True Jesus Church

MANNA

ISSUE 60 | January–March 2010 | **Money**

God Will Never Leave Me • His Hour, His Glory • A Life of Simplicity

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

Dear Reader,

Spring is a pleasant season. After the cold and dark days of winter, it's nice to have the sun shining brightly and warmly. Spring is also a time when animals and plants that have been dormant over winter start to awaken.

The resurgence of life during spring, both new and renewed, calls to mind our spiritual life. Some of us are new believers, recently called to begin a new life in Christ. Some of us are lapsed or stagnant believers who have renewed our faith.

No matter where we are in our life of faith, we always need to feed our souls with bread from heaven. And in this issue of *Manna*, there are uplifting articles on coming to Christ and growing in faith. The theme and Bible study articles give us teachings and truths to ponder so that we can continue to grow and lead productive lives that testify for God.

THE EDITOR

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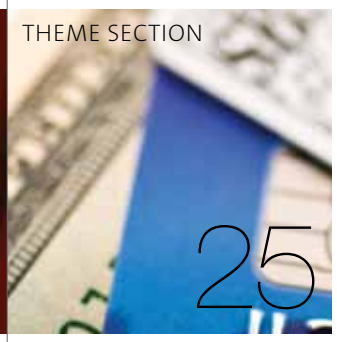

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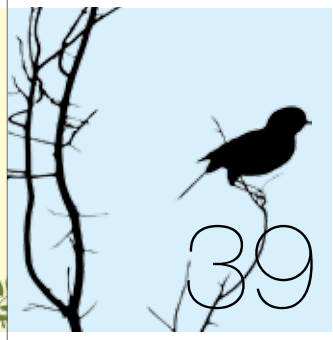

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How I Found My Spiritual Family

Molica Nol—Pacifica, California, USA

HAPPY ON THE OUTSIDE

I was born on April 16, 1993. My mom was sixteen years old and my dad wasn't even there for my birth. Soon after, he got put into prison for shooting someone, and my mom wanted to give me up for adoption. Thank God, my grandparents fought for me and became my guardians. It is because of them that I can be here in True Jesus Church and have brothers and sisters in Christ.

Growing up without a father figure was hard for me, and I struggled every day because I didn't have anyone to look up to. As I got older I started hating my life more and more. I really thought there was no point to life.

When I entered high school, my depression got worse. Every single day I would repeat in my head, "I want to kill myself." I felt emptiness inside my heart, and I thought that there was nothing that could replace that emptiness or fill it.

I hated my life with a passion because high school was difficult—I felt like no one cared about me, everyone had boyfriends or girlfriends, and I wanted to be cool, but being cool didn't make me feel better.

During my freshman year I would always sneak out and party to try to find happiness. For that short moment I always felt like I was on cloud nine, but really I was making a fool of myself. And I never felt truly happy.

My partying and depression got worse. I seemed happy on the outside but inside I was dying slowly and darkness clouded my heart. Loving people and trusting them were hard for me. I thought that everyone was out to get me; I was always paranoid about telling anyone anything.

I transferred to a new high school in January 2008. I was worried about it at first because I had to make new friends, but it turned out to be okay—except that everyone that I was friends with was into drugs and alcohol. At the time I thought that it was normal for teenagers to use drugs and drink, so I wasn't worried that it was wrong.

LOSING HOPE

After a month at the new school, I found out that I would be moving across the country to California after the school year ended to live with my uncle. I saw him maybe twice a year and barely talked to him. I only knew that he was a pastor and traveled a lot. I didn't see the point of living with someone who's never home.

Knowing that I was moving for sure made me completely lose hope for everything. I didn't believe that my life would get any better. I always looked on the negative side because it seemed like everything had gone wrong my whole life and I was never happy.

I got depressed whenever I thought about the move, and when I told my friends that I was moving, none of them believed me. They didn't care because they thought I was joking.

Everything turned bad for me: my school, my friends, and my family. I was failing in school because I never wanted to go, and I never paid attention in class.

My friendships ended because they were people I should never have trusted in the first place. My family was never close like a real family—it was a broken home where everyone was either partying or gambling, and no one was ever around.

By the end of the school year things got so bad that I wanted to kill myself and suffer by hurting and cutting myself as much as I could. I kept telling myself, "I'm nothing, I'm stupid, I'm worthless, and no one cares about me." I didn't care about anything or anybody, even the people that loved me.

As school was about to end, I thought about committing suicide by jumping off a bridge because I thought that was the easiest way to die. But someone made me realize that there's more to life than waiting for death.

One of my closest friends, who is like a sister to me now, said, "Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending." It really taught me that even though I couldn't start my life over again, I could start new today and make a different ending for myself.

EXPERIENCING GOD

I was ready to start fresh once I moved to California, but I actually felt more sad because I lost most of my friends, and I couldn't see my family as much as before.

But when my uncle brought me to True Jesus Church, I felt the love of the brother and sisters. Even the members who couldn't speak English would put in that effort to say Hi or *Ni hao* whenever they saw me. Never in my life have I met such nice and compassionate people.

I enjoyed going to church and learning about the Bible. I discovered that God is a great God, and His love is manifested in the brothers and sisters in church. Whenever I stepped into church, I felt peace in my heart that I had never known. It's a feeling I can't describe.

My life changed completely in the summer of 2008 because I experienced God for the first time in my life. It was the most heartwarming feeling ever.

The National Youth Theological Seminar (NYTS) was held in Northern California and I got the chance to visit a few times. Whenever I visited I would participate in the prayer sessions, and through the longer prayers I realized that I really wanted to change my life and receive the Holy Spirit.

The first time I heard people praying in tongues I thought that they sounded crazy. But I came to understand that the Holy Spirit was a gift from God and that I could be a different person if I received it. I was pursuing the Holy Spirit in all my prayers because I really wanted to stop being unhappy.

After Sabbath service during NYTS, a sister asked me to pray with her and the rest of the students attending NYTS. I replied "no" because I didn't want to pray for some reason, I just wanted to go home. But it wasn't time for us to leave, so I ended up praying with them.

When I knelt down I felt peace and joy come back to my heart. I realized that I needed to pour out my heart to God because He listens to our prayers. I was finally ready to let go of my past and tell everything to God because I knew He cared.

As I prayed, I didn't pray only for myself but also interceded for other people because I knew that I wasn't suffering as much as they were suffering. I felt a warm breeze, and I could feel the Holy Spirit move in my body. Then slowly I was speaking in tongues and I finally felt God's love and warmth upon me.

After the prayer ended, tears of joy continued to run down my face. I knew that God understood what I had gone through and had listened to my requests. My heart was finally at the destination it was looking for, and it was a calm heart. It was a feeling I couldn't describe, but God's words could:

Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (Rom 5:5)

FINDING MY SPIRITUAL FAMILY

A few days after NYTS ended, the Student Spiritual Convocation (SSC) took place at Garden Grove Church. I was really excited to go because it was my first time attending, and I wanted to spend time with God and pray for my cousin who hadn't received the Holy Spirit yet.

One night at SSC, it was really hot and the air conditioner was broken, so we had to open all the windows during the evening prayer in the chapel. Afterward I felt really dizzy, and as I was walking back to my seat I could tell that I was about to pass out. So I sat down on the closest pew and tried to breathe correctly.

I discovered that God is a great God, and His love is manifested in the brothers and sisters in church. Whenever I stepped into church, I felt peace in my heart that I had never known. It's a feeling I can't describe.

Someone asked me what was wrong, but I couldn't hear clearly. Then one of my counselors brought me into the side chapel and laid me down and made sure I had enough water. She started to hum my favorite hymns, and it was the nicest feeling at the moment.

Soon more people came into the room and I could hear them talking, making sure I was okay. Then they began to pray for me, and I felt the room fill with the Holy Spirit. As they finished praying, I was able to get up and go to my room and

sleep. I was touched by their love because they took time to pray for me when they could have been doing other things.

I was sad about leaving SSC when it ended. Even though I had only spent a few days with people I had never met before, it felt like I had known them for years. We all bonded as friends and as a spiritual family. This was the family I had been searching for my whole life.

I really learned a lot from the other students at SSC. They taught me how to relax and just be a kid for once. They also taught me how to love because they showed me so much love, and they told me that it's because of God's love that they can love.

There was a Bible verse we read during SSC that really touched my heart:

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)

It really moved me because this verse teaches us that if we have the Spirit of God, then we can have all these qualities, which God Himself has. Through SSC, I finally found the path I had been looking for, and I discovered that it's the path of salvation. I went home with a calm and pure heart, knowing that God is my Savior and is the author and finisher of my faith.

EMBRACED BY GOD

It is through God's grace and mercy that I was baptized at Pacifica Church a few months after SSC with three other members of my family. I truly believed that True Jesus Church was the only church that could save us. I knew there was only one true God, and He was the God we worshipped and prayed to.

In my prayers during the spiritual convocation before baptism, I made sure that I had repented for all of my sins. As I repented, I felt that the burden that had been weighing down my heart was finally lifted. It felt like I was walking on air. I knew God was listening to my prayers.

The students at SSC taught me how to relax and just be a kid for once. They also taught me how to love because they showed me so much love, and they told me that it's because of God's love that they can love.

When we arrived at the baptismal site, the water was just above freezing and the wind was so cold. My uncle told me I had to be the brave one and enter the water first. As I entered the icy-cold water, I was repeating "hallelujah" in my heart.

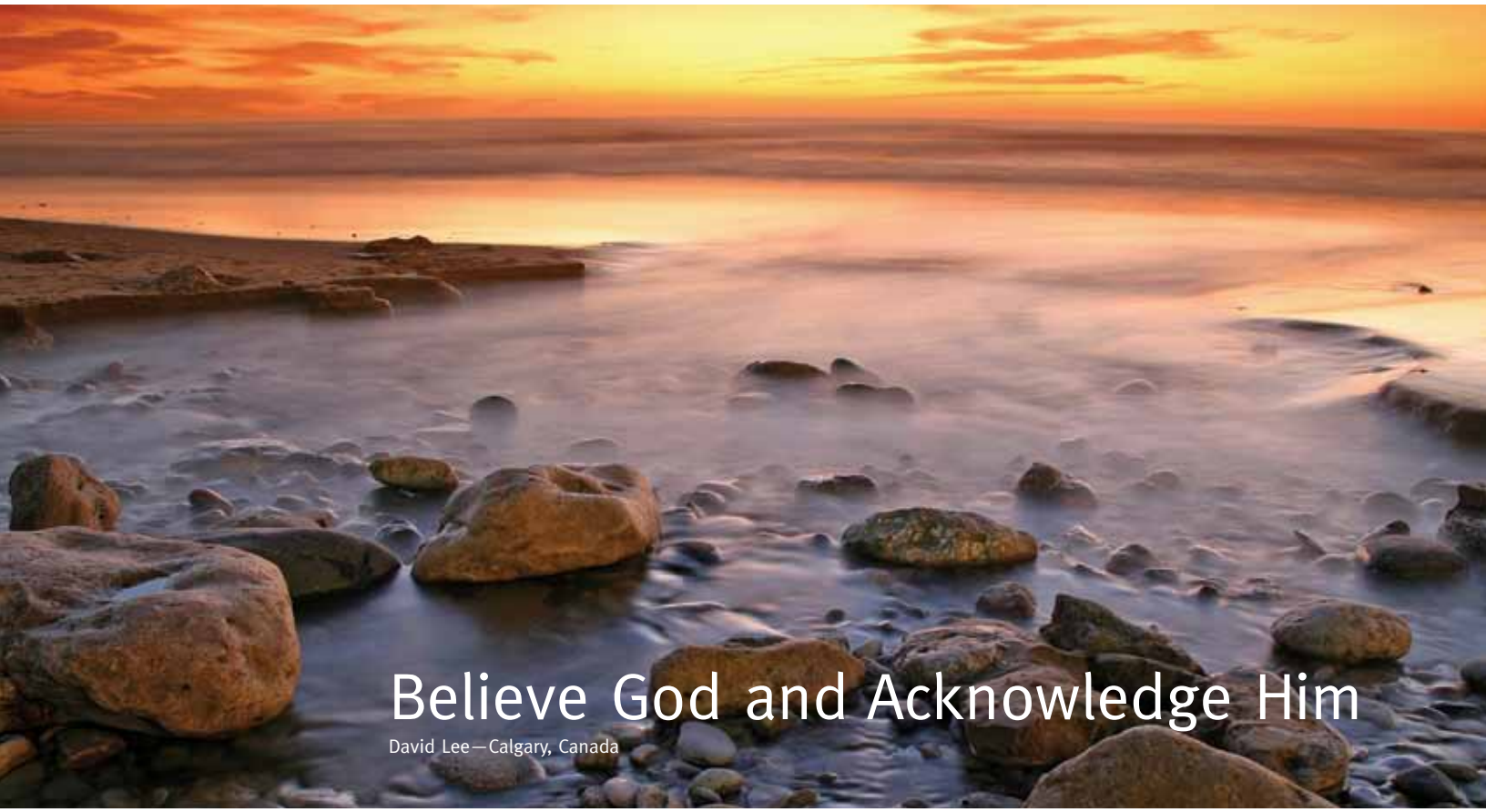
My sinful body was submerged in the water in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. As I slowly got out of the water, I felt warm. God had just washed away my sins, and it felt like He was embracing me with His arms.

Since then, my family has noticed that I have changed so much as a person. My biggest weakness has always been anger. I struggled with it every day because the smallest things were enough to get me going. When I got angry I didn't think before I acted or spoke, so I often hurt people's feelings without knowing it and yelled or punched things in my way.

