

MANNA

ISSUE 55 | April–June 2008 | **What Really Matters**

**A Bundle of Love in Disguise • Overcoming Thorny Ground
God's Mercy upon My Family**

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

Dear Reader,

Through the first half of the year, we have seen the power of nature. Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, the earthquake in Sichuan, tornadoes and floods in the USA. Whether or not we live in areas directly affected by these natural disasters, we react to them.

We pray for victims. We write checks and donate food and clothes. We give blood. Even while we try to help the victims of these events, we wonder why such things happen. Why did it happen to so many innocent people? What if it happened to me?

We may not receive answers, but what we must remember is that God is watching over us. The articles in this issue help remind us of the love and mercy of God. We may not understand God's will at first, but when we sincerely seek God and follow Him, we will not fail to receive His grace and blessings. It doesn't mean that our life will be easy, but it will be the best one for us.

THE EDITOR

MANNA
April - June 2008
ISSUE 55 Vol 32 No. 2

What Really Matters

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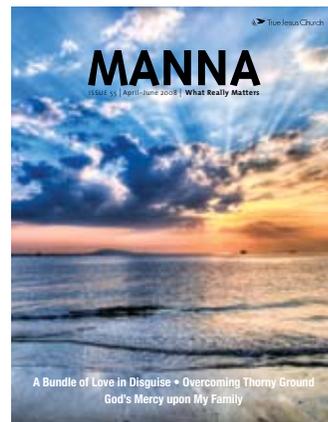
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Manna (ISSN1528-8617) is published quarterly by the True Jesus Church, IA Department of Literary Ministry, 314 S. Brookhurst St., #104, Anaheim, CA 92804 USA.
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U.S. Postmaster: send change-of-address forms to 314 S. Brookhurst St., #104, Anaheim, CA 92804 USA.

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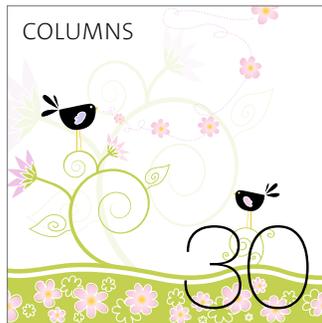


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God's Mercy upon My Family

Adeline Lin—Baldwin Park, California, USA

STAYING ANOTHER YEAR

"There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless the Lord's counsel—that will stand." (Prov 19:21)

In February 1997 all I wanted to do was to go back home and find a job there. After all, Taiwan was my birthplace and where my parents, relatives, and friends still lived. Therefore I had no desire to stay in the United States, where I had been living the past two years to obtain my master's degree.

Knowing that the job market was not good, I even went back to Taiwan during that winter break just to send out my resume and to talk to people, hoping that I could pave a path for my future.

But after talking to a director at the Human Resources Department of a college, I realized that I probably had no chance to get a position in the field I was interested in. I felt hopeless after the interview and became very anxious about my future.

After returning to the US, an unfamiliar

idea came up during some of my conversations with my husband (who was a good friend at that time). "Why don't you stay another year for an internship?" he suggested. Initially I struggled with this idea because it was against my will. However, the thought of "stay another year" was like a ray of light at the end of the tunnel. It gave me hope and even peace, so I decided to give myself a chance to go for it.

Unexpectedly, this journey became smoother and smoother. First, my work permit was approved very quickly. Following the approval, I immediately received a response and got a teaching job right after the interview. Moreover, I was able to find a convenient place to stay within a very short time. I did not have a car, and God had arranged a comfortable apartment that was a few minutes' walk away from the train station and grocery stores.

All of these changes happened within two months. I, who did not know the true God yet, thought that I was just lucky and gave thanks to my "gods." I was

completely unaware of God's guiding hand.

Seriously Seeking God

Although I came from a family that observed Chinese traditional religion and had followed my parents in worshipping ancestors and idols, I knew very little about them. My mother was usually the one taking care of all the details of ancestral worship, and the rest of us merely followed her instructions.

However, there were two things that really bothered me. One was seeing my mother exhausted from preparing sacrificial food; and the other was knowing that most of those idol worshipping activities, such as burning incense and paper money, were wasteful and harmful to the environment. The noise of fire crackers and loud music from the lion dance were always a nightmare to me.

I was introduced to my husband at the end of 1996, and he invited me to True Jesus Church family service a few times in the Boston area. Even though I didn't understand the truth and was very

unaccustomed to prayer in tongue, the members received me with great warmth. I gradually grew familiar with the faces on Sabbath, as well as with the way they worshipped. I received baptism in April 1999. Thank God for those brothers and sisters who shared their testimonies, encouraged me, and became spiritual friends with me.

However, I lacked the heart to pursue the truth so I did not receive the Holy Spirit until much later. I could not understand the Bible well, nor could I relate the teachings to my daily life. During service, I often had a difficult time staying awake. I became alarmed and started to seriously seek God when I realized that I was one of the few at church who did not have the Holy Spirit. I was afraid that God had rejected me because of my wishy-washy attitude.

After praying for a year, during a spiritual convocation in 2000, God finally poured down His precious Holy Spirit on me. I felt a hand lightly tap my left shoulder, and then suddenly my tongue loosened and started to roll. I was speaking in tongue, communicating directly with God. I finally felt accepted and loved by Him. Ever since then, His Spirit has opened my eyes—the Bible is no longer a storybook, and sermons are no longer a lullaby. And I learned how poor I was in spirit.

God's hand of amazing grace did not stop there. Over the following years, He cared for my family and brought them to Him, one by one, in miraculous ways.

MY SISTER'S BAPTISM

My younger sister has a strong character and independent mind. From her unpleasant experiences with those who had tried to preach to her, she had bad impressions of Christians. But through her colleague, she started to get in touch with people at a church in Xinzhu, Taiwan.

Even though she did not know much about Christianity, what she heard and saw at that church did not seem right to her. Moreover, she was unexpectedly

I was speaking in tongue, communicating directly with God. I finally felt accepted and loved by Him.

pressured into receiving baptism at one of their events. So she was worried and started to bring up issues to me since I was a Christian. It was quite a surprise to me that she would make an international phone call just to ask me questions about the Bible and God.

I was newly baptized at that time and had only learned a little about God, so I suggested that she visit the True Jesus Church near our parents' house. She went with her unquenchable spirit of seeking the truth, and was moved to tears the moment the service started. She knew right away that it was the church God wanted her to go to.

After seeking the truth at True Jesus Church for about a year and a half, she received the Holy Spirit and decided to receive baptism in November 2001. On that day, with her eyes closed for a prayer prior to her baptism, she felt God's warm and glorious light shine upon her. Others who were present at the baptism also saw the great light.

AN UNEXPECTED DELAY

In April of 2003, my sister was getting married at Dallas church. She and my parents planned to meet me in Boston and spend some time together before we all flew to Texas for the wedding.

I received a phone call from my sister as I was getting ready to pick them up at the airport. She said they were waiting for their connecting flight in Detroit, but she was about to be deported because of a visa problem. She did not know what to do.

I was in shock when we hung up. I quickly called a friend who worked at the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office

in Boston, hoping to get instant help. But all I got was "Do what the officials tell you." Then my sister called again to let me know that my parents were allowed to enter the US, but since the police were ready to take her away, she couldn't stay on the phone any longer.

It was three hours after their connecting flight to Boston. After that phone call, I didn't know what my parents would do since they could not speak much English, did not know how to use a pay phone, and had never changed flights by themselves before. I could only assume that they would get onto the next flight to Boston. My husband and I had no other choice but to wait at the airport, checking one flight after another. Finally, they showed up at the gate with six suitcases. We were so relieved and gave thanks to God!

My father was a very organized person who liked to plan things ahead. This trip had taken him months to arrange. At that time, he just wanted to return home; on the other hand, he felt guilty for not being able to accomplish his task. He owed the groom's family an apology. Since we had already booked our flights and hotel rooms in Texas, we decided to go without the bride.

As for my sister, she got a "free ticket" to travel the world, and did not return to Taiwan until two days later. Now we all laugh when we think of it, but at the time it was not amusing.

After my sister got back to Taiwan, she immediately applied for a fiancée visa. According to the lawyer, it would be approved in two months. However, almost a year passed, and she still had not received it. It was a very difficult time for my sister while she waited for her visa and people repeatedly asked her "Why are you still here?"

Thank God for giving my sister strength and hope, so that she was able to patiently wait, fast and pray, and totally rely on Him during that period of time. A pastor told her that this delay might be because she had unfinished work in Taiwan.

MY PARENTS' BELIEF

Indeed, the delay miraculously opened the door of salvation for my parents. In the past my parents had refused to go to church because they did not want to “betray” their ancestors and replace their decades-long belief with something foreign to them. But during that year while my sister was waiting for her visa, my parents' hearts were no longer hardened.

One day in March, my father asked her, “How can we help you?” “Pray for me,” she replied. Immediately, my father agreed and promised, “We will pray for you every day. Ten minutes in the morning and ten minutes in the evening.” My parents even started attending church services with her in April 2004 (though with doubtful hearts in the beginning).

A pastor went to visit my parents on April 22, while North Taichung Church was holding an evangelical service. After his explanation and encouragement, my parents' concern about their ancestors' memorial tablets was solved. My father decided to get rid of the pagan altar and idols in the house. My parents wanted to get baptized. Seeing their great faith, the pastor agreed to baptize them on April 24.

The baptism of my parents, which I had always hoped to witness, arrived so suddenly that it did not even give me enough time to book a flight to Taiwan. I could only thank God on the other side of the world.

After my parents started to pray for my sister, she met a travel agent who was very experienced in visa applications. He meticulously instructed my sister on how to fill out her visa application and advised her on other important details.

The visa was quickly approved in June. On July 4, 2004, our friends and families once again gathered in Dallas Church to witness my sister's wedding.

My prayer for my parents to receive the Holy Spirit was also answered—they both received it soon after the wedding. Even though they no longer had my sister

around, God's Spirit would guide them as they journeyed on. Thank God for His mercy!

MY FATHER'S ILLNESS

My father had had hepatitis B since he was a child and began receiving treatment after being diagnosed with a liver tumor in 2005. At the end of September 2006, he fainted as he was about to walk down the stairs. Thank God that my older brother, who was rarely home early from work, was there when the accident happened.

An ambulance brought my father to the emergency room. The doctors discovered that excessive bleeding from his liver caused him to faint. That night, the doctor issued a Do Not Resuscitate Form for my mother to sign. Even though my father was in critical condition, thank God for His mercy that he was discharged in a few days.

During that time, my father was planning a two-month-long trip to the United States to visit me and my sister. Because of his internal bleeding, relatives and friends advised him to cancel his trip.

He told my mother that this trip might be his last chance to visit us in the US, and he believed that the Lord Jesus would take care of him and grant his wish. Even though we were worried, after knowing his great faith in the Lord, we laid down our worries and looked forward to seeing him.

With God's blessing, my parents arrived safely in Boston and later went to stay with their newborn granddaughter in Dallas for a month. Every day they lived in great peace, satisfaction, and joy. We had a great time together. Out of the grace of God, the precious two months were given not only to our father, but also to the family.

In January 2007, not long after my father returned to Taiwan, he underwent another liver embolization for his tumor. Afterward he became lethargic and lost a lot of weight. The doctor told my mother that he had one to two months to live.

At this critical time my brother, a physics teacher and the only non-believer in the family, started to pray. Because of his background in science, he placed his faith in evidence and his own ability. He had never seen God and, moreover, did not need God. However, he knew that none of his scientific theories or training could do his father any good. Even though he still had doubts, he always joined us as we prayed. During the time that I was in Taiwan, we spent time with our father in singing hymns, reading the Bible, and praying together.

I really thank God for giving me strength during that time so that every day I managed to have a peaceful heart to devote myself to long prayers. I asked God for a miracle; but I also prayed that if it was His will for my father to go, that He would give us wisdom to understand His good will and comfort us with His own hand.

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MY BROTHER'S BELIEF

My father's condition did not improve, but was stable. Early in the morning of March 4, 2007, I went to my father's room to pray with him before I left for the airport. As usual, he gave me some Japanese currency so that I could buy snacks as I waited for my connecting flight in Japan. I had struggles in my heart to leave him because I was afraid that we would be saying our final goodbyes. But I suppressed my sadness and, just as what I usually would do, accepted his kindness with many thanks and a smile.

On the way to the airport and before I boarded, my brother and I talked about

God again. Surprisingly I found that he was willing to listen and to share his thoughts.

That night he decided not to doubt any longer but to believe. He pleaded with God to heal our father's illness. When he was praying by himself in his room, the Holy Spirit moved him and he started to speak in tongue. He finally experienced God and could not but believe in His existence. He was very excited and his worries immediately disappeared.

However, over the next two days, evil spirits tried to disturb him. He would beat himself during prayers. Sometimes, his prayer sounded very harsh, like he was berating someone, and according to his students his face turned black with bruises. It seemed like the Holy Spirit was casting out the evil spirits, but they were unwilling to leave. After going through several spiritual battles, everything returned to normal on the third day. An elder from church visited my brother and laid hands on him. He confirmed that my brother had received the precious Holy Spirit.

I was so joyful upon hearing the news, but at the same time I was worried that the evil spirits would attack my brother again because he was not yet baptized. My parents were newly baptized, so they were still spiritually weak. I regretted that I did not stay with them longer. All I could do was to plead to God to fight the spiritual battle for them.

Thanks to God's arrangement, shortly after my departure my sister was able to return to Taiwan with her four-month-old daughter. Many pastors, elders, and deacons also took time out of their busy schedules to visit and pray with my family. Their visitation comforted my anxious heart and I learned the preciousness of having spiritual friends at a difficult time.

MY FATHER'S REST

Soon after I returned to the US, my father's health began to deteriorate. We were afraid that my mother could not

take care of him by herself any more, so we sent him to the hospital. Not long after his admission, he went into a coma.

Around 5 p.m. on March 30, 2007, while I was in a hurry to get ready to return to Taiwan, my brother called and said that our father was not doing well and that I should bid farewell to him over the phone. I was speechless, unwilling to believe what I heard. But with my brother's gentle encouragement, I calmed myself and told my father to go with our Lord Jesus Christ, and I would meet him later in the heavenly home.

Two hours later, my father rested from his worldly labor, illness, and pain, and slept in peace.

My father was always tender-hearted and our Lord Jesus knew him well. Whenever he saw sad or unfortunate events on TV, he would switch the channel because he could not bear to see people suffer. Therefore, it was his will that he did not want emergency treatment. He preferred peaceful rest over endless pain, surgery, and tubes all over his body.

Thank God that my father did not feel much pain, unlike other patients who had the same illness. It was the most wonderful arrangement from the Lord that He took him away to Paradise before the illness caused him great suffering.

My brother did not lose his faith even though God did not heal our father. On the contrary, he was grateful that God took away my father's pain, my mother's heavy burden, and his own sin. On April 28, 2007, he received the precious baptism, foot washing, and Holy Communion.

Throughout the past few years, God has arranged brothers and sisters from all over the world to accompany us in our journey of faith. They sympathized with our weaknesses and gave us timely care, help, and prayers of intercession so that my entire household could be baptized into the name of the Lord. May the Lord remember their love!

Even though we live in different parts of the world and rarely see each other,

through the Lord Jesus Christ, we will definitely be reunited in our heavenly home.

May blessings and edification be with you, whom we have shared the gospel with. And may all the glory and praises be unto the true God, our Father in heaven. Amen! ★



How I Found God in True Jesus Church

Pik Sin Choo—Telok Kurau, Singapore

ATTRACTED BY A BOOK

When I was nine years old, one of my aunts, a Roman Catholic nun, gave my elder brother a Good News Bible. My brother was not interested in it; I was. Seeing that it was an English book containing many pictures, I thought it would be a great way for me to learn English. It worked.

Besides just picking up English, I came to learn that there was a God called Jesus. He was very powerful and loved children. I told myself that I was going to worship this God when I grew up.

A few years later, when the same aunt realized that I was still interested in the book, she gave me a Catholic Bible. Unlike the earlier one, this Bible had only words. Lots of words! I didn't know where to start reading. Through the index, I found the Ten Commandments, so I started with that.

