Manna

Issue 89:
Discern the Time and Judge What is Right

Helping the Youth Cultivate a Love for the Truth
True Jesus Church is the Ark of Salvation
Work While There is Time

True Jesus Church

Discern the Time and Judge What is Right

Peter Shee
Singapore

The ancient mariners' rhyme, "Red sky at night, sailors' delight; red sky at morning, sailors take warning," reflects established Jewish wisdom during the time of Jesus (Mt 16:2–3). But many among the Jewish community had to be reprimanded by Christ for not knowing how to discern the time (Lk 12:54–56).

God's people in Haggai's era said, "The time has not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built" (Hag 1:2). This is reflected in *Lessons from Jesus about Discerning the Time*, an interesting study into the context of Jesus' reprimand. The Jews who did not discern the time during Jesus' first advent did not recognize Him as the Messiah, the true temple. When the physical temple was destroyed according to Christ's prophecy, it became apparent that the Jews had nothing that could connect them to God. The need for discerning the time is even more urgent for Christians today; heresies and unrest will precede the second advent, and if we are not careful, we will individually be destroyed while the church as a whole will be saved.

Knowing the Time offers practical advice for Christians to discern the time, recognize the perils, stand firm in the truth and be prepared to face the enemies when they surround the beloved city of Jerusalem, the church. Discerning the time also means knowing right from wrong.

Each successive generation represents a step closer to the end. *Helping the Youth Cultivate a Love for the Truth* recommends that young people must be trained to fight not with vigor alone but with wisdom to know the time, a feature not lacking in David's army.

Gainsayers in the last days existed from the time of Peter and Paul. Our world, once destroyed by water, is reserved for destruction by fire. Where do we find refuge but the one and only ark of salvation (2 Pet 3:1–13; cf. 1 Pet 3:20–22)? Knowing the time leads to recognizing the restored apostolic church—*True Jesus Church is the Ark of Salvation*.

The end of all things is at hand, and the time of judgment has come (1 Pet 4:7, 17). Is there a cloud in the west? Is a shower coming (Lk 12:54)? If in the time of the latter rain, God's people neglect to ask the Lord for rain (Zech 10:1), it will be too late when summer arrives at the door (Mt 24:32).

EDITOR IN CHIEF: Anna Khoo
MANAGING EDITOR: Emmalyn Lai/ Marian Shek
REVIEW BOARD: Andrew Chu (Australia), Ezra Chong, Joel Chong (Malaysia), Lemuel Leong (Sabah), EG Tay, Philip Shee, Simon Chin (Singapore), FF Chong, Michael Chan, Vincent Yeung (UK), Richard Solgot, Stephen Ku, WC Yeh (USA)

Manna (ISSN1528-8617) is published quarterly by the True Jesus Church, IA Department of Literary Ministry, 21217 Bloomfield Avenue, Lakewood, CA 90715 USA.
Copyright © 2020 True Jesus Church. All rights reserved.
U.S. Postmaster: send change-of-address forms to 21217 Bloomfield Avenue, Lakewood, CA 90715 USA.
Back issues of Manna can be downloaded at: www.mannamagazine.com

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the New King James Version.
Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Contents

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

THEME

Discern the Time and Judge for Yourselves
by Fu Ming Tse

The role of the True Jesus Church within God's unfolding salvation plan.

Lessons from Jesus about Discerning the Time
by KC Tsai

Discerning Jesus' true nature, His heavenly message, and the signs of His coming.

Helping the Youth Cultivate a Love for the Truth
by Samuel Kuo

Steps in encouraging our youth to experience God from young, and to grow in faith.

True Jesus Church is the Ark of Salvation
by Aun Quek Chin

Addressing the common challenges to the claim of the one true church.

Knowing the Time
by FF Chong

Time to wake from spiritual slumber to sharpen our discernment and discard the works of darkness.

EXHORTATION

David Defeated the Amalekites: Lessons for Life and Ministry
by Michael Hsu

Overcoming trials in our service by not assigning blame, but following God's lead.

TESTIMONY

A Journey of Faith
by Evelyn Eng-Nol

From childlike belief and teenage angst, to striving for joy and satisfaction in God alone.

True Jesus Church Myanmar Missionary Work
by MMC Volunteers

How God has blessed His works and His workers in Myanmar.

COLUMN
EVANGELISM

Q&A: Be a Lover of Souls
by RED Team

Answering members' concerns on how to practice personal evangelism.

COLUMN
YOUTH

Work While There is Time
by Jordan Kwok

A health scare causes a youth to reflect on the brevity of life and his service to God.

COLUMN
FAMILY

What God Has Joined, Let No Man Separate (Part 3)
by Aun Quek Chin

The final installment—striving to grow together in God's love with our spouse.

48 Call for Articles

49 Articles of Faith

Fu Ming Tse
Taichung, Taiwan

Discern the Time and Judge for Yourselves

Editor's note: From March 23 to 24, 2019, delegates from True Jesus Church locations worldwide gathered for the twelfth World Delegates' Conference (WDC) in Olive Garden, Port Dickson, Malaysia. During the Sabbath service, Elder Fu Ming Tse, the International Assembly (IA) Chairman, shared an exhortation based on the conference theme. This article is based on that sermon.

The WDC theme, "Discern the Time and Judge for Yourselves," was inspired by the Lord Jesus' words in Luke 12:54–57:

Then He also said to the multitudes, "Whenever you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming'; and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow, you say, 'There will be hot weather', and there is. Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time?"

The Lord Jesus observed how the people of His time had no problem interpreting the signs of the natural world. Yet, they could not recognize the Messiah, who was in their midst. He lamented:

"But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, and saying:
'We played the flute for you,
And you did not dance;
We mourned to you,
And you did not lament.'
For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children." (Mt 11:16–19)

Ironically, when Jesus preached a message of glad tidings, the people refused to listen. Yet, when John the Baptist preached a message of warning, they remained indifferent. Such apathy was like that of Noah's generation, who simply ignored Noah's prediction of the impending judgment. As a result, they perished. Only Noah and his family were saved.

Likewise, today, in this end time, the true church has been commissioned to preach the gospel of salvation. Even though the world may ignore or even despise the message, the church must discern the time and continue to fulfill the will of God.

DISCERN THE TIME: GOD'S UNFOLDING PLAN

The chronology of God's salvation plan can be gleaned from studying the Bible.

"In this end time, the true church has been commissioned to preach the gospel of salvation. Even though the world may ignore or even despise the message, the church must discern the time and continue to fulfill the will of God."

From Genesis to Revelation, the plan gradually unfolds: the making of the tabernacle; the building of Solomon's temple; the destruction and restoration of the temple; the establishment of the apostolic church; and the emergence of the True Jesus Church. God's plan has been set out in fine detail.

The year 2017 marked the five-hundredth anniversary of Martin Luther's Protestant Reformation. Interestingly, that year also marked the True Jesus Church's centennial. Comparing the Protestant Church's five centuries of history with the True Jesus Church's one hundred years, unsurprisingly, some question the latter's credibility. However, they fail to see God's holistic salvation plan—how it began at the dawn of time with the choosing of God's elect and continued to this present time with the emergence of the true church.

Skeptics demand proof, just like the scribes and Pharisees who doubted Jesus' identity and demanded a sign from Him (Mt 12:38). Jesus refused, saying that no sign would be given except for the sign of Jonah (Mt 12:39), which was fulfilled subsequently through His death and resurrection, accomplishing God's salvation plan. After Jesus ascended to heaven, He poured out the Holy Spirit to establish God's church on earth. However, when heresies infiltrated the church after the apostolic period, God withdrew His Holy Spirit from the church.

In 1917, God revealed the true gospel once again to humankind and re-established the church on earth in the form of the True Jesus Church. How do we view the time leading up to this milestone? Do we see it as a long hiatus or a brief interlude? It depends on whose perspective you take: man's, whose concept of time is inherently constrained, or God's, whose outlook stretches to eternity.

The Church's Role in the End Time

In the Gospel of Mark, we learn of two beginnings: the first is the "beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Mk 1:1), while the second is the beginning of His tribulations (Mk 14). These two beginnings remind us to discern the time. This order is also echoed in the Gospel of Matthew, where the parable of the sower highlights the propagation of God's word (Mt 13:3–23), followed by the parable of the dragnet (Mt 13:47–50), which brings our attention to the "end of the age," or the end of the world. This "end of the age" refers to a period filled with tribulation (Mt 24). As the Lord Jesus later explained in the parable of the fig tree (Mt 24:32–33), we understand that the appearance of leaves heralds the coming summer, so we should discern the signs that precede the Son of Man's second coming. We may not know the exact date, but we know that when the gospel of the kingdom has been preached to all the world, then the end will come (Mt 24:14).

The True Jesus Church is tasked to preach the gospel to the whole world. This is not easy. Those who believe in God will agree that the current generation is characterized by sin: rebellion towards God, unbelief, and immorality. Without God's presence, there is a void in people's hearts. Many are searching for something to fill that void: enjoyment, alcohol and drugs, pursuit of knowledge and power, as well as dabbling in "spirituality" and "self-discovery." Despite these, the true church has a vital role to play: she must be the messenger who delivers the gospel of salvation to enlighten humankind.

Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water."
(Rev 14:6–7)

However, when the True Jesus Church undertakes this commission in earnest, Satan will oppose—with heretical teachings from within and hostile reception from without. In Matthew 24:24, Jesus forewarns of false prophets emerging to deceive even the elect. These events will happen because Satan knows his time is limited (Rev 12:12). Members of the True Jesus Church must take care to discern between truth and untruth, and to understand the will of God.

DISCERN THE TRUTH

Heresies are not a new phenomenon. When the apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth, he warned of people preaching another Jesus, another spirit, or a different gospel (2 Cor 11:4). In the current times, the surfacing of heresies should not surprise us, as man's heart is corrupt. People have access to a myriad of channels to share information quickly and widely, courtesy of the internet, spreading not only fake news but also fake gospels. More than ever, we need God's wisdom to discern between fact and fiction. We can learn from God's faithful followers

"However, when the True Jesus Church undertakes this commission in earnest, Satan will oppose—with heretical teachings from within and hostile reception from without."

of the past, such as Noah, who was able to walk determinedly with God and preach a message of righteousness, calling people to repentance.

The question is, how do we know we have God's wisdom? Elder James says the evidence is in our good conduct (Jas 3:13). We will display wisdom that is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (Jas 3:17) and brings peace to others (Jas 3:18). In other words, when people spread a message that leads to chaos and factions, we know that it is not from God; such messages arise from pride and jealousy. The proponents are false prophets of whom Jesus has warned us. The Lord Jesus says that true Christians are the salt and light of the world, bringing flavor and light to the lives of others (Mt 5:13–16). These Christians are good trees that bear good fruit (Mt 7:17). We must pray for God's wisdom to be discerning.

United in One Faith

The Lord Jesus advises us to build our faith upon the rock so that we will have a firm foundation that will not be shaken, even when faced with adverse environmental factors (Mt 7:24–25). That Rock should be Jesus Himself, not a fallible human being. The question is, are we led by Jesus' Spirit and His word, or are we influenced by personal ties and feelings towards other individuals? We must hold tight to the truth of the Bible and be clear about our faith.

Paul says, "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify" (1 Cor 10:23). Do we live our lives to glorify God and edify others? It is essential that in whatever we do, we strive to have a clear conscience and not cause others to stumble. We aim to avoid divisions and be "perfectly joined together in the same mind" (1 Cor 1:10), and that is, to be united in Christ.

CARRYING OUT OUR COMMISSION

The one-hundredth anniversary of the True Jesus Church and the fiftieth anniversary of the IA are appropriate junctures at which to reflect on our faith. As we turn the pages of commemorative publications to view photos of the past, what comes to mind? Hopefully, they make us evaluate our faith at a global level, as well as national, local, and personal ones. Have we made progress? Is the faith of our generation better than that of the last? Has our zeal for preaching the gospel increased or diminished? Are we sharing the precious faith imparted to us by previous generations with our children and grandchildren? Believers in those old photos will gradually pass on over time, and we must pass the baton of faith to future generations. We can do this by strengthening the faith of our nearest and dearest, by building the family altar, and by bringing back the lost sheep in our immediate circles. However, to do this, we need to have Paul's attitude, namely, the willingness to live for Christ (Phil 1:21), prioritizing God's will over our own. The Lord has given us different gifts. We must willingly offer them for God's use to prosper His ministry.

"More than ever, we need God's wisdom to discern between fact and fiction. We can learn from God's faithful followers of the past, such as Noah, who was able to walk determinedly with God and preach a message of righteousness, calling people to repentance."

“We can take heart that God’s Spirit will empower those who come forward; they need not rely on their abilities, nor indeed should they do so. When a worker has “fellowship in the gospel,” God will accomplish His work through him. All he needs to do is pray and rely on God.”

When the Lord Jesus Christ ascended to heaven after His resurrection, the disciples watched in awe as He was carried away in the cloud. Two angels interrupted their reverie by saying, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven?” (Acts 1:11). Today, we may well be asked the same question if we think it is acceptable to rest until Jesus returns. In reality, we have much work to do: we must testify for the Lord Jesus in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Are we willing to carry out the Lord’s command?

Uphold the Faith

As members of the True Jesus Church, we need to do our best to uphold God’s commandments. They include observing the holy Sabbath, which is Saturday, the seventh day of the week. It is helpful to ask ourselves, are we observing this day joyfully, with the belief that it is a blessing, or are we keeping it grudgingly? It is only when we have the correct attitude that we will honor God and refrain from following our desires. In January 2019, I visited our brethren in South Africa. There, I learned that almost every family had been robbed at some point. There was one member who had survived despite being shot nine times. He had gone to South Africa intending to make money and he worked hard all week, chasing his dream. However, once he was faced with his mortality, he knew he had to return to God. The number of members observing the Sabbath in South Africa has been increasing over time, as more have realized the need to keep God’s commandments.

Another commandment that we should uphold is tithing. In the Book of Malachi, God reminds His people to bring their tithes and offerings into His house, with the promise of abundant blessings (Mal 3:10). He warned them that failure to do so was tantamount to robbery (Mal 3:8–9). Today, if only some members offer tithes, how will the house of God be supported, and how can the church ministry flourish? In Taiwan, there have been various campaigns in the church: to remind members to offer tithes, to do charitable works, and to leave a donation in their will for church ministry. Over ten years ago, there was a particular campaign encouraging members to offer one coin per day. Many members took part in this fundraising effort, and they raised a substantial sum. We can imagine the outcomes of such a campaign if it were run today. For example, in Taiwan, we have fifty thousand members. If even ten thousand members were willing to offer a coin each day, their efforts would result in USD 1.2 million a year. What a significant impact this would have on the church work—on evangelism, literary ministry, and internet ministry.

The Harvest is Great

Funding is only one issue; the need for workers is another. Jesus said, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest” (Lk 10:2). If we look at our local churches, we see that this is indeed the situation. We have aging workers. Very few youths are coming forward to serve as full-time workers. This is not because we lack gifted members; we thank God that we have many members in our churches with spiritual gifts. The issue is a lack of members willing to serve God full time. We can take heart that God’s Spirit will empower those who come forward; they need not rely on their abilities, nor indeed should they do so. When a worker has “fellowship in the gospel,” God will accomplish His work through him (Phil 1:5–6). All he needs to do is pray and rely on God.

We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says:
“In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you.”
Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.
(2 Cor 6:1–2)

May God move us to serve Him all the more as the day of His coming approaches, and may we work together in unity to accomplish His will. May He also grant us the spiritual eyesight to appraise our current time and inspire us to work together to prosper the gospel. Amen.

KC Tsai
Toronto, Canada

Lessons from Jesus about Discerning the Time

A COMPLETE FAITH

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." *(Deut 6:4–5)*

This declaration, known as the *Shema* (meaning, "hear"), is the basis of the Jewish faith. Yet, James wrote: "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!" (Jas 2:19). James reminded the Jewish believers in his day that their faith should be superior to that of demons, who know that God is the One and only Lord. It is the same for us who have received God's grace through faith today; believing in the one true God is the foundation of our faith, but believing this alone is insufficient.

To nurture a complete faith that is pleasing to God, we must submit to His teachings and biblical truth. We must be continually transformed through the Holy Spirit's guidance, leaving behind bad habits, and eventually regaining the image of God.