But after coming to Christ and receiving baptism, I realized that none of these things would solve my problem. When I am angry or frustrated, instead of acting out right away, I am able to take a step back and think to myself: Is that what a Christian would do?

Living in a house where God is our priority shows me that our family helps us understand what's wrong and right and whether the choices we make are according to God's will. I have learned that I need to rely on Him whenever I start to get angry. Knowing that God is there for me and won't give up on me no matter what is what helps me the most.

Weaknesses can be a way for God to show the grace, understanding, and mercy He has for us. I drew close to God through repenting of my sins and changing the direction of my life. Through His love and mercy I have found my spiritual family and a calm and peaceful heart. Most of all, I know now that God will never leave us hanging when we need Him the most. ★



Believe God and Acknowledge Him

David Lee—Calgary, Canada

A LUMP ON THE NECK

I thank God for giving me this opportunity to share the blessings and grace that He has given me. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the brothers and sisters for all the prayer, love, and care that they have shown me. Without them, it would have been even more difficult to live through the past couple of years.

In late September 2007, I discovered a lump on the right side of my neck as I finished washing my face before going to work. This lump was fairly large, about 4 cm in size. I really had no idea how long it had been there because it was the first time I had noticed it. I didn't think too much about it but jokingly asked my wife to look at it. She became worried right away and had me make an appointment to see our family doctor.

During the appointment, I could see that my doctor was a little worried but was trying not to cause any unnecessary alarm by speaking casually. She said that she had seen patients in the past who had a certain condition that could cause swelling in the neck. But I knew she was concerned it was more than that because she booked an ultrasound for me in addition to a test for the condition she mentioned.

She kept saying that the ultrasound was just a precaution because she wanted to cover all possibilities and that I shouldn't worry too much yet. I didn't think too much of it at the time, but I could tell that my wife was a little worried and made sure I made the ultrasound appointment. I truly thank the due diligence of my family doctor because, otherwise, my condition would have worsened with time.

On the day of my ultrasound, I was a little worried. I hoped that it was easy to treat and not anything bad. The thought of cancer was in the back of my mind, but I still thought it was almost impossible. I didn't think cancer would happen to me, especially because there was no history of cancer in my family.

Perhaps this is what others refer to as denial, but I wasn't consciously doing it. I believe this is an example of when we are in certain situations, we ourselves don't realize what is happening. But people around us, like family members and close friends, can see the bigger picture and help us understand it.

In my case, it was my wife who saw what was happening and made sure I did everything necessary to find out what was wrong with me. Otherwise, I would have delayed the tests because I didn't feel sick, tired, or show any other symptom of illness.

Hoping for Answers

During the ultrasound, the technician was very careful in going through every inch of my neck, not just the area with the lump. This examination took quite a while. At the end of the session, I asked

the technician what she saw and she wasn't able to tell me. She only said that there were some "things" there and that the doctor would take a closer look and let me know.

I realized that she went around my neck several times because there were other masses there. It wasn't just the large bump on the side of my neck; there were other growths all over my neck. Now there were even more questions than answers.

When the ultrasound results came back, I went to see my family physician hoping for some answers. When I asked her what she thought about the results, she simply told me that there was a large mass about 4 cm in size and other masses as well around my neck. But she didn't know whether the large mass was cancerous. The other masses were smaller, which was why we couldn't see them or feel them yet.

The doctor asked me if I wanted to see a surgeon or a head and neck specialist. I was still pretty naïve at that point so I didn't think much of the choices she gave me. I simply told her to arrange whatever she thought was best.

She made an appointment for me to see the surgeon and mentioned that a biopsy may be required. I did start to feel a little more anxious then, but I doubted that it was anything close to what my family members were feeling. They didn't share their concerns with me, but I could tell from their faces that they were worried.

When I went to see the specialist, he wasn't afraid to say what was on his mind. During my first appointment, he felt around my neck and immediately said that he thought I had lymphoma.

I remember that I wasn't that scared or worried at the time because the doctor was only guessing and no tests had been done yet. I still truly believed that God was watching over me and would look after me.

My belief was not just a blind belief in God. It was backed up by experiences of how He had looked after me and my family in the past, especially when my daughter was born with a diaphragmatic hernia in 2003. I knew that there was still a chance that this lump in my neck was nothing serious or just a benign tumor that could be easily removed.

DIAGNOSIS

After the physical examination by the surgeon, he arranged a biopsy for me. When the results came back a week later, the surgeon made an appointment to discuss the report with me.

He led my wife and me into his office, sat us down, was silent for a little bit, and then came right out and said, "I'm sorry, but it is cancerous." I maintained my composure and asked if it was benign or malignant. He said it was malignant and added that that was not the real problem.

I looked at him for an explanation of what he meant by that. He continued by saying that the lump in my neck was not the source of the cancer. The cancer had spread to my neck, and it would be a race against time to find the source of it.

At that point, I pretty much fell apart. Tears gathered in my eyes, and my heart started beating faster. For a moment, I felt that my God had failed me. I had never felt so afraid in my life.

My mind raced through all sorts of scenarios. *Could I be cured? What are my chances of survival? How much longer do I have to live? How is my life going to change? Who is going to take care of my family?*

As I tried to process the diagnosis, I did my best to calmly ask the surgeon what the next step would be. He explained that several different tests would need to be done to find the source of the cancer—further biopsy, CT scan, bone scan, and MRI.

Something I am very thankful for now is that the surgeon suspected that the cancer might have originated from my nose and scheduled me to see a nose specialist as well as a couple of oncologists at the Sunnybrook Cancer Center. With cancer of the nasopharynx (nose), the typical symptoms are nosebleeds and a blocked nasal passage on one side. I had none of those symptoms, but the doctor nevertheless made an appointment with the nose specialist.

After we left the office, my wife went out to call my parents while I waited for appointments to be scheduled for the different tests I had to take. I knew my wife was quite upset, but I really had no idea what I could say to her. I was still feeling perfectly normal at the time because I had no symptoms whatsoever of the disease. It was hard for me to accept and believe that I had cancer.

FINDING COMFORT AND DEALING WITH TREATMENT

The drive home was very quiet. That night was a very long night for me. I had never felt so cold and lonely. The first thing I thought about was my chance of survival. I also started wondering if I would be able to see my young children grow up. I truly felt that my road had come to an end, and I no longer had a future ahead of me.

We often hear people talk about looking at life from the perspective of death, and I truly saw my whole life coming to an end at that point. Many things that I should or should not have done started to become clearer to me. My past flashed through my mind, and I started to worry that God wasn't pleased with me and that He had left me on my own.

It happened that Pr YM Yang was leading a week-long Bible seminar at Toronto Church (I was living in Toronto at the time). I missed the seminar the day I received the diagnosis, and when I went to service the next evening a brother asked me why I had missed the service when I was supposed to do audio recording. I didn't know what to tell him so I simply said that I was sick.

However, my dad had already spoken to Pr Yang, asking him to put in a prayer request for me, so my wife and I were

comforted by the service that night. My wife told me that she felt a lot better after listening to the sermon because Pr Yang described how he had also battled against cancer. When I look back now, I can see that God's provision and arrangement is at times both mysterious and perfect.

A few days later I started going in for tests. During the examination by the nose specialist, he inserted a probe with a camera into my nose and found a growth at the back of my nose.

He immediately performed a biopsy and removed some tissue samples. It wasn't pretty and it didn't feel pretty, either. But I felt a sense of relief in my heart because they were able to find the source of the cancer so quickly. I truly believe that this is all part of God's guidance.

A week later, I met with the oncologist at Sunnybrook Cancer Center. By that time, the results of the biopsy were back, and the oncologist confirmed that I had cancer of the nose. They explained the types of treatment that I would need to undergo and approximately when they would start.

I was seen by the radiation oncologist, the surgical oncologist, as well as the medical oncologist. They told me that surgery was not necessary yet, but I would have to undergo both radiation and chemotherapy at the same time. They let me know all the possible side effects and the preparations I needed for treatment, such as visiting the dentist and having a feeding tube put in my stomach. All of this happened fairly quickly within a month's time.

I was scheduled for six months of treatment: I had to undergo one cycle of chemotherapy each month for a total of six cycles. The first three cycles were accompanied by thirty-four days of radiation.

The second month of treatment was the most difficult because the chemotherapy and the radiation were the heaviest then. Whatever side effects were possible, I experienced: vomiting, mouth sores, dry mouth, sore throat, constipation. Whatever came with the treatment, I had.

LEARNING THROUGH TRIALS

Under such circumstances, it is not surprising when people ask God, "How could You let this happen to me when I believe in You?" I also asked the same question for a time while undergoing treatment.

But if we truly think about it, many different things happen in our lives. Some

may be more serious than others, but each of us suffers through different tribulations simply because this is part of life.

The question is not so much why these things happen to us, but what we can learn from them. Does anyone learn how to skate without ever falling? Has anyone learned how to ride a bike without getting a few scrapes here and there? Has a child learned how to walk without getting a few bumps and bruises? Any difficulty or hardship we face teaches us something, and hopefully we become a better person from it.

As I look back at these experiences now, I truly see and understand how God guides us and leads us. It requires us first to place our faith and reliance on Him because we simply cannot see what is ahead of us.

We all know that one day, our physical life will end. I remember a minister once said that to have a meaningful, godly life, we should look at what we would like to have accomplished before we die. I am not referring to physical things such as traveling around the world at least once, but rather what we need to do to prepare ourselves so that we can be at Jesus' bosom in His heavenly kingdom.

While dealing with cancer, especially in December 2007, when I felt physically and spiritually at the weakest, I started to appreciate and understand what ministers mean when they encourage us to lead a meaningful godly life.

When I was spiritually weak, all I could think about was how unfair my life was compared to others. I wondered how others who did worse things than I ever did could go unpunished when I suffered while trying to live a godly life.

I tried to make sense of God's righteousness from my own perspective, but I realized that it was only making me weaker. I thank God that as I prayed about my situation and attitude, He helped me understand that how we view our lives depends on asking the correct types of questions. Do we often ask God why certain things happen to us? Or do we ask what we can learn from this opportunity that God has provided us?

I will be the first to admit that sometimes it is hard for me to ask the right questions. When we are weak, we tend to ask why. But Jesus can help us. We should pray and ask Him to give us strength. And if and when we ask Him sincerely and patiently, He will give us the strength we need to overcome whatever obstacles we are facing.

We have to make the most of our time to know God and serve Him. So whenever we come to church and attend services or whenever we need to do a little work for God, we shouldn't do it because it is our obligation as a Christian. Rather, it is an opportunity provided by God for us to get to know Him and learn from Him.

When we go to school, we learn. When we go to work, we train. When we work for God, we grow. And when we face challenges, we are refined. The question is whether we take hold of these opportunities.

RELYING ON GOD

"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." (Mt 6:31-34)

"Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven." (Mt 10:29-32)

We don't know what will happen to us each day, but we do know who has control of tomorrow. And we are worth more than many sparrows, so if we believe in God and acknowledge Him, He will surely look after us.

I completed all the necessary treatments in April 2008. It was definitely difficult, but God saw me through it. I will always cherish this experience and the lessons I learned.

As I look back at these experiences now, I truly see and understand how God guides us and leads us. It requires us first to place our faith and reliance on Him because we simply cannot see what is ahead of us. I also realized that we cannot just rely on what we, as man, think is good but must rely on what God thinks is good. It is difficult do this sometimes, but the more we know the words of God in the Bible, the easier it is for us to differentiate what God thinks and what we think.

Please continue to pray for me, that He will continue to lead me and guide me to walk on His path. May all glory, praise, and honor be unto His name. ★

Finding New Life Through God

A WILD PAST

I am a Christian today because of God's love. I believe He chose me when I was in my rebellious stage, when I was the most undeserving, to show me how much He loves me.

When I was in grade five, my family moved from Calgary to a small town just forty-five minutes away from the city and opened a restaurant there. My mom hired more workers during Saturdays so that she could drive me and my siblings to the city for Chinese school, swimming lessons, piano lessons, art lessons, and other activities.

During my teenage years I continued to attend Chinese school on Saturdays. When my mom dropped my siblings and me off for Chinese school, I often sneaked out with my friend and roamed around downtown and Chinatown. We joined other friends and hung out.

For fun we stole cars for joy rides or weekend trips, partied and drank, vandalized, stole anything we could, and did drugs.

We fought often, both physically and verbally, within our group and with other groups of people we knew. There was a lot of violence, betrayal, anger, false friendships, jealousy, and lies.

My family was really worried about me during this time because they knew I had bad friends but didn't know what I was up to all the time.

In our family of four children, I was the middle child and often referred to as the troublemaker. Ever since I was young, I was left out by my siblings because I was different from them. I was not obedient like them, nor did I like to study or help out around the house. Instead, I drew closer to my friends and became more distant from my family.

I would argue with my mom and yell at her until she thought she was going crazy. There was one time she ran home from work and started to drink whiskey straight from the bottle. Even though my mom didn't drink, she was so upset and angry with me that she would rather die. My dad was a quiet man and didn't say much, but I knew from my siblings that he had given up on me and had in fact disowned me.

MEETING CALVIN

I continued living a wild and dangerous life with bad influences throughout high school. My senior year, I celebrated my seventeenth birthday with a barbeque at a park. In the large group of people who gathered, I met someone named Calvin.

