

MANNA

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We Almost Lost **Heather**
The Garden Within

A College Blob:

Youths Sharing Their Faith Through the Internet

MANNA

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Spiritual Discipline

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

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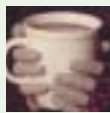
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Dear Reader,

The best way to enjoy a good read is with a cup of coffee in one hand and having the good fortune of finding a soft place to fall—or sit.

Now that you are comfortably settled and before you move on to the contents of this issue, allow me a couple of paragraphs to request your help.

Manna needs you to keep these pages filled! For those of you who enjoy expressing God's love on paper, we hope that you will take a closer look at our call for articles in the back of the magazine. We hope that readers around the world will submit articles and that our community of writers will continue to grow and diversify.

Recently, we've created a home for Manna on the web, and you can now read Manna articles online at www.mannamagazine.com. Please visit us, and any feedback or comments that you might have are always welcome!

Writing is a wonderful way to count our blessings. If only we did it more often, we would realize just how deep and how wide is the love of Christ. May God inspire you to share His grace with us.

THE EDITOR

Spiritual Discipline



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We Almost Lost Heather

Dave and Agnes Lo—Baldwin Park, California, USA

WORDS OF THE FATHER

My wife, Agnes, and I were involved in the preparation of the Hosanna Outreach services (English evangelical service), held in Irvine Church in Southern California last year. Our lives were smooth at that time. But on the morning of October 7, 2001, the day of the last outreach service in Irvine Church, our lives changed.

That morning, Agnes told me she had a very bad dream. In her dream, she saw Heather become suddenly ill and died. Needless to say, this bothered her immensely; however, I disregarded the dream as one of her maternal paranoia encounters.

Later, Agnes left the house with Heather's older sister, Amber, to go to

choir practice before the service while I waited for our nanny to come and take care of Heather.

Heather's Fever

At around eleven o'clock, I found Heather lying on the sofa and I checked up on her and discovered that she was running a fever at 102 degrees Fahrenheit. I immediately gave her some Children's Tylenol and thought the medicine should last until I came back from church around four or five o'clock.

I stayed with Heather for as long as I could to monitor her progress, and I gave the nanny instructions to keep tab on her temperature and to have her encourage

Heather to eat and drink whatever she liked or could stomach. And if Heather's fever continued she should call us.

At about one o'clock in the afternoon, I left for Irvine Church and told Agnes about Heather's fever and asked her to keep Heather in her prayers.

The evangelical service went smoothly that day. Agnes called home and checked on Heather's situation and everything seemed well. She went home around 4:30 p.m., and I left Irvine Church an hour later. Agnes called me to buy some take-out and told me that Heather's temperature went up to 102 degrees Fahrenheit again. I told her that I would be home soon.

As I drove to the hospital, I started to think about my faith and wondered if I had what it took to deal with the consequences.

Losing Our Daughter

After I bought dinner, Agnes called me again and said that Heather had lost consciousness. She called 911 for an ambulance to send Heather to the emergency room.

By that time, I was only a few minutes away from home. When I walked in the door, I saw Agnes on top of Heather—sobbing with the phone in her hand and trying to communicate with the 911 operator.

I thought Agnes was going to perform CPR on Heather but then the ambulance arrived. We called for Heather to respond, but her body remained motionless, and her eyes were rolled up as if she were dead.

I was shocked, traumatized, and at a loss of what to do next. I helplessly stood and watched the paramedics do their work. They first removed Heather's clothes and asked me to give them a warm wet towel. I ran back from the restroom with the towel to see what they were doing to my daughter.

I realized that they were trying everything to get her to respond and to cool down, but she still did not react and her eyes showed no signs of movement.

She was completely silent—not even a moan or a groan. The paramedics put an oxygen mask on her and tried to get her to respond. She did not move. I started sobbing silently because I remembered what Agnes told me that morning about her dream.

They put Heather on a stretcher and put her in the ambulance. The

paramedics said that Heather was still alive but she needed to be sent to the emergency ward. Agnes went with them, and I stayed behind with Amber to gather things that they needed for a possible hospital stay.

Calling for Help

I promised Agnes that I would contact the pastors in the area and ask for their prayers. I called a pastor who was here from Northern California to assist with the Hosanna Outreach services.

I then called our resident pastor. When I started talking to him, I could not hold it together any longer and started to cry out loud, because I just could not bear the possibility of losing Heather.

After that, I called a couple of friends and family members to ask for their prayers. I kept sobbing, thinking about what Agnes had said to me that morning. Every detail of her dream was coming true and I was losing control of myself.

When I gained my composure, I was thinking more clearly and decided to leave Amber with my sister, Mary, who lived close by. Then, I went straight to the emergency room of the hospital where they took Heather.

As I drove to the hospital, I started to think about my faith and wondered if I had what it took to deal with the consequences. I was so overwhelmed by this incident that I didn't even cry out to God for help. Why did I not think of turning to God for help? I realized how weak my faith was.

I began to understand that this experience was from God and realized that if God wanted to take Heather back, I should stop feeling helpless. I should be thankful for His mercy in bringing her to her heavenly home if that was His will.

But was this God's time? Was God allowing Satan to try our faith to see if we were able to stand? If God allowed this to happen, would the members' faith be shaken? I said to God, "May Your will be done."

When I arrived at the hospital and found Agnes and Heather in the emergency room, I saw Heather lying on the gurney with nothing but her diaper on, smiling at me as I approached.

It was then that I knew everything was going to be fine. Her time had not yet come! Thank God. I immediately felt the presence of members who prayed for my daughter, and I believe that the Lord heard their prayers.

Life is So Fragile

After the nurse checked on her, I heard Heather singing *This is My Father's World*. She sang it verbatim for about three quarters of the first stanza. I couldn't believe she was praising God and showing us about God's love and power over life.

Tears rolled down my eyes while I listened to this three-year-old sing—it was amazing how God was letting this little girl experience something that I wasn't experiencing. When she finished, I asked her how she knew that hymn: "Did mommy sing it to you earlier?" She said, "No." I later confirmed it with Agnes.

Life is so fragile. We have learned that we should not take things for granted. At times like these, Agnes and I feel that nothing else matters because Heather is our beloved child, for whom we would

sacrifice our lives to save.