A critical aspect of this transformation is being able to discern and correctly judge the events happening around us so that we can adjust and cleanse our thoughts, speech, and behavior accordingly. How does discernment help us adjust our behavior and complete our faith?

DISCERNING THE TIME FROM JESUS' EARTHLY MINISTRY

When Jesus was preaching the gospel of the kingdom, He told the multitudes:

"Whenever you see a cloud rising out of the west, immediately you say, 'A shower is coming'; and so it is. And when you see the south wind blow, you say, 'There will be hot weather'; and there is. Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time? Yes, and why, even of yourselves, do you not judge what is right?" *(Lk 12:54–57)*

In Palestine, when a cloud rises from the west, where the Mediterranean Sea is, it naturally signals impending rain. When the hot south wind blows in from the desert, the weather will be dry. These are logical conclusions to draw. Anyone who fails to read these signs and prepare for the forecast weather lacks common sense. In Jesus' time, the Jews heard Him speak with authority and witnessed Him performing miracles from God (Mt 7:29; Jn 3:2), but they were unwilling to believe what they saw or draw near to hear the heavenly

message. Jesus indicated that the Jews were deceiving themselves; they were hypocrites who appeared to have faith but lacked the heart to pursue the truth.

Discern True Worship

Our understanding of the Lord should not stop at the elementary principles of the word (Heb 5:12–6:1). A spiritual babe can only digest milk, not solid food; this means he esteems and pursues only worldly benefits, and is unable to focus on spiritual things and eternal life. Only a spiritually mature individual can take solid food and nurture his spiritual life. In doing so, he trains his mind to be wise, to discern good from evil.

Jesus said: "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (Jn 4:24). When God made a covenant with His chosen people at Mount Sinai, He handed down the Ten Commandments and the Law, His holy words, through Moses. This was meant to benefit the people: if they obeyed the Law, they would receive life (Deut 4:1–2). However, they lacked the knowledge of God, and so were unable to understand the Law's true essence. They eventually twisted the Law away from God's will, adding many Jewish traditions to it (Mt 9:10–13; 15:1–9; 19:3–8; Jn 2:6).

Therefore, the Lord Jesus came to usher in the era of "new wine," teaching God's original intent behind the Law. They were to put off the pursuit of outer godliness and worship. And they were to receive the new wine of Jesus' message of grace with "new wineskins," that is, a new heart, to return to worshiping God in spirit and truth (Mt 9:10–17).

Discern Jesus' True Identity

On reading Jesus' teachings of new wine and new wineskins, some have come to the same conclusion that the Pharisees did: Jesus came to abolish and replace the Mosaic Law. However, Jesus said, "Do not think I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Mt 5:17). Therefore, as we learn about the Lord, we should study the Old Testament Law and Prophets to gain a fuller understanding of His nature. Otherwise, we will base our knowledge on our limited understanding and experience, shaping our perception according to our ideals.

> *"A critical aspect of this transformation is being able to discern and correctly judge the events happening around us so that we can adjust and cleanse our thoughts, speech, and behavior accordingly. How does discernment help us adjust our behavior and complete our faith?"*

The Jews in Jesus' time failed to discern Jesus' identity even though they were familiar with the Old Testament Law and Prophets. They were unable to understand the heavenly message He preached. Jesus warned: "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Lk 12:1b). The Pharisees were experts in Jewish laws and traditions and practiced strict observance of these in their outward behavior. However, they overlooked mercy and forgiveness. They neglected self-transformation from the heart by obeying God's teachings. Not only did they deceive others, but they also deceived themselves (Mt 15:14).

The Lord Jesus came to make a new covenant through His blood, opening the door of grace in the New Testament era. He reminded the people to identify their spiritual immaturity and ignorance (Lk 11:37–54). He wanted them to know Him as the prophesied Messiah, who would die on the cross for the sins of man, and understand how His death would impact their lives. This was why He wanted the people to discern the time and judge all things according to the truth He preached.

After that, the Lord Jesus said:

"Also I say to you, whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God. But he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God. And anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but to him who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven." (Lk 12:8–10)

It is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, an unforgivable sin, to deny that Jesus' work came from God and to attribute it to Satan (Mt 12:24–32). In fact, through His actions, the Lord Jesus proved Himself to be the Messiah of which Moses and the Old Testament Prophets spoke. He wanted the Jews in His time to know Him through the miracles He performed and His authoritative teachings. However, many of them were blinded by their foolishness and stubbornness, unable to recognize His identity (Jn 9:39–41). Conversely, those who truly know the Lord Jesus willingly believe and confess that He is the fulfillment of God's word.

Peter's denial of the Lord Jesus also serves as a warning to us; Peter was one of the Lord's closest apostles, but even he buckled under extreme pressure

> *"As we learn about the Lord, we should study the Old Testament Law and Prophets to gain a fuller understanding of His nature. Otherwise, we will base our knowledge on our limited understanding and experience, shaping our perception according to our ideals."*

and disavowed his Master before men. Although Peter boldly followed Jesus to the high priest's courtyard after Jesus' arrest, he subsequently and, most painfully, denied Jesus three times, just as the Lord had predicted. Peter was devastated, but the Lord had already forgiven, comforted, and encouraged him before this whole affair. Peter truly understood the Lord's love and forgiveness, and that understanding helped him to persist in his faith into old age (2 Pet 1:12–15). After this incident, he did not deny his Lord and Master again, even unto death (Jn 21:18–19).

A key takeaway from Peter's experience is that we must always acknowledge the Lord Jesus and hold on to Him, despite the external pressures and sufferings we may face. He is our Master and Savior who redeemed us and set us free. We may be weak at times, but we know there is nothing in the world that can separate us from Jesus' love (Rom 8:37–39).

Discern True Riches

Let us return to the passage in Luke: the Lord Jesus continued with the parable of the rich fool (Lk 12:16–21). This parable helps us to put material wealth into perspective. A man may be very prosperous on earth, but if he does not work hard to prepare for the life to come, then he is, in fact, very poor. When he dies, he will be unable to bring his possessions with him. Conversely, a man who makes preparations for his soul is wealthy before God; whether or not he has many possessions in this life, he has saved up riches in heaven. This drives home the Lord's reminder to be watchful and prepared: "...for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Lk 12:35–40).

DISCERNING THE TIME BEFORE JESUS' SECOND COMING

Watch Out for Challenges of Faith

Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" *(Mt 24:3)*

"These things" refers to the Lord's prophecy about the temple: "...not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (Mt 24:1–2). The disciples wanted to know when this utter destruction would occur. Today, we know this happened in 70 C.E., around thirty-seven years after the Lord spoke these words.

However, the Lord's answer points not only to the physical temple of Jerusalem but also to the challenges of faith His disciples and subsequent believers would face. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who was sent to abide in us. Since we were bought at a price and belong to God, we should glorify Him in our body and spirit (1 Cor 6:19–20). God allowed the physical temple in Jerusalem to be destroyed. Today, if we do not learn the lessons from the failure of God's chosen, we, as individuals, will continue to fall short of God's glory and, likewise, be abandoned by the Holy Spirit and destroyed.

Peter, James, John and Andrew privately asked the Lord two questions: When would the temple be destroyed? And what would be the signs of the end of the age, when Jesus comes again? (Mt 24:3; Mk 13:3–4).

The Lord's answer to these questions was: "Take heed that no one deceives you" (Mt 24:4). This is because both then—the time before the temple was destroyed—and now—the end time before Jesus comes again—there would be individuals who fall away because of deception. Their bodily temples would be destroyed just as the Lord had prophesied (Mt 24:2, 10).

Watch Out for Signs and Calamities

How should we be watchful, and of what should we be watchful? The Lord Jesus mentioned two things: signs and calamities. When one sees the signs, the calamities will be imminent.

The first sign Jesus mentioned in Matthew 24 is the appearance of false christs, who come in the name of the Lord to deceive many. The second is wars and rumors of wars; nation

"How should we be watchful, and of what should we be watchful? The Lord Jesus mentioned two things: signs and calamities. When one sees the signs, the calamities will be imminent."

“Every believer must be vigilant when receiving teachings from others; we must study the Bible and discern whether what we hear is biblically sound. We must strive to obey the truth and build the foundation of faith upon the Rock.”

will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. The third is famines, pestilence, and earthquakes in various places. Believers will experience tribulation and be hated by all nations for the sake of the Lord's name. These signs have been fulfilled throughout history but are also happening in this present time. We can also observe how they are fulfilled both physically and spiritually.

It is evident how the Lord's prophecy has come to pass historically—there have been wars between nations, civil wars, famines, and earthquakes. The Roman army surrounded the holy city in the fourth month of 70 C.E., and burned the holy temple in the eighth month that year. Christians were severely persecuted and murdered by the Romans, and at the end of the first century, with the passing of the apostles, the early rain of the Holy Spirit ceased descending on the church.

On a spiritual level, we can see how the signs will manifest today. There will be false christs who exalt themselves and love to be followed and idolized by others (2 Thess 2:1–4; 2 Tim 3:5–6). There will be co-workers who criticize and judge one another maliciously, as though they were nations going against nations. There will be preachers who speak according to their own will and not the word of God (1 Thess 2:13). This preaching is akin to famines and earthquakes, being unable to satisfy man's hunger and thirst. On top of this, the addictive nature of multimedia entertainment, boundless information, and social media on the internet can easily distract us from pursuing God's word. These worldly distractions are also great earthquakes that have caused a famine of the truth. These phenomena may not be widespread, but their existence signifies the last days, the coming of the Lord, and the beginning of sorrows (Mt 24:8).

What are these sorrows? They refer to people falling away, betraying and hating one another, and rising as false prophets to deceive many (Mt 24:9–12). Therefore, every believer must be vigilant when receiving teachings from others; we must study the Bible and discern whether what we hear is biblically sound. We must strive to obey the truth and build the foundation of faith upon the Rock (Mt 7:24–27).

God's Servants Must Be Watchful

Finally, the Lord's advice to remain watchful and discern the time is most important for those who serve Him. A servant of God must self-reflect, lest he become a false prophet who deceives others. Not only will he cause others to fall, but he will fall too. To avoid this, he must unceasingly train himself in humility and serve God with his whole heart. He must not serve his own ideals and ambitions.

May we learn from these teachings of Jesus to truly understand His nature and His heavenly message; to hold firm in our faith to Him, our Lord and Savior; and to discern the time, being vigilant and prepared as the day of His second coming draws near.

Samuel Kuo
Flushing, New York, USA

Helping the Youth Cultivate a Love for the Truth

During the week before His crucifixion, Jesus Christ spoke of "the sign of [His] coming, and of the end of the age" (Mt 24:3). Amid sharing several signs and prophecies, one consistent message that Jesus emphasized was to not be deceived: "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Mt 24:24).

Since we are living in the end time, as the day of the Lord approaches, it is imperative for us to cultivate a love for the truth so as not to be deceived. This is especially so for the younger members in the church. We have been entrusted with an unchanging truth; we also aim to have an unchanging faith. How can we help our youth to love the truth? These are some suggestions based on the Bible and personal experience.

YOUTH-CENTRIC SUGGESTIONS

The Importance of Early Contact

When we brainstorm ways to encourage the youth to love the truth, we should first and foremost examine the nature of love. By definition, love is not forced. As the Song of Songs thrice repeats: "Do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases" (Song 2:7; 3:5; 8:4). It is an affection that arises organically and is confirmed through free-will commitment.

While the youth cannot be forced to love the truth, love can only have an opportunity to be awakened through contact and exposure. How can they love someone they have never encountered? Therefore, while believers are still in their childhood years, it is important for them to come into contact with the truth. The church and, more importantly, their parents are to build up a Christian worldview within their young minds. The religious education (RE) system and the family altar become essential tools to help them establish their own budding relationship with the true and living God.

> *"Since we are living in the end time, as the day of the Lord approaches, it is imperative for us to cultivate a love for the truth so as not to be deceived."*

"While the youth cannot be forced to love the truth, love can only have an opportunity to be awakened through contact and exposure. How can they love someone they have never encountered?"

Isaac is one such example in the Bible. As a young second-generation believer, he observed how his father worshiped the LORD. Thus, when he was at Moriah, he was able to recognize that they lacked the lamb for the burnt offering (Gen 22:7). This fledgling faith eventually blossomed into a mature one, as seen in his patient prayers for his wife's infertility (Gen 25:20, 21, 26) and in how he blessed Jacob in faith (Gen 28:3–4). God eventually called Himself "the God of Abraham, the God of *Isaac*, and the God of Jacob" when He revealed Himself to Moses hundreds of years later (Ex 3:6, emphasis added).

Timothy is another example. He was a third-generation Christian. The genuine faith "dwelt first in [his] grandmother Lois and [his] mother Eunice" (2 Tim 1:5) and eventually dwelt in Timothy himself. This was partially because "from childhood [he had known] the Holy Scriptures" (2 Tim 3:15). He later also learned about the Scriptures from Paul (2 Tim 3:14). This early contact caused a love for the truth to bud, so much so that he dedicated his life to evangelism and ministering to the churches—so that they too could grow to love the truth.

With early exposure, our young members would also be given the opportunity to love the truth that we have received. It is strongly advised that children always attend Sabbath services, RE services, and other church gatherings. Moreover, children need to be raised amid a culture of fearing and worshiping God in their own homes. Have them read the Bible with you. Have them learn to pray alongside you. Have them understand and know Christian values. As Proverbs 22:6 says: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

The Importance of Experience

One aim of early exposure is for the youth to be captivated by the truth and enraptured by God, or in other words, to experience God Himself.

The Psalmist invites us: "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!" (Ps 34:8). The apostle John likewise reminds us that the truth he declares is "that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled" (1 Jn 1:1–3). These are passages on having direct, life-changing experiences with the one true God.

Jacob's transformation was clearly marked by his experience at Bethel, where he had a dream of a heavenly ladder, with angels ascending and descending on it (Gen 28:12). It instantly caused him to make a vow to God (Gen 28:20). He never forgot that dream, even on his deathbed (Gen 48:3; cf. 28:19).

When Peter beheld the transfigured Jesus in all His glory, he declared, "Lord, it is good for us to be here" (Mt 17:4). He proposed building three shelters on an otherwise deserted mountain for Moses, Elijah, and Jesus, completely neglecting himself! In his old age, he used this majestic experience to encourage others who doubted the legitimacy of the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 1:16–21).

It is vital that the youth today also experience God, so that what was originally just theory becomes reality. However, having an experience is not fully within our control. In the end, it is God who chooses when, where, and how He reveals Himself to us (Rom 9:18–21; 2 Cor 12:9). Nevertheless, we should always encourage the youth to pray with faith and reach out to God in any circumstance (Heb 11:6). Each experience, no matter how trivial, builds up their faith, knowledge, and love in the invisible God.

The Importance of Taking Root

While divine experiences certainly leave deep impressions, they are not enough. It is likely that we all know some members who had many spiritual experiences and yet still somehow departed from the truth. In the end, we must be rooted in God's truth itself (Col 2:6–7).

This is akin to the five thousand who were fed by the Lord Jesus Christ and immediately proclaimed, "This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world"; and yet moments later, they "walked with Him no more" (Jn 6:14, 66). In the end, the vast majority were not attracted by truth; they merely followed Jesus for the physical blessings (Jn 6:26).

This is a distinction that we must make clear to our youth. Ultimately, we must answer these questions: Who is Jesus to us? Is He just a teacher, prophet, miracle-worker, or our Lord and Savior—the one true God Himself?

Theological training is imperative for every youth. Not only do church seminars expose us to the truth and grant us prime opportunities to experience God in prayer, but they also help to root us in the faith. The

"While divine experiences certainly leave deep impressions, they are not enough. It is likely that we all know some members who had many spiritual experiences and yet still somehow departed from the truth. In the end, we must be rooted in God's truth itself."

systematic study of Bible doctrines and Bible books at church seminars like student spiritual convocations or the National Youth Theological Seminar (NYTS) is seldom matched in weekly church activities. Classes are often interactive, helping participants to iron out doubts and questions. As seminars are extended church gatherings, they are conducive in forming deeper spiritual friendships, so that the youth can navigate the journey of faith together. After attending such spiritual events, many youth proclaim how these are like heaven on earth. Through them, they can grow to appreciate and love the truth.