When we first met, we didn't get along because our best friends were enemies, but despite our mutual dislike, we started to talk on the phone and then became friends. At the time, he was part of a group of people who did even worse things than my group of friends.

Soon after we met, Calvin went to a different city to finish his studies. We

After experiencing the movement of the Holy Spirit and through studying the Bible, my attitude started to change towards my family and friends. There were fewer arguments at home, and Calvin encouraged me to love my family and to respect my parents.

would talk on the phone every day and visit each other whenever we could.

After a few months, I started to have a harder time getting a hold of him. He told me that it was because he was attending church services. This was a big surprise to me, as he had never mentioned he was a Christian and that he went to church. The church that he was attending was called True Jesus Church.

He was busy most of the time because he attended services Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday—sometimes even more if there was family service. I didn't know what was happening to him because he was in the next province, so I decided to take a few days off from school to visit him.

His Surprising Change, My Weight Lifted

When I arrived, he looked like a different person. He no longer wore dark designer clothing, and his hair was no longer highlighted and styled fashionably. He was wearing a green sweater and khakis with his hair dyed back to black and gelled to one side.

His friends, who were True Jesus Church brothers, were genuinely nice people, unlike the friends he hung out with before.

While I was visiting I watched him walk to the bus stop to go to school early in the morning, carrying a large backpack. There is nothing extraordinary about this in general—many people do this every day. However, I witnessed a person completely transformed from the way he used to be. After he returned from school I asked him to take me to his church the following Saturday.

When we arrived at church, the sermon was on jealousy. It was really intriguing because it was a problem I struggled with. I felt so peaceful and happy after hearing the sermon because it felt like a lot of weight was taken off of me.

Calvin introduced me to many brothers and sisters that day. One sister came to me and shared many words of encouragement. She told me to seek after God because He really loved me. She mentioned that Calvin could bring me to church but could not bring me salvation. It was up to me to seek after God and to find Him. I really felt God's love through the brothers and sisters that day and was even touched to tears.

I had always thought that I knew God and that He was automatically part of my life; I never thought that I had to pursue and seek after Him. As devout Catholics, my family attended Sunday Mass every week. But I never felt God the way I felt Him through other brothers and sisters at True Jesus Church, and the sermons never touched me the way they did at this church.

CHANGING OLD HABITS

After this experience at True Jesus Church, I went home and started reading the Bible. I also carefully and thoroughly read the basic belief booklet that they gave me at church. The last part of this booklet talked about the second coming of Christ. One part quoted 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

This painted a vivid picture of the second coming of Christ. After reading it, I really wanted to be one of those who would be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord and to return to our home in heaven forever!

I continued to study the Bible and learn more about the beliefs of the True Jesus Church. A few months later, I attended service at Calgary House of Prayer. I prayed for the first time with other brothers and sisters.

The preacher said that we needed to be humble, kneel down before God, repent to Him of our sins, and ask for forgiveness. He also said that those who had not received the Holy Spirit should pray for it.

I followed what the preacher said to do and knelt down and started to repent. I started digging up all the sins I had committed in the past, and I felt so ashamed while I was thinking of what I had done. I had never felt ashamed before and never regretted anything I did.

However, in that prayer I felt really ashamed of myself and unworthy to ask for God's Holy Spirit. While I was thinking this, my arms started to shake, I started to cry, and I felt God's presence for the first time in my life. The prayer was very peaceful and full of light.

After experiencing the movement of the Holy Spirit and through studying the Bible, my attitude started to change towards my family and friends. There were fewer arguments at home, and Calvin encouraged me to love my family and to respect my parents.

Every time I got into an argument with my mom, I would tell him, and he would encourage me to apologize to my mom and tell her I loved her. It was very difficult for me to say "thank you" and "sorry." Even though I really wanted to, I had to

fight all of my old habits and my pride to say those words.

I remember crying in front of my mom when I told her that I was wrong and that I was sorry. She also started to cry and came to hug me.

Getting Baptized

As I continued to seek after God and learn His truth, I learned that my sins were not washed away through the baptism I had received as a baby. I registered to get baptized during the next spiritual convocation.

The day of the baptism was a cold November day. We had to drive about one and a half hours out of town to get to the lake.

When we got there, we walked up to the shore and saw that the lake had already turned to ice! Although there was sunshine and snow had not started to fall yet, the lake was already frozen over.

My first thought was that God did not want me to get baptized that day. However, the brothers and sisters took the initiative and tried to break a hole in the ice. Young and old, they threw rocks, stomped on the ice, and pounded away with all their strength using sticks they found on the shore.

It was very touching to see the effort of these brothers and sisters. They were not willing to let this chance go to save one more soul. Not long after, a hole large enough for two people was made through the thick ice, and I was baptized in the name of our Lord Jesus.

A NEW LIFE TOGETHER

Calvin and I got married the year I was baptized. As we wanted to start a new life together in Christ, we decided to move so that we could avoid our past and the bad friends we made over the years.

This change was very sudden. We did not slowly detach from our friends, but stopped all communication with them. It was a conscious, deliberate decision for us, knowing that if we wanted to live this new life in Christ we had to change ourselves, especially our friends. Thank God, through His love, we made these changes easily.

We are both thankful that our past never came looking for us and that our hearts were not tempted to go back to enjoy the evils of the world. Giving up our old life freed up a lot of time, which we filled with God.

I looked forward to Friday evenings because it was the start of the Sabbath. The brothers and sisters were attentive because I was a newly baptized member and graciously studied the Bible with Calvin and me during the week. Some of the church members also invited us to their homes for dinner and to share the word of God.

Since we got married at a young age, we promised each other that if we ever got into an argument we would kneel down and pray and trust our problems to God. We believed that God would watch over our marriage and become the head of our family.

The change in my life shocked my old friends as well as my family. Even my friends' parents, who used to follow us around to see what we were doing, couldn't believe I was talking to them about God and how my husband and I were determined to commit our marriage to God.

Together, we have tasted the joy of living a simple and quiet life in Christ, which is far better than what the world could offer.

GOD ACCEPTED ME

Our wonderful Lord has His great plan for everything. He even had a plan for a small-town girl who was not only the black sheep in her family but was also unwilling to listen to anyone!

I was brought to His church through witnessing the quick and dramatic change in a friend's life, which caught my attention and sparked my curiosity in the source of this transformation. I was also drawn to know God because I felt His love through the brothers and sisters in church as well as God's movement in me when I prayed for the Holy Spirit.

Romans 8:38, 39 says:

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God's love is so immense and so great, I don't know if we can fully comprehend it. We can only relate based on what we have encountered in life and assume that God's love is infinitely greater than that.

The only comparable love I have experienced is parental love. My parents sacrificed a lot so that my siblings and I could have a good future. They worked really hard at the restaurant and put their time and money into our education and other extracurricular classes. They always gave us the best and took the leftovers.

Our wonderful Lord has His great plan for everything. He even had a plan for a small-town girl who was not only the black sheep in her family but was also unwilling to listen to anyone!

However, this love is limited. At my most rebellious stage, my parents disowned me not because they did not have love, but because I grieved them beyond what any human being could bear. My mom said, "I will feed you, you may live here, but you are no longer my daughter." I put on a strong face and showed no emotion, but in reality I felt empty and lonely.

I now understand why I cried so much when I went to church the first time and when God's Spirit moved me in my prayer in Calgary. It was because even in my worst state, when my own mother had disowned me, God accepted me and loved me.

Through God's love I learned to seek after Him and became His child. ★

How to Evangelize Through Campus **Fellowships**

A campus fellowship provides a way for church members who attend the same university or live in the vicinity of the university to help one another pursue spiritual edification and growth.

"Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:41, 42, 47).

A campus fellowship can model itself after the apostolic church. The early members convened often to study the word, have fellowship, share in spiritual feasts, pray, and bear witness to the love of Jesus Christ. Likewise, a campus fellowship provides the opportunity for its members to study biblical teachings, draw closer to God and to each other, intercede for one another, and evangelize.

The Reason for Evangelical Outreach Efforts

Before His ascension, Jesus entrusted us with the Great Commission to preach the precious gospel to the ends of the earth.

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

For members of a more seasoned campus fellowship, it is important to focus on the elements of spreading the gospel and cultivating the members within the fellowship. Although a starting campus fellowship can have the same heart, it may need to work more on internal issues before it can truly focus on the role of evangelism.

Ways to Evangelize

Word of Mouth

-Testify about the word of God through personal testimonies and reading and quoting from the Scriptures.

-Inform your friends of the basic beliefs of the church.

Posting/Distributing Flyers

-Advertise campus fellowship meeting times and special events to the university community.

-Post flyers in public areas such as on bulletin boards and bus stops.

-Distribute the flyers to passers-by in public areas.

-In some universities, registered groups can request permission to set up a table for distribution of flyers at any time during the school year.

College Newsletter/Newspaper Advertisement

-Advertise campus fellowship meeting times and special events in your school newsletter or newspaper.

External Website

-Declare and explain the basic beliefs of the church

-Present the details of your campus fellowship such as Bible study meeting place and times

Preparation for an Evangelical Service

There needs to be an effort to establish either an informal or formal type of evangelical service to which friends can be invited to learn and reflect on the word of God.

The first step is to decide the format of your campus fellowship's evangelical service. The format can range from casual to formal depending on the needs of the audience and the fellowship group.

The service usually is held at someone's house or apartment.

-Determine the theme and title of the evangelical service.

-Discuss the format from the introduction to the main event to the conclusion.

-The main event can consist of thematic discussions, a brief message, skits, a short movie introducing the beliefs of our church, or a musical presentation.

-Ask for volunteers or perhaps pass around a sign-up sheet for different work teams such as food preparation, praise session team, discussion leaders, etc.

-The leader of each work team may assign action items to each team member for follow-up.

-Figure out the budget for the event and how the finances will be covered, either through local church sponsorship or campus fellowship offerings.

-Plan to keep in contact with the friends that attend (e.g. making a contact card that the visitors can fill out, sending emails regarding any upcoming special events).

-Most importantly, pray, pray, and pray!

Questions and **Answers**

How can God, who is love, send anyone to hell to suffer eternally? If He loves every human being, He should allow everyone to go to heaven unconditionally.

God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek 18:23). Like the prodigal son's father, He wants everyone to turn from evil and live (Lk 15:11-24; Ezek 18:31, 32, 33:11). Out of His love, He even gave His own son to us so that we may have eternal life (Jn 3:16, 17).

While God offers everyone love and forgiveness, He does not force His love on those who do not want it. Because He loves us, He wants us to be free. We are given free will to accept or deny God's love. God does allow everyone to go to heaven, but not everyone chooses heaven. If a person chooses to sin and refuses to repent, he chooses to reject God's love. By rejecting God's love, he chooses hell because hell in essence is the absence of God's love. There is no other choice, since the only place where God's love does not exist is hell.

Is anyone really so evil as to deserve the eternal punishment of hell? Can God not forgive those who don't believe in Him?

God does not intend to send anyone to hell. Instead, He "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4). We should not think of hell as God's vengeful punishment. Hell is a choice. People choose hell by rejecting the grace of God. When we sin, we choose to be separated from God, and this separation is exactly what hell is—eternal separation from God, His love, and His joy. Our very action of sinning is its own punishment.

When addressing the question of whether anyone deserves hell, Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli explain, "Hell's punishment fits sin's crime because sin is divorce from God. The punishment fits the crime because the punishment is the crime. Saying no to God means no God. The point is really very simple. Those who object to hell's over-severity do not see what sin really is. They probably look at sin externally, sociologically, legalistically, as 'behaving badly.' They fail to see the real horror of sin and the real greatness and goodness and joy of the God who is refused in every sin. We all fail to appreciate this. Who of us fully appreciates God's beauty? The corollary immediately follows: who of us fully appreciates sin's ugly horror?"[1]

If God makes everyone go to heaven, including those who do not want or to be forgiven by Him, then human beings have no free will. God does not force anyone to be in heaven, although His grace of forgiveness is available to all. We need to make the choice to accept this grace.

1. Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 300.

Facts, Stats and **Syntax**

Word Study

Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ammi were the prophet Hosea's younger two children (Hos 1:6, 8, 9). They were named to symbolize the Israelites' continuing sin against God and His subsequent wrath and punishment during the decline and end of both Israel and Judah.

Ruhamah means "mercy" and ***ammi*** means "my people," and the prefix ***lo*** means "no or not." So Lo-Ruhamah means "no mercy" and Lo-Ammi means "not my people," showing that God would no longer protect and care for the Israelites as His own.

Did You Know?

What did people in biblical times write with and on?
They wrote with metal chisels (Job 19:24) on stone tablets (Ex 34:4), and sharpened reed and ink (Jer 36:18) on papyrus paper (Isa 8:1). The Hebrew word for ink is ***deyo*** (for its blackness) and it was made by mixing charcoal or soot with water. Papyrus paper was made by pounding strips of papyrus branches woven together and sewing sheets of it together to make scrolls.