I was stumped when I came to the commandment that baldly stated that we must not worship man-made idols. I saw many hand-made statues whenever

I entered a Catholic chapel. Worse, I was taught that I could worship the true God by praying through these statues. So who was right? This nagging doubt deterred me from getting baptized in the Catholic Church.

INVITED BY A FRIEND

Years later, I graduated from university and began working as an auditor. In June 1999, I went to a company to carry out an audit assignment. During our lunch break, the secretary of one of the company directors asked me whether I had any religious affiliation. I told her that I read the Bible on my own but did not attend any church because I didn't know which one was the true church. In reply, she invited me to go to her church, which, she said with full conviction, was the true church.

I accepted her invitation and went to her church—the True Jesus Church—on the following Saturday. Everything seemed pretty normal when I stepped into the church. Then a loud and strange

sound suddenly came over the public announcement system. It sounded like human voices, but they were quite unlike anything I had heard before.

I could feel my whole face turn white in fear. The sister who invited me must have seen my shock. Quickly, she explained that it was just the sound of people praying and that there was no need to be alarmed.

We then went up to the second floor and entered the chapel. The service began. When the congregation knelt down for the first prayer, I was still very frightened, but I didn't want to leave after being there for barely half an hour.

Remembering how powerful Jesus was, I knelt down too and prayed to Him in my heart. I told the Lord I did not know where I had brought myself and what I had gotten myself into; I asked Him to come and save me quickly! However, when the preacher started to deliver his sermon, my fear subsided somewhat because I noticed that he quoted often from the Bible.

REASSURED BY A VISION

I continued to attend services at True Jesus Church. One Sabbath in December 1999, a special fasting and prayer session was scheduled. The aim was to seek God's guidance and abidance for the annual year-end Spiritual Meeting that was going to be held one week later.

This prayer was to be held after the afternoon Sabbath service. I had intended to sneak away, but before I could get very far, the wife of Preacher Chang Kuo Ching, the resident preacher then, invited me to join them in prayer. Not exactly keen to stay, I gave her the excuse that I had not fasted. She replied that I need not worry about that since God looks at our heart.

My brain couldn't work up another excuse fast enough so I reluctantly agreed to stay. The prayer was longer than the normal prayers. It wasn't long before I started to feel my whole body ache with fatigue. I kept wondering, "Why is the preacher not ringing the bell to stop the prayer yet?"

Even as I wondered, another thought crossed my mind, "Why are these people praying so hard?" As I asked myself this question, I saw a cross in the distance. A figure hung on the cross. The whole vision was very dark and there was light only around the cross.

Tears started to flow down my cheeks. Things I had only read about before in the Bible were now shown directly to me ... amazing love, how could it be, that the Son of God, the Lord Jesus died for me. He died for all of us.

It was grace indeed that sinful man could be reconciled to Him. And prayer

Suddenly, my surroundings became brighter and brighter. Words fail to capture this wonderful light—so very powerful, but yet extremely gentle and comforting, that it was not glaring at all.

was the way that we could communicate directly with Him. I no longer dared, no longer wanted, to wonder why the preacher was not ringing the bell to end the prayer.

The following week, I attended the Spiritual Meeting at Adam Road church. At the end of the first service, anyone who wanted to pray for the Holy Spirit and to experience God was invited to go to the front of the chapel. The sister who brought me encouraged me to go to the front. So, I went.

At that time, I was still not baptized. I dared not pray for the Holy Spirit, as I felt unworthy. In my prayer, I merely asked God to tell me if this was His true church.

Suddenly, my surroundings became brighter and brighter. Words fail to capture this wonderful light—so very powerful, yet so extremely gentle and comforting that it was not glaring at all. The thought flashed into my mind, "My father on earth may not love me but my Father in heaven loves me dearly."

My tears flowed freely again. The Lord Jesus had not answered my question directly. Somehow, I knew He wanted me to find the answer myself, and He reassured me that I could find Him in True Jesus Church.

CLEANSED BY THE BLOOD

On June 11, 2000, I received baptism. After we returned to church, all of the newly baptized were told to go to the front for the laying on of hands.

A few minutes into the prayer, I still had not received the Holy Spirit. I then told God in my heart, "Lord Jesus, I have just been baptized and I am at my cleanest now. Please give me the Holy Spirit. If not, I will sin again once I step out of the church, and I will no longer be as clean as I am now."

As I was making this simple plea, my heart started to open up. Indeed, I could feel it blossom as a flower does. Although I did not receive the Holy Spirit in that prayer, the feeling of being sinless was

very real and left a lasting impression on me.

A FLASHBACK TO MOPS

Some time after my baptism, I finally realized how the Lord had answered my question on whether I had come to the *true* church.

One afternoon in late 1998, before I had heard anything about True Jesus Church, I was on a bus when it stopped at a bus stop opposite a church. What caught my eye was the "arrogant" name "True Jesus Church." Although I was not attending any church at that time, I was quite offended by the sign. I thought to myself, "Hey, do you think that only your Jesus is true? My Jesus is also true!"

But the name also intrigued me. So after passing True Jesus Church that afternoon, in my infrequent prayers, I would ask the Lord Jesus to guide me to His true church.

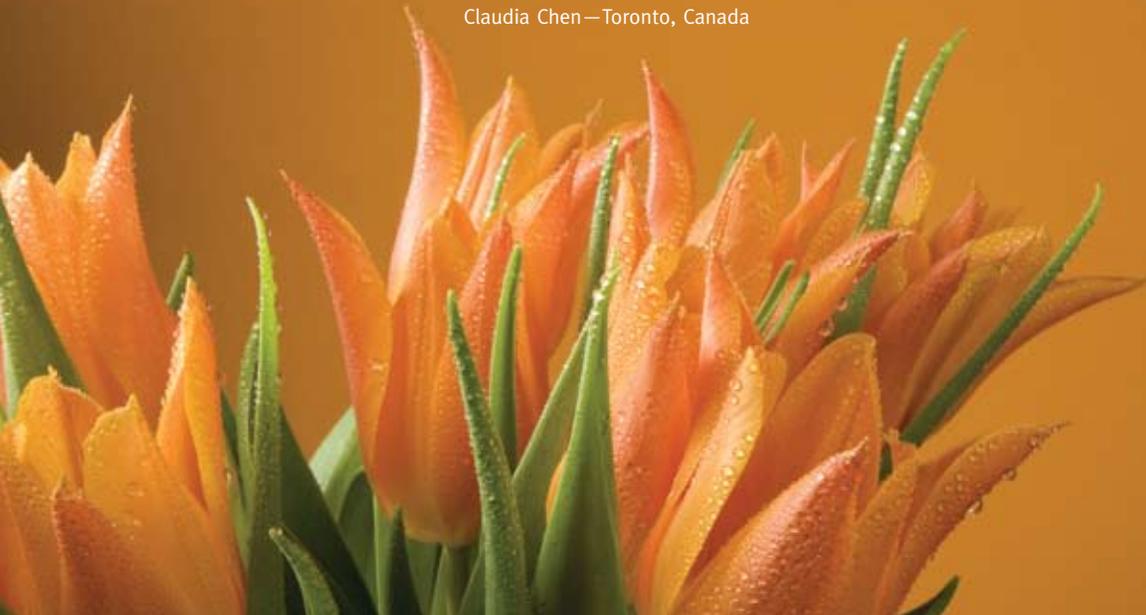
One night I had a dream. In that dream, I came to a place where I felt great peace and joy. Somehow, I knew that I had come to the house of God. When I woke, I couldn't remember much about what the place looked like, but I distinctly recalled there was a fence on the premises, and there was a row of mops hanging on the fence.

Much later, after I had started to attend True Jesus Church, I went to the Adam Road church for the first time. The occasion was a truth-seekers' gathering; we had a tea reception in the dining area. As I strolled by the side of the dining area, I suddenly gasped—there was a row of mops hanging on the fence exactly as it had appeared in my dream! So through a most interesting channel the good Lord had already shown me His true church.

Today, the Lord Jesus continues to guide me and bless me in many ways. Each time I look back at how He has gently called me and brought me back to Him, to His Truth and His church, I can only repeat to myself—indeed, my Father loves me dearly. ★

Remembering the Tenth Anniversary of God's Miracle to Us

Claudia Chen—Toronto, Canada



Editor's Note: In an earlier issue of *Manna*, Deacon Fritz Chen shared how the peace of God helped him through the days when he fought to overcome stomach cancer. On this tenth anniversary of his being in remission, his wife, Claudia, reminisces about being by her husband's side through those dark days and deeply experiencing God's love and mercy. Dn. Chen's complete testimony, "Peace in the Lord," can be found in *Manna* Issue 32, p. 10-13.

Passages in italics are taken from Dn. Chen's testimony.

GOD'S MIRACLE TO US

I met my husband in 1983 through a preacher. We were married the next year, and we had our daughter, Rebecca, the following year. Our life was very smooth until the beginning of 1986, when my husband's job became more demanding with irregular work hours, making it difficult for him to eat regular meals.

Because of this, he started to have stomach problems that increased in severity. During a regular check-up in 1993, the doctor was shocked by the condition of my husband's stomach.

I underwent surgery to remove a cancerous tumor in my stomach (gastric lymphoma). The doctor first proposed to remove my whole stomach and then have me undergo chemotherapy.

Fritz went ahead with the operation and had his stomach removed in December 1993. As I stood staring through the windows of the door that separated me from the operating room, tears rolled down my face. Family members of other patients were trying to comfort me, but I

couldn't hear or digest any of their words. Even though I prayed constantly in my heart, I was heartbroken.

I thought to myself, "Heavenly Father, are you there? You know how helpless I am! But I know you are very merciful, and You know that at this moment I cannot afford to lose my husband."

Our daughter was only eight years old and I dared not to tell her that her father had a very serious illness. So, I kept on asking God not to take him away but to give him more time.

I also prayed to God that, if possible, to leave him with at least a little bit of his stomach so that he could eat. I felt like I was trying to bargain with God.

[As] it turned out, the doctor removed only four-fifths of my stomach. And to my surprise, I didn't need to go through chemotherapy after the operation because the tumor turned out to be benign. Thank God, the doctors told me I was healthy.

The doctors and nurses were astounded because they couldn't understand how this could have happened. My husband and I hugged each other and cried in the hospital room because we knew that it was God's miracle to us.

“THE LORD WILL FOR SURE HEAL DAD”

In January 1995, Fritz went back to the hospital for a check-up and all the tests came back normal. Around the same time, he decided that we should relocate from Taiwan to Canada, and with God's smooth guidance, we arrived in Toronto on March 1, 1996.

One year and one month after we settled down in Canada, my husband started experiencing stomach discomfort again, but the doctor thought it was due to stress from adjusting to a new country. Another year went by with him often throwing up after meals.

In February 1998, I was sent to the hospital. My condition was a lot more serious this time. For a long time I could not eat because the tumor took up so much space in my stomach. I was literally skin and bones.

One month later, Fritz could no longer eat anything through his mouth. By that time, his weight dropped to 110 pounds, and every day I wouldn't know whether we would have tomorrow.

The doctors recommended that I should not undergo surgery because I was too weak and it would have been too risky to operate. They suggested that instead I skip directly to chemotherapy. However, I was even too weak to start treatment immediately.

After examining my reports, the surgeon was convinced that he could successfully operate on me, despite objections from the other doctors. The operation was scheduled to take place two weeks later on March 16, 1998.

I was more prepared for what could happen this time, so I told my daughter that it was very possible we could lose our loved one at any time. Every night, my daughter and I would pray earnestly despite the fact that my husband's condition got increasingly worse.

One night when we were praying at home, I felt so completely helpless that I cried out to God, “Lord, if everything that I have encountered is from You, then I will not say anything. But I really hope we can have another opportunity to go to church and attend service together as a family, just the way we did before.”

Miraculously, I felt this warmth coming out from my heart, like a fountain of water gushing out. Even though I was crying bitterly, I felt such an indescribable joy that I wanted to laugh. This feeling lasted until I stopped praying.

I told my daughter, “I don't know why, but I am very happy.” My daughter told me, “Didn't I tell you that the Lord will for sure heal dad?” Children are truly simple and pure; adults really do worry too much sometimes.

I really thank God that He comforted us in prayer. With God's abidance, I had more courage to face what was coming because I no longer felt alone.

The Power of Prayer

The period of time just prior to my surgery was the most critical and trying because I was dying. At times, I would even lose consciousness.

Those days, Fritz rarely talked to me. Every day, I stayed with him, read the Bible, sang hymns, thought about the lyrics, and prayed to God in my heart. I knew that I had to take care of myself and remain healthy in order to take care of my family.

On March 10, 1998, he was in the worst condition he had ever been. He vomited three cups of blood and had four bloody bowel movements. He told me that it

might be God's will to take him away this time. Then, he began to speak his last will and testament. I asked him to stop talking and hugged him as we cried.

That night, he wanted me to stay with him in the hospital. I had trouble falling asleep and just lay there on the bed, praying until the sun rose, when suddenly I heard the sound of water flowing. The sound came from a distance, and, as I listened I realized that it was the sound of prayer.

The voice was very small at first. But when I listened more carefully, it became quite loud and full of strength. My husband was praying in tongues!

I saw him lying on his bed praying, this sound coming out of him. Just like that, I felt very comforted. I lay down again and fell asleep until the doctor knocked on the door at 9 a.m.

Thank God, I was able to sustain myself through prayer up until the actual day of the major operation.

Miraculously, I felt this warmth coming out from my heart, like a fountain of water gushing out. Even though I was crying bitterly, I felt such an indescribable joy that I wanted to laugh.

AN EXTRAORDINARY OPERATION

When my husband was wheeled in to surgery at 8 a.m. on the day of his major operation, I told him, “I will be waiting for you in the waiting room.”

As I was wheeled into the operating room, she saw me peacefully wave to her, saying, “Peace be with you,” as if we were bidding our usual good-byes.... Around 10 a.m. the doctor, sweating profusely, emerged from the operating room. Anxiously, he informed my wife that I was in a very critical state, completely beyond his expectations.

The doctor said that if they continued with the operation and it failed, it was highly likely that my husband would not make it out of the operating room. And if they didn't operate and left Fritz in his current condition, he would probably survive for only another two to three days.

My sister was with me when the doctor spoke to us. We told him to just try his best, and we would pray to our God. The young doctor put his hand on my shoulder and comforted me. He told me to have faith and to ask God to guide him, and he hurried back into the operating room.

My hands and feet felt very weak after he left. I rushed to the washroom and cried out bitterly to God. It seemed like all the experiences that I had had and the peace that I had felt meant nothing. I asked God, "Were You kidding with me when You tried to comfort me in my prayers?"

Originally the doctor expected the operation to last six hours. But at 2 p.m. in the afternoon, we still had not heard anything else from the doctors. I felt very uneasy.

At that moment I saw two familiar people, Elder Huang and Brother Jackson, walking into the waiting room. They joined us and we sang hymns, while Elder Huang kept on encouraging me. I was comforted and strengthened after they joined us.

The operation continued until around 4 p.m., when the doctor came out again and said to my wife, "Your God has saved him!" He described the operation as "searching for a path through the forest." He did not know how he managed to complete the operation, but his face showed that it was successful.

The doctor drew a diagram on a piece of newspaper to show us how he had conducted the operation. I still have this piece of newspaper. He showed us how he removed the whole stomach and spleen. Some parts of the pancreas and

intestines were also removed. Then he showed us how he joined the remaining parts together.

On April 2, thirty-eight days after his hospitalization, my husband was discharged. After he came home, I continued praying to God. I am not a very good cook, but I prayed to God to guide me so that the things I cooked would appeal to his appetite. And things really turned out this way.

He stopped eating baby food very quickly, and began to eat normal meals. He ate everything! During chemotherapy, he continued to gain weight until he surpassed what the doctors said people without stomachs could weigh. He gained forty pounds in three months, thank God!

Throughout these ten-plus years, I've seen God's miracles every day, and I've counted God's blessings every day.

On August 1, 1998, during Holy Communion in Toronto Church, my husband and I both saw a vision of the cup of grape juice turning crimson with the blood of Christ. Once again, we were encouraged by God's unfathomable grace.

Fritz had the opportunity in the year 2000 to participate in the theological training program held by the United States General Assembly (USGA). It was beyond our expectation that he would be able to complete the three-year course.