As I held Heather, I asked God why He allowed this to happen. What did He want me to learn from this? I immediately heard a voice in my heart saying, “If you love Heather this much, can you love my sheep just as much?” I was stunned. I couldn’t stop the tears from rolling down my cheeks. I believe this is a question we all need to ask ourselves from time to time—to keep ourselves humble.

The Lord instructed us to love our neighbors as ourselves, but our practices are so far from God’s standard. Do we really love others as ourselves? Until we can love someone whom we can see, how can we say that we love the Lord Jesus whom we cannot see?

I truly thank God for everyone’s prayers and the love they showed Heather and my family. We are deeply touched by the love of the family of believers in Christ Jesus.



I encouraged myself that God would take care of Heather because we were doing sacred work in church.

WORDS OF THE MOTHER

A Disturbing Dream

The night before the last Hosanna Outreach service in Irvine Church, I had a very disturbing dream. In my dream, Heather, our second child, looked at me with dimming eyes and told me she was losing her sight. I didn’t respond to her right away and very soon after she was gone.

I cried to God and asked why Heather’s life was taken. All of a sudden, I woke up and saw Heather sleeping safely next to me. I held her close to me and thanked God that it was only a bad dream.

The next morning, I told Dave about the dream and tried to get it out of my mind. I then went to Irvine Church for the choir practice. Around noon, Dave called and told me that Heather was running a fever. I usually would not worry too much, but because of the bad dream the night before, I became very concerned.

Although we had arranged a nanny to babysit Heather while we were at church, I still wanted to go home to take care of her. However, since we had invited our friends to the service, I encouraged myself that God would take care of Heather because we were doing sacred work in church.

Feeling Better

After our friends left the service, I went home to check on Heather’s condition. I arrived home around 5:40 p.m.; the nanny told me that Heather’s temperature had risen again.

I checked her temperature and it was close to 102 degrees Fahrenheit. I thought Dave had given her Motrin, which would have lasted six hours (but later I found out he had given her Children’s Tylenol, which lasted for four hours). Our girls have managed higher temperatures before, so I wasn’t too anxious.

After the nanny left and Dave was on the way home, I knelt down to pray for Heather and I was filled with the Holy Spirit in that prayer. Afterwards, I decided to play some hymns for her. She rested on the sofa in the family room, while I was in the piano room next to it.

While I was singing and playing the piano, I heard Heather telling her older sister, Amber, that she was feeling better already. I felt comforted. Amber gave her some soft candy, and they were talking and laughing. After a few hymns, I thought I should sing some hymns for Heather, so I brought my hymnbook and sat on the floor facing her.

A Turn for the Worse

As I sang the second verse, Heather was still smiling at me. Then suddenly, she stopped smiling and became very serious. She started to jerk as though something had hit her nerve, and she looked dazed.

I called her name but it seemed like she did not hear my voice. Her eyes were fixed on something distant. I tried to open her mouth to remove the candy she was chewing on, but she wouldn’t cooperate and her teeth were clenched so tight I couldn’t pry them apart.

It sounded like she needed to regurgitate, so I quickly picked her up, took her to the bathroom, and leaned her face towards the toilet bowl. By this time her body was soft like jelly.

Suddenly, she started jerking again, and images of my dream flashed across my mind. The look on her face was like the images in my dream. I kept calling out to God and begged for His help because I was not ready to accept the fact that Heather would be taken away or would become paralyzed.

I cried to God not to take Heather away from me. I looked at her lifeless body and kept saying, "No! No!" I simply could not believe my nightmare was coming true and even doubted if God was there for me.

I tried calling a sister to pray for Heather, but she had not returned home

I noticed that her eyes and mouth twitched slightly and responded when I spoke to her.

Shortly after, the ambulance came and the paramedics began administering oxygen. When they took her temperature, it had already risen to 105 degrees Fahrenheit. In the ambulance, I gazed at her tiny body laying on the huge stretcher—holding onto the teddy bear the paramedics gave her, and all I could think of was my child's life and well-being.

While all this was going on, Dave was contacting church members and asking for urgent prayers. One of the calls was to the Garden Grove Church. A USGA meeting was taking place, and all the participants stopped the meeting to pray for Heather. I was deeply moved and thankful for their love.

not know how to deal with the situation effectively and safely. Worse, I might have aggravated Heather's condition.

I learned a lot from this incident. I truly experienced that God is the giver of life and that spiritual warfare is also inevitable as we learn to serve the Lord. I also learned that we should never take our children's lives for granted but to cherish every moment with them. Now, seeing Heather being her usual self means more than anything in the world to me.

May all the glory be given unto God.★

I truly experienced that God is the giver of life and that spiritual warfare is also inevitable as we learn to serve the Lord.

from church. I held Heather's lifeless body and called 911. In my panic, I asked the 911 operator to send some help as my lips uttered, "God please help us!"

She asked me whether Heather was still breathing, and I said I didn't know if she was still alive. I could not feel her heartbeat—just my own. The 911 operator told me not to hold her but to lay her down, undress her, and put her on her side.

She suggested that I should calm down and continue to talk to Heather because she might still hear my voice and that I shouldn't let her sense my fear. I calmed myself down, touched Heather's body and told her that I love her.

God is the Giver of Life

In the emergency room, the doctor diagnosed Heather with a viral throat infection, which caused the sudden high fever and resulted in the febrile seizure. After some medicine and observation, Heather was sent home to recover.

Later, I discussed with a doctor friend about Heather's symptoms and was told that it is not rare for children under five years of age to have febrile seizures caused by sudden spikes in body temperature.

Looking back, I realized that it was my negligence that caused me to lose Heather in my dream. If not for the instructions of the 911 operator, I would



My Christian Journey

Thomas Erickson—Coos Bay, Oregon, USA

AN UNHAPPY PAST

Many years ago, in 1968, I made a commitment to Christ. I was truly zealous for the Lord but I had no knowledge of the Truth. Anything I tried to accomplish for Him came to no avail. I spent many years trying to tell others about Jesus, but it was very frustrating to me.

