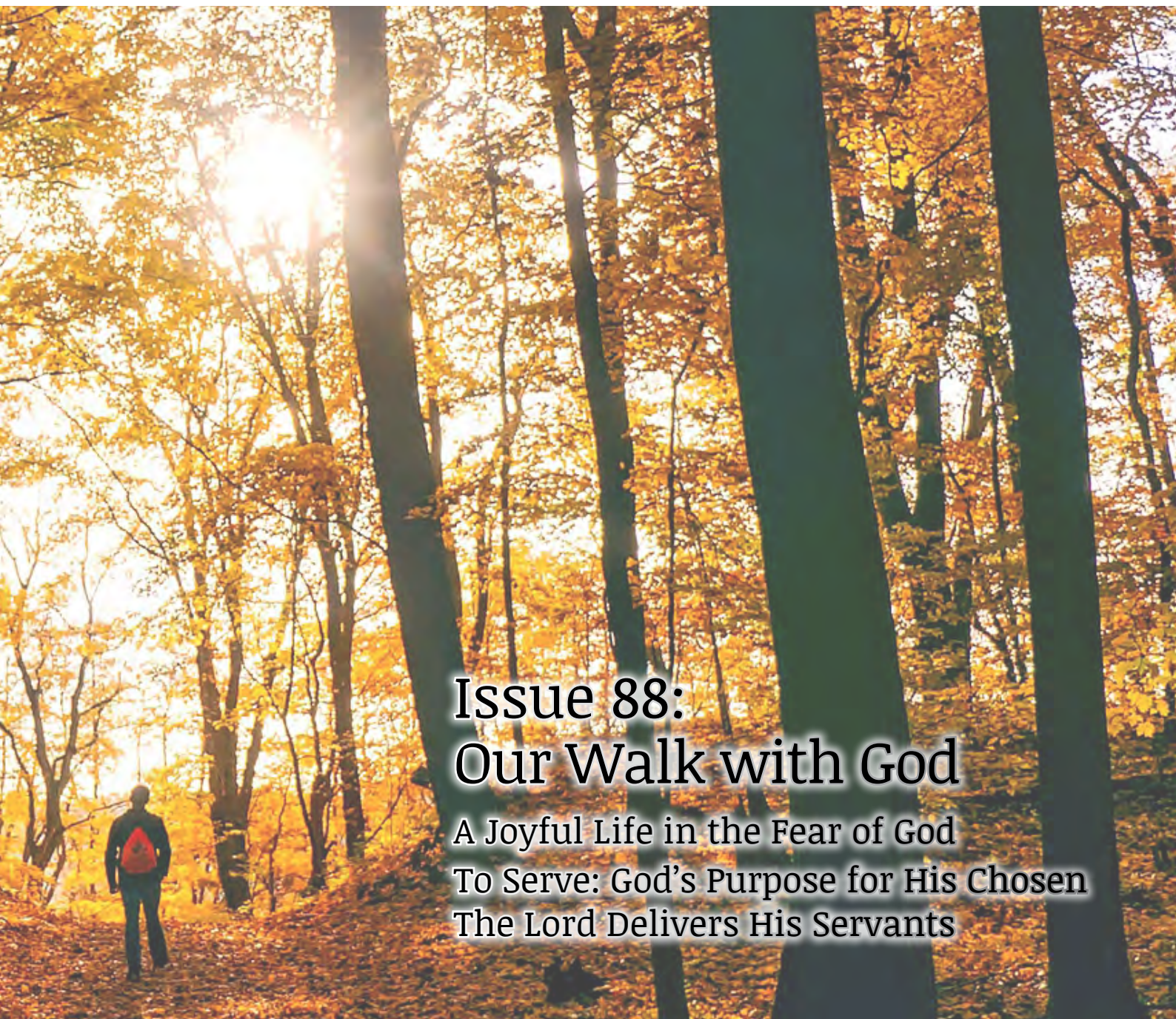


Manna



Issue 88: Our Walk with God

A Joyful Life in the Fear of God
To Serve: God's Purpose for His Chosen
The Lord Delivers His Servants

Our Walk

with God

Vincent Yeung
Cambridge, UK

“Woe is me, for I am undone!
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King,
The LORD of hosts.”

(Isa 6:5)

The expression *mysterium tremendum* describes the numinous experience of awe and dread in the presence of the almighty and transcendent God. The question is, why had Isaiah not felt this fear and wonder in God’s temple before? The answer is that this theophany—or manifestation of God—and the seraphim’s proclamation of God’s holiness (Isa 6:3) made Isaiah aware of God’s holy presence in the temple. He realized his utter sinfulness in the light of God’s presence, bringing fear of judgment and condemnation.

Today, we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, and the church is the church of the living God (1 Cor 6:19; 1 Tim 3:15). But have we, in the same way, forgotten that He is the holy God? Is God’s presence in our lives merely an abstract concept, easily forgotten, as our worship becomes more sterile? The danger of God becoming irrelevant in our life, either consciously or subconsciously, is that we will depart and go our separate way.

Isaiah’s experience prompts us to re-evaluate our relationship with God, and reflect on what He requires of us. In this issue of Manna, we are reminded to keep ourselves in the love of God. If we fall from His grace by not persisting in our faith, how can we find our way back? We need to honor God as the Lord of our life and submit to His sovereignty by fearing Him again.

We may ask, if God calls us His friend, and perfect love casts our fear (Jn 15:15; Jas 2:23; 1 Jn 4:18), why should we fear Him? Why do we need to work out our salvation in fear and trembling (Phil 2:12)? If there “is no fear in love” (1 Jn 4:18a), how can we love and fear God at the same time?

The “fear” that we should have is an attitude of reverence towards God in our lifelong journey towards salvation, rather than the irrational, emotional fear discussed in 1 John. This is godly fear (Heb 12:28). When we serve God with fear, we can rejoice with trembling (Ps 2:11). This is the progressive relationship we should have with God, rooted not only in love, but also fear of Him, leading to heavenly joy.

So, we see how fear plays a key role in our faith journey and in our relationship with God. Many of us start from the position of indifference—ignorant and unaware of God’s presence. We progress to the point of awareness but remain terrified in His presence. Isaiah was afraid of the majesty and mystery of God when God appeared because he did not truly know God. Since the fear of God is the beginning of knowledge (Prov 1:7), we must move on in our faith journey to become God’s servant and trusted friend. As we draw closer to Him, we also continue to honor and respect Him, with love and fear. Let us continue to serve Him in truth, with all our heart (1 Sam 12:24a).

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Steven Shek
Edinburgh, UK

THE OVERLOOKED AND WEAK IN FAITH

We rarely hear of joy and the fear of God spoken in the same breath. Most want to receive joy from God, without cultivating the fear of Him. But if we do not seek after godly fear, then the joy we experience will be short-lived. Any individual concerned with his salvation must have the motivation to fear God. A progressive relationship with God is rooted not only in God's love, but also in godly fear.

A lack of godly fear can lead to sin and, as a result, punishment from God. Through God's word, Jeremiah foresaw the devastation that God's children would bring upon themselves through sin (Jer 33:1–26). But God also revealed that, once His people fear Him and

repent, He would have mercy:

"Behold, I will bring it health and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them the abundance of peace and truth. ... Then it shall be to Me a name of joy, a praise, and an honor before all nations of the earth, who shall hear all the good that I do to them; they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and all the prosperity that I provide for it." (Jer 33:6–9)

This prophesy speaks truth to those who, when they realize the error of their ways, repent and return to God. Those

who acknowledge God's discipline will turn to God in fear of Him. And He will heal. God will do many things for His returned people, such that they will joyfully magnify His holy name!

When one has the fear of God at the center of his life, he will have a foretaste of heavenly joy. The relationship between godly fear and joy is evident throughout the Bible. Let us look at how God's word is fulfilled from generation to generation, and how we, too, can live a joyful life.

"If we do not seek after godly fear, then the joy we experience will be short-lived. ... A progressive relationship with God is rooted not only in God's love, but also in godly fear."



FEAST OF THE PASSOVER

When the Israelites observed the Passover in Egypt, they knew what God was going to do—He would destroy all the Egyptian firstborn and lead His people out of Egypt (Ex 12:1–14, 29–42). Indeed, they witnessed God's salvation and almighty power through this event. After they received the Law of Moses, the Israelites continued to keep the Passover out of the fear of God (Deut 16:1–8). And by observing this feast, they rejoiced in God's deliverance.

On the first anniversary of the Passover, during their walk in the wilderness, the Israelites were to observe the feast again (Num 9:1–14). However, it became known that a group of people had been defiled by touching a human corpse. These individuals confessed their defilement, and they also asked why they could not partake in the Passover. They were keen to present the offering, but did not want to break God's law by doing so while unclean. God, in His mercy, allowed them to keep the Passover a month later, giving them time for ceremonial cleansing before partaking in this most holy feast (Num 5:2). We can see the fear of God ruling in their hearts, to act according to God's commandments.

During the kingdom years, after a period of spiritual decline under a series of ungodly kings, Hezekiah led a reformation to turn the people back to God (2 Chr 30). He proclaimed that the Passover was to be observed—a message sent not only to his own people of Judah, but also to Israel. The messengers ran to every locality, commanding the people to return to God so that God would return to them. The people were called to yield to God, to prevent the same fate of desolation that befell those who had transgressed God's law. Those who did not fear God laughed and mocked, but others humbled themselves and went to Jerusalem. The hand of God was upon Judah. Those who gathered throughout the Feast of Unleavened Bread were filled with great joy. We can see the relationship between having the fear of God, leading to humble obedience, and the joy that comes from observing His commandments.

"Each time the children of God observed the Passover, they did so out of the fear of God. This is especially true when, after periods of spiritual darkness, they rediscovered God's word. And each time, their spiritual lives were revived with joy from God."

Decades later, after returning from captivity, the Jews again kept the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ezra 6:19–22). They had the fear of God, as those who "returned from the captivity ate together with all who had separated themselves from the filth of the nations of the land in order to seek the Lord God of Israel" (Ezra 6:21). In the process of seeking God, they observed the Passover, and in keeping God's commandment, they departed from evil. The wonderful testimony for us today is that those who kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread did so with joy. This joy did not arise because Darius assisted them in rebuilding God's temple, but was bestowed on them by God because they observed His will.

Each time the children of God observed the Passover, they did so out of the fear of God. This is especially true when, after periods of spiritual darkness, they rediscovered God's word. And each time, their spiritual lives were revived with joy from God. We know the Passover prefigures the Holy Communion, because Jesus is the Lamb of God and our Passover (Jn 1:29; 1 Cor 5:6–8). We are to keep the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Each time we partake in the Holy Communion, let us reflect on the truth of Christ's sacrifice and allow godly fear to reign in our hearts. Then, obedience to His commands and heavenly joy will follow.

FEAST OF TABERNACLES

The Feast of Tabernacles is another Old Testament feast that holds prophetic significance for us today (Lev 23:33–44; Num 29:12–40; Deut 16:13–17). During the feast, the Israelites would make offerings and live in tents for seven days, to remember how the Lord

brought them out of Egypt. This was a time of rejoicing, not only in looking back, but also in looking forward to how God would bless them. Everyone was invited to this sacred feast of the Lord.

After Nehemiah led the rebuilding of Jerusalem's city walls, Ezra, the scribe, read the Law of Moses to the people (Neh 8:9–18). When they heard God's law, the people were broken-hearted and wept over their sins. However, the Levites quieted them and said, "Be still, for the day is holy; do not be grieved" (Neh 8:11). The people understood what they were taught, and continued to study the law. They discovered that God had commanded them to dwell in booths (tents) during the feast of the seventh month. The people followed the instructions of the spiritual leaders, and "there was very great gladness" (Neh 8:17b). Throughout the feast, God's word was read to the whole congregation of Israel. We can see that they experienced godly fear, as well as joy.

FEAR AND JOY IN THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

The apostolic church also experienced the joy that comes with knowing and following God's word. After the Pentecost, three thousand souls were added to the fold, and the believers "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42–47). In those days, hearing God's word was enough to put godly fear into the believers. Having received the Holy Spirit, this newly established and expanding church had the fear of God among them (Isa 11:1–2). As in the days of the Feast of Tabernacles, they were taught God's word through the doctrine of the apostles. This cultivated their fear of God, which in turn brought them



joy in the Lord. They “ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God” (Acts 2:46b–47a).

Spiritually speaking, we have always been dwelling in tents. The apostle Paul describes our present perishable bodies as “our earthly house, this tent” (2 Cor 5:1–4). The apostle Peter also spoke the same truth:

“Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me.” (2 Pet 1:13–14)

We may be living in tents, but we have departed from the spiritual Egypt, having been saved by our Savior, Jesus Christ. Therefore, we look forward to “a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor 5:1b). We observe the weekly Sabbath in anticipation of eventually putting off our tents and entering into this eternal Sabbath rest

“We should avoid trying to generate joy through other means; if we are not perfecting our fear of God through keeping His commandments, then this is not true joy. When God sees that His children truly fear Him, He will personally give them joy.”

(Heb 4:8–10). As we are one with the apostolic church (Jn 17:20–24), we ought to have the same fear and joy, arising from God’s word.

CONCLUSION

The above examples highlight the fact that God’s word alone is sufficient to induce the fear of Him in our hearts. In turn, this fear leads us to receive joy from God. We should avoid trying to generate joy through other means; if we are not perfecting our fear of God through keeping His commandments, then this is not true joy. When God sees that His children truly fear Him, He will personally give them joy. So, whenever we have a joyful experience, we should discern whether it is from God, through godly fear.

May God bless us all to seek the fear of God, so that we can obey God’s will and receive true joy from Him. Amen.

To Serve: God’s Purpose for His Chosen

WHAT IT MEANS TO SERVE

For most Christians, to worship God means coming to church, singing some hymns, listening to a sermon, and saying a prayer or two. Over time, weekly church attendance becomes routine, and the worship of God inextricably linked with the setting of a church service. At a push, we may bring our worship home in the form of a family service.

When it comes to serving God, we tend to see it as separate from worship. We approach divine work as fulfilling the duties assigned to us by the church. As long as we perform these tasks with a willing spirit, God will take delight. In fact, we further compartmentalize our service to God in its own sphere—it is something we render to God in the confines of the church, away from our personal and work lives.

“We approach divine work as. ...something we render to God in the confines of the church, away from our personal and work lives. However, the Bible’s concept of worship and service is very different.”

However, the Bible’s concept of worship and service is very different. Rather than being distinct from the rest of our day-to-day life, worship and service are very much woven into a Christian’s existence and purpose.

Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. (Gen 2:15)

After God created man, He placed him in the garden. But it was not for man to idly enjoy; rather, God set man “to

tend and keep” the garden. Here, “tend” is translated from *abedah*, whose root meaning is “to serve, cultivate, enslave, work.”¹ In other words, it was God who gave man work, and entrusted man to work for Him. Man has been divinely ordained to serve God through his labor.

This gives rise to the fundamental truth that to work for our livelihood is God’s

1 James Strong, *The New Strong’s Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), H5647.



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will for us: “Six days you shall work” (Ex 34:21). God ordains when we should work and when we should rest. Not only that, our labor must reflect the godliness that God expects of His children. Paul elaborates on this expectation for our secular jobs:

Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men.

(Col 3:22–23; see also Eph 6:5–8)

We must work for our employers with sincere hearts, as to Christ. For a believer of God, work goes beyond the scope of earning a living—it is to fulfill God’s will. We should do our secular work with goodwill, as a service to God.

Serving God, then, is not only about attending service on the Sabbath day and doing divine work in church. Just as Adam had to tend the garden daily, service to God is a daily and active affair. Serving God daily and actively occasions many moments to ponder and gain insight into how to improve ourselves and our service. And most important of all, it gives our lives purpose and meaning.

SPIRIT OF SERVICE

We all desire our service to be acceptable to God. But it is important to remember that God’s acceptance is incumbent on the way we conduct our lives. God’s acceptance of our service does not depend on the type of work; He looks at our hearts more than anything else. If we live our lives contrary to His divine nature, our service will not be acceptable to Him. However impressive the work, a corrupt nature will render

it invalid and even abominable in God’s eyes.

The example of Cain and Abel says it all. Cain murdered his brother because Cain “was of the wicked one...[and] his works were evil” (1 Jn 3:12)—his behavior reflected his wicked nature. The rejection of Cain’s offering was the tipping point for evil to get the better of him. God exposed his wicked nature, telling him, “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door” (Gen 4:7a).

God’s rejection of Cain’s offering reveals to us that the way we conduct ourselves impacts our service to God. Spiritual cultivation becomes a must, as the foundation to every service we render. It must be infused into every aspect of our lives.

PREPARATION FOR ACCEPTABLE SERVICE

With All Our Heart

At Saul’s ordination, Samuel addressed some important teachings relating to serving God. Leading up to Saul’s ordination as king, the Israelites demanded that Samuel appoint a king to rule over them. This demand, however, did not originate from a

positive impulse. Rather, it signals their shift towards a Gentile lifestyle and model of nationhood in a blatant disregard for God and a demonstration of their unfaithfulness.