MINISTER-CENTRIC SUGGESTIONS

The Importance of Authentic Christian Living

As for church ministers, or those in a pastoral role, including parents, not only do we encourage the youth to live according to the truth, but we must also look within and improve ourselves. When the younger generations observe us, do they see people whose lives are consistent with the truth and who sincerely love the truth?

We seek to spend time with those we love. We are willing to make sacrifices for them and we strive to please them. Given that these actions are manifestations of love, how then does our love for the truth and for God manifest itself? Unfortunately, we may often live with hypocrisy, and our religious actions may stem from pretense rather than genuine discipleship.

Over time, the youth are able to differentiate between what is authentic and what is false. They may recognize a difference between their parents' behavior in church and on the car ride home. They may notice contradictions if their ministers preach a godly message but convey the opposite through their actions. Our love for the truth, whether genuine or otherwise, will eventually be revealed, just as Paul said to Timothy:

Some men's sins are clearly evident, preceding them to judgment, but those of some men follow later. Likewise, the good works of some are clearly evident, and those that are otherwise cannot be hidden. *(1 Tim 5:24–25)*

Hypocrisy is a major stumbling block for the youth. They reason that if this two-faced behavior is the result of the so-called "truth," then they want no part of it. Here, Jesus' warning is worth repeating:

"But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea." *(Mk 9:42)*

Therefore we should examine ourselves for signs of hypocrisy and correct our mistakes before God. Otherwise, the price to be paid by us and the next generation would be far too great.

The Importance of Understanding the Time

Apart from authentic godly living, it is also important to understand the time. David's army was described as having men from the tribe of Issachar, "who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do" (1 Chr 12:32). As wise stewards of God's household, we must also understand the times His sheep are living in, so as to give them "food in due season" (Mt 24:45).

The Germans have the term *zeitgeist*, meaning, "the spirit of the time." We must have a good grasp of the current *zeitgeist*. In other words, what are the ideas, philosophies and values that permeate the culture enveloping our youth? Every time and space and every generation and community will vary slightly. However, observing, understanding and analyzing the times will help us to know how to best educate our youth, particularly when the *zeitgeist* directly contradicts the truth.

"Not only do we encourage the youth to live according to the truth, but we must also look within and improve ourselves. When the younger generations observe us, do they see people whose lives are consistent with the truth and who sincerely love the truth?"

> *"Secular humanism is the pervading worldview, dominating most forms of entertainment. A moral revolution has already taken place—things that were once shameful are now celebrated. … Are we prepared to combat these ideas that our youth are exposed to every day?"*

For example, developed western countries have become increasingly secular, essentially becoming post-Christian societies. Fewer young westerners go to church with each passing year. Secular humanism is the pervading worldview, dominating most forms of entertainment. A moral revolution has already taken place—things that were once shameful are now celebrated; things that were once celebrated are now shameful. The internet has amplified its influence. Are we prepared to combat these ideas that our youth are exposed to every day? Have we been giving them "food in due season" so that they stand strong in whatever ideological storm they face?

Countries in the Eastern Hemisphere, developing Africa, or other regions may have other primary influencing beliefs and ideas. However, regardless of the country, the principle is the same. We need to understand the times so that we vaccinate our youth against these ideological pathologies:

For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. *(2 Cor 10:4–5)*

The Importance of Intercession

Finally, as Christian ministers and parents, we must always intercede for those under our care. Paul's letters are full of his intercessions for the church (Rom 1:9; Eph 1:16; Col 1:9–12; Phil 1:9–11) and co-workers like Timothy (2 Tim 1:3) and Philemon (Phm 4). Epaphras likewise "labored fervently for [the Colossians] in prayers" so that they could be spiritually mature (Col 4:12).

We do not know if the next generation will love the truth, but we must exert our best effort, and then cry out for the mercy of God in prayer. The Bible tells us that God does not desire that anyone should perish (2 Pet 3:9; Ezek 33:11). We must wholeheartedly appeal to that heart of God in prayer. However, at the same time, God acknowledges the personal freedom of every individual to make his own decision.

Will our children choose to love God and the truth? We do not know. That decision is theirs to make. However, may God, who has mercy on people like me and you, also grant the same incredible mercy to every True Jesus Church youth. In the end, we can only humbly surrender ourselves to our heavenly Father.

As Jesus told us, the end is nigh. May He "who is able to keep [us] from stumbling, and to present [us] faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" guide us till the last day (Jude 24).

Aun Quek Chin
Singapore

True Jesus Church is the Ark of Salvation

Editor's note: The True Jesus Church's declaration that she is the ark of salvation is commonly greeted by Christians from other denominations with, at best, incredulity and, at worst, hostility. This article addresses some common challenges made to this declaration.

CHALLENGE 1: A SINGLE ARK IS UNREASONABLE!

A logical inference from the statement that the True Jesus Church is the ark of salvation is that other Christian churches are *not* arks of salvation. Claiming that the many different churches in the world cannot lead their many adherents to salvation sounds very unreasonable.

However, consider Noah's ark. Out of the entire world, a single family comprising eight people was saved by entering a single ark—*the* ark. If reasonableness were measured by the number of people saved, then the God of the Old Testament would be an unreasonable and unloving God. He saved a mere eight people out of the entire world's population!

However, we know that God is love and is always wise; so what is the right perspective of this event?

By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.
(Heb 11:7)

[God] did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly.
(2 Pet 2:5)

The Noahic world had become so corrupt that God had to judge them based on His righteousness (Gen 6:6–7, 13). However, the loving God was unwilling to destroy humankind without first giving them the opportunity to repent and be saved, so He instructed Noah to preach righteousness. He also commanded Noah to build an ark; whoever believed Noah's message of imminent judgment could enter this ark and be saved from certain death. Unfortunately, the people neither believed nor repented. Their refusal to enter the ark condemned them of their sins. Noah bore testimony to this and the reasonableness of God's command. These people ultimately perished not because God did not want to save them. They perished because they were unwilling to enter the sole ark that God had lovingly provided.

The end-time destruction of the world

> *"The True Jesus Church is the ark of the last days because she was established based on the truth revealed by the Lord. God wants to use this church to save all who believe. However, if people choose not to believe in His way of salvation and refuse to enter this ark of salvation, they condemn themselves."*

will be no different. The True Jesus Church is the ark of the last days because she was established based on the truth revealed by the Lord. God wants to use this church to save all who believe. However, if people choose not to believe in His way of salvation and refuse to enter this ark of salvation, they condemn themselves.

CHALLENGE 2: HOW DARE YOU CALL US FALSE?

Another common reaction to hearing the name "True Jesus Church" is one of anger: "If you're true, then are you saying that my church is false?" The True Jesus Church is accused of arrogance because these critics think we have no right to use the word "true."

People often use this word in conversations—"What I said is true"—or declarations—"My love is true." No one takes offense because all of us recognize the importance of being true. We know only true love is valuable, and true words are significant. Being true is a positive attribute sought by all. Thus, if we believe that the object in our possession has this attribute, and we declare as much, should we be accused of arrogance?

For example, if a fruit seller knows that his wares are fresh, he may display a sign on his shopfront saying: "Fresh fruits sold here." No one would accuse the fruit seller of arrogance. Buyers are free to examine the fruits before purchase, and if they discover the fruit seller's claim of freshness to be untrue, they can then demand a refund.

Also, consider the example of an expensive luxury watch such as a Rolex. Cheaper imitations are available. An owner of a genuine Rolex will declare with some pride that his or her watch is the real deal. Any doubters could check the watch for hallmarks of authenticity. The Rolex owner need not feel defensive. If there are people who still insist on classifying the watch as counterfeit despite evidence to the contrary, then it is their prerogative.

In the context of the True Jesus Church, the church's name was not formulated out of arrogance or with the intention of criticizing others. Instead, the name indicates that we know that she is indeed the church that belongs to Jesus Christ.

CHALLENGE 3: TRUE JESUS CHURCH IS A CULT!

The True Jesus Church's claim of being the one true church has resulted in her being labeled a cult. However, when some researchers came to observe us, they found no cultish characteristics[1]—there were no secretive communities, unorthodox practices, systematic brainwashing, or exploitation of members by leaders.

1 Rick Ross, "What Makes a Cult?," *The Guardian*, May 27, 2009, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/may/27/cults-definition-religion.

In apostolic times, the apostles made no apology for emphasizing that their gospel was the pure gospel. They also reiterated that those who preached other gospels could not save (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6–9). If the rationale for classifying the True Jesus Church as a cult is our exclusivity as the one true church, then the apostolic church was guilty of the same. This logic could be extended to encompass the whole of Christianity. There are myriad religions in this world and many gods. Yet, Christianity preaches Jesus as the only Savior of humankind. Should these other religions label Christianity as a cult? Clearly, it is a flawed argument to deem a church a cult just because she openly proclaims herself as the one true church.

Responsibility, Not Audacity

Given that the True Jesus Church is frequently criticized for her audacity in declaring that she is true (and thus implying that others are false), some of our members may wonder why the church does not just adopt a more politically correct stance. For example, a much less offensive approach would be to play down the name of the church or dilute our claims about being the sole ark of salvation.

It is not that the church is deliberately obtuse and unaware that other denominations will take offense. It would be far easier to be ecumenical. However, we have no choice in this matter. We have to courageously proclaim that man must come to the one true church that is saved, because these are the words of Jesus Himself.

And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I

> *"Any church of the present era whose teachings align fully with the apostles' teachings must be true. This also means that any other church whose teachings and practices contradict apostolic teachings cannot claim to be the true church."*

> *"The divine perspective of love differs from our limited human perspective. To man, making offerings and displaying zeal for church work are sufficient signs of love for God. However, to Jesus, loving God's truth and showing obedience to His word are highly critical and integral components in loving the Lord."*

am the Christ,' and will deceive many."
(Mt 24:4–5)

Some hold the view that all Christian churches belong to Christ. But Jesus Himself said that this is not the case. He warned that there would be many—not just one or several—who will come in His name to deceive. We must heed this warning. Not all churches that claim to be Christian belong to Christ. That is why we need to emphasize that there is a church that is true to Jesus, and there exist churches that are not.

Discerning the True Church

Having established that the true church differs from the others, how do we discern whether a church is indeed true? A reasonable and objective criterion is to see whether the teachings of the church are consistent with apostolic teachings. Such a criterion is reasonable because every Christian denomination acknowledges that the church of the apostolic era is the true church established by the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, any church of the present era whose teachings align fully with the apostles' teachings must be true. This also means that any other church whose teachings and practices contradict apostolic teachings cannot claim to be the true church.

The term "true church" was not coined during the establishment of the True Jesus Church. In fact, in early Christian creeds, the "true church" claims, referring to the church during the time of the apostles, were already made. The apostolic church was the one true church because she had been established by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The Lord calls it His church.

"And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." *(Mt 16:18–19)*

What did Jesus mean by "on this rock I will build My church"? Some Christians claim that believing in Jesus Christ is equivalent to being established on the Rock. Jesus would disagree—people who call Him "Lord" but do not do the things that He has commanded are definitely not building on the Rock (Lk 6:46–49).

Be it as an individual or a church, if we believe in Jesus but do not walk in full accord with His words, then we are not established on the Rock of Jesus Christ. We are not the church that belongs to Christ, and we will not be able to enter the kingdom of heaven.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' "
(Mt 7:21–23)

These people who called Jesus "Lord" were very sure they could enter the kingdom of heaven. They were not nominal believers, but people who had been zealous for the Lord. They had performed miracles, prophesied, cast out demons, and done many other wonders in His name. Surely, the ability to do all these in the name of Jesus must mean that He abided with them. Yet, very surprisingly, Jesus was adamant that they would not enter His kingdom. Jesus even declared to them that He never knew them! The basis of the Lord's rejection is plainly stated—because they did not practice the will of the Father in heaven.

This is a stern warning indeed. Jesus was not speaking about weak believers. The people in His parable were better than those who only paid lip service to their faith. At the very least, they had the love to help people and the zeal to preach. They also interceded for people, cast out demons, and healed the sick. However, there is still much of God's will that they had failed to follow, resulting in them being denied entry into the kingdom of our heavenly Father. Today, we must also be very sure to know what the heavenly Father's will is—and what parts of His will we have yet to fulfill—lest we, too, be rejected and lose our hope of salvation.

The will of the Father comprises the teachings Jesus was instructed to impart. Jesus did not add or subtract anything because these words concern judgment and eternal life. No one has the authority to change any of these words.

"He who rejects Me, and does not receive

> *"To the apostles, it was not enough to preach Jesus and proclaim the salvation of the cross. What was as critical is how we ought to believe in Jesus, and how we ought to receive this salvation of the cross."*

My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak."
(Jn 12:48–50)

"He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me." *(Jn 14:24)*

The words of the Lord Jesus are indeed the words of the Father. Those who want to enter the heavenly kingdom must fulfill the heavenly Father's will—namely, the words He commanded Jesus to speak.

CHALLENGE 4: DOESN'T LOVE SUFFICE?

Another scenario frequently posed to the True Jesus Church is this: "There are many who wholeheartedly love the Lord, who have offered and perhaps even suffered much for God. Is the True Jesus Church saying that despite such love and sacrifice, these devout Christians will be rejected just because they have not strictly fulfilled some "minor" aspect, such as being baptized through full immersion?"

We are tempted to sympathize with such an argument. The essential articles of faith—being baptized according to the instructions of the Lord, having our feet washed, receiving the Holy Spirit—seem to pale in comparison with the deep conviction in Jesus and intense evangelical zeal demonstrated by these Christians. How can the True Jesus Church claim that selfless missionaries who have been beaten and jailed for the gospel cannot be saved just because they observed Sunday worship instead of Saturday? How can such genuine love for the Lord not suffice?

However, reflecting more deeply, do we realize that proponents of this argument are effectively saying that love—defined in our limited human way—for Christ overrides the truth of the Lord? The Lord Jesus Christ has a different definition of what it means to love Him: it encompasses obedience to His words, the truth.

True Love

"He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. …If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words." *(Jn 14:21–24a)*

The divine perspective of love differs from our limited human perspective. To man, making offerings and displaying zeal for church work are sufficient signs of love for God. However, to Jesus, loving God's truth and showing obedience to His word are highly critical and integral components in loving the Lord. If our salvation depended on our good deeds, then the apostle Peter need not have brought the gospel to Cornelius the centurion (Acts 10:1–6).

Jesus said that if anyone loved Him, they would keep His words. According to the apostle Paul, love rejoices in the truth (1 Cor 13). One who truly loves the Lord will surely love His words. One who listens to the word of God and practices it faithfully is one who truly loves the Lord.

Receiving and Keeping the Truth

"For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me."
(Jn 17:8)

After His ascension to heaven, Jesus entrusted this truth to the apostles and instructed them to preach it. So, the apostles were not preaching their own message. They preached the words of Jesus that came from the Father.

Jesus told Peter, "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 16:19a). These keys, which unlock the gate of heaven and permit us entry, are the words of the Father. They were not given to Peter as a sole individual. Instead, they were handed to Peter as the representative of the apostolic church. When we obey these words, we open the gate and enter the kingdom of heaven unto eternal life.

The word of truth preached by the apostles must be the only basis of what is preached in, and by, the church today. In the apostolic church, any preaching which deviated from apostolic truth was rejected. No one who preached differently would be acknowledged as part of the church.

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,

> *"No one has the authority to change God's word. The apostolic church was entrusted with the commission to teach others the word of God. Today and right until the end of the age, the one true church has the responsibility to teach these exact words."*

which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed." *(Gal 1:6–9)*

Initially, wherever the church was established—whether in Jerusalem or in Galatia—the same teachings were preached. But by the time of Paul's letter to the Galatians, there were two groups of churches. Both supposedly belonged to Christ but were preaching different gospels. Paul did not magnanimously accept both as churches belonging to Christ. This is clear from his stern rebuke, "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel." To Paul, any amendments to the gospel mean it is no longer the gospel of Christ; anyone who preached the variation was accursed. The apostles did not recognize any church that preached contrary to what they had received from the Lord.

What is the scope of apostolic teaching?

