the things of this world became unimportant to me.

All I want to do now is to abide in God's will. I know it will be a constant struggle, for there is constant spiritual warfare within us. I pray that God will protect me from returning to my life of sin and will remind me of His wonderful mercy and grace.

Through my experience, I hope to encourage you that experiencing God in prayer will spiritually empower you in your Christian walk. It will uplift your spiritual life and renew your faith in Him. May all the praise be given to our merciful and loving God. Amen. ★



Beautiful Steps

Hallelujah, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I testify. In April 2001, God received a very close relative in my family—my aunt, sister Shek, a deacon's wife. She was also a mother, a wife, and a sister in Christ. In 1999, she was diagnosed with lung cancer and passed away at the age of fifty.

This testimony is an account of how a True Jesus Church member battled for her life while suffering and failing both physically and spiritually, who came to realize the will of God, and at her final breath left the world refined as pure gold. I am compelled to use her story as an encouragement to those who remain in this world.

THE ONSET OF SICKNESS

The problem began several years ago when my aunt started coughing unusually frequently. She had showed difficulty in singing in the church choir and complained of a shortness of breath, something she had never exhibited before.

This problem became increasingly severe, especially when she sang solo for a spiritual convocation. The hymn was entitled *I Am Coming, Lord*. I remember the day she sang because the moment was truly beautiful.

Apart from singing, she excelled in bringing laughter and joy to other people, and it had become her trademark in the church. It was, therefore,

that much more distressing for me and other brothers and sisters to see her condition worsen.

After a period of lengthy medical examinations, an x-ray scan showed a suspicious shadow in her lung. Doctors reassured her and explained that the possibility of cancer was remote because she was still young and a non-smoker.

However, a tissue biopsy was still necessary, and this involved a simple operation. It seemed that what happened next was indeed far from anybody's imagination.

In the operating room, the surgeon discovered a tumor in her lung, and this meant removing the lung altogether. My aunt came out of surgery in a lot of pain and found it incredibly difficult to adjust with only one lung. The news that followed was all the more worrying and difficult.

TOUCHED BY LOVE

The tumor was found to be malignant and she had to be treated with chemotherapy. We had hoped that the treatment would kill the cancerous cells and stop it from spreading further.

I remember seeing how weak she was, especially after the chemotherapy. It seemed like the joy she gave so openly made the sadness more painful for us.

During summer vacation that year, a number of preachers came to train in Elgin church. In the days when I didn't have to work in my parent's takeaway, I would go to church with my aunt for the prayer sessions. Our conversations and time spent together appeared always light-hearted.

One night, on taking her home, she told the preacher and myself about how sad she was that she could not sing anymore. The preacher's reply stuck in my mind: You cannot make one hair white or black (Mt 5:36). Suddenly, I realized how insignificant I was.

Many brothers and sisters persisted in their prayers for my aunt and showed their love by making food and nutritious soup for her. I could tell that she was very touched by them.

Apart from taking her prescriptions,

she also took herbs prescribed by a Chinese doctor. In many ways, these were normal responses to illness. However, the coughing persisted and worsened.

LOSING HOPE

The cancer had spread to her brain, the other lung, and to many other vital organs. Once again she had to undergo additional treatment. Upon hearing the news, a friend and I went to visit her in the hospital.

We were prepared to comfort her, but she was lively and very comfortable when we arrived. We chatted about many things and she showed no signs of anxiety. It was a truly wonderful moment of fellowship, and it is a moment I continue to treasure very much.

The next time I saw her, she changed a lot. Her body had become incredibly frail and her hair had fallen out. Once again she became very low, physically, mentally, and spiritually. The brothers and sisters mourned with her and, day by day, the mourning increased.

When she was able to go to church, she asked people to pray for her. It seemed she was losing hope and crying out for help. We realized that she was feeling very angry and questioning why she had this illness. This same question crossed everyone's minds because she used to be the happiest and one of the most fervent sisters in church.

The several months that went by, many brothers and sisters from other regions came to Elgin to visit my aunt. She cried because reality was cutting her. She knew she didn't have long to live.

LET YOUR TEARS TURN TO STRENGTH

But something began to change. As our sadness deepened, her faith rose to great heights. The crying ceased and, while everyone else cried more and more, she carried courage and a gentle peace within her heart.

One day, upon another visit from the sisters' fellowship, we said a prayer for her. In that prayer, I felt that it wasn't

God's will to cure my aunt, and I changed my request and asked God to have mercy on her so that she would not feel any more pain.

Everyone extended words of encouragement to my aunt before they left, and their words were tearful and emotional. But she spoke with words that were more comforting than those she received and told us not to cry because Christians have the true hope. These were her last words to the sisters' fellowship: Let your tears turn to strength.

The week before she passed away, I went to visit her with my parents. There, she told us about a vision she had seen in prayer before her illness. In that prayer, she saw somebody lying down, and everyone walking toward this body had sad expressions on their faces. After the prayer, she decided not to tell anyone about this vision because it was too strange.

My aunt then said, quite calmly, that God revealed to her that she was going to die. She was ready to go and understood that this was God's will.

After she passed away, a sister gave a testimony concerning my aunt. The incident occurred during one of her visits to my aunt's home. In the middle of the prayer, she cried bitterly to God and pleaded to Him to heal my aunt.

At that moment, she heard a voice telling her that this wasn't His will. Upon hearing this, she cried even louder and hugged my aunt, who was praying next to her.

HOPE BINDS US TOGETHER


I am compelled to write because her story is the closest I have come to experiencing spiritual victory. I was there when my aunt prevailed during some of the highest and lowest points at the end of her life.

Her attitude and courage has inspired me to pursue more zealously after my faith. I hope that through this testimony, you may understand God's will more clearly and learn from the beautiful steps of her life. I miss her and hope to see her again in heaven. May all glory be unto our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. ★

The artwork features a vibrant red background with a complex, wavy texture. In the center, there is a large, irregular shape composed of concentric, swirling bands of blue and white, resembling a topographical map or a cross-section of a geological formation. The overall effect is one of dynamic movement and depth.

A CRISIS IN THE ISRAELITE CAMP

Shuhong Lin—Chicago, Illinois, USA



It seemed like a stalemate—two armies encamped on two mountains, one facing the other, with only a valley separating them. There on two mountains that flanked the Valley of Elah, the Israelite camp stood against the Philistines. Upon closer examination, the situation resembled more a checkmate rather than a stalemate. On one side of the valley, “a champion went out from the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath” (1 Sam 17:4). On the other side, “Saul and all Israel... were dismayed and greatly afraid” (v. 11). Without a doubt, there was a crisis in the Israelite camp.

The history of the Israelite nation is punctuated by countless battles, many of which serve as parallels to the spiritual battle Christians face today. The battle against Goliath provides a few noteworthy points that we may reflect upon and learn from.

In this well-known battle, the real polarity is actually not found in the physical opposition between the Philistines and the Israelites—it is within the Israelite camp. By revisiting this all-too-familiar story, some reminders may surface about our tactics in the spiritual war that we, the children of God, inevitably are engaged in.

THE FAILURE OF THE ISRAELITES

The Crisis

It was a military checkmate. The Israelite army could see no way of defeating the Philistines, at least not

with Goliath around. Towering to a height of about nine feet, his very appearance probably sent chills down the spines of the Israelites and paralyzed their morale.

On top of that, Goliath wore a bronze helmet, armor on his legs, and a coat of mail weighing five thousand shekels. He also carried a spear (1 Sam 17: 5-7). When they saw him, “all the men of Israel... fled from him and were dreadfully afraid” (v. 24). Physically, it was impossible for any Israelite soldier to fight and prevail over him.

Goliath's challenge was simple and straightforward:

Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But, if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us. (vv. 8-9)

Pathetically, but understandably, not a single Israelite soldier dared to fight him. Even Saul, the king whom they had chosen to rule over them so they could be “like all the nations” (1 Sam 8:7), was completely helpless. The Israelite camp must have been in a state of frenzied panic with the expectation of doom threatening to become a reality.

Strategies, Strategies

The Israelites did not resign themselves to the fate that seemed to await them. There were desperate attempts to improve their chances of averting imminent doom. The king proclaimed that the one who killed Goliath would be endowed with riches, tax exemption, and even the hand of the princess in marriage (v. 25).

This was certainly more than a generous offer. And, no doubt, this is a

strategy that has endured the test of time, for such still remains the most effective method of attracting human resources of the highest caliber. It was a frantic but clever attempt to solve the problem that was at hand.

The news of the reward spread throughout the camp; however, there was simply no man who accepted the challenge. Who could fight the menacing giant who was armed from head to toe? No one wanted to volunteer for what seemed like guaranteed death.

The clever, time-tested strategy did not work.

A Boy Called David

Against this backdrop of a chaotic and frightened army, David the young shepherd boy appeared on the scene. Calmly and firmly, he declared that he would go and fight Goliath (v. 32). Yes, one little lad volunteered to battle the seasoned warrior who had been “a man of war from his youth” (v. 33).

Impossible. Sheer insolence. Overbearing pride. These were the reactions from the soldiers and even his very own brothers (v. 30).

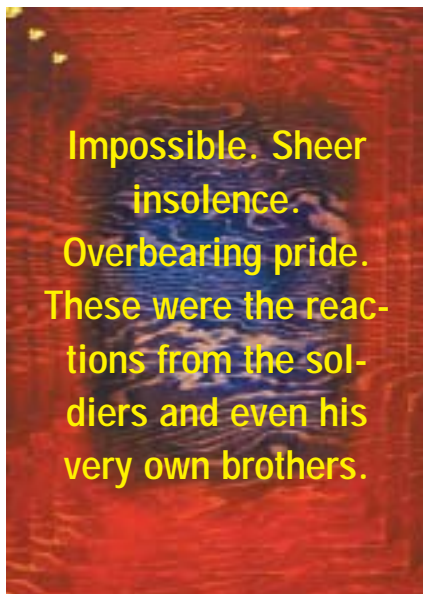
How easy it is to label someone who has true zeal for God! How easy it is to disregard the other person's point of view and believe that one's own understanding is right! This is the common response to someone who operates out of pure, simple faith from a majority accustomed to handling situations via well-thought-out human strategies.

Saul agreed to let David go into battle, but not without some good reinforcements. So “Saul clothed David with his armor, and he put a bronze helmet on his head; he also clothed him with a coat of mail” (v. 38). It must have been the best armor, for it was the armor fit for a king.

Unfortunately, the armor was more a hassle than help. David was unable to

walk under the bulk and the weight, so he took them off (v. 39). David would go fight Goliath without the armaments that seemed essential from the human perspective.

There were many good-willed strategies that emerged in the Israelite camp, from rewards for bravery to adorning David with the best armor. Nevertheless, all of these human strate-



gies wrought no success. Ultimately, it was a young David, coming in the name of the Lord and wielding a little stone and sling, who saved the Israelites.

LESSONS BEHIND THE VICTORY

The Power of God

In David's mind, it was not an impossibility to defeat Goliath. It had nothing to do with ignorance, insolence, or unrestrained pride. To David, the crisis was fundamentally an issue of whether or not God was included in the solution.

From the beginning, when he inquired about the situation at the battlefield, David defined the problem as a God-related matter: “For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should

defy the armies of the living God?” (vv. 26, 36).

Unlike the rest of the Israelites, David did not see God as separate from the problems that arose. Even in his daily life as a shepherd, he recognized the role of God in his triumph over the lion and the bear (v. 37).

On the contrary, the Israelite army saw only Goliath's size and their impending doom. They came up with one strategy after another, all to no avail. Even when David offered himself, they failed to see beyond his physical limitations.

In essence, they failed to see things at the spiritual level. When this happens, one inevitably fails to see God and His power. This was the crucial difference that set David apart from the rest of the Israelites: the ability to see God.

This is also the fundamental dividing line between Christians who are victorious through God and those who are locked in stalemates with problems that beset them.

Do we act like the Israelites and simply react to issues and events as they crop up? Or do we see things as part of the big picture—a spiritual battle between the soldiers of God and the devil?

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Eph 6:12)

How we define problems determines how we delve into them, and hence, how we attempt to solve them. The spiritual insight that David possessed is something absolutely necessary in all our spiritual endeavors for God.

Inner Spiritual Mettle

David was not only able to see God amidst crises and define problems in terms of God's power, but he also possessed the courage to say "no" to human methods.

When Saul adorned him with kingly armor, David found himself bogged down by its weight. Even though it was the king's well-meaning offer, David was bold enough to reject it (v. 39).

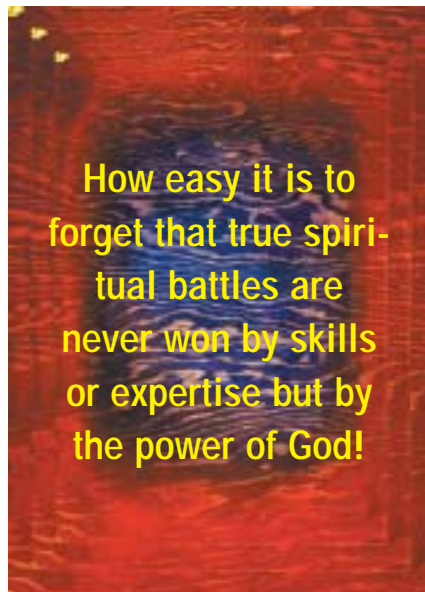
Put in today's context, it is important that believers and servants of God possess the right mentality with regard to the weaponry we use. The work of God cannot be accomplished if we rely on human strategies and allow other factors to take greater importance than God's power. When there is a need to say "no" to human ways, we have to be bold and say "no," or we will not see the victory that David received.