Polls and Statistics

Religious demographics in major English-speaking countries where True Jesus Church is established:

Australia (2006 Census):
- Catholic 25.8%
- Anglican 18.7%
- Uniting Church 5.7%
- Presbyterian and Reformed 3%
- Eastern Orthodox 2.7%
- other Christian 7.9%
- Buddhist 2.1%
- Muslim 1.7%
- other 2.4%
- unspecified 11.3%
- none 18.7%

Canada (2001 census):
- Roman Catholic 42.6%
- Protestant 23.3% (including United Church 9.5%, Anglican 6.8%, Baptist 2.4%, Lutheran 2%)
- other Christian 4.4%
- Muslim 1.9%
- other and unspecified 11.8%
- none 16%

Malaysia (2000 census):
- Muslim 60.4%
- Buddhist 19.2%
- Christian 9.1%
- Hindu 6.3%
- Confucianism, Taoism, other traditional Chinese religions 2.6%
- other or unknown 1.5%
- none 0.8%

Singapore (2000 census):
- Buddhist 42.5%
- Muslim 14.9%
- Taoist 8.5%
- Hindu 4%
- Catholic 4.8%
- other Christian 9.8%
- other 0.7%
- none 14.8%

UK (2001 census):
- Christian (Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist) 71.6%
- Muslim 2.7%
- Hindu 1%
- other 1.6%
- unspecified or none 23.1%

US (2007 estimate):
- Protestant 51.3%
- Roman Catholic 23.9%
- Mormon 1.7%
- other Christian 1.6%
- Jewish 1.7%
- Buddhist 0.7%
- Muslim 0.6%
- other or unspecified 2.5%
- unaffiliated 12.1%
- none 4%

Taken from *The World Factbook*:
https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/

His Hour, His Glory

Albert Chen—Garden Grove, California, USA

Do you remember the story of Jesus changing water into wine? It is one that has repeatedly puzzled me.

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it." Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it. When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!" This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him. (Jn 2:1-11)

Jesus responded to Mary's statement about a lack of wine by saying, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come" (Jn 2:4). Why did Jesus perform a miracle He seemed to disagree with? Why didn't Jesus just avoid the situation or perform one of His famous "slipaways"?[1] Why did Jesus even go to the wedding in the first place?

TO MANIFEST HIS GLORY

"Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?" (Jn 2:4)

These were Jesus' first words as He replied to Mary's request. Consequently, I initially thought this passage was about Jesus yielding to His mother, though He

had His reservations, in order to set an example for one to respect one's parents.

However, Jesus reveals that it wasn't about respect or parents when He called His mother "woman" (Jn 2:4). It was uncommon then for people to call their mothers "woman." If the story were about obeying one's mother, Jesus would have used "mother" to address Mary. However, His use of "woman" suggests an absence of maternal authority.

In fact, Jesus' explicit disagreement to act upon Mary's request was to draw a line between acting upon the command of man and acting in His time.

The concluding verse clearly states the primary purpose of the miracle: "This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him" (Jn 2:11). Jesus attended the wedding and fulfilled the need for wine, but in His time and in order to show His glory, so His disciples would put their faith in Him.

TRUST IN HIS TIME

"My hour has not yet come." (Jn 2:4)

With this reply to Mary, Jesus showed there was a difference between God's time and man's time.

When referring to the activities of men in the Gospel of John, the Greek term for "hour" was used to point to a time in the day.[2] Jesus, however, used the same term to talk about the future,[3] like in reference to the descent of the Holy Spirit.[4]

There is a clear distinction between how men think in hours and how Jesus thinks in hours. Furthermore, Jesus once said to His brothers, "[Y]our time is always ready" (Jn 7:6). Yet, for Jesus, He has His own time, and there is a "right" time.[5]

In the Gospel of John, "My hour" and "His hour" usually signified Jesus' crucifixion and subsequent glorification by God.[6] "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son" (Jn 17:1).

Similarly, Jesus' reply to Mary meant that the hour for Him to perform the miracle was not at Mary's command. She had to wait and trust in Him, for only at His appointed time could His glory be revealed through the miracle.

As for us, we often worry when we encounter critical needs. When our car's battery runs out of power in the middle of the road, we ask Jesus to fix our car instantly. When we apply for a job, we ask Jesus to help us get that high-paying, near-home job straight away.

However, who knows if it might be God's will for us to preach to the nice couple that helps jumpstart our car? Who knows if the job with lower pay will allow us more time for holy work, so we can edify ourselves and edify others living in that area?

When our needs persist and the clock ticks, we grow anxious. When problems aren't immediately resolved after we pray, we grow impatient.

It was the same when Mary eagerly presented the wine shortage to Jesus. After Jesus told her, "My hour has not yet come" (Jn 2:4), she understood that she needed to yield to Jesus' timing, and she handed the issue over to Jesus.

Jesus will fulfill our needs, but we must "trust in the Lord with all [our] heart and lean not on [our] own understanding" (Prov 3:5). When all hope and possibility have "run out" like the wine, we must understand that our perspective is limited. Instead, there is always a way through God.

Jesus reassures us, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things" (Mt 6:34). Jesus is tomorrow—His hours are of the future. He knows what we need and will need.

Though the clouds seem dark, we need only to trust in Him and wait patiently. He will provide in His time, so that in all that we receive His name may be glorified.

ALL GLORY TO GOD

"Whatever He says to you, do it." (Jn 2:5)

At these words, the servants submissively obeyed Jesus. Keep in mind that the stone waterpots Jesus used were receptacles for holding water for ceremonial purification,[7] the traditional washing of hands before and after meals.

Imagine if you were one of the servants Jesus commanded. You were taking, to the master of the wedding, water you had just poured from jars that a bunch of people used to wash their hands, telling him to drink it. How embarrassing and shameful would it be if the water never transformed? The servants, however, fully obeyed without questioning Jesus.

Instead of us telling Jesus to do things our way, we should be ready and willing to do whatever Jesus tells us to do. Even though we may be like the servants carrying hand-washing water, not knowing Jesus' plans, we must still obey whatever command Jesus gives us. Even though we cannot see the benefit our work will bring, we must still trust that our work will give Him glory in His time.

There once was a True Jesus Church member named Simon (not his real name) who owned a small restaurant. The businesses in his area, including his restaurant, consistently generated the most revenue on Saturdays. Simon used to work on Saturdays along with other church members but then realized that keeping the Sabbath was most important.

We need only to trust in God and wait patiently. He will provide in His time, so that in all that we receive His name may be glorified.

Though we might not see how obeying God can give Him glory in our time, we must still submissively obey. In His time, His glory will be revealed.

Miraculously, when Simon stopped working on Sabbaths, there was hardly any business in that area on Saturdays. Yet, his weekly revenue was higher than before and began to exceed that of the neighboring businesses. Because of the dramatic change, even non-believers decided to follow Simon to church on Sabbaths, eventually believing.

We often think that obeying God might be detrimental to our livelihood. Though we might not see how obeying God can give Him glory in our time, we must still submissively obey. In His time, His glory will be revealed.

Not only must we obey, we must fade from the scene after we diligently finish our work. It is just like the servants: after they obediently finished their duty, they disappeared, and the narration returned to how Jesus manifested His glory.

After we have done our duty for the Lord, we must recede from the scene so that the work God has performed through us may be credited to Him. All glory belongs to Jesus Christ.

After we lead a service, prayer, or Bible study, do we linger, waiting for people to compliment us? Or do we retreat after we finish our holy work? After we guide the congregation in hymns, interpret, or play the piano, do we accept their praises of how well we served? Or do we give Jesus all the glory?

We must decrease so that the glory for Jesus may increase.[8] We are only preparing the path and leading others to Jesus. After we have finished our job, we must fall down before God, take off our crown, and lay it before Him like the elders in Revelation.[9]

The crown on our head belongs to God, so we must give it back to Him. All glory comes from God. All glory belongs to God.

A MIRACLE OF GREAT MAGNITUDE

He manifested His glory. (Jn 2:11)

Plain water and stone jars destined for dirty hands. Servants whose names were not even recorded.

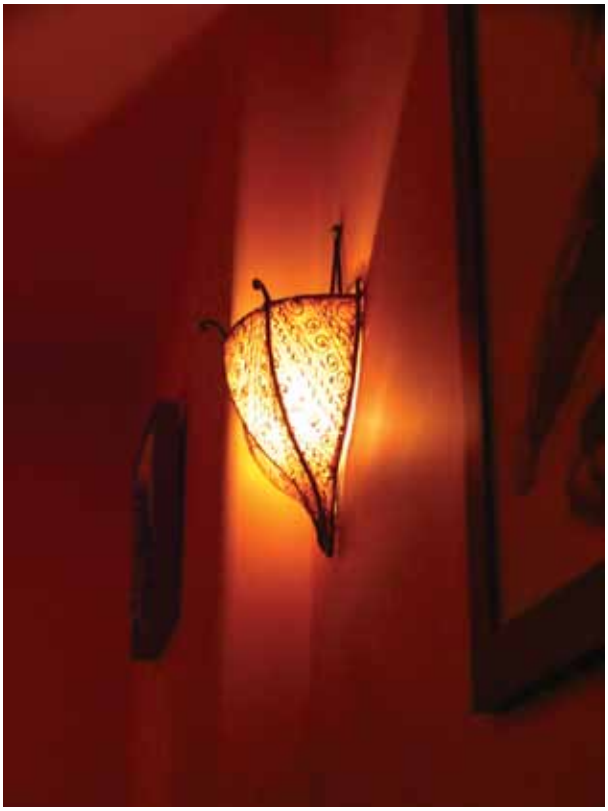
It is just as the Bible said:

God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen…that no flesh should glory in His presence…"He who glories, let him glory in the Lord." (1 Cor 1:27-31)

Jesus chose the lowliest—the water, the stone jars, and the obedient servants—to perform a miracle of great magnitude: tap water changed into the best wine.

The impossible becomes possible, and Jesus is glorified when we submit to His timing. His hour, His glory. ★

1. Jn 5:13, 8:59
2. Jn 1:39, 4:6, 4:52, 4:53, 19:14, 19:27
3. Jn 5:25, 5:28, 16:2, 16:12, 16:25
4. Jn 4:21, 4:23, 16:4
5. Jn 7:6
6. Jn 7:30, 8:20, 12:23, 12:27, 13:1, 17:1
7. Jn 2:6
8. Jn 3:30
9. Rev 4:10



The Disgrace of King Joash

Rebecca Lee—Vancouver, Canada

Joash had a unique reign as king of Judah, where he took over the throne at the age of seven. He was raised by a priest, and, at a tender age in his youth, he set his heart on repairing the temple of God.

In three separate verses, the Bible records that Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days in which Jehoiada the priest was alive and instructed him (2 Kgs 12:2; 2 Chr 24:2, 12). Jehoiada adopted Joash when he was only an infant, after his father King Ahaziah had died.

As a matter of fact, Joash's existence was not known until he became king. He was hidden in the temple of God because his grandmother, Athaliah, had massacred all of Ahaziah's children in order to take the throne.

Joash grew up under the care and instruction of Jehoiada, who must have instilled in Joash a solid understanding of God's statutes and commandments. As king, he led the people in serving God and repairing the temple.

Unfortunately, everything changed for Joash shortly after Jehoiada's death. In a dramatic turn of events, Joash left the house of God to serve idols instead. Consequently, when he died, Joash was not buried in the tomb of the kings.

In contrast, Jehoiada the chief priest was buried "in the City of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, both toward God and His house" (2 Chr 24:16).

How did this come about? What caused Joash's change of heart?

A DEPENDENT FAITH?

One way to explain this change of heart is that Joash's faith had not been independent and rooted but had been based on Jehoiada. Perhaps Joash knew only how to be a good king under Jehoiada's instructions. Perhaps, like a puppet, he only knew how to take orders from Jehoiada.

In fact, every time a big decision was made or where money from the house of God was concerned, the Bible records that it involved "the king and Jehoiada" (cf. 2 Chr 24:6, 12, 14). Joash's two wives were even brought to him by Jehoiada. Perhaps Joash was lost without the guidance of the only father he ever knew.

But wasn't Joash the one who took the initiative in repairing the house of the Lord? The Bible records that "Joash set his heart on repairing the house of the LORD" (2 Chr 24:4). He also took the lead in setting up a system for contributions to fund the repairs (2 Chr 24:5-8).

So, it appears that Joash's faith was not completely dependent on Jehoiada, even from a young age. He had been taught well by Jehoiada.

This makes it more difficult to comprehend why Joash could so easily forsake the commandments of God that he learned at a young age. After all, it wasn't until after the twenty-third year of his reign that he fulfilled his dream of repairing the temple (2 Kgs 12:6).

What could have possibly snatched away the word of God from his heart so quickly and made void his long and dedicated efforts in repairing the temple of God?

HE LISTENED TO THEM

The turning point in Joash's life came after Jehoiada died: "Now after the death of Jehoiada the leaders of Judah came and bowed down to the king. And the king listened to them" (2 Chr 24:17).

It seems counter-intuitive that after "the leaders of Judah came and bowed down" to Joash that he would turn around and listen to them! It appears as if Joash had been desperate for someone to quickly replace his deceased father, who had always provided him with sound advice and guidance throughout his life.

The most powerful men in the country came to offer Joash support. Having the leaders of Judah stand behind him meant that his political future would be secure. Such an opportunity is something a young king could only hope for.

In fact, Joash was probably flattered when the leaders of Judah bowed down to him. However, in turn, they actually made him bow down to them! Consequently, they were able to easily influence him.

With this critical mistake, Joash and the people "left the house of the Lord God of their fathers, and served wooden images and idols" (2 Chr 24:18). But this begs the question: Why didn't the leaders of Judah come and bow down to Joash before? Was it a mere coincidence that they came to Joash immediately after Jehoiada had died?

The leaders of Judah most likely came to Joash with a hidden agenda. Had they truly wanted to honor him and the ways that were established through Jehoiada, the direction of his ruling would not have changed so drastically—from the worship of God to the worship of idols—in such a short period of time.