To the apostles, it was not enough to preach Jesus and proclaim the salvation of the cross. What was as critical is *how* we ought to believe in Jesus, and how we ought to receive this salvation of the cross. On the Day of Pentecost, when the Jews, moved by the Holy Spirit, were cut to the heart, they repented. At that point, they already believed that Jesus was the Savior, and they believed in the grace of the salvation of the cross. However, this was insufficient. This was why they continued to ask a critical question: "What shall we do?" Peter's answer was direct and straightforward: "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

Accepting water baptism and praying for the Holy Spirit are not conditions formulated by Peter. These were instructions of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Those who believe and are baptized will be saved (Mk 16:16); those who believe must pray for the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4–5); and those who believe must receive footwashing (Jn 13:8). In short, the content of the gospel is not just about believing in Jesus but also practicing the words Jesus spoke.

Keeping the Whole Truth and Nothing but the Truth

"[Teach] them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." *(Mt 28:20)*

We must take heed and practice all of the Lord's commandments. It is not for us to pick and choose which to follow and which to ignore. We have no such authority. If we believe that the words of the Lord Jesus Christ are absolute and that they directly relate to the judgment in the last days, then we have no other choice but to follow them absolutely. We cannot add to or subtract from God's word because this concerns salvation.

No one, apart from God, has the authority to save or judge humankind. Hence, no one has the authority to change God's word. The apostolic church was entrusted with the commission to teach others the word of God. Today and right until the end of the age, the one true church has the responsibility to teach these exact words.

There are churches today—aside from the True Jesus Church—who claim to be the revived apostolic church; they too declare themselves the true church. However, if what they preach is not entirely according to what the apostles preached, their claim is hollow. In contrast, the doctrines preached by the True Jesus Church are in complete accordance with apostolic teachings. Very importantly, the Holy Spirit received in the True Jesus Church is the same Spirit received by the apostles.

Let us never doubt that we are the church that belongs to God. True Jesus Church is the ark of salvation. We must enter into it and hold fast to our faith. Let us not be deceived into leaving this ark. May God preserve our faith. Amen.

FF Chong
London, UK

Knowing the Time

In the Bible, to know the time is not just about being conscious of the time as shown on the clock. It refers, more importantly, to a spiritual strength and capacity based on knowing God's work and His plan for His chosen people. A Christian who knows the time is endowed with a spiritual perception that keeps his walk in line with God's way. Not only is he in a position to resist the corrosive influence of the world, he is also able to exert a positive influence on those who are around him, particularly the church community.

CONTRADICTIONS

Not every believer of God knows the time. In this aspect, the people of God in the Old Testament were inferior even to birds (Jer 8:7). When winter approaches, the God-given instinct of migratory birds prompt them to migrate to a safe place. Their ability to detect and defect to warmer regions with unfailing regularity is innate, ensuring their survival and allowing them to continue growing and multiplying. They know how to avoid being trapped in turbulence, which could cause them to lose their senses and, ultimately, their lives.

> *"A Christian who knows the time is endowed with a spiritual perception that keeps his walk in line with God's way."*

Ironically, the people of God were spiritually shortsighted, being trapped frequently in their waywardness. Their lack of acknowledgment of their Master's providence made them inferior to animals (Isa 1:3). Having lost the capacity for discernment, they lived a life contrary to the will of God and grieved their Master, the Lord. Worse still, God's judgment was looming but these people did not have the slightest inkling that the wrath of God was about to be poured upon them.

Likewise, the Pharisees and the scribes of Jesus' days were unable to discern the signs of the times. They were religious leaders assigned with the task of leading the nation to God. Unfortunately, they had lost sight of matters concerning salvation. They were, ironically, skilled in discerning the weather (Lk 12:54–56)! This lack of discernment over spiritual matters earned them a rebuke from Jesus.

"To know the time, we need to know its signs. These signs do not appear in obscure and mysterious ways that defy discernment. Instead, they are events long prophesied in the Bible that are happening in the church of God today."

KEY SIGN OF THE TIME: FALSEHOOD

Our ultimate aim in believing Jesus is to receive Him when He comes again and to be with Him forevermore. This requires us to stay alert in Jesus to the end. However, the world distracts us from God, blinding us with its affluence and allure. Without spiritual preparation, we are unable to know the signs of His second coming. Without a heart sensitive to the word of God, we are unable to delve deeply into His teachings through which God enhances our spiritual discernment every day.

To know the time, we need to know its signs. These signs do not appear in obscure and mysterious ways that defy discernment. Instead, they are events long prophesied in the Bible that are happening in the church of God today. The following considers some signs Jesus spoke about in the Gospels. These signs cannot be ignored and must be thoroughly understood with the help of Holy Spirit. They are interrelated and consistently indicate that the time of Jesus Christ's second coming is near (Mt 24:3).

Increase of False Teachers

One sign of Jesus' second coming is the confusion of the truth due to the increase of false teachers at a frightening rate (Mt 24:4–5). Many will come in the name of Jesus, saying, "I am the Christ." The Gospels of Mark and Luke give a slightly different rendition: "I am He" (Mk 13:6; Lk 21:8). Both "Christ" and "I AM" are titles that mean the "Messiah" or "the anointed," and "the only self-existent God," respectively.

The attempts by false teachers to confuse the truth are one of the present dangers in the True Jesus Church. They subtly distort the doctrine of the "one true God" away from that of the Bible and the church's traditional belief. For example, the church believes and teaches that only God is self-existent. In recent years, the emergence of heretical teachings concerning Satan's self-existence deceived many and hurt the church, just as Jesus and the apostles had once prophesied (Mt 24:5; Mk 13:6; 2 Pet 2:1–2).

This sign is a stern reminder that we must submit ourselves to the authority of God and be obedient to the truth that God has given to His church. Teachers of the word of truth, the gospel of salvation, must first have no doubt about the accuracy and authenticity of the truth that the church has received. They must then teach this truth completely and faithfully (Phil 4:9; 2 Tim 2:2). Those who meddle with the pattern of sound words enmesh the church in deception, but ultimately earn themselves destruction (2 Pet 2:1).

Increase in Internal Conflict

Jesus has warned that His coming would not bring peace on earth. Instead, His coming would bring about conflict and division. One layer of meaning to this prophecy is the increasing conflict within the house of God in the last days (Lk 12:49–53). This teaching is in line with the prophecy of Micah (Mic 7:5–6). The message highlights the prevalence of mistrust among God's people, creating an atmosphere that breeds conflict and enmity—"A man's enemies are the men of his own household" (Mic 7:6b).

Is such a biblical interpretation exegetically consistent? Careful analysis of the accounts in the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Micah shows that both writers highlighted conflicts within the setup of a family or household. In Luke's account, immediately after proclaiming the internal conflict (Lk 12:49–53), Jesus went on to declare the need to discern the time (Lk 12:54–56). This suggests that the intra-household conflict is no routine family misunderstanding but one that can happen even within the household of the Lord.

What is the cause for such a conflict? From Jesus' messages on the signs of His second coming, this conflict stems from the infiltration of falsehood (Mt 24:4–5; Mk 13:6–7; Lk 21:8–9). Jesus warned that things that are made for our peace are now hidden from our eyes (Lk 19:42). Truth is integral to the church. It is by the truth we hold onto that we stay reconciled to God. It is by the truth that we are united together (Eph 4:13). When the fabric of unity, the truth, is removed, believers will fall prey to deception and deceiving spirits. In the absence of the truth, man's heart and the community of faith will become places for wickedness, hence the exponential increase in conflict.

Jerusalem is Surrounded

According to Luke, we will know that the desolation is near when Jerusalem (the church in the spiritual sense) is surrounded by armies (Lk 21:20). This desolation refers to the abomination of desolation (Mt 24:15). In Matthew's writing, the account of the abomination is bracketed by two accounts of the rise of false prophets (Mt 24:11, 24), indicating that falsehood is the cause of the desolation.

The church is able to stand against

"The attempts by false teachers to confuse the truth are one of the present dangers in the True Jesus Church. They subtly distort the doctrine of the "one true God" away from that of the Bible and the church's traditional belief."

all odds because God is in her midst. Nevertheless, God's presence with the church is on the condition that she abides by His truth. The true church cannot afford to be complacent even for a second because her opponents are the beast from the sea and the beast from the earth. These two beasts go all out to fight against God (Rev 13:5–6), striving to destroy the church by attacking her foundation, the truth. When the truth of the church is being challenged from all directions within the church, then we would know that the end time is near (Lk 19:44).

HOW DO WE DISCERN THE TIME?

Although the signs of the times are clearly recorded in the Bible, and messages about these are repeatedly preached, there is no discernible sense of urgency among the believers. Such general indifference has contributed to a lack of discernment in the church. Not only will this stifle the growth of the church, but also over time there will be a general apathy towards and lack of interest in the matters of God and the well-being of the church. How can the trend be reversed?

Wake Up from Slumber

In his message to the believers in Rome, Paul urged them to wake up from their slumber. Only those who are spiritually awake will realize that the salvation of God is nearer than ever before (Rom 13:11–14). Spiritual slumber is a threat to our spirituality. We must never allow ourselves to slip into the darkness of slumber. As children of light, we are vastly different from the rest of the world (1 Thess 5:6). We do not do things against God and His principles.

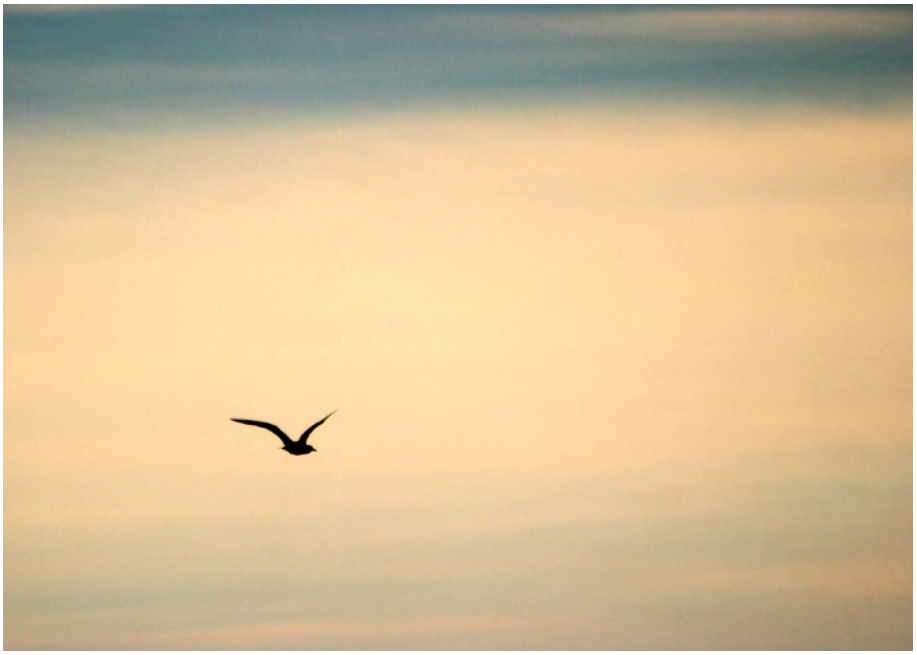
Waking from slumber requires us to cast off the works of darkness, for example, lust and pride. There are two immediate benefits from doing this. First, we are able to know the truth of God; those who are of the flesh and controlled by their lust can never learn the truth well (2 Tim 3:6–7). Without the knowledge of the truth, we will be blind and spiritually unable to see that the time of His coming is near. Second, the truth enables us to safeguard ourselves against falsehood.

Put On the Armor of Light

Even after being awakened, we cannot afford to become complacent. If we are not constantly alert and protected, there is a high likelihood of us falling back into slumber. We can easily fall under the influence of the world again. Paul reminds us of the urgent need to put on the armor of light after casting off the works of darkness (Rom 13:12). Our journey of faith is a battle that requires us to prepare well in order to overcome the world. The armor of light comprising faith, righteousness and humility helps us withstand the fiery darts of the wicked one (Eph 6).

This armor of light serves two very important functions. One is to protect us from external forces; we will be defeated by such evil forces if the attributes and nature of God are not part and parcel of our lives. The other is to guard against internal forces; we have to keep our heart from turning against God. Specifically, we must guard against pride, which comes from the heart and mind. An arrogant mind submits neither to God nor His word. We must beware of pride because it can manifest in subtle ways, deceiving us and playing tricks on us. Changing the word of God is the most obvious symptom of pride. When we subdue both sets of forces with the armor of

“Waking from slumber requires us to cast off the works of darkness, for example, lust and pride.”



light, we will be able to maintain the sharpness of our discernment.

Redeem the Time

The word of God is likened to a two-edged sword, and we are all given this sword. How often do we apply the word of God in our lives to demonstrate His virtues? For us to manifest His virtues, we need time to practice, for as the old adage says, practice makes perfect. Nowadays, because of the many distractions in our lives, it is challenging for us to make good use of our time. Inspired by the Spirit, Paul said that we must redeem the time (Eph 5:16; Col 4:5). We have to rely on God to use our time wisely. This means we utilize the time God has given us well by exhibiting His virtues, such as caring for others, preaching, and cultivating ourselves in a conscious and persistent manner.

When each and every one of us is well aware of the necessity of redeeming the time, the church will collectively gear towards the level of perfection God wants us to reach. If we put in conscientious effort in redeeming the time, we will always stay vigilant, and the entire church will be acutely aware of the signs of the times that God has revealed around us. Our spiritual minds will be fine-tuned to anticipate the impending destruction of the universe. Such perception of the end time will make us look for and hasten the coming of the day of the Lord (2 Pet 3:12) and spur us to be diligent in nurturing ourselves spiritually.

CONCLUSION

Knowing the signs of the times is not done through physical exercise. Training our discernment in a classroom setting alone will not help us to be mindfully aware that the coming of the Lord is near. This is because when we are in spiritual slumber, we lack the discernment to know the time, despite the signs being around the corner and fulfilled in our midst. The ways to sharpen our discernment are to discard the works of darkness, put on the armor of light, and redeem the time, knowing that this world is evil.

With these basics put in place, we will be in a better position to perceive the signs of the times clearly. We will become faithful to the truth and will not allow any compromise to exist in the church, knowing that the truth is not a matter of personal opinion. The church does not and must not tolerate two different sets of doctrines. Though our defense of the faith will cause the heretics to be more aggressive against us, the defenders, we should not be surprised; based on Jesus' prophecy, we know the church will inevitably be surrounded by enemies from within. When these signs happen, we will know that the end time is near.

"Our journey of faith is a battle that requires us to prepare well in order to overcome the world. The armor of light comprising faith, righteousness and humility helps us withstand the fiery darts of the wicked one."

David Defeated the Amalekites: Lessons for Life and Ministry

Michael Hsu
Edinburgh, UK

Editor's note: The sixteenth Africa Ministry Training Course (AMTC) was held in London, UK, in January 2019. The annual AMTC is organized by the Western Hemisphere Department of World Mission of the International Assembly, with the help of the UK General Assembly and the Africa Ministry Committee. Though the gospel has reached many countries in Africa, much assistance is still needed in training local church workers, establishing the religious education system, and constructing church buildings. The objective of the AMTC is to provide opportunities for members with a calling in evangelism to participate in this missionary work. This article is based on a lecture delivered during this event.

> *"David did not justify himself by blaming others or the circumstances. Instead, he "strengthened himself in the LORD his God."*

In 1 Samuel 29, we read of the Philistines and the Israelites preparing to do battle. To escape from King Saul, David had earlier defected to the side of Achish, king of Gath (a Philistine city). But, worried about David's potential betrayal, the Philistine military leaders refused to let David and his followers join them in the battle against the Israelites. David had no choice but to leave the Philistine forces and return to his city of Ziklag. On arrival, David and his men found to their horror that the Amalekites had burned and plundered the city, taking the women and the city's inhabitants captive (1 Sam 30). Furious and grieved, David's men blamed him for this attack, and even considered stoning him

David's response to this shocking event has many valuable lessons for our faith and ministry.