In place of the full armor, David brought his staff, his sling, and five smooth stones from a brook. There was nothing magical about those stones. It could have been any stone from anywhere that David used to hit Goliath right on his forehead. What was instrumental in David's defeat of Goliath was simple:

[Goliath] come[s] to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come... in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel... know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear. (vv. 45-47)

It was pure-hearted zeal to defend the name of God and complete confidence in God and His power.

Today, in the search for workers of God, it is tempting to recruit those with expertise rather than spiritual character and knowledge of God's word and power. How easy it is to forget that true spiritual battles are never won by skills



or expertise but by the power of God!

The message from times of old still holds true today: "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit'" (Zech 4:6).

David's faith in God and His power did not come at the spur of the moment, serendipitously driven by the occasion. True faith does not rise and abate with the rising and falling of events or the call of the occasion.

David's faith in God came from his experiences with God while he tended his father's sheep. Working alone, David probably had time to reflect upon the ways of God. This was quite similar to Moses' character-building in the wilderness of Midian.

Extended stretches of time alone, with God as the only form of reliance, make a good platform for building up one's faith. When the lion and the bear attacked the flock, David had only himself to fight these wild beasts. God was the only source of help. Such experiences fostered a relationship of trust and reliance.

These times of quietude and reliance on God are crucial to bringing

forth a strong, inner spiritual mettle required of anyone who wishes to possess God's endorsement and abidance to work for Him.

TRUE SPIRITUAL VICTORY

David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. But there was no sword in the hand of David...when the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. (vv. 50-51)

The crisis was over. The Israelites prevailed. At the end of it all, it was inner spiritual substance that won the day. There were no "heroes" that came forward because of the reward offered, no heroes who fit the standard definition of conventional wisdom. There was no room for any praise of human-tested strategies. This was true victory, for God, by God.

David's victory over Goliath was not inexplicable magic or coincidence. There were good reasons behind the glorious defeat of Goliath. David's winning formulae were precisely what the Israelites fail to seize hold of. They also simply did not possess David's spiritual mettle.

When we examine the success of David, we also see the contrast depicted by the reactions of the other Israelites. In our daily lives, do we handle situations the way David did, or are we often tossed and thrown about like the frenzied and rowdy Israelites?

In our service to the Lord, are we little "Davids"—with real approval from God and allowing Him to work? Or do we operate by human will and project that upon God, as if it were His will also?

May God bless us with spiritual wisdom and inner strength like David, so that we have true spiritual victory against any form of Goliath. ★

Marriage



The relationship between a man and a woman—the process of finding love, marrying, and establishing a life together—is probably the most wonderful but also the most challenging of all the relationships we will ever encounter. Through the experiences of the following writers, we see that marriage isn't always easy, but with God's guidance and His teachings, it is a journey that can be both fulfilling and enriching.

These articles remind us that love and marriage involve not only husband and wife, but God also. In addition to recognizing and respecting our unique roles in marriage, we need to honor God's crucial role in the success of our marriage. God is the source of love. If we rely on God and put our faith in Him, He will guide our marriage so that our union will be one that brings joy and satisfaction to husband and wife, at the same time glorifying the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Marriage Dance

Angel Marie Solgot—Seattle, Washington, USA

Planning for a wedding is not an easy task. I know this because a little over two years ago my husband and I had our very own wedding to plan. There were countless details to consider for the ceremony, and it seemed like the list of things to accomplish was endless. On top of planning the wedding ceremony, reception, guest list, seating arrangements, flowers, cake, and so much more, my husband (then my fiancé) and I were both in knots worrying about that great American wedding tradition symbolizing a couple's new life together—the First Dance.

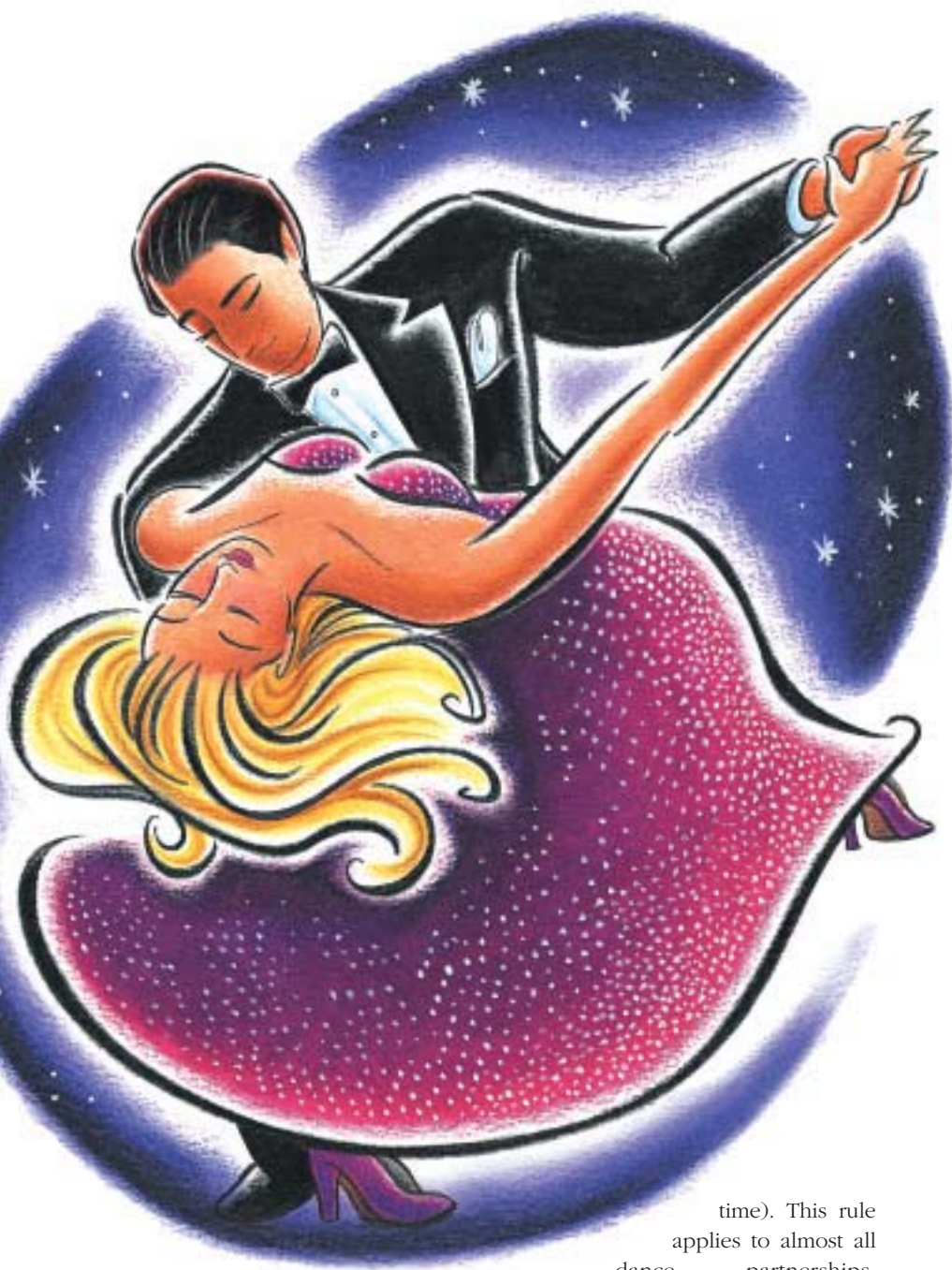
Knowing that neither of us could even remotely consider ourselves as talented as famed dancers Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, we decided to sign up for private ballroom dance lessons at the local dance school.

During the lesson, the instructor first worked with my fiancé. He taught him the correct posture, how to count the steps, how to step with the music, and most importantly, how to hold his partner's hand and support her back while guiding her around the ballroom. The instructor then taught me how to count the steps and, mostly, how to follow my dance partner around the ballroom floor.

My fiancé and I did just fine while practicing separately, and, watching ourselves in the mirror, we appeared to know what we were doing. Things seemed hopeful that is, until we tried out the steps together.

Once we started dancing with each other, my fiancé and I always seemed to turn or step backward or forward at opposite times, and we just kept bumping into each other. I wanted to gain more control over the situation, so I tried my best to guide him into doing what I thought needed to be done. But he kept trying to stick to what he had learned and to what he thought was right.

Though seemingly dancing together, we were in reality dancing separately, and truly disgracing the lovely art of ballroom dance. Our first lesson turned out to be our last lesson as well, and not because we mastered the art of ballroom dancing rather, we realized how hopelessly uncoordinated we were and decided to throw in the towel.



Although my husband and I did not succeed in learning to dance during this fiasco of a session, we both walked away from the ballroom dance lesson with a new understanding of the roles a man and woman must assume in order to glide gracefully across the ballroom floor of life together.

MARRIAGE LESSONS LEARNED FROM DANCING

We learned from this dance lesson that there can only be one leader in a ballroom dance, and this leadership role is best deferred to the man (which was something I found hard to accept at the

time). This rule applies to almost all dance partnerships, whether it is the waltz, swing, or ice dancing it's always the man's job to direct the routines and to make sure his partner looks stunning and remains safe during all the spins and tosses.

I thank God that over the past couple of years of our marriage, the lesson I learned during that ballroom dance session has translated itself into my own understanding of the roles of husband and wife in marriage.

When I was single and read the passages in the Bible about the roles of husband and wife, I never truly understood or accepted these roles as ones that were necessary (especially the part about a wife being submissive to her

husband!). In a time of equal rights for men and women, and after all that women have accomplished to advance their position in society and the workplace, it just seemed so backward that I should ever lower either my voice or my stand on issues in my own marriage. To me, marriage was supposed to be an equal partnership it seemed only fair.

But from what I've learned in my interactions with my husband and in dealing with the issues that a couple must face in the first years of marriage, I now realize that the Bible is accurate when it advises us to seriously respect the separate roles of a husband and wife.

In a marriage (as well as in most governments, companies, and organizations), it is just too difficult and disruptive to have more than one person in charge. I believe God instructs us to follow certain marital roles to ensure the success, happiness, and uninterrupted flow of a marriage and family.

SOCIETY'S MISCONSTRUED IDEAS OF MARRIAGE

Today's society has greatly blurred the line distinguishing the roles of husband and wife in marriage. In many households, both parents work long hours away from home, trying to run a household and raise their children during the evenings and weekends. Stress levels run high in these homes, and very little quality time is spent between husband and wife, as well as between parents and children.

In many of these cases, both parents, being equal in education, career status, and financial income, may find it difficult to agree on matters of the home. This can lead to constant arguments and battles neither spouse willing to give in to the other out of pride and possibly stubbornness.

Is this really what God wants for the children He loves so dearly? Does He really want us to live in marriages of

turmoil, stress, power struggles, divisiveness, and frustration? No. On the contrary, God has called us all to live peaceful, joyful, loving, and fruitful lives. He wants us to raise godly children who will live on as great imitators of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God has instructed us to live in oneness and unity with our spouses. It sounds like a great thing, theoretically, but just how do we go about creating such marriages and families? Is this unity and peacefulness even possible in today's marriages?

Yes, it is possible. But in order to make a marriage work, we have to abide by God's word no matter how harsh and unfair it may sometimes seem. We have to make a wholehearted commitment to honor the teachings in the Bible to the best of our abilities, understanding that God ultimately knows what's best for us.

CREATING A SUPPORTIVE AND GODLY UNION

One of the most important steps we must take toward ensuring that our marriages are blessed, harmonious, and lasting is to clarify and firmly reestablish in our hearts God's instructed roles for a husband and wife. We must set aside society's trends and return to the Bible, where we will begin to see, once again, the beauty in a godly marriage.

We must understand that God has created separate roles in marriage, and that neither one is more respectable or inferior. Rather, both roles are honorable and essential, complementing each other as they work to fulfill God's perfect design for a harmonious and blessed marriage.

In a godly marriage, a husband takes on certain important responsibilities, and so does the wife. With the two individuals fulfilling their God-given duties, the marriage thrives and glorifies God. Husbands should return to the instructions detailed in the Bible and

strive to fulfill the role of being servants in their marital and family leadership. Wives should likewise return to the instructions detailed in the Bible, striving to fulfill the role of being their husband's helper, as well as the maker of the home.

This may sound very much like something you'd see on television shows of the 1950s, and I guess it is. But when you compare the divorce statistics of the 1950s with those of today, where one out of every two marriages ends in divorce (and these statistics don't even include the marriages that stay unhappily intact!), you'll see that maybe there is a need for us to return to simpler days and simpler family structures. Maybe we're better off redefining our families based on what the Bible teaches us.

Let's look into the Bible to see just what types of roles and responsibilities God has instructed husbands and wives to carry out in their marriages.

A Husband's Leadership through His Service

Paul instructs married believers to thoughtfully and lovingly consider their roles as husbands and wives. In Ephesians 5:22-33, he writes:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church

Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as

himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

According to this passage, there is so much more to the idea of a husband's role in marriage than simply being the boss, the head honcho, or the master of his domain. These are all erroneous concepts that many men and women simply assume from quickly skimming this passage in Ephesians.

When we really look into the passage, into each phrase and analogy, we begin to see that Paul is not encouraging husbands to consider their role as rulers in their marriages; instead, he encourages husbands to serve their wives tenderly and lovingly, as Christ served His church.