Even though I made a commitment to Christ, I still had a lot of problems. I was able to stop smoking, drinking, and using foul language, but I was unable to rid myself of the darkness that was in my soul. Discouraged and despondent, I entered into a period of depression.

If somebody was to ask me what it felt like, the only way I could describe it is the feeling of being at the bottom of a hole without any place to escape. I could

not make rational decisions, and accepting responsibilities became a monumental struggle. I was desperate.

At the time, I was also married with four children, but my marriage was a shipwreck.

A Second Chance

I remarried a little over eleven years ago, but both my wife and I came with extra baggage from our past. About five years into the marriage, we determined that we must seek after the Lord.

We started to attend church. We realized that we really didn't know each other, so we took three days off work to spend time with one another, to read the Bible, and to learn how to communicate

with each other.

We also set some goals, one of which was praying together every morning. This may be common with some people, but it wasn't common to me or my circle of friends. Another goal was to read God's words everyday.

My wife worked the afternoon shifts from 12 p.m. to 6 p.m., and I worked night shifts from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. She would wake me up in the morning, and we would have devotions. After she left for work, I'd have nothing to do, so I began to spend my afternoons in prayer.

As we kept up our devotions and prayer, we felt the Lord moving upon us and instilling in us a desire for a closer relationship with Him. He slowly began

to show us our need to be baptized in Jesus' name.

This was not acceptable to the church I was attending at the time. So we kept seeking God—praying to Him for His guidance. While we were seeking God, I became sick and unable to work a five-day week.

Dealing with Sickness

I knew that something was drastically wrong with my body. I went to a specialist and he discovered that I had bladder cancer.

We went through minor and major surgeries, and I entered a new phase in my life with a tolerance for pain I never had experienced before. I was unable to take the prescribed medication, so I cut the dosage down as much as I could.

During this period, the most painful time was at night—after my wife, Willa, had gone to bed and I was alone. I continued to draw nearer to God and I felt a if His Spirit embraced me in my suffering. His grace truly is sufficient for us.

As time passed and I healed, that closeness I felt with God suddenly disappeared. I almost wanted my cancer back so that I could regain that closeness. But through my wife's and my reading of the Bible and praying for our children, our relationship with our children improved.

Dealing with Loss

On occasion, I tried to talk to my youngest son, even though he didn't have a desire to communicate. One day, Willa and I felt impelled to intercede for him in prayer. At the time, I had not received the fullness of the Holy Spirit, so we prayed for our son but didn't receive

When we seek God and worship Him, we have to do so with everything within us. We must walk in His love, be obedient to His word, and be in contact with His wisdom and apply it in our lives.

any specific direction. On September 8, 1999, I received a phone call that my son had committed suicide.

It is so true that we do reap what we sow. When we are young and have our life ahead of us, we have a great opportunity to be an example to our family. We also have a great opportunity to serve God and affect our neighbors.

When we seek God and worship Him, we have to do so with everything within us. We must walk in His love, be obedient to His word, and be in contact with His wisdom and apply it in our lives. But I had not yet reached that point of my life when my son died.

COMING HOME TO GOD'S TRUE CHURCH

After this incident, my family rejected us, but we kept seeking God. We knew that there must be more to serving God than what we were experiencing. This went on for a period of time, and we began to attend another church.

I thought this was the one: "Finally, I'm going to find fulfillment and peace." And yet, by what His words declared and the way He was filling my heart, I knew that this church was not taking us where we wanted to go.

I began to search His words diligently and used the Internet to look for more knowledge concerning the Truth. I searched hundreds of websites and read many doctrinal statements from different churches, but I failed to find what I needed.

One day, a woman at our church lent us a book. That book had a description of

many churches, including the True Jesus Church. I liked what this church had to say. I was so desperate that I emailed the General Assembly of the United States (USGA).

I knew that they were very busy, but I wanted an immediate answer. I went through the list of email addresses and found one for Southern California, but I should have emailed the one for Northern California, which was closer to where I was living.

I got a response within a couple of days. This person invited me to the True Jesus Church. The thing that struck me so profoundly was what he wrote: "I will be your servant guide." I thought to myself, "This must be a true Christian." They referred me to the local church at Pacifica, California.

A brother emailed me and invited me down for the church's spiritual convocation. I was so excited. I was so hungry. I was baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. I came and I found peace.

Even though the Spirit came upon me in times past, it was never as powerful as it was on the day that I began speaking in a new tongue as I came out of the water. I had found hope for my children because the great Comforter, who abides within me and intercedes for me, is also dealing with their hearts as I pray.

I've learned not to be selfish but to lay down my life. I am older. I don't consider myself old yet. I don't know how much time I have left, but with what strength that I have, I give it to the

Lord. There is no greater calling, no greater blessing, than to serve our Lord. Seek God. Serve Him with all your heart. Be an example. Walk in purity.

in preaching the gospel. But I've changed.

The seminar has been the greatest experience of my life. What I've gained and experienced I will never forget. I recognize the need for change in my home.

There is no greater calling, no greater blessing, than to serve our Lord. Seek God. Serve Him with all your heart. Be an example. Walk in purity.

FELLOWSHIP IN GOD'S WORD

The summer of 2002, I had the wonderful opportunity to attend the National Youth Theological Seminar (NYTS) at Pacifica Church. There are a couple of things that I learned there.

The first thing I realized, after a couple of days, was that I was no longer a teenager and that I could only do what was within my capabilities. I also learned and gained a new determination to pray and to seek God.

During those two weeks, there was a closeness and a fellowship that I had never experienced before. When we prayed for the fullness of the Holy Spirit, I knew that He heard our requests and our prayers. I knew that He was preparing us for something.

Willa and I live in Coos Bay, Oregon, in an RV park. The RV park in Coos Bay is a field that is ripe and ready for harvest. I know that I have neither the strength nor the courage to confront the challenges of presenting the gospel to my neighbors. This has caused me to cry out to Him for the fullness of His spirit, to enable me to proclaim His Word.

I also recognize where that change must begin—with myself: the way I conduct myself, the boldness with which I would proclaim His Word, and the perseverance to swim against the tide.

If you are reading this, I ask that you pray for God's holy work in Coos Bay. We have one other truth seeker who comes over to study the Bible and listen to sermon tapes with us.