When Jehoiada was still alive, he was a powerful and influential advisor to Joash, so bowing down before Joash and getting him to listen probably would not have worked.

But as soon as Jehoiada was no longer around, the leaders of Judah went to Joash and led him to serve other gods, which was utterly against his beliefs. Despite all the time he spent under Jehoiada's instruction, he had not established a faith that could stand on its own.

We must be careful not to be like Joash, heeding the call of temptation instead of holding on to our beliefs, and leaving behind years of obedience and truth for temporary gain.

This insidious method employed by the leaders of Judah reminds us of temptations today. They don't come at you full throttle; they bow down to you first. They wait until you are all alone in your faith, when you let your guard down, when you feel desperate or lonely, when you are unsure of yourself, and when you are not close to God.

When temptations invite or bow down to us, the most natural feeling is not repulsion but flattery. They make us feel good about ourselves first, in hopes that we will hand over the steering wheel to our lives. Whether it is the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, or the pride of life, these temptations are all around us in our daily lives.

We must be careful not to be like Joash, heeding the call of temptation instead of holding on to our beliefs, and leaving behind years of obedience and truth for temporary gain.

HE DID NOT REMEMBER

Recall that Jehoiada the priest took Joash in as his own son when he was only an infant. Jehoiada and his wife, Jehosheba, had saved Joash from the hands of his wicked and murderous grandmother, Athaliah.

Joash was supposed to be killed, but his life was spared by grace. Jehoiada and Jehosheba must have spent much patience and effort in raising him secretly in the temple of God. After all, they had to teach him to become a good king, for they knew this was the only way to remove Athaliah from the throne along with all the wickedness and idolatry she used to mislead the people.

But flattery from the leaders of Judah had such a profound influence on Joash that he "did not remember the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him" (2 Chr 24:22). All the guidance, care, and instruction that Joash had received from his beloved father was forgotten for the remainder of his reign as king.

Had Joash's faith been patterned after Jehoiada's, Joash would have done much better in comparison to his unfortunate end. He would have been able to recognize the wrongdoing that stemmed from the leaders of Judah. He would have known that the idols should have been removed from the high places (2 Kgs 12:3). He would have relied upon the statutes of God, which he knew by heart. Instead, he remembered neither his father's kindness nor God's commandments.

The Lord was actually merciful to Joash and His people because "He sent prophets to them, to bring them back to the LORD" (2 Chr 24:19a). One of the prophets was Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada. However, Joash was so lost in his faith and unwilling to listen that he commanded the people to stone Zechariah to death in the court of the house of the Lord!

In the same way, our Lord Jesus is always merciful to us and gives us opportunities to return to Him, but how often are we willing to listen?

Sometimes we may be so blinded by the flattery of sin that we may not remember the kindness and grace of our heavenly Father, who sent His only Son to die for our sins. We were supposed to be killed by the evil one, but through the blood of Christ "[we] died, and [our] life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3).

We should learn from Joash, who forgot this amazing grace when he fell in sin.

HE WAS NOT REMEMBERED

Not only did Joash sin, he died in disgrace. His own servants conspired to kill him, and he was not buried in the tomb of the kings (2 Chr 24:25). Despite all the good that he had done, including repairing the temple of the Lord and leading the people by example to offer for the house of the Lord, his failure to keep his faith until the end is what defined him.

As it says in Ezekiel 18:24:

"But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die."

We need to always remember the love of our Lord Jesus so that the evil one will not be able to snatch away the words of God from our hearts or make void all of our efforts in servitude and holy work. We must cherish our beliefs and understand the importance of our faith so that we will be strong enough to withstand the wiles of sin.

We also need to be vigilant in our own faith, being firmly rooted in the truth. Otherwise, we may stray when our spiritual guardians—the Jehoiada in our lives, such as our family members, spouse, brothers and sisters in church, pastors, or religious education teachers—are no longer around.

Furthermore, if temptations come when we are not watchful, we may turn to them easily and forget everything we have learned before, regardless of how much knowledge or experience we may have gained in the past.

Thus, we must persevere to the very end, despite whatever temptations may come our way and how flattering they may be. Only then can we say to our heavenly Father, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim 4:7). ★

Money

Money is a necessity. We cannot survive without it. While it is important to work and save money, society seems to be obsessed with the accumulation of wealth and possessions. It can be difficult not to be influenced by these worldly values.

We know that "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" (1 Tim 6:10). If we do not love money, what is the appropriate perspective Christians should have?

The theme articles explore how the Bible's exhortations on money apply to our lives today. We have a different view of money than the world, and our lives should reflect this principle. We will find true contentment, whether or not we are rich, in following God's teachings.

The Role of Money in Christian Living

Vincent Yeung—Cambridge, UK

EXCESSIVE RICHES

My first taste of business class travel was a gratifying experience that illustrated the comfort and privilege that money can bring. It allowed me to bypass the check-in, security, and boarding queues and avoid the annoying mass that congregated at the waiting lounge.

I was showered with endless supplies of champagne and fresh juice. For the first time, I could sleep flat on the plane without the need to fight for a few millimeters of space with my fellow passengers. The cabin crew even called me by my name, and I was no longer labeled as passenger 40A!

However, luxury comes with a cost—it is expensive to keep up with this opulent lifestyle. Morally, it is hardly justifiable to spend ten times the cost of an economy class ticket to fly business. An average person in the bottom billion is living on less than $1 a day.[1] It is obscene to spend 10,000 times that on a plane ticket.

Psychologically, this experience raised my aspirations and expectations, which made it difficult to "trade down" to a pedestrian lifestyle. It is human instinct to avoid harm and pursue advancement and a comfortable life.

As the majority of the population is now involved in the production of services and goods that enhance human comfort and living conditions, we are devoting more of our time to entertainment and enjoyment.

Christians often hold an ambivalent view on money, the accumulation of wealth, and its uses. But Jesus' warning on the risks of excessive riches should

> *Money is a tool, a means to an end, but it must neither be our master, nor should we serve it.*

sound the alarm bell in many believers' minds.[2]

It is difficult to define what is acceptable and unacceptable. My example of business travel can't even compare to hiring private jets. To complicate the matter, our lifestyles are often funded by debt. Instead of saving for a holiday, a car, or a house, we borrow money to gratify ourselves now and pay for it later.

How do we strike a balance between prudent accumulation and use of money without having to lead an ascetic and frugal lifestyle?

MONEY: OUR SERVANT OR MASTER?

The financial system is vital to the functioning of a modern society, and money is central to it. We no longer live in a society that trades on goods we produce in exchange for other goods and services. Money is a necessity in life.

However, for some, mammon has become a god and an object of love.[3] They love the comfort, privilege, and power that money can bring.[4]

The advances in mass multimedia are feeding a celebrity cult that has grown outside the circle of movie stars and singers to include athletes, celebrity chefs, and lifestyle gurus. Their lives are chronicled through photographs and blogs on the Internet and on reality shows and the news.

People are startled and yet mesmerized by their wealth, appearance, fame, and lavish lifestyle. They start to desire the same luxuries and privileges. However, they often resort to borrowing and speculation to pay for a better life.

Money is not inherently evil; there is nothing wrong with lending or borrowing money, although strict rules concerning both were applied in Moses' time.[5] We are encouraged to work, build property, and save for rainy days.[6]

Enjoyment is not a prohibition either. As it says in Ecclesiastes 3:13, "every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God."

Money is a tool, a means to an end, but it must neither be our master, nor should we serve it.

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

Do not Love Money

Our attitude towards money and the application of it are dictated by our relationship with God. God demands our unflagging devotion to Him, which is enshrined and subsumed in the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex 20:3). Yet love toward money has usurped God's place in many people's hearts.

What is prohibited is the love of money and our services to it:

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." (Mt 6:24)

The love and desire to accumulate more money is a gateway to all kind of evils.[7] Love and desire become a "lust," an act of reaching out frantically to acquire wealth. In the search for money, morality is set aside and errant and sinful behavior

ensues.[8] The milk contamination scandal in China and Madoff's Ponzi scheme are just two examples of what can happen when people have lost sight of their moral values.

A total devotion to money can make a person rich for himself but cannot make him rich toward God.[9] Those who serve money are warned against over-reliance on uncertain riches.[10] The rich fools are satisfied with the wealth that they have gathered, believing that they can fall back on it in hard times. This false sense of security turns their attention away from God.[11]

In the wrong hands, money becomes unrighteous.[12] Money pampers the rich with comfort and power; their wealth leads them to believe they are different, exquisite, and out of this world. Exclusivity and uniqueness are the selling points of many services and products.

Money and power are intertwined: money buys influence, influence confers privilege and connections, which in turn generates money for the wealthy.

The prophets vociferously warned against reliance on wealth, power, and alliances instead of trusting in the living God.[13]

A Healthy View Toward Money

In Proverbs 30:8, 9, Agur declares,

Give me neither poverty nor riches—
Feed me with the food allotted to me;
Lest I be full and deny You,
And say, "Who is the LORD?"
Or lest I be poor and steal,
And profane the name of my God.

Excessive wealth can corrupt, but the lack of money is equally harmful. Our overwhelming need to quench our daily hunger can become a distraction that hinders us from honoring God or behaving morally.[14] Many crimes are driven by desperation and poverty.

There is nothing wrong with accumulating wealth. The ants are commended for storing food during good times.[15] Abraham, Isaac, and Job were blessed with material blessings,[16] but their great possessions did not hinder their relationship with God. Their wealth did not appear out of the blue; it was accumulated through a combination of God's blessing, hard work, and sensible management.

Jesus did not condemn the rich because of their material wealth. It was their attitude towards wealth that hindered the rich from entering into the heavenly kingdom.

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Money can open many doors and avenues as well as expose us to temptations and snares.[17] The power that riches bring blinds people to their social responsibilities.[18] It is not their enjoyment of riches but rather their selfishness and insensitivity toward suffering that is condemned.[19]

The well-off are entrusted with God's blessing and should act faithfully and responsibly while maintaining their relationship with Him.[20] They are in an influential and powerful position to do mercy and justice.

Make Good Use of God's Blessings

The Bible never advocates suffering for suffering's sake, and indulgence and pleasure-seeking are likewise discouraged.[21] Lifestyles that are driven by pleasure-seeking, self-indulgence, showing off, and the lack of self-control should be a warning for us.[22]

We need to always act modestly, doing our part to contribute to the well-being of society. When we devote sufficient time to God and His ministry, we can enjoy our possessions and the fruit of our work. Even if we are not rich, we have been blessed by God to live comfortably and so should act sensibly and consider the impact of our actions.

We need to consider how to make good use of the material wealth God has given us.[23] Before we spend we need to ask ourselves: Am I setting a good example for others to follow? Will my purchase arouse envy and strife, inadvertently causing more harm than good? Am I spending money on top brands, products, or services that are not necessary, too complex to understand, and even extravagant?

We should not drive expensive gas-guzzling cars that pollute the environment even if we could easily afford it. We should not be wasteful, changing our wardrobe every year, or buying too much food and subsequently throwing some of it away uneaten.

If we have decided to spend top money on a luxury cabin on a cruise holiday, perhaps we can consider trading down. We know that it only costs a few thousand US dollars to build a church in Africa—why not put our money to good use?

Our small sacrifice in booking a cheaper cabin and offering the difference will bring a lot of joy to many, and it is a way to fulfill God's grace and love[24] that is pleasing to both God and man.[25]

Cornelius' devotion and kindness[26] appeared to be a contributing factor in his election as a child of God. King David accumulated vast amounts of wealth in his lifetime and put them to good use by offering them for the construction of the temple. His offerings moved his officials to act likewise.[27] The apostolic church is the quintessence of true religion[28] and manifestation of God's love.[29]

However life unfolds before us, we should be satisfied with what we have[30] and be thankful to God however little or much we possess.

Jesus led an exemplary lifestyle: He ate and drank in public[31] and dined with the rich and powerful,[32] yet He was ready to sleep rough[33] and fast and pray in the desert and mountains.

Similarly, Paul was no stranger to the hospitality of wealthy believers,[34] but he was equally at home in prison.[35] No wonder he could say, "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound," and "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil 4:12, 13).

Trade up or down, exaltation or humiliation, they are only transient affairs in our worldly lives,[36] merely the concerns of the world.[37] In my travels I have seen the dazzling height of human excess as well as the dejected poverty of the bottom billion. I feel content in a top-notch hotel in the financial center of Beijing and I am equally happy to lie on the carpet floors of churches in the UK or the hard floorboards of churches in Asia.

We should make the most of what life offers. I will lie down and sleep well on my flat seat on the plane, knowing that it is only second best to my usual bed and that the next time it could be a hard surface somewhere in the world. ★

1. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/7905174.stm
2. Mk 10:25
3. Lk 16:13
4. Prov 22:7
5. Ex 22:25
6. Prov 24:27, 30:25
7. 1 Tim 6:10
8. Hos 12:8
9. Lk 12:21
10. 1 Tim 6:17
11. Isa 47:8
12. Lk 16:11
13. Jer 2:36, 37; Hos 14:3; Isa 30:1, 2
14. 2 Kgs 6:25-28
15. Prov 30:25
16. Gen 13:6, Gen 26:16, Job 1:3
17. 1 Tim 6:9
18. Prov 22:7
19. Amos 6:6
20. Lk 16:11
21. Gal 5:13
22. 2 Tim 3:1-5
23. Lk 16:8-31
24. 2 Cor 8:8, 9
25. Phil 4:17
26. Acts 10:2
27. 1 Chr 29:1-7
28. Act 2:44, 45; Jas 1:27
29. 1 Jn 3:16-18
30. 1 Tim 6:6
31. Mt 11:19
32. Lk 7:36, 19:5
33. Lk 9:58
34. Acts 16:14, 15
35. Acts 16:25
36. Jas 1:9, 10
37. Mt 6:25-34

Finding Perspective in Difficult Times

Audrey Chan—Leister, UK

The past couple of years have presented those of us living in the UK with one financial challenge after another. First, we faced rising interest rates, then soaring petrol prices, followed by inflated household bills. Now, we find ourselves in the midst of a recession. The latter has hit the country particularly hard, with many businesses struggling for survival and others going bankrupt.