Paul encourages husbands to offer their lives and bodies as sacrifices for their wives, never hating them or allowing them to be disgraced. Paul encourages husbands to lead through service in marriage. In Mark 10:42-45, Jesus explains just how he leads through His service to those He came to save:

You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

Being a Christian husband means:

- ◆ Taking an overall responsibility for the direction of your family.
- ◆ Taking the initiative to serve the needs of your wife and children.
- ◆ Striving to maximize your wife's gifts, talents, and abilities, and responding to her with encouragement and

praise on a regular basis.

- ◆ Laying down your life for your wife, so she can become all that God intended her to become.
- ◆ Denying yourself and sacrificing your life on behalf of your wife and children.
- ◆ Caring, supporting, and respectfully listening to the needs and concerns of your wife.

After we carefully consider Paul's instructions, it's obvious that a husband's role is a very serious one, and certainly not superior to the wife's. A husband must imitate Christ in many ways. He must be full of love, devotion, comfort, direction, guidance, sacrifice, humility, forgiveness, and responsibility. God gives husbands a very tough role to take on, but He also knows that this is best for the success of a marriage and a family.

A Wife's Role as Helper and Homemaker

Proverbs 31:10-12 and 25-31 clearly detail the virtues of a godly wife and mother:

*Who can find a virtuous wife?
For her worth is far above rubies.
The heart of her husband safely trusts her;
So he will have no lack of gain.
She does him good and not evil
All the days of her life.
Strength and honor are her clothing;
She shall rejoice in time to come.
She opens her mouth with wisdom,
And on her tongue is the law of kindness.
She watches over the ways of her household,
And does not eat the bread of idleness.
Her children rise up and call her blessed;
Her husband also, and he praises her:
Many daughters have done well,
But you excel them all.*

Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing,

But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.

*Give her of the fruit of her hands,
And let her own works praise her in the gates.*

It's important to understand that the woman's role in a marriage is an invaluable one. Genesis 2:18 reads, The Lord God said, It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.

From this passage, we learn that Eve was created to be Adam's helper and that Adam had certain needs that could only be met through his wife's abilities and company. Being a godly wife is vital to the success and happiness of a marriage. It allows a husband's needs to be fulfilled, enabling him to be complete and, ultimately, able to guide and serve his family. Godly women have unique qualities that work to fill the gaps in their husband's lives.

Being a helper is the exact opposite of being a competitor in a marriage. Competitors don't strive to fill each other's needs and gaps; instead, they expose those weaknesses in order to gain the advantage over the other. A competitive wife using negative and hurtful tactics may actually stir a husband to aggression and retaliation, or possibly to withdrawal and apathy.

In a good marriage, both spouses work together for the benefit of their marriage and family. They honor each other's roles and allow each other to use their God-given talents for the benefit of the marriage and their spouse.

When you look at most of the Bible's instructions on roles in a marriage, you will see that a wife is not necessarily called to obey her husband in everything; instead, she is called to submit. Submission means empowering the husband to be the leader it is a

wife's genuine response to her husband's sacrificial leadership, and it is not something to be demanded or ordered by the husband. A husband doesn't have the right to expect his wife to submit; rather, it is God who instructs her to do so. By submitting to her husband, a wife gives him room and permission to do what he feels is best for the family, without fear of criticism or anger from her.

Being a Christian wife means:

- ◆ Taking an overall responsibility for the support of your husband, children, and home.
- ◆ Working alongside your husband as a helping teammate, rather than a competitor.
- ◆ Doing your best to build up and encourage your husband.
- ◆ Lovingly and respectfully providing your advice and feelings to your husband, helping him to understand your needs.
- ◆ Caring, supporting, and respectfully listening to the needs and concerns of your husband.
- ◆ Respectfully submitting to your husband, allowing him to lead as a servant to the family.

Likewise, a loving and considerate husband naturally wants the best for his wife, so he communicates with her in order to know her needs better. He turns to her for counsel, out of his respect for her. But he also understands that, in the end, the decision ultimately rests on his shoulders. Any loving, Christian husband would feel the weight of this enormous responsibility each and every day of his life.

A godly and loving wife understands the burdens of her husband's serving leadership and respects his sacrificial love for her. She strives to provide her husband with constant encouragement to help him fulfill his God-given responsibilities, all the while cre-

ating for him a happy home life, marriage, and family.

IT'S REALLY ALL A DANCE

Going back to the traumatic ballroom dance lesson my husband and I survived, when you really think about what God tells us about marriage and the roles a husband and wife should play, it makes sense for a wife to defer the leadership role to her husband.

I made the mistake of trying to lead my husband at the same time that he was trying to lead me. We collided into each other and quite often repelled each other through our uncoordinated steps. We were both perfectly capable of counting out the steps ourselves, but it just didn't work for both of us to constantly verify with each other which number we were on and where we were going. We would have been much better off if I had just trusted my husband to lead us to the best of his ability.

In the same way, during our first year of marriage, I often did not give my husband's opinions and decisions my full respect. I didn't really know how to trust him as the leader in our marriage, because this was so counter to what I thought was fair in a marriage. I was in my late twenties, held a couple of educational degrees, was relatively successful in my own teaching career, and thought I managed just fine on my own. I had my own way of doing things, and I believed that my way was just fine. Because of my assertiveness, we constantly butted heads in that first year on decisions that needed to be made.

But thank God, as time progressed and I had more opportunities to observe my husband in our marriage, I began to realize just how seriously he cares for me and how lovingly he makes so many sacrifices for me. God opened my eyes to understanding and really respecting the many things my

husband so quietly does for me each day of our marriage.

My natural response to this revelation became a kind of trusting submission. I began to see that, though I'm perfectly capable of handling a lot of the things my husband takes care of so responsibly like paying the bills, maintaining our cars, planning for trips, developing our retirement savings, and so much more and though I may want to handle them differently, it makes more sense for me to let go of these things and trust him in what he feels are his God-given responsibilities in the marriage.

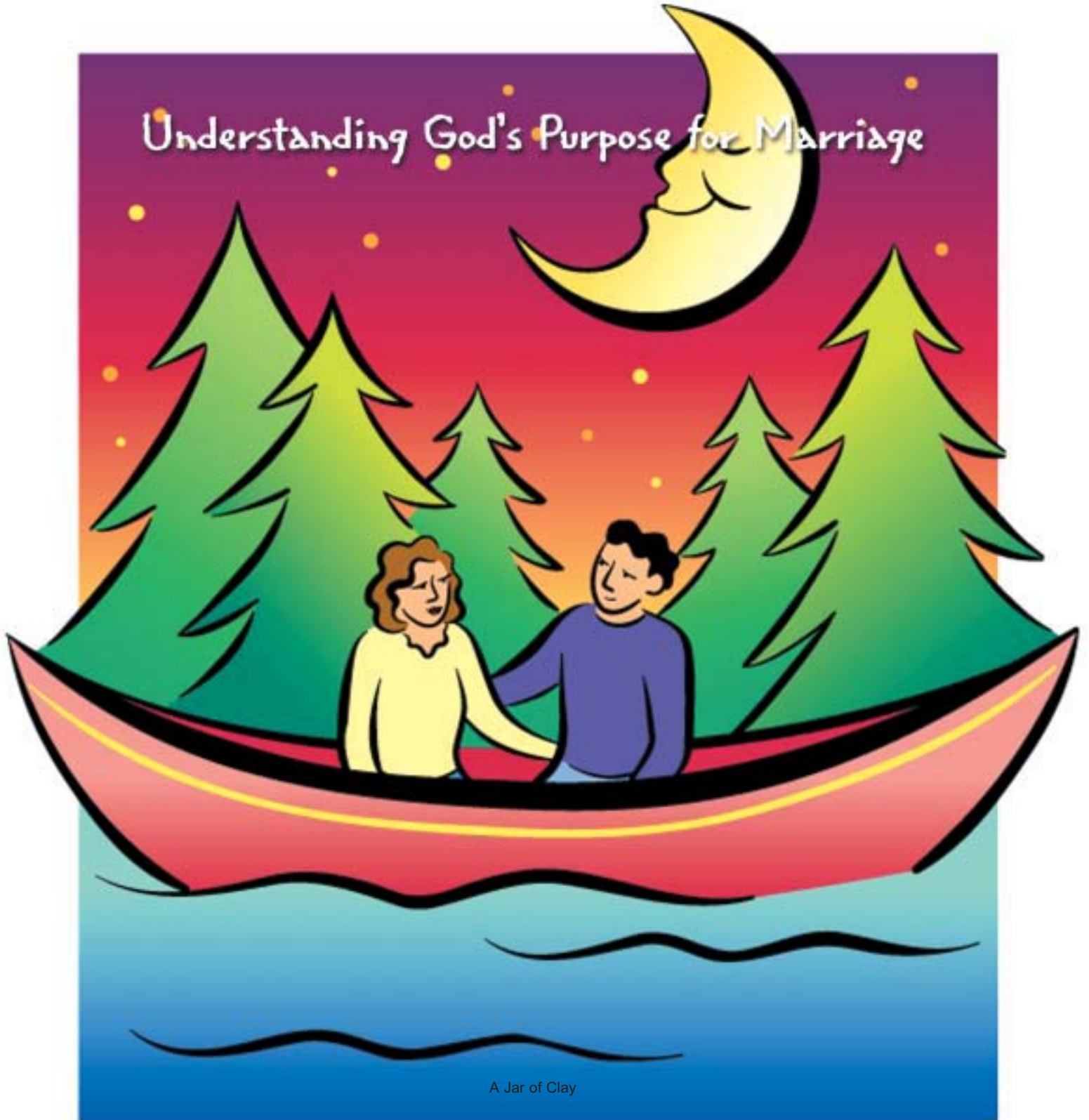
Of course, I'm not completely oblivious to these matters in our home. It's just that I no longer worry about where my husband is leading us in our marriage and in our life, and I can dedicate myself to taking on the other responsibilities of our home, my career, and then someday with our children, should we be so blessed. I trust him and I trust God's instructions to husbands and wives regarding our respective roles.

And I know my husband respects me when he asks for my opinions on plenty of personal, social, spiritual, and even financial matters. I offer my advice and feelings to him, but I make it known that I will go along with whatever he truly feels is best for us, based on my input as well as the input he receives from the Holy Spirit.

Though we totally bombed our lesson on the ballroom dance floor, I think my husband and I are faring pretty well on the dance floor of life. With these Scripture-based roles we've defined for our marriage, we're colliding much less frequently, and we're beginning to truly feel a sense of direction, peace, and happiness. ★

WHY WE MARRY

Understanding God's Purpose for Marriage



A Jar of Clay

September 11, 2001. It is a day that changed all of our lives in one way or another. The terrorist attack that brought down the once stately towers in New York City has thrust upon us a new, somber reality of uncertainty. Since that day, countless people have paused to listen to many stories of tragic loss and heroic sacrifice and to ponder about life.

One story in particular stands out in my mind. It is the story of a wife who lost her husband on the ill-fated flight that went down in Pennsylvania. In spite of her loss, this woman took comfort in the belief that her husband was meant to go on this flight.

To her, his presence helped thwart the evil plans of the hijackers. Her conviction was absolute, and it enabled her to transcend the anguish of losing a loved one so that she could achieve a sense of peace.

What strikes me the most about this woman is her understanding of the purpose of her husband's life. Few people seem capable of recognizing this kind of purpose in their own lives.

Her conviction inspired me to reflect upon this question: Can we proclaim as boldly as this woman that we are living our marriage with a sense of meaning and spiritual direction?

As Christians, I think that we can only attain this conviction if we know God's will for our marriage. You may think that it's strange to ask, 'What is the divine purpose of my marriage?' After all, getting married is a natural part of life.

We grow up, get married, and then have a family of our own. Generations have come and gone in this manner. And yes, it seems clear that God created

Eve to be Adam's helper. Two are better than one to keep warm, to build a home, and to raise a family. The reasons go on. The answer seems straightforward enough.

But I challenge all of us to consider this: out of billions of people in this world, why has God joined us specifically with our spouse?

The Bible tells us that each hair on our head is numbered (Mt 10:30). Not one falls except by the will of God. If even a seemingly miniscule matter such as the fate of our hair is under God's control, He must certainly have a purpose for our marriage!

God knows that our union with a particular person would serve a purpose that cannot be achieved if we were not with this person.

SPIRITUAL COMPANIONSHIP

Few people would argue that an important purpose of marriage is having a spiritual companion who can help us reach a higher spiritual level.

We often need our spouse to pick us up when we stumble on the heavenly path, and we in turn are there when our partner needs a helping hand. This is the beauty and preciousness of a marriage built on mutual encouragement and companionship.

These moments bring us joy and give us a taste of heaven on earth, for walking together will not feel as lonely or as vulnerable as walking alone.

Naturally, we hope and strive for this kind of relationship with our spouse. God's desire in every marriage is for each spouse to be a loving spiritual companion to his or her partner. He also wants us to establish a spiritually sound marriage so that we may raise God-fearing children. But all too often, we stop at these more obvious purposes and fail to recognize other ways that our marriage may help us grow spiritually.

HIDDEN TREASURE

People always raise their eyebrows in dismay when I tell them that one of the

things I value most about my marriage is how my spouse helps me see the worst in myself. That's right. Being able to see my shortcomings is what I consider the hidden treasure of marriage.

You see, unlike my relationships with other people, the unique chemistry and bond that I have with my spouse allows not only the best, but also the worst, parts of my personality to be revealed in our interactions.