It has been over ten years since my husband was first hospitalized. Even so, I get teary-eyed every time I think about what happened, because the love of God is truly deep, wide, and long. How can we fully repay God's love? Throughout these ten-plus years, I've seen God's miracles

every day, and I've counted God's blessings every day. I see how the time we have in our family should be treasured. Each moment is a gift from God.

During this trial, I really felt the power of intercession by the brothers and sisters. As the Bible says,

"if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them." (Mt 18:19)

Our faith is living and true, and I believe that God is here in our church. I have seen with my own eyes and have experienced Him myself.

God knows how much we can bear. It is true that the end of human beings is the beginning of God. As long as we can hold onto Him tightly, He will never forsake us. And no matter what comes our way, God's grace will always be sufficient. ★

How to Strengthen Your Campus Fellowship



I do not consider myself an expert in campus fellowship, but it is a topic near to my heart. Being actively involved with my college fellowship played a big part in shaping who I am today and, looking back, was the most meaningful part of my college years.

Thankfully, when I became coordinator of my fellowship, two of my close friends in church were also coordinators at their universities. By constantly keeping each other updated on events and sharing our challenges, we were able to form an indispensable network.

Here are some of our tips.

Start with prayer

Prayer is the single most important ingredient to any campus fellowship. I feel strongly about this because, during my first year at campus fellowship, the coordinator was an alumnus who could not come often given that his work was far from campus. Even so, I felt that the campus fellowship was so spiritually alive and filled with love because I knew he prayed a lot for it.

Even for a flourishing fellowship, regular prayer together is absolutely necessary for its maintenance. I witnessed the changes and felt the abidance of God when we had regular prayer nights besides the weekly Bible study meetings.

Gather a few members together to pray for unity and growth. These prayers can be held on campus or at members' apartments. Our Lord promises us that, "where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20). Do not be discouraged if the prayer group starts off small— just keep it consistent.

"I feel like my campus fellowship lacks unity."

"Be shepherds of the church of God which he bought with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). A campus fellowship is not connected because of similar personalities or interests. We're one because we're spiritually united by His blood, which is a different bond than all other groups we may associate with. Lack of cohesion is natural when campus fellowship members are unfamiliar with each other or when the group has grown larger and impersonal. However, there are many ways to build bonds among the members.

Older members should care for the younger members—for example, introduce the first year students to your favorite study spots and useful services on campus.

Take advantage of the fact that you have brothers and sisters with you at the same school. Support your fellow brothers and sisters in their other club activities, such as attending their performances or competitions. Plan a campus fellowship outing to a nearby museum, or go hiking and enjoy God's creation.

Just remember that fellowship needs to be in the light (Eph 5:8-13). Spending time with church brothers and sisters is not automatically edifying. Be conscious of whether the way you use your time together glorifies God, and try to engage all members instead of forming small cliques.

"Campus fellowship is boring."

A campus fellowship should be founded on the studying of God's word. Bible study should remain the core of the meetings and be the attracting factor, but it doesn't have to be the same all the time.

In our campus fellowships, we have found varying the format to be very important. During Bible study, you can engage the members through large or small group discussions, sharing before or after, having members draw their responses to the passage, or making posters of the main points.

Mix in a couple of special topics that are relevant to the lives of the members. A possible topic could be "How to choose your career." Invite fellowship alumni to speak or brothers and sisters from nearby local churches. Have a praise session once in a while and teach new praise songs.

Make sure that there are life applications throughout the Bible study. If the group is small enough, everyone can take turns to answer questions. You will find that this helps you to get to know each other a lot better.

“Our bond is okay, but we don’t have a spiritual connection.”

We want to care for and understand each other as if we are the same body.

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many... so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one suffers, every part suffers with it; if one is honored, every part rejoices with it. (1 Cor 12:14-26, NIV)

Learning about each other’s needs is important to understand how to help one another spiritually.

Sometimes, members may want to build a spiritual friendship but are not used to talking about God or His work in their lives. Help the members get used to this by having them share God-related happenings in the past week before starting Bible study.

Try pairing everyone up into prayer or sharing buddies and rotate partners as often as seems necessary. Make sure that the focus is on spiritual friendship. After church seminars or events, have members share their reflections and what they learned. With practice, it gets easier.

Post the current Bible study schedule and share event photos on the campus fellowship website. If maintaining a website seems too difficult, using a blog works just as well!

Have someone be in charge of collecting and emailing weekly prayer requests. Everyone will feel more united because they are caring for each other in prayer—you know others are doing the same for you!

“We find it hard to get our name out there.”

At student organization fairs, reserve a table with the school and prepare a poster with photos from past events and flyers advertising upcoming fellowship or church events. Rutgers University Campus Fellowship prepares freebies, such as pens with the fellowship website printed on them. Whatever is left can be distributed among members to pass out to classmates.

Many schools allow pre-approved flyers to be posted around campus and have newspapers or online event calendars that are good places to advertise. Some schools even offer websites for registered campus organizations. Make sure that the fellowship’s meeting information is up-to-date and that a contact person is assigned to answer inquiries.

Volunteer as a group for community service at school or in the area, such as at races for cures or at soup kitchens. Sing for the elderly or visit a hospital. If you have the funds to make fellowship T-shirts, this would be a good time to wear them. In addition to

being a wholesome activity for the members, it is also a good way to shine for Christ and to let other campus organizations know of our church.

Finally, don’t give up! Like Paul, let us “press on, that [we] may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of [us]” (Phil 3:12b).

“Our campus fellowship seems to lack direction or a goal.”

Campus fellowships require a lot of effort to remain balanced because the needs of the fellowship change often. It is good to have an evaluation every few months to clarify the purpose and goals.

If possible, try to have one at the beginning and end of each term. The evaluations can be casual and fun over a themed dinner or dessert. At the beginning, ask everyone to share their personal goals and group goals. Ask them to say specifically how they think the group goal can be reached together.

Plan activities that work towards these goals. Review the goals periodically to remind the members and check on progress. Have members anonymously fill out evaluations on whether the fellowship is progressing toward the goals, and ask them to offer their suggestions.

With members changing as people enter and leave each year, consider the various levels of spiritual knowledge amongst members of the group. Choosing books and church publications that include questions for discussion may be helpful for a fellowship with many members who have not had much experience leading Bible studies.

Campus fellowship is a good opportunity for us to learn humility and to repay Jesus’ love and follow in His footsteps. If we care deeply about the growth of the campus fellowship, let us reflect this in prayer.

God does not call any of us to “save” the campus fellowship. God only calls us to serve as He did. I learned this lesson the hard way when I had many plans that I wanted to implement but became discouraged when others seemed indifferent or attendance was low. “‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty” (Zech 4:6).

When the fellowship is successful, it is not because of our capabilities. Likewise, when things seem like they could be better, it is the abidance of God that can turn things around.

Questions and Answers

What are the meanings of the biblical symbols used to describe the Holy Spirit?

The Bible uses several symbols to describe the Holy Spirit. These symbols are not the Holy Spirit Himself; they are simply references to the Holy Spirit's work in and upon God's people:



1. **Wind**—moving and renewing us (Jn 3:8; Acts 2:2; Ezek 37:9, 10).
2. **Fire**—reviving our faith and refining us (Acts 2:3; Isa 4:4).
3. **Water**—giving spiritual life and abundance (Jn 7:38, 39; 4:14).
4. **Oil**—spreading joy and God's light (Heb 1:9; Mt 25:4).
5. **Rain**—sending blessing impartially and helping fruits grow (Mt 5:45; Zech 10:1; Hos 6:3; 10:12).
6. **Dove**—allowing goodness and peace (Mt 3:16, 10:16; Gen 8:11).
7. **Seal**—confirming authenticity and guaranteeing quality (Eph 1:13, 14, 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22, 5:5, 6; 2 Tim 2:19).
8. **Sword**—used to attack Satan and discern the truth (Eph 6:17; Gen 3:24; Heb 4:12).
9. **Light**—reproaching us when we live in sin and reminding us to live in the truth (Eph 1:18, 5:13, 14).

What blessings does the Holy Spirit give?

Giving spiritual rebirth and renewal. “[U]nless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn 3:5, 6; Ezek 37:14).

Setting a seal of redemption on us. “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph 1:13). “[T]he Holy Spirit of God, in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30). “God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee” (2 Cor 5:5).

Setting believers free. “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2). “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Cor 3:17).

Anointing believers with the Holy Spirit of truth. The Holy Spirit counsels us and gives us wisdom. “[T]he anointing which you received from him abides in you” (1 Jn 2:27). “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (Jn 14:26). “He who is spiritual judges all things” (1 Cor 2:15).

Strengthening us spiritually. “That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man” (Eph 3:16). “If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (1 Pet 4:14).

Having the power to testify. “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me...” (Acts 1:8). “And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor 2:4).

Having a fruitful spirituality. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law” (Gal 5:22, 23). “[B]ut we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption...” (Rom 8:23).

Helping us reach the depths of spiritual prayer. “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit” (Jude 20). “Pray at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication” (Eph 6:18). “The Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26). “For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays...” (1 Cor 14:14).

Giving believers spiritual gifts. “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.... But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills” (1 Cor 12:4, 11).

Giving comfort. “That you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Rom 15:13).

Sanctifying us. “But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).

Reviving our spiritual life. “[G]ive life to your mortal bodies also through His Spirit which dwells in you” (Rom 8:11).

Facts, Stats and **Syntax**



Polls and Statistics

Top 10 Largest National Christian Populations

Nation	Number
1. USA	224,457,000
2. Brazil	139,000,000
3. Mexico	86,120,000
4. Russia	80,000,000
5. China	70,000,000
6. Germany	67,000,000
7. Philippines	63,470,000
8. UK	51,060,000
9. Italy	47,690,000
10. France	44,150,000

These numbers include adherents of different divisions within Christianity, including Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Latter-day Saints, African Indigenous Churches, and others. From http://www.adherents.com/largecom/com_christian.html

Word Study

The name Jesus comes from the English form of the Latin name Iesus and the Hebrew name Yeshu, which is short for Yeshua, which is the shortened form of Yehoshua (Joshua). Jesus' name means "Jehovah is salvation." It is the personal name of the LORD, a heavenly name revealed by the angel Gabriel (Mt 1:21; Lk 1:30, 31).

Did You Know?

The number 40 is used many times in the Bible. It often means God is about to usher in a new event or era. For instance, rain during the flood lasted 40 days, spies explored Canaan for 40 days, Jonah warned Nineveh for 40 days, and Jesus fasted in the wilderness for 40 days.

News

Expansion of TJC in the Americas

Thank God for His guidance, in the past few years He has truly blessed the churches around the world in building and purchasing new chapels. Here are some of the churches and houses of prayer in North and South America that have been established or dedicated to God since the beginning of 2006:

May 2006: Boston House of Prayer (USA)

August 2006: Hillsborough Church (USA)

October 2006: San Jose Church (USA)

December 2006: Sao Paulo Church (Brazil)

January 2007: San Diego House of Prayer (USA)

January 2007: Argentina Church (Argentina)

May God continue to guide us in evangelizing so that we may continue to grow and shine His light in the world.

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If you would like for us to send you a monthly supply of spiritual encouragements, please subscribe to our TJC e-newsletter, The True Vine! You will find helpful articles and testimonies to uplift your faith, and this electronic version is both easily accessible and available for your convenience.

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<http://www.tjc.org>

May 2008

Of Love and Seals

How much do you love me?

Isn't this a question we often ask? We ask our parents, siblings, friends, spouse, and sometimes even Jesus Himself. We want to know how much we are valued, how much people are willing to do for us, and how far they are willing to go for us. Who do you think loves you the most? [Read more...](#)



Christian Living



Why I Got Rid of Cable TV

It is reported that the average American watches more than four hours of television each day—equivalent to twenty-eight hours per week—making it the third most consuming activity behind sleep and work. [Read more..](#)

Our Stories



A Life-Changing Year

In January 2004, while everybody was making New Year resolutions, I received some upsetting news from my gynecologist. He told me that the results of my last physical showed the presence of abnormal cells in my uterus, and the worst case scenario pointed to the the possibility of uterine cancer. [Read more...](#)

Q & A



On Heaven

Won't heaven be a boring place? How can you be happy if you do nothing but worship all day? [Read more...](#)

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The Fallen Mighty Man

Samuel Kuo—Dallas, Texas, USA



Mostly forgotten, and if not forgotten, mostly anonymous, the mighty men of David are typically vague impressions in the believer's mind.

Nevertheless, these were the war heroes of burgeoning Israel, thirty-seven in all (but often referred to as "the thirty"), whose stories of courage and strength still cause us to marvel. It was one such man, with only a spear in hand, who killed 800 foes at one time (2 Sam 23:8). It was one of the thirty-seven who staunchly "stationed himself" even though his companions fled, turning an otherwise disaster into a great victory (2 Sam 23:9).

Uriah, Bathsheba's first husband, who was named among the mighty men, died in utmost fidelity (2 Sam 11:15). On one occasion, when King David longed to drink from the well of his hometown Bethlehem, it was again three mighty men who broke through the camp of the Philistines to deliver the prized water (2 Sam 23:16).

They killed lions (2 Sam 23:20). They slew giants (2 Sam 21:15-19). They were

victors. And they were, without a doubt, talented. They were the mighty men of David.

Yet, how gravely did one fall!

A TALENTED INDIVIDUAL

His name was Asahel, meaning "made by God," and God endued him with speed. While silent on the specific talents of the other mighty men, the Bible exclusively records that "Asahel was as fleet of foot as a wild gazelle" (2 Sam 2:18). According to Jewish historian Flavius Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews*, Asahel could even outrun a horse.

So it is without wonder that Asahel would eventually climb the ranks of David's army, overseeing 24,000 men (1 Chr 27:7). He was the complete warrior, having speed, might, and valor.

His family certainly did not hurt his success either. Not only did God weave Asahel's innate warrior constitution, but his brothers were Joab and Abishai—also numbered among the thirty. God reared him among heroes (cf. 2 Sam 2:18).

Recall how Joab was the first to answer David's call to attack the Jebusites when Jerusalem had yet to become the glorious City of David (1 Chr 11:6). He was an initiator, a catalyst. Abishai was no coward either, for he volunteered to venture into King Saul's slumbering camp, returning with Saul's spear and jug (1 Sam 26:7). He was a daredevil, a maverick. I like to think that both of them shaped their little brother's personhood, too.

By the grace of God, Asahel was the complete package, and was *surrounded* by the complete package. He was a mighty man through and through.

Though mighty and gifted, Asahel died tragically, giving today's holy workers forewarning.

Let us read his account in 2 Samuel 2:19-23:

So Asahel pursued Abner, and in going he did not turn to the right hand or to the left from following Abner. Then Abner looked behind him and said, "Are you Asahel?" He answered, "I am." And Abner said to him,

“Turn aside to your right hand or to your left, and lay hold on one of the young men and take his armor for yourself.” But Asahel would not turn aside from following him. So Abner said again to Asahel, “Turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How then could I face your brother Joab?” However, he refused to turn aside. Therefore Abner struck him in the stomach with the blunt end of the spear, so that the spear came out of his back; and he fell down there and died on the spot. So it was that as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died, stood still.

THE DOWNFALL

Prior to these events, a power struggle had ensued over the kingdom of Israel after King Saul’s death. Abner took Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, and crowned him king.

Meanwhile, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel—followers of David—thought otherwise. They challenged Abner and his men, eventually triggering a fierce battle. In defeat, Abner retreated. It was at this moment that Asahel sought to seal the matter once for all by pursuing Abner’s life. After all, why not quell the insurgency at its source?

Upon first glance, his persistence and ambition can be deemed admirable. “He did not turn to the right hand or to the left from following Abner” actually sounds a lot like how God encouraged Joshua, “Only be strong and very courageous... do not turn from [the law] to the right hand or to the left” (Jos 1:7).

But in reality there were many fatal errors in his approach. In fact, Asahel’s downfall illustrates typical flaws we may see in our own servitude.

Gifted, but Only Trusted in Himself

Throughout the episode, we notice that Asahel relied solely on his own gifts. He stubbornly pursued Abner, not turning to the right or to the left, running full speed ahead. Without armor. Hubris. He only trusted in his gift, his speed. His self-confidence led to his tragic death. Had

Gifts should be thought of as mere tools to accomplish holy work rather than claims to authority that would only cause us to stumble in servitude and faith. For God leads His church, not man.

he stopped for a moment and sought for God’s counsel, as David had done in many of his battles (cf. 1 Sam 30:7), or humbly recognized his vulnerability and armed himself before battle, he could have saved his own life.