PRINCIPLE 1: NEITHER BLAME OTHERS NOR EXALT OURSELVES

Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God. *(1 Sam 30:6)*

There is a natural human tendency to look for a scapegoat when things go wrong. The Book of Genesis describes how—after their disobedience and sin had been exposed—Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. All three parties were eventually punished for their actions (Gen 3:12–24). Generations later, when the prophet Samuel highlighted Saul's error of sparing his enemies and their livestock, Saul was unwilling to face facts. Instead, he defended his actions by blaming the people, claiming that they were the ones who had wanted to keep the booty (1 Sam 15:1–21). God was displeased with such disobedience and refusal to accept responsibility, and rejected the first king of Israel (1 Sam 15:23).

David—the second king of Israel—was a stark contrast to his predecessor. He came back to a destroyed city and was being blamed for this state of affairs. He did not justify himself by blaming others or the circumstances. Instead, he "strengthened himself in the LORD his God" (1 Sam 30:6b).

As we journey through life, we will encounter problems and troubles along the way. Ministry life will also have its fair share of difficulties and hardships. It is tempting, and often easy, to find someone or something to blame for our misfortunes. But David has shown us an important principle. Do not assign blame when things go wrong. Start by reflecting on whether we have done our best. Honestly examine whether we were at fault in any way. And most importantly, turn to God.

On the other hand, when things turn out very well, there is typically a rush to claim credit. This is a pitfall to avoid in our service to the Lord. Never think that our ministry was a success because we are so gifted; or that God has worked with us because we are so exemplary. In Haggai 2:4, God encouraged the people to be strong and work, *because He was with them*. This qualifying phrase is crucial. When we do the work of God, our strength and ability come from Him. Whatever has been accomplished is due to God and God alone (see 1 Cor 3:6–9).

"David has shown us an important principle. Do not assign blame when things go wrong. Start by reflecting on whether we have done our best. Honestly examine whether we were at fault in any way. And most importantly, turn to God."

PRINCIPLE 2: INQUIRE OF GOD, TRUST AND OBEY

Then David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech's son, "Please bring the ephod here to me." And Abiathar brought the ephod to David. So David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I pursue this troop? Shall I overtake them?" And He answered him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them and without fail recover all." (1 Sam 30:7–8)

Another common reaction to crisis or calamity is to rush into action. The initial shock may paralyze us. But when we come to our senses, we itch to do something to assuage our anxiety and grief. In David's situation, we would not want to lose any time in rescuing our kidnapped loved ones, as well as redeeming ourselves in the eyes of our followers.

But David did not succumb to a kneejerk reaction. He waited. And importantly, he inquired of God (1 Sam 30:7–8). His humble inquiry ensured that he knew what to do next. His supplication also enabled him to find strength from the Lord, not just to defeat his enemies but,

more importantly, the inner strength to trust the Lord's directions.

In the Ziklag incident, God permitted David to pursue the Amalekites. But, in David's shoes, if the Lord had told us to sit, wait, and do nothing, would we have been able to obey? Would we have insisted to God that we must take action lest the enemy flee?

When we encounter challenges in our service, be they personal, to do with our relationships, or church-wide, we have to soldier on. Soldiering on requires both strength and wisdom from the Lord. To gain these, we first and consistently inquire of the Lord. But after consulting the Lord in our ministry, it is equally vital for us to completely trust and obey.

PRINCIPLE 3: LET GOD LEAD

So David went, he and the six hundred men who were with him, and came to the Brook Besor, where those stayed who were left behind. But David pursued, he and four hundred men; for two hundred stayed behind, who were so weary that they could not cross the Brook Besor. Then they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David; and they gave him bread and he ate, and they let him drink water. (1 Sam 30:9–11)

Responding to David's inquiry, God had assured him of victory over the Amalekites. But during the chase, two things happened that seemed to suggest otherwise. First, a third of David's troops dropped out because of exhaustion. Second, their pursuit was delayed by an ill and starving Egyptian man, an ex-slave of the Amalekites (1 Sam 30:13). Put in a similar situation, many of us may find some doubt arising in us regarding God's assurance.

David's absolute willingness to trust God's leadership is an essential reminder not to rely on our understanding and experiences when making decisions. In the world, intuition and experience are valuable assets that ensure work or business success. We are naturally inclined to rely on these same things when we serve God. We assume that doing things the way we have done before will yield the same results. But David's experience was that, in identical situations, God could give different strategies! Therefore, even when we find ourselves confronted with a problem similar to what we have faced before, we still need to trust God to lead. Otherwise, we may not succeed in resolving our problem.

> *"While it is important to plan, we would do well to remember that God is the One who directs our path. To serve the Lord effectively, we must devote much time to prayer, in the mornings and evenings."*

The Battle of Ai is an enduring lesson of the fallibility of human understanding. After the amazing victory of Jericho, the Israelites thought they could easily conquer the small city of Ai (Josh 7:2–5). But they were routed. Decades later, the prophet Samuel made a similar mistake. He relied on his judgment of their outward appearance to opine which of Jesse's sons would be the new king (1 Sam 16:6). He was wrong.

While it is important to plan, we would do well to remember that God is the One who directs our path (Prov 16:9). To serve the Lord effectively, we must devote much time to prayer, in the mornings and evenings. Our daily wait for the Lord is an essential part of serving Him. We need to trust Him and allow Him to work. When we rush into something, we often end up hurting ourselves. In every circumstance, we must allow God to lead us, as this is the way to success.

PRINCIPLE 4: GOD USES THE ORDINARY TO ACHIEVE THE EXTRAORDINARY

Then David said to him, "To whom do you belong, and where are you from?" And he said, "I am a young man from Egypt, servant of an Amalekite; and my master left me behind, because three days ago I fell sick. We made an invasion of the southern area of the Cherethites, in the territory which belongs to Judah, and of the southern area of Caleb; and we burned Ziklag with fire." And David said to him, "Can you take me down to this troop?" So he said, "Swear to me by God that you will neither kill me nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will take you down to this troop." (1 Sam 30:13–15)

David and his men had no idea where the Amalekites were, even though they were desperate to hunt them down. When they came across the half-dead man, David could easily have left him so as not to waste any precious time. But, out of compassion, David provided the young Egyptian with food and water. The grateful man became the key informant regarding the whereabouts of the Amalekites' camp. David and his men were thus able to attack and defeat the Amalekites successfully.

In our lives, we often encounter seemingly irrelevant and insignificant things which we are tempted to leave aside; since we are already so busy, someone else can deal with these trivialities. But the Bible shows us time and again that God uses insignificant characters and events to accomplish His will. Elijah was sustained by a widow in Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:9). Naaman came to know the true God of Israel through the slave girl belonging to his wife (2 Kgs 5). Jesus used a young lad's meal of barley loaves and fish to feed five thousand (Jn 6:9). Hence, we should not dismiss the "small stuff"—God uses these to change our circumstances. Similarly, in our ministry life, defined priorities are required. But in order not to erroneously overlook the small things that God values, we must seek to understand God's will, and ensure that our priorities are the same as His.

This mindset should extend to ourselves—though we think we are inadequate and have minimal talent, God can defy human logic and use us

to accomplish great things. When we entrust everything to Him, He can perform miracles. Let us always be vigilant to His calling (Isa 6:8) and, by remaining humble, we can become noble vessels ready for His use.

PRINCIPLE 5: FAITHFULNESS, THE MOST PRECIOUS QUALITY

After David and his men managed to recover everything they had lost, the men wanted to divide the spoil among themselves and give nothing to those who did not go into battle. But David told the men, "My brethren, you shall not do so with what the LORD has given us" (1 Sam 30:23). He recognized that both those on the battlefield and those who remained to protect the supplies deserved the spoil.

Frontline work may seem more glamorous and more deserving of recognition, but everyone who serves God faithfully deserves a reward, regardless of the kind of work they do. Today, some dedicate themselves to be preachers, while others devote themselves as part-time workers, having to also care and earn money for their families. Neither is superior to the other. What the Lord demands of us is that we are faithful in executing our work; the Bible tells us that faithfulness is the most important quality in God's household (Lk 16:10).

Acts 8:4 records the persecution of the church and how "those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word." We may think it was the apostles' job to uphold the faith and preach the gospel. Yet this episode tells us that ordinary members, the unnamed ones, recognized their responsibility. They had a mission in mind. They were forced to leave their homes, but they remained faithful to the word and the preaching of the word.

Today, every single believer is called to evangelize to the world (Mt 28:19–20; Mk 16:15). We must be faithful in executing this great commission. This is why we have to spend time studying the doctrines, equipping ourselves with and upholding the word. At the same time, our behavior must show that we are disciples of Jesus. And we have to pray for power from above, so we can serve faithfully in God's kingdom, wherever we are sent.

"What the Lord demands of us is that we are faithful in executing our work; the Bible tells us that faithfulness is the most important quality in God's household."

CONCLUSION

The road ahead will be difficult, particularly as we live in the end time. However, we have to trust in the Lord and always follow His lead. As long as we are faithful, God will accept our offering to Him; and in the end, though we are unprofitable servants, we will be richly rewarded when He comes again.

May we remain faithful in the work. Amen.

Evelyn Eng-Nol
Houston, Texas, USA

A Journey of Faith

Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls—
Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.
The LORD God is my strength;
He will make my feet like deer's feet,
And He will make me walk on my high hills. *(Hab 3:17–19)*

During the time of Habakkuk, the people experienced countless trials and tribulations. However, Habakkuk was determined to rejoice in the Lord even if his life was filled with suffering.

This is the kind of faith I hope to have as I journey toward eternal life. When the world seems full of darkness and evil, and it feels as if nothing can strengthen my faith, I hope to remember that I worship the almighty God. He will give me strength and make my feet like deer's feet.

ENCOUNTERING GOD

As a young child, though no one taught me about God, I knew that God exists—I felt there was a power much greater than me. When I felt afraid, I would pray to God for help. I would also draw pictures of God and me together. In Jeremiah 1:5, God said to Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you." Even before I was conceived, God knew who I was. I also believe that God put the knowledge of His existence into my heart.

My family went to a local church in Boston for a short while, but I did not feel God's presence there. Then in 2000, when I was about ten years old, my uncle invited me to their church, the True Jesus Church, Boston House of Prayer. I do not remember much about my experience, but the love I felt there was clearly etched in my mind because the members treated me with kindness.

During our drive to the church, I sat in the front passenger seat of my uncle's car. We talked about God and he mentioned that we sometimes misunderstand the way to worship God. Some people complicate worship by making it an extravagant performance. However, worship should be a simple affair. Jesus Himself came to earth in a simple manner—He was born in a manger and led a life of simplicity. My uncle explained that we should also worship God in a similar manner, with no frills or unnecessary extravagance. All God desires is sincere worship from our hearts; that message has stuck with me to this day.

After a few more visits, I stopped attending services and eventually lost contact with my uncle when my mother decided it would be more convenient to attend a different church closer to our home. A few years later, I learned that my aunt and uncle had moved to San Jose. Although I did not think too much about this, I knew that I missed going to True Jesus Church because one morning afterwards, I sat on my bed and began to cry. When I wept, I felt alone. Then I remembered how I did not feel lonely when I was in church. To deal with my sadness and loneliness, I became an angry young girl who would take out my frustration on my peers in school. I bullied other children and would purposely start fights. Throughout this time, I regularly wrote in my diary and had pages filled with curse words. The worst part about this time was that I blamed God for my misery.

When I was between thirteen and sixteen years old, my feeling of loneliness persisted, and I would seek attention from friends, teachers and boys. My diary entries during this period focused on my hopes, my dreams, and the crushes that I had on several boys. They were usually written with excitement, and sometimes I would thank God for the momentary feelings of happiness. However, each page was filled with vanity. Even when I thanked God in my entries, those words were superficial. The relationships I formed never seemed enough. I was also not able to maintain lasting friendships.

Then in 2007, when I turned seventeen, I joined an art program and met several high school students who were part of a Christian youth group. They welcomed me into their social circle and invited me to attend a night of worship with them. When I first entered their church, I was instantly overwhelmed by the sounds of worship music from the band playing on stage. For a brief second, I thought that this manner of worship seemed odd. However, I brushed the thought aside and readily immersed myself in my new friendships. I gradually became more involved; I participated in Bible studies, summer camp retreats, and joined the worship band. I began to genuinely seek God, but amid these church activities, I still felt far from Him. When I read the Bible, it seemed like there was a wall between me and the words on the pages. Then, I experienced a life-changing moment one summer morning, before my senior year in high school. I went out for a walk and observed the sunlight coming through the tree branches along my path. This beautiful sight brought tears to my eyes; it filled me with a longing and a hope for another place beyond this world—a heavenly home.

“I went out for a walk and observed the sunlight coming through the tree branches along my path. This beautiful sight brought tears to my eyes; it filled me with a longing and a hope for another place beyond this world—a heavenly home.”

COMING TO KNOW GOD

Senior year in high school was an eventful time. There were events like prom, graduation, and numerous festivities. It was supposed to be an exciting period in my life, but there was a deep sense of emptiness in my heart.

Toward the end of my senior year of high school, my family reached out to my uncle for financial advice. I had just received my college acceptance letter and we were uncertain about some sections in the financial aid form. At this point, we had not spoken with him for over eight years. During our phone conversation, I learned that my grandparents and cousins were moving in with him and his wife in San Jose the coming summer. I also discovered that he had become a pastor. He then invited me to catch the same flight as them to visit him for two weeks. Although I was hesitant to go because I was not close to my relatives, I agreed, and my tickets were booked the same day.

Before my trip to San Jose in August 2008, I attended one last Bible study with the Christian youth group. The discussion led to the topic of praying in tongues. That night, I left with many lingering questions regarding baptism, the Holy Spirit, and what these meant for Christians.

After we landed in San Jose, we were met by my aunt and uncle. We drove to their home in two separate cars and this time, I happened to sit in the front passenger seat with my aunt. At first, it was a quiet ride. Then I turned to my aunt and asked, “Does your church believe in the Trinity?” Both she and I were surprised by my abrupt question. She briefly explained that there were some gaps in the concept of the Trinity; instead, the True Jesus Church believes in the one true God.

The next day, my uncle started to share passages from the Bible with me, and this opened up a whole new world to me. It was as if I woke up for the first time. Despite my earlier doubts, in that

“My uncle started to share passages from the Bible with me, and this opened up a whole new world to me. It was as if I woke up for the first time. Despite earlier doubts, in that moment, I knew with absolute certainty that God did exist.”

moment, I knew with absolute certainty that God did exist. We spent the next few days exploring San Francisco in the mornings, and in the evenings, we stayed up to read the Bible together. I felt very joyful. That Friday during the first week I was with them, my uncle had to travel to the church in Sacramento to lead the Sabbath service, and he thought of asking me to go with him. Right before he approached me, I had been experiencing unusual stomach pains that caused me to lie in bed all morning. When my uncle learned of this, he thought it might be best if I did not go. I also thought that a long car ride was the last thing I needed, but I thank God that I eventually decided to go.

After the Friday night sermon in Sacramento, my uncle invited everyone to pray in the front of the church hall. I knelt down, closed my eyes, and everyone around me began to pray in tongues. It sounded both foreign and familiar. One sister in particular prayed so earnestly that I was touched by the sound of her prayer and the sincerity in her voice. Since then, the sound of prayer has always brought comfort to me. Through everyone's prayer, my stomach pain subsided the next morning. That afternoon, we joined a hymnal sharing session where we sat in a circle to talk about our favorite hymns. I was not familiar with any, but as I flipped through the pages in the hymn book, I stopped at the hymn entitled, *I Know Who Holds Tomorrow*. The refrain was exactly what I wanted to express.

Many things about tomorrow,
I don't seem to understand;
But I know who holds tomorrow,
And I know who holds my hand.[1]

The future was something I frequently thought about. I would wonder why my life turned out the way it did. When I read the last two lines in the refrain, I felt a sense of freedom and was comforted to know that the Omnipotent God, who held the future in His hands, would also be holding my hand. We returned to San Jose later that evening.

During the second week of my visit, we attended the weeknight service at the church in San Jose. Another pastor was delivering the sermon. When my family and I walked into the chapel, my uncle asked where we wanted to sit. Without a second thought, I requested to sit right at the front. During the message, I sat at the edge of my seat, listening intently. It was during this time that I received the Holy Spirit. The night before my return flight to Boston, we attended a prayer session where I prayed in tongues for the first time. Besides feeling warm in my heart, my mind was also full of peace.

Sister Evelyn right after her baptism.