To be able to learn about my flaws is much more spiritually valuable than seeing my bright spots. It creates precious opportunities for me to reach a higher spiritual ground. As I become aware of my shortcomings through my spouse, I can begin to work on improving myself in ways that I was blinded to before. From this perspective, each argument with my spouse becomes a treasured opportunity for me to learn about myself.

Don't get me wrong I don't try to stir the pot just for the sake of having a conflict. But over time, I have come to recognize that what I bring to feed the disagreements holds the key to unveiling my shortcomings. It could be a hurtful act stemming from the unwillingness to let bygones be bygones, or an unfair criticism born out of an impatient streak.

No matter what it is, once the situation allows me to recognize it, my blind spot is uncovered and I can see how I can work toward repairing not only my marital relationship, but also the spiritual blemishes in myself.

In this way, God unites us with our spouse so that we can help each other recognize and round out our rough edges.

BEACON OF LIGHT

Jesus said to his disciples, You are the light of the world... Let your light shine

People always raise their eyebrows in dismay when I tell them that one of the things I value most about my marriage is how my spouse helps me see the worst in myself.

before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (Mt 5:14-16).

Paul wrote, We have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men (1 Cor 4:9). He also admonished us to live the rest of [our] time in the flesh... for the will of God (1 Pet 4:2), that in all things God may be glorified (1 Pet 4:11).

It seems clear, then, that as children of God, we ought to live our lives in a manner that will bring glory to the Lord before men and before angels.

As a couple, Aquila and Priscilla were repeatedly lauded in the Bible for their devotion to God's ministry and for their unfailing assistance to God's workers. They became a husband and wife team that worked together, and their godly labors brought glory to the Lord's name. Looking to this couple as an example, our marriage ought to be a living testament to others.

In our success, we should give credit to God and let others see how Christ has helped us succeed as a couple. In our distress, the strength and peace that God brings to our marriage ought to point others to see our joy and hope in Him.

NUMBER OUR DAYS

No one likes to think that the dreams we build with our beloved spouse will come to an end someday. Instead, we like to think that our days with our

spouse will be endless, forever, and knowing no bounds.

The events of the September 11th tragedy have made us pause and listen to many heartfelt stories. We ought to also stop and take heed of God's will for the lives we lead with our spouses. There are countless ways that we may bring glory to God through our marriage. I'm sure that if we pause and consider this matter from time to time, we can easily come up with a lengthy list.

A common problem, though, is that we do not stop and consider. Caught up in our daily hustle and bustle, we lose our perspective about time. The fact that each day is a divine gift often eludes us. Though we plan for the future, we have no ownership of tomorrow. But we don't think about it, perhaps because deep down, it frightens us to face this fact.

I am not saying that we ought to live in fear and existential angst, watching for death at every corner. Scripture instructs us to seek wisdom by remembering the finitude of our lives. So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom (Ps 90:12).

Let us not fall back to our old pattern of living life with a timeless mindset, for it can lead us to live foolishly. Rather, let us learn to number the days we have with our spouse so that we will treasure our time, and always strive to make each day of our married life truly meaningful. ★

MARRYING IN THE LORD



Have you ever noticed how married people begin to resemble each other? They laugh at the same corny jokes, wear identical sweat suits, and share similar points of view—it's no wonder they appear alike. Aside from physical appearance, have you also noticed how some people change spiritually after marriage?

There are examples of notoriously rebellious individuals in the church who, after settling down, turn over a new leaf and become model Christians. There are also believers who serve the Lord with great fervor while they are single, but sadly, after marriage they gradually withdraw themselves from church activity to lead a private and exclusive family life.

The Bible tells us, He who finds a wife [husband] finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the LORD (Prov

18:22). The latter scenario is probably not the good thing favored by God.

Married couples spend so much time together that in many aspects they start to think, talk, and act alike. Our spouse will undoubtedly be the most influential person in our life, and our commitment should be made with careful consideration.

“WHY SHOULD I MARRY A BELIEVER?”

We pursue marriage because of love.

To willingly give up our desires, habits, and viewpoints in order to make someone else happy is a selfless and honorable expression of that love. However, we should be clear on one thing that should never be given up even for our beloved and that is our relationship with God.

There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and

spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world how she may please her husband (1 Cor 7:32-36)

Is it possible for us to be married and still serve the Lord without distraction? A significant factor is whether we marry someone in the same faith and if our spouse understands and loves God above all else.

If we consider God as first priority and our spouse does not, there will be a conflict of interest. On one hand, we want to please God and build an intimate relationship with Him, but on the other hand, we want to please the person whom we feel we cannot live without.

Marriage would not be such a struggle if our spouse had the same faith and love for God, for pleasing our spouse would mean pleasing God. There is less conflict and need for compromise when both put Christ first.

We won't have to coax our spouse into attending church services or bicker about financial decisions, because we both know that our lives and possessions are in the Lord's hands. We understand that Jesus is the foundation of our lives and share the goal of living a godly lifestyle and teaching our children likewise.

Because our spouse also loves God above all else, they support our desire to serve Christ and His church. In turn, our Father will bless us and be pleased with a union that glorifies His name.

Priscilla and Aquila are a model couple who lived a simple life as tent-makers but served God faithfully even with their humble lifestyle. They grew together in the knowledge of God's grace and truth, opened their hearts and homes to God's people, and refreshed fellow workers in Christ (Acts 18).

God gave each of us a helper, not so that we should rely on Him less and depart from His body, but that we may

support one another, growing in faith, and forming a threefold cord that is not easily broken God, husband, and wife.

“MAYBE THIS IS GOD’S SPECIAL WILL FOR ME?”

Despite all the encouragement to marry in Christ, many of us are still tempted to look outside the flock. Some of us are struggling at the start of a relationship with an unbeliever and others are already deeply involved. With our hearts already bound to them, we pray that they too can come to believe in Christ.

We once may have been established in the Lord and determined to wait patiently on Him, to not be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14), and to keep our minds and bodies pure.

But now, torn between the desire to please God and the desire to keep company with an unbeliever, a shadow of doubt is cast upon those biblical principles that were once so firmly rooted in our hearts and minds. Emotions overshadow our understanding of the truth, and biblically defined marital boundaries now become a blur. Finally, we pose the question, Maybe this is God's special will for me? Perhaps it is my particular commission to marry and convert this person?

Scouring the church for examples to justify our resolution, we disregard all the unsuccessful marriages with Gentiles but cling with all hope to the few with happy endings discounting their long and painful beginnings. The statistics count against us, the truth of the Bible cuts our heart, the Holy Spirit prompts our conscience, fellow brothers and sisters lament for us, and our parents plead and fast and pray for us all to no avail.

The level of our biblical conviction and spiritual confusion is relative to our

proximity to Christ. The closer we draw to God, the closer He will draw to us (Jas 4:8), and the more we will be able to discern the truth. Conversely, the further we are from God, the more vulnerable we are to Satan, who is the author of doubt and confusion.

Our relationship with God is established on the covenant that we shall love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind (Mt 22:37). How can someone understand the mystery of love without first understanding God, the source of love? In addition, how can someone practice true love if Christ does not live in them? (1 Jn 4:8)

A person who does not know Jesus cannot make Him the highest priority. A person who does not know what it means to utter Hallelujah cannot pray with us in the Spirit. A person who does not fear God will not place equal importance in keeping His commandments.

We can plead with them to have faith in Jesus, but if they do not believe, where will the faith come from? It is hard enough for us to stand firm in Christ on our own imagine how difficult it would be if our spouse were draining our spirit.

“BUT I CAN’T FIND ANYONE IN CHURCH”

Search from the book of the Lord, and read:

Not one of these shall fail; not one shall lack her mate.

For My mouth has commanded it, and His Spirit has gathered them. (Is 34:16)

In this passage, the prophet Isaiah describes how God willed for the land of Edom to be populated and taken over by wild beasts. God spoke and His Spirit assembled the animals together. According to His good will, none of them would lack a mate; they would produce offspring and overcome the

land He purposed for them.

It is also God's will for this earth to be populated by His children, that we should multiply and produce godly offspring, to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth, and eventually inherit His heavenly kingdom.

God does not will for any of His children to falter, neither does He expect anyone to endure alone. Our Almighty Father has someone especially prepared for each of us, a perfect rib to be molded into each body, balanced and complementary so that one's lack will be supplied by the other's abundance.

The promised Holy Spirit will be granted to each one of us, and it is this same Spirit that will work to gather us to our mate. So it is not in vain that we are encouraged to pray for this matter with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our eyes can only see what is external and our senses fool us, but God's Spirit searches all things to the inner depths of the heart (1 Cor 2:10).

We cannot find our spiritual partner by relying on our sight. We need to humbly ask God to close our fleshly eyes and open our spiritual eyes, so that His will and not our own may be done.

Finally, we have to wait. Many of us have an earnest desire to marry within the Lord but grow impatient and anxious with time, taking matters into our own hands. Waiting is not merely the passing of time but also a true test of patience, trust, and belief in Christ.

"WHAT DO I DO WHILE I'M WAITING?"

The Bible warns us, The time is short, so that from now on even those who have wives should be as though they had none (1 Cor 8:29). We do not know whether we will live or die tomorrow, so let us focus on living today and doing good work worthy of the Lord's calling.

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going. (Eccl 9:10)

We should take advantage of this limited time we have to be without care (1 Cor 7:32) and serve the Lord without distraction (1 Cor 7:35).

Responsibilities change with age. Working professionals can no longer dedicate summer vacations to holy work and attending spiritual seminars. The married can't simply leave their spouses to assist in seminars or missionary trips. Parents cannot easily leave their children and assist in church work. Now is the time to equip ourselves in Christ and to offer our best sacrifice to Him. Before bringing a third party into the picture, let's make sure our relationship with God is fully established.

As we wait patiently on the Lord, we should be careful not to take this matter into our own hands. In an attempt to find the right one, many young people are now dating and becoming involved in relationships. Whether or not they are Christians, this is a dangerous chemistry experiment as young people are getting too involved too soon.

There is an old adage that says, You can't continue to walk along the shoreline without getting your feet wet. You may start out wanting only to test the waters, but soon you become submerged in the tide. Are we stronger than Samson, greater than King David, or wiser than King Solomon? These great men were brought down in the time of temptation. The best bet is to walk a safe distance from the coastline.

In a discussion forum, someone raised the question, How do I know if this person is truly the one God wills for me to marry? Someone wisely responded, It is more important for us to *be* God's will than to *know* God's will.

Each day we should focus on being who God wants us to be, doing what is right in His eyes, and keeping ourselves holy. We must remain obedient to His commandments and pursue love, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit. As we continue to grow in the understanding of His knowledge and truth, the mystery of His will shall be made known to us, in His time.

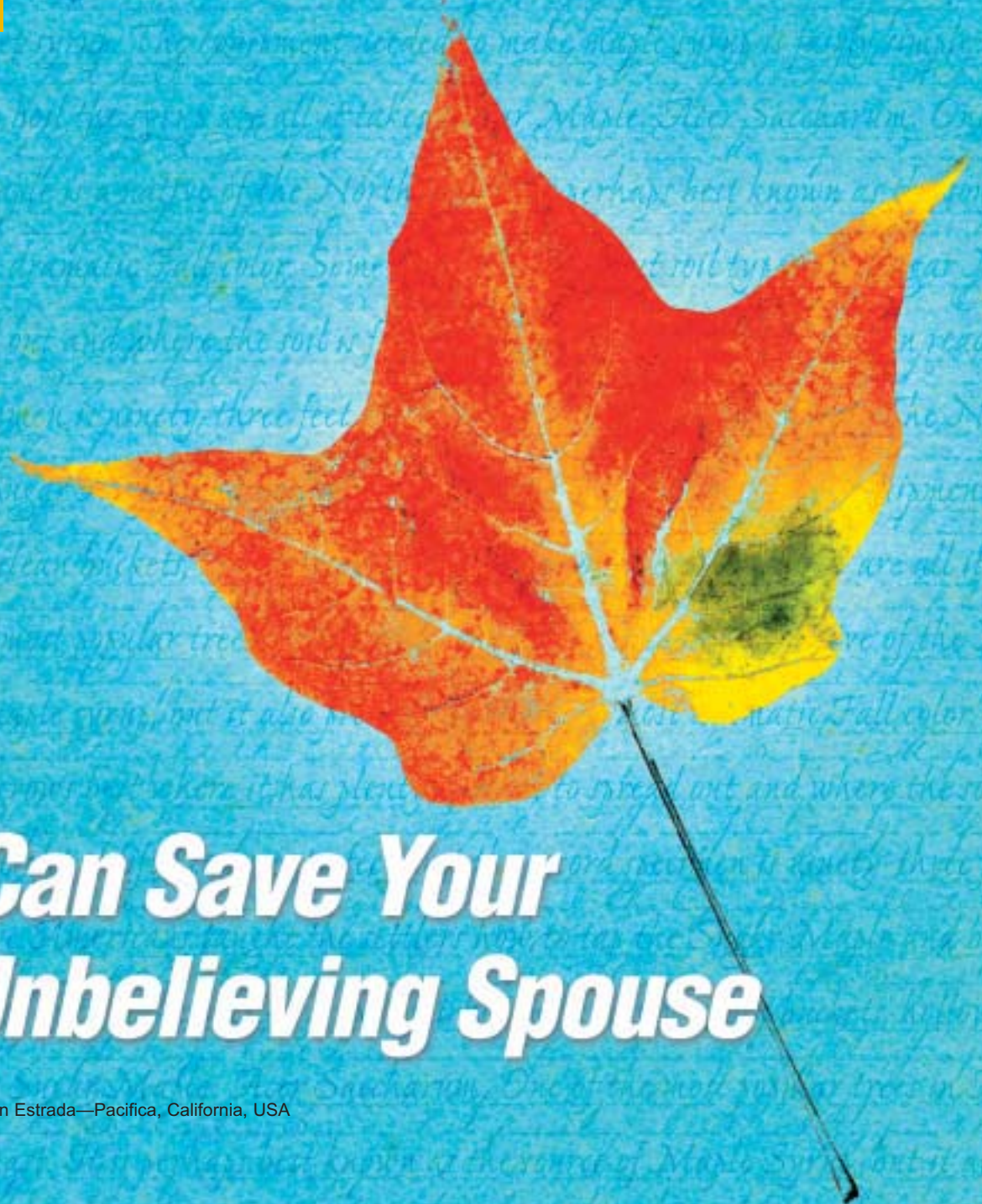
THE MOST IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP

Marriage, like our biological family, is only a worldly relationship. Marriage does not exist in heaven (Mt 22:30), nor is it a pre-requisite to enter God's kingdom. Our relationship with God is the most crucial relationship in life more important than our relationship with our spouse, our friends, or our family.