Sometimes in sacred work, we do the same, charging ahead with tasks that we are talented in, meanwhile forgetting that anything we desire to accomplish for God’s kingdom requires His blessing and grace.

To be more precise, we must execute what God desires for us to do and not flip the table by asking God to endorse what we deem as advantageous work. Servitude, by definition, is master-centered, not self-centered. Asahel forgot this principle, trusting entirely in his innate abilities to pursue Abner.

Gifts should be thought of as mere tools to accomplish holy work rather than claims to authority that would only cause us to stumble in servitude and faith. For God leads His church, not man.

Many biblical characters wound up misusing their God-given talents and either died or fell because of them. Think Samson. Think Judas. If God has used us mightily in the past, thank God! But those gifts or experiences shouldn’t amass into arrogance in our heart.

On one occasion I asked a full-time minister about his rich experiences as an African missionary. I had heard that African members even named their children after him. Out of curiosity, I asked him how he handled that—I know if it were me, I certainly would feel some pride.

He shared with me what he had

learned vicariously through a co-worker who had fallen years earlier. Indeed, this co-worker had been used by God—many converts were won with his preaching, many miracles were performed through his hands. However, his eventual downfall began as he slowly accumulated those experiences in his heart, eventually thinking that he was the cause.

Little by little, he built a pedestal for himself. It began with the mentality of, “If God used me so greatly in the past, why wouldn’t He in the future?” Then, it swelled into a sense of entitlement—that people ought to listen to him because God used him. *That* surely was the beginning of the end.

Collecting his thoughts, this full-time minister shared with me words I will never forget. Whenever we work for God, no matter what the result, but especially in success, “Let it be.” Forget it, and go on (cf. Phil 3:13).

How can we tell if we only trust in our own gifts? A basic test is to examine if we wholeheartedly pray before we serve God. Do we continually seek God’s guidance? Or have we neglected that fundamental aspect of servitude because of past successes?

Another way to tell is to consider if we truly listen to advice. Abner, quite the skilled warrior, admonished Asahel to wear some armor. Abner knew he could easily beat an unprotected Asahel.

But Asahel trusted in his own gifts and did not listen to any advice. Do we often reject others’ opinions and suggestions? Human nature often causes us to be stubborn to other opinions, refusing to change our ways or even admitting that we were originally wrong.

“He who heeds counsel is wise” (Prov 12:15, 21:2). Therefore, a good worker of the Lord is humble—teachable and moldable—always seeking wisdom from God and other experienced workers to better employ his gifts. When given advice, he soberly examines himself against it (Rom 12:3).



Pursued Alone

We can assume Asahel pursued Abner alone, for Abner conversed only with him when they were within speaking distance. Unfortunately, Asahel had no companion in close vicinity during his pursuit of Abner, for they could have worked together to a better end.

While spiritual cultivation is often something that we must seek alone, church work is usually something that we should pursue with others. Jesus often retreated to isolated places to pray by Himself, but His ministry was always in the company of His disciples.

The Bible also asserts the principle, “Two are better than one...for if they fall, one will lift up his companion” (Eccl 4:9-12). This principle is echoed through metaphors and symbols throughout Scripture: *many* branches of one vine (Jn 15:1-10); *many* parts of one body (1 Cor 12:12-30); *many* living stones of one spiritual temple (Eph 2:19-21; 1 Pet 2:5); and seventy sent out, *two by two* (Lk 10:1, 17).

It is true that sometimes God may move

a person to single-handedly carry out His work. Sometimes David’s mighty men acted alone (2 Sam 23:9). Philip preached to the eunuch unaccompanied (Acts 8:26-39). But that is not ideal. Even when Jonathan valiantly charged against the Philistines, he went with his armor-bearer (1 Sam 14). “Two are *better* than one” (Eccl 4:9, emphasis added).

True, we might contend that one is better than none. However, if possible, we should serve with other co-workers in Christ, for our own sake. This is true especially if we do not have explicit instructions from God.

“Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Prov 11:14). This is why church councils comprise many workers, not one. This is why missionary and visitation teams are usually sent out in pairs or more, or church treasurers have auditors, or *Manna* writers go through a review process, etc.

Companions help us to think clearly and biblically in our servitude, and not otherwise do something for vainglory, out

of human will, or even to sin against God. Accountability and counsel is the goal.

Therefore, we must also be extra careful when we do church work alone. Is it at all possible to invite another with the same mind to participate (cf. Phil 2:19, 20)?

Are we an isolated worker of the Lord? Are we the sole person championing a certain cause? We may already be on the lonely downward path. In rarer cases, we may not necessarily be in the wrong, for truth is sometimes unpopular; it may just be improper timing. Regardless, wisdom calls for us to be extra cautious when we find ourselves serving alone. Let us not be deceived (cf. 1 Cor 10:12).

Good Intentions, Wrong Method

Asahel’s intention to end the power struggle in Israel by pursuing Abner was good in principle. Nonetheless, as we have seen, his method of serving King David was quite objectionable.

Abner was even able to point out at least one flaw. What we notice in the account is that Abner did not advise against Asahel’s pursuit of him. What he

did advise against was the *method* by which Asahael went about it. Namely, “Grab some armor, please!”

Likewise, matters of truth and doctrine cannot be compromised—especially the truths that have been revealed concerning salvation. But in matters of method, often we can be more open to and receptive of others’ opinions. We should be willing to listen and esteem others as better than ourselves and be willing to consider the interest of others before our own (Phil 2:3, 4).

More importantly, method sometimes violates truth, though we may not realize it at first. It is true the vast majority of those who serve God do so with good intentions—I do not know a single person who does not. God changed their lives, and they are compelled to serve (2 Cor 5:7). Their conscience is clear, their passion pure. They desire to channel their God-given talents and capabilities into a more honorable purpose.

But for those who fail in their service, what often occurs is that clarity and purity stray and are grounded on wrong standards or misguided concepts. What may have started as a well-intended offering, rooted in the word of God, slowly transforms into one based on personal reasoning, ambition, or pride. In fact, these may grow to be so impregnable that they become blind spots to the individual in service.

Even the great King David—a man after the heart of God—failed in this manner. His desire to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem demonstrated beautiful intentions and a willingness to serve. However, he used the wrong method from God’s perspective, since it violated God’s truths.

David’s genuine passion to serve God is evident, as he especially used a new cart to carry the ark. His love for God is also undeniable. But he should have known the ark of the covenant was made to be carried and not transported on a cart (cf. 1 Chr 15:15; Num 4:5-15, 7:9; 2 Sam 6:1-

11). This resulted in some unfortunate events, particularly the death of Uzzah, for God was not pleased.

Fortunately, David recognized his improper methods and corrected his mistake, carrying the ark into Jerusalem three months later (2 Sam 6:13).

Examples like this abound in the Bible (cf. 1 Sam 13:1-14, 15; 2 Sam 6:6-7; 1 Kgs 13; Acts 5:1-11, 9:1-4). If even King David can fall in this manner, how about us? No wonder we must always be vigilant, not only in our motivation but also our method of serving God. Let us soberly examine them before Him. Psalm 2:11 declares, “Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.” Let us serve not just with soul, but in Spirit and Truth.

Rather than rely on our passions and emotions, we need to cultivate a heart to seek God’s will always. Seek not that God is on our side but that we are on His. Seek not that our wishes be done but that His kingdom come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Indeed, if we pray with faith, if God wills, and so long as we do not quench Him, the Holy Spirit will continually help us and lead us. If we seek Him, His opinion will be revealed even in complicated or initially ambiguous matters (cf. Acts 15). He will guide and counsel us in the proper way, sending us in the way we should go (cf. Acts 13:2).

*But let us seek the Lord’s ways.
Let us be His mighty men of valor
to the very end.*

WHAT A DEATH

At the end of the battle, Abner retreated and David’s men were victorious. Yet, what a loss they suffered. Scripture specifically singles out Asahel’s death. “And when he had gathered all the people together, there were missing of David’s servants

nineteen men and Asahel” (2 Sam 2:30). Rather than record “twenty men were lost,” Asahel is uniquely mentioned to emphasize his epic and unexpected fall.

Present-day workers of God can relate intimately to Asahel’s make-up. Many have been baptized since infancy, reared with God’s blessings, and thrive both in society and in the church.

Highly educated, highly versatile, and highly zealous can describe many such servants, young and old. They are known by their good names, their talents, their biblical knowledge. And if not that, they are known for their fruitful service. They are often selected as teachers, church council members, or ordained as deacons and preachers.

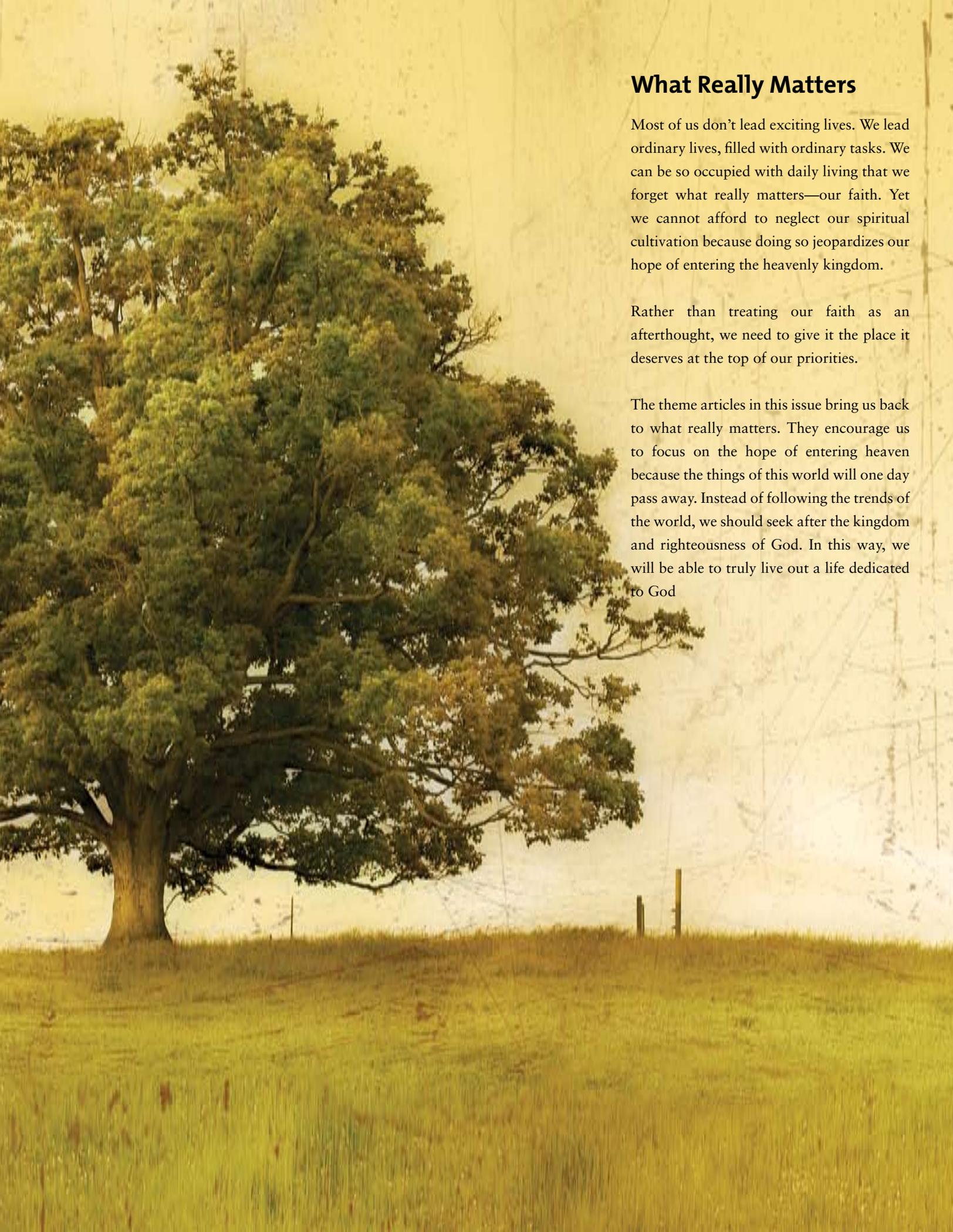
By the grace of God, their reputation precedes them. By God’s hand, their spiritual authority is established. The church is able to use them in many ministries, and God often works mightily through them. They are mighty men.

But one too many is the sad day when we hear that one of them has fallen. Many stood still where Asahel fell and died. The butt-end of a spear through the stomach! Surely our hearts pause, too, when we hear of a great worker’s fall.

Asahel’s downfall resulted from servitude out of self rather than servitude for the sake of God. Let us learn from Asahel’s mistakes.

Let us not be buried in our gifts. Let us not die alone. Let us not fall from foolish methods.

But let us seek the Lord’s ways. Let us be His mighty men of valor to the very end. ★



What Really Matters

Most of us don't lead exciting lives. We lead ordinary lives, filled with ordinary tasks. We can be so occupied with daily living that we forget what really matters—our faith. Yet we cannot afford to neglect our spiritual cultivation because doing so jeopardizes our hope of entering the heavenly kingdom.

Rather than treating our faith as an afterthought, we need to give it the place it deserves at the top of our priorities.

The theme articles in this issue bring us back to what really matters. They encourage us to focus on the hope of entering heaven because the things of this world will one day pass away. Instead of following the trends of the world, we should seek after the kingdom and righteousness of God. In this way, we will be able to truly live out a life dedicated to God



Overcoming Thorny Ground

Audrey Chan—Leicester, UK

You know the saying: when it rains, it pours. This describes well the fortnight I have just been through. Nothing overly serious, just irksome issues which came, one after another.

Firstly, strong winds brought down some fence panels in our back garden, and then some guttering on the front of the house came loose, making the rainwater gush down the brickwork. Next, the windscreen wipers on my old car stopped working in the middle of a rainy journey. Finally, I had troublesome dealings with a local garage, trying to sort out the last problem. In the end, I decided it was too costly to fix the car and started looking for a new one.

The search for a new car turned out to be a worse ordeal than all the aforementioned mishaps. The problem is, I like to make informed choices, and with the major purchase of a car, finding the right one became something of a mission. So, for the best part of a week, I looked

through car magazines, did research on the Internet, compared specifications and prices, and haggled with car dealerships for the best deals.

This all affected me in a number of ways, and none positively. Most of my time and energy was channeled into finding the right car, feeling sorry for myself for having a hard time, and weighing the value of different courses of action.

It all had a detrimental impact on my service to God. I had promised to do some writing for the church that week, but I could not concentrate. All that I could think about was sorting out the car. I had no room left for God's work: no inspiration, no enthusiasm, no energy.

CHOKED BY THE CARES OF LIFE

I expect that most people can relate to the above scenario. After all, we all have the cares of life to contend with. Sometimes our problems rotate: one week, it might be finances; another week, it might be

health issues, our children, relationships, or work pressures. Other times, they come all at once.

The issue is that we need our lives to run smoothly. There are often not enough hours in the day at the best of times, and one hiccup can throw our lives out of sync. But we should not be surprised when there are setbacks, as the Bible reminds us that life is far from smooth:

*The days of our lives are seventy years;
And if by reason of strength they are eighty
years,
Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow;
For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.
(Ps 90:10)*

In the parable of the sower (Mk 4:3-20), Jesus spoke of seeds sown on thorny ground, which choked the growing plants. He explained,

*"Now these are the ones sown among
thorns; they are the ones who hear the
word, and the cares of this world...choke
the word, and it becomes unfruitful." (Mk
4:18, 19)*

We need, then, to condition our mindsets, to make a consistent habit of remembering God's grace and providential care, and of articulating our thanks to Him for giving us life, shelter, food, clothing, and much more.

As human beings, we have limitations. We can only concentrate properly on one thing at a time. So when we give our attention to one thing, it is at the expense of something else. This means that when we focus on the matters of our everyday lives, we have less attention and time for God. Worse, the cares of life have the potential to drain us of our spiritual well-being. God's words cannot grow and bear fruit in us.