The outcome for many people is an uncertain future. The picture seems to be very much the same in other industrialized countries, and I suspect few of us will escape untouched.

Nevertheless, as Christians, we can reflect on some important teachings from the Bible, which offer us some much needed perspective in these difficult times.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL CARE

The Bible reminds us that our heavenly Father knows our needs:

"Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?" (Mt 6:26, 27)

God lovingly takes care of the smallest living creatures and shows even greater care for us, His children. But this is a truth we can sometimes forget, especially when difficult times arrive. On the one hand, we know the Bible's teachings about God's providential care; but on the other, we have the reality of household

What we have is given to us and is temporary. Therefore, we should make use of what we have in a manner that is pleasing to God.

bills dropping through our letterbox each month. It takes a strong person not to worry.

The Bible encourages us with these words:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:6, 7)

Christians are not exempt from the trials of life. But what distinguishes us from those who do not believe is that we have a heavenly Father, the almighty God, whom we can turn to.

The Lord Jesus has given us the Lord's Prayer through which He teaches us to pray, saying, "Our Father in heaven… Give us this day our daily bread" (Mt 6:9, 11). These simple words are all we need to ask God to supply our daily needs. Importantly, they act as a constant reminder that He is our ultimate provider—the One who gives us life, health, gracious opportunities, and everything we have.

When I think of God's providential care, I reflect especially on the early years of my married life. My husband and I bought our first home when the housing market was at its peak. The result was that the mortgage and other bills stretched our incomes to the limit. Yet, we felt immensely blessed because we had enough to live on and life was stable.

When we moved some years later, we lost a substantial amount due to tumbling house prices. By God's grace it did not worry us very much. However, things got more challenging when I could not find new work and had to receive unemployment benefits for about a year.

I prayed to God as I searched for work, and He finally helped me find the perfect job, one that seemed almost tailor-made for me. He also provided us with an affordable new home. From then on, we were back on track to supporting our young family.

I am sure we all have our own stories to tell. When we count our blessings, we realize that God has always been with us through the inevitable ups and downs of life. It is just far clearer in hindsight. Knowing this, we should look ahead with faith and be confident that He will continue to care for us. We should never doubt or be disheartened, because we are His children and He holds our lives dear to His heart.

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (Jn 14:27)

KEEPING LIFE SIMPLE

I remember a minister once humorously pointing out that Christians sometimes want the best of both worlds: the luxurious life of Solomon *and* the reward of Paul. The fact is, there can be real tension between our aspirations for this life and our spiritual faith. Hence, Jesus tells us:

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." (Mt 6:24)

The problem is not wealth itself, but our hearts. The Bible says:

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (1 Tim 6:9, 10)

The moral is that when money and material things become our passion, our *raison d'être*, our faith will inevitably suffer. Therefore, it is with good reason that the Bible teaches us to aspire to a simple life.

Moreover, as we cannot take our wealth with us when we leave this world, we will do well not to make material wealth our focus. The apostle Paul advises:

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. (1 Tim 6:6-8)

Many of us have more than the basic food and clothing that Paul is talking about. It is likely that we have very comfortable lives indeed: food in abundance, fine homes, closets full of clothes, and all manner of technology for an easy life—even during these hard times.

Therefore, there is ample reason for us to be content and not to crave for more. Paul describes contentment as "great gain," undoubtedly because it brings immense benefits. It means that we live within our means and do away with the pressure of toiling extra hours and years for things we do not really need: perhaps a bigger house, a better car, more up-to-date gadgets, the latest fashion items, and so forth.

Hence, the writer of Hebrews exhorts us, saying:

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Heb 13:5)

The other reason for contentment being "great gain" is that it gives us the right conditions for nurturing our relationship with God and for serving Him. As human beings, we have finite amounts of time and energy. When we stop striving after material things, we will have more to dedicate to God for advancing church ministries, for taking care of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and for our families.

Having said this, there is nothing wrong with being rich *per se*. In fact, God is the one who can choose to bless us with wealth. But when He does, we can be confident that there will be no accompanying angst:

The blessing of the Lord makes one rich,
And He adds no sorrow with it. (Prov 10:22)

However, we should remember that whatever the extent of our earthly riches, it is only for this lifetime, and we will do well to set our minds on the eternal things above (Col 3:1, 2).

STORING UP TREASURES IN HEAVEN

Difficult financial times remind us of the fragility of wealth:

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there you heart will be also." (Mt 6:19-22)

Thinking of the situation today, we see the truth of this teaching all too clearly. The modern equivalent of moths and rust are the adverse market conditions that have decimated some people's hard-earned assets. Life is unpredictable, so we should not overly depend on our earthly riches.

When Job lost all that he had in one calamitous day, he reflected in the following manner:

"Naked I came from my mother's womb,
And naked shall I return there.
The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away;
Blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21)

His words remind us that we came into the world empty-handed, but God has graciously provided us with all the things we need for this life. In some cases, He has also chosen to bless us with wealth.

However, just as God can give, so He can also take away—we live under His grace. On our own, we can do nothing. Knowing this helps us to put things in perspective and not to place too much importance on wealth.

What we have is given to us and is temporary. Therefore, we should make use of what we have in a manner that is pleasing to Him. Moreover, when we do, we can be sure that it will bring everlasting dividends.

The apostle Paul teaches:

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. (1 Tim 6:17-19)

He exhorts the rich amongst us to do good, to give, and to share. Such good works constitute our faith in action when we apply the Lord's commandment to love God and to love man (Mt 22:36-40).

It may entail us giving financial support to the church, donating to charitable causes, practicing hospitality, or giving aid to our brothers and sisters in Christ (Gal 6:10). Jesus likens such acts to storing up treasures in heaven, meaning that God will keep an account of what we do. The outcome will be eternal life and a glorious reward (Rev 20:12, 22:12; 1 Cor 4:5).

However, good works should not be confined to the rich. In fact, the Bible teaches us about the generosity of those who had very little: the widow of Zarephath, who sacrificed her last meal (1 Kgs 17:8-16); the boy who offered up five barley loaves and two small fish (Jn 6:9); the poor widow who contributed two mites (Mk 12:41-44); the impoverished Macedonian churches that rallied to the aid of their fellow brethren (2 Cor 8:1-5).

Their noble examples touch not only us, but surely touch our heavenly Father who sees into the heart (1 Sam 16:7).

Lastly, the Bible tells us of a wonderful blessing associated with giving that we can expect in this lifetime. The apostle Paul says:

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written:
"He has dispersed abroad,
He has given to the poor;
His righteousness remains forever." (2 Cor 9:8, 9)

Doing good enables us to experience a miracle: God has the power to ensure that we have "an abundance" for future good works. However, this blessing is only for those who give willingly and in faith. Should we choose to hold on tightly to what we have for ourselves, we will not see this grace.

But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (2 Cor 9:6)

Living in this world, we will encounter difficult financial times. But, for Christians, they are merely reminders to avoid trusting in uncertain riches. Rather, we should rely on our heavenly Father, who is the provider of all our needs.

We should also aspire to live simple lives and to have the spiritual foresight to use what we possess in this lifetime for good works, thereby laying up everlasting treasures in heaven. ★

A Life of Simplicity

Based on a sermon by Derren Liang—San Jose, California, USA

The dream of owning a house, a car, and living in luxury puts many of us on a time-consuming chase after material things. But somewhere in the process of these pursuits, sooner or later, we will come to a rude awakening that this dream is more like a nightmare, taking with it our peace.

As much as we live in the luxury of technological advances that are supposed to help streamline our lives, we still do not have enough time to do everything that needs to be done. If fact, we are doing more. High-speed Internet, teleconferencing, and smart phones notwithstanding, we still work long hours and have little leisure time.

Despite the standard of a forty-hour workweek, many people routinely spend fifty or sixty hours at the office. Add to this a family and spiritual life, and it is no wonder that people feel overwhelmed.

The question is whether there is anything we can do to make our complex lives simpler. While we still have to work to make a living for ourselves, there must be a way for us to get off the worldly track and get back on the spiritual track.

To regain our peace and reestablish a joyful life, we need to go back to the Bible and learn from God's servants—the people He chose to carry out His work and were trained to lead complex yet simple lives that were wholly devoted and dedicated to Him.

FOCUS ON GOD

Take our first example, Moses. His was a complicated life. Growing up as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, he lived in the palace and enjoyed all the available luxuries and pleasures. For forty years, he was treated to all the best in food, clothes, entertainment, and education. His status and wealth filled his life with possessions and complexities.

But Moses did not value his life of luxury and was instead set on rescuing his Hebrew peers from slavery in Egypt. Hebrews 11:24, 25 tells us:

By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.

God was willing to use Moses, but his training and service did not happen when he was a prince living in the palace. In order for Moses to be able to serve wholeheartedly, God trained him for forty years as a shepherd in the wilderness. During this time, he had nothing—no status, no possessions, and no money. Everything he had in Egypt was stripped away so that his heart could be unobstructed in reconnecting with God.

When Moses became the leader of the Israelites, he began a new chapter that was filled with another forty years of complications. He was entrusted with leading the Israelites and was in charge of every aspect of their lives. This is a responsibility hard for us to imagine.

Even with all these complications, Moses managed to live a simple life and keep his focus on God. He knew how important it was to keep drawing strength, direction, and fulfillment from God and often entered the tabernacle to talk to God face to face (Ex 33:8-11).

With a heart trained by God to focus on the right things, Moses was able to lead the Israelites without becoming overwhelmed. For us to survive in this complicated world, we need to have the same focus. We need to learn how to lead a simple life despite the complexities.

By pursuing the kingdom and righteousness of God, we renew our lives and change its direction. Then we will no longer be self-centered and lost in our worldly responsibilities; instead, we will have a simple heart that does not lose strength.

HAVE FAITH IN GOD

As a prophet in the idolatrous Northern Kingdom, Elijah's task to renew the faith of the Israelites was daunting. To prepare him for the difficulties he would face, God caused him to live by the Brook Cherith.

There Elijah had to focus on God because there was no way for him to find food. He had to place his hope in God's promise: "And it will be that you shall drink from the brook, and I have commanded the ravens to feed you there" (1 Kgs 17:4).

The ravens brought Elijah food twice a day by God's command. In this exercise of faith, Elijah needed to have complete faith and reliance in God, believing that, since God put him there, He would take care of him. It was essential that his trust in God remained strong so he would be able to face the king and bring the Israelites back to God.

When the water in the brook dried up, God told Elijah to go to Zarephath, where a widow would provide for him. The test of his faith, whether he could rely on God to live a simple life, wasn't finished yet.

Elijah had nothing—no money or food—only the clothes on his back. He had to do whatever God told him to do just to survive. He had to trust that God would provide, even though the widow had only enough oil and flour for one small cake.

> *Learning how to focus on God and making time to worship Him gives us an inner peace that will not leave us even during the most difficult times.*

With no room for doubt or despair, Elijah demonstrated great faith, asking the widow to make a cake for him first. With this absolute faith and reliance on God, the flour and oil never ran out.

When life is stripped down to its bare essentials, when we have nothing and must trust in God to provide for all our needs, we can see whether we have the focus and hope it takes to have complete faith in God. Elijah was able to focus on God during this time with simple faith, and it gave him the strength and training he would need to carry on in his difficult work.

But we don't often rely on God the same way. We worry too much over the difficulties we encounter, the endless issues that crop up in our complicated lives. Will I be the next person to get laid off? Can I afford a new computer? When will I find a job? Where should my child go to school?

Immersed in making decisions, we forget to put our focus on God instead of these issues. As Jesus told His disciples, we should place Him first in our lives:

"Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; nor about the body, what you will put on. Life is more than food, and the body is more than clothing…And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you." (Lk 12:22, 23, 29-31)

If we have faith in God, we will give Him all our burdens, trusting in His power to provide a way for us in all things.

OBSERVE THE SABBATH

Before David became king, he was on the run from Saul, who was intent on killing him. Yet, even in this difficult time, in the valley of the shadow of death, his heart sought after God.

One thing I have desired of the LORD,
That will I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD
All the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD,
And to inquire in His temple. (Ps 27:4)

This is the true test of our faith: that in the midst of our busy and stress-filled lives, we are still able to truly place God first and seek Him. Because David kept his priorities straight during a life-threatening situation, he did not come to any harm.

David's desire to seek after God did not change after he became king. Though different from his days of running from

Saul, his life remained complicated and stressful. Nevertheless, he kept the desire most important to him, which was to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life.

God's house today is the church. God dwells there, and we go there to worship Him and behold His beauty. We need to recognize just how important it is to worship Him in His house. If we hold onto the Sabbath and leave behind all our worldly cares and affairs, we can establish a good relationship with God.