No one denies that loneliness is a kind of suffering, and those who have yet to find their soul mate will feel this at times. Some people bear the suffering gracefully by taking refuge in God's love, while others grow desperate and forsake His commandments. Some feel it is better to marry an unbeliever than to burn with passion, but others believe that it is better to draw close to God and wait for His time than to be burnt by passion.

Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (Jas 1:12)

Let us pray that our love for God will be greater than any fear of loneliness or suffering and that our faith in Him will not turn cold with the passing of time. The temporary feeling of loneliness cannot be compared to eternal separation from God. Nothing in this world, including marriage, is worth jeopardizing our relationship with Christ. ★



God Can Save Your Unbelieving Spouse

Susan Estrada—Pacifica, California, USA

The biblical parenting model is one of a father and a mother working together to raise children who love God and obey Him. A man and his wife can make this joint effort only if he and his wife are of one faith and share the same basic beliefs. If they do, they can encourage and support each other as they work toward a common goal.

However, if this couple does not share the same basic beliefs, the challenge of parenting becomes twice as difficult. I can tell you that my parents had it very difficult. I almost followed in their footsteps. But God changed all that.

What is your story? Do you long for your spouse to share the same basic beliefs? Believe. God can save your unbelieving spouse. Please let me explain.

The Lord Our God Will Open a Way

Because you know your spouse better than anyone else, you may sometimes find yourself wondering if he or she will ever become a believer. Do not doubt. If you doubt, you will be discouraged. Do not give up on your husband or your wife. If you do, your heart will become bitter and, if left unchecked, it will become hardened.

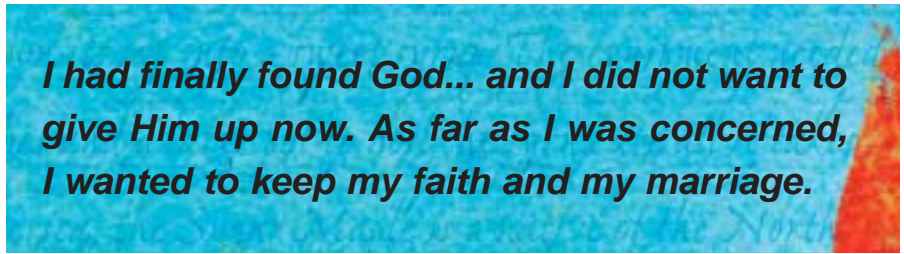
Instead study Paul's counsel to men and women who were in your shoes. He told them not to walk out of their marriage. He put it this way, For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, O husband, whether you will save your wife? (1 Cor 7:16).

Therefore, if, in times of frustration, you catch yourself muttering under your breath or uttering in jest that your spouse is a hopeless case, ask God to forgive you. No situation is ever too difficult for Him to handle. If you let Him, the Lord Jesus Christ, whom we worship, can save your spouse. He will open a way.

I know this firsthand. The way came for me in the form of a test. Soon after I found God and made my way back to church with two young children in tow, my husband wanted me to sever all ties with the True Jesus Church or risk the breakup of our marriage. This put me in a difficult situation, like that in between a rock and a hard place.

Under ordinary circumstances, I would have given in to him for the children's sake, especially since my own childhood was embroiled in religious conflict. But I had finally found God after a lifetime of wandering in the wilderness of this world, and I did not want to give Him up now. As far as I was concerned, I wanted to keep my faith and my marriage.

There was another reason. The conflict made me realize that I was another generation of women in my line of the family whose husband was an unbeliever. Somehow, it occurred to me that if I did not hold on to my new-found faith, the pattern would never be broken and my daughters would,



through no fault of their own, be next in line. The thought frightened me.

The Lord Our God Will Give You Faith

You will know in your heart when God has opened a way for you to introduce your spouse to Him. When God has opened a way for you, your resolve is to follow His lead. You will not get lost if you do. When God opens a way, He does not leave you alone to figure out where to go and what to do. Instead, He will guide you every step of the way.

He sees the big picture of your life, as well as your spouse's life. Remember, He is the creator of heaven and earth and everything in it, you and your spouse included. It's important that you remember God is in control. If you do, you will trust Him, even though you cannot make sense of everything that is going on now or see what's up ahead.

Still, there are some practical things you can do at this time. You can develop a keen sense of observation and go where He wants you to go. Listen to what He is telling you. Obey Him. This is your time of trial and temptation. A merciful God, our Lord will give you the measure of faith that your heart desires.

I know this firsthand. Without God's mercy, I would not have known where to go and what to do when the Lord opened a way for me. A grown woman in my early thirties, I had only just begun reading the Bible a few years earlier. If anyone had given me a Bible knowledge quiz in those days, I would have failed; not even an open book test would have helped.

But there were a few passages that left a deep impression on my heart and in my mind. One of them was Jesus' parable of the persistent widow (Lk 18:1-8), a story our Lord told to show

His disciples that they should always pray and not give up. The woman's persistence fired up my imagination!

It also triggered childhood memories of my mother's habit of reaching out to the folks at church for their prayerful support, and I found myself imitating her. In due time, the word of God would be proven right.

The Lord Our God Will Give You Patience

Times of trial and temptation are ordeals that come and go in a Christian's life. They are a necessary part of our spiritual journey. Every ordeal helps us grow one step closer to meeting God's standard of perfection. When you understand this, you will not try to get ahead of God. You will learn to be patient.

A large dose of patience will help take off much of the pressure you are already experiencing. Living in these uncertain times, you may feel a great need to speed up the process of your husband or wife's conversion. But if you are impatient, you may hurt the process more than you can help.

Your impatience may add to a lot more pressure in the home than that which already exists in the course of everyday living. A build-up of pressure blows away the peace and stability in a home. When parents let this happen, our children are the ones most affected.

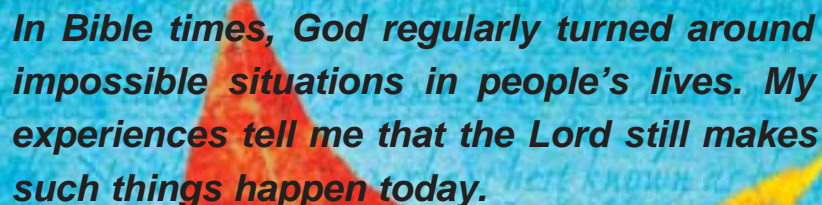
As a believer, you want to keep in mind that the Lord our God understands the sense of urgency you are feeling. When you do, you will learn to keep your emotions in check. You will not try to hurry up your spouse's conversion according to your own timetable or give up on him or her altogether. A merciful God, our Lord will give you the measure of patience your heart desires.

I know this firsthand. I grew up in

an environment where the believing spouse nearly always brought the couple's children to attend Sabbath services without the unbelieving spouse's approval. Many ill feelings are created in these types of situation.

When I was caught in between a rock and a hard place, I found myself gravitating toward Peter's counsel to women who were in my shoes. Here's that verse in today's NKJV Bible, Wives be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear (1 Pet 3:1,2).

These words shone like a lamp in the dark to give me a sense of direction in my time of trial and temptation. They gave me hope and encouragement. As a result, I told my husband that I would not go to church if he did not want me to. I did not know when he would change his mind, but I was willing to wait. In due time, the word of God would be proven right.



In Bible times, God regularly turned around impossible situations in people's lives. My experiences tell me that the Lord still makes such things happen today.

The Lord Our God Will Give You Perseverance

If it is your heart's desire that your spouse will become a believer, you must be prepared to support and encourage him or her every step of the way. Are you willing to stick it out, however long it takes, and, whatever sacrifices you must make? This calls for perseverance.

A dictionary defines perseverance as continued steady effort to achieve an aim. Perseverance is good for us. It helps us become better Christians. It is written, Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything (Jas 1:4 NIV).

Knowing that we still have a long way to go in our own Christian walk helps us look at the situation in proper perspective. When we remember that we ourselves haven't quite made it yet, we will learn to empathize with our spouse and help him or her along, whether at great risk or minor inconvenience.

When we have this kind of commitment, nothing and no one can distract us. Instead, we will keep our eyes on Jesus and keep on going. Again, a merciful God, our Lord will give you the measure of perseverance your heart desires.

I know this firsthand. We used to live a five-minute drive away from church. When my husband started attending Sabbath services, we were in the process of moving away to a more affordable part of the country.

For a time, I worried that if we bought a house before my husband became a believer, he would never get saved. As it turned out, he received baptism of water and of the Holy Spirit well before the purchase of our house was

finalized. But here's where perseverance comes into my story.

It so happened that during this period, my husband's employers were making improvements to the production lines at work and he was required to be present on Saturdays. Although this wasn't a problem when we were still living at our old address and I could drive the short distance to church, it became an issue after the move.

Immediately, I found myself making Sabbath plans that did not include my husband. I took our children to church on public transportation. My husband was very unhappy when he got home from work one evening.

Because my plans weren't going so well, I stopped to consider the situation.

Somehow, it looked to me that I was becoming a stumbling block in a new believer's Christian walk. It didn't look right. Drawing strength from the virtue of submission as taught in the Bible, I waited for my husband to complete his assignment.

I did not know how long I would have to wait, but I looked forward to the day when we would again be going to church and worshipping God together as a family. In due time, the word of God would be proven right.



In Bible times, God regularly turned around impossible situations in people's lives. My experiences tell me that the Lord still makes such things happen today. You only have to believe that He does. I do not know how He will make it happen for you, but my experiences tell me that you have to change your attitude and let go of feelings and thoughts that chain you to the letter of the Word.

Rather, give yourself permission to trust in the might of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will guide you to know what it is to believe in the spirit of the word. To take this bold step, you need to pray for strength and courage. God will help you. He will not let you down, and He will save your spouse.

I can testify to this because my husband received baptism on January 1, 1989, about one and a half years after God had opened a way for me to introduce him to the Lord. He received the Holy Spirit at the next spiritual convocation that was held six months later.

The following year, he was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer. On December 13, 1993, my husband passed away. Five evenings before he died, he suddenly called out in his sleep, Lord, here I am. I can make no more compelling argument than this.

May our Lord and merciful God give you faith, patience, and perseverance. May His name be forever praised.

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THE PATH TO A HAPPY CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE



A Christian couple who makes a commitment before God to join in marriage must base their relationship on Christian principles. They ought to share a bond of mutual love, honor, and respect. In addition, they should strive for a God-centered marriage with Him as the nucleus of the home.

God holds marriage in high esteem for it reflects the spiritual relationship between Jesus Christ and the church (Eph 5:31-32). As the church is built upon Christ Himself, a Christian marriage is built upon Christian principles. By establishing marriage upon these principles, God is exalted, and both husband and wife will enjoy an enduring and blissful Christian home redolent of God's love.

Inasmuch as this is true, what are these principles and how do we apply them to our lives so that we can achieve a fulfilling and happy Christian marriage with our spouse?

RESPECTING THE DIFFERENT ROLES OF MARRIAGE

God's Role

In the beginning, God ordained and instituted the first marriage in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:18-24), and He established this precedent for all marriages thereafter. Therefore, a Christian couple must understand and respect the value of their marriage because God is the author and director of their marital union.

The marriage bond between a man and a woman is the most intimate and sacred—it is even stronger than bonds built with family and friends. God designed marriage for one man and one woman (Gen 2:25), and this union was meant to be permanent—a life-long partnership between husband and wife. As Gen 2:24 records, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

The Roles of Husband and Wife

A husband and wife must recognize that honor and respect are key factors of a fulfilling marriage (Mt 7:12).

The husband heads the home and he is the head of his wife (1 Cor 11:3). As the provider, it is to his honor to bear the responsibility of looking after his household, for his family looks to him for authority. An exemplar who demonstrated these qualities was Joshua, who depicted confidence and responsibility when he made the choice on behalf of his household to serve the Lord (Josh 24:15). Moreover, the husband is God's representative and it is also his duty to love, protect, and appreciate his wife (Eph 5:25).