Samuel was determined to guide and correct this renegade nation, and he put forth an unchanging principle to them: serve God with all your heart. He even stated this twice in his address to the Israelites (1 Sam 12:20, 24). In the first instance, Samuel said, “You have done all this wickedness; yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart” (1 Sam 12:20b). Samuel did not hesitate to right their fundamental wrong—God is their King, and the wish to replace God with a human ruler was wicked. Nevertheless, even if Israel insists on installing a king, Samuel reminded them that they must still follow God. The nation would not be able to serve the Lord wholeheartedly without this basic principle of obedience. In other words, submitting to God’s word comes before serving Him.

In the second instance, Samuel added two more factors to the equation. The first is: “Only fear the LORD, and serve Him in truth with all your heart” (1 Sam 12:24a). To “fear the Lord” is the mindset they should have. The nation of Israel has committed the greatest evil, which is to forsake God. They needed to eradicate all false gods in order to start anew with God, believing Him to be the only true God and Savior. Returning to God may well be a long and painstaking process, but it is the very foundation of meaningful service towards Him. The second is: to serve the Lord “in truth.” The nation of Israel was to acquaint

herself with the Law of Moses and serve God strictly according to His way, rather than following the Gentile way of life and worship. This was a reminder that they had to be faithful to the word of God in their service to Him, keeping His word in accordance to His will, and never again assimilate pagan religious practices into their pure faith. Otherwise, God would withhold His divine acceptance and blessing.

What would be their motivation to serve God in fear and truth? Samuel told them to consider the great things God had done for them (1 Sam 12:24). Historically, God had saved their forebears from the Egyptians; the story of this great deed was passed down from one generation to another. In Samuel’s time, God again saved them from extinction by the hands of the Philistines. On reflection, these deeds should lead to a greater understanding of God’s love towards His chosen (Deut 10:15). How could the Israelites respond, if not with gratitude?

Samuel reminded the Israelites that in serving God with all their heart means a service that is founded on obedience, fear, and truth. This means having a willing heart to serve God, a fear for God as their rightful Ruler, and keeping the word of God faithfully without bringing in other pagan or secular ideals. These values likewise apply to us today in our service to God.

Today, understanding God’s love, as manifested through Christ (Rev 1:5), should similarly generate in us an unquenchable motivation to reciprocate. The momentum of such gratitude will help us overcome any difficulties we face in the course of serving God, enabling us to serve with a heart of thanksgiving. Not only this, we would seek to do so in full obedience, departing from evil, and with a pure faith. We should be determined to remain faithful, knowing that we have already been saved.

With All Humility

Christ’s death on the cross is the most notable example of accomplishing God’s work with all humility. In order to carry out the work of redemption, Jesus, being God, humbled Himself to



the lowest even before His incarnation (Phil 2:7–11). The very fact of His coming to the world is the epitome of humility. And in spite of unceasing opposition and shame showered upon Him, He persevered to fulfill the Father’s will.

Having learned from Christ’s example, Paul too submitted himself fully to God’s authority in his service. He understood the heart of Christ, which is a heart of sacrifice for the church. In his final message to the elders of Ephesus, this understanding is apparent in his care and tears for the church (Acts 20:17–35). He toiled and labored for the faith of the believers, counting everything as loss, and suffering the loss of all things (Phil 3:8–9). And he persevered, despite constantly being plotted against.

When we feel attacked or aggravated, our natural instinct is to become defensive and retaliate. But if we lose control of ourselves in such situations, we put the work of God in jeopardy. This is why Paul told Timothy to correct those in opposition with humility (2 Tim 2:25–26).

Correcting those taken captive by Satan is a mission fraught with danger. First, we expose ourselves to the risk of being deceived. Second, we risk being falsely accused by the deceived, since they are no longer capable of telling the truth. With humility, Timothy had

to first submit himself to God’s will, by following Paul’s instructions. He would also need to exercise humility in the event of provocation and false accusation. Doing this would enable him to overcome the immediate discomfort, and to do whatever he can with reverence, in the hope of saving the deceived from Satan’s snare.

Evidently, to serve God requires us to forgo our own will and status. More often than not, to suffer shame and pain is part of serving God. However, all these become more bearable when our heart is no longer dictated by ego, knowing that Jesus Himself went through the greatest of suffering and shame for us. Humility directs our heart to let go of negativity and any sense of grievance. At the same time, it focuses our attention on God, which assuages any pain we feel in the process of accomplishing God’s work. The sense of peace and joy obtained from exercising humility, despite unrelenting fiery darts, is inexpressible.

With a Heart of Purity

The Book of Revelation gives a vivid account of those who survived the great tribulation. Instead of depicting the excruciating sufferings the saints went through, John emphasizes how the saints came through the trials unscathed. This provides us with food

“More often than not, to suffer shame and pain is part of serving God. However, all these become more bearable when our heart is no longer dictated by ego, knowing that Jesus Himself went through the greatest of suffering and shame for us.”

for thought. In our times of trial, do we only seek for a way of escape or are we concerned about keeping ourselves pure and righteous in the eyes of God (Rev 7:9, 14)?

In the vision, the victorious saints are standing on a sea of glass mingled with fire. The fire indicates their struggle against the beasts (Rev 14:9; 15:2), and the suffering they underwent. Despite their ordeals, the saints managed to find their way to come before the throne. They could only do so because of two elements. First, they kept their robes white and pure. Keeping our robes clean is the only way to draw closer to God, and it is by cleansing through trials that we experience God's abiding presence. God is interested in the spiritual wellbeing of His chosen more than anything else. And it is only through purging trials that He ensures we are spiritually healthy (Isa 4).

The second element is victory. Aside from overcoming sins, John conveys the trust and endurance that the tribulation saints had to have. The victory that the saints obtained is a victory over deception. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus describes how deception will be ever on the increase, so much so that it will become profoundly difficult to identify. If we are to stand before God's throne, then our top priority must be to hold to the truth in the face of great deception.

In our service to God, then, we ought to remember where our focus lies. It is not about escaping and finding the quickest way out of our trials and difficulties, but maintaining our purity and righteousness before God. Moreover, in the face of growing deception, we have to remain faithful in our service and to stand firm and not be swayed.

CONCLUSION

Serving God is a lifelong endeavor, which reflects the greatness of God's love received by His people. Though once alienated from God and dead in sin, we are now made alive in Christ and are the children of God. We have been handed the opportunity to serve the Lord and, in fact, divinely ordained to work for God. Our service to God, however, is not to be isolated from our everyday lives. To serve God acceptably, as we have seen from the examples in the Bible, is to redirect our entire lives towards God: to serve Him with all our hearts, in obedience, fear, and truth. We serve Him with humility, even to the point of suffering shame and loss, knowing that God has to be placed before everything else in our service. And we serve with a heart of purity, a heart that is not shaken or stirred in tribulation or temptation, but that desires to stand before God on that great day.

The Book of Revelation indicates that the end-time true church has been divinely ordained to fulfill the final phase of God's plan, during the most challenging time period. John reveals that, for our service to be ultimately accepted, we must stand before God's throne. The greatest struggle we face is the work of the beast against the church, as he does his best to obscure the right way of salvation. Only the servants of God shall be sealed by the Holy Spirit, on account of their faithfulness towards the gospel of salvation (Rev 7:3; Eph 1:13). These victorious saints shall always serve before the throne of God (Rev 7:15; 22:3-4). Let us all therefore carry out our duties with enthusiasm and an appropriate conduct in the assurance that, by doing so, God will accept our service.

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True Jesus Church

Knowledge of the Son of God

Adapted from a sermon by
Barnabas Chong
Singapore

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul urges God's elect to "all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13). What is the knowledge of the Son of God? How can we, as God's elect, mature into the stature of the fullness of Christ?

To have the stature of Christ, we must know Him and what He has done, and continues to do, for us. As Jesus said in His prayer, the gift He came to give was eternal life, so that we may know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He sent (Jn 17:3). The concept of eternity is difficult enough to understand, let alone understanding what it means to receive eternal life. Hence, the Gospel of John links eternal life to knowing Jesus. But what is it specifically that John is telling us we should know about

“ Jesus rose from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, this is the same power that will raise us up. If the same Holy Spirit dwells in us today, it means we, too, are bound for that final and glorious resurrection. ”

Jesus, in order to gain and embrace our eternal life?

KNOW JESUS AS OUR SAVIOR

We must *know and believe* that Jesus is our Savior and giver of redemptive grace. This is the fundamental tenet of our Christian faith. Beyond knowing this fact, we need to accept it as a promise. Paul writes:

That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His

death, if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

(Phil 3:10–11)

Eternal life is resurrection from death and, in relation to our knowledge of Jesus, it is understood in two parts.

Power of Resurrection

First, we need to know the power of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus did not resurrect simply to impress future generations of Christians with His supernatural abilities. We must seek to

understand what this power actually means for us, as the elect of God today. Paul elaborates:

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. (Rom 8:11)

The resurrection of Jesus can be seen as a telescope and a mirror. It is a prophecy and reflection of the core and common Christian hope, that one day we will rise from our mortality, as Jesus did, and gain new life with God. This verse also tells us that Jesus rose from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, this is the same power that will raise us up. If the same Holy Spirit dwells in us today, it means we, too, are bound for that final and glorious resurrection. Conversely, without the Holy Spirit in us, we will not receive eternal life on the last day. This is a key reason why we emphasize that every believer must receive the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, once we believe in Christ, are baptized, and receive the Holy Spirit, we should constantly and carefully prepare ourselves for that final day when we will rise again, as Christ did. Elder James tells us:

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (Jas 4:7–8)

Submitting to God is both a momentous, life-changing occasion, and a lifelong journey that improves with practice. We should thoughtfully and sincerely begin in submission, and continue in the same spirit. In order to put to death the deeds of the flesh, we must rely on God. By submitting to God, we are submitting to all the teachings of the Holy Bible.

Take anger, for instance. It is one thing to understand that anger is bad, but it is another to accept that our anger is our responsibility. We cannot lay the blame on others and accuse them of inciting our wrath. If we do so, then we have not submitted to God. Though weak and prone to sin, those who truly gives

themselves to God know that He has the power to strengthen them—as long as they wholeheartedly rely on Him.

Another piece of practical advice we should heed is when Jesus says, "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mt 26:41). First, we need to watch, which means we have the intent to overcome our weakness. Second, we need to pray—to rely on God. It is a very simple, but effective, action. Many a time, we pray, but we are not vigilant in our thoughts and our actions. If these do not align with the Bible, then our prayers will have little effect on our weaknesses.

Fellowship of Christ's Sufferings

Second, we need to know the Lord Jesus through the fellowship of His sufferings. Christians suffer as all men do, but we suffer differently. We suffer with Jesus Christ. This seems very different from the messages of peace and blessings that we hear. Not many will preach that we must have fellowship with Christ in suffering, and, at the end, be conformed to His death. It does not sit well with us, and we start asking: *Does it really need to be like that?* The reality is that Christians need to suffer as Christ suffered. Hence, whenever we undergo trials, persecution and sorrow, we need to have this deeper understanding of our fellowship with Christ. As Paul writes:

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. (Rom 5:6–9)

Have we ever pondered why Paul describes the love of God in this way? Paul's description demonstrates his mature understanding; he does not simply say, "God loves me." Instead, he invites us to think: *Why would this Man die for us while we were still sinners?* How should we respond?

God has called us to swim against the currents of the world, to stand defiant and rooted against society's waves of conformity. We have been promised persecution. But that is just one half of the promise. Above all, we have also been promised a family and a faith to hold on to during these persecutions. Today, this family is the True Jesus Church. To know Jesus is to know of Him through the love, service and ministry of the church—to be a living member of this great body. On one hand, Jesus' death was a tragedy, but on the other, it was the greatest act of love since creation.

LIVE FOR CHRIST

Our sinfulness has brought us to God's church, in the hope of salvation. Christ's sacrifice keeps us here. And it is our duty to know that God loves us, and understand how His love manifests in our lives. Additionally, we must share this indefatigable love with those around us. We must "all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph 4:13).

Today, we may simply thank God for loving us. How many of us have considered: *Why does God love me? Am I worthy of His love?* Paul even went one step further: *Since God loves me so much, what should I do?*

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. (2 Cor 5:14)

Paul describes how the love of Christ compels and motivates us all. These are the indisputable truths we hold dear to our hearts. What do they tell us? That through the knowledge of the Son of God and His resurrection, we have no greater commission nor higher calling than to live for Him. We must no longer conform to the ways of the world. With the power of the Holy Spirit, we need to resolve to put to death the deeds of our body (Rom 8:13). In short, we should no longer live for ourselves, but aspire to live up to the greatness of the death and resurrection that save us. Amen.



Keep Yourself in the Love of God

Simon Chin
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But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. (Jude 20–21)

Our life of faith begins when we come to know God and accept that Jesus Christ is our only Savior, by whose death and blood shed on the cross our sins are forgiven. After repentance and baptism in Jesus' name, our life should transform from one of bad habits, sinful character and carnal lusts to a life that is godly, sober and righteous (Tit 2:11–13).

However, after accepting baptism and the saving grace of our Lord Jesus, many of us lose sight of what a life of faith means, and our zeal declines. We become lax in fearing God, keeping His commandments, and submitting to Him as Ruler of our lives. Instead,

“After accepting baptism and the saving grace of our Lord Jesus, many of us lose sight of what a life of faith means, and our zeal declines. We become lax in fearing God, keeping His commandments, and submitting to Him as Ruler of our lives.”

we rely on our own accomplishments, abilities, wealth, careers, status and interpersonal relationships, to live not by faith—as the Lord Jesus recommends—but by sight. We may feel it is safe to relax and become more casual in our faith. But what are the dangers of a casual faith?

THE DANGER OF DEPARTING

During Jesus' ministry on earth, there were some Jews who initially believed in Him, but could not understand how the truth would set them free:

They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, ‘You will be made free’?” (Jn 8:33)

They could not let go of their existing status as God's elect, and rejected Jesus' teaching that they needed to abide in His word. Later, when Jesus proclaimed, “[B]efore Abraham was, I AM,” they even took up stones to throw at Him (Jn 8:31–58). This shows that Jesus' word had no place in them (Jn 8:37).

Like these Jews, who believed at first but eventually sought to stone Jesus, there are believers in the church today who deny our Lord. Although purchased with the blood of Christ, they cut themselves off and depart from the fold. They no longer fear God or submit to His sovereignty. This is a sad outcome, for the grace of justification and sanctification unto eternal life is no longer available to them:

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame. (Heb 6:4–6)

How can we avoid this outcome and keep ourselves in God's love?

TRIALS AND SUFFERING

Often, we are in danger of departing from God's grace when we meet trials and tests, and we struggle to trust in God. If we do not fear the Lord with a reverent heart, it will be difficult for us to accept trials or overcome suffering.

During his ministry, Paul suffered from a thorn in his flesh. It was only by submitting to God and remaining faithful that he was able to overcome the pain that would stay with him for the rest of his life. He prayed three times to God to remove the thorn, but the Lord told him, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). This led him to declare:

Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for

“There are believers in the church today who deny our Lord. Although purchased with the blood of Christ, they cut themselves off and depart from the fold.”

Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12:9b–10)

This was how Paul remained faithful, submitting to God's divine sovereignty, and keeping himself in the love of Christ—the One who lived and died for him (Gal 2:20).

A LIFE OF FAITH

While undergoing trials and suffering could potentially make us depart from Christ, the reality is that we need to persevere even when life is going well. How can we maintain a life of faith that enables us to endure to the end and receive the salvation of our souls?

Seek and Know God through the Scriptures

While the Ethiopian eunuch traveled home from worshipping at the temple in Jerusalem, he was reading the prophecy of Isaiah (Acts 8:26–39). He invited Philip to board his chariot and explain the passage:

“He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth.” (Acts 8:32b–33)

Starting from this Scripture, Philip preached Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch. As they rode on, they came across a natural spring and the eunuch requested baptism. Philip replied, “If you believe with all your heart,

you may.” The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37). He had searched the Scriptures and found Jesus; his faith was established on the word of God. Such faith will endure.

While we search the Scriptures, we need to pray for the Holy Spirit to fill us with spiritual wisdom (Jn 16:13; 1 Cor 2:13). The Holy Spirit helps us to understand the word of salvation and know Jesus Christ, whom we have believed. The mystery of God's word, revealed by the Holy Spirit, grants us wisdom for salvation through faith (2 Tim 3:15), and it is shown to those who search the Scriptures and seek God with a pure heart (Jer 29:13). Those who find Christ Jesus shall know Him, and be motivated by His love to live and die for Him (Rom 14:7–8).