When I arrived home, God moved me to throw away a lot of my material possessions, such as CDs, clothing, photos, and things that linked me to a life of sin. God also gave me confidence to talk to my family about the True Jesus Church and continue praying in the Holy Spirit. Then in the following month, on September 28, 2008, I received water baptism conducted by ministers of the Boston House of Prayer. Although the weather was gloomy, when I came out of the water, I felt I had received God's abundant grace. I was determined to become the new person God wanted me to be.

WALKING WITH GOD

That September was also the start of my freshman year in college. I was excited but concerned about how to tell my roommate that I prayed in tongues. While I meditated on this, it came to my mind that the best approach was to tell my roommate right away. On the first day we moved in, I politely shared with my new roommate about my prayer and she wholeheartedly welcomed me to practice my faith. I was thankful for God's arrangement and established a daily prayer routine right away!

> *"When I read the last two lines in the refrain, I felt a sense of freedom and was comforted to know that the Omnipotent God, who held the future in His hands, would also be holding my hand."*

1 By Ira F Stanphill. © 1950, renewed 1978, Singspiration Music.

"I felt Him embrace me and let me know that I was not alone. This experience taught me that the feeling of loneliness would always be present in my life, but that was alright. It served as a reminder that only God could truly satisfy me."

Another concern of mine was the temptations I would face on campus. I was afraid to lose God and be drawn away by sin. My old self continued to struggle inside with loneliness, anger, and my desire for attention. I knew that boy-girl relationships would be a problematic issue. In addition to meeting my roommate on the first day, I also got to know a male student who moved into the dormitory across the hallway. He was attractive, funny, and also expressed interest in me. This seemed like a red flag, so I shared the situation with my aunt and uncle. They reminded me that Satan was working hard to make me spiritually fall and advised me to limit my interactions with this student.

One verse that comes to mind when I think about my time in college is Colossians 3:3: "For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." I wanted to manifest these words but was often challenged by my pride and insecurity. A part of me yearned for acceptance, popularity, and acknowledgment from my peers. The other part of me wanted contentment in a hidden life with Christ, just as this verse says.

During the second week of classes, a boy asked if I wanted to study with him. The following month, a girl I met at freshman orientation invited me to a party. At the end of my first year, another girl from my dormitory pleaded with me to join the housing lottery with her and two boys, in order to reserve a shared living space for the next academic year. These encounters were similar; they seemed harmless, but in each case, my heart was troubled to oblige. I had to choose whether to please people or please God.

One particular night, as I was falling asleep, I was overwhelmed with loneliness. It felt dark and unquenchable. When I cried out to God in my heart, I felt Him embrace me and let me know that I was not alone. This experience taught me that the feeling of loneliness would always be present in my life, but that was alright. It served as a reminder that only God could truly satisfy me.

By God's grace, I was able to overcome these temptations. It would not have been possible without daily spiritual cultivation and me sharing my weaknesses with my aunt and uncle. I am also thankful that I was able to attend the Sabbath service every week. I always looked forward to the scenic train rides that took me from campus to church during the weekend. Each season painted a different scenery—the red foliage in fall, the white blanket in winter, and then the blooming flowers in spring. God's creation inspired and comforted me throughout my entire time at school. That was how I survived my college years.

BLESSED BY GOD

When I was between twenty-three and twenty-seven years old, my life was filled with a myriad of blessings and spiritual refinement.

After graduation in May 2013, I actively sought work. I was worried that I did not have enough experience. I submitted my resumé to countless companies but months passed without any response. It was not until December 2013 that I had my first interview. I was helping with the central region student spiritual convocation in Houston when I received the call. I had to reschedule my interview twice—the first time because I was not going to be in town, and the second because my flight from Houston to Boston was canceled due to a snowstorm. Despite the complications, the company readily rescheduled the interviews for me.

God blessed me with a good job in water resource engineering, a position that I was not qualified for. However, the more experience I gained, the more I was amazed at how beautifully God had crafted this career path for me; in addition to office work, I was also able to spend time outdoors amid God's lovely creation while completing related fieldwork.

Through God's guidance, I moved from Boston to Dallas and bought my first house, which was something that I had always aspired to do for my parents and for my younger sisters. God truly provided for my family and me all these years.

With each passing year, God continues to bestow His mercy upon me. Sometimes, I still feel unsure about the future. Other times, I still feel the weight of loneliness. However, even if the fig tree does not blossom and the vines do not bear fruit, I will always strive to rejoice in the Lord.

True Jesus Church

Myanmar Missionary Work

Philip Shee
Singapore

The True Jesus Church (TJC) was established in Myanmar in the 1990s when a few local Christians from the ethnic Chin[1] group contacted our International Assembly (IA). They were interested in the beliefs preached by TJC, particularly our doctrines relating to the Sabbath day and the Holy Spirit. About the same time, some members were working and doing business in Yangon, so they were able to assist in this pioneering work. After missionaries were sent to Myanmar in the mid-1990s, the first batch of believers was baptized. A church was then established in Sakankyi, a village in the plains below the Chin Hills in Northwest Myanmar. Over time, TJC was established in several other villages.

> *"When we bring the gospel to developing countries, the task of making disciples is complicated. ... Despite the many obstacles we face, we must not be afraid but press on, for our Lord Jesus promised to be with us always."*

From 2000 onwards, the IA tasked the Singapore TJC to pastor and develop the church in Myanmar. Since then, with the help of members from Singapore, Malaysia and Taiwan, Myanmar TJC has conducted annual programs such as Bible camps, short-term theological training courses for students and youth, spiritual meetings and various training seminars. The church has run full-time theological training programs for two cohorts of preachers.

Currently, TJC is present in the city of Yangon and in three other rural localities in Northwest Myanmar, namely, Taungzalat and Natkyikong in the town of Kalaymyo, and Sawbuayeshin, a village about seventy-two kilometers from Kalaymyo. Two full-time local preachers and one deacon pastor some three hundred members in Myanmar.

1 The Chin people form one of the major ethnic groups in Myanmar. Many Chin live in the Chin State and Sagaing Region of Myanmar, where the town of Kalaymyo lies. They are mostly Christians (as opposed to the Buddhist majority in Myanmar), with many belonging to Protestant denominations. Around fifty percent of our Burmese members are Chin.

The completed True Jesus Church, Sawbuayeshin.

Pathian in Malsawm ang—God Will Bless Us

Enoch Chin
Singapore

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. (Mt 28:19–20)

This is Jesus' commission to us—that we must go and make disciples of all the nations. Making disciples is not easy, as it is not simply baptizing people; rather, it involves nurturing them to be true followers of Christ. When we bring the gospel to developing countries, the task of making disciples is complicated by existing cultural and religious backgrounds, language barriers, poverty issues, differing personalities, and life's challenges. Despite the many obstacles we face, we must not be afraid but press on, for our Lord Jesus has promised to be with us always.

By God's grace, I have been given the opportunity to serve in the Myanmar Mission Committee (MMC) since 2011. During these years of service, I have truly experienced God's guidance. *Pathian in Malsawn ang* is a phrase I hold dear to my heart, because it represents all my mission trips to Myanmar. *Pathian in Malsawm ang* means "God will bless [us]" in the Mizo language, a dialect of the Chin people in Myanmar. God has blessed and will continue to bless the Myanmar mission work. No matter how difficult the work is, I am resolved to do my part. I would like to share three instances of God's blessings during my trips to Myanmar.

GOD'S PROVISION IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF A CHURCH BUILDING

In April 2013, I was part of a team sent to Myanmar to conduct a youth camp. Just like the previous trips, we brought along funds for the camp, trip reimbursements and members' education welfare benefits. During this particular trip to Kalaymyo, a town in Northwest Myanmar, we encountered a problem—there were insufficient funds to complete the construction of the church building in the nearby village of Sawbuayeshin, which was scheduled for dedication the week after our trip. The shortfall was due to rising raw material costs and an underestimation of the amount of materials required. The local church board approached us at the last moment; they had to obtain the funds that very same day to ensure that the construction would be completed in time for the church dedication.

After counting all the money we had, we found that what we had brought was just enough to make up for the shortfall. Discussions with the MMC chairman, local ministers and church board followed; it was agreed that we would give the money we had on hand to complete the construction. This was God's amazing provision because no man could have made such accurate calculations! I believe God had arranged for us to bring the exact amount of funds required to finance the building construction.

GOD'S PROVISION DURING A DIFFICULT JOURNEY

In October 2013, I took part in a mission trip to conduct a youth leaders' training course and youth spiritual meeting in Kalaymyo. Due to the closure of the Kalaymyo airfield for runway repairs and issues with the timing of the express buses, we hired a private van to travel from Yangon to Kalaymyo for the youth activities. The journey would typically take about twenty to twenty-four hours, with the first twelve to fourteen hours on the expressway and trunk roads, followed by eight to ten hours on mountainous roads. However, what was not told to us was that many roads along the way to Kalaymyo were affected by the cyclone that had battered Myanmar the week before we arrived.

After an uneventful first leg of the journey, we started traveling on dirt tracks and mountainous roads. The driver felt increasingly uneasy as he was unfamiliar with the route and unused to driving on dirt roads. After a slow and

The mission team pushing the van through the flood on the way to Kalaymyo.

Stuck in the mud just before Kane-yi village.

cautious drive past the first mountain stretch, our van met with a flood on the plains, with water reaching knee level. The driver refused to drive through the floodwaters, insisting that we waited for the water to subside so as to not damage the car engine, even though it seemed like the water level was lower than the engine. After negotiating for two hours and seeing countless vehicles drive past us, we managed to convince the driver to allow us to push the van past the flooded stretch and continue the journey.

Within fifteen minutes of resuming the journey, we reached a steep downward slope, followed by an immediate upward slope after a right turn. The driver drove very slowly downslope and was caught in the mud at the bottom due to the lack of speed and momentum. Some passers-by helped the driver to free the vehicle. After the short upward slope, we drove to Kane-yi, a rural farming village. The driver stopped the van and refused to take us any farther. He insisted on turning back to Yangon and said he would try to get a replacement vehicle for the rest of the journey. However, we would need to wait for at least a day with no guarantee of a replacement.

Kane-yi was a village without proper amenities and electricity. It had a couple of small sundry shops for the locals and no restaurants or cafés, much less a place for us to stay. Also, we had not seen any vehicles since we entered the village, except for a couple of motorcycles and bullock carts. We persisted in our negotiation with the driver to resume the journey or find us a feasible solution. As minutes turned into hours, we decided to ask a villager if there was a vehicle in the village or nearby villages that could take us to a bigger town to secure our transport to Kalaymyo.

Unexpectedly, the villager pointed us to an alley where there was a man with a vehicle. Seizing the opportunity, we went to the vehicle owner to ask for help. What happened next was beyond our expectations: the vehicle owner was willing to take us all the way to Kalaymyo and would only need thirty minutes to prepare before setting off. What was more amazing was that the refund we would get from the original driver was exactly the same amount that the new driver was asking from us! We could see God's marvelous provision and care; He arranged a vehicle to take us from the middle of nowhere to Kalaymyo. In hindsight, we realized that the first driver lacked the necessary skills to safely navigate the mountainous dirt tracks, and we might not have arrived unscathed or in time for the church events.

GOD'S PROVISION FOR THE TROUBLED

During our trip to Myanmar in April 2019 for a youth and student Bible camp, we witnessed the amazing grace of God once again. A total of eleven participants received the Holy Spirit during the camp. There was a young brother who, on hearing an encouraging message from a preacher, decided to pray for the Holy Spirit in his spare time, in addition to the scheduled prayer sessions. Despite it being a hot summer night, he gathered a few friends to pray before bedtime. Although they had just had an exhausting day of lessons and activities, and there was no electricity due to a power outage, they prayed to God with a sincere heart and sought after Him.

The next day after lunch, the same group of students gathered once again to pray in the church hall of their own

> *"The prayer took place during the hottest hour of the day with a temperature of forty-five degrees Celsius. Under a heat-conducting zinc roof and away from the fans that were circulating the hot air, this group of students, some as young as seven to eight years old, were determined to seek God and His precious Holy Spirit."*

About seventy participants took part in the youth and students Bible camp in April 2019.

accord. This time, the prayer took place during the hottest hour of the day with a temperature of forty-five degrees Celsius (113 degrees Fahrenheit). Under a heat-conducting zinc roof and away from the fans that were circulating the hot air, this group of students, some as young as seven to eight years old, were determined to seek God and His precious Holy Spirit. God truly hears the prayers of those who diligently seek Him; He poured down His Spirit onto a number of them, including the brother who initiated the prayer.

During that prayer, the brother saw a vision of bright light, which lifted him toward the light source. After he was lifted up, he saw a golden building surrounded by very beautiful lakes and trees. He also saw birds and a lion roaming freely. When we asked him to tell us more about his vision, he was at a loss for words and could only describe the place as beautiful beyond words. God heard the prayers of this brother and understood his troubles. He was facing a lot of problems at home. Not only was his family poor, but they also had difficulty making a living. His mother had left home recently, abandoning his father and the three children. When this brother confided in God and sought Him with all his heart, God provided him with the Holy Spirit and comforted him through the vision.

Students praying earnestly for the Holy Spirit.

CONCLUSION

Yes, there are challenges, and we could even face failure when we want to make disciples of all the nations. However, *Pathian in Malsawm ang*—God will bless us! This is the work of God, so He will personally lead us. God will bestow His grace upon us. As servants of God, our duty is to go and preach and make disciples. When we do so with a willing heart, God will be with us!

RED Team
USA

Q&A: Be a Lover of Souls

Editor's note: It can seem daunting to bring a friend or truth-seeker directly through the doors of the church. However, we can use online tools to help ease the introduction of Christianity, all accessed from the comfort and convenience of one's home.

In 2013, the General Assembly of the United States (USGA) formed the Remote Evangelism and Discipleship (RED) team to promote evangelism and discipleship, utilizing internet technologies such as voice and video conferencing, and webinars.

The RED team began hosting webinars in 2014. By God's grace, over time, the number of participants has increased, and new features such as recordings, accessible online, were added to the resource kit. These webinars act as an evangelism tool, to which members can invite friends and family members interested in learning about Christianity and biblical truths. They are also used for internal church training, to educate and promote evangelism among the youths.

In Spring 2019, the RED team hosted a webinar "Q&A on Personal Evangelism," led by Preacher Samuel Kuo. The following transcript has been edited for clarity.

QUESTION 1:

Many young people are not very receptive to reading the Scriptures. On one occasion, I tried to preach to a Catholic friend. He was not very interested, saying that he had never had a good understanding of the Bible and did not feel it was necessary. In such a scenario, what are the next steps we could take?

When we preach to Christians, we ought to tactfully remind them that the basis of their (and our) faith is the Scriptures. We can start by asking them why they believe what they believe and how they justify these beliefs. Let them examine and evaluate their faith, and reflect on whether belief in God can be sustained without trying to know the word of God. However, at the end of the day, as the saying goes, we can lead a horse to water, but we cannot make it drink.

QUESTION 2:
For certain churches, there may be pastoral issues that must first be addressed because they affect the evangelistic work. For example, the members may not be very welcoming to truth-seekers or are too busy doing other church work. How can a church prioritize between pastoral work and evangelistic work? How do we find a healthy balance?

Pastoral and evangelistic work are complementary and integral to one other. If we choose only to pastor—focusing on ourselves and our deficiencies—we may be so mired in these that we would never get out of that loop and find time to do outreach. Conversely, if we are on the other extreme of the spectrum, where we only evangelize but never self-reflect, then we may not realize that our behavior is keeping people away. There must thus be a healthy balance.

Pastoral work in the form of workshops and seminars to provide fundamental training to our believers on the gospel that we are preaching is necessary. However, after a certain level of theoretical knowledge has been imparted, believers must take practical action, i.e., go out to preach the word. The process of evangelizing—meeting with naysayers or skeptics—will naturally motivate us to improve ourselves. Importantly, we will be reminded that our actions and conduct must be consistent with our preaching. For example, we cannot preach that we must observe the Sabbath if we do not practice it. Hence, as we do outreach, we will also be reflecting and improving ourselves.