In my situation, they left me feeling stressed, tired, and spiritually low. I had

nothing left to give to God. Any capacity for bearing fruit had been well and truly choked out of me.

I am reminded at times like these that we need to reflect on what we should do to stop ourselves from being overwhelmed by the cares of life.

GIVING THANKS TO GOD

An all too easy reaction to life's problems is to grumble. We probably know the experience: we start by feeling sorry for ourselves, then we grumble about our predicament, and may end up distancing ourselves from God.

It is reminiscent of the behavior of the Israelites in the wilderness when they complained about the unvarying supply of manna and water that did not arrive fast enough for their liking (Ex 14:11-12, 15:24, 16:2-3, 17:3; Num 11:4-6). God was personally taking care of the Israelites and only expected faith and submission in return, but it was not good enough for the demanding people.

From the Bible, we understand that God does not like complaining. It signals ingratitude and insubordination. By

grumbling, we are indicating that we are unhappy with God's arrangements, that we feel that His love and care are insufficient, and that we deserve more. What was the outcome for the Israelites? Well, those who grumbled were destroyed (Num 11:1, 33; 1 Cor 10:10). So grumblers beware!

The antidote to grumbling is thanksgiving. The Bible reminds us, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess 5:18). In fact, gratitude towards God is

positively beneficial to our spiritual well-being. It lifts us onto higher plains.

We need, then, to condition our mindsets, to make a consistent habit of remembering God's grace and providential care, and of articulating our thanks to Him for giving us life, shelter, food, clothing, and much more. "More" is the fact that we have salvation because God sent us His only Son Jesus Christ to die for us (Jn 3:16). When we constantly recall this, we will not dare to complain, because we realize that God has given us His all. We will learn to walk humbly and meekly with Him, because we appreciate the greatness of His love and grace, and the fact that we have done nothing to deserve them.

Thanksgiving comes when we learn to face reality. In the comfortable lives that most of us lead, our expectations can be quite high. We expect lives with the minimum of hiccups, or in my case, no hiccups at all.

Yet, we forget that we live in a fallen world, one that is far from perfect because sin has entered into it (Rom 5:12). Perfection can only be found in heaven. And so, we should not be surprised when we meet with problems, illnesses, or trials. These are all part and parcel of life.

As Christians, we need to ask God for the strength to face up to them. They will teach us that this world is not our home and that we should not place our hope in it. Rather, there is somewhere far better that awaits us—a place where there is no sorrow or tears (Rev 21:4).

Thanksgiving also comes from putting things into perspective. Some things are frankly not worth getting so upset about. In my case, they include fallen fences, loose guttering, and a broken-down car. When I compare them to the greater challenges faced by many other brethren—such as serious illnesses or persecution—my problems pale in comparison. In fact, they become nothing at all.

We need to remember that all these things, big or small, will one day pass. If this were all that there was to life, then

we would have reason to worry and complain. But as Christians, we have a wonderful heavenly hope (1 Pet 1:3, 4).

CASTING OUR CARES ON THE LORD

Christians are not exempt from the trials of life, but we can take heart from the fact that the Lord understands our struggles (Heb 4:15). He invites us to come before Him, to His throne of grace, to receive help in the time of need through prayer. This is a special blessing and grace given to us as Christians.

Sometimes though, we complicate things by speculating on what we can or cannot share with God. For example, we may think that we should only pray for spiritual matters and may even feel guilty for raising mundane issues. Yet, prayer should not be complicated, for the Bible simply teaches us,

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God...(Phil 4:6)

And when we pray in the Spirit, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us according to the will of God and comforts us.

Likewise the Spirit also helps us in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (Rom 8:26, 27)

When we think about it, prayer is really a lesson in faith. Through it, we learn to communicate our worries to God and to let go of them. It requires that we believe that He has heard us, that He loves us, and that He will do what is best for us. We do not need to anticipate what God will or will not do—we should leave it to Him. Sometimes, this takes practice.

I remember hearing, years ago, an



anecdote from the pulpit about a weary traveler who was struggling with his journey home on account of the heavy load he was carrying. Still, when he managed to get a ride, he persisted in carrying his baggage. This story produced some knowing chuckles from the congregation because it brought to mind our own human foibles.

The fact is, when we pray to God, we are often like the traveler who continues to hold on tightly to his burdens, afraid to let go even when we are offered respite. Elder Peter tells us the remedy: “[Cast] all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Pet 5:7). So we not only need to tell our cares to God, we need to cast them upon Him, that is, to leave them in His capable hands. And when we do, we will have the chance to discover how amazing He is...

Returning to my earlier predicament, I finally negotiated the purchase of a new car with a dealership and was ready to trade in the old one. The collection day was the following Wednesday. The only remaining problem was a spate of bad weather. I was wondering how I was going to drive the old car with windscreen wipers that no longer worked to the car dealership some sixteen miles away.

The five-day weather reports on the Internet indicated increasingly bad weather, with rain forecast for that Wednesday and Thursday. I dithered about canceling the appointment but was in no position to offer a suitable alternative date.

Despondent, I phoned my husband, who was in Scotland at the time. His advice was to pray for good weather. I was not sure about this—surely God

THEME

was not at my beck and call to sort out something as trivial as the weather! But he reminded me that, while God was not at my beck and call, He is our heavenly Father. And so, armed with this thought, I briefed my two sons that night to help pray for good weather.

The next day I checked the weather report again. When I logged onto the web page, I laughed out loud. There, right in the middle of the week, on that vexing Wednesday, was a bright yellow sun symbol! I was astounded and humbled by God's graciousness.

Praise God, the sun was indeed shining when I went to collect the car. And it duly rained the following day. I will never forget that God is our heavenly Father who knows our hearts and understands our problems. Best of all, my children learned another wonderful lesson about the power of prayer.

Life is full of trials, great and small. They teach us to remember God's grace and to give thanks for all that is good. They also teach us perspective—that there are some things which are not so important in the scheme of things. However vexing and worrying our earthly worries may be, they will all pass. What is important is that we focus on God and rejoice in the knowledge of our future heavenly hope.

As Christians, we have the privilege of being able to entrust our cares to God through prayer. Better still, we can ask Him for strength to lead a triumphant life—one in which we can overcome the thorns in the ground. Then, one day, when we have received our heavenly reward, we will be able to look back and realize that the thorns were really nothing after all. ★



Seek First His Kingdom and Righteousness

Jason Hsu—Baldwin Park, California, USA

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Mt 6:33)

One of man's purposes in life is to seek after God. He has set the pre-appointed times of all men and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they might seek after Him.¹

Yet, today, we see very few people seeking after God. This has to do with our priorities. Jesus said no one can serve two masters, for He wanted us to know that each of us must make a choice as to who or what will be our first priority.²

Our priorities are quite important because they determine the goal and direction of our life. Where we end up, whether or not our life has a good ending, depends a lot upon our having the right priorities.

Let us therefore study what it means to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness.

SEEKING

A Matter of the Heart

A concerned parent may strictly discipline a wayward child. However, strict discipline sometimes fails and the wayward child's path is still not set aright. Although a son may outwardly obey his parent's wishes for a time, nothing has truly changed if there is no inward change of heart.

Our heart directs our path and the direction we travel.

The things we seek—our priorities—are matters of the heart. Just as the foundation for a meaningful love or faith rests upon a willing heart, seeking only becomes meaningful when it is founded upon a willingness to seek. Therefore, the heart to

seek is fundamental to our priorities.

There is a distinct difference between looking and seeking. Looking may simply refer to an outward act. Seeking, however, runs deeper, for it derives from an inward motive—from a heart to look. While looking may be forced upon a person, seeking cannot be forced because it originates from within, where no human hand can reach.

Therefore, unless a person first has a heart to seek, that person will never find.

When Jesus taught us "seek, and you will find," He was teaching us that "finding" is intimately connected with the heart to seek.³

A heart to seek stems from an inner desire to find. It's that inner desire—that heart—to seek that is precious in God's sight. This is the heart God blesses.

Having the heart to seek, therefore,



is vital to receiving the fullness of God's blessings in our life.

We will not accidentally stumble upon God's kingdom and righteousness in our life; we must seek it.

Seek the Right Things with the Right Focus

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. (Mt 5:6)

When a person is hungry, their focus is on food. When a person is thirsty, their passion is for drink. There are so many hungry and thirsty people in the world today, many of whom hunger and thirst for success. But Jesus said if we hunger and thirst for righteousness, we are

blessed.

Seeking can be viewed from two aspects: what we seek, and the way we seek. Successful seeking reconciles seeking the right things with having the right focus.

Seeking the right things means seeking what is good and right in God's sight.

For example, a man who diligently seeks material security might have a good focus and passion. His mind, his heart, his best are all focused on this goal: to retire early and live out the rest of his life in comfort. But the focus of his life may be entirely wrong. If he gained the whole world and lost his soul, did he really seek the right things?

Having the right focus means having a strong inner desire for what we seek, just like a hungry and thirsty person has for food and drink.

The story of Bartimaeus illustrates what it means to seek with a strong inner desire.⁴

Bartimaeus was blind and probably often sat by the roadside begging. One day, Bartimaeus heard that Jesus was passing by. He grasped the opportunity to cry out, "Jesus...have mercy on me!"

Others commanded him to be quiet, but Bartimaeus only cried out all the more, "[Jesus]...have mercy on me!"

The Bible says Jesus heard his cry and stood still. He then called for him and asked, "What do you want Me to do for you?" Bartimaeus said, "Rabboni, that I may receive my sight." That day, he received his sight.

Bartimaeus sought Jesus with the type of inner desire a truly hungry and thirsty person would have for food and drink, so he successfully received what he sought.

Successful Seeking Requires Persistence

Luke 11:5-8 records the Lord's parable about a persistent friend. In His parable, a man went to his friend at midnight and asked for three loaves for his guest. It was quite late, however, and his friend was

already in his bed, had already put his children to sleep, and had shut his door. So his friend replied, "Do not trouble me; the door is now shut...I cannot rise and give to you."

Faced with such a circumstance, most of us would retreat, if only out of respect, but this friend would not leave. Instead, he remained persistent to the point of being shameless. Although his friend would not rise out of friendship, he rose and gave as much as his friend needed because of his persistence.

We also must be persistent in seeking God's kingdom and righteousness. Apostle Paul encouraged the Galatians not to lose heart in doing good, which also serves to remind us not to lose heart as we do God's work.⁵ So if we are to be successful in pursuing God's kingdom and righteousness, let us persist in seeking it.

FIRST

The essence of priorities is placing first things first. To put something first means we place an importance on it.

Priorities of the World vs. Priorities of the Kingdom

Jesus once said, "[M]any who are first will be last, and the last first" (Mt 19:30). Many of the priorities of this world are not priorities in God's kingdom. Rather, the principles of this world are often at odds with the principles of His kingdom.

In the Sermon on the Mount,⁶ Jesus gave many blessings, or beatitudes. We notice that He called the "poor," "mournful," "meek," "hungry," and "persecuted" blessed.⁷ If we were to judge such people by the standards of this world, they would be called accursed. Yet Jesus calls such people "happy" or "blessed."

This teaches us that the priorities of God's kingdom won't always align with the logic of this world. Very often, we may find that the principles of God's kingdom do not make sense in the general scheme of human understanding or justice.⁸

Therefore, living by the principles of God's kingdom will not always come naturally to us and will often require a deliberate act on our part.

Jesus said,

"If you love those who love you, what reward have you?...[I]f you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even [sinners] do the same?" (Mt 5:46, 47)

To live by the precepts of God's kingdom, then, often means we must actively seek to engage the principles of God's kingdom in our lives. They won't always come naturally to us, so we must prioritize how we will act.

In this world, if someone slaps us on the right cheek, we naturally slap him back with equal or greater force. That's fair. And if somebody takes away our shirt, we would be a fool to give him our coat, too. But the priorities of God's kingdom may not be the priorities of the world.

Priorities can be viewed from two perspectives: (1) time and (2) importance.

Sometimes God takes us along the path of our life and through many trials to teach us this very thing: what is important and comes first. Because if we fail to know this, we too will fail to find God's complete blessing over our lives.

First in Time

First in time relates to order. We all know that, in nature, everything has a natural order. The sun rises and sets. Both the earth and its seasons follow a natural order. From creation, then, we know that God is orderly.⁹ In fact, every divine institution—from marriage, to family, to church—has an order.

So when Jesus says, "Seek first the

kingdom of God and His righteousness," we could interpret this to mean we must put God's kingdom in its natural order. This is an important way we understand priorities—by what we order first in our lives.

Many times we put our own things, not God's things, first. Yet, in Acts 17:26, Paul said God determined man's pre-appointed times and the boundaries of his dwelling. In other words, even a man's life is ordered by God. In some important way, God has ordered man's life to seek after Him.

Man, however, will not always be aware of God's pre-appointed times. Many times we don't even know where we will be next month let alone where God set the boundaries of our dwelling. Therefore, we should try to step only where God would have us step, and walk where God would have us walk.

For this very reason, we need to seek after God throughout our lives. But how can we do this when we don't even know where we will be or what we will be doing a year from now?

Proverbs 20:24 says, "A man's steps are of the LORD; How then can a man understand his own way?" Even though we don't always know where we are going or the complete order of our lives, we know this: we walk by faith and not by sight.

Our forefather Isaac also learned to order his life by faith. When Isaac first dwelled in the land of the Philistines, he faced many challenges. Wherever he pitched his tent or dug his well, the Philistines would force him to move.¹⁰

Then he came to Beersheba, and the Lord appeared to him. God told Isaac, "I am the God of your father Abraham" (Gen 26:24), and He confirmed His covenant with Isaac. After this pivotal moment, Isaac built an altar first, then pitched his tent, and then dug his well.¹¹ This was the order established by faith, and it bore the fruit of peace among men and God's complete blessing.¹²

Sometimes, God takes us along the path of our life and through many trials to teach us this very thing: what is important and comes first. Because if we fail to know this, we, too, will fail to find God's complete blessing over our lives.

Be the First to Act

When God's kingdom and righteousness become first in our lives, we are often called to be the first to act in accordance with God's righteous principles.

Many times we require others to act first. We live by the motto "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine."

But Jesus taught us differently. He said, you take the initiative and act upon God's righteousness.

Thus, Jesus taught that if, before you make your offering to God, you remember your brother has something against you, first be reconciled with your brother and then make your offering.¹³

Similarly, Jesus taught us to look to ourselves first before we condemn another's wrongdoing. Jesus said,

"[W]hy do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?...Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." (Mt 7:3, 5)

Putting God's kingdom and righteousness first in our lives often requires us to take the initiative to act first.

First in Importance

"First" can also mean "first in importance." This is related to our values. For instance, a person seeking to enter university may place entrance into the top universities as his first priority. This means, at this point in his life, entering the top university is what is most valuable to him.

Where do we find value? Many people value wealth and material security, and this is what often becomes the priority.

Jesus said that the Gentiles worry about what they will eat, what they will drink, and what they will wear, but your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.¹⁴ So Jesus told us not to be anxious over any of these things.

He said that God feeds the birds of the air, who do not know how to sow seed in its season or reap a harvest. God clothes the flowers of the field, who do not know how to make clothes; yet, are not the flowers of the field still gloriously clothed?

Jesus' teachings are very simple yet easy to forget. That's why we often exchange the Lord's promises for things of lesser value. Yet, Jesus said, "'But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you'" (Mt 6:33).

"All these things shall be added to you" means God will provide all our needs if we would only learn to engage this truth: to seek first His kingdom and righteousness.

So what is important? What is valuable in our life?

Seeking God's kingdom and righteousness is the most valuable pursuit we could have in this life.

GOD'S KINGDOM AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Rule and Character of God

Two important biblical images of God are King and Judge. God is our King because He rules and orders our life as He pleases. God is our Judge because His righteous judgments and precepts govern our lives.

Today, we should relate to God in both His capacity as King and as Judge.

To take priority in our life, God's kingdom and righteousness must first become relevant to it. God's kingdom deals with God's kingship. How is God's kingship expressed in our life? God's righteousness deals with how God's character and actions govern our lives. God's righteousness is most clearly expressed through His law. To be relevant, then, we must come to terms with how



God's law applies to our life.