Through the revelation of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul learned the hidden wisdom of God—how Christ's death on the cross redeems men from sin and grants salvation grace (1 Cor 2:4–10). Knowing Christ deeply is how Paul remained steadfast when facing trials:

For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. (2 Tim 1:12)

Fear God and Keep His Commandments

Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil. (Eccl 12:13b–14)

This was King Solomon's conclusion in the Book of Ecclesiastes, written after a lifelong quest for wisdom. Jesus

“The reality is that we need to persevere even when life is going well. How can we maintain a life of faith that enables us to endure to the end and receive the salvation of our souls?”



“The Holy Spirit helps us to understand the word of salvation and know Jesus Christ, whom we have believed. The mystery of God’s word, revealed by the Holy Spirit, grants us wisdom for salvation through faith.”

is the Judge, who will appear on the last day with His angels to execute His righteous judgment, and recompense each individual for what he has done. The righteous shall rise to everlasting life, and the wicked to everlasting punishment.

However, some believers forget this and live as though they will not face judgment—they lack the fear of God and go on to commit sins of sexual immorality and covetousness, yielding to the lust of their flesh and love of this world. When this happens, they are unable to continue in the saving grace of Christ Jesus; they have despised His divine mercy and submitted to sin, making them enemies of the cross.

Joseph is a good example of one who feared God throughout his life. In Egypt, when his master’s wife attempted to seduce him, he rejected her advances, saying, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen 39:9b). Out of fear of the Lord, Joseph fled from her, leaving behind his garment that was later used to falsely accuse him of impropriety. When he was imprisoned, Joseph found favor with the jailer and interpreted the dream of Pharaoh’s cupbearer. It was only after two years that the cupbearer remembered Joseph and recommended that he interpret Pharaoh’s dreams. This turn of events brought Joseph to the height of power within the Egyptian government, second only to Pharaoh himself.

Up until this point, Joseph had suffered many misfortunes, beginning with his brothers selling him as a slave to Egypt. Yet, he did not take revenge on his brothers when he was in the position to do so. His fear of the Lord remained. He knew that the Lord had sent him to Egypt to preserve life and a posterity for

his brothers, so they would not perish in the famine (Gen 45:3–8).

After their father, Jacob, died, the brothers were afraid that Joseph would take revenge for the evil they had done to him. But Joseph said:

“Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.” And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

(Gen 50:19–21)

Joseph had the favor of God because he feared Him and did not succumb to vengeance and the desires of the flesh. He departed from evil (Prov 3:7). For believers who lack the fear of God, they find themselves unable to forgive those who have wronged or spoken unkindly to them. In some cases, the hurt can cause them to lose faith in Jesus. They

may even entertain thoughts of repaying evil with evil. To harbor such hatred is akin to murder (1 Jn 3:15), and can lead them to practice unrighteousness. Such believers doubt that God will judge righteously, and defend their cause, and may even depart from the faith.

But for those who fear God, Elder Peter’s words are instructive:

For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.

(1 Pet 2:19–21)

Furthermore, if we leave all judgment to the righteous and faithful God, we would pursue good in all circumstances:

Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink;

For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

(Rom 12:17–21)

Honor God and Submit to His Sovereignty

[T]here is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.”

(1 Cor 8:6)

Jesus, whom we serve with all our heart, is the Lord of life. He is the way, the truth and the life (Jn 14:6)—the God who is Sovereign over all creation.

If we are to be victorious, we must fear God and submit to His sovereignty. In Revelation, Elder John recounts his vision of those who were victorious over the beast. They were standing on the sea of glass mingled with fire, holding harps and singing:

“Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy, For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested.”

(Rev 15:3b–4)

These victorious saints had the peace of Christ Jesus ruling in their hearts, having yielded to God’s sovereignty.

Peter and Paul led lives of faith and submission, despite imprisonment and persecution during their ministry (Acts 12:4; 16:24–25). They endured hunger and thirst, and were misunderstood, falsely accused and reproached by fellow brethren (2 Cor 12:10). Eventually, they were martyred for the word of God. But they were victorious, and kept their faith till the end.

Knowing that his death was imminent, Paul submitted fully to God’s path for him, writing:

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the

good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

(2 Tim 4:6–8)

When Agabus prophesied how chains and imprisonment awaited Paul in Jerusalem, the brethren pleaded with Paul not to embark on his onward journey. Paul replied:

“What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

(Acts 21:13)

This was Paul’s submissiveness to the sovereignty of Jesus Christ, the Lord of his life.

CONCLUSION

If we do not submit to God’s sovereignty over our lives, then we are probably not living according to His divine will. Without submission, we cannot be victorious.

To remain in the love of God and endure until eternal life, we must seek Him, know Him through the Scriptures, fear Him and keep His commandments, and submit to His sovereignty. Let us look to God’s grace and trust in His righteous judgment, as we serve Him as the Lord of our life. If we do this, rest assured, His grace will bear in us the fruit of salvation when the time comes.



In Fear and Trembling

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When we reflect on the Christian message, we often focus on the mercy and love of God, but overlook the call to fear Him. Yet, throughout the Bible, we are reminded to fear and tremble before the Lord. In this article, we will consider why we need to fear God, and how to manifest this attitude in our lives.

WHO OR WHAT DO WE FEAR?

It is part of the human condition that we are beset by a multitude of fears. These range from the rational to the irrational. Some individuals are scared of the smallest things, such as insects, which we have the power to control and destroy—surely, such fear is irrational. Others are afraid of the unknown things of the spiritual realm—of ghosts, in particular. In the Book of Job, Eliphaz claimed to have had an eerie encounter

in the dead of night (Job 4:14–15), an experience which made him tremble and shake. In the New Testament, the disciples twice reacted in a similar way when they caught sight of the Lord Jesus—once, when He was walking on the water at night (Mt 14:25–26), and again on meeting Him after He resurrected (Lk 24:33–37). Both times, the disciples thought they had seen a ghost. But should we be afraid of ghosts?

The Bible indicates that there are only three types of spirits that a person will see or experience on earth: the Spirit of God, angels, and demons. Once a person passes away, his spirit does not remain in the world, nor can it return. Any ghosts people claim to see are nothing but the tricks of evil spirits.

Most of us would be terrified by an

encounter with a demon. If we do not belong to God, as in the case of King Saul after he departed from God's grace, the demon has the potential to harm or torment us. But, as children of God, we have nothing to fear—if we remain in the Lord and under His protection, we cannot be brought under the devil's dominion.

It is clear, then, that God's children have little to fear. So why should we fear our loving and merciful God?

We all know the story of Daniel, God's faithful servant who continued to worship God despite the risk of death. After God delivered Daniel from the lions' den, Darius—a Gentile king—magnified the Lord and commanded his subjects to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel:

*I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel.
For He is the living God,
And steadfast forever;
His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed,
And His dominion shall endure to the end.
He delivers and rescues,
And He works signs and wonders
In heaven and on earth,
Who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.* (Dan 6:26–27)

If we had been in Daniel's shoes, who would we fear? Most humans would naturally fear the king who has the power to put a man to death, or the ferocious lions that could effortlessly rip a person to shreds. In the face of such danger, why did Daniel persist in his daily habit of praying to God in his upper room, with the windows open toward Jerusalem, in clear view of his enemies? Surely it was because he was not afraid of the king or the lions, but he feared and trembled before the Almighty God.

*“Do you not fear Me?” says the LORD.
“Will you not tremble at My presence,
Who have placed the sand as the bound of the sea,
By a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass beyond it?
And though its waves toss to and fro,
Yet they cannot prevail;
Though they roar, yet they cannot pass over it.”* (Jer 5:22)

Here, God asks the Israelites, “Do you not fear Me? Will you not tremble at My presence?” After all, He is the One who created the heavens and the earth, and has the power to set the boundary of the seas. These words echo those He spoke to Job:

*“Or who shut in the sea with doors,
When it burst forth and issued from the womb;
When I made the clouds its garment,
And thick darkness its swaddling band;
When I fixed My limit for it,
And set bars and doors;
When I said,
“This far you may come, but no farther,
And here your proud waves must stop!”*” (Job 38:8–11)

“We rejoice in God because of His salvation. But we need to fear Him as well, to ensure that we conduct ourselves in such a way that does not anger our kind and forbearing God.”

God is to be feared because He controls the vast and tumultuous oceans with a wall of sand, and they stay within the boundaries He has set. In contrast, God's people—the Israelites—refused to listen to their Creator. Indeed, they were a stubborn and rebellious nation who did not fear and tremble before God.

Are we like the Israelites? Or are we like the oceans, who acknowledge God's sovereignty? Or Daniel, who feared God more than death itself?

WHY SHOULD WE FEAR GOD?

God's Righteousness

Sometimes we have a misconception, or, rather, we do not know enough about God. We focus solely on His goodness and mercy and forget about His righteousness. We assume that He will overlook any sins we commit, and so neglect to fully follow His will.

In Psalm 2, we learn that not only the Israelites rebelled against God's command—the nations and the kings of the world were also averse to having God rule over them and placing restrictions on their lives. But could they really escape from the living God?

*Now therefore, be wise, O kings;
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.
Serve the LORD with fear,
And rejoice with trembling.
Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,
And you perish in the way,
When His wrath is kindled but a little.
Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.* (Ps 2:10–12)

It is true that God is slow to anger, but to say that He will never be angry is untrue. Sometimes we behave like children, pushing the boundaries of our forbearing Father until His goodwill and patience expire. We see such an outcome in the Book of Acts, when

Ananias and Sapphira experienced the swift and decisive judgment of God. Perhaps Ananias and Sapphira, who were Jewish believers, had forgotten that this God is the same God of righteousness and judgment they had feared in their recent past. Not surprisingly, after they died, fear and trembling came upon the church (Acts 5:11). Although the believers learned a tough lesson, the positive outcome was that they saw God in a more holistic light.

The Psalmist of Psalm 2 sings about rejoicing with trembling (Ps 2:11). How do these two seemingly contradictory emotional states coexist in our relationship with God? Of course, we rejoice in God because of His salvation. But we need to fear Him as well, to ensure that we conduct ourselves in such a way that does not anger our kind and forbearing God.

Work Out Our Salvation

In Philippians 2:12, Paul exhorts us to “work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling.” And yet, many writers in the wider Christian community conveniently ignore this teaching, choosing instead to emphasize God's mercy. They believe that once a person is saved, he can never lose this entitlement. To them, fear is an emotion incompatible with the gospel and salvation. However, Paul is clear: salvation is a journey—one that needs to be embarked upon and continued with a lifelong attitude of fear and trembling.

There are also Christians who quote Elder John's words: “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment” (1 Jn 4:18a). So is John contradicting Paul? Let us read carefully what John wrote:

Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of



judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.
(1 Jn 4:17–18)

John explains that this type of fear arises when we are not perfected in love and are, therefore, unprepared for the day of judgment. As the writer of Hebrews points out, all we can do in such a situation would be to wait for that day with a fearful expectation (Heb 10:27). This type of fear is different from the one that Paul refers to in Philippians. The fear Paul speaks of is godly fear, a positive force that motivates us to work on our salvation and to perfect our love. When we do this, we will not have the trepidation that John describes. So what does godly fear look like? It is similar to being a conscientious student, who not only studies hard, but also constantly reviews his progress to see if there are any areas he needs to improve upon before the exam. If we know that we will stand before the judgment seat of God one day, would we not constantly review the state of our faith and ask for God’s help to become perfect and more like Him (Mt 5:48)?

*For thus says the LORD:
“We have heard a voice of trembling,
Of fear, and not of peace.
Ask now, and see,
Whether a man is ever in labor with child?
So why do I see every man with his hands
on his loins
Like a woman in labor,
And all faces turned pale?
Alas! For that day is great,
So that none is like it;
And it is the time of Jacob’s trouble,
But he shall be saved out of it.”*
(Jer 30:5–7)

Here, the prophet Jeremiah warns the Israelites of the impending judgment

“ If we know that we will stand before the judgment seat of God one day, would we not constantly review the state of our faith and ask for God’s help to become perfect and more like Him? ”

of God at the hands of the Babylonians. God describes how every man will grip his loins like a woman in labor, faces pale with fear. The effect of God’s judgment day in the end time will be like this, if we have not been perfected in love. Will we stand before God with confidence or with trepidation? It all depends on whether we fear and tremble before Him on our faith journey, as we work out our salvation.

HOW CAN WE MANIFEST OUR FEAR AND TREMBLING?
Aside from the exhortation to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, Paul mentions other areas of our faith and life where we need this attitude.

In the Ministry of Evangelism
And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.
(1 Cor 2:1–5)

We often associate preaching the gospel with attributes such as confidence and authority. But here, Paul says that when he was preaching to the Corinthians, he did so with fear and trembling. It indicates that he was aware of his inadequacy. However, when he ministered with such humility, God worked through him with great power. More importantly, it meant that the Corinthians could see that the message Paul delivered was divine, and they were able to place their faith in God and not on Paul.

When a person serves God, especially if he is eloquent, there is a danger that others will focus their attention and admiration on the worker rather than on God. Alert to such a risk, Paul took care to undertake his ministry with the right attitude, making sure that God would be given all the honor and glory. Do we fear and tremble when we preach the gospel?

In Showing Hospitality to God’s Workers
And his affections are greater for you as he remembers the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling you received him.
(2 Cor 7:15)

Here, Paul writes of how the Corinthians received Titus with fear and trembling. They understood that they were not merely receiving a friend, but a servant and ambassador of Jesus Christ (Mt 10:40; Jn 13:20).

In Submission to Our Employer
Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ.
(Eph 6:5)

Employers come in all shapes and sizes: some are good and fair; others, harsh and unreasonable. Paul reminds all workers to serve and obey their superiors with fear and trembling. We may question why we should do this, and Paul’s answer is that the One we serve is not the person we see before us, but rather Jesus Christ. Knowing this, we should do our work with sincerity and with fear and trembling.

CONCLUSION
As a Christian, our life should have God at its center: from our personal salvation, to preaching the gospel, receiving a worker of God, and being a good employee in the workplace. Daniel and Paul knew how to conduct their lives with fear and trembling for the glory of God. Are we able to do the same?

Parables of the Heavenly Kingdom (Part 3): The Parable of the Mustard Seed

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Editor’s note: The seven parables in Matthew 13 have an important significance: they enable men to find the true church through knowledge of the kingdom of God. In the first parable, the parable of the sower, seeds are widely sown but only those that fall on good soil will become deeply rooted, grow, flourish and bear fruit. Everyone has an equal chance to find the heavenly kingdom. However, only a truly receptive heart will understand the gospel, come to the true church and continually walk in God’s word. In the second parable, the parable of the tares, tares are sown among the good seed. Although troublesome, the tares will ultimately be weeded out and destroyed. The devil attempts to disrupt the true church through false brethren. This is a trial of faith. True believers should not lose heart but trust God to eradicate these sons of the wicked one.

This instalment continues with the third parable.

THE MUSTARD SEED
After delivering the parable of the tares, the Lord Jesus immediately spoke the parable of the mustard seed. He said:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”
(Mt 13:31–32)

Birth: The Gospel Seed is Sowed
Jesus used the mustard seed as an analogue for smallness (Mt 17:20). In this context, the parable of the mustard seed highlights the “small” or modest beginnings of the kingdom of heaven. This mustard seed was sown by a man in his field. This man refers to the Lord Jesus, who began the gospel work in the house of Israel.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.”
(Jn 12:24)

He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.
(Jn 1:11–12)

Jesus had come in the flesh to preach the words of the kingdom of heaven to the world, humbly commencing the gospel work. Although His people, the Jews, rejected and crucified Him, when He is lifted up from the earth, He will draw all peoples to Himself (Jn 12:32). He was one humble grain, but His death, burial, resurrection and ascension produced much grain. In fact, after Jesus ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit descended to establish the



church on earth. His Spirit guided the apostles to preach the words of life and be His witnesses, not only in Jerusalem and in all Judea, but also in Samaria and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:6–11).

Growth: Spirit's Abidance and Satan's Attacks

Although it is the least of all the seeds, the mustard seed grows into a tree, greater than the herbs. This prophecy of growth was fulfilled during the apostolic times. With the presence of the Holy Spirit, the church was full of spiritual wisdom and power. She expanded outwardly, in accordance to the instruction and prophecy of the Lord Jesus prior to His ascension (Acts 1:8).

When the church carries out the gospel work diligently, the devil will just as diligently seek to attack and destroy. The Lord is not willing for any to perish, but the devil is not willing for any to be saved. Thus, the devil perpetually strives to mislead and confuse man regarding the truth. For instance, when Barnabas and Paul went to preach in Salamis, Cyprus, Elymas—a sorcerer and false prophet—tried to hinder their work so that the proconsul would not believe in the truth. Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, saw through this work of the devil. Elymas was rebuked and became temporarily blind. The proconsul believed when he saw what had been done (Acts 13:4–12). On another occasion, when the gospel was preached from Asia Minor to Europe, a spirit of divination tried to cause trouble through a servant girl. So Paul cast out the devil in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 16:16–24).