Having a dedicated evangelism team is critical to this ministry. Tasks typically undertaken by this team include praying together, developing and running events, following up with truth-seekers, etc. If your church does not currently have an evangelism team, do propose starting one to the church council,[1] and develop a plan to meet the needs of truth-seekers. Alternatively, get several active members to form a core group. Let this core group begin by praying together regularly for evangelism. Through sincere prayer and the movement of the Holy Spirit, the work will naturally start to fall into place.

When we want to catch our metaphorical fish, we must cast our net—which in essence means preaching. However, if our net has a hole, we must mend the net; otherwise, all the fish we catch will naturally slip out. The church needs to fortify her faith by relying on the Holy Spirit. As fishers of men, our preaching must be coupled with our faith-building.

QUESTION 3:
Sometimes, we are not entirely comfortable bringing our friends to church. It does not always feel like the most inviting place, with cliques or language barriers. What can we do individually and as a fellowship?

Each of us can do our part to shape the culture of our church. If we do see cliques or general indifference towards newcomers, we should initiate the change and influence our peers. Since we realize how difficult it is for someone to step into church, let us put our best foot forward and help these friends feel the love of Christ. Be the change we want to see. Even though it is challenging, let it start with us. Then when people see the zeal and love shining through you, they will be inspired and motivated as well. Recognizing the value of truth-seekers' souls will increase our sense of urgency to try to make a difference.

There are a couple of success stories I have heard of :

Members of Church X realized that friends coming to church for the first time could feel very awkward when they are led straight into the church hall. So they started an introductory fellowship to assimilate visitors into the church and to introduce the beliefs of the True Jesus Church. In this instance, the fellowship was a hiking fellowship. Since it was something casual and fun, it provided a more comfortable environment in which to speak to truth-seekers and introduce them to other members.

Another church started assigning teams of two or three believers to greet and introduce themselves to people whom they did not know coming into church. In the beginning, the assigned teams were reluctant. However, because they

1 Also known as church board or church executive committee.

“When we are close to God, we have something that cannot be quantified, but that others can see in us: inner peace, inner joy. Many people are looking for that. Even the super-wealthy sometimes suffer an emptiness in their hearts. When the contentment we have in God shines through, people are drawn to that.”

were assigned, they had to do it. After five or six times, this became part of their routine; and they realized greeting strangers was not as frightening as it was before.

I believe that our general fear or reluctance to speak to strangers stems from a lack of cultivation of such social skills when we were growing up. To change this culture, we should start by encouraging our young students to practice preaching to their friends and greeting truth-seekers in church.

QUESTION 4:
How do we preach to Christian friends who do not feel the need to attend church—for example, Christians who say it suffices to believe in their hearts or only attend holiday services?

Many of my neighbors are Christian, and their church attendance ranges widely between strictly religious to casual observance. What I have found to be quite useful is to understand why an individual goes to church in the first place. This understanding of what they believe in helps us see where their heart is.

You may want to ask them: “What do you seek in your faith?” If they are serious about their faith, commend them, and then dive right into the biblical text. If the individual we are speaking to already shares this common ground of faith—i.e., God—and takes the study of Scripture seriously, that is an excellent benefit for us. Turn to one key passage on the Holy Spirit or baptism, read the passage together, and ask what they think of it. Allow them some time to reflect before having another discussion. Since we already have a similar world view, our discussion may lead them to accept an invitation to our church. Once they become more familiar with the scriptural teachings—e.g., Sabbath-keeping—those teachings will resonate with them.

In general, we aim to find a common topic that stirs their desire to know more. Hopefully, as our discussion progresses, they will see God, and the truth will blossom in them.

QUESTION 5:
How do you share the gospel with family and friends when they are doing better than you are, physically and financially?

Sometimes, we may feel like our friends and family members are doing well, especially when we look at their external circumstances. However, one of the treasures we have as Christians is the emotional and spiritual peace that comes with being close to God, primarily through the indwelling Holy Spirit. When we are close to God, we have something that cannot be quantified, but that others can see in us: inner peace, inner joy. Many people are looking for that. Even the super-wealthy sometimes suffer an emptiness in their hearts. When the contentment we have in God shines through, people are drawn to that. As mentioned in the Gospel of John, we have springs of living water flowing through us (Jn 4:10, 14).

Our friends and family often do not come to Christ seeking financial or physical help. Frankly speaking, some of our members are multimillionaires. But friends do not come to our church to find out the secret to their wealth. Instead, friends are more interested in the way that we pray, the truth we believe, and the joy and peace found in our church. Even if they are better off than we are, they can see much more beautiful blessings beyond these external factors.

QUESTION 6:
I want to evangelize, but I just feel like there are not any opportunities to preach to others. What are some practical ways I can use to find new opportunities to evangelize?

As Christians, our faith is to be integrated with our life: life is faith, faith is life. If we are living out a true faith, sooner or later, when we talk to others about our lives, we will naturally start sharing about our faith. For example, at work, if someone were to ask us what we did over the weekend, we could tell him or her about the activities we do at church. We do not have to avoid those topics. Genuinely sharing in this way will capture the interest of our co-workers or classmates. Even the simple gesture of giving thanks before a meal may intrigue those around us sufficiently for them to ask about it. This can be a conversation-starter that allows us to share our faith.

“As Christians, our faith is to be integrated with our life: life is faith, faith is life. If we are living out a true faith, sooner or later, when we talk to others about our lives, we will naturally start sharing about our faith.”

Prayer really does work. The first time I was unemployed, I wanted to use my free time to preach more. However, I thought to myself, *How could I preach to people who do not want to be bothered?* Once, at the gym, I prayed in my heart, asking if God could give me an opportunity to preach. Soon after, I was forced into an awkward situation, which required me to speak to the people around me. That gave me a chance to share my faith, and one of those present came to church. He is still truth-seeking to this day.

QUESTION 7:
How should we preach the gospel to people who already believe in Jesus, but who are from other churches and denominations? If they are willing to visit our church, but also invite us to their church, should we go? And after that, how do we continue preaching or clarifying our position?

The advantage of preaching to other Christians is that we already have similar worldviews, including believing in the authority of the Scriptures. Whenever we share our beliefs, we should always refer back to the Bible so that our friend knows that it is coming directly from the Scriptures. I think occasionally accepting invitations to attend their church services can be helpful because it can give us a basis for discussion. However, if we do so, it is crucial that we are already rooted in our faith and can discern adequately, otherwise it could be detrimental to our faith.

QUESTION 8:
How do we balance evangelism/outreach with pastoral work and personal cultivation? Sometimes I feel stretched between all the people I want to preach to and the lost sheep I want to find, as well as taking care of my faith.

While knowing how to best balance time is a legitimate concern, I believe that evangelism and self-cultivation tend to go hand in hand. When we are reaching out to others, there tends to be an innate drive to also better ourselves, lest we be found hypocritical. For example, how can we preach about the Sabbath if we are not keeping the Sabbath? As for time management, there are no simple answers. God can give us wisdom as to what to prioritize. Evangelistic and pastoral work is a church-wide effort, so the burden is to be shared accordingly.

QUESTION 9:
Any tips for preaching to other Christians who are well-versed in the Bible and have strong beliefs without getting into a debate or argument? What is a good topic to start with, and how do we guide the conversation?

When engaging in these discussions, we should keep in mind that the point of the conversation is to see what the Bible says concerning salvation. We should also keep in mind that we are not seeking to win the debate, but to win the soul—if a person can experience genuine love, it goes a long way to melting their hearts. Some common topics that we can start with are the Holy Spirit, the holy Sabbath, and water baptism.

“We should keep in mind that the point of the conversation is to see what the Bible says concerning salvation. We should also keep in mind that we are not seeking to win the debate, but to win the soul—if a person can experience genuine love, it goes a long way to melting their hearts.”

QUESTION 10:
How do we overcome the barrier of our preconception that someone is already living a good life and does not seem like they need Jesus? How do we approach someone who does not seem “poor,” either physically or spiritually speaking?

While there are those around us who may have everything they need in life (wealth, health, status), gaining these is not the reason why we believe in Jesus. Though they may not appear to suffer any lack of material or emotional fulfillment, we should still try to see if they have any spiritual needs. Sometimes, the people who have the most in the world have the least in the eyes of God.

If they seem to have a lot already materially, ask them about their spiritual fulfillment. If they seem to be happy spiritually, ask them about their beliefs, and how they feel about these beliefs. Preaching is not always about winning over someone’s heart, but simply sowing the seeds of the gospel of Christ.

QUESTION 11:
What do you do when you are preaching to someone who already has a negative perception of True Jesus Church, and tells you to explore other religions?

Since they already have a bias against the True Jesus Church, any arguments or discussions would most likely prove to be more detrimental than beneficial. In these cases, it may be best to pray for them and invite them to church when the opportunity comes. A sister prayed for her friends every single day—fifteen minutes for each friend. Eventually, almost every friend she prayed for came to church. Many were even baptized and became fervent members. When a person’s heart is hardened, only God can help.

If, however, you feel that their

“ Timing is essential, and it depends on your relationship with your friend. Push them too hard, and your friendship may become strained. As clichéd as it sounds, prayer really is the answer in these difficult cases. Try dedicating time in prayer solely for this person each day. ”

negative perception stems from a misunderstanding or misconception, then it would be prudent to talk about it. Nurturing a culture of willingness to discuss tough topics, in church and out of church, in a loving and respectful way, could prove beneficial for members and truth-seekers alike.

QUESTION 12:
How do we try to evangelize again to a person who has already rejected us? Is there a good waiting time before we ask them to come to church again? Or should we just pray for them?

It is okay to be rejected; however, if we are motivated to save their souls, we should continue to pray for them. Timing is essential, and it depends on your relationship with your friend. Push them too hard, and your friendship may become strained. As clichéd as it sounds, prayer really is the answer in these difficult cases. Try dedicating time in prayer solely for this person each day.

QUESTION 13:
How do you preach to people who are not actively seeking God? How can we introduce the church to them, so they feel the need to pursue God?

There is power in vulnerability. When we share our vulnerabilities, such as our struggles, people are more willing to open their hearts to listen. People innately want to help. At this time, we can share how God has comforted or helped us in our times of need, despite the sufferings we had to endure. Everyone struggles in one way or another. If, through our stories, they can see that we could find peace in God despite our sufferings, this may prick their curiosity. Let your life be a light to the people in this world.

QUESTION 14:
Are there any practical tips for making the church a more welcoming place for people of all cultures? In the US, our church comprises predominantly Chinese members, and we have had challenges with retaining visitors who are genuinely interested in seeking the complete truth, yet are ultimately put off by our “Chinese-ness.”

The reality is that our members in Western countries are predominantly of Asian descent—specifically Chinese. I would say that trying to reduce or downplay their natural “Chinese-ness” is not as simple as ordering non-Asian food for lunch. Just like in the Bible, this is a struggle we need to overcome by the power of the Spirit. There are several essential principles:

Critically, the church needs to be spiritually grounded, built on the apostles and prophets as our foundation, with Christ as the cornerstone. At the same time, the church needs to develop a culture of welcoming people. I have

“After being rejected a few times, you realize it is not calamitous. Moreover, the sting of the rejection is mitigated by the compassion we feel for them; they are rejecting the precious gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ, who can give them extraordinary peace and eternal life.”

heard of a church where most of the members could not communicate with one another because of the language barrier. However, through gestures, very rudimentary English, and actions, they showed love for one another. If we prove to be a welcoming church, truth-seekers would not feel ostracized and singled out. We can start cultivating such a culture in our church by assigning designated teams (perhaps two to three people in each team) each week to welcome truth-seekers. Parents can also encourage their children to greet them. This culture takes time to cultivate, so patience and prayer are essential as well.

We can learn how Jesus Christ preached to non-Jews: let us take the story of how Jesus interacted with the Samaritan woman. He first started the conversation by bringing up a mundane, day-to-day subject: water and thirst. This means we can start having a conversation with truth-seekers by finding common ground, such as sports, games, kids, school, work, etc. Jesus Christ showed that He understood the sufferings that the Samaritan woman had to endure, having to cycle through five different husbands (there are culture and history behind this). Thus, we can also take time to understand the reason for a visitor to come to the church. We can show we are concerned about their problems. Pray with them. Then, hopefully, when a certain trust is built, we can begin discussing the spiritual teachings of our doctrines.

QUESTION 15:
How do I overcome rejection?

I think one way to overcome rejection is by experiencing it more, to go through a kind of desensitization process. After being rejected a few times, you realize it is not calamitous. Moreover, the sting of the rejection is mitigated by the compassion we feel for them; they are rejecting the precious gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ, who can give them extraordinary peace and eternal life. They are not rejecting us personally.

We can also take some time to process the idea that, according to the Bible, people we see every day—who are not saved—will meet an inevitable fate of suffering in hell. As Christians, we are trying to “snatch” souls from this fate. If we have sympathy towards those suffering in developing countries, should we not also have compassion for those around us who are most likely heading toward eternal damnation? This thought may help us overcome the fear of momentary embarrassment or persecution. After all, as 1 Peter 3:14 records, “if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you are blessed.”

Jordan Kwok
Newcastle, UK

Work While There is Time

Hallelujah! Thank the Lord for His immense love and grace toward His children. May His name be proclaimed among the nations, and may His glory be magnified.

The Bible tells us that God disciplines, chastens and refines His children, those whom He loves dearly (Heb 12:7; Rev 3:19a). He allows us to go through trials to lead us to repentance so that we can become holy; to purge us of our impurities so that we may become offerings in righteousness; and to test us to see if we are indeed faithful to Him (Rev 3:19b; Heb 12:10; Mal 3:3; Zech 13:9). Only through suffering can we enter the kingdom of God, and only through persecution can we live a godly life in Christ Jesus (Acts 14:22; 2 Tim 3:12).

However, we should not be dismayed, because if we can withstand these tests of faith by drawing strength from Jesus our Lord and King, then our robes will be washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb. Then we can dwell before the throne of God, to serve in His temple day and night, and receive eternal blessings. The hope of our Christian faith will finally be realized (Rev 7:14–17)!

I would like to testify of God's love and abidance during a recent test of faith concerning my health. Not only did God reaffirm and strengthen my faith in Him through this trial, but He also taught me to value opportunities to serve and draw close to Him while there is still time.

A TEST OF FAITH

In February 2019, during a routine check-up with my general practitioner (GP) for minor ongoing health issues, some abnormalities were found in my blood test results. The levels of various cells and other substances were out of the normal range, and my blood pressure was unusually high (160/100, when it should be below 120/80). A subsequent urine test revealed further

“Not only did God reaffirm and strengthen my faith in Him through this trial, but He also taught me to value opportunities to serve and draw close to Him while there is still time.”

> *“Indeed, if we believe that God is the Creator, then we would acknowledge that our lives are in His hands. If our lives are within His control, then why do we have to worry? God created the universe; to guide and comfort us in our times of difficulty is not a big task for Him.”*

problems—protein and blood leakage. The doctor asked for my symptoms, including those he had already been monitoring. We came up with a long list: chronic coughing, chest pains, lower abdominal pains, night sweats, passing of urine five to ten times a night, coughing or vomiting blood, loss of appetite, and drastic weight loss (around one stone, or six kilograms.)

After further analysis and consultation with specialists, my GP informed me that I had reduced kidney function, comparable to that of a seventy-seven-year-old. He was very concerned and pushed me to undergo more tests, such as an X-ray, CT scan, and ultrasound. I was reluctant because of my fear of needles and medical procedures. However, the doctor strongly recommended that I undergo these tests and warned that I could have chronic kidney disease or even kidney cancer. Further testing would enable him to ascertain the right diagnosis and treatment.

FINDING PEACE IN GOD

It was surreal to hear that, at the age of twenty-seven, I could potentially have cancer. However, I thanked God then that my heart felt great peace. After prayer, I did not doubt that God would be beside me every step of the way and that His beautiful will was behind everything. The Holy Spirit caused me to recall God’s word:

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. *(Phil 1:21–23)*

When Paul wrote this passage, he desired to depart and return to Jesus. However, he accepted that if it were God’s will for Paul to remain, he would continue serving the brethren, growing with them in the joy of faith (Phil 1:24–26). Both options were beautiful. This passage reminded me that there could only be two wonderful outcomes from my situation. If I pass away, I could return to God and finally realize my hope as a Christian; if I remain, I could continue serving God in this world for however long He wanted.

The Book of Job describes God as the Creator, the Almighty, the King of the heavens and the earth, and the One who governs all things.