In Christ, we are no longer under law but under grace. At the same time, God's grace should not be used as a pretext to live a sinful life.¹⁵

Many people today remove the applicability of God's ethical laws to their life. Some even attack public displays of the Ten Commandments. However, the outward display of the law is secondary to the more important display of God's law through our lives.

Because we live by God's word, we are still under His rule and righteousness.

God Is King

We show God is first and King by living a righteous life. Jesus said: Seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness. Jesus spoke not only of God's rule, but

also of His rule in conjunction with His righteousness. By living according to His principles—by living out a righteous life—we show God is King through the witness of our lives.

Christians often speak negatively about the Pharisees, equating them to "hypocrites." Yet the original goal of the Pharisees was actually quite noble; they were the "separate ones." Pharisees were the ones who separated out their life to seek wholly after God's law. They were the ones who determined they would not be defiled by the popular pagan culture of that time.

In other words, they were those who sought to live a holy life before God, and there is something very important we can still learn from them.

Some say Jesus' teaching in Matthew

5:20 is the theme of His Sermon on the Mount. He said,

"[U]nless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven."

What Jesus taught, then, was not to forsake righteous living under God's grace but that our righteousness must even exceed that of the Pharisees. This goes to the very heart of the matter.

Therefore, when we put God's kingdom and righteousness as our priority, we will turn away from our former way of life apart from God.

Living in God's Righteousness

Therefore, when we place God's kingdom and righteousness as our priority, we will turn away from our former way of life apart from God. Because His righteousness is our priority, our heart, our principles, and our values are different. Because our priorities have changed, our world changes.

Formerly, we may have valued money most; now we value God most. Formerly, we may have worried over our material needs most; now we worry about whether we're living as God would have us live.

The law says, "You shall not murder," but we should strive for more; we strive to not even be angry with our brother.¹⁶ While the world values those who are materially rich, we seek something different—the blessings of the poor in spirit.¹⁷ While the world would seem to reward those who assert human justice and autonomy, we seek something better—the rewards of the meek who will inherit the earth.¹⁸

Those who seek first God's kingdom and righteousness are asking, seeking, and

knocking on the door to the kingdom.¹⁹ They are striving to enter the narrow way.²⁰ They are seeking to do the Father's will.²¹ They do all these things because they understand what comes first.

Jesus concludes His sermon:
Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken to a wise man who built his house on the rock...But everyone who hear these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be a like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall. (Mt 7:24-27)

All of us want to seek after the things that matter most—the things that will provide a strong foundation for our church, for our family, and for our life. To find this, we need to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness.

For it is in hearing these teachings and doing them that we are like the wise man who built his house on the rock. That house can withstand all manner of attack.

May the Lord bless each of us with such a solid foundation. Amen. ★

¹Acts 17:24-27

²Mt 6:24

³Mt 7:7

⁴Mk 10:46-52

⁵Gal 6:9; cf. 2 Cor 4:1, 16; Eph 3:13

⁶Mt 5:1-7:29

⁷Mt 5:3-11

⁸Cf. Mt 20:1-16

⁹1 Cor 14:33

¹⁰Gen 26:15-21

¹¹Gen 26:25

¹²Gen 26:26-33

¹³Mt 5:23, 24

¹⁴Mt 6:31, 32

¹⁵1 Pet 2:16

¹⁶Mt 5:21, 22

¹⁷Mt 5:3

¹⁸Mt 5:5

¹⁹Mt 7:7

²⁰Mt 7:13

²¹Mt 7:21



God Planted and Love Grew

Emily Lin—Merced, California, USA

I promised long ago I would tell the story of how God brought Daniel and me together. It's taken me a while to do so because it involves a number of things in my life, some of which are a little difficult for me to share. It's really a testimony of the many lessons I learned through a period of my life, of how God guided me to where I am today.

If you've read Daniel's testimony,* you'll know that a preacher e-mailed him in the spring of 2001 and asked him to write me. That spring I had the opportunity to spend a month's time studying with the seminary students in the Theological Training Program—a truly wonderful experience and one of the most precious times in my life.

When the month concluded, the minister who had been teaching us told me he had contacted a brother named Daniel in Southern California and asked

him to write me. I was a little surprised, but I had suspected something when I saw my mother talking to this minister one Sabbath afternoon. I was twenty-four at the time, and I knew that was about the right age for marriage in her mind, that she was concerned about my "future."

As Daniel testifies, he never wrote me; he even deleted the e-mail from that minister. It did not bother me very much that I never heard from Daniel, although I was curious which Daniel it was, and why he never wrote. As the book of Ecclesiastes tells us, however, God has made everything beautiful in its time (3:11), and indeed this is the case with our relationship.

INTERLUDE

That was about two years into my service as a full-time worker in the ministry. Serving God full time was something I

had always wanted to do, so when the opportunity came about a year after I graduated from college, I felt both expectant and fulfilled.

I rejoiced every morning as I started the day that, as it says in the Lord's Prayer, God was giving me my daily bread. Carrying high expectations, I also experienced tremendous challenges and frustrations. I learned that Satan is real and is always trying to exploit our weaknesses in a way that is not always apparent when we lead our lives day to day.

The apostle Paul wrote of how he disciplined his body and brought it into subjection, "lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Cor 9:27). This verse was a warning to me that our desire and fervency to serve is not sufficient, and that it is possible to become lost even though we have worked for the Lord with fervor.

Yet God's grace is sufficient, and is shown perfect in our weakness (2 Cor 12:20).

A few months later and into the spring of 2002, I somehow fell into a state of depression. I think it was due to a number of factors, including the sudden death of my grandfather, but the overriding one was the frustration I felt in my service, at the lack of progress and how things just were not going according to plan. It was an overwhelming sense of helplessness that ballooned into a sense of hopelessness.

I was no longer sure of what I should be doing with my life. I had determined to commit myself wholly to the ministry, but I began to doubt my effectiveness and whether I could continue. As I lost any sense of direction, I began to feel resentful: Jesus said, "whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Mt 16:25), yet why could I only see a dead end?

I could not sleep at night and would be extremely fatigued during the day. I lost my appetite and would cry or become emotional without warning. My sister, a medical doctor, one day told me she believed I was depressed. I then realized what a state I was actually in.

There are times in our lives when we may encounter trouble or illness and because it is not shared by anyone, the pain and loneliness seem unbearable. I remember nights when everyone else was sound asleep, and it struck me deeply how I could be surrounded by loved ones and still feel entirely alone.

I can only say that prayer saved me.

Stripped of self, of any confidence or surety, I encountered the magnanimity of God and learned to submit my whole being to Him. Relying on Him, I discovered hope again and a constant abiding peace.

Even though there were times when I doubted my faith, I somehow continued to pray, and I know that my family and others also prayed for me. Truly it is at those times that we need to pour it all out before the Lord, to pray without ceasing. I would often read the Psalms, which to me are a kind of prayer. Psalm 103:11-14 reads,

*For as the heavens are high above the earth,
So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;*

*As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.*

*As a father pities his children,
So the Lord pities those who fear Him.*

*For He knows our frame;
He remembers that we are dust.*

As I faced my own weakness, I realized the fullness of God's understanding and mercy. God knows how inherently frail and limited we are, better than we ourselves do; yet in spite of, or rather, for this very reason, His compassion towards us is immeasurable. He loves us not because of our value or what we can do for Him; all He asks is that as His creatures, His children, we fear Him. This realization brought me comfort, as I prayed, "Lord, You know me, You know my heart" and laid it before Him.

Over the course of many months, God healed me. The picture that has come to mind is of a crustacean that loses its shell, and the vulnerable, raw, shrunken body is exposed. Stripped of self, of any confidence or surety, I encountered the magnanimity of God and learned to submit my whole being to Him. Relying on Him, I discovered hope again and a constant abiding peace.

Even though my reality had not changed or disappeared, somehow it did not matter as long as I had the presence of God beside me. It was through this process of shedding and suffering that I grew into a stronger, confident shell.

Through my prayers, I came to realize

that God calls us to serve not in one way, or in the way we think we ought to serve Him, but rather in all the roles we play, in all aspects of our lives. I thought of my grandmother, who had no career and in the eyes of the world no accomplishments of which she could boast, but who cared for those around her with her whole heart.

She did her best to raise us to be healthy, disciplined, and above all, to know, love, and fear God. Although she had no means of transport, she cared for widows and orphans (Jas 2:27)—broadly speaking those without family—as she could: by inviting them over for dinner; by telephoning them, especially when she had not seen them at church; and by keeping them in her prayers. She made it a point to greet and welcome everyone at church, especially visitors, even though her English speaking skills were limited.

I realized that I am called to serve God every day, through my roles as a daughter, sister, friend, co-worker—and yes, as a wife and mother.

READINESS IS ALL

Often we desire to be in a relationship out of our own need: to enjoy the pleasure of someone's company, to have someone to go out with, to be cared for by someone. Certainly there were times during my struggles when I wished that I could find someone, settle down, start a new chapter in my life. I sought and prayed for a soul mate to be the solution to my problems—the proverbial knight in shining armor. Now I realized those yearnings denoted I had not been ready at all.

Having reached the point when I was prepared to serve another and give of myself, my prayers to God on the matter also changed. In the past I had set my heart upon certain qualities in a mate, but now I acknowledged that only God knows a man's heart (Jer 17:9, 10). "Lord, You know man's heart, You know what is best," I prayed. "Let it be someone who truly loves you. Help me to love him and

serve him in whatever capacity I can.”

In November, we hosted a seminary student at our house and the topic of my “future” came up. I found out that he knew the minister had talked to me about Daniel, and I told him that Daniel had never written me. In December, I received an e-greeting from Daniel, and the abruptness and awkwardness of his message did not impress me very much. When I shared it with my mom, she encouraged me to keep an open mind.

The following month I was scheduled to travel to southern California, and so it was arranged that I would visit Canoga Park church, and Daniel would pick me up. On the way to church, Daniel got lost and we ended up on a toll road heading toward the San Bernardino Mountains. Perhaps due to his anxiousness to get to church on time, there was silence between us the rest of the ride.

After the morning sermon, Daniel was making announcements, and he appeared quite nervous; I was experiencing what I can only describe as a sinking feeling inside. Did God really want me to shed all expectations—in this matter, too, to “lose myself”? My experience, however, had taught me to rely on and pray openly to Him, and so that afternoon I prayed earnestly to God, “Lord, if this is Your will, open my heart.”

I saw how God had, in His own way, supplied my “wants” above and beyond my expectations.

After service, I expressed my uncertainty to the seminary student’s wife as we headed to their apartment, where Daniel would later meet us. She encouraged me to “give this a chance.” I remained somewhat disengaged as we sat in the kitchen and she and Daniel chatted, and even felt a little annoyed as he answered

his cell phone during the conversation. As I watched him talk over the phone—it was his mom—I very consciously felt a change of heart.

It was as though God had flipped the switch, the light had turned on, and I saw him in a different light. After the phone call, Daniel turned to me and asked about an elderly brother from Philadelphia. We realized that it was my grandfather, and I found out that Daniel had accompanied my grandfather during his visit to Hong Kong several years ago. I recalled how my grandfather had appreciated the warm hospitality he had enjoyed during that trip. This “coincidence” further encouraged my change in outlook.

That evening, during our first date, we talked about our goals in life and realized that we shared the same aspirations. Daniel was firm that his first priority was in serving God, above all other pursuits. I suppose from that point on, I knew that he was the one.

Over the following months, as we spoke over the phone, I found myself falling very much in love. I saw how God had, in His own way, supplied my “wants” above and beyond my expectations. Even as I came to know our differences, especially after we were married, I have looked upon our relationship as something God planted, this love as a gift from God. That has made it all the more precious.

THE FOUNDATION OF LOVE

That spring, I also began to job hunt. A chance conversation led to a phone interview, and as things progressed, I prayed that if it were His will, that God would guide all things to go smoothly. In April, Daniel traveled to Philadelphia and we became engaged. The week after, I was flown out to California for an in-person interview and was offered the job.

Daniel drove up to Merced and we considered the possibility of moving there. This too, was an instance of shifting expectations—for one, I had always

been adamant that I would never live in California. Yet each step had progressed so smoothly, and everything just felt right. After I flew home, however, Daniel expressed his reservations over the phone. I was shaken, because I had come to feel that this was God’s will, and this was our first occasion of difference of opinion.

After our conversation, I knelt down to pray, and through prayer was led to another lesson. 1 John 4:18 states there is no fear in love; as I meditated on this, I came to realize how our love for God is founded upon and manifest by our faith in Him. How can we say that we love God if we do not believe in Him and put our trust in Him? Similarly, my love for Daniel must be founded on trust in him. So I learned to set aside my own opinion and said to Daniel with a calm and open heart, “I trust you to make the right decision for us.”

This is a lesson I’ve returned to time and again in our new life together in Merced. It isn’t always apparent what God has planned for us, and certainly there have been challenges living so far from what is familiar. Part of me knows it is the training—this life in the “wilderness”—that God has sent us into the world. The test is living out the lesson that trusting in the Lord, just as serving Him, is a conscious, active choice we make each day. ★

*You can read Daniel’s side of the story in *Manna* 53 pages 28-31, “Tofu Custard and Orange Peel: How God Arranged our ‘Unlikely’ Match.”

Office Relationships Series

After a few years of commuting to and from the same office building, there aren't many new variables that cause an exhilarating rush to skip happily into work every morning. There are the days, however, when alarm clocks are snoozed more than once and a mad rush out of the house in an effort to beat morning traffic sounds all too familiar.

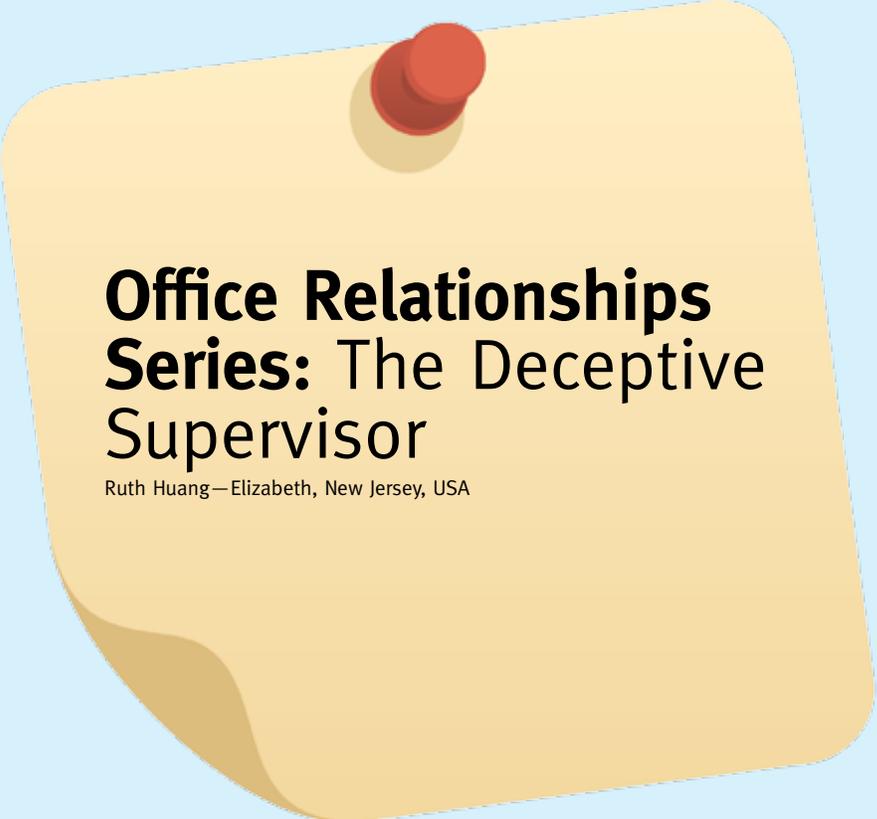
Of course, there is no right or wrong way to start a day. But there are godly ways that the Bible enlightens us to follow throughout our workdays. One of the most crucial components of godliness in the workplace is in the area of office relationships. Interpersonal relationships in the office can affect mood and behavior in and out of the office, especially if the relationship has gone awry.

It is essential, as growing Christians and career-building professionals, to provide an exemplary model in our hearts at home, at church, and in the workplace by not causing others to stumble spiritually, mentally or professionally.