Constant renewal of our relationship with God every week will give us a faith that cannot be affected by worldly concerns. Those who do not have time to draw close to God on the Sabbath are those who lose their faith. They value the things of the world so much that they become numb to spiritual things.

Therefore, it is essential to focus on God that one day of the week so that we can pray and be filled with His Spirit, meditate on Him, and receive peace and power in our hearts. As Hebrews 4:11 says, "Let us be diligent to enter that rest," the rest of observing the Sabbath.

Then, like David, we will not lose our faith because of our busy lives and our struggles, but we will draw closer to God and find strength in Him. If we want simplicity in our lives, we must observe the Sabbath. One of the greatest enjoyments is having a peaceful and quiet life, and the Sabbath is the one day of the week we can find true peace and rest.

OUR GOAL

We struggle to balance all the responsibilities in our lives, but we are trying to solve our difficulties the wrong way. Instead of viewing our life in simple terms of reprioritizing, we need to change our focus and clear away distractions to our goal—to live a simple life that is focused on God.

Living a simple life doesn't mean that we have no possessions and don't work. We can see that the servants of God still had many responsibilities to carry out. Simplicity means not allowing our possessions or responsibilities to control us; rather, we are in control of every aspect of our lives. And in order for us to be in charge of our lives, we must have a good relationship with God.

Learning how to focus on God and making time to worship Him gives us an inner peace that will not leave us even during the most difficult times.

We do not want to be trapped by worldliness and materialism, vying for a lofty position in society and chasing after money. If we are clear on our goal, we are able to evaluate our lives and make adjustments as we learn how to lead a simple life that is pleasing to God. ★

Finding Hope in Every Circumstance

Growing Up as a Remote Area True Jesus Church Member

Christine Lin—Raleigh, North Carolina, USA

When you first step into the chapel on Sabbath morning, what crosses your mind? For many of us, it is simply another Saturday at church. But what if you didn't have a local True Jesus Church to go to each week? What if you couldn't attend Bible studies or youth fellowships with your brothers and sisters and could only see them a few times a year?

As a remote area True Jesus Church member, I have learned to treasure activities that seem normal or routine to others.

Before I was born, my parents moved to Raleigh, North Carolina, almost 400 miles away from the nearest church. I was baptized when I was two, and my family and my mother's family were all believers.

In Raleigh, there were three or four families that would join us for service. However, my mother's family later moved to California and the others left church. Even though joining a non-True Jesus Church church in the area would have made our worship lives easier, we stayed in True Jesus Church because we sincerely believed that this was the true church.

Ever since I was a child, our Sabbath family service has been the same—one hour of watching a sermon tape in our own home. Because I didn't have a religious education class, my dad taught me everything I knew. I didn't have religious education teachers to look up to or brothers and sisters my age to support me.

At first, I complained about my circumstances, and I considered leaving church many times. After all, I didn't have a physical church to go to.

But I learned that as long as we have faith in God's plan, He will reveal His purpose for us. And in the meantime, He provides us with everything we need to overcome our struggles, which I have personally experienced.

ASKING QUESTIONS

When I was about ten years old, my parents felt it was time for me to start attending church events, so I went to my first Student Spiritual Convocation (SSC) at Elizabeth Church in New Jersey. It was a new experience for me because it was my first time in a church since my baptism.

To actually step into a chapel, hear sermons in person, and sing hymns with

a crowd of people was amazing for me. I felt that I had found my true home, filled with family and friends. It was there that I learned about the importance of the Holy Spirit and how He could help me.

I went to SSC every chance that I had, but year after year, I went home without the Holy Spirit. I was very frustrated with God and felt it was unfair that He put me in a place without a church. Everyone else had a church to go to, and they had the Holy Spirit. Why was it that I had neither?

By the time I started my first year of high school, I had been attending SSC for several years. I made a lot of friends at school, but because my closest friends were from church, I still felt very lonely.

I had dealt with depression throughout my life, and I reached my lowest point during my last semester of high school. I was still praying for the Holy Spirit, but I began to think that perhaps God had forgotten or didn't care about me.

During those six months, I learned that depression was not simply a mental condition. It had everything to do with my low spirituality, and it also affected my health. I sought comfort from my church friends, but they could only pray for me and talk to me over the phone or Internet. I knew that the majority of them couldn't empathize with what I was going through.

I began to think about what I had to do to get out of this endless cycle. My high school years were almost over, and I would soon begin a new chapter of my life. Perhaps this would be my chance to make a fresh start.

I only applied to two schools: Rutgers University and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC). Although UNC was much closer to home (only thirty minutes away), I had every intention of going to Rutgers in New Jersey if I was accepted.

At Rutgers, not only was there a church nearby but also a campus fellowship with most of my closest church friends. I felt I needed to surround myself with people who could help me keep up my faith. I didn't want to feel lonely anymore.

When the winter SSC came that year, I prayed for the Holy Spirit and told God I wanted to go to Rutgers because it would help my faith. Rutgers seemed like the obvious choice, and my parents supported my decision.

However, when I arrived home after the convocation, my mother simply told me, "You're going to UNC." It wasn't His will for me to go to Rutgers, and it wasn't time for me to receive His Holy Spirit yet. But I couldn't understand why God wanted me to stay in North Carolina.

After moving to college my first year, I was not only away from my church peers but my family as well. Because of my busy school schedule, I didn't see my parents for weeks or months at a time.

The hardest part about college was facing the loneliness. I cried myself to sleep most nights. I kept asking God, "Why am I here? Why didn't you let me go to Rutgers? How can I possibly keep up my faith if no one is here with me?"

FINDING ANSWERS

The first lesson I learned on my own, without friends or family around, was to find motivation through God. I thank God that, at some point, I realized I had to pray harder and longer every day in order to survive spiritually. This isn't to say that I had stronger faith or that I was better than others. This was just something I had to do.

After finding sermon recordings on the True Jesus Church e-Library website, I put together a schedule for myself on weekdays and Sabbaths. On weekday nights, I sang a hymn, prayed for thirty minutes, and read three chapters of the Bible. Sabbath day was more flexible, but I usually listened to a sermon in the morning and afternoon and wrote reflections on the week.

Through little things every day, God reminded me that He was watching over me. He guided me through my schoolwork and gave me a reason to wake up each morning and start again.

I spent my first year of college adjusting to this schedule. I often fell asleep listening to sermons or reading the Bible, or I didn't have the motivation to pray. Other times, I became so busy with schoolwork that I forgot to make God my first priority.

Nonetheless, after many months, I gradually grew so accustomed to spending time with God every day that it felt wrong if I didn't. Through little things every day, He reminded me that He was watching over me. He guided me through my schoolwork and gave me a reason to wake up each morning and start again.

I began to understand God's will for me when He gave me the opportunity to attend the National Youth Theological Seminar (NYTS) for three consecutive summers. The second time I attended, like the first, I spent most of my prayers asking God, "Why?"

Only this time, rather than complaining about my situation, I wanted to know His will for me. After many prayers, a verse came to me:

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." (Isa 55:8, 9)

With this one verse, God answered all of my questions.

In the journal I kept during the seminar, I wrote down these realizations:

1. I am in North Carolina for a reason. I am physically away from brothers and sisters so that my faith will grow—my own faith, and not that of my parents or my church friends.

2. I am in North Carolina because God wants to train me. Ever since my first

NYTS, God has been training me to serve Him.

3. I have not received the Holy Spirit yet so that I will first learn a few things and strengthen my faith. God wants me to stay strong and set an example for others—that through Him, they may see that my life is a miracle. It is a miracle that I can stand here today.

4. God has a special purpose for me. He wants my life, my background, and my circumstances to strengthen and encourage the people around me.

All this time, I had done nothing but complain to God. I couldn't see past the things I didn't have in order to see that God had a bigger plan for me all along.

A PRECIOUS GIFT

My third NYTS in 2008 was the most memorable because God gave me what I needed to overcome my struggles. During those two weeks, I felt as though each day was a spiritual battle.

In some prayers, I felt I had reached a spiritual high, but at the same time I knew Satan was doing all he could to pull me back. But, thank God, I had many brothers and sisters praying for me each day, and it was enough to encourage me.

After praying for over ten years, I received the Holy Spirit at the age of twenty. God had given me something so precious and fragile, and I felt it was my responsibility to cultivate it and make it grow.

In the following months, the Holy Spirit helped me to change into a different person. I began to take on a more optimistic approach to life and was gradually able to overcome depression.

Now, as I apply for graduate school, whether God wants me to stay in North Carolina or go to a school near a church, I have no doubt that He will continue to guide me in the right direction and give me the strength to overcome future trials.

One thing is for sure—living in a remote area means experiencing various trials that are different from what most brothers and sisters face. We may feel that no one understands what we're going through or that we don't know if we can overcome our struggles. Or perhaps, we don't know if God is listening to our prayers.

Though we may not understand God's will at first, within every circumstance is the hope of God's promises and His guidance. What seems to be a discouraging situation at first can turn out to be full of hope. ★

God Will Never Leave Me

AH—Kowloon, Hong Kong

MY PLAN, NOT GOD'S PLAN

"Yesterday, today, forever, Jesus is the same. All may change, but Jesus never!" These lyrics from the hymn "Yesterday, Today, Forever" mean a lot to me. I found out firsthand how they are the best medicine to heal a sorrowful soul.

In the early 1990s, I had many plans for my life. My first priority was to enable my parents to have a comfortable and happy retirement—I pictured them sitting in big armchairs looking content and happy.

I wanted this because they both had very unhappy childhoods, were abandoned and given away by their parents, and had worked very hard as immigrants in England to bring up six children. They ran a business without any knowledge of English and had to cope with Mum's kidney problems, which caused her to be in and out of the hospital regularly.

I thought that if I worked hard at my job, I would be able to provide them with the material things they needed for a comfortable, worry-free retirement. However, my plan was not God's plan.

Dad was diagnosed with rectal cancer soon after retiring. After the first session of chemotherapy, the doctor told us the cancer had spread and chemotherapy was no use. Dad started to suffer endless pain, and even injections of morphine had no effect towards the end. He died within six months of the diagnosis at age fifty-nine.

After Dad's death, my focus was on Mum. She was a kidney transplant patient at the time and needed someone to help her while she recovered. To take her mind off Dad, I spent all of my spare time with her and did all that I could to give her the best and make her happy. Yet, I saw no joy or lessening of pain in her heavy heart.

I then came up with what I thought was a clever idea: I would have a baby to keep Mum company and take her mind off Dad, thinking that would make her happy. Soon after, I conceived and bought a house across the street from her. She once said to me, "I wish I could see you when I wave my hand in the living room window." Living in the house opposite to hers would fulfill her wish and show that we all loved her dearly even though Dad was gone.

However, things did not unfold according to my calculations. Mum had

a stroke before my baby was born. She was paralyzed on her left side below the shoulder and required a long period of recovery at the hospital. Besides running a Chinese takeout, I visited her daily and cooked for her. All of my effort paid off after seeing her improvement, which encouraged me to go on despite a tired mind and body.

After my daughter was born, I wanted to take her to see Mum straight away. However, my husband objected and explained that there would be plenty of time and opportunities in the future because Mum was on the road to recovery. Taking a newborn baby to a busy city hospital would be unwise. As I didn't want to argue with him, I agreed.

I could just imagine Mum's happiness when she saw her granddaughter, my special gift to her, a few weeks later. However, Mum did not have the chance to see her present.

Just two weeks after the birth of my daughter, Mum passed away unexpectedly. As I held her warm and soft body until it turned cool and stiff, all I could do was cry. Why was God so cruel that He took away my dad and mum within eighteen months? He destroyed my biggest purpose in life and shattered my world.

A PAINFUL HEART

My husband worried that I would have a nervous breakdown or suffer from postpartum depression because I was so deeply affected. Everything now seemed pointless to me.

Deep down I blamed myself because I believed that my parents' deaths might be punishment from God for all the wrongdoings in my life—in particular, not acting upon His words after my baptism. My whole family except Dad was baptized into the True Jesus Church in the late 1970s when Mum was suffering from fatal kidney failure. I didn't have any particularly strong feelings about baptism but felt that if our baptisms cured Mum, then it was a good thing that I would do.

Through God's mercy, Mum pulled through each time the doctors said that she might not make it. I prayed hard whenever something went wrong with Mum but would again be my disinterested self when she recovered. I was young and wanted to enjoy life. I believed that religion could wait until I got older, perhaps when I entered my forties or fifties.

Therefore, while I attended church services and listened to sermons every week, I was not interested in committing myself seriously to Christianity. When I lost my parents, I still had a very shallow faith because I hadn't established a relationship with God. Instead of turning to the church and prayer for support during that difficult time, I began to hate myself and believed that I would never ever be happy again.

The thought of suicide passed through my mind, but seeing my daughter's tiny face helped me come to my senses. This baby was innocent and had not asked to come into this world. I was responsible for her and could not pass the responsibility to my husband alone. I carried on as a mother and an elder sister to my siblings, and I continued to run the takeout business.

However, in doing all of this with a painful heart, I almost had a nervous breakdown. The hard work of running the business, being an inexperienced mother, and worrying over whether my siblings were taken care of drained away all my energy.

I was young and wanted to enjoy life. I believed that religion could wait until I got older, perhaps when I entered my forties or fifties.

I thought of my parents every day because I had taken over the business they operated for many years, and everything there reminded me of them. Knowing that all of my plans for them had gone wrong gradually affected my personality. I would get depressed very easily, especially on Mother's Day, Father's Day, their birthdays, and the days they died.