Jesus had already sounded the warning through the parable of the tares: growing pains are inevitable. The devil will relentlessly undermine the true church's gospel work. But the church can triumph by relying on the sending and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The apostolic church is proof of this. Despite the devil-instigated slander and hindrance from the Jews and Gentiles, the gospel prevailed. The church grew continually amidst persecutions and difficulties. Paul even preached the gospel truth to Rome in

chains. His epistles transcend time and space to edify those who read them.

Infiltration: Distortions of the Truth

When the mustard seed has grown and becomes a tree, the birds (plural) of the air come and nest in its branches. Three points are noteworthy:

1. Becomes a tree

In the land of Palestine, mustard can grow to approximately ten feet (about three meters) in height. However, it remains a bush. If the small mustard seed has grown to become a great tree, with branches so large that birds can build nests therein (Mk 4:32; Lk 13:19), it means that this particular plant has changed its essential nature. God created all things according to its kind (Gen 1:12). Herbs and trees may grow but should remain as they are, nature unchanged.

2. Birds of the air

Birds may prefigure or represent different things in different parables (cf. Prov 1:17; Mt 6:26). However the parables in Matthew chapter 13 all pertain to the mysteries of heaven and are thus related. Therefore, as the Lord Jesus Himself explained in the parable of the sower, “birds” in these parables refer to the wicked one, i.e., Satan (Mk 4:15) or the devil (Lk 8:12).

3. Nest in its branches

The tree grown from the mustard seed has become the dwelling place of the wicked one, Satan.

PARABLE FULFILLED IN CHURCH HISTORY

Holy Spirit Departs from the Church

The fulfillment of the prophecy that “birds of the air” will nest in the branches (Mt 13:32) and under the shade (Mk 4:32) of the mustard tree, whose nature has changed, was seen after the apostolic period. Infiltrated by worldly customs and heresies, the church was no longer able to uphold the pure doctrine. Satan could nest within the church. During this period, the secularized church grew in terms of size, but she no longer had the abidance of the Holy Spirit or belonged to God.

When the apostles were still alive, their defense and exhortation helped to keep at bay the heresies creeping into the church. But new challenges arose. One of these was persecution. The Romans had previously maintained a neutral policy towards the faiths of the nations within their empire, but this changed because of the Jewish revolt in 66 C.E. The Roman authorities became more alert to uprisings within different ethnic communities. In contrast to the enclosed culture of Judaism, Christianity was preached to all peoples, and its doctrines opposed the polytheism and pagan practices common throughout the Roman Empire. Not only were Christians perceived as a political threat, many also hated them, making them the ideal scapegoats when the people needed to be appeased. In the period between 60–300 C.E., around ten Roman emperors persecuted Christians. From Nero (54–68 C.E.) to Diocletian (284–305 C.E.), Christians were subject to varying forms and degrees of persecution.

However, many believers remained undeterred and continued to evangelize. As a result, even some pagans were moved to believe. One of these was Constantine I, or Constantine the Great (306–337 C.E.), the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity. His conversion was a turning point. In 313 C.E., the edict of Milan provided Christians with limited freedom within the empire. In 315 C.E., various anti-Christian practices and regulations were abolished, and in 325 C.E. an edict was issued, advising all people within the empire to convert to Christianity. For Christians, this was hope amidst darkness.¹

While Constantine's conversion had removed persecution, the new challenge of secularization emerged. The emperor convened the first Ecumenical Council in 325 C.E. in Nicaea. Among the key achievements of this council were consensus on the Christological issue of God the Son and His relationship to God the Father, and the adoption of the Nicene Creed, the first uniform Christian doctrine.

1 Lin Dayi, *Research on the New Testament Background* (Taichung: Palm Press, 1990), 316.

“ Truth is revealed only through God's inspiration, not artificially constructed and driven by man's desire to unite church and state, or different denominations. ”

The creed became the basis on which subsequent Christian denominations defined their statements of belief on the Godhead and canons of doctrinal orthodoxy.² These efforts resulted from Constantine's earnest desire to unify the church and the nation. However, at that point, he was still not baptized! Not only did he attend the council as a non-believer, he even chaired the entire meeting. This was not a trivial issue. The resolutions of the council would subsequently become the standard of general church belief, and breach of these beliefs would be deemed heretical. Evidently, the Nicene Creed had a significant negative impact on later church development.

Several implications from Constantine's effort to unify the church and the nation serve as important reminders for the true church today. First, only God, and God alone, is the source of truth (Jn 8:40). God's word is the truth (Jn 17:17), and is bestowed upon those whom He has selected through the Holy Spirit (Jn 17:6–8, 14–19; 1 Cor 2:10–13). Truth is revealed only through God's inspiration, not artificially constructed and driven by man's desire to unite church and state, or different denominations. Otherwise, “truth” will just be the compromised articulation of the pre-existing, and flawed, beliefs that we are seeking to integrate.

Second, the truth should not be ascertained by a resolution passed by the majority, without reaching a consensus or common understanding. Biblical examples remind us that the majority decision can often be erroneous (Num 13:31–33; Lk 23:23), especially if the general population does not have deep experience and knowledge of biblical exegesis, is not in full possession of the

2 “First Council of Nicaea,” Wikipedia, accessed April 1, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Council_of_Nicaea.

facts, or is susceptible to manipulation. World history is rife with examples of the latter. The tolerance that Constantine I had towards Christians stemmed mainly from political strategy. He wanted to make use of Christianity to restore the corrupt hearts of the people, and to unite the various races within his jurisdiction. As such, his decision to embrace the church led, ironically, to her eventual corruption.

In 321 C.E., Constantine I allowed the church in Rome the right to accept bequests. At first glance, this opened up a great channel of wealth for the church—a blessing indeed. However, church history shows that this move diverted the focus of the church ministry away from pastoral care and evangelism, towards money generation, power and status, resulting in people fighting for wealth and power within the church. Constantine stipulated the first day of the week as a day of rest for all people except farmers. Taking Sunday as a day of rest gradually replaced the rest and worship of Sabbath.

In 380 C.E., Theodosius I (347–395 C.E.) made Christianity the national religion. When everyone claimed (or was compelled) to be a Christian, the church started to become a worldly organization filled with people with no genuine faith. Although the entire nation converted to Christianity, many of them were unwilling converts, and many races were unwilling to forsake their old traditions and practices of worship, such as Saturnalia—the worship ceremony of the solar deity.

Worse, the political ideologies and structure of the Roman Empire were brought into the church. This resulted in the essence of the church being changed, turning it—eventually and inevitably—into a political organization. The papal system emerged, resulting in further corruption of the church, and

making the church a nest for the devil.³ By then, because the Holy Spirit had departed from the church, the church leaders argued endlessly over their own theological ideas, based on their own thoughts and opinions. As for the believers, many of them became lost in their faith because they were unable to receive genuine spiritual food: they were taught to kneel before images, to worship angels, Mary and the relics of the deceased. As a result, the church departed further and further from the Bible.

A church that has lost the truth is like a herb that has grown into a tree—it has changed in type and in essence.

The True Church Must Remain Alert

The Lord Jesus prayed to the heavenly Father:

“Sanctify [My disciples] by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.” (Jn 17:17–19)

The apostolic church was established through a miraculous downpour of God's Spirit. But with the demise of the apostles, heresies infiltrated, the truth was lost, and the church was no longer sanctified by the truth. The church became an organization as secular as any other, subject to the same political intrigues, personality-led decision-making and the introduction of celebrations and festivals to please the masses. This is the period of church development described in the parable of the mustard seed. Although there was significant growth in the number of churches and believers, it was no longer the church that the Holy Spirit established during the apostolic era—the church which had the truth.

The true church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim 3:15). At all times, and through all time, she must firmly uphold the truth.

3 Lin Dayi, *Research on the New Testament Background* (Taichung: Palm Press, 1990), 308–317.



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Set Your Mind on Things Above

Jachin
Singapore

Common sense has told generations of guileless Christians that being too heavenly-minded means you will never be useful on earth. But this simplistic admonishment neglects to take into account the millions of lives that have come and gone since the beginning—lives of the most worldly of people who, despite pursuing success, wealth, honor, and all varieties of pleasure, are burdened by regret and resentment.

Perhaps we need to reconsider what the Bible says about heavenly-mindedness. We know it is good, but what is it exactly? And how do we achieve it?

EARTHLY VERSUS HEAVENLY HOPES

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. (Col 3:2)

Here, Paul tells us that to be heavenly-

“Be alive on earth and dead in your sins, or be alive in the heavenly places and dead to your sins. This is a clear-cut choice, and definitely not an easy one.”

minded is to set our mind on things above. He urges us to bury our earthly hopes with the fleshly body of sin. In place of these mortal hopes, we will gain better ones from God Himself—hopes that are spiritual and eternal.

The Christian calling insists that the things of heaven and earth be mutually exclusive; we can have heaven or earth, but not both. The choice, then, is this: be alive on earth and dead *in* your sins, or be alive in the heavenly places and dead *to* your sins. This is a clear-cut choice, and definitely not an easy one.

But if we want to be a true Christian and please God, we must ask ourselves: what occupies us, and what place do we hope to one day occupy? Our mind is where our hopes are, so we need to carefully consider what to set our mind on.

RENOUNCING SIN

How do we set our mind on things above? As mature adults with real-world responsibilities, we rarely give ourselves the time to consider this. However, in times of uncertainty, referring to the Bible should always be our first resort.

Paul writes:

“Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” (Col 3:5)

This verse tells us that a person who sets his hope on things above begins to do so by putting to death his members on the earth. What are these? Paul describes various types of sexual impurity. Our sexual behavior most tellingly reveals the state of our relationship with God. If we can learn to sever ourselves from our strongest desires and give ourselves fully to God, who asks for our finite self in return for nothing less than infinity, then we will be holy and pleasing to Him.

Desire applies more broadly to other aspects of our lives as well. Desire and hope are not bad things but, misplaced, can lead us to destruction. If we do not stand our ground in our faith or guard our desires and hopes with the same possessive jealousy and love with which God guards us, then we will bring about our own end.

It is also important to remember that putting to death our members on the earth is not a one-time affair. Rather, it is a process, in which we must remain ever-vigilant.

PUTTING ON THE NEW MAN

Paul describes a second step in setting our minds on things above:

But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him. (Col 3:8–10)

We must put on the new man by knowing and emulating Christ. It is admittedly very tempting to dismiss our “minor” sins as negligible and unimportant in the larger scheme of things. We cannot imagine ourselves suffering serious spiritual consequences simply because we lose our temper or use profanities. It may be so. But to permit ourselves

“This shedding of our old behaviors is not easy, not by any means, but it is necessary. To this end, God has given us His word, the Bible, as a mirror, and His Spirit as a Counselor. They both guide us step-by-step in our pursuit of perfection.”

to do such things because we think we will not be caught, or because the punishment is not all that bad, is to think as a child—and we must grow up.

When God tells us to lead our lives in a certain way, He wants us to understand and remember the all-important fact that we are different. And we are. We must be. Priests, the elect, the chosen—we are all these and more; we are special, called out and loved. If we seek the anonymity of the world, we scorn our privilege. God knows our names, and this is a great blessing—should we spend the rest of our lives trying to make Him forget us?

God wants us to put off the old man. Paul says that when we come into God’s grace, we should naturally change. Paul likens this process to changing a set of clothes: you put off the old set—the old man with his deeds—and then put on a new set—the new man according to God’s image. This shedding of our old behaviors is not easy, not by any means, but it is necessary. To this end, God has given us His word, the Bible, as a mirror, and His Spirit as a Counselor. They both guide us step-by-step in our pursuit of perfection.

GROWING IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

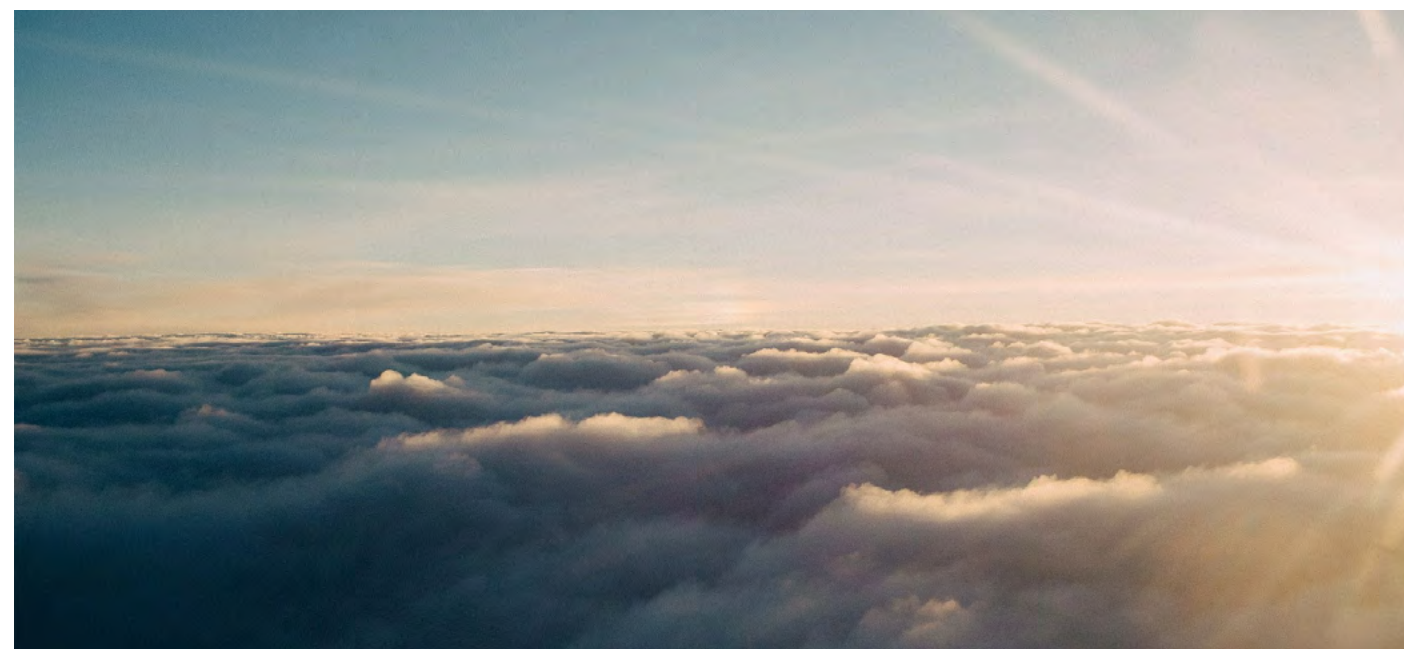
Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Col 3:16)

In everything Jesus did, He manifested the image of God. If we are to put on this same image, we must come to know Jesus better, through His word. The word of Christ can transform us if we keep it in our hearts, constantly

deepening our understanding of His nature. Knowledge of God, as any long-time Christian will tell you, is not just knowledge. It is knowledge that changes you, that forces you to do something about the way things are. It is not idle knowledge. If we choose to accept the challenge and blessing of transformation, we must continually be renewed in knowledge and allow ourselves to become more Christ-like.

When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. (Col 3:4)

This is the ultimate aim of a Christian life—the goal toward which we are all now marching together. Therefore, let us set our minds, hopes and desires on things above. Let us make our way to that heavenly place, one day at a time, until we come to the promised rest with our God who loved us and showed us the way.



The Lord Delivers His Servants

Editor's note: When the apostle Paul implored God to remove the thorn from his flesh, God replied "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). The Lord does not promise that our service to Him would be without suffering and difficulties, but He does promise to be with us—that, if we rely on Him, He will give us help and grace in our time of need. Servants of God who pray for healing may not receive a miraculous, on-the-spot healing. But, without fail, God's grace is sufficient, and He strengthens faith. Here are the testimonies of two ordained workers who have experienced such amazing grace from God.

God's Marvelous Healings

Having been born into a True Jesus Church family, I have received abundant grace from God all my life. Here, I would like to testify of two occasions when I received God's marvelous healing. I cherish these experiences for life and, by sharing them with a heart of gratitude, I hope to give all glory to God.

TESTIMONY 1

Finding Faith through Illness

In 1982, as an eleven-year-old school student, I contracted a strange illness.

Lemuel Leong
Tuaran, Sabah, Malaysia

I could not control the muscles on the right side of my body and, at times, I would suffer from cramps and spasms in my right arm and leg. I would drop my utensils during mealtimes, or knock over food or drinks, and my right leg dragged so much when I walked that my shoes would quickly wear out from the friction.

My parents consulted a highly respected doctor in my hometown of Tawau, Doctor Matthew Chen, who once headed the central hospital in Tawau. Despite three months of treatment under him,

my condition did not improve and there was no diagnosis. I then went to the central hospital for further treatment. However, even specialist doctors could not diagnose my condition; I was admitted to hospital for eight days of observation.