While working with other people, we need to demonstrate an attitude and behavior according to the Bible. For as Christians, we are the "light of the world" (Mt 5:14). Our purpose in the workplace is to guide others in a godly way and not to shy away and cover the light within us that God has requested us to shine, due to lack of godly courage.

In hopes of bringing some mutual enlightenment, this series will be divided into several installments to focus on some core office relationships. Interestingly enough, most of these relationships closely resemble those from the Bible, which creates great grounds for learning.

Let's kick the series off with the Deceptive Supervisor.



Office Relationships Series: The Deceptive Supervisor

Ruth Huang—Elizabeth, New Jersey, USA

The relationship between employee and supervisor is probably the most crucial relationship in the workplace. This is especially true if your projects do not require you to work in a team with other people on a daily basis.

Supervisors can serve as great mentors, peers, and guides who sincerely look out for your best interests and help you along in your career. However, there are the unfortunate cases where supervisors are deceitful and manipulative, whose main concern is making themselves look good even at the expense of others.

If you do not get along with your supervisor, it really takes a lot of forbearance to continue working under what may seem like excruciating conditions.

LABAN: THE DECEPTIVE BOSS

Genesis 29:15-30 records the perfect scenario of a deceptive boss.

Jacob fell in love with Rachel, Laban's daughter. For her hand, Jacob agreed to work for his uncle Laban for seven years. However, Jacob was deceived by Laban when he gave him Leah, Rachel's older sister, instead.

What Jacob was given was not what he was promised after his hard work and loyal dedication for seven whole years of work. Rather, the crafty Laban received seven additional years of work from Jacob.

The Knee-Jerk Reaction to Deception

Although our projects may not last seven years, it is common practice to be rewarded after a long and grueling assignment that may require extended hours plus 110% effort. Perhaps, the driving motivation to take on such projects (aside from it being part of the job description) is the hope or promise of a bonus or promotion.

If that contract were denied at the

project's end, feeling unappreciated upset would predictably occur. This could even lead to the planting of a seed of sin in the form of resentment, contempt, and conceit.

In situations like these, it is easy to get angry and very natural to feel that you've been wronged. In a worst-case scenario, supervisors who purposely manipulate to achieve their own goals thrive on victory, and they put their subordinates down to feed their egos.

Lessons Learned from Jacob

In this story, Jacob gives a good example of what our behavior should be like when deception that derives from selfish ambitions occurs in a relationship with a supervisor or primary boss.

Remain Calm and Collected

When faced with a stressful situation provoked by your boss, the knee-jerk reaction would be to let your boss have a piece of your mind. But hindsight would most likely tell you otherwise when your relationship with your boss has gone awry.

Even advice from a business perspective would not encourage storming into your boss's office in attack mode, because it is just not proper office etiquette. Anger management classes suggest things like counting slowly to ten, removing yourself from the situation, or taking a walk to cool off.

From a Christian perspective, the best thing to do is to remain calm and collected before taking any action. To indulge in negative impulses is not abiding by the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22-23)—with the emphasis here on peace, gentleness, and longsuffering.

The attributes of the fruit of the Holy Spirit come from God. Therefore, if we find that we are lacking in any of these areas, which are more important than the welfare of a professional career, we may need to be extra mindful to cultivate our spiritual lives.

The longsuffering Jacob exhibited in his

Being proactive in communication isn't always easy; it is especially difficult if we are accustomed to being submissive and putting others before ourselves. However, we do not need to shy away from contesting for what we believe to be ours

pursuit of Rachel would have been in vain if he were not peaceful, gentle, and longsuffering when dealing with his uncle. Even though Jacob was frustrated and upset that his uncle deceived him, he respected Laban and kept his composure (Gen 29:25-28).

Communicate with Godly Wisdom

Laban consciously knew what he was doing and didn't intend to give Rachel to Jacob before giving Leah, his first daughter. However, the Bible did not record Jacob complaining after he was cheated. He did, however, inquire of his uncle why he would deceive him so.

And [Jacob] said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel

that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?" (Gen 29:25)

Although we should be tolerant and forgiving like Jacob by bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit, we must also communicate the situation with our boss. Communication needs to be paired with godly wisdom, so that we can benefit ourselves, edify others, and glorify God's name.

When faced with bad bosses, many of our coworkers try to fight back by documenting incidences or reporting how they were wronged, in hopes of benefiting from the situation. Unfortunately, very few of them can do so in a manner that actually touches others, removes negative thoughts, and rectifies the unethical practices in their workplace.

Being proactive in communication isn't always easy; it is especially difficult if we are accustomed to being submissive and putting others before ourselves. However, we do not need to shy away from contesting for what we believe to be ours.

Jacob did not leave the situation idle and just settle for what was handed to



him. He got what he wanted, but this was only possible because he communicated with wisdom.

Know when to be Submissive

When a decision is made and it is not the one you completely agree with—even after trying all means to reason with the boss—then it comes down to submission. Sometimes, we need to learn how to deny our views and accept those of our boss as long as it is ethical.

It can be hard to be submissive, because our own thoughts and emotions may not be in the right place. Personal career goals can get in the way. Also, constantly thinking negatively about supervisors and management does not contribute to a healthy working atmosphere. Even though it is difficult, we need to ask God to transform those negative thoughts into thoughts of submission.

It is often hard to see hope in the future, especially if the current times are difficult and we are hard-pressed to submit against our will.

Jacob reflected:

“There I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes. Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands.” (Gen 31:40-42)

Jacob submitted to the conditions Laban gave in exchange for Rachel by working an additional seven years. This requires an abundant amount of self denial and patience that only God can provide. Jacob did not let his pride interfere and maintained his respect towards Laban by honoring the new conditions.

It is important to remember that being submissive is not a sign of weakness; it

It is important to remember that being submissive is not a sign of weakness; it is actually a sign of inner strength that God uses to mold us into being better-equipped Christian soldiers.

is actually a sign of inner strength that God uses to mold us into being better-equipped Christian soldiers. Through lessons of submission to the authorities that God has placed in charge of us, we are learning to deny ourselves and be submissive to God.

Learning to deal with a deceptive boss takes a great amount of prayer, patience, and wisdom. If we do not cultivate ourselves constantly would be very easy to get discouraged and frustrated enough that we may be affected outside of the workplace.

Jacob teaches us a humbling lesson to be submissive and respect the authority that God has put over us, even if we have truly been wronged. He was able to achieve his goal amidst a bad situation by staying within godly boundaries.

Later on, Laban's attitude toward Jacob changed. He made a covenant to serve as a witness between Jacob and himself to end further disputes and make peace. Jacob gave all the glory to God for guiding him to prosperity. By the time Jacob left Laban's house, he had a strong conviction that the God of his fathers took care of him through those twenty years of hardship.

God teaches and takes care of His children for good. He would not do so in such a way that will harden our hearts to be bitter or vengeful. Sometimes, He molds us into a worthy vessel by means of our careers. Applying God's words to our daily lives at work will not only please God, it will reap wonderful benefits for our spirituality and for those around us.

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. (Col 3:12-15) ★



A Christian Perspective on Greek Organizations Part II

Kayla

In the last issue, a brother recounted the spiritual consequences of his decision to join a fraternity during college. Now a sister shares her experience and perspective.

Why did you want to join a Greek organization?

I'm sure I am not the only person who feels I have lived a somewhat sheltered life. Coming from a conservative family, I felt I never had the chance to properly explore what the world had to offer the way my school friends did. Joining a sorority was an outlet to express the side of me that I thought had been "trapped" for the past eighteen years.

Everything changed when I was accepted to a major university. An abundance of freedom was placed into my hands. No parents, no rules, no curfew!

At the time, I had just adopted my newfound faith in Christianity after receiving the Holy Spirit at the True Jesus

Church. I had been baptized for one year when I started university. Not knowing how my world was about to change, I met a couple of nice sorority sisters during welcome week who invited me to attend an orientation session. At a school with a large student population, I wanted to start meeting people. The extremely friendly sorority sisters successfully persuaded me to participate in rush.

What was rush like for you?

I attended a "ladies night out" event at a hotel. After a nice dinner, there was a party for all the girls rushing the sorority. I felt a little apprehensive about joining the event but decided to give in since I enjoyed dancing. Without realizing what I had gotten myself into, I started down the path of becoming a "sorority sister" that night.

I was not comfortable with the fraternity brothers who were invited and felt as

though the sorority was very much geared towards drinking, partying, and boys. I also saw something quite disturbing: a few rushees were subjected to uninvited groping by some of the fraternity boys while dancing with them. After expressing my concern to a few of the sorority sisters, they assured me that this was not normal and that partying was only one aspect of the sorority among many other great things such as sisterhood and everlasting friendship.

I got a little closer to a few of the sorority sisters that night. They were all so well put together and seemed so confident and successful. Before I knew it, I was filling out an application to join the pledgship program.

What happened during your pledgship?

In the beginning, I enjoyed it. There was a continuous stream of fun events during which they showered me with gifts and

love. I became more social and made a few friends. Then after about two weeks, the reality of sorority life began to show itself. With the fun came excessive drinking, partying, and meeting boys. I soon realized that this was the “networking” the sisters who recruited me were talking about.

I clearly remember nights when I would willingly take shots of hard liquor to repre-

When you're in a Greek organization, you undergo tremendous pressure to adapt yourself to your environment. You choose to engage yourself in a fierce spiritual battle, effectively jeopardizing your spiritual life.

sent my pledge class and to demonstrate how capable I was of holding down my liquor. Even the way I dressed completely changed. All of this new behavior meant changing my values and beliefs in order to belong to this new world that I was now a part of. I feel that for those three years, I gave up God for the world (Jas 4:4).

Week after week, there were endless “exchanges” (parties) with other Greek organizations in the surrounding areas. These “exchanges” soon became monotonous while negatively affecting my schoolwork. Because the sorority consumed so much of my time, I was forced to make my studies a secondary priority.

These parties were also on Friday nights. Being newly baptized, I did not realize the importance of Friday evening worship service. I often came home at 2 a.m. in the morning and woke up around noon. In addition to Friday night “exchanges,” almost every Saturday there would be some sort of community service work or another social outing.

I explained that I needed to attend church on Saturdays. They told me that they understood but still made me feel guilty about missing sorority events. I was told that if I was not there, it would

negatively affect my pledgemates.

I was lucky if I made it to Sabbath morning service even once a month. When I did have the opportunity to make it to Sabbath, I felt uneasy because I knew in my heart that I was living two separate lives. Six days a week, I lived in a world of darkness. One day of the week I struggled to hold onto my faith. At this point, the cycle seemed endless

and my spiritual well-being already lost. It was hard to have the heart to serve God with a sorority pulling you the opposite direction.

What effect did the sorority have on your spiritual life?

When you're in a Greek organization, you undergo tremendous pressure to adapt yourself to your environment. You choose to engage yourself in a fierce spiritual battle, effectively jeopardizing your spiritual life. When you join a Greek organization, temptation lurks around you 24/7. You will often be in an environment filled with raucous music, foul language, and unedifying activities of this world.

Sin does not occur randomly. James 1:14, 15 tells us that,

each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; when it is full-grown, brings forth to death.

The bottom line is, no matter how strong our spirituality is to begin with, the social environment we place ourselves in will have a direct effect on our values and our spirituality.

We first place ourselves in the situation,

and then we come to accept those around us and their actions. After that, we are slowly enticed by our own desires to participate and explore. No matter how we look at it, when we are surrounded by evil, sin will be born.

I once heard a story about how to kill a frog. Rather than placing the frog in boiling water, place the frog in a container of cool water. The frog will be happy in its new and different environment. As the water becomes warmer and the frog adapts to the temperature, it loses its sensitivity to the rising heat. Before the frog knows it, the water boils and it is too late to jump out.

In the same way, the warm water of a sorority or fraternity becomes a part of your life and you reach a boiling point where you can no longer distinguish what's right and wrong in the eyes of God. This is the same situation that I faced, but because of God's mercy and guidance, I was able to leave this lifestyle before sin led to death.

What finally made you decide to leave the sorority?

The thought of leaving the pledge program crossed my mind several times. However, leaving is actually very hard. First, the pressure to stick it through comes from your pledgemates who want you to continue the program with them. Second, there is pressure from the active members. Third, I was curious whether it would be as great of an experience as they promised. Lastly, even though I knew I was not on the right path in terms of achieving my ultimate goal of salvation, I led myself to believe that it was only for a year. Next year, I could strive to be “holy” again and try to make it up to God for how I behaved this past year. This attitude is not pleasing to God, as recorded in James 4:13-17:

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make



a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.

I figured that things would be different after I crossed and that the expectations to attend meetings and events would end. But it didn't. In a sorority, you spend all day planning for social events and going to parties. I was starting to see that these events were a complete waste of time and took me back to a world without purpose and meaning.

After crossing, the events continued and the following years held the same commitment level, if not more. Now, I was expected to take care of a pledge family of my own. I had absolutely no time for my family, friends outside of the sorority, and especially God. I left during my third year because it was clear to me that my sorority had nothing to offer me but a life full of sin.

I know that joining a sorority was not the right choice and I thank God that I can share my experiences today with those who are curious about joining a Greek organization. Most people join a Greek organization thinking that they will be in control of what they want or do not want to do. They believe that they will be affected only if they allow themselves to be. However, I would discourage any sister from joining a sorority because when you do, you become someone else. You compromise your identity whether you intend to or not.

In the end, I can only wholeheartedly and humbly thank God for pulling me away from the darkness. For three years, I was not living a Christian life in the way I dressed, acted, and supported unedifying activities. During that time, I was covered

in sin and felt I could not face God.

Thank God that through my university's campus fellowship, He slowly brought me back to His fold. By His grace, He arranged for caring brothers and sisters to nurture my spirituality during my last year in college. Having lived the sorority life allowed me to truly realize how empty my life would be without God and how much I need Him. Like the prodigal son, I did not realize how precious it was to be one of God's children. We are each precious vessels of God whom He chose to be sanctified (1 Thess 4:4) and we should cherish our position.

May all the praise and glory be unto our Father in heaven. ★



A Bundle of Love in Disguise

Chalcedony

For this issue we interviewed a sister who struggled with the idea of having a baby. Read about the lessons we can learn when life veers off our well-laid plans and well-thought-out ideas.

How did you feel when you discovered that you were expecting?

When I found out I was pregnant, I thought God was playing a trick on me. I did not want children, now or ever. I was perfectly content with life—I had just gotten married and my husband and I were happy. I was finishing up my master's degree and had a job with good benefits. After we saved a bit of money, my husband would go to law school, become an attorney, and make a comfortable living.

Having children did not fit into the picture. I had actually talked to my husband before we were married about the possibility that I would never want children, and he was fine with it. So when I found out I was pregnant, I felt as if all

my well-laid plans were ruined.

On one hand, I felt that I had brought this upon myself because I wasn't more careful. On the other hand, I wondered why God didn't prevent this from happening. I felt that if He really loved me, He wouldn't have allowed this to happen to me, especially at this point in my life.

I had everything planned out, and it wasn't as if I didn't include God in my life. I prayed and asked Him for guidance in every decision I made. But He allowed something to happen to me that completely threw me off track, and I was no longer in control of my life and my plans.

Why didn't you want children?

I did not want children for many reasons:

I feared that I would not be a good parent. Parenting is such a great responsibility, and I was not sure that I had the ability to raise godly children. It was hard enough to maintain my own faith; it

would be even harder to teach a child to fear God and obey His commands with all the negative influences of the world. I had witnessed parents trying their best to raise their children in the Lord but, in my mind, failing. I worked with their teenagers who grew up in church but had no relationship with God. This just confirmed to me that parenting was a futile investment and an impossible task.

I felt that it was pointless to bring another human being into the world. According to my understanding of the Bible, the world was evil and full of sin, so why would I choose to bring another person into this world to suffer? And since the world was under the dominion of Satan, things would only get worse, not better. I felt justified in my decision because my reasoning was based on biblical principles.

I also thought that children were a hindrance to a happy marriage. Children required much time and energy, which meant that the couple would have less



time for each other and their relationship would suffer. Having children would cause stress and arguments between the couple.

Last, I felt that it was too expensive to have children. We worked hard for our money, and it would all go toward the child if we had one. There were clothes and toys to buy, and later on, college tuition to pay.

It just didn't make sense to me to have a child.