Jesus came to speak to them...all authority has been given to me in heaven and earth. Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all things that I command you. And I'll be with you till the end of the age. (Mt 28:18)

I can no longer take God's words lightly, nor can I take any shortcut in prayer or water down the gospel. We must speak the truth. Amen. ★

A Call to Action

Before I attended the NYTS, my wife, who is a truth seeker, was bolder than I



One More Bite

“So I commend the enjoyment of life, because nothing is better for a man under the sun than to eat and drink and be glad. Then joy will accompany him in his work all the days of the life God has given him under the sun” (Eccl 8:15).

This is the wisdom of life from King Solomon.

THE JOY OF EATING

The first day I volunteered at the hospital, I was assigned to help patients with swallowing disorders in the dining room. Although I had already learned that brain-damaged people could have swallowing disorders, I was truly shocked by the actual sight of these patients.

Sitting around a dining room table, I observed how four stroke patients tried extremely hard to eat their specially prepared food—all with shaky hands. Because of their physical limitations, none of the patients could eat their food without splattering it all over the dining

room table, their clothes, and their faces.

Some of the patients ate so fast they began to choke; others would vomit what they had just eaten. However, none of the patients I saw gave up their heart to eat.

Observing their satisfied faces, it seemed as if they were enjoying the most delicious meal of their life. However, the irony of the situation was that their dishes were nothing more than low-fat, low-salt, and low-sugar mashed food—food without flavor or taste to most people.

But I saw their eager hearts burst forth with these messages: “Let me eat more! One more bite and my heart will be fully satisfied” and “Being able to eat again is my greatest pleasure.”

Watching them, I suddenly realized how being able to eat, drink, and be glad are truly great blessings from the Lord. I used to think “eating and drinking” were mere reflexes.

To these patients, however, eating was much more than a reflex—it was a joy.

Relearning How to Eat

To truly understand their situation, we need to understand how these patients used to eat. Before attempting to eat solid food, these patients underwent a NPO (nothing pass oral cavity) period, during which they neither drank nor ate solid food.

The patients could only use a tube to feed themselves. Through the tubes, they would see how the “food” was fed into their stomachs. In order to eat safely, these patients had to relearn how to eat; otherwise, they could choke or become infected with life-threatening pneumonia.

Being able to eat and drink are privileges we often take for granted. Unlike these patients, most of us have never undergone the whole arduous process of relearning how to eat, so we often don't realize that our ability to eat and drink is a blessing.

For these stroke patients, eating and drinking were a matter of life and death, which was why they cherished every opportunity they had to eat. In fact, they cherished their opportunities to the point that they no longer seemed to care about how tasteless their food was or how undignified they appeared to others as they splattered food everywhere.

“What is this bread of life I am seeking?” “What is this water of life I am so desperately thirsting for?” I probed the depths of my heart for the answer to why I had become so discontented with my life.

SPIRITUAL DISORDER

Through this experience, I learned invaluable life lessons: we must each treasure our God-given ability to eat, drink, and be glad; we must each

treasure the opportunities God has given to us.

While we may not suffer any physical affliction that would prevent us from eating, drinking, and being glad, we may be encumbered with spiritual infirmities that hinder us from eating, drinking, and being glad in the Lord.

There was a particular period in my life when I thought I would never again find peace or contentment within my spirit. Though I would often participate in church services and activities, my heart and spirit felt dead. My fellowship with other church members brought more discouragement than encouragement.

Sadly, I think many of us struggle with these same difficulties. Like myself, you too may have experienced a time when you found it difficult to enjoy the Bible's teachings. Even now, you may not know how practicing God's words can bring a lasting joy and peace to your heart.

And I came to realize that my faith had not been strengthened, transformed, or refined by my trials. Rather, it seemed to exhibit symptoms comparable to a spiritual swallowing disorder: the inability to open my heart to accept God's blessings—to eat and drink from His table and cup.

God's words no longer brought the joy it should have brought. I could no longer find fulfillment within the Lord or within my life.

Losing My Way

Throughout those dark years of my life, I tried very hard to pursue closeness with God on my own terms; however, the more I tried the more frustrated I became. I reached a point where my whole life was clouded by doubt and uncertainty. Spiritually, I felt as if I was mired in a quicksand—slowly sinking with every move.

I was lost in a “big way” and did not have enough strength or heart to return and rest upon God (Isa 30:15). I felt extremely burned out. I was tired, so tired, and so afraid of what trials and difficulties lay ahead of me that I felt paralyzed. I can't fully express the burden I felt in my heart during that period of my life.

What I do remember is that I struggled with all my might to practice God's teachings. Yet, the more I struggled, the more I felt my closeness to God slip away. Piece-by-piece, I lost my faith, my hope, and, eventually, my love.

Then, I saw these stroke patients. Sitting there in the hospital, I was deeply moved by their spirit to take one more bite out of life.

As I observed more intently, my heart slowly opened, and I began to hear a tender voice in my heart saying, “Try to eat the bread of life. Try to drink the water of life. Try to let your mind be satisfied.”

Hearing this message, I kept wondering, “What is this bread of life I am seeking?” “What is this water of life I am so desperately thirsting for?” I probed the depths of my heart for the answer to why I had become so discontented with my life.

“THIS IS THE WAY; WALK IN IT”

And so I tried to remember the height from which I had fallen—to find the place where I first lost my faith. I poured over the meanings of my trials and pondered the spiritual lessons to be learned. Suddenly, a Bible verse flashed across my mind:

Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teacher will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. Whenever you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying “This is the way; walk in it.” (Isa 30:20-21)

As these verses came to me, God’s peace, which surpasses all understanding, rushed into my heart. Before, I had always tried to think of my trials as “blessings” from God; however, in my heart, I did not accept them as such.

Rationally, I would attempt to force myself to swallow my pain; yet, emotionally, I could not take even one more bite. Through His words in Isaiah 30:20-21, God allowed me to understand that all my trials, all my doubts, and all my hardships were not only “the bread of adversity and water of affliction” but also the very bread and water of life themselves.

The bread and water of life, in whatever form, are given by the Lord’s hand; we must stop and consider the Lord’s guidance and providence in the full spectrum of its colors.