Likewise, the wife must appreciate her husband's leadership. She must respect and be submissive to her husband (1 Pet 3:1-2). She is her husband's helper and counterpart—sharing in his own nature. Eve was created, with divine intention, to be a partner and helper for Adam (Gen 2:18). In like manner, a wife should readily accept her role as a helpmeet for her husband because her vow is as to the Lord (Eph 5:22).

gentle courage, quiet wisdom, and enduring faith. Likewise, a wife can be assured of her husband's fidelity, integrity, moral rectitude, sincere faith in God, as well as his unequivocal love.

LOVING IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Another aspect of a fulfilling Christian marriage is when a couple put their love in the right Christian perspective. This is especially important when our marriage encounters difficult times. To be able to confront the realities of marriage requires discipline, tolerance, acceptance, and the guidance of God.

Do Not Let Emotions Rule

Undoubtedly, problems and quarrels will occasionally surface—more often in some marriages and less in others. A Christian couple may lose their self-control in the heat of an emotional dispute. When such disagreements surface, they may be consumed with anger, and react irrationally in an ungodly manner.

However, as Christians, we must not allow these unpleasant episodes sour our good relations with our spouse. Neither must we be assailed with hatred or trade insults, for these

Though it may seem difficult to do at times, we must learn to accept our other half as they are. We must relinquish any fanciful ideas we have of our partners.

Accordingly, if a Christian couple remains unwavering in their honor and respect for each other, they will discover that marriage is both enduring and rewarding, for marriage is primarily the union of two unselfish Christians. A husband can be inspired by his wife's

can be likened to a canker that will corrode our love for each other and do a great deal of harm to what began as a solid marriage.

Tolerance is Key

Though it may seem difficult to do at

times, we must learn to accept our other half as they are. We must relinquish any fanciful ideas we have of our partners. Tolerance is a key factor within a marriage, and we must learn to tolerate and live with each other's imperfections.

Early into the relationship, couples in lasting marriages learn to develop good strategies to face difficulties. They also understand the need to accept different points of views, and to be able to keep feelings of disagreement, disappointment, and discouragement in the right perspective. If we can mutually accept and tolerate each other, we are on the way to forging a firmer bond of understanding and compassion for one another.

Setting Reasonable Standards

We should set reasonable standards in our marriage and accept in good faith what God has given to us. Do not set unrealistic goals and expectations as it may result in unnecessary frustration, anger, and stress on either party.

Do not ask for the impossible! We cannot expect our spouse to be what we want them ideally to be; rather, we should appreciate and focus on each other's virtues. We can only hope to improve upon each other's weaknesses.

As a Christian couple, we must converse and interact freely with our mate, for lack of communication, growing detachment, and unrealistic expectations may inflame adverse feelings.

We must learn how to turn to one another in the face of crisis, and how to unite as one when our marriage is threatened. The path to a fulfilling marriage begins when we are willing to work on the relationship by spending more intimate time together and by being more accepting of each other.

Turning to God for Help

When mutual love turns to repudiation, it is of greatest damage to the relation-

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ship because it leaves both parties disillusioned and feeling disrespected. At these seemingly helpless moments, we should turn to God and pray together for prayers can solve many problems. It is our safest recourse.

At this time, we must dig deep and recall our Christian capacity for love, forgiveness, deep compassion, and unfailing loyalty—not rendering evil for evil or reviling for reviling (1 Pet 3:9), but submitting to one another in the fear of God (Eph 5:21).

FOCUSING ON WHAT IS IMPORTANT

Sharing and Communication

As a couple, we must learn to share and communicate with each other. To sustain and nurture a healthy marriage, we should share our love, thoughts, and needs, so as to better understand and to edify one another. We must find a way to communicate effectively and this communication must be a two-way effort.

This includes walking together in the faith and being fervent and consistent in worship. It is good to have common interests in life and to be able to share the joys and sorrows of our workload. Sharing, within the intimate relationship of a husband and wife, also includes the bearing of each other's burdens: Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:2).

Most importantly, we must commu-

nicate together in prayer: Again I say to you if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven (Mt 18:19). On a daily basis, we need to study the words of God together (Acts 18:24-26), and to pray with one mind and one heart—remembering to intercede for one another, our children, family, church, and the divine work of God.

Giving Thanks

Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 5:20). It is important that, as Christian couples, we acknowledge that our life partner is a blessing and gift from God. We must remain thankful and grateful to God for He has ordained marriage to be a spiritual union.

Marriage is a constant learning process that requires team effort. Whether we are experiencing joy or difficulties, we should remain grateful to God in every circumstance. Through each other, we can be uplifted to a higher level of spirituality as we discover the meaning of total oneness with our spouse. Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor (Eccl 4:9).

Therefore, we should appreciate and give thanks to God for He has given us a life-long companion to support us in every circumstance, and to be co-heirs with us of the gracious gift of life (1 Pet 3:7). ★

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MY FIRST YEAR'S JOURNEY

A Sister's Testimony of Her First Year of Marriage



At the writing of this testimony, my husband and I have been married a year and two months, and we are truly amazed at how far God has brought us in our marriage, both emotionally and spiritually.

We've had plenty of obstacles to overcome and boy, do I mean plenty! But somehow, we've managed to make it to this point in our marriage a point where we have truly grown to understand, accept, encourage, love, and appreciate each other.

Five or six months ago, I would've never imagined that this would ever be the result of our marriage, believe me!

CHALLENGES OF THE FIRST MONTHS

*and they shall become one flesh.
(Gen 2:24)*

Our first month was truly a beautiful time in our marriage. Though we corresponded for seven years before marrying, there was still so much to learn about each other. Everything was new and welcomed we were newlyweds, of course! The tender gift of intimacy from God was very alive, and we both felt very blessed to be able to receive each other fully.

But our days in this Garden of Eden didn't quite carry us through the second, third, fourth, or even fifth months of marriage. Somehow, that nasty Serpent found its way into this paradise and into our hearts. We began looking at each other very critically. Things we once thought were so endearing like the way he so responsibly managed our finances, or the way I had a flare for

decorating became disturbing and annoying to the other.

We later began to mutter to ourselves, I wish he wouldn't be so obsessed about our money! Can't he see his obsession is ruining our relationship? And, Why is she so obsessed with buying decorations for the home? Can't she see that we're drowning in debt from the wedding, the new furniture, past debts, and our mortgage?

The Differences

Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received you, to the glory of God. (Rom 15:7)

The differences we discovered in each other truly ate away at our marriage in the early months. We faced vast differences in spending habits, energy levels, interests, and even verbal skills.

He was an early riser and wanted us to spend our weekends outdoors, while I loved to sleep in on weekends and bum around the house. He was interested in sports, cars, and business, while I was interested in puzzles, gardening, decorating, and crafts. He always wanted to discuss issues, while I began to avoid discussing them out of my fear of arguing. We also really struggled with issues like punctuality, housekeeping, orderliness, dependability, and flexibility, and I won't even begin to tell you about the spiritual differences we were challenged with!

The idea of accepting my husband despite all of our differences was really hard for me to deal with. Needless to say, we brought little praise to God through our actions toward each other those first months of marriage.

Hanging by a Thread

*Help us, O God of our salvation,
For the glory of Your name;
And deliver us, and provide atonement
for our sins,
For Your name's sake! (Ps 79:9)*

For a long time, I really thought I married the wrong guy. I mean, we just had so many differences! I can't even begin to tell you how many times I reached for my United Airlines reservations card to book a flight back home to the loving and accepting arms of Mom and Dad.

But I didn't. I wanted out of the marriage so badly, but I knew God didn't want me to give up. I couldn't break the promise I made to God and my husband in front of so many brothers and sisters on our wedding day. I couldn't hurt my husband, even though I really viewed him as the Enemy at the time.

So many people came to celebrate our marriage vows with us on our wedding day. I had to prove to myself and all my brothers and sisters in Christ that a godly marriage can indeed work. I just had to figure out how to become a godly wife, and I needed to ask God to forgive me for the angry words and feelings I was directing toward my husband.

The journey to healing and growth began when I finally made the promise to myself and to my Lord and Savior that I was committed to making my marriage work through His strength and His word.

STEPS TO HEALING AND GROWTH

This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it. (2 Jn 6)

The first step I took was to make the determination to actually show my forgiveness to my husband, even if it meant that my pride was at stake. It was such a difficult thing for me to do because I was pretty stubborn. I had to practice saying, I'm sorry, which was very difficult for me to say to anyone. And, I had to practice forgiveness and the art of expressing forgiveness to my husband.

Promises to Each Other

One evening, after a huge argument had been settled, my husband and I made a few Bible-based promises to each other.

1) **Eph 4:26:** Be angry, and do not sin : do not let the sun go down on your wrath We resolved never go to bed angry and to always tell each other I love you before going to sleep, regardless of whether the situation had been resolved or not. We also made a commitment to accept apologies and offer them openly to each other, whether they came in the form of spoken words, a hug, or the reaching out of a hand.

2) **Num 14:18:** The Lord is long-suffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression. We agreed to practice flexibility and try our best to overlook the small matters, no matter how much they annoyed us. This meant that I'd have to bring the toilet seat down if he forgot instead of hammering him about it. (It didn't make sense to have a fifteen-minute argument over something I could have handled in

a second by just putting the toilet seat down myself.) It also meant that he'd have to bend a little when I change our weekend plans out of an oversight on my part.

3) **2 Chr 7:14:** If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. We determined to always pray to God together before going to bed, even if the problem hadn't been totally resolved. In our prayers, we would examine our

The journey to healing and growth began when I finally made the promise to myself and to my Lord and Savior that I was committed to making my marriage work through His strength and His word.

hearts, motives, and actions pertaining to the conflict. We would also ask for God's guidance, His love, and His forgiveness in our marriage.

4) **1 Thess 5:14-15:** Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. We must remind ourselves that we really don't have malicious intent toward each other. When things go wrong, and we accidentally say or do hurtful or annoying things to each other, we must realize that these things aren't intentional. We have to convince ourselves that we truly want the best for our marriage and each other. It's just that we're both all too human and fallible. We say and do the wrong things, and quite often, out of stupidity or an oversight.

Self-Evaluation

*Let us search out and examine our ways,
And turn back to the Lord. (Lam 3:40)*

The second step involved self-evaluation. I had to really think, Is there even an ounce of truth behind the criticisms my husband is making toward me? A lot of times, I discovered his criticisms were actually quite on the mark. He wasn't 100% correct about every criticism, but he was right a lot of times.

My attitude about money was really

not where it should have been, and I did have a lot of room for growth in this aspect. I tended to spend frivolously and my wardrobe was a bit overdeveloped. Credit cards had become my best friends, and I had to learn to manage money and debt much better than I had been.

When I began to take steps at making myself a better person, wife, and Christian with respect to our finances and so many other things, I noticed that my husband began to discuss his weaknesses, inviting me to help him become a better person, husband, and Christian, too.

Communication

*The wise in heart will be called prudent,
And sweetness of the lips increases learning. (Prov 16:21)*

My family was usually quite open with their feelings we teased each other, spoke sarcastically, and were brutally

sudden! But the intensity and frequency of those arguments did diminish over time, thank God.

After nearly a year of battles and struggles, we've both reached a point where we can truly see and feel our Lord Jesus Christ in our marriage.

honest with each other with no malicious intent. In an atmosphere of total acceptance, I had grown to become careless with my words.

The way I had become accustomed to communicating with my parents and brothers was inadvertently hurting my husband's feelings in my interactions with him. I had to learn to communicate my feelings to him in a more positive and less hurtful way.

My husband's upbringing was totally different, and he took great offense at my inability to mince words. I learned in my initial tense encounters with him that the communication skills I developed with my family were not going to work with him at all.

I was judgmental, harsh, and extremely sarcastic during our moments of conflict. Once-calm conversations always became shouting matches, which led to days of angry silence. Eventually, I avoided airing my feelings out of fear of these shouting matches. I went from shouting matches to periods of withdrawal and avoidance. Basically, I went from one extreme to another, and neither was getting us anywhere.

With God's help and my husband's determination to work out the communication problems we were facing, I learned to communicate my feelings to him in very careful, loving, and less-critical ways.

Don't get me wrong, the shouting matches didn't cease to exist all of a

PATHS MADE STRAIGHT

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding;*

*In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He will direct your paths. (Prov 3:5-6)*

Now this man who was once my most loathed enemy is now my closest, dearest, most intimate and cherished friend. After nearly a year of battles and struggles, we've both reached a point where we can truly see and feel our Lord Jesus Christ in our marriage.

We feel God's forgiveness, His grace, and His unconditional love in each other, and we are able to experience what it's like to offer complete forgiveness, unending grace, and unconditional love to each other. It's a most amazing thing, really.

A year ago, I would never have imagined that my husband would be my closest companion and that I would ever really need him. I was an established individual, and I cherished my independence and my way of doing things. I truly enjoyed my twenty-seven years of singleness, and I wasn't all that ready to give up my independence.

It never occurred to me that I would actually need a man to complete me I mean, I married my husband because I loved him and I knew I was

called by God to take care of him, but I never really thought that I, myself, would ever need him to take care of me.

But now I have to say that I am very dependent on my husband. Once I began to allow him to care of me and us as a couple, I never wanted to go back to who I was before. I can surrender myself to him without feeling inferior to him.

I've seen such an amazing transformation in my husband, one that I never would have imagined him going through in the eight years we've known each other. He's now become such a flexible, affectionate, patient, forgiving, tender, and even humorous person! The feeling of being able to totally relax and trust another individual with your life and your heart is indescribable.

And the feeling of lying in the arms of a man who has placed you as his dearest priority on this earth can only be compared to the feeling I know I must have felt when I was held in the arms of my all-loving and self-sacrificing parents when I was a child.