During my hospital stay, I would wake up every morning unable to control my hands. If I woke with my palm open, I would not be able to close it; if I woke with a closed fist, I would be unable to unfurl it. My mother would have to massage my hand for three to five minutes before it returned to normal. When I was first admitted to hospital, my father had decided to fast and pray for five days. But when he saw the lack of progress, he became more resolved to rely on the Lord. He vowed that, if God were to heal me, he would let me serve the Lord when I grow up. Miraculously, God's amazing intervention came on the fifth day, when my condition rapidly improved. I was able to hold a pen to write, and move around as normal. On the eighth day, I was discharged from hospital.

Called By the Holy Spirit

During my formative years, my mother would constantly remind me that God had sustained my life, and that I should share this grace. One day, when I was twenty-three, I joined the 5.30 a.m. morning prayer at the church in Tawau. As I prayed, I was suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit and my heart was greatly moved. In my mind, I heard the Holy Spirit say, "Jump out! Jump out!" Immediately, my body felt weightless, like a leaf carried by the wind, and I steadily moved from where I had been praying—on the left side of the seventh row—to the front of the pulpit. After this, the Holy Spirit said, "Bring Huang Gang-qian with you." Brother Huang

“ I decided to accept and live with my ill-health as a mark of grace. I stopped seeking a cure. Instead of praying for healing, I relied on God's mercy. Indeed, the Lord covered me with His strength. ”

was praying in the back row at the time.

God had released me from the woe of a persistent illness, and now He had called me to take up His commission. This was confirmation of the path God wanted me to take in my life. A year later, on January 8, 1995, I responded to God's call and entered the first theological training program run by the Sabah General Assembly. Three years later, Brother Huang also took the entrance exam to join the second intake of theological students, and was later ordained as Preacher Boaz.

Lingering Health Problems

Despite God's healing, I still suffered from lingering side effects, this time emerging on the left side of my body. Whenever I was too tired, I would feel weak and numb from my cheek down to my leg; and my fingers would quiver, affecting my fine-motor skills. These did not impact my day-to-day life, but it gradually became a burden, physically and mentally, much to my shame and misery. I spent a lot of money seeking treatment from doctors trained in Western medicine as well as traditional Chinese medicine. I also adjusted my diet and daily routines. On top of these, I prayed persistently and earnestly. But all to no avail.

Eventually, I decided to accept and live with my ill-health as a mark of grace. I stopped seeking a cure. Instead of praying for healing, I relied on God's

“ I was suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit and my heart was greatly moved. In my mind, I heard the Holy Spirit say, “Jump out! Jump out!” Immediately, my body felt weightless, like a leaf carried by the wind. ”

mercy. Indeed, the Lord covered me with His strength, which was made perfect in my weakness. My illness was not an obstacle in my full-time ministry, and I was even able to climb to the top of Mount Kinabalu—the tallest peak in South East Asia. This goes to show that the Lord's grace is sufficient for me—in fact, it was more than sufficient (2 Cor 12:9)!

Unexpected Grace and Healing

The year 2017 was the centennial of the True Jesus Church's founding. I was serving in the evangelistic and pastoral department of the Sabah General Assembly at the time, and we were responsible for organizing and promoting five major outdoor evangelism events across the state. This meant many choir and orchestra rehearsals, plus a series of intensive conferences to prepare for these events. All this was on top of our usual ministerial responsibilities: regional pastoral affairs, theological seminary matters, overseas ministries, and other important duties. This was perhaps the most challenging year of my twenty-two-year service as a preacher.

In order to support the heavy workload, the evangelistic committee members fasted and prayed every Sabbath, earnestly asking for the Lord's guidance and spiritual strength. As these events approached, true to God's faithfulness and mercy, He did not disappoint. We were able to resolve every difficulty, and each event was well attended, so that God's name was lifted high and glorified.

On August 19, 2017, after one of these evangelism events, it suddenly occurred to me that the left side of my body felt fine and that my fingers no longer trembled. The Lord had healed



“He quietly healed my fragile body so that I would have the stamina to serve Him. I felt so undeserving of such immense grace.”

me from the ill-health that had plagued me for thirty-five years! The gracious Lord was compassionate and merciful towards me, even though I had not asked for it. He quietly healed my fragile body so that I would have the stamina to serve Him. I felt so undeserving of such immense grace. God indeed fulfilled the promise He gave His servants:

“So you shall serve the LORD your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you.” (Ex 23:25)

TESTIMONY 2

Stricken by Partial Deafness

On August 30, 2018, as I drove home to Tuaran after a general assembly meeting, I suddenly lost hearing in my left ear. I felt an intense nerve pressure in my head, particularly my forehead, and all I could hear was a sharp metallic sound. I was due to fly to Indonesia three days later, and I could not help but worry that my ear problem would worsen due to the changing air pressure on the five-and-a-half-hour flight.

The following Friday and Sabbath, I was assigned to speak three sermons. As I spoke, I was unable to hear the interpreter properly, and I became increasingly anxious over the accuracy of the interpretation. After I finished delivering the Sabbath morning sermon at the church in Kolombong, Deaconess Mary Wong enquired about my condition. When she realized how bad it was, she took me to a nearby clinic. It turned out that I had an ear infection, even though I felt no pain. The doctor injected oxygen into both ears to reduce the pressure, but it did not improve as expected. So he prescribed three different types of medication, including antibiotics. During the closing prayer of the Sabbath afternoon service, I prayed earnestly for God’s help. Indeed, after the prayer I distinctly felt God’s comfort and peace in my heart.

That night, when my father-in-law, Deacon Thomas, learned of my ear infection, he specifically made the trip from the mountains of Tinuhan to come and lay hands and pray for me. After the prayer, he gave me these solemn instructions: “Go ahead with your trip to Indonesia; you will get better gradually until your ear fully recovers.” I truly admired his faith, and was greatly touched that my ninety-two-year-old father-in-law would travel such a great distance—twenty-five kilometers from Tinuhuan to my home—to show his love and concern for me. It is indeed a rare grace for a preacher to receive the laying of hands.

Actually, I had been struggling within myself about whether to delay or cancel the Indonesia trip. But, encouraged by my father-in-law, I decided to take the leap of faith and proceed with it. After all, the God I serve is the merciful, Almighty God.

A Stress-Free Trip

On the morning of September 3, I flew to Kota Semarang, Indonesia. Thanks to the prayers of my family and the church members, I felt no pain from the pressure in my ear. Following this flight, I spent another hour on the road to reach my destination, Salatiga, in central Java. Under God’s protection, the entire journey was free of further issues.

As my father-in-law predicted, my ear infection gradually improved and the sharp sound faded during my stay at the theological seminary in Salatiga.

“I am resolved to listen to God more attentively, to praise Him through hymns all the days of my life, and to proclaim God’s amazing work.”

However, my ear did not fully recover, even after I had completed the course of medication.

Slow Road to Recovery

My dormitory in the theological seminary faced a busy and noisy street, but because my hearing was still muffled I was able to enjoy good quality sleep at night. Funnily enough, my ear infection meant I was well-rested and could concentrate on my work better.

On September 7, I could faintly hear the sounds of the busy street and motorcycle engines when I covered my right ear. The ringing in my left ear was still there, but I estimated that I had recovered about twenty percent of my hearing.

On the evening of September 11, I received a call from a Taiwanese brother, and we talked for about twenty minutes. A few minutes into the call, I suddenly realized that I was holding my mobile phone to my left ear—and I could hear every word! I could not suppress my emotion, crying out, “Thank God!” My left ear was more than ninety percent recovered.

My work in Indonesia ended on September 25. Before I departed, I used my earphones to test my left ear—indeed, the ringing had disappeared and my hearing had fully recovered. I recalled my father-in-law’s words, and gratitude filled my heart.

After this experience, I could now relate to and empathize with those who have hearing impairment. I am resolved to listen to God more attentively, to praise Him through hymns all the days of my life, and to proclaim God’s amazing work. May all thanksgiving, praises and glory be given to our Lord Savior and true God, Jesus Christ. Amen!

Saved from the Brink of Death

Allelujah, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I testify to the Lord’s abundant grace and mercy—of how He delivered my husband, Elder Simon Hsu, from the brink of death.

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)

There were two occasions when the Lord stretched out His hand to save my husband.

HEALED FROM MALARIA

In 1980, when my husband was serving as a preacher, he was sent on a missionary trip to Lagos, the capital of Nigeria at the time. He traveled with Deacon Meishi Tsai from the USA. Unlike today, where preachers are given information and training on how to prepare for such trips, my husband and Deacon Tsai knew very little about practicalities such as taking anti-malarial tablets. They set off submissively, full of faith and fervency to serve the Lord.

A week after my husband’s return from Nigeria, he started to have heavy flu-like symptoms. He consulted our GP (general practitioner), who assured him that it was nothing serious. However, after delivering a sermon during a spiritual convocation, he went to his room and found a note from the GP saying he needed to go to the hospital immediately. We followed this instruction and my husband was admitted to the local hospital. That night, he became delirious and was urgently transferred to the Royal Infirmary, the best-equipped hospital in Edinburgh. Doctors confirmed he

had contracted malaria—the first case of its kind in Edinburgh.

The parasites had affected him severely, damaging almost every internal organ and causing kidney failure, which meant he needed emergency dialysis (the scar from the shunt on his wrist is still visible today). We were only allowed to communicate with him through a glass barrier.

When the church members learned of his condition, they prayed earnestly for him. Most members owned and worked in Chinese takeaway businesses, so they would gather at church after work, around midnight, to pray and beseech God to have mercy on my husband. Thank God, I was able to devote myself to caring for him with a God-given peace. With complete trust towards the Lord, I prayed, “Oh Lord, he is Your servant. I am sure You will take care of him, as he contracted malaria whilst preaching Your word. But even if You decide to receive him into Your heavenly home, I will not contend with You, as I know that You will surely provide for me and my two boys. Let Your will be done.”

With the earnest prayers of the brethren, God showed us mercy and grace. My husband gradually made a full recovery. As it transpired, Deacon Tsai had also contracted malaria and suffered liver damage. The Lord likewise showed mercy on him, and he too made a full recovery.

POST-SURGERY COMPLICATIONS

The second occasion where God saved my husband was three years later, in 1983. After undergoing a minor operation under general anesthetic, he stayed in hospital for a few days before being discharged.

A few weeks later, one of the nurses who had cared for my husband joined

Helen Choi
Edinburgh, UK

the Sabbath worship at church, having been invited by my husband. It was after the service that she spoke of an incident that had happened after my husband’s operation. While she was doing a ward round on night duty, she had shone a torch onto my husband and discovered that his lips and nails had turned blue. She immediately called the doctors, who took emergency measures to save him. My husband had suffered an adverse reaction to the general anesthetic.

Once again, God had saved my husband from a life-threatening situation. This time, it was through the mouth of a stranger that we learned of the Lord’s deliverance, for even my husband had not been aware of his brush with death.

The love of God is truly marvelous. We could never repay His kindness. May God continue to accept our service and guide our path ahead. All glory be unto His holy name!

FINAL NOTE FROM ELDER HSU

Twice the Lord has delivered me from death’s door. His grace is truly immense!

In whose hand is the life of every living thing, And the breath of all mankind?” (Job 12:10)

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

For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s. (Rom 14:7–8)

The Power of Zealous Prayers

in the African Ministry (Part 2)

Editor's note: For some believers, volunteering for pioneering missionary trips to overseas territories requires a level of spiritual cultivation and servitude not reached by many—this seems like a task for the ordained ministers and most gifted workers of the church. However, if we are committed to spreading the truth throughout the world, we must correct this misconception so that more will rise up to labor in these faraway fields.

The Africa Ministry Committee (AMC), under the administration of the General Assembly of the United Kingdom (UKGA), has made many in-roads in this respect over the past couple of decades. By setting up an AMC Volunteer Team (AMC VT) and conducting annual training seminars, the AMC has equipped many young volunteers to participate in the evangelistic, pastoral and religious education work in Africa. This has also raised awareness of the work being done, and enabled more believers to envision themselves participating in this ministry. The AMC has established a good model for other missionary committees to emulate.

In issue 85, we published the testimonies of three AMC volunteers, who shared on the power of prayer and God's grace in their ministry on the African continent. Here, we share a further two testimonies that reveal how, despite all difficulties, God accomplishes the work and, at the same time, refines His workers. These are the lessons they learned.

**Jonathon Ho
Elgin, UK**

Date of Trip:
November to December 2015
Country Visited: Kenya

In the name of the Lord Jesus, I testify. I thank God for giving me the opportunity to help with the National Student Spiritual Convocation (NSSC) in Kenya, in 2015. Because I have been so blessed, I owe it to the Lord to share my experiences and testify of His power and love for His children around the world.

I had never envisioned myself participating in the African ministry. Africa seemed too far away, too hot, and completely out of my comfort zone. I could think of many reasons not to go. But, having heard many testimonies

from other African ministry volunteers, I also wanted to experience God's power in its most raw and tangible form. So I decided to volunteer. In Africa, you are away from home comforts and worldly distractions. When these are not around you, your spirituality and reliance on God are heightened. You depend on Him more and your eyes are opened to witness His presence. Throughout my time there, I experienced His guidance, especially with my health, which was not good at that time. I had heard about the effects of malaria and dehydration, and also about the rural places we would visit, far away from healthcare facilities. So I had to put all my trust in God, believing He would protect me from serious harm. I thank God for allowing me to remain relatively healthy throughout my trip.

As well as this, I would like to share three incidents in which I witnessed God's power.

THE INJURED CHILD

The first incident happened at our church in rural Simerro, when a young girl, a church member, ran into another child whilst they were playing. The child, who had not yet been baptized, was badly injured and had trouble breathing. We suspected that she might have broken a rib, but the nearest hospital was many hours away by car. We were all very concerned; the teachers and workers of God prayed earnestly for her, but to no avail. We contemplated calling an ambulance, but instead we persevered and prayed more. Thank God, the next day, the child was unrecognizable from the night before—she was playful, running around, and full of life. She had fully recovered!

THE DEMON-POSSESSED CHILD

The second incident involved a twelve-year-old girl, a truth-seeker. She had been acting strangely throughout the NSSC. During one prayer, she broke down in tears and, afterwards, admitted her sins and wrongdoings. We were shocked by what she had done, and we soon learned she was also demon-possessed. The preacher and other workers immediately

“It is evident that God is present within our church, even when we are visiting our brethren in far-flung countries. The power of prayer is the same in your own country as it is in any African country.”

took her into another room to pray. Picture the setting: we were out in the countryside with dozens of students; it was extremely dark at night and we only had paraffin lamps to light the church. Hearing the powerful prayers of the workers, mingled with the child's weeping, was unsettling at first.

However, we witnessed the power of God; this child repented and was healed. The following day, she was at peace and very attentive in the lessons. The drastic change in behavior really opened my eyes to the power of God and prayer.

THE CHILD YET TO RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

The last incident I would like to testify about is the one that made the greatest impact on me. One student had yet to receive the Holy Spirit. During every prayer session, he went to the front of the hall to receive the laying of hands, and he never lost heart. One by one, every other student received the Holy Spirit, but he did not. So, for the last prayer of the convocation, we all gathered around this brother and prayed for him. During the prayer, I could hear the sound of praying in tongues. The noise was overwhelming—it felt like a wave crashing down on me. It got to the point that I opened my eyes to see what was happening. Everyone was praying so earnestly for this brother. Tears were shed and voices became hoarse. Thank God, this brother received the Holy Spirit during this prayer.

The main message I want to share through these three testimonies is the power of prayer. It is evident that God is present within our church, even when we are visiting our brethren in far-flung countries. The power of prayer is the same in your own country as it is in any African country. Prayer

helps in times of pain. I am grateful to God for granting me the opportunity to personally witness this. He is all-powerful and so loving to His children. He forgives, heals and comforts when they call on His name.

Thank God for my experiences in Kenya.