Although the taste of the bread of adversity and water of affliction is bitter, experience has taught me to reflect more deeply on the meaning of life’s trials. People say, “Hindsight is 20/20.” And with hindsight, I see how God has led me

throughout my difficulties—one step at a time.

Though the price of keeping God’s words seemed too high a price to pay at the time, my trials have revealed to me how God freely mended my wounded heart—one stitch at a time. And though my mind was filled with sorrows, the path I have traveled has shown me God’s goodness as I walk through the valley of the shadow of death (Ps 23:4).

One More Bite

So God’s voice encourages us, saying, “Whenever you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying ‘This is the way; walk in it’” (Isaiah 30:21). Now, more than ever, I can grasp the height, depth, width, and breadth of God’s love and encouragement in my life (Eph 3:18).

The bread and water of life, in whatever form, are given by the Lord’s hand; we must stop and consider the Lord’s guidance and providence in the full spectrum of its colors.

Reflecting on my past, I often wonder why I hesitated to eat God’s bread of adversity. Why did I shrink away from drinking the water of God’s affliction? Why did I let my trials place my life on hold? And why did I let my tribulations paralyze my faith?

The answer to all my questions may seem obvious: nobody likes to eat adversity or drink affliction. But then we realize that God’s answer is not always obvious. When I finally received God’s answer to the questions in my life, I was finally able to submit my whole being over to God.

I stretched out my hand. I opened my mouth wide. I realized that I could no

longer reject the bread and water of life given by God, so I chose to let go of my own will and submit to God’s.

I decided I would take one more bite. And this time, the “bread of adversity” and “water of affliction” did not taste quite as bitter. Instead, I regained my strength and rejoiced in the Lord and in my life. And so I thought to myself, “So this is how we eat, drink, and be glad!”

I hope my experience in life can serve to encourage you in your own life experience. Let us pray that the Lord continues to guide us and give us the answers to our deepest questions, whether in times of faith or doubt, no matter the good or evil days that lay ahead of us. Amen. ★



The Woman and the Pharisee

AWS—Garden Grove, California, USA

In the incident recorded in Luke 7:36-50, a woman of questionable background comes to the house of a Pharisee, where Jesus has been invited to eat, and anoints His feet with fragrant oil. Contrary to what people expect, the ill-reputed woman gains Jesus' approval, but the esteemed Pharisee receives a reprimand from Jesus and a lecture on love and forgiveness.

What can we learn from this woman who, of all people, found the acceptance of God?

RECOGNIZE OUR OWN SINS **The Woman Recognized Her Sin**

In this passage, this woman is referred to as a “sinner” twice, and Jesus Himself states that she has many sins. When the Bible refers to a woman as a sinner, she is probably a prostitute or an adulteress.

The Pharisees shunned women like her, because they did not associate with sinners. In fact, the word Pharisee means “separated one.” The scribes and Pharisees even criticized Jesus for eating with sinners (Mk 2:16-17).

We can infer from these facts that this woman came to the Pharisee's house as an unwanted guest. Why did this woman brave the Pharisee's scorn and come to his home uninvited? Because she had something of utmost importance to do—to seek Jesus' acceptance and forgiveness.

She was a sinner. She knew it, and so did everyone else. She probably heard about the “Son of Man” who had “power on earth to forgive sins,” who befriended tax collectors, touched lepers, and healed the sick. Perhaps she thought there would be some way to erase her tainted past and for her to live a new life.

So she came to Jesus, weeping at His feet for her sins, wiping His feet with her hair, and anointing His feet with oil.

The Pharisee Did Not

When the Pharisee saw this, he thought to himself, “If this man were a prophet,

He would know what kind of woman was touching him.” It's interesting how the Pharisee immediately focused on this woman's sin, rather than the beautiful act that she was performing on Jesus. All he could think was, “This woman is a sinner. She shouldn't be touching Jesus.”

But was the Pharisee so blameless himself? Despite their respected positions in society, Jesus called the Pharisees “whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are all full of dead men's bones and uncleanness” (Mt 23:27).

On the outside, they unflinchingly observed all the Mosaic laws, but on the inside, they were full of hypocrisy, pride, and evil. Jesus revealed their pretense for what it was—they were not holy at all, but in fact evil, because their hearts were not right with God.

In God's eyes, the Pharisees were also sinners. The only difference between the woman and the Pharisee was that the woman's sin was visible, while the Pharisee's sin was not. But the woman differed from the Pharisee in that she recognized her sin and her need for forgiveness, while the Pharisee was blind

to his own sin and could only focus on the sin of others.

Examine Ourselves and Follow Jesus

This is something that we can all learn from this woman: to recognize our sin and our need for forgiveness. Most of the time, though, we are more like the Pharisee—blind to our faults but having perfect vision with regard to the faults of others.

As husbands or wives, we lament about how our spouse does not understand us and communicate with us. As workers, we notice the colleague who arrives to work late and sneaks out early. As church members, we notice the brother who skips Sabbath or the sister who tiptoes in late. In our hearts, we might even secretly think, “Thank God I’m not like that.”

If we find ourselves with this kind of attitude, we should realize that we’re treading on dangerous ground. The natural result of not recognizing our sin is that we begin to think that we’re better than we really are, and we start to despise others.

So what must we do to become more like this woman and less like the Pharisee?

The first thing we must do is to examine ourselves constantly. Most of us are pretty careful about our appearance; we notice if we get a spot on our face, a mole on our arm, or a gray hair. We want to get rid of anything that looks unsightly or ugly.

If only we were as careful about our character as we are with our physical appearance! If we put in the same amount of effort in self-examination as we do on our physical appearance, we would be able to catch our “character defects” early on and do something

We might say, “Who cares what people think?” but in our heart, we do care. Nobody wants to be shunned or looked at strangely; everyone wants to be accepted and valued.

about them.

The second thing we must do is to focus on ourselves and on improving our relationship with God, rather than focusing on others. We all tend to get sidetracked by the people around us; even the apostle Peter had the same problem.

During their last conversation together, Jesus told Peter how he would die for the Lord and commanded him, “Follow Me.” Then Peter, seeing “the disciple whom Jesus loved” following them, said to Jesus, “But Lord, what about this man?” Jesus said to him, “If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me” (Jn 21:20-22).