Who among all these does not know
That the hand of the LORD has done this,
In whose hand is the life of every living thing,
And the breath of all mankind?
(Job 12:9–10)

Indeed, if we believe that God is the Creator, then we would acknowledge that our lives are in His hands. If our lives are within His control, then why do we have to worry? God created the universe; to guide and comfort us in our times of difficulty is not a big task for Him.

Other than recalling God’s word and the testimonies of others, I could only attribute the peace I felt to God Himself. I thank God—I had learned from past trials that to truly rely on God’s strength and faithfulness, I must pray. I knew in my heart of hearts that I was incredibly weak—weak in faith, weak in prayer, and weak in my reliance on Jesus. In that moment of uncertainty, only Jesus could help me. Through prayer and fasting, my doubts were erased and I felt the overwhelming sense that God was beside me. I was once again reminded of God’s love for me, that I was His child, and that no matter what happened, all things worked together for good to those who loved God (Rom 8:28). Despite my unbelief and my weakness, I resolved to rely on Him for strength and not succumb to this trial.

ENCOURAGED BY BROTHERLY LOVE

On March 6, 2019, I went to my local hospital for scans and tests. Though the doctors could not reveal much, I was constantly reminded of God’s abidance during this period. Physically, it felt like I was walking through this alone, but I knew in my heart and mind I had the prayers and companionship of my brethren, family, and wife.

Thank God, several brothers and sisters encouraged and prayed with me. God indeed provides everything we need in every trial. Not only has He given us His word, His Spirit, His abidance, and His love, but He has also provided for us His church. The church is a remarkable thing: not only a collective of people redeemed by Christ’s blood, but also a family with a united heart and goal to seek the Lord Jesus. We all face our tests and trials, but we go through suffering for the edification of others.

At the same time, there is nothing new under the sun—everything we face has happened to someone else before us. No matter how young or old we are, there is always something to learn from our brethren. And so, there will always be companionship and support during our difficult times. However, whether or not we accept encouragement from others is a different matter—it can be a test of humility within our hearts. Are we going to go through our trials by ourselves, by our own strength? Or will we rely on God and His church to overcome our weakness?

The encouragement and prayers of brethren reaffirmed that, indeed, there is love in God’s church, as well as the sense of mutual care and mutual faith. One new insight that I gained was that some, especially our close friends and family, worry much more about us

than we do. Not only should we accept encouragement in times of trouble, but we need to have the courage to comfort those who love us. Sharing how we have been encouraged by God's word, our faithfulness towards God will bring comfort to those around us.

GOD'S GRACE IS SUFFICIENT

On March 21, I met a consultant nephrologist at the Freeman Hospital in Newcastle for some discussions, analysis, and further routine tests. My symptoms had yet to subside, and my blood and urine test results were as before. This consultant echoed much of what my GP said, but the way he delivered his message was quite alarming. However, as he spoke, I felt as though the Lord, my Shepherd, was walking me through the valley of the shadow of death (Ps 23:4). God indeed comforts us in our times of difficulty. He is always there, and He lives inside our hearts. Whether or not we recognize and submit to this is a different matter. We must realize that we indeed are weak—we cannot walk through this valley by our own means. But with God in front of us, what do we have to fear? Do we fear evil? Or do we fear God?

After reviewing my test results, the consultant booked me in for an urgent kidney biopsy to be done within two weeks and handed my case over to a more senior consultant. My biopsy was booked for April 5. Since I have a fear of needles, the thought of having a huge needle going into my back was frightening. As the date of my procedure loomed closer, I prayed for God to comfort my heart. Once again, God reminded me of His word: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9a). In this passage, Paul describes imploring God to remove the thorn in his flesh (2 Cor 12:7–10); I was going to have a "thorn" in my flesh too! But what is most comforting is God's reply to Paul. No matter what role we play in church, or our financial and career status in society, we are only human, full of weaknesses. Paul *boasts* about his weakness. In our bodies of flesh, we will inevitably face difficulties like illness, pain, and suffering—but God's grace transcends all. Nothing is outside of God's control. Though we may suffer physical and even spiritual harm, God's grace is sufficient. God can turn these hardships into opportunities for us to grow spiritually (Rom 5:3-4), enabling us to depend on Him all the more, just as Paul did (2 Cor 12:9–10).

Praise God, the biopsy went smoothly, and both the nurse and the consultant helped me to overcome my fear of needles. A sister suggested that, since I may be allowed to play my music in the theatre, listening to hymns during the procedure might help. However, everything happened relatively quickly. If you ever have to undergo a biopsy, it may sound scary, but it is not as bad as you think. After some bed rest, my blood pressure was still raised (around 160/100), but all my other vitals were stable, so, thankfully, I was discharged that evening.

Consultation on the biopsy results was on April 17. Although the possibility of cancer was still there, my wife and I were comforted by the fact that the hospital did not contact us earlier—had the signs pointed in that direction, my case would have escalated faster. Nevertheless, we were ready for any outcome, without expectations. The senior consultant told me the news: I have a chronic autoimmune kidney disease, where my immune system attacks my kidneys, resulting in reduced kidney function. Not only this, but my body was severely deficient in vital vitamins and minerals, which explained many of the symptoms I was experiencing. Thank God, had my high blood pressure not been diagnosed, my condition would have gone undiscovered, exposing my kidneys to

"Our Omniscient God has sent His children into the world, at various points in space and time, to serve Him and fulfill His will, and to shine His light into the darkest corners of men's hearts. Wherever we are, there are always opportunities to preach and glorify His name."

high risk. The doctor prescribed me some medication to treat the kidney disease, and some supplements to address the other symptoms. God's grace indeed is sufficient.

WORK WHILE IT IS STILL DAY

What I learned through this whole experience is that life is short. If the diagnosis had been cancer, then my life expectancy would have shortened. This is what we must realize today. The Bible reminds us that our lives are nothing but a vapor, like a passing shadow, and withering grass (Jas 4:14; Ps 144:4; 1 Pet 1:24). We are on earth for but a moment.

The beloved hymn, *Work for the Night is Coming,*[1] relays a strong message: work while it is day, because when the night comes a man can no longer work. Jesus conveyed this message in more detail when He healed a blind man using His saliva and clay. During this miracle, he said to His disciples:

"I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."
(Jn 9:4–5)

Today, we must bring our faith back into the context of why we are here. Our Omniscient God has sent His children into the world, at various points in space and time, to serve Him and fulfill His will, and to shine His light into the darkest corners of men's hearts. Wherever we are, there are always opportunities to preach and glorify His name. However, we often become distracted by various worldly cares—our hearts become infiltrated with desires and idols, luxuries, and comforts. Through this experience, God brought my focus back to the one essential thing in life: God Himself.

While we have the opportunity, while it is called today (Heb 3:13), let us endeavor to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength (Deut 6:5). In our hearts of worship, let us hear His voice and follow Him more diligently (Jn 10:27). In our daily lives, let us put Jesus at the forefront of our minds, to consider Him (Heb 3:1) and remember all He has done for us. In our servitude, let us strive to become more faithful and humble (Mt 25:23; Lk 17:10).

Serving God is a grace; not everyone has the opportunity to serve in the way they want. Some may yearn with all their hearts to serve God but never get the chance. So while it is today, let us treasure this grace in which we were called (Eph 2:8–10). While we still have the chance, let us urgently work on our weaknesses, relying wholly on the Lord's strength, as the sons of God (Rom 8:13–14). Who knows what tomorrow may bring, so let us turn our hearts back to God today (Zech 1:3, Joel 2:13).

May all praise, honor, and glory be given to our heavenly Father, for He is good. Amen.

1 By Mrs Harry Coghill (1836–1907).

Aun Quek Chin
Singapore

What God Has Joined, Let No Man Separate (Part 3)

Editor's note: The first two installments of this series focused on understanding God's will and purpose in instituting marriage, as well as His principles for marital union and how these impact our relationship with Him. In this final part, we will look at how we must diligently strive to grow and mature together with our spouse.

God instituted marriage to perpetuate life, as well as to provide an environment in which a man and a woman can grow and mature together. Before marriage, we are primarily concerned about our own feelings and happiness; but after marriage, we learn to consider the feelings and needs of our spouse, in all matters major and trivial. Through mutual care and giving way, couples can grow together and sustain strong marriages.

> *"Marriages, like gardens, must be tended in order for beautiful blooms to grow."*

RECIPROCITY

But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife. There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world—how she may please her husband. *(1 Cor 7:33–34)*

According to the apostle Paul, before marriage, it is as though we are betrothed to the Lord. He will come one day to take us to dwell with Him in His eternal kingdom. Before His coming, we busy ourselves over His matters and show our love for His church. We take the initiative to support our weak brethren and participate in different ministries. In church, we do not behave like strangers who just pop in and out for visits, or guests who are quick to complain but do nothing to help. Instead, we step up quickly to resolve problems. These actions demonstrate our sense of responsibility towards our beloved Lord.

After marriage, although we should still be dedicated to our church duties, some of our time and energy will be channelled into our Christian duty of caring for our spouse and raising a God-fearing family. Paul noted that for the husband, "[H]e who is married cares

about the things of the world—how he may please *his* wife." Similarly, for the wife, "[S]he who is married cares about the things of the world—how she may please *her* husband." In short, marriage entails a mutual responsibility to love and please our spouse.

Marital problems arise when this principle is forgotten—when couples start pointing the finger at each other, accusing the other of not showing love. Very often, they have not asked whether they themselves have shown love. They fail to realize that reciprocity is key to a successful marriage.

The decision to begin a marital relationship must be based on mutual love. Of course, there may be some who enjoy the attention of courtship; they just want to be cherished without giving the same in return. Such one-sided relationships are not healthy, and will lead to unhappiness and suffering. A person who just wants to receive but not give love is not ready for any relationship, let alone marriage.

Marriages, like gardens, must be tended in order for beautiful blooms to grow. It is possible that, over time, initially loving relationships become one-sided. For example, some may take their spouses for granted, others may become more self-centered. They expect to receive their spouse's love, forgetting to reciprocate. Another scenario is when both parties harbor expectations of the other but neither is willing to take the first step. Disappointment and resentment over the other party's lack of care, concern and love will create a fissure in their relationship, which may widen into a gulf. Both parties must take the first step to rekindle the spark of marital love within their marriage.

SACRIFICE

Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.

(Eph 5:24–25)

Paul sets out the model relationship. Christ loved and gave His life for His church. This is the sacrificial love husbands must give their wives. On the wife's part, love entails submission to her husband: sacrificing her will. Such love should be shown not once but consistently, and in all areas. None of us is perfect but God wants us to diligently learn and manifest such a spirit of sacrifice and submission. If a husband and wife—two people who have become one body—cannot love each other, how can they love others?

> *"Meeting the high standard of divine love requires effort, but when we put it into action, we will appreciate its preciousness. Many waters cannot quench this type of love, because its flames are not ignited by passion or desire, but by the fire that is at the altar of God."*

Love is more than murmuring sweet nothings and giving gifts. While these are expressions of love, they do not capture its true significance. Love is more than feelings and passion. Once upon a time, your wife may have been the pretty young lady, or your husband, the handsome knight. But as time passes, when your young wife's cute chatter seems to have become your aging wife's nagging, or your young husband's admirable decisiveness seems to have become a cantankerous old man's stubbornness, will our love for our spouse remain unchanged?

As a couple, we would have experienced love at an emotional level in the early days, when there was much passion. But as we grow up and grow old together, we discover that love is also about sacrifice, and that we have much to learn in regards to bearing with each other and forgiving each other.

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

(1 Cor 13:4–8)

This is the essence of God's love. Our Lord Jesus wants us to love others as He has loved us. This type of love has to be learned. Meeting the high standard of divine love requires effort, but when we put it into action, we will appreciate its preciousness. Many waters cannot quench this type of love, because its flames are not ignited by passion or desire, but by the fire that is at the altar of God. Feelings can diminish, but God's love never fails.

Husbands and wives must understand God's will and establish their love upon Him. In this way, their love will grow over the years, and they will enjoy its sweetness (1 Cor 13:13).

GOD'S NATURAL ORDER

At creation, the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him" (Gen 2:18). Creation was a process transforming imperfection to perfection. This was especially true when God created a woman to help man. What would cause marriage, a good God-established institution, to turn bad? One reason is the failure of both parties to heed the word of God. For example, if one is egotistical and the other wants control, and both demand to have their own way, then there will be turbulent times ahead. A loving couple will develop into bitter enemies. In public, they may attack each other covertly; in private, they have no need to be subtle. Cold wars and snide comments are par for the course. To avoid such battles, we need to obey the word of God and return to the original state that God intended for man and woman. When order is reinstated, there will be peace and tranquillity.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. *(Eph 5:22–23)*

This is the order established by God. In the church, the Lord Jesus Christ is the head, and we, as members, are expected to submit to Him. At home, the husband is the head, and the wife is expected to submit to him. This is God's will. Some may think it unfair—since God has joined man and woman together, should there not be perfect equality? However, being the head in a relationship does not mean authority but responsibility. When problems arise, the husband is the one with the ultimate responsibility to deal with them. The wife's role is to be his helper (Gen 2:18): to share her opinions, and to offer advice and support, but not to undermine or overrule him.

SEASONED SPEECH

Arguments are inevitable in any marriage. They should be managed carefully so that they are not protracted, as this gives a foothold to the devil (Eph 4:26–27). Mishandled, they may spiral out of control, leading to physical violence or the call for divorce. In business, when partners disagree, they can go their separate ways; but not in a marriage.

There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword,
But the tongue of the wise promotes health. *(Prov 12:18)*

Words can either wound and cause death, or they can heal the soul. It is up to us. In our marriage, will our words stir up hurt or love? If we recall the days when we were deeply in love, we would think nothing of telling our loved one how much we adore them. But after our wedding, why do we find it so hard to say, "I love you," "thank you," and "you look so beautiful (or handsome)." And when things go wrong, why do we not say, "'I know it's been hard for you," or "sorry, it was my fault"? These are simple words, which are like honey to the hearer. We should not be grudging with kind words; they will only enhance our relationship.

> *"Words can either wound and cause death, or they can heal the soul. It is up to us. In our marriage, will our words stir up hurt or love?"*

It is easy to say hurtful words in the heat of the moment. As spouses who have lived together for a long time, we know which buttons to press. However, it is worth remembering that arguments can escalate to the point of no return. The lesson is that when we are angry, it is better to keep quiet. Angry words are often irrational, and the hearer will remember them. You cannot take your words back. Indeed, when we are angry, this is the time to exercise self-control.

More importantly, we must learn to forgive. When we are in the right, we are always tempted to gloat and penalize. But remember all the times that our spouse has forgiven us when we were in the wrong. It is now our turn to forgive. True love does not keep a record of wrongs.

CONCLUSION

The wedding ceremony is the beginning of a new life together with our beloved. For a beautiful wedding to develop into a wonderful marriage, we must have a new mindset. Life is no longer about expecting love, but about giving it. Before marriage, we would have been showered with love from our parents and relatives. After marriage, it is our turn to give love. In the past, we may not have had much responsibility, but now we must be prepared to shoulder great responsibilities. Previously, we may have expected things from others, or we gave conditionally, but now there is someone in our life to whom we should give willingly and unconditionally.

Many parents give to their children without conditions, even if it means tightening their belts. This type of love comes from maturity and has the power to touch the heart of others. When God created man, He gave us the gift of love, embedding it in our nature. We thus have the ability to dispense and to receive love—a balance that cannot be lacking in a couple's life. Let us rekindle the love we once have, and allow it to flourish unto maturity. As marriage is instituted by God, let no man separate.

> *"Some may think it unfair—since God has joined man and woman together, should there not be perfect equality? However, being the head in a relationship does not mean authority but responsibility."*

Call for Articles

Issue #91: Family Altar

Articles due
August 1, 2020

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.

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?

True Jesus Church

Articles of Faith

JESUS CHRIST

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 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.

TRUE JESUS 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.

WATER BAPTISM

Water baptism is the sacrament for the remission of sins for regeneration. The baptism must take place in natural living water, such as the river, sea, or spring. The Baptist, who already has had received baptism 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 downward.

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 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 with 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.

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.

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.

LORD'S SECOND COMING

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.