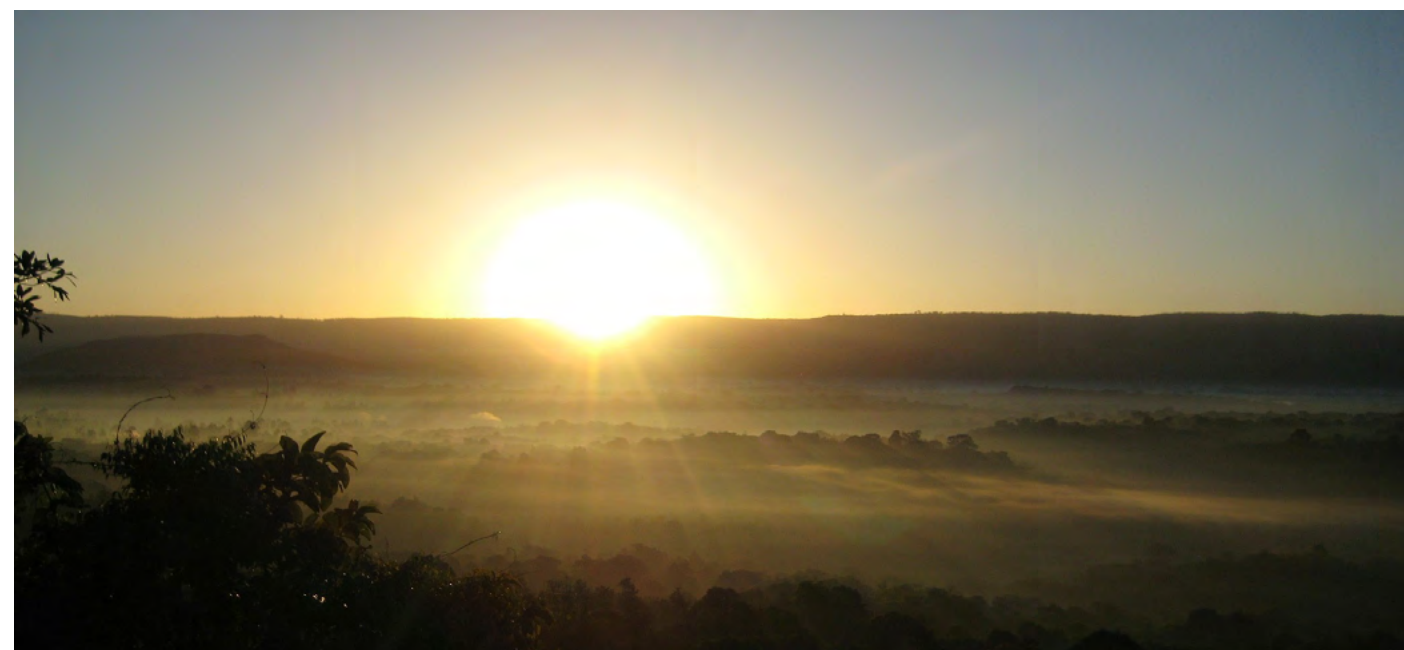
*Deal bountifully with Your servant,
That I may live and keep Your word.
Open my eyes, that I may see
Wondrous things from Your law.”*
(Ps 119:17–18)

**Rachel Chan
Sunderland, UK**

Date of Trip:
September to October 2016
Country Visited: Kenya

Some may think that the secret to a smooth and successful Africa ministry trip is to be adaptable and prepared; with this approach, a volunteer would avoid any major problems. But the truth is, without prayer, we would not be able to accomplish anything. Just as the Holy Spirit empowered and directed the disciples in the time of Acts, He also works through His servants today.

During my first trip to Kenya, I experienced firsthand that we can only serve by the grace, power and will of God, not by our own strength or ability. I soon came to understand that “no prayer means no work,” which became my theme for the trip. I can confidently say that if we had not had an hour-long prayer every morning and evening, the work would not have been as fruitful as it was.



GOD'S PRESENCE SHOWN IN PRAYERS AND HYMNS

During the two-week workers' seminar held at the church in Alendu, one of my duties was to teach hymns from the *Hymns of Praise* hymnbook. This was so that the participants could teach them to their local church members upon their return home. During a testimony session, two participants testified of experiences they had in prayers during the seminar, both involving these hymns.

Brian's Testimony

Brother Brian was the youngest member attending the workers' seminar. He was seventeen or eighteen at the time, while most participants were religious affairs officers aged between forty and seventy. Not only that, he had only been baptized for two months. I was encouraged seeing someone so young dedicate his time and energy to travel such a long distance to learn about God. The seminar's purpose was to equip the workers in servitude through in-depth Bible study—not an event to be attended casually—so I could see how zealous he was for God.

When Brian arrived, he had not yet received the Holy Spirit. But during the first morning prayer, God blessed him with the Holy Spirit and he began to sing *To the Work*¹ repeatedly. He had never heard or sang this hymn before, but the words and melody came to him in that prayer. Without knowing this had happened, I decided to teach this very hymn to the seminar participants. When Brian heard it, he was shocked and overjoyed—God had already taught him this hymn in prayer!

This was not the only way God showed Brian His presence and grace. Brian shared how he had come to the seminar with many worries and problems, both physical and emotional. He was suffering from ill-health and backache, though on the surface you would not be able to tell, since he had such a happy demeanor. But by the grace of God, his problems were solved, one by one, over the course of the seminar. I believe God could see his genuine heart to seek the

1 By Fanny J Crosby (1820–1915).

“ I experienced firsthand that we can only serve by the grace, power and will of God, not by our own strength or ability. I soon came to understand that “no prayer means no work,” which became my theme for the trip. ”

truth, teaching him this hymn to recruit and encourage him to serve.

Jacinta's Testimony

The second testimony is from Sister Jacinta, whom I can attest truly has the heart to serve God. Not only did she take time off from her work as a nurse to attend the seminar, she also accompanied us on every home visitation in her local area. However, she was suffering from kidney failure and, lately, the pain had affected her commitment to prayer.

One night during the seminar, she had a dream. Although she did not elaborate on the content, it made her question how much time she had left to serve God. The dream began to weigh on her mind and she struggled with worry in her heart. During an evening prayer, she prayed about this matter

and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, found herself singing a spiritual hymn. This hymn was *O Think of the Home Over There*.²

At this juncture, I should add my own experience. During an earlier prayer session, I was praying over which hymns I should share with the members. At this point, the Holy Spirit inspired me to sing three hymns: *At the Cross*,³ *Send the Light*,⁴ and *O Think of the Home Over There*. As I sang, this medley of hymns blended and repeated throughout the prayer. Although I wondered if I had truly received these hymns from God, or whether it was just my imagination, I decided to teach them in the next hymnal session.

2 By DeWitt Clinton Huntington (1830–1912).
3 By Isaac Watts (1674–1748) and Ralph Erskine Hudson (1843–1902).
4 By Chas H Gabriel (1856–1932).



Jacinta was familiar with the first two hymns, but *O Think of the Home* was new to her. So later, when God answered her prayers with this hymn, she was deeply comforted and full of thanksgiving. The hymn encouraged her to set her sight on the Lord and our heavenly home. While we still have time and life in us, we should use it wisely to serve the Lord.

Not only this, but I was later informed by Jacinta's niece that her aunt no longer needed to take medication for her kidney failure. Thank God, she had been healed!

Together, these testimonies reveal that God is true and His Spirit abides with the true church. God worked in the lives of three witnesses, and His name was glorified. God knows what is in our hearts, and He gives us reminders, strength, encouragement, direction and hope through His precious Holy Spirit. This is how He testifies to us that we belong to Him. These experiences are not just for the moment, but to give us strength for a lifetime of service to God.

THE SIMPLE FAITH AND SERVITUDE OF OUR BRETHREN

The members I met had such pure and simple faith; their joy in the Lord would overflow from their hearts and be poured out into their actions. At the workers' seminar, after each morning prayer, we would go around to shake each other's hands, greeting one another in the name of Jesus and saying, "Praise God." There was an elderly sister named Bella who was a good example of genuine joy in the Lord—every morning she would give me the biggest hug and widest smile. Her enthusiasm was so contagious that we would stand there happily praising God together.

The members truly love God and are content with whatever He gives them. In more developed countries, our faith towards God may be conditional. It is based on what we can see before us, and the current state of our life—whether it is peaceful, unsatisfied or full of worries, for example—rather than an unwavering love for God. The African members may lead simple and humble



lives, but their faith is also simple and humble: trust in God in all things and He will be our salvation. They love to pray, which is a powerful way to show their love for God—to give thanks to His name and to pray for His will.

Not only did I learn from the faith of our African brethren, but also from their servitude. They were very willing to give, even out of their own poverty. They did not have much, but they gave the best they had—their time, their physical strength, their humility and their willing hearts. For example, they provided us with hot and cold water every night so that we could wash with warm water. Bear in mind that without kettles or boiler tanks, heating up vats of water was neither fast nor easy. During our time in Alendu, the same few sisters cooked for us—three meals a day for two weeks. Those with access to conventional ovens, electric kitchen gadgets and supermarkets cannot begin to imagine the labor involved in cooking without such conveniences. These sisters had to build fires and work in the heat all day long just to cook and wash up for us. I tried to help but, believe me, it was not easy. I sincerely thank God for their love and care.

LASTING FAITH LESSONS

Some may have the impression that the work in Africa always goes according to plan. The workers preach, many come to believe, demons are cast out, and great miracles are wrought. This is true, and I have witnessed it myself. But during this trip to Kenya, God guided me to a great realization: the path of servitude is not always straightforward; things do not always go according to plan, but we must always press forward.

It may seem that, in Africa, people simply believe and are baptized into the fold. But like everywhere else, problems arise. Where God is working, the devil is also trying to obstruct the work. People fall due to pride and temptation, and some leave the church. Going to Africa, I did not anticipate that I would witness this side of the ministry.

I heard about situations where individuals had departed from God and, in doing so, decided to bring harm to the church. It made me feel sad and discouraged to hear such things, but I brushed these feelings aside and distracted myself with the joys of spending time with our family in Christ.

However, God knows what is within our hearts. I noticed that, throughout the

“Through the Holy Spirit, He gave me the message to keep moving forward. No matter what happens in church, no matter who may depart from God, nothing that has happened or will happen can dilute or degrade the sacrifice given by our Lord Jesus.”

trip, I would often sing spiritual hymns during prayer. But these experiences were different from previous ones: I was moved to sing hymns from the hymnbook. This made me very self-conscious, and I was unsure whether I was being moved by the Holy Spirit, or singing of my own accord. I would try to suppress it by pausing and speaking “Hallelujah,” but it would instantly come flowing out even stronger. I would sing different hymns, sometimes blending one into another, or the melody would be slightly different. There were times I would sing a hymn I was not very familiar with, and would have to search for it in the hymnbook afterwards.

Upon reflection, there was a running theme between the hymns I was moved to sing. Many were about the cross, the blood of Christ, and about the heavenly kingdom and following God to the end. Even so, I could not understand why I was receiving these hymns and why it was happening so often. I eventually came to a half-satisfying conclusion that it was because I felt weak.

Several months after the trip, I attended the Africa Ministry Training Course (AMTC) 2017 in London. The participants who had already visited Africa were asked to share their experiences during a scheduled sharing session. During the evening prayer, on the day before the sharing session, I prayed and asked God what I should share. I briefly thought back to my experiences of receiving hymns in prayer, but dismissed it fairly quickly. I thought, *How could I share something that I still don't really understand myself?* On thinking this, I suddenly felt a strong feeling within that said, “It's because you were discouraged.” These words pierced me;

I felt vulnerable, but at the same time, a feeling of relief and comfort flooded me. At that moment, everything clicked. I realized that, during my trip, I had suppressed these sad thoughts rather than deal with them. But even if we try to hide our deepest thoughts, the Spirit of God knows what lies in our hearts:

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

(Rom 8:26–27)

God had been encouraging me all along, so I could continue to serve Him. Through the Holy Spirit, He gave me the message to keep moving forward. No matter what happens in church, no matter who may depart from God, nothing that has happened or will happen can dilute or degrade the sacrifice given by our Lord Jesus. He shed His blood and gave His life on the cross—paying the price for our sins. Nor will anything tarnish God's glory or impede God's salvation plan. Therefore, all we can and must do is follow Him till we reach the heavenly kingdom.

Aun Quek Chin
Singapore

Holy Work Series: Delivering Sermons

Editor's note: Learning a new skill has never been easier—there are countless how-to-guides and online videos offering guidance on almost anything we may need for work or leisure, from the mundane to the esoteric. However, when it comes to serving God, there is no guide better than God's inspiration—His word and His Spirit. With God's guidance, we need not worry, but entering any ministry new to us can be daunting. In this new Holy Work Series, we will look at various ministries, duties and roles within the church, and ask experienced workers to offer practical advice for carrying out these works, as well as outlining, more importantly, the spirit we should have. We hope these guides will benefit both beginner and experienced workers alike.

It would be difficult to come up with a definitive method for preparing and delivering a sermon on the pulpit. In fact, there are probably as

many ways to deliver a sermon as there are workers chosen to serve in this ministry. Nevertheless, there are important principles sermon speakers should follow. Most critically, we should do this holy work with the attitude God wants us to have.

THE CORRECT ATTITUDE

Sent by God to Preach His Word

As sermon speakers, we must understand that we are being sent by God to preach. God desires all men to be saved, but He does not force them to believe. Nor does He command angels to appear and preach, astounding men into immediate obedience. Instead, God sends His servants, so that whoever hears and believes will be saved (Rom 10:14–15).

Beginning the sermon in the holy name of the Lord Jesus reminds us that we are

mere vessels for God's word. We speak not for ourselves, but to glorify God's name. God does not need great sermon speakers; He needs sermon speakers who can speak of His greatness.

Receiving and proclaiming God's message are crucial to our faith. Yet, there are many today who do not esteem sermons, either as the speaker or the listener. This is not surprising, as the apostle Paul warns us: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine” (2 Tim 4:3a). As sermon speakers, we may occasionally find some congregants dozing off during our sermons. This should not discourage us, but remind us to review what factors could have contributed to their lack of attention and engagement. More importantly, we must resolve to put in the utmost effort to speak every sermon well. This is because we have been sent by the Lord to speak His word.



“As God’s messenger, we deliver His word to His people so that they can realize their sins and inadequacies, to repent and seek His forgiveness. Like the prophets and apostles of old, our responsibility is to explain the word of God, to lead man to come before Him.”

If we do not esteem sermon speaking, we will prepare and speak sermons perfunctorily. Instead, we should give our best and treasure each opportunity we have to serve God in this ministry.

Sermon Speaking is Holy

As God’s messenger, we deliver His word to His people so that they can realize their sins and inadequacies, to repent and seek His forgiveness. Like the prophets and apostles of old, our responsibility is to explain the word of God, to lead man to come before Him.

As a holy ministry that brings man before God, sermon speaking must be revered and taken seriously. Paul said he labored and strived to warn and teach every man in all wisdom, to present every man perfect in Christ Jesus (Col 1:28). Our sermons should not be an attempt to display our intellectual ability or showcase our scriptural knowledge. Importantly, we must appeal to the listeners’ hearts. This does not mean that we use rhetoric to appeal to sentiment or manipulate emotions. Instead, it is a reminder that our eloquence will not truly reach the hearts of God’s children if we do not first prepare our sermons knowing that God is the Author of all worthwhile wisdom. It is His word, not ours, that must be shared.

Working with the Holy Spirit

Paul writes that he speaks not with words which man’s wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches (1 Cor 2:4, 13). The Lord said that when the Spirit of truth comes, “He will guide you into all truth,” and “the Holy Spirit... will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (Jn 16:13; 14:26). Therefore,

when we speak sermons, we ought to work with and rely on the Holy Spirit to understand and preach the word of God.

The common anxieties that beset the sermon speaker are many. A lack of original ideas or access to information can throw off even the most experienced speaker. But these worries are secondary. The first thing that should come to mind as we prepare to give a sermon is whether the Holy Spirit is present with us throughout.

When we are preparing our sermon script, there are times when we have to stop because we run out of ideas or cannot understand certain things; this is when we should seek the Holy Spirit’s inspiration. There are also times when we suddenly remember a relevant Bible passage we can reference, or

verses that support our message. These are the small pleasures of sermon preparation—we experience how the Holy Spirit moves and guides us to understand and apply the truth.

From the start of the idea generating process, to gathering information and organizing the message for the pulpit, we must seek to have the Holy Spirit work with us.

ESSENTIAL ADVICE: BRING THE RIGHT “PRICE”

Just as one pays a price for any quality product, sermon preparation and delivery also demands a “PRICE.” Below are five essential tests a sermon speaker should use to ensure his sermon is valuable in God’s eyes.

Passion: Touch People’s Hearts

Luke records Jesus meeting two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus, after His resurrection: as He spoke on the Scriptures, their hearts burned within them (Lk 24:32). Beyond eloquence, what truly gets the message across is being able to touch the hearts of the listeners.

Some speak eloquently, with well-prepared scripts. While listeners may enjoy these sermons, their hearts are

not touched. Sermons that touch hearts are those that carry the authority of God’s word, and trigger a sense of awe and fear toward God. Such sermons make the listeners feel remorseful before God and bring about repentance. They are filled with hope, making the listeners yearn for the better home in heaven.

Hence, a touching sermon is not about eloquence. Ultimately, it is about whether the sermon speaker works with the Holy Spirit, and whether he puts his heart and soul into his sermon.

Relevance to Believers’ Lives

A sermon is not just about expounding biblical knowledge, it should also help the members grow and renew their faith. It ought to explain how this truth can be relevantly applied in the listeners’ lives; to this end, a sermon should have breadth and depth. The message delivered by Moses in Deuteronomy was one that was relevant to the congregation’s lives, teaching them to obey the word of God and, thereby, gain God’s favor instead of incurring His wrath (Deut 32:46–47).

If a sermon only focuses on depth (deepening scriptural knowledge), it will be too highbrow for many congregants, and is of no relevance to their lives. Believers feel that such sermons are dry and dull. Hence, one has to apply breadth—helping believers see the relevance of these scriptural precepts and concepts to their lives. Then, they will be edified.