We also tend to ask the same questions: “Lord, what about this brother that’s not following your commands?” “What about that sister who is living a sinful life?” But Jesus tells us, “What is that to you? You follow Me.” We don’t have to worry about what the people around us are doing (or not doing). Our first and foremost responsibility is to follow Jesus.

SEEK GOD’S ACCEPTANCE

During Jesus’ ministry, many people sought Jesus to grant them a “boon”—food, healing, exorcism, etc. But this woman was one of the few who asked Him for forgiveness. She was willing to enter a Pharisee’s house uninvited and face his disapproval (and probably the other guests’ as well)—all to gain Jesus’ acceptance.

In contrast, the Pharisees’ goal was to seek praise from man. Jesus said:

But all their works they do to be seen by men... Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. (Mt 23:4-7, 14)

To a certain degree, we all struggle between striving to gain the acceptance of God and striving to gain the acceptance of man. We might say, “Who cares what people think?” but in our heart, we do care. Nobody wants to be shunned or looked at strangely; everyone wants to be accepted and valued.

Much of society is driven by “what people think.” But as children of God, we should constantly seek the acceptance and approval of God in everything that we do. We need to stop looking at others and start looking at God instead.

The Pharisees fell into the dangerous trap of false humility and used this to gain the praise of man. This is something that we need to be careful of. Some of us may have received certain responsibilities in church, whether we are religious education teachers, sermon deliverers, or holy work coordinators.

Sometimes we will garner the praise of others through our work. The dangerous thing is when we start to do the work not for God’s acceptance or His glory but for the praise of man. This is something that only we know deep in our hearts—no one else except God knows the real motivation behind why we do certain things.

We need to ask God continually to

renew our hearts so that we are truly serving Him for His glory and His acceptance. This is not something we can change from the outside; it's something that we need to change from the inside, from our hearts. And this isn't something that we have the power to do ourselves; we need to ask God to change our hearts.

That is why King David constantly prayed, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Ps 51:10). We need to ask God to create the desire within us to live for His approval.

God knows that there is room enough in our heart for only one "most precious thing." If it's not Jesus, then it's something else.

OFFER OUR MOST PRECIOUS THING TO JESUS

This woman brought with her "an alabaster flask of fragrant oil" to anoint Jesus. Most likely, the oil was spikenard, a type of very costly perfume. Spikenard was usually imported from India in alabaster boxes (Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, p. 1009). A flask of spikenard could cost up to a year's worth of wages (Jn 12:5).

In those days, when special guests arrived, their host would sometimes anoint their head with oil. What was remarkable about this woman's action was that she used this precious oil not on Jesus' head, but on His feet. Not only did she humble herself by washing Jesus' feet, she used her most prized possessions—her hair and her precious oil—to wipe and anoint His feet, the most humble part of His body.

In contrast, the Pharisee did not even

offer Jesus the most basic hospitality (Lk 7:44-46): no water for His feet, no kiss, and no oil for His head. By that time, opposition from the scribes and Pharisees had grown, and the Pharisee's "motive may have been to entrap Jesus rather than to learn from Him" (NIV Study Bible, p. 1550).

What about us? Jesus gave us His most precious thing—His life in atonement for our sin. Have we in turn given Him the most precious thing in our lives, or have we left Him by the wayside, not extending to Him even a welcome into our lives?

We all need to ask ourselves, what is the most precious thing in our lives? Money, material possessions, time, plans for the future, or our desires?

It's not necessarily that these things are bad in themselves, but when they begin to take the place of God in our hearts and in our lives, they hinder our walk with God. God knows that there is room enough in our heart for only one "most precious thing." If it's not Jesus, then it's something else.

That's why Jesus said that we cannot serve both God and mammon (money). In the same vein, we cannot serve both God and something else—our plans, our desires, our relationships, or our possessions.

Jesus tells us the secret of life, the true meaning of life: "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and

the gospel's sake will save it" (Mk 8:35). In essence, we need to give up our lives to Jesus and to live for Him. This is the secret to gaining eternal life. If we live our lives for Jesus now, we will receive eternal life in return.

That's one good investment.

LOVE MUCH

Jesus describes an interesting phenomenon at the end of this incident, "Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little" (Luke 7:47). This woman loved much, and because of this God forgave her many sins.

But those whose sins have been forgiven little, in turn, love little. Those who realize the greatness of their sins are more capable of loving Jesus in return. But those who do not feel like they have many sins to forgive find it hard to love Jesus (and the people around them).

It's easy to become self-righteous and look down on others who are struggling with sin when we believe that we observe His commandments. But it's important that we have not only the outward actions but also the inner heart of love.

In order to achieve this, we can learn from this woman's virtues. Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you. Go in peace" (Lk 7:50).

Today, we, too, will be saved if we also recognize our sin, seek God's approval, and offer to Him our best. May our Lord Jesus fill us with His Holy Spirit so that we can finish this heavenly race victoriously. May all the praise and glory be unto Jesus' name. ★

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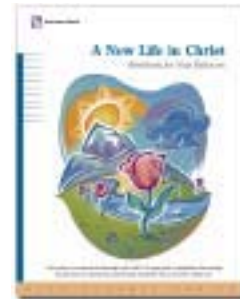
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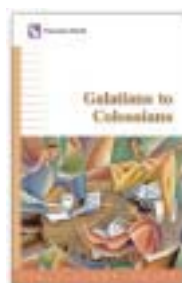
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Have you run into questions you couldn't answer when you tried to share the gospel? Maybe you're still skeptical of the Christian faith and have many questions. Q&A on the Basic Belief is a handy resource that gives concise and to-the-point answers to the most frequently asked questions about basic truths.

Spiritual Discipline

The blessing of a new year often means another opportunity to make new resolutions. Have you thought about your spiritual goals for this year? The older we get, the harder it is to change our habits. It is no wonder that the Lord Jesus encouraged us to become like little children again—and this takes spiritual discipline.

Spiritual discipline suggests a constant shaping and molding of one's faith. It is also the expression of our obedience to follow God's commands, which is a struggle we all constantly face. If our belief in Christ Jesus is not firmly rooted in His truth, then our lifestyle will reflect our old habits and our misconceptions.