I was jealous when other people mentioned their parents. I would take out my anger, sorrow, and depression on my husband, blaming him for all the hard work I had to do. I acted out in many ways: shouting so loudly that it could be heard next door, breaking things, even contemplating a divorce.

I knew I should not have behaved in this manner, but I couldn't control myself. These extreme thoughts and actions seemed to be my way of releasing the pressure within me.

However, things could not continue like this. Both my husband and I felt the problem had to be resolved before I ended up in a mental hospital. We had a serious discussion about leaving the country because unhappiness surrounded us there; perhaps I would be a happy, normal person in a new environment. In autumn 1999, we left England for Hong Kong hoping for a new life.

A DORMANT FAITH

We thought that leaving England would improve my disposition but things were worse. I was still unhappy, and the endless work and pressure from work did nothing to improve my temper.

Yet, I still did not seek God's help. I attended services at church because it was a routine for me, but I did not have any connection to faith, and I did not pursue spiritual cultivation.

During that time, I started to have bad dreams and nightmares. I had often dreamt of my parents after they passed away, but now my dreams started to affect me badly. On top of that, they were

quite frequent, probably due to my busy life. I would scream, lash out physically, and panic because of them, and my husband had to calm me down when he was awakened by me.

I once dreamt that someone chased me down an endless road. Another time, I dreamt that I was dying, and as I lay in bed my spirit sank lower and lower like it was falling down a hole, but there was no bottom.

I also dreamt that I was entering the chapel, and I saw that everyone inside was wearing white except for me—I was in black. This scared me because I didn't want to end up in hell after I died. I wanted to see my parents in heaven.

Because of these dreams and many similar ones, I started to think about God and my faith seriously. I still wondered why, if He wanted to punish me for my wrongdoings, He punished my parents instead of me. I felt both guilty and angry at God, yet I hoped that there was still a chance I could be saved.

I knew that I needed help, but I wasn't sure where to start. However, as I was still going to church, I started to listen attentively to the sermons. Despite my efforts to concentrate and learn during church, I still felt that God did not love me. God's words had no effect on me and did not touch my heart.

A few days before the 2006 spiritual convocation at Kowloon Church, my husband joyfully told me that he had just received the Holy Spirit. I was happy for him and said something like, "Good! You can die without fear now." Little did I know, I would be given the same mercy from God in a few days' time.

GOD'S IMMENSE LOVE

The spiritual convocation at Kowloon Church was the turning point for me. That Sabbath day, for the first time in my life, I felt that every word spoken by the preacher was directed at and meant for me. I will never forget that my life changed completely that day, when I finally left the depths of grief and was transported into the loving arms of God.

I felt God's immense love in me. It was the first time in my life that I truly felt His existence. I was like a little lost sheep that He had not abandoned and still cared to find even after all my wrongdoings.

As I listened to the sermon, tears began to run down my cheeks. I lowered my head, hoping that others would not see me crying. All my life, I felt that crying in front of others was a sign of weakness. Being strong and coping with difficulty well were important to me, but no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't hold back my tears.

All the wrongdoings in my past came back to me, and I was so ashamed of being a sinner that I didn't feel worthy to hold my head up. I felt a lot of hurt and pain when I reflected on my past. I had never experienced this before. I was glad that I was sitting near the back because I could hide my tears a little better.

I planned to wipe my face discreetly during the ending prayer, but as soon as I closed my eyes, all I could do was cry. I did not care anymore if others around me could hear me crying in the prayer. I was so ashamed of my sins and how I had not lived out God's word all these years. My thoughts were focused on God, and I started to pray earnestly.

Suddenly, I felt God's immense love in me. It was the first time in my life that I truly felt His existence. I was like a little lost sheep that He had not abandoned and still cared to find even after all my wrongdoings.

I cried like a baby in the prayer and wished it would never end because I had so much to tell God. I wanted to tell Him about my sorrow, all the tears that I had shed over Dad and Mum for so many years, my regret over my sins, and the shame and guilt in my heart. God was the only one who truly understood me and how I had lived so unhappily for the past fifteen years.

I felt God's love and mercy surround me as many emotions swirled within me, and I shed many tears. I wondered if what was happening had something to do with the Holy Spirit, which I had heard about ever since my baptism but had never experienced.

I decided that there was no way God would bestow His precious gift on me because I had sinned so much. I just wanted Him to understand my sorrow and feel His mercy and forgiveness. I did not dare to ask Him for the Holy Spirit in my prayer.

However, I was very curious to find out what this strange feeling inside me was—I was so eager to pray, I didn't want the prayer to end. I also felt joy in my heart despite the tears of guilt and shame.

In the past, my mind wandered most of the time during prayer. I only prayed seriously when I interceded for my parents. But because of this new experience in prayer, for the first time in my life, I mustered up the courage to move to the front row during the next prayer session.

To my surprise, the minister told me afterward that I had received the Holy Spirit. It was proof that God had really forgiven a sinner like me. Nevertheless, I was afraid that there had been a mistake, so I was hesitant to believe it fully.

A few weeks later, a different minister confirmed that I had received the Holy Spirit, and I believed it with a heart full of happiness. Receiving God's forgiveness and love changed me. The burden in my heart lifted.

Dear brothers and sisters, if you think you are a sinner and do not deserve the love of God, please remember that His love and forgiveness are immense and beyond our imagination.

PROGRESS IN FAITH

Knowing that God had forgiven me and still loved me helped tremendously. The bad dreams and nightmares occurred less frequently and my temper improved. I began reading many church publications such as the Holy Spirit Monthly. I joined fellowships and other church events, which helped me understand the Bible more deeply.

Attending church from then on was a happy and enjoyable event for me and no longer a habit or routine. However, I still thought a lot about Mum and Dad and wished that they were still alive. As I learned more biblical teachings, I was afraid that God would dislike me because Jesus said, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Mt 10:37).

One night in autumn 2008, I had a strange dream. I dreamt that I was looking in a mirror but couldn't see my own reflection. I got scared and asked my husband to look in the mirror, and he couldn't see his reflection either. I believed that this meant both of us were dead.

While I was thinking this, I looked in the mirror again and suddenly saw the beautiful faces of a man and a woman in their youth. They both looked so young and happy. I knew straight away that they were the ones I longed day and night to see. I screamed out, "It's Mum and Dad!" My screaming woke me up and I couldn't stop crying out of happiness when I realized that I was repeatedly saying, "Hallelujah, praise the Lord."

I recalled reading a testimony from a sister who said she had often shed tears over a relative who had passed away. One day, she had a dream or vision and saw that relative in heaven, looking like he had as a youth. Seeing my parents in their youth comforted me and gave me hope that they were safe in the hands of God.

I do not know whether the dream was God's way of comforting me or just me thinking too deeply of them both. Nevertheless, I truly thank God for allowing me to have this dream because it helped me to not think about the past and move forward in my faith and my life.

GOD WILL NOT ABANDON HIS SHEEP

Looking back now I see that God opened a path for me out of my difficulties. If He hadn't given me a tolerant and loving husband and our baby daughter around the time of Mum's death, I would not have been able to carry on at all.

Usually, my husband did not interfere when my anger exploded. He would just listen to my threats and harsh words of blame and wait for me to calm down. I am thankful and grateful that God gave my husband the strength and patience to stand a wife like that for many years.

God also gave me a daughter that any mother would want. I remember that I once scolded her heavily over her homework when she was about six years old. When I woke her up for school the next morning, she said to me, "Mum, I am very sorry for upsetting you last night, really sorry."

I knew straight away that she must have cried all night without sleeping because of me. How could I have done this to my beloved daughter?

There was another time when she came to my room to comfort me. She said, "Are you missing grandma and granddad again?" I asked her how she knew that I missed them. She said, "I saw you holding the photo of them in your hand for a long time." Thank God for giving me such a loving girl.

God took away Dad and Mum but gave me a wonderful daughter and a good husband that I could rely on at the lowest point of my life. I cannot imagine what I would have become without them by my side.

I truly believe that God's word is true and that He will not abandon His lost sheep. He let me go through my deepest, most difficult trial and then led me back to Him. The Bible states:

"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?" (Lk 15:4)

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Mt 11:28)

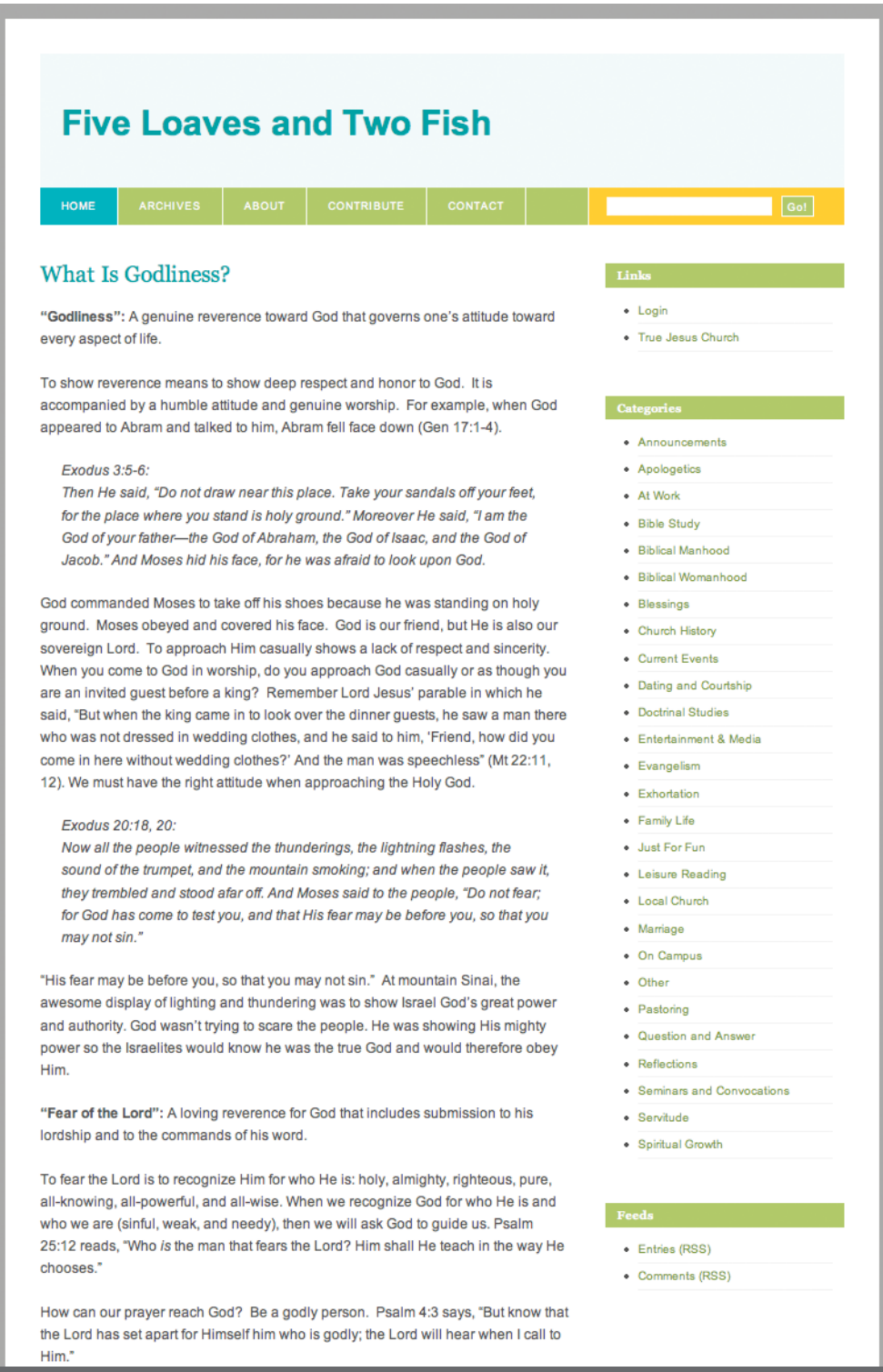
"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,
A broken and a contrite heart—
These, O God, You will not despise." (Ps 51:17)

Every time I hear these words, my heart is filled with thanksgiving.

Dear brothers and sisters, if you think you are a sinner and do not deserve the love of God, please remember that His love and forgiveness are immense and beyond our imagination. All we need to do is open our hearts and face Him. As it says in Hebrews 4:16, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

I have God to rely on now. Others may leave me tomorrow, but God will never leave me. As long as God is there, I will not be afraid to continue on my path. I just hope that I can remain pure until the end of my road and that I can face Him with a guilt-free conscience. No matter what tomorrow will bring, He will always be there for me.

Yesterday, today, forever, Jesus is the same. All may change, but Jesus never! Glory to His Name! ★



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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- Comments (RSS)

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!

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 CD to:

Manna
General Assembly of True Jesus Church
314 S.Brookhurst St, #104
Anaheim, CA 92804 USA

Please direct any questions to manna@tjc.org or
Phone: +1-714-533-8808
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.

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Author Guidelines and Editorial Calendar

Issue #65:

Topic: Dealing with Calamities

Articles due: July 1, 2010

Christians are not exempt from hardships and distress. How should we respond to calamities, whether personally experienced or not? What are we supposed to learn from them? How did people in the Bible react to calamities and what can we learn from their response?

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!

True Jesus Church
314 S.Brookhurst St, #104
Anaheim, CA 92804 USA
Phone: +1-714-533-8808
Fax: +1-714-533-8878
info@tjc.org
http://www.tjc.org

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