Delivering sermons differs greatly from giving speeches. Audiences applaud the speaker if his speech is entertaining or interesting. They respond to his public rhetoric and have minimal expectations of his private life. But sermons deliver the word of God, so we have to live out the words we speak. While the congregants listen to our sermon delivered on the pulpit, they will observe our behavior off the pulpit. If the sermons we speak are unable to transform us, how can we demand that the hearers be transformed? Therefore, Paul encouraged Timothy to give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. One ought to pursue improvement, be

an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. By continuing in these, we will save both ourselves and those who hear us (1 Tim 4:12, 16). A sermon speaker was once asked how long it took him to prepare a sermon. “Fifty years,” came the reply. “Every teaching worth telling is built on a lifetime of practice, and we are also preparing to live out what we preach.”

Interesting: Capture Attention

During His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus’ words were well received by His hearers. Apart from sparking initial interest with intriguing questions, the Lord often used characters, events and parables to explain the truth. This allowed the audience to understand easily, as well as sustaining their interest (Mk 12:35–36).

We do not speak on topics that interest us only. Rather, we need to stir the congregation’s interest so that we can hold their attention. This does not mean that we have to tell jokes or recount entertaining stories. Instead, the Lord’s example teaches us to explain the significance of the truth by using familiar and relatable characters and situations. This helps the listeners understand and sustain their attention.

To be able to do this, we must research, read and gather information. When we are not lacking in information, we can make the content of our sermons rich and interesting.

If we hear feedback that our sermons are too profound and hard for the congregants to understand, we are not being asked to stop speaking profound sermons. Rather, we should spend more time explaining any complex concepts

using accessible words and examples.

When Paul repeatedly states that it is not eloquence or wisdom that redeems his message, he is not confessing ineptitude. Rather, he is reminding us that the basics—relatable, simple ideas, told in relatable, simple language—are all we need. Instead of copying and pasting everything we stumble across—an increasingly tempting option with technology at our fingertips—we ought to slow down and digest the gospel to the best of our abilities. This is a crucial first step.

Clarity: Organize the Message Clearly

In homiletics—the study and practice of preaching sermons—good organization and clear sermon structure are indispensable. Some speakers do not believe in organizing their sermons. They are of the view that to structure a sermon script based on man’s thoughts produces lifeless sermons; they are convinced that life-giving sermons are only produced through the Holy Spirit’s movement. They speak whatever comes to mind, claiming such to be the moving of the Holy Spirit. From the congregation’s perspective, this usually results in bits and pieces of scriptural exposition, stitched together in a haphazard manner, if at all.

Luke did not write the Gospel of Luke whenever he felt moved by the Holy Spirit, and stop writing when he did not. He carefully studied the words he had heard from the beginning, and wrote them down in chronological order (Lk 1:1–4). During the writing process, he prayed for the guidance and moving of the Holy Spirit. If the written word requires structure to convey a coherent message, what more

“While the congregants listen to our sermon delivered on the pulpit, they will observe our behavior off the pulpit. If the sermons we speak are unable to transform us, how can we demand that the hearers be transformed?”



the spoken word, which is fleeting and has to be processed at a faster pace. Useful techniques like not digressing from our central theme and signposting our main points are ways that can help us communicate our message more clearly. We ought to list the main points rather than mix everything up in one undefined chunk of information. In addition, the main points should be logically organized: each section should be coherent and flow smoothly to the next section. Logical structure and clarity will help the listeners stay attentive and focused, able to follow and understand the sermon.

Explain: Expound the Bible

Rather than simply reciting Bible passages or mindlessly rehashing well-worn clichés, sermon speakers have to do their best to break down the meaning of biblical passages, parables, and principles. When Philip asked the Ethiopian eunuch if he understood what he was reading, the latter answered, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” So Philip explained the Bible to him (Acts 8:30–35). Sermon speakers are also sent to explain the Bible to the members, to help them better understand the word and, thus, strengthen their faith.

Apollos had good understanding of the Scriptures, but he only knew the baptism of John. Therefore, Aquila and Priscilla made the effort to explain the word of God more clearly to him. Similarly, some members may only have partial understanding of the Bible. It is thus the speaker’s duty to thoroughly expound the word to them.

In Colossians 1:25, Paul says that he became a minister according to the stewardship from God, so he had to preach the complete word of God. When we explain the Bible, we must do so completely, accurately and correctly. Paul reminds us to rightly divide the word of God (2 Tim 2:15); while Peter warns us not to interpret the Scriptures based on our personal interpretation (2 Pet 1:20–21).

Explanations have to be complete and biblically accurate. Incomplete truths and misleading messages are

the source of much misunderstanding and confusion, and can wreak as much spiritual havoc as outright deception. Therefore, we ought to be cautious when we speak sermons. We should practice correct exegesis (biblical interpretation), backed by scriptural evidence, rather than eisegesis (reading our own ideas into Scripture). Do not, for the sake of novelty, deviate from the teachings of the Bible. And, finally, do not speak things which are pleasing to the congregation, in order to humor or flatter them (Gal 1:10).

A FAITHFUL PROPHET

The opportunity to serve in the pulpit ministry is a blessing from our Lord Jesus. We must approach this with the right mindset and heart. The pulpit is not a public platform for us to showcase our eloquence and increase our popularity with the congregation. It is a holy ministry for us to help our brethren understand God’s will and word, completely and correctly, so that we can all grow together as the body of Christ. Every opportunity to speak must thus be treasured, and every effort be made to prepare ourselves for this work. Let us ask God to guide us in our ministry as faithful bearers of His word to His children.

Mellisa Ho
Sunter, Indonesia

Inspired by Jesus:
My Evangelistic Wedding

MY THOUGHTS, NOT GOD’S THOUGHTS

Most of us dream of one day finding that one person we love—the one we will marry and live together with for the rest of our lives. That sense of anticipation culminates on the wedding day, which is the start of a shared life together. It is no surprise that weddings are highly esteemed, pompously celebrated, and planned to perfection. We even imagine the smallest of details, perhaps paying no attention to how much time or money it may cost.

I was no different. A beautiful wedding dress, a wedding venue lavishly decorated with luxurious flowers and sparkling crystal chandeliers, an extravagant wedding cake in the shape of a small white castle, hundreds of lavish and sumptuous banquet dishes,

with strains of romantic arias in the background—that was my dream wedding. Such a wedding was not going to be easy to achieve, but my then-fiancé and I were willing to save up to make our dream a reality.

It was a truth universally acknowledged: weddings had to be this way. Or so I thought...

In the months before my wedding, as my fiancé and I were chatting with other brothers and sisters about their wedding experiences, we were astonished to discover that several of them had nothing more extravagant than a simple church ceremony. A preacher even suggested, “Maybe it is not necessary to have a wedding feast.”

No feasting and no banquet? I had always thought that a banquet was an integral part of any wedding—it would

be strange not to have one. *My wedding is a once-in-a-lifetime experience*, I thought. *It should be perfect!*

What should I do? What does God really want me to do? My thoughts were in disarray—torn between having my dream wedding and the simple wedding that everyone around me espoused. I thought that I was not strong enough to let go of my dream wedding. However, as I look back and reflect, I realize the truth of this Bible verse:

“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)



The wedding of Brother Venus Hariono and Sister Mellisa Ho.

UNDERSTANDING FROM GOD

These thoughts were running through my mind as I attended several wedding banquets held by relatives and friends. Then, the most peculiar thing happened: my feelings began to change. Attending those banquets, I felt a deep sense of emptiness and lack of meaning. The more banquets I attended, the stronger this feeling grew.

It was confusing and unnerving. I asked myself, *Why do I no longer feel the same joy and desire for my own dream wedding?* I prayed and asked God what these feelings meant.

I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure”; but surely, this also was vanity. (Eccl 2:1)

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. (Col 3:1–2)

God is truly miraculous. In the midst of my confusion towards my change of heart, He gave me a clearer understanding. I started to question myself: *Why did I want a wedding feast? Was it because I wanted to be the “princess of the day,” the fairest of them all?* All eyes would be on me, as the center of attention, for all to admire. But if so, where do I place my Lord Jesus?

I came to realize that, after being baptized as God’s child, “I” am no longer the most important. We should always put God first whatever the situation, even on our wedding day. We should walk a God-centered life, “[f]or [we] were bought at a price; therefore [we ought to] glorify God in [our] body and in [our] spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor 6:20). This way, our life will not be empty and full of vanity.

MY WEDDING, A CHANNEL FOR MY GOD

After a great struggle, God finally changed my heart, and I no longer wanted that girlish “dream wedding” anymore. Instead, I wanted to do something meaningful for God.

As I pondered on how to have a meaningful wedding, a thought

“Sometimes we have to take a step back and reflect on our true intentions and the underlying desires that we are seeking to satisfy.”

suddenly came to mind. I recalled a sister and her husband once told me their dream wedding was an “evangelistic wedding service.” This was because, during a matrimonial service, many family members and friends willingly come to church, like “fish happily swimming into the net.” It would be an excellent opportunity to preach the gospel to them. This felt like a eureka moment, as if the Lord Jesus were telling me that this is the type of wedding He wanted me to have.

Moreover, if we did not have a separate banquet in another venue after the wedding service, all of our guests would have to come to church. They can learn about and experience worshipping in the True Jesus Church. As the Bible says:

Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. (2 Tim 4:2)

My fiancé supported the idea, and we reorganized our plans so that we could have an evangelistic wedding service. Throughout this whole process, it felt like God was guiding us each step of the way.

IMPLEMENTING OUR PLANS

To start off, we had to explain the concept of an evangelistic wedding service to the officiating preacher and the members who would be helping to organize the big day. Firstly, we requested that the sermon message during the ceremony be changed to emphasize how man needs Jesus and the truth. Secondly, we requested that the choir presentation and hymns be themed on God’s love, and man’s need for God. Thirdly, we invited a brother and a sister to share testimonies, under the guise of “speeches from the friends of the bride and groom.” My fiancé even prepared a testimony on how God’s grace had led us to that moment.

Fourthly, we prepared evangelistic pamphlets, a ten basic beliefs flyer, and a pen as our wedding souvenirs. Last of all, we recruited brothers and sisters as ushers, to accompany and preach the gospel to our non-believing friends and relatives during the post-ceremony lunch at church. We even went to the extent of preparing seating plans and providing background information on target guests.

Initially, we were really anxious because this evangelistic wedding concept was very different, and had never been done in our local church before. I was afraid to ask the church to help with our plans, but God gave me the courage to go ahead. By the grace of God, the evangelistic team were very supportive and more than willing to assist with our wedding plans. I thank God that He gave me the strength to carry out His will for me.

My fiancé and I pressed on with our plans and, praise the Lord, the wedding went smoothly! Afterwards, one of the non-believing guests shared with one of the ushers that he was touched by the ceremony and would be willing to return to attend church service.

The “evangelistic wedding” also edified the members, and many even started encouraging young couples to do likewise. Rather than spending our money to glorify ourselves, it would be better if we use it to bring glory to our Lord Jesus Christ instead. Sometimes we have to take a step back and reflect on our true intentions and the underlying desires that we are seeking to satisfy.

Remember, we have all been bought at a price, and our lives are no longer ours (1 Cor 6:19–20). In all that we do, we ought to give glory to God (1 Cor 10:31). May all the glory, honor and praise be unto Him. Amen.

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What God Has Joined, Let No Man Separate (Part 2)

Editor’s note: The first of this three-part series, published in issue 87, focused on understanding God’s will and His purpose in instituting marriage. This second part looks at God’s principles for marriage and extends these principles to our relationship with Him.

Disagreements and difficulties arise in every marriage. The world offers solutions such as marriage counseling and therapy to help couples get through their rough patches. Christians have the additional privilege of having an Almighty God who is always ready to see them through these storms. Yet, we hear of Christians who ultimately divorce; we see couples in cold, loveless relationships—they remain together but can barely tolerate each other. If we look at God’s original plan for marriage, we will see that such situations are not what God intended. To prevent our marriage from declining

to such a state, we must clearly understand and firmly uphold God’s established principles for the marriage covenant.

There are three key principles of marriage that God’s children must believe and practice:

ONE HUSBAND, ONE WIFE

And this is the second thing you do: You cover the altar of the LORD with tears, With weeping and crying; So He does not regard the offering anymore, Nor receive it with goodwill from your hands. Yet you say, “For what reason?” Because the LORD has been witness Between you and the wife of your youth, With whom you have dealt treacherously; Yet she is your companion

And your wife by covenant. But did He not make them one, Having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. Therefore take heed to your spirit, And let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. “For the LORD God of Israel says That He hates divorce, For it covers one’s garment with violence,” Says the LORD of hosts. “Therefore take heed to your spirit, That you do not deal treacherously.” (Mal 2:13–16)

Monogamy is God’s intended marital arrangement for man. We can infer this from various parts of the Scriptures. First, God created only one wife—Eve—for Adam. He could have created multiple spouses to meet Adam’s need



for companionship and help. But it was His will to create just one woman for the first man. From the beginning, the Creator has already indicated that He does not tolerate a third party within a marriage. We thus have a responsibility to be faithful to our spouse.

Second, the prophet Malachi reiterates God's expectation of monogamy (Mal 2:15), declaring that adultery incurs God's rejection. Malachi rebuked God's people for having extramarital relationships. He warned them that God was fully sympathetic with the wronged wives. Helpless to prevent their husbands' infidelity, the former prayed and wept at the altar of God (Mal 2:13). Consequently, God rejected the offerings of their philandering husbands.

Dealing treacherously with one's spouse and divorce are abominations to God. Even as we obey God to worship Him in spirit and in truth, we must also speak and act with sincerity toward others. We would be hypocrites if we harbor hatred towards our spouse, have romantic feelings for a third party, or indulge in an extramarital affair. Our heavenly Father watches from heaven. Even though it seems we have deceived others and there is nothing our spouses can do, God will mete out judgment.

For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. (2 Cor 11:2–3)

God's expectation of our marital fidelity is rooted in His expectations of our relationship with Him. Paul says we are betrothed to Christ, who will come for us one day. We must be faithful whilst waiting, meaning we must be single-minded towards Jesus. Our hearts should not stray, and we should remain chaste. Our declarations of love for our spouse are hollow if we are also harboring affections for another person. Proponents of polyamory like to claim that they have sufficient love to share, and that their love for their

multiple partners is genuine. Such love may be real, but it is certainly not pure.

God's love for man is pure love, and this is the type of love He expects in return. Jesus reminds us that a person cannot serve two masters. We may proclaim the Lord with our lips, but if our heart is distant from Him, our love is deceitful and impure (Isa 29:13). In the same way, God expects us to have a pure love towards our spouse. Our marriage bed should never be defiled by a third party, as the physical relationship between husband and wife is sanctified. We must ask God to help us maintain a pure love towards our spouse.

TILL DEATH DO US PART

Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives? For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man. (Rom 7:1–3)

To God, marriage is for life. It is the most serious and longest lasting covenant that a person can make. Since it is a promise made before God and man, it must be upheld, as the traditional vows state, "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part." Unfortunately, financial difficulties, long-term illness, incompatible personalities and myriad other factors may drive a wedge between the couple. Intense and sustained conflict in these situations may tempt

us to give up on our marriage. In such moments, we must remind ourselves that while we enjoy the benefits and pleasures of marriage, we must also be prepared to share and bear its burdens and responsibilities. Demanding the good times and fleeing the difficult is indicative of our immaturity and irresponsibility. Worse, it shows we were lying when we said our vows.

What is the significance of making our vows before God?

God is faithful and unchanging. He is our ultimate standard, a worthy witness to the covenant we make with our spouse. Hence, the marriage vow is sacred. In a wedding ceremony, the most solemn part is the making of the vows. The congregation is generally very attentive and excited to see the bride enter and walk down the aisle. However, everyone should be even more attentive when the couple say their vows, because their words form the basis of a covenant made before God. The words are also very useful as a reminder to those in the congregation, who are already married, of whether they are truly continuing to love their spouses in all circumstances. Uttering these words insincerely or unthinkingly is tantamount to trivializing the wedding ceremony, or worse, committing perjury.

*Set me as a seal upon your heart,
As a seal upon your arm;
For love is as strong as death,
Jealousy as cruel as the grave;
Its flames are flames of fire,
A most vehement flame.
Many waters cannot quench love,
Nor can the floods drown it.
If a man would give for love
All the wealth of his house,
It would be utterly despised.* (Song 8:6–7)

“ God's expectation of our marital fidelity is rooted in His expectations of our relationship with Him. Paul says we are betrothed to Christ, who will come for us one day. We must be faithful whilst waiting, meaning we must be single-minded towards Jesus. ”



According to Solomon, love is as strong as death and its flames are unquenchable. These verses underline the fact that the flames of love transcend lustful desire or simple emotion. The flames of love are holy and are from God, which is why they cannot be quenched.