With the new year comes a gentle reminder for us to renew the wellspring of our hearts. We hope the following articles will give you a little push in God's direction.





The Garden Within

There is a marked difference between a garden and a wild field.

A garden is someone's treasured corner. It comes complete with oak benches, man-made fishponds, and three-inch Chinese wooden bridges. Someone cares for it and takes delight when its grass grows a deeper shade of green and when its flowers blossom in thriving abundance. It is loved.

A wild field is left to the harsh realities of nature. Its plants grow to unkempt lengths, and its soil is parched and dying. Yet somehow, it finds the endurance to run for miles and miles free of care—often impinging on someone else's garden and silently choking their foliage from underground.

When we come to believe in Jesus and confess Him to be the guardian of our soul we find ourselves knocking on

His door. This door that we walk through leads to a beautiful garden, which Christ Himself has prepared on our behalf.

Deep in our heart dwells the garden of God. He has plans for it to bear fruit, and He hopes that it will leave the lingering fragrance of His presence. He longs to fill it with His Holy Spirit—the life and soul of this garden.

ENCLOSED WITH HIS WORD

Just as a garden is vulnerable to the tempest of seasons, so is our faith susceptible to doubts and the cruel nature of this society. Everyday we are faced with temptations and the prospect of sin. Guarding it has never been more intricate. Therefore, we must enclose our spiritual garden—to protect and to separate ourselves from the world.

To be enclosed is to put up a partition

Dig deep. How long has it been since you've looked in on your garden? How long ago since you really set aside some time with God?

to keep out the influences of this world. It is to surround ourselves on all sides with the words of God. “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Ps 119:11).

With each word of God hidden and added to our heart, we gradually build a strong and fortified wall. The stronger this wall, the clearer we are able to see that we are distinct and separate from this world.

Therefore, we need to build the walls of our spiritual garden with the best materials, so that, when tested, our faith shall stand.

Some Christians read Chicken Soup more than they read the Bible. Others enjoy dissertations on theology and supplementing God’s words with philosophy. Some of these are external tools to help us and some will lead us further away from the truth—we must remember that only the Bible has the complete truth. It is the best material to support our garden. If we desire to seek after God, we need to turn back to His words as the foundation of our faith.

It is important that we compare what we have learned with the Bible’s teachings.

These [the Bereans] were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. (Acts 17:11)

There is a difference between a genuine Christian and one that is

lackadaisical. The former diligently holds on to the words of God, but the latter knows only to acknowledge that the Bible is important. We need to be careful and discerning of the influences of other teachings, because these will affect our relationship with God.

SHUT UP IN PRAYER

Hardly any gardener keeps his garden open for constant display. There will be times when he needs to close the garden to water the plants, feed the soil, and trim the branches. He doesn’t do it with many people in his way; rather, he does it when all the visitors have gone home and he is alone.

The pursuit of spiritual discipline is likened to tending a garden. The more often we prune and water, the more effective its results. Dig deep. How long has it been since you’ve looked in on your garden? How long ago since you really set aside some time with God?

The more time that elapses between each encounter, the more chance the world will have its way with you. You might’ve been given a garden, but who could tell the difference from a wild field?

What I’ve come to realize is that even though we may be entrusted with His garden and appointed as gardeners, we don’t always nurture and care for it as we should—we may serve God faithfully for many years, but it doesn’t mean that we are cultivating God’s garden.

That is why some of us end up bitter and disillusioned about our purpose as a Christian. We forget why we do what we

do, and when the Lord Jesus passes by our garden and wants to come in, we are embarrassed to open the door.

Our First Love

We are a spring shut up, but more than that—we are a spring shut up in prayer. Praying is spending time with God. This is our time away from this world. And the only way to have deep communion with Him is through His Holy Spirit.

We cannot do without the spirit’s guidance, and we cannot live without His breath. Every relationship requires something to keep it going. Our intimacy with the Lord Jesus requires the Holy Spirit, for it is the essence of our friendship with Him.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. (Jn 14:26)

It is through prayer that we are able to find our first love deep within our garden. Jesus said the Holy Spirit would help us remember all things—it would help us remember our first love.

Our first love is Jesus Christ Himself, someone we cannot do without. Therefore, we must “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17).

But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly (Mt 6:6)

Go on. Close that door behind you today. Shut up this garden of yours for a little while and give God your full attention.

SEALED TO ONE MASTER

Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity. (2 Tim 2:19)

Things that are sealed are meant for only one owner, and no one else can claim ownership. When Jesus died for us and shed His blood on the cross, He placed a seal over our heart. He is our owner and we belong to Him.

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to one and despise the other... (Mt 6:24)

Likewise, our hearts cannot contain more than one master.

Being the children of this age and society, it would be a lie to say that, somewhere in this lifetime, we have not been torn between our love for God and our love for the world. It is because we continue to serve two opposing masters that we find conflict within our spirituality.

We must learn to be prudent gardeners, so that our heavenly master will be pleased. We must bear the responsibility of the garden God has entrusted to us. How can a garden thrive when the gardener cannot tell the difference between a flower and a weed? The more attracted we are to the world, the harder it will be for us to separate flowers from weeds.

A Garden Ready for Display

The most important responsibility God

gave us was to nurture our garden. If we cannot look after our own heart—to discipline our mind and spirit—how can we be entrusted with the greater things of God?

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special

When our garden is ready for display, we have a commission to go out and praise God, and wherever we go, our garden will display the seal of our master, the Lord Jesus Christ.

people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. (1 Pet 2:9)

God does not tell us how special we are to make us feel good. He tells us to let us know that with His love comes the commission to “proclaim the praises of Him who called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

When our garden is ready for display, we have a commission to go out and praise God, and wherever we go, our garden will display the seal of our master, the Lord Jesus Christ. And this seal will bear no resemblance to worldly knowledge or accomplishments or status in society.

This seal will bear the love of Christ expressed in compassion, in humility, and in the virtues of the spirit:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. (Gal 5:22-25)

And everywhere we go, this is the

seal that will proclaim the praises of God.