I look back at who I was before, and I realize that my marriage has forced me to grow in ways I never even thought I needed to grow in, and it has allowed me to experience a love I never thought could exist outside my parents' love for me.

I can only thank God for this most amazing miracle, and I can only repay God for His loving and abiding presence during my first year of marriage by telling you about it, with hopes that my testimony will encourage you in your future marriage. ★

Love & Marriage seeks to address and provide biblical advice on a wide range of questions and issues related to dating, singlehood, and marriage. If you have any comments or suggestions for this column, please write to love.marriage@tjc.org.

WHOSE MONEY IS IT?

Richard Solgot—Tampa, Florida, USA





You came into the world with nothing, and you aren't going to take anything with you when you go. What makes you think that the assets that you get in the time between the snipping of your umbilical cord and the closing of your casket belong to you?

The Bible has an interesting perspective on finances. It says that everything belongs to God.

The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness; the world and those who dwell therein. (Ps 24:1)

Both riches and honor come from You, and You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; In Your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly as this? For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You. (1 Chr 29:12,14)

However, the government certainly doesn't adhere to this position. It requires income taxes from you because your name is on the paycheck.

So where do you fit into the God owns everything scenario? That can be answered with one word: *oikonomos*. Although this sounds more like the name of a prescription ointment for athlete's foot fungus, it is a Greek word that translates into English as stewardship.

The term implies a manager of a household who administers someone else's property. God has made us the stewards of His possessions:

You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet. (Ps 8:6)

If what we have belongs to God, then we should manage it according to His principles. This perspective means that every decision we make about our money from how to spend it to how to invest it has spiritual ramifications.

We are not just accountable to God for the few bucks we might toss into the offering box at church, and we are not off the hook with God so long as we pay Him a surcharge of a certain percentage of our earnings. If God owns it all, then we must be faithful stewards in handling all of it.

There are eight areas in which we should be faithful as financial stewards:

1. We should work diligently. (Prov 12:24, 13:4, 20:4)
2. We should spend wisely. (Isa 55:2)
3. We should save consistently. (Mt 25:15-30)
4. We should avoid debt. (Rom 13:8)
5. We should give generously. (Prov 11:25, 22:9; 2Cor 9:5)
6. We should deal with others honestly. (Rom 13:13; 1 Thess 4:12; Heb 13:18)
7. We should seek wise counsel from others. (Prov 19:20; Judg 18:5; 2

Chron 10:6)

8. We should teach our children how to manage money properly. (Mt 25:15-30; Deut 4:10)

If you believe the Bible when it says that everything belongs to God, then you can believe the Bible when it says that God will take care of all of your needs. Our part is to be good stewards of what God has given to us; God's part is to make sure that we have everything that we need:

Therefore do not worry, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or What shall we wear? For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you. (Mt 6:31-33)

If we approach our finances as belonging to God instead of ourselves, it will make us more responsible in how we handle our money, and it will change our perspectives about what is important in life.

LIVING IN SACRED SIMPLICITY

If we handle our finances as if they



belong to God and if we trust Him to provide all of our needs, then we don't have to panic when the stock market drops or the price of Oreos at the supermarket rises.

God is in charge, and we don't have to worry about our future:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God,

You don't have to stiff the waitress out of a fifteen percent tip and you don't have to sneak soda and treats into the movie theater just because you are trying to be a good steward of God's money.

which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:6-7)

There is the real secret for shedding feelings of being a financial failure. When you live with a divine perspective about your finances, it simplifies your life. Instead of fretting about your money, you can enjoy a feeling of sacred simplicity. Approaching life with a view of sacred simplicity works something like this:

- ◆ **God will supply all of your needs**, so you don't have to worry about them.
- ◆ **You can be content with what you have now**, and you can be content in the future if God increases or decreases your net worth. The amount doesn't really matter because

God has promised to give you everything you need.

- ◆ **You don't need to worry about the future.** There may be times of increase and decrease in your financial position. Either way, God is in charge. In both circumstances you are to trust Him. You don't rely on your cash reserves in the good times, and you don't worry about insufficiency in the tough times.

The concept of sacred simplicity is foreign to our culture. It goes against the prevailing thought of becoming self-sufficient and independently wealthy with a plump retirement account. So it is natural that you might misunderstand the applicable principles of sacred simplicity.

Don't get the wrong impression:

- **Sacred simplicity is not devoted deprivation.** You aren't required to give all of your money to the church or mission works. You don't have to cancel buying presents and gifts for your family and friends.
- **Sacred simplicity is not pious parsimony.** God doesn't want you to blame Him for being a cheap-skate. You don't have to stiff the waitress out of a fifteen percent tip and you don't have to sneak soda

and treats into the movie theater just because you are trying to be a good steward of God's money. He wants the waitress to get a generous tip, and he doesn't want you to smuggle M&M's in your socks.

- **Sacred simplicity is not ardent austerity.** Good stewardship does not require selling all of your possessions and wearing a trash bag instead of clothes from the Gap. You don't have to sell your 2002 Lexus and replace it with a 1980 Pinto (if you can find a Pinto that is still running). God doesn't object to money or the things that it can buy. But He does want you to have the proper perspective.
- **Sacred simplicity is not sanctimonious sluggishness.** Don't think that you can quit your job and live on the beach because God has promised to provide everything you need. Stewardship requires you to be a diligent worker.

Sacred simplicity has nothing to do with the quantity of your money. But it has everything to do with the quality of your heart.

If you want to move from failure to success in your finances, then change your perspective and attitude. Realize that everything belongs to God and that you are responsible to Him as a steward for what He has given to you. Then relax and stop worrying because God has everything under control. ★

In the Workforce is a recurring column in Manna dedicated to survival tips and advice on how to shine the light as a Christian at work. If you have some advice or anecdotes from your own work experience that you feel may be edifying to the fellowship of brothers and sisters in Christ, please send it to workforce@tjc.org.

KEEPING YOUR IDENTITY

Elaine Shek—Boston, Massachusetts, USA



I caught myself talking the other day and, to my horror, I realized that I sounded like one of my middle school students. Spending time day in and day out with thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds is somehow rubbing off on me. I'm also losing my Scottish accent little by little and acquiring more of an American accent. This isn't a bad thing, but losing my accent makes me feel like I'm losing part of my identity. I've been trying very hard to maintain my accent, but it's been a struggle.

Likewise, as Christians, we spend most of our day with friends and classmates. We need to constantly examine our speech and conduct so that we do not adopt worldly attributes and lose our Christian identity. Here are a few tips on maintaining our Christian identity at school or at work.

KNOW OUR ROOTS

We all have an identity. We know who our parents are, what our nationality is, and where we come from. Some people, to better understand their lineage, delve even deeper into their roots and study the genealogy of their family.

Knowing our lineage helps us understand who we are today. As Christians, it is vital that we know our roots and spiritual lineage. So what is our spiritual lineage?

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Pet 2:9)

Our spiritual lineage stems from being a chosen generation. We have

obtained mercy, we have been justified and purified, and we are now the temple of God (1 Pet 1:12; Gal 4:7; 1 Cor 3:16, 6:19-20). Our spiritual lineage was established when our Lord Jesus Christ turned us from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God so that we may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in [Him] (Acts 26:18).

Our spiritual lineage makes us Christians today. It is important that we know what our spiritual lineage stands for and that we live up to our identity as Christians.

Nehemiah 7 records how God asked Nehemiah to register by family those who came back from the captivity (Neh 7:6). Among those who returned were three families of priests who were unable to identify their



father's house nor their lineage (Neh 7:61). As a result, they were excluded from the priesthood as defiled (Neh 7:64).

Not knowing our heritage may cost us our spiritual priesthood, as it did these three priestly families in the Old Testament.

When I finished high school, I was very excited because I was about to embark on the next stage of life university. To my dismay, my exam results did not permit me to go to the university of my choice, so I took a gap year and spent that time working and studying.

In retrospect, I realize that it was God's will that I did not go to university that year, although it took me a while to grasp this. The extra year allowed me to understand my relationship with God better and pinpoint the state of my faith.

At eighteen, my faith was still immature and I wasn't ready to handle life away from home. God knew better, and He kept me at home another year to establish my faith and to clearly identify my spiritual roots. Without that year, it would have been extremely difficult for me to uphold my faith at university.

KEEP OURSELVES PURE

Nowadays drugs, sex, and alcohol seem to be the norms of student life and of society in general. Many people use these addictions to drown their sorrow, seek happiness, or escape the emptiness of their lives. They have lost their identity, not knowing who they are and what they are doing.

As Christians, our beliefs and values often run contrary to society's norms. But we cannot allow the diminishing values of society to make us

compromise our faith. Instead we need to firmly fix our eyes on Jesus and keep ourselves from evil.

*I will set nothing wicked before my eyes;
I hate the work of those who fall away;
It shall not cling to me.
A perverse heart shall depart from me;
I will not know wickedness.
(Ps 101:3-4)*

While Joseph was in Egypt, he held firm to his beliefs and stayed true to his spiritual lineage. Although he was tempted by Potiphar's wife, he did not give in to physical gratification. He knew that the temporary satisfaction would eventually lead to his spiritual demise.

Daniel also lived in a foreign land filled with delicacies and all things

pleasing to the eye, but he did not conform to their indulgences. Instead, he determined to keep himself pure and refused to defile himself with the king's food.

But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's delicacies, not with the wine which he drank; therefore he requested of the chief of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. (Dan 1:8)

Daniel dared to be different, to stand out. In order to keep ourselves pure, we too need to have this daring attitude to stand out, to be different, and to uphold God's principles.

There are some youths I know who have mixed in with the wrong crowd. If I did not know them personally, I would not have known that they were Christians. They have adopted the worldly ways of their friends: they smoke, dye their hair, and date around. Many of them do this because all their friends are doing it, and they don't want to be different.

It is vitally important that we choose our friends wisely and that we do not end up in the wrong crowd. The righteous should choose his friends carefully. For the way of the wicked leads them astray (Prov 12:26). Our friends could be the weight that tips our balance in the right or wrong direction.

BE A POSITIVE INFLUENCE

I notice that my colleagues never curse in front of me, and when they do, they apologize for doing so. Knowing that I am a Christian and that I do not curse has somehow rubbed off on them. They respect my beliefs and principles, and they do their best to act likewise when I am around. I'm sure that many other Christians have experienced similar situations.

We need to uphold our identity in a way that glorifies the Heavenly Father. We should never allow worldly identities to rub off on us. Rather, we should

In order to keep ourselves pure, we too need to have this daring attitude—to stand out, to be different, and to uphold God's principles.

allow our Christian identity to be a positive influence on the people around us. Jesus teaches us, Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (Mt 5:16).

To ensure that we are not compromising our Christian identity and instead shining the light of Christ, we need to constantly examine ourselves. Do wholesome words come out of our mouth? Do we use our mouth to bless or to curse? Does our conduct reflect Christ? Do we dress modestly or provocatively? James says,

Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh. Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. (Jas 3: 10-13)

There was a sister whose spiritual life was revived through the positive influence of church brothers and sisters. This sister had a very busy social life when she was in high school. Wild parties, loud music, bad company, and a flashy dress sense ruled her life. She was caught up in a life where her true identity in Christ was slowly withering away.

When this sister entered university, she began to change. She started to attend church services more frequently and established close friendships with church youths. They reflected Christ in them, which slowly rubbed off on her. This sister now truly lives for Christ and continues to bear much fruit for Him.

During her university years, she stood her ground as a true Christian soldier. This ultimately allowed her to hold on to her faith and keep her spiritual lineage.

Another sister used to stand at the door after lectures to see if anyone was interested in studying the Bible with her. Most people weren't interested, since they were rushing off to a party or some other social event. But this sister was persistent. She had determined to share the gospel with others, and she stood firm in her determination. She knew her identity, understood her beliefs, appreciated the value of her life.

Jesus said, Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. (Lk 10:3) We are indeed lamb among wolves. We need to be as pure as doves and wise as serpents. We need to show that we belong to Christ.

Do not conform to the world. Instead, dare to be different.

In order to cling to our Christian identity, we might need to break with the norm and even make some sacrifices. It definitely isn't easy upholding our beliefs in a crooked world. But since we know our heritage, it's important that we uphold our spiritual lineage and stand our ground. It's not always easy to fight the good fight, but it is always good, and it is always right.

May the Lord continue to guard our hearts and minds and guide us all in our endeavors to cling to Him, and to leave behind a beautiful Christian legacy. ★

On Campus seeks to support and inspire an active faith among our youth through candid discussion and exploration of the many challenges facing Christians on campus. Please send comments on this article or questions about student life to on.campus@tjc.org.



Setting **LIMITS**

*A Christian
Parent's
Responsibility*

Richard Solgot—Tampa, Florida, USA

All parents have the responsibility to set limits for their children. We make sure they eat the proper foods, dress appropriately for the weather, and are in bed at a reasonable time. As they get older we expand their limits, giving them more freedom to make their own choices, while staying close by to step in if necessary. The ultimate goal of setting limits throughout our children's lives is to help them develop the ability to set their own responsible boundaries once they are out of the nest.

It doesn't take much effort to see that somehow in our world today the process of setting limits has broken down. The stories in the news about out-of-control children are only slightly more appalling than the thought of all the ones whose stories don't make the headlines. Why is this happening? More importantly, what can we as Christian parents do to serve as role models for non-believing families?