Love sparked by our carnal desires for sex, money or fame often end quickly. Carnal desires will not last forever; the heat from these sputter out once they are gratified. Flames of emotion are good, but they are weak and unstable. Couples in a good mood tell each other "I love you" but when they are in a bad mood, they spit "I hate you!" at each other. The flames of true love from God are unchanging because this love is based on God's love.

ONE MAN, ONE WOMAN

The third principle underlying marriage is that God instituted this covenant for a man and a woman. Today, some liberal countries have legalized same-sex marriage, and some Christian denominations conduct same-sex wedding ceremonies. Many people justify such developments on the basis that gay and lesbian individuals do not choose their sexuality; they are born that way. But this is not what the Bible says.

plan for human lives. God's plan is perfect, as long as we abide by His principles for this holy union. When we start to go beyond His boundaries for marriage, problems arise. And as humans imagine more and more possibilities for how to define marriage, complications multiply in tandem. We can safeguard our marriages by upholding God's principles, remembering that the quality of our relationships ultimately impact our relationship with God.

Of course, even when we adhere to God's boundaries for marriage, dissatisfaction can still arise with time. In the concluding article, we will look at how to grow together with our spouse, and how to deal with conflicts within our marriage.

For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.

(Rom 1:26–27)

Our Omniscient God and Almighty Creator would clearly have been aware if homosexuality were part of His intended design. But what we repeatedly see in the Scriptures is a rejection of this inclination. Those who indulge in these "vile passions" will receive "the penalty of their error." However, in His love, God is not willing for any to perish. For those people inclined towards homosexuality, the Holy Spirit can help them exercise self-control if they choose to heed God's words, and submit to Him. In contrast, for those who choose to follow their passions and fleshly desires, God will give them up and let them do what they want. Both women and men who do so will receive God's judgment.

CONCLUSION

Our Almighty God instituted marriage at His creation, as part of His foundational

I Have Loved You with an Everlasting Love

The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: "Yès, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore, with lovingkindness I have drawn you." (Jer 31:3)

God spoke these words, through the prophet Jeremiah, to all the families of Israel (Jer 31:1). But who were these families of Israel? Who exactly are the recipients of God's everlasting love?

Jeremiah was born in the southern kingdom of Judah, after Assyria defeated and destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C.E. As part of the Assyrian campaign, many Israelites were displaced to Assyria, and the Samarian cities were repopulated by people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath and Sepharvaim (2 Kgs 17:24). The ten tribes that formed the northern kingdom were gradually assimilated by these

peoples, and have thus disappeared.¹ They are known as the Ten Lost Tribes. Judah was also later destroyed by Babylon in 586 B.C.E. Jerusalem's walls were destroyed, the temple burned, and many of its inhabitants exiled to Babylon. Seventy years later, some captives returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and, subsequently, another group returned to reconstruct the city walls. But, primarily, they continued to be governed by foreign powers until 1948, when the nation of Israel was re-established. However, this present nation is a republic, governed by an elected president, prime minister and parliament—far from the Davidic kingdom that God promised to establish forever. As God revealed to David, through the prophet Nathan:

¹ "Ten Lost Tribes of Israel," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed April 1, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ten-Lost-Tribes-of-Israel>.

"When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ... And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever." (2 Sam 7:12–13, 16)

Regarding this everlasting kingdom, God later sent an angel to Mary, saying:

"You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." (Lk 1:31–33)

This is a kingdom established through Jesus' blood, a new covenant offered to

those who are willing to come to Him.

Before God concluded the writings of the Old Testament (OT), He sent the prophet Malachi to His people. The Book of Malachi opens with what sounds like a conclusion of God's long-suffering love for His chosen people:

"I have loved you," says the LORD. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" Says the LORD. "Yet Jacob I have loved." (Mal 1:2)

The physical descendants of Abraham were given the covenant to be God's elect. But at the close of the OT, when God reminded them of His love, they appeared to be unaware of being loved. As Moses said to the chosen people, the faithful God keeps His covenant and is merciful for a thousand generations, towards those who love Him and keep His commandments (Deut 7:9). But His rebellious children broke the covenant which He established with their forefathers with their own hands.

This is why the prophet Jeremiah proclaimed that God was ready to make a new covenant:

"Behold, the days are coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD." (Jer 31:31–32)

This new covenant was inaugurated through Jesus' blood, and offered to all who are willing to come to Him.

Therefore, when God tells the families of Israel, "I have loved you with an everlasting love," He is speaking to the spiritual family that includes those within this new covenant—the kingdom of Jesus. This is the spiritual church whose members were chosen by God before the foundation of the world, yet hidden in Himself until the apostolic era, as revealed to the apostles and prophets through the Holy Spirit (Eph 3:5–11). So, aside from the OT saints and the apostolic believers, these words of everlasting love are also directed to us today.

“ God’s love transcends life and death, and cannot be measured by whatever is happening to us in the immediate present. ”

God loves us with an everlasting love. However, our limited experience and knowledge make it difficult for us to understand this love. Take the case of the kingdom of Judah. Although God said, also through Jeremiah, that His thoughts toward His people were thoughts of peace and not of evil, He sent His servant Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to invade their cities and destroy the temple. This kind of peace is hard to comprehend. But He did so to give them a future and a hope (Jer 29:11).

The people of Judah had been living in spiritual darkness, worshipping Baal and other false gods alongside offering sacrifices in the temple of God (Jer 7:8–11). So it was out of love that God took them to a different environment for seventy years, to reflect on their past sins. While in exile, God's children sat by the rivers of Babylon and wept when they remembered Zion (Ps 137:1). They yearned for the celebrative worship back home, and their hearts were again drawn to God in this foreign land. True to His promise, when God's people returned to Him, He returned to them. Experiencing God's love in this way, they realized that He had never been far from them—a realization that brought true peace.

We can never fully appreciate what everlasting love is, but we know that God has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4). He has "called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began" (2 Tim 1:9). This is love beyond human comprehension—we were chosen purely because, in His eternity, He loves us. This is an unchanging and everlasting love. Not even calamities, such as Judah's seventy-year captivity, could cast doubt on the beauty of this love.

Our time on earth is brief, while God's love is everlasting. Through this

everlasting love, God has drawn us to Himself. Since we have not lived forever, how can we appreciate everlasting love? In fact, God's love transcends life and death, and cannot be measured by whatever is happening to us in the immediate present, or by the success of our secular pursuits in this physical life. His love for us lives on, even after we die.

God's love may not be apparent at certain points in time, but when we look back at the path God has guided us on, we will see His mercy and will for us. For this, we cannot but give thanks, every moment of our lives.

As we experience God's love, we also learn to patiently love others. Whatever the circumstances, if we love persistently, it will eventually bear fruit, even if it is unappreciated by the other party at the time.

[W]e have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Heb 12:9–11)

We enjoy many blessings and joyful moments from God. However, even within God's love, we experience pain and stress as He purifies us. Certainly, "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28). Time, and our commitment to walk with God all our lives, will produce the peaceable fruit of righteousness.

And when we finally reach the end of our life's journey, we will surely see how He has loved us with an everlasting love!



A Joyful Return

aaliyah
UK

When the LORD brought back the captivity of Zion,
We were like those who dream.
Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
And our tongue with singing.
Then they said among the nations,
“The LORD has done great things for them.”
The LORD has done great things for us,
And we are glad.
Bring back our captivity, O LORD,
As the streams in the South.
Those who sow in tears
Shall reap in joy.
He who continually goes forth weeping,
Bearing seed for sowing,
Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing,
Bringing his sheaves with him.
(Ps 126:1–6)

Psalm 126 is one of fifteen psalms known as the “Songs of Ascents,”

which were sung by the exiled Jews as they “ascended” from Babylon to their homeland, Jerusalem, during the time of Ezra the Scribe. Seventy years before, God had allowed the Babylonians to capture Judah, as punishment for the latter’s disobedience and idolatrous ways. Yet, during this period of exile, God still kept His covenant with Abraham. At the appointed time, He stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, King of Persia, to allow the exiled Jews to return to the promised land. Later, as part of the Levites’ duties in the holy temple, they would also sing these psalms, accompanied by instruments, as they ascended the stairway to the inner court.

GOD BROUGHT BACK WAVES OF CAPTIVES

In the darkness of their captivity, God’s

people yearned for the land they had left, for the God they had forsaken. Indeed, when the returning exiles sang of God’s mercy and deliverance, they were poignantly described as being “like those who dream.” God, in His mercy, had brought them back from the foreign land of Babylon to the promised land. For any lost or wayward child of God, the experience of returning to God’s fold is akin to a dream. Today, we hear of numerous testimonies, going back many generations, of God’s grace and guidance in bringing back those who were once lost.

In the UK, for example, the early believers who emigrated from the island of Ap Chau in Hong Kong underwent such a spiritual journey. In the 1960s, the first batch of Ap Chau youths arrived in the UK. They settled in areas far from the existing fellowship of

True Jesus Church members, primarily composed of Malaysian students in and around London. The Ap Chau immigrants lived under the roofs of strangers, in unfamiliar territories, without family or church support. They lived like the people of the world. As a result, their faith spiralled downwards. Scattered throughout the UK, they were like lost sheep without a shepherd (Ezek 34:5–6). Although there were moments of spiritual revival during fellowship gatherings, their faith became stagnant without the guidance of a shepherd.

As they ceased calling on the name of the Lord, these members entered a period of spiritual darkness. Nonetheless, God did not forsake them. He sent His servants to encourage His people—in 1972, the International Assembly started to send workers to shepherd these members and help establish regular services. By 1975, God had brought the majority of the Ap Chau population to the UK, pushing the number of members to seven hundred. And through the continual labor of the workers, several prayer houses were established in the UK during this period. By God’s bountiful grace, in 1976, the first True Jesus Church in the UK was dedicated to the Lord in Newcastle upon Tyne.

When members recall these events, some forty years later, they still clearly remember the abundant grace of God. Such stories of God’s love and compassion toward our forefathers in the midst of despair can seem like a dream, and we can indeed proclaim: “The LORD has done great things for us, and we are glad.”

SOWING IN TEARS FOR THOSE STILL CAPTIVE

Many of us have made this same journey from captivity back to God. In dark moments of our faith, we may have been entrapped by the world, before eventually being brought back by the Lord. Therefore, we can testify to the Lord’s abidance, and rejoice over His abundant mercy. However, we will also find ourselves thinking of our brethren who are still lost in the world.

When the returned Jews sang, “Bring

“ We may have been entrapped by the world, before eventually being brought back by the Lord. Therefore, we can testify to the Lord’s abidance, and rejoice over His abundant mercy. However, we will also find ourselves thinking of our brethren who are still lost in the world. ”

back our captivity, O LORD, as the streams in the South,” many of their fellow countrymen were still in captivity. Likewise, today, we want our loved ones to be set free from the world, to join us as we ascend into the inner court of our King. Some of these brethren may even be our physical family members. Our hearts ache for their return.

For this reason, we “sow in tears” in prayer and continually go “forth weeping” each day, only to end each day still weeping. It seems a strange phenomenon, yet this is the result when you see your own still enslaved, despite repeated efforts to bring them back. At times, it seems as though the more abundantly we love them, the less we are loved (2 Cor 12:15). Often, workers of God experience the most rejection when reaching out to lost sheep. It is deeply painful when you pour your heart out to someone, only to be met with indifference or rejection. This was the pain the Old Testament (OT) prophets experienced as they “went in bitterness” to the captives (Ezek 3:14). Perhaps our early UK workers felt similarly, toiling to re-establish the faith of the members.

The Bible shows us that, throughout the ages, our Lord has patiently waited for His children to return to Him (2 Pet 3:9). Even in the beginning, when Adam and Eve were ensnared by temptation, God called out, “Where are you?” (Gen 3:9). As each generation falls captive to the world, we see the heartache of our God, who is “grieved” and “crushed by their adulterous heart which has departed from [Him]” (Gen 6:6; Ezek 6:9). When Jesus was in the world, He lamented over Jerusalem: “How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen

gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!” (Lk 19:41; 13:34b).

ONLY GOD CAN DELIVER

From the history of the Jews and of the UK church, we know that only God can deliver His people from captivity. When we dwell upon the past forty-plus years of church development in the UK, it is evident that “the LORD has done great things for us.” Our hope and trust is that He will continue to do the same, today and tomorrow. The love and guidance of our Lord Jesus Christ are constant and, as such, we should rely fully on Him who longs to gather us together.

As we rely on our Savior, we can continue to “sow in tears,” knowing that we will eventually “reap in joy” and “shall doubtless come again with rejoicing”—just like our forefathers. The seeds that we sow are not only words of doctrine and life, but also deeds of love. Seeds of love have the best chance of surviving in the harsh environment of a heart in captivity. It was the love of the OT prophets, our early workers, and ultimately the love of God, which brought back those in captivity. Therefore, we have this assurance, that “God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name,” and we will no doubt “come again with rejoicing, bringing [our] sheaves with [us]” (Heb 6:10; Ps 126:6).

Though the physical church has been established, we must toil daily in the arduous task of building up the spiritual church. May we continue to strive for this dream through relying on our Lord Jesus, sowing seeds of love as we ascend into the inner courtyard of our Lord and King. Amen.



The dedication of True Jesus Church in Newcastle, UK in 1976.

Call for Articles

Issue #90: Family Altar

In Romans 16:5, Paul mentions the church in the house of Priscilla and Aquila. In the early apostolic church, it was common for believers to gather in their homes to worship and break bread together.

Today, we need to return to the apostolic model, bringing our faith into our family lives, and creating a church at home through regular family Bible reading and prayer times. If we can establish God as the center and foundation of our home, then we can truly shine forth as lights, and ambassadors for Christ, in every area of our lives.

How can we nurture a God-centered family and establish a good spiritual environment for our children to grow up in? How can newlyweds start their lives together in the right direction, building their service to God at the same time as building their career, in preparation for the future? How can empty-nesters and retired couples pivot their lives when they no longer have the responsibility of raising their children, to find purpose and play a positive role in the wider family and church community? And what role does a child play in their household, as

they learn to honor their parents and gradually take responsibility for their own faith? Does this role change as seasons pass and our relationship with our parents change?

No matter what our family looks like, if we can establish a family altar and open our doors to brethren and non-believers alike, then we can truly stir up love and good works, exhorting one another as we see the day approaching (Heb 10:24-25).

General Writing Guidelines

Content

- Content should be biblically sound and adhere to biblical principles.
- The 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.
- Do not plagiarize the work of other writers or institutions, published either in print or online. Any quotations, ideas, or concepts taken from other sources must be properly referenced.

Grammar/Style

- Use active instead of passive voice.
- Write concisely.
- Use concrete words and ideas instead of abstract concepts.
- Use "plain English" instead of obscure, academic language.
- Use the NKJV version when quoting Bible verses.
- Use American spelling, if possible, in print or online.

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Please email articles as Microsoft Word documents to manna@tjc.org

Please direct any questions to manna@tjc.org or Fax: +1-562-402-3190

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

Articles due

August 1, 2019

Manna only accepts submissions written by True Jesus Church members. If you are planning to write an article (regardless of topic), please try to adhere to one of the genres below.

Christian Living

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

Bible Study

A Bible Study explores a passage or character from the Bible and draws out the teachings for readers to apply to their lives. Article length: 2500-3000 words.

Doctrinal Study

A Doctrinal Study examines an aspect of True Jesus Church beliefs and may present it in comparison to other beliefs. Article length: 2500-3000 words.

Exhortation

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

Testimony

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

Creative Writing

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

Articles of Faith



Jesus the True God

Jesus Christ, the Word who became flesh, died on the cross for the redemption of sinners, resurrected on the third day, and ascended to heaven. He is the only Savior of mankind, the Creator of the heavens and earth, and the only true God.



Holy Spirit

Receiving the Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues, is the guarantee of our inheritance of the kingdom of heaven.



Footwashing

The sacrament of footwashing enables one to have a part with the Lord Jesus. It also serves as a constant reminder that one should have love, holiness, humility, forgiveness, and service. Every person who has received water baptism must have his/her feet washed in the name of Jesus Christ. Mutual footwashing may be practiced whenever it is appropriate.



Holy Communion

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



Salvation

Salvation is given by the grace of God through faith. Believers must rely on the Holy Spirit to pursue holiness, to honor God, and to love humanity.



Holy Bible

The Holy Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is inspired by God, the only scriptural truth, and the standard for Christian living.



Baptism

Water baptism is the sacrament for the remission of sins for regeneration. The baptism must take place in natural living water, such as a river, sea, or spring. The baptist, who already has received baptisms of water and the Holy Spirit, conducts the baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the person receiving the baptism must be completely immersed in water with head bowed and face down.



Church

The True Jesus Church, established by our Lord Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit during the time of the "latter rain," is the restored true church of the apostolic time.



Sabbath Day

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



Judgment Day

The Lord's Second Coming will take place on the last day when He descends from heaven to judge the world: the righteous will receive eternal life, while the wicked will be eternally condemned.



CONTACT INFORMATION

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

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