God spiritually gauges us; no one can tell us if we've reached His standards. We can only strive for perfection with the tools He entrusted us—with His spirit and His truth (Jn 4:24). This is what spiritual discipline is all about.

But do not be disheartened that you might not be able to live up to His standards, for He left us with this promise:

The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your soul in drought, and strengthen your bones; you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. (Isa 58:11)

And it will be well with you. ★

In October 2000, God blessed my husband and me with a beautiful baby daughter, whom we named Adriane. During my 16-month career of being a parent, I discovered that children have many virtues, and I'd like to share with you two of these characteristics that we can learn from.



A Childlike Heart

AWS—Garden Grove, California, USA

In Matthew 18:3, Jesus said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. I used to wonder what this verse meant.

Some people said that being like a child is having a simple childlike faith—accepting what you hear without question. But this explanation was hard for me to accept, because I wondered, what if what you’re taught isn’t correct?

I pondered the meaning of this verse a long time, but I didn’t really understand what it meant until after I became a parent and carefully observed the virtues of young children.

I believe that God has given us the relationships around us so that we can better understand our relationship with Him. He has given us children of our own to better understand His abounding

love for us.

As we study how children relate to their parents and the world around them, we, too, can learn how to better relate to our Heavenly Father and to become as little children again, for “the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Mt 19:14).

TRUE SATISFACTION

One day as Adriane was a little over a year old, I was in the kitchen washing the dishes. She came up to me and, stretching out her arms, said, “Bao-bao!” (which means “hold me” in Mandarin), but I wanted to finish the dishes so I gave her some plastic measuring cups to play with. She sat down and happily played with them for all of sixty seconds, and then she threw them aside and held her hands up to me, wanting me to hold her again.

So I gave her some wooden spoons to play with, and she sat down again and happily played with them for all of thirty seconds, and her arms went up again, wanting me to hold her.

Then I opened one of the drawers in the kitchen with miscellaneous sponges and washcloths, and she took everything out of the drawer and threw them on the ground (which lasted about a total of fifteen seconds), and up her arms went to me again, and this time, she cried loudly.

I tried one last time and gave her a silver spoon to play with, and this time she threw it on the floor forcefully and cried even louder. This finally convinced me that I couldn’t put her off any longer, so I picked her up. She wasn’t hungry or tired; she just wanted to be with me and close to me.

In our relationship with our Heavenly Father, I think we all start out somewhat like Adriane. We know that only the Lord Jesus Christ can truly satisfy us, and we make the effort to draw close to Him.

But as we continue our walk, the world throws all kinds of things at us, like

Many times, we consciously know that only the Lord Jesus can give us true joy, but for some reason, we go to look for happiness in other places.

money, fame, power, relationships, and temptations. These divert us from our true goal, which is finding satisfaction in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Somehow, we are hoodwinked into thinking that these things will satisfy our hearts. True, these things may divert us for a while, but that's all they are—diversions. They cannot truly satisfy our souls.

Filling the Emptiness

Depression is rampant among old and young alike. It affects 20% of all women, 10% of all men, and 5% of adolescents worldwide. Although the United States has one of the highest standards of living, depression is the most common psychological problem in the US, afflicting about 17.6 million people each year.

Many people have emptiness in their hearts, and they try to fill it through many things: pleasures, projects, and even other people. Many fail to fill that emptiness, and the end result is ongoing depression or worse—suicide.

These people do not realize that only God, our Heavenly Father, can fill the emptiness in our hearts, just as children have a need in their hearts that can only be filled by their parents.

Now an interesting thing about this percentage is that it includes Christians and non-Christians alike. Which means that as Christians, although we believe in the Lord Jesus, we do not go to Him to fill our hearts and give us true joy and satisfaction.

Many times, we consciously know that only the Lord Jesus can give us true joy, but for some reason, we go to look for happiness in other places.

When we're feeling bored, we switch on the TV or go to the movies. When we're feeling lonely, we hang out with boyfriends or girlfriends, or go to parties. When we're feeling stressed out, we play basketball or golf. But it is rare that we think of turning to our Lord Jesus.

After I gave birth, I was really busy with the feeding, changing, and general care of an infant. I had no time even to take a shower or sleep, much less pray and read the Bible. I started to feel really grouchy and even a little depressed at my overall state.

I thought that what I needed was time to pamper myself; so I took out the time to indulge in hot baths, do some pleasure reading, and go shopping. I tried to give myself "alone time" but still I felt a sense of unhappiness.

Finally, I realized that these things were not the things that I was missing. What I was missing was "alone time" with my Heavenly Father. It wasn't until I started praying regularly and reading the Bible that I felt the emptiness in my heart slowly start to fill.

This was King Solomon's conclusion of life:

*Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth,
Before the difficult days come,
And the years draw near when you say,
"I have no pleasure in them..."
Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:
Fear God and keep His commandments,
For this is the whole duty of man.
For God will bring every work into judgment,
Including every secret thing,
Whether it is good or evil. (Ecc 12:1-8, 13-14)*

Solomon's life went around in a big circle. He began his life close to God, but he departed to find his own way, and in the end, he came back to God again. But he had wasted his entire life, and that's why he tells us to "remember our Creator in our youth," and not when we near the end of our lives.

True Satisfaction in Jesus Christ

In contrast, let's look at apostle Paul's view on earthly pleasures.

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ. (Phil 3:8)

Paul was a man who truly had spiritual wisdom and spiritual sight. He could see through the masquerade of this world and tell what was truly valuable in this world, which was Jesus Christ.

Paul was a man of good standing—on his way to becoming a top religious

leader when Jesus called Him. He could have continued looking for happiness through status or wealth or power. But he considered all of this rubbish because he knew that none could satisfy but the Lord Jesus. So he gave everything up in order to gain Christ.

What about us today? How do we try to find joy and satisfaction in our lives? Are we still looking for happiness in worldly pleasures, money, success or fame? Solomon has been there and done that, and he warns us against it. None of those things can give us true joy and satisfaction. We can only find true joy in our Lord Jesus.

So the next time we're feeling bored, lonely, frustrated, or depressed, instead of switching on that TV or going to that party or playing golf, try going to our Heavenly Father. Raise our arms up to Him in prayer, and ask Him to hold