With all of these misgivings, what kept you going as the due date of your baby drew nearer?

When I found out that I was pregnant, it seemed to me that God was cruel because He knew all of my reasons for not wanting a child, and yet, here I was, pregnant. I was so depressed that I couldn't even pray. The only reason I didn't get an abortion was because of God's command against committing murder.

I did not want the child even up to the month of her due date. Most women who have unexpected pregnancies usually warm up to the idea sometime during the pregnancy. But for me, this never happened.

I felt sorry for my unborn child because I did not love her as a parent should love her. On top of that, I questioned God, wondering why He gave me this child if I did not want her and could not be a good mother to her.

I had nine months to pray and think about these issues, and one conviction that kept me going was that God knew better than I did. I remembered the passage in Isaiah 55:8, 9, which says:

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

I just had to firmly believe that God, in His infinite wisdom, knew having a child

The first lesson, to put it simply, is to trust in God's power and His love for us. I had feared that I would not be a good parent and would not be able to raise my child to be God-fearing.

was good for me, even though I could not see it.

Another belief I had to hold on to was that God loved me and that He would not do something to me to ruin my life.

An interesting thing happened to me before I found out I was pregnant. I had gone over to a friend's house to do Pilates, and after I finished my session, her son gave me two drawings. On one picture, he had written that Jesus loved me and, on the other, that Jesus loved my husband. It was unusual because I usually took no interest in children whatsoever, and it was the first time that boy made a drawing for me. So, I took the pictures home to show my husband and said something along the lines of, "Isn't this cute?"

A few hours later, I found out I was pregnant.

It struck me how this message, that Jesus loved me and my husband, came from a child.

So I thought a lot about God's love for me, and it kept me going.

When my doctor confirmed my pregnancy and congratulated me, I actually began to cry uncontrollably, so she insisted that I see a psychologist. Throughout the nine months of pregnancy, she was persistent about getting me to see a psychologist. However, I didn't go because I knew that God was the only one who could help me solve my issues and heal whatever was in my heart. I needed to take up my issues with Him personally.

I thought that God would help me resolve all of my issues before my baby was born, but He didn't. Two weeks before the due date, I still was not at peace with having a baby. I prayed even more and asked God what exactly He

wanted me to do. But it wasn't until after she was born that I was able to learn the lessons God wanted me to learn.

What were the lessons that you learned through this process?

When my daughter was one week old and I was exhausted from being up all hours of the night, I remember asking my husband, "Is this a punishment from God?" During that time, I was eating a lot, nursing a lot, thinking a lot. I was still searching for answers.

Sometimes when I did have enough strength, I would kneel down and pray. Most of the time, though, I would talk with God in my heart. I would ask God questions and try to "hear" His answer to me. I think that through this process, God helped me.

I had to decide whether I should continue working or quit my job and take care of the baby. My mother was not around and my mother-in-law lived six hours away, so I didn't have much help. I prayed and asked God what He wanted me to do, and I also asked the brothers and sisters at church to pray for me. After prayer, I felt that the right thing for me to do was to quit my job and stay at home, even though our finances would be tight. This was bizarre, considering the fact that I did not want this child and had always envisioned myself as a career woman.

After I made this decision, God really began to open my eyes and helped me see what He wanted me to learn. He helped me to resolve all of the issues I had about having children, which was exactly what I had asked of Him.

God's Power

The first lesson, to put it simply, is to trust in God's power and His love for us. I had

feared that I would not be a good parent and would not be able to raise my child to be God-fearing. But I realized that we just have to do our best and put our trust in God because He loves our children, too. He created my child.

I went through nine months of pregnancy just eating and sleeping. I don't know how, but this life was forming in me, and I wasn't the one doing it. It was a miracle. When I first saw my baby, I was amazed at God's creation.

I could really praise God because His physical work in me had created a miracle. God was helping me to see that every one of us is a creation of His and a miracle. Because He created my child, He loves her, and He will guide her if I do my job. In a way, He has entrusted my daughter to me. It is my responsibility to raise her, but at the same time I have God's help and I can trust in Him.

I realized that my fear stemmed from not having enough faith in God's power. I did not believe God would be able to bring up this child. I relied too much on myself, thinking that a child was raised on human effort alone, and, hence, there was no guarantee. But God was teaching me that if I put my faith in Him and did my best to teach my child about Him, He would take care of the rest. My child was also God's child, and He would guide her the same way He guided me.

God's Purpose

The world may be evil and dark, but it doesn't mean that God is not at work in the world.

Although life may be difficult, God brought my daughter into our Christian family so that she could become a part of His people—the salt and light of the world. This was His plan, even if it wasn't part of my plan.

I didn't understand that it was God's choice, not mine, to bring a person into this world. I mistakenly thought that it was my choice because I had conceived this baby. It was ironic how couples who

really wanted children could not, whereas I did not want children yet conceived. This made me realize that God is the giver of life.

God's Work

Originally, I had felt that it was too much work to raise a child, especially with no guarantee that the child would turn out okay. But now I understand that despite the amount of work involved, it is a job that God has given to me.

Before I had my daughter, I felt that I loved and served God through church work, which made my life meaningful. But having her brought new meaning to my life, because I now understand that raising my daughter is part of the work that God has given to me. Since God does not place intolerable burdens upon us, He must believe that I have the ability to carry out this work. And if He has given me this work, then He will give me the ability to do it.

God also made me see that having children is a very valuable tool for strengthening a couple's bond. Rather than being the cause of stress and arguments, a child brings the husband and wife closer together.

There is no other work given to men that equals raising up one's children. By working together on the "project," it enables a couple to see more of each other's weaknesses and strengths so that they can better support one another. After the work is done, the couple can enjoy the fruit of their labor together.

Raising a child is actually doing holy work, so it will be very rewarding because God's work is never performed in vain. I do not need to be discouraged if

Raising a child is actually doing holy work, so it will be very rewarding because God's work is never performed in vain.

my child does not meet my expectations; I just need to continue to put effort into this important work. Just like with church work, we need to do our part and not focus too much on the present situation because God is in control of the results.

God's Providence

Initially, I thought there was no way that we would be able to afford all the things we would have to buy for the baby but God provided for us in miraculous ways.

My husband and I had just moved to a new area, so it was such a great surprise to me that so many brothers and sisters came to my baby shower. I was so touched by their love and generosity. They gave us everything we needed for the baby, and more.

After my daughter was born, other mothers would pass along to me clothes and other baby items they no longer needed. It turned out that my daughter had so many clothes we didn't have to buy any. I joked to my mother that I had enough clothing for twins!

Through all of this, I knew that it was God showing His love for us through the love of the brothers and sisters. I remember during my pregnancy calculating how much we would have to spend on clothes and other necessities, but we actually spent very little money because almost everything was provided for us. Every time I look at my daughter's things, I smile because I see God's providence. I believe that if He has provided for us so far, He will do so in the future. I am reminded of Jesus' words:

"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" (Mt 6:26)

God's Love

I did not have a close relationship with my parents, so it was hard for me to comprehend passages likening God's love to a

Father's love. I could only understand this kind of love on a theoretical level.

However, through nursing my daughter, I gained insight into God's love for us. When my daughter was born, I spent much time nursing and holding her, and I was reminded of Psalms 131:2, where David says,

"But I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with its mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me."

Looking at my daughter, I began to understand the kind of contentment you experience in the bosom of God.

Another verse that touched me to tears was Isaiah 49:15:

"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!"

It would be physically and emotionally impossible for me to forget my nursing baby. Yet, even if this impossible thing should happen, God would never forget us. This was such a strong message of God's love that it brought me to tears. It had taken a great deal of time and conscious effort, but I had finally established a strong bond with my daughter and felt much love for her. Still, it was incredible that God's love for me surpassed even the love I had for my baby.

I believe that this whole experience was God teaching me about His love for me. Before, there was no way anyone could have convinced me it was good to have children. But then God gave me a child of my own and opened my eyes.

Initially, I just observed my daughter. I neither loved her nor hated her—I just felt nothing toward her. I took care of her because she was my responsibility, but I saw how my husband really loved her. He would bring my daughter's tiny face close to mine and say, "Give her a kiss!" My response would be to turn my head away because I knew that if I did kiss her,

it wouldn't be from my heart.

Little did I know that God was working. During those three to four months of "observation," I saw the miracle of her growth and how she was a part of God's amazing creation. I noticed her smile of contentment every time after she nursed. I was amazed that she responded to my care and that when she looked at me, she knew who I was.

I now see the parallels between my relationship with my daughter and my relationship with God, and this has helped me better understand God and my own spirituality.

The first time my husband and I went out for a "date night," my daughter cried the whole time we were gone. When I came home and she heard my voice, she let out a loud wail but immediately stopped after I picked her up. I began to realize that she really did love me, and I began to love her in return.

I now see the parallels between my relationship with my daughter and my relationship with God, and this has helped me better understand God and my own spirituality. For example, I see her sheer happiness just by being with me. When I return to her after I am gone for a brief period, her whole face lights up and she runs to me for a big hug.

Her learning to walk and talk further strengthened our relationship because we could finally communicate with each other in definite terms (not just me trying to decipher her cries). Now, my daughter is two years old, and I see that she is becoming her own person. It has been a long journey, but God has transformed my heart. I not only love my daughter deeply but also genuinely enjoy being with her and spending my days with her.

In the same way, I can see how God would be pleased if we responded to

His tremendous love by simply enjoying spending time with Him.

If you could describe this experience in one phrase, what would it be?

The lyrics from the praise song, "Trust His Heart," encapsulate my process in overcoming my obstacles:

*God is too wise to be mistaken.
God is too good to be unkind.
So when you don't understand,
when you don't see His plan,
when you can't trace His hand,
trust His heart.*

I learned that I just needed to trust God's heart of love.

In the same way that I know more and see farther than my daughter, so God also knows more and sees farther than I do. God is in control, and He loves me, so there is no cause for me to worry. Even if something may not go according to my plans, I know that I don't need to be depressed or lose hope. A situation that may seem awful to us may actually turn out to be a blessing. Although I suffered much during this process, it turned out to be beneficial to me because God corrected my misconceptions and brought me to a new understanding of Him. ★



Five Loaves and Two Fish

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What Is Godliness?

"Godliness": A genuine reverence toward God that governs one's attitude toward every aspect of life.

To show reverence means to show deep respect and honor to God. It is accompanied by a humble attitude and genuine worship. For example, when God appeared to Abram and talked to him, Abram fell face down (Gen 17:1-4).

Exodus 3:5-6:

Then He said, "Do not draw near this place. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground." Moreover He said, "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God.

God commanded Moses to take off his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. Moses obeyed and covered his face. God is our friend, but He is also our sovereign Lord. To approach Him casually shows a lack of respect and sincerity. When you come to God in worship, do you approach God casually or as though you are an invited guest before a king? Remember Lord Jesus' parable in which he said, "But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless" (Mt 22:11, 12). We must have the right attitude when approaching the Holy God.

Exodus 20:18, 20:

Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. And Moses said to the people, "Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin."

"His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin." At mountain Sinai, the awesome display of lighting and thundering was to show Israel God's great power and authority. God wasn't trying to scare the people. He was showing His mighty power so the Israelites would know he was the true God and would therefore obey Him.

"Fear of the Lord": A loving reverence for God that includes submission to his lordship and to the commands of his word.

To fear the Lord is to recognize Him for who He is: holy, almighty, righteous, pure, all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-wise. When we recognize God for who He is and who we are (sinful, weak, and needy), then we will ask God to guide us. Psalm 25:12 reads, "Who is the man that fears the Lord? Him shall He teach in the way He chooses."

How can our prayer reach God? Be a godly person. Psalm 4:3 says, "But know that the Lord has set apart for Himself him who is godly; the Lord will hear when I call to Him."

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FIVE LOAVES AND TWO FISH is the True Jesus Church weblog where you can share God-given inspirations and reflections with others for mutual edification and God's glory. Let the blessings of God flow through you to our site visitors so they can be encouraged to draw closer to God. Don't hesitate to offer your loaves and fish to the Lord today.

Visit <http://blog.tjc.org> and start reading and contributing!

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Author Guidelines and Editorial Calendar

Manna is looking for certain types of articles, or article genres. Each genre constitutes a different subject matter and writing approach. If you are planning to write an article (regardless of topic), please try to adhere to one of the genres below.

Christian Living

A Christian Living article gives practical biblical guidance on real-life issues and how to use Jesus' teachings in our daily lives.
Article length: 1500-2000 words.

Bible Study

A Bible Study explores a passage or character from the Bible and draws out the teachings for readers to apply to their lives.
Article length: 2000 words.

Doctrinal Study

A Doctrinal Study examines an aspect of True Jesus Church beliefs and may present it in comparison to other beliefs.
Article length: 2000 words.

Exhortation

An Exhortation encourages and admonishes the reader in different aspects of the Christian faith.
Article length: 1500-2000 words.

Testimony

A Testimony recounts an experience in the Lord that will encourage and edify the reader.
Article length: 1000-1500 words.

Creative Writing

Creative Writing pieces include poems, parables, or short stories that illustrate a biblical teaching or idea. Keep in mind as you're writing: how will this edify the reader?

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Please email electronic files of articles (Microsoft Word) to manna@tjc.org, or send hardcopy and disk to:

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Fax: +1-714-533-8878

In your submission, please include your name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number even if you wish to remain anonymous.

Issue #59:

Theme: Media and Entertainment

Articles due: November 1, 2008

Through media and technology, we are able to get informed and keep in touch with the world at almost instantaneously. But the same tools that help us can also hurt us. How can we prevent ourselves from getting to the point of being media saturated? Where do media and entertainment fit in a Christian's life? And how can we use media to complement and expand church work?

In your submission, please include your name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number.

GENERAL WRITING GUIDELINES

CONTENT

- Content should be biblically sound and adhere to biblical principles.
- Article should be organized and have a logical flow of thought.
- The main point or teaching of the article should be clear to the reader.
- Readers should be able to apply what they have read to their daily lives.

GRAMMAR/STYLE

- Use active instead of passive voice.
- Write concisely.
- Use concrete words and ideas instead of abstract concepts.
- Use "plain old English" instead of obscure, academic language.
- Use the NKJV version when quoting Bible verses.
- Use American spelling, if possible.
- Adhere to the IA Style Guide, except for He/Him when referring to God/Jesus.

True Jesus Church

Articles of Faith

Jesus the True God

The One True God was manifested in the flesh. He is the Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for the redemption of sinners, was resurrected on the third day, and ascended to heaven. He is the only Savior of mankind, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and the only True God.

Holy Bible

The Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible are inspired by God and are therefore the only authentic scriptures which testify to the Truth.

Church

The True Jesus Church was established by our Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit (the Latter Rain) and is the revival of the True Church of the Apostolic Days.

Salvation

Salvation is given by grace through faith. However, it is necessary to rely on the Holy Spirit to pursue holiness and to keep the biblical teachings of honoring God and loving humanity.

Baptism

The Baptism of Water is the sacrament for the remission of sins and for regeneration. The baptist must already have received baptisms of water and the Holy Spirit. The baptism must be immersion in natural, living water and must be administered in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, with the candidate's head facing downward.

Foot Washing

The Washing of Feet is a sacrament which enables one to have a part in the Lord and teaches mutual love, holiness, humility, service, and forgiveness. The sacrament of the washing of feet must be performed in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ to all newly baptized members. Mutual washing of feet may be practiced when necessary.

Holy Spirit

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is a prerequisite for entering heaven; speaking in tongues is the evidence of having received the Holy Spirit.

Holy Communion

The Holy Communion is the sacrament to commemorate the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. It enables us to partake of the flesh and blood of our Lord and to be in communion with Him so that we may have eternal life and be raised on the last day. This sacrament should be held as often as possible. Only one unleavened bread and grape juice should be used.

Sabbath Day

The Sabbath Day, the seventh day of the week (Saturday), is a holy day, blessed and sanctified by God. It is to be observed under the Lord's grace for the commemoration of God's creation and redemption and with the hope of eternal rest.

Judgment Day

The Lord Jesus Christ will descend from heaven on the Last Day to judge all people; the righteous will receive eternal life, while the wicked will be eternally condemned.

TRUE JESUS CHURCH CONTACT INFORMATION

For additional information on the True Jesus Church, contact us or visit us on our website. We look forward to hearing from you!

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