It would be impossible to list all of the reasons for the breakdown of parents asserting their role as limit-setters in families today, but let's touch on a few:

- ◆ Both parents working outside the home leaves large numbers of children home alone before and after school, as well as during summer vacations. These children are basically left to raise themselves.
- ◆ Parents want to be fair. How can we think of telling our children no when all their friends are allowed to do something? Parents want to be their children's friend. Somewhere along the child-rearing path, adults have come to think that their offspring should see them as equals.
- ◆ Society as a whole seems to have a higher tolerance for sin in the form of media violence, sexual content, and dysfunctional behavior.

Christian families are not exempt from having to face these situations. How we handle them, however, is what makes a difference. By following godly mandates, we can set a positive example for others and at the same time provide a witness to our faith in Jesus Christ and in God's provisions.

BEING PRESENT TO NURTURE

The Mother's Role

Today it is not uncommon for both parents to be in the workforce at least part-time. With the upward spiral of costs of living and education it has become nec-

essary for both husband and wife to earn incomes to support their families. It is also well known and believed that due to this need, that the core values and spiritual life of the family suffers as well. For that reason each Christian family should take a look at its own financial status to determine whether the parents are working because they are in need or is it because of their desire to fulfill their educational goals and dreams and live the life of luxury. Although it may be politically incorrect in today's society to say this, the family unit suffers when there is not at least one nurturing parent at home.

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. (Gen 2:21-22)

God created woman from man, and thus He made them differently to fill different roles. It is known that women are intrinsically better equipped to be nurturers and supporters. By being there to help during the critical years of the formation of the child's personality, character, and habits, the mother can better train the child in the way he or she should go.

When a wife fulfills this role, a husband can better fulfill his role as spiritual leader and provider. God did not mean for women to compete with men in these areas, although women certainly can and should provide spiritual guidance to their children, as well as provide for their families in many other ways.

However, just because a mother should decide to stay at home during the formative years of her child's life doesn't guarantee that the child will become an obedient and respectful person. It takes a strong commitment, determination, self-control, wisdom, faith in God and a lot of love to become

a successful mother. Simply staying home and being a babysitter is not the way to properly raise a child. She must be ready to become a teacher, a nurse, a mechanic (to fix those broken toys), a chauffeur, an athlete, and most importantly, a minister of God.

Proverbs 31 provides a beautiful description of the characteristics of a perfect wife and mother. The woman described in this chapter of Proverbs, though most likely a composite character, beautifully illustrates all that a woman can do to benefit her family.

If possible, Christian women should resist the desire to work outside the home if the need is not there. Ask the Lord to show you ways to adjust your financial situation that will not require you to hold a job while your children are at home. Of course, this does need to be a personal decision, one made with your husband and in prayer.

If taking a job is your only option for providing for your family's needs, then you should try to seek a position that will be the least disruptive to the life of your family perhaps one that you can do while the children are in school or when your husband is home to care for the children. Children need their parents, and non-believing families need to see that Christians are willing to make sacrifices in their lives for the good of their children.

The Father's Role

Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD the fruit of the womb is a reward.

Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth. Happy is

The man who has his quiver full of them (Psalm 127:3-5)

With the mother concentrating on being the primary nurturer, the father can focus more on fulfilling his role as the spiritual leader of the family training

his children to be God's children by leading through example.

God wants every family to be a loving one, so as fathers we should ask ourselves whether or not we are loving not only to our family, but also through living the life of Christian love for God, for His sheep, and for souls who are lost. God wants every family to be a prayerful one, so as the spiritual leaders in the family, do we lead by example? Is our life of prayer strong, mild, or weak? Have we taught our children the importance and value of effective prayer and Bible reading? Have we established a program to help build strong spiritual habits and character in our family? The father must always carefully examine his own spiritual behavior if he expects his children to learn the true meaning of righteousness.

The father's role should also be to support the mother in her role as nurturer. He should always be in tune to the demands placed upon the mother in raising children and keeping a tidy household. How else can he help his wife in carrying out her duties, so that she can also remain at peace with God, herself, her children, and very importantly with her husband?

BEING A FRIEND vs. BEING A PARENT

Both parents should be in agreement about the issues and methods of discipline: about which infractions require calling a time-out and which behaviors should demand sterner discipline perhaps even corporal punishment. It is extremely important that parents be unified and consistent in the discipline of their children.

Fairness is certainly an admirable attribute in friendship, but the parent/child relationship was not designed to be that type of relationship.

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. (Prov 22:6)

God gives parents the responsibility to teach their children right from wrong. At the same time, He warns parents not to exasperate their children.

And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Eph 6:4)

So many parents today go to the extreme of not exasperating their children that they let them do whatever they want. They have paralyzed their role as parents by believing that it is better to let a child make his own unwise choices rather than to make him suffer by saying no.

Beyond spoiling a child, this behavior can harm the child more deeply. How can children learn what their parents' values are if they are not made aware of them through their judgments about what they can or cannot do? Telling a child what he should do is one thing, but true learning takes place when it is both observed in non-conflicting parental behavior as well as lived out by the child himself.

As Christian parents, we should seek God's wisdom in all matters pertaining to choices for our children. We need to recognize, too, that the choices God would have us make on our children's behalf will not always be popular with them and may subject us to criticism from nonbelievers. This should not sway us in our decision to follow the Lord's direction, but rather it should encourage us that we are bearing a powerful testimony to the world.

BEING YOUR CHILD'S CENSOR

Take a look at today's movie listings, the top 50 CDs, and popular computer and video games. If you examine them closely, you may be shocked to see just how many contain violence, obscenities, hatred, and sexual explicitness, as well as anti-Christian sentiments. Sometimes these things are quite

obvious, other times they are buried under the surface and take some discernment to find. Why is there so much vile material out there? It is because society has accepted it as normal. Standards have been drastically lowered, and Christians are being dragged down right along with the rest of the population.

There is no good that can be obtained from allowing our children to be bombarded with ungodly images, lyrics, and pastimes.

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

Paul's exhortation should be our touchstone. Paul knew how insidiously appealing worldly things can be, and they remain so for our families today just as they were for the Philippians of Paul's day. Do not be afraid to censor your child's media intake—consider it your God-given duty.

We as Christian parents certainly have our work cut out for us. We need to remain confident that God will provide us with the answers about what limits we need to set for our children. He has provided us with all the tools we need: His written word, His Holy Spirit, and the gift of prayer through which we can communicate our worries and concerns to Him. May He guide us to use these tools to set healthy limits for our children and to teach them how to set limits for themselves. ★

Family Altar is dedicated to providing practical, biblical insight for parents who face the challenge of raising a family in today's fast-paced and variant society. Please direct comments on this article or questions about parenting to family.altar@tjc.org.

LETTERS FROM MOM



Honey,

Since reading the One Faith theme articles in the October-December 2000 issue of Manna, I've thought much about our role as messengers of the perfect gospel in the world today. How, for example, do believers in the True Jesus Church bring the Lord's message of water baptism to men and women who truly believe a person is saved when she confesses that Jesus is Lord and accepts Him into her heart? How do we explain that, as in the days of the apostles, they too can now see and hear for themselves when a person has received the Holy Spirit? And how do we share that it is clearly the will of God to have only one church on earth rather than many Christian denominations or groups? As you can see, a difficult task awaits every one of us.

The Christian church, as we know it, has a two-thousand-year history. Though today a confusion of many denominations and non-denominations, it did begin as one body of believers who shared one doctrine and one faith. With the Holy Spirit in their midst, the early believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (Acts 2:42, NIV). This took place in Jerusalem, where the apostles had gathered following Jesus' return to heaven. But as we read in the Bible, this one doctrine and one faith would, as time went by, be challenged by folks who added to and/or subtracted from the apostles' teachings that had been taught them by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Unfortunately, this challenge was not just confined to the pages of the Bible. As Christianity spread, this one doctrine and one faith very quickly got lost in the course of human history. Confusion in the church has reigned ever since. This is a sad commentary because all through history, devout and God-fearing men and women have longed to obey God and do His will. This is also true of devout and God-fearing men and women of our time. They love the Lord with all their heart and would, if it were demanded of them tonight, give up their lives for their faith;

setting for us an example of which we can only admire from afar. The fact remains, however, that the Christian church today is not the one body she appears to be.

Our Lord never meant for this to happen. He very specifically taught the apostles that He only has one flock. As was pointed out in one of the theme articles, Jesus had told the apostles, "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; they also I must bring, and they will hear my voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd" (Jn 10:16 NIV). The Lord our God does not make promises He cannot keep. In the time of His favor, devout and God-fearing men and women will hear His voice. All those who have been appointed for eternal life will stop wandering around in circles. No longer will they lead or be led astray.

We find an example in the apostolic church in the person of a man named Apollos. A Jew, he was a native of Alexandria, a large city in the Roman Empire renowned as a great center of learning. The author of Acts describes Apollos as an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures. He writes, "This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John" (Acts 18:24-26).

Today, there are many Apolloses in the Christian church. Eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures, these devout and God-fearing men and women devote themselves to the speaking and teaching of Jesus Christ. Having understood that God sent His only son from heaven to suffer and die for the sins of the world, they cannot help but speak boldly of God's great love for all men. But like Apollos before them, they have one need, as we read: "When Priscilla and Aquilla heard [Apollos], they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately" (Acts 18:26). Notice the words "more ade-

quately. This act was of no small significance for as we learn in subsequent verses, Apollos became a most effective messenger of the Lord's perfect gospel. When Apollos wanted to go to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples there to welcome him. On arriving, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 18:27, 28). This example could be repeated again and again in our time.

Still, in a sea of denominations and non-denominations that span the globe, the True Jesus Church is small and insignificant. While much of the Christian world elbow for position and recognition on the world's stage, we go about our lives quietly, worshiping God and minding our own business. While they turn their heads and lean their hearts toward new teachings added to and/or subtracted from the one doctrine and one faith, we remain unaffected. Secure in the one doctrine and one faith as revealed by the Lord Jesus Christ to the earliest workers of His church in 1917, we shut our doors behind us upon entering the sanctuary of our homes and chapels. We say our prayers and sing our hymns. We listen to our sermons and read our Bibles. And all is well.

But all is not well when men and women are left to sink or swim in this sea of many denominations and non-denominations. When the Lord was on earth, He told His followers that they were obligated to be the light of the world (Mt. 5:14). Light, by its nature, draws attention to itself. It offers light to those in the dark and warmth to those in the cold. Even from a distance, light fills the weary and confused traveler with hope, perks up his spirit, and encourages him to make that one more step in the right direction. It carries the message that tells him where he is at and shows him which way he must go.

A light was, in essence, what Priscilla and Aquila became to Apollos. Without drawing attention to themselves and stealing the spotlight, this couple worked behind the scenes. Sensing a devout and God-fearing man, Priscilla and Aquila reached out to this newcomer in their midst. Though fully equipped with the knowledge of God and certain of His way, they were careful not to dampen Apollos' spirit and snuff out his faith. Mindful of God's grace, they sought only to explain the way of God more adequately. In that sense, they shone like a beacon in the night to guide Apollos and help him stay on course while he was navigating his spiritual journey.

As followers of Christ's one doctrine and one faith today, we too must shine like beacons in the night. Beacons exist to warn or guide ships that navigate the seas as they make their way from their place of departure to their place of destination. They're an especially welcome sight to the navigator on rough waters and in times of distress and foul weather. Today many devout and God-fearing men and women are navigating the rough waters of many denominations and non-denominations even as they are battling the winds of increasingly fierce relativism. The time has come when we must reach out like beacons in the night. Anchored ever so securely in the one doctrine and one faith, we shall be an especially welcome sight to the multitude of weary and confused navigators before us.

Make no mistake. The challenge before us is no small matter. And we will be tested and tempted. But none of this should deter us. Remember the Lord's exhortation, Freely you have received, freely give (Mt 10:1-8). Take it to heart.

Take this statement to heart as well: The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Heed the advice that follows, Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field (Mt 9:37). There is no more urgent plea than this today. Though we do not always know it, devout and God-fearing men and women present in our midst are watching and waiting for a way out of the confusion of many denominations and non-denominations of this world. Who among us will bring them the message of the perfect gospel? Who among us will reach out to explain the way of God more accurately? Let every one of us begin by asking the Lord for the strength and courage to emulate Priscilla and Aquila. Let us ask Him, not tomorrow or the day after, but today. Surely He will hear our prayers and fulfill His promises in the time of His favor.

*Love,
Mom*

Written as a mother would her child, Letters from Mom addresses the struggles of our young people as they step toward the threshold of adulthood. This column hopes to encourage, comfort, and urge the youth to continue living as children of God. Please send comments or questions to this.mom@tjc.org.

Because Of Love

G.H. Chen—Houston, Texas, USA

Because of love, Abraham stood and pleaded before the Lord on behalf of Lot and the people in the city of Sodom (Gen 18-20-33).

Because of love, Joseph tearfully kissed and forgave his brothers, who sold him to Egypt (Gen 45:1-5).

Because of love, Ruth faithfully assured her mother-in law, "If anything but death parts you and me" (Ruth 1:15-18).

Because of love, Queen Esther had the courage to say, "If I perish, I perish" (Est 4:13-17).

Because of love, Mary broke the flask and poured costly alabaster on Jesus' feet (Mk 14:3-9).

Because of love, our Lord Jesus Christ carried the cross all the way to Golgotha (Mt 27:27-37).

Because of love, Paul counted everything as rubbish (Phil 3:8).

Because of love, what are you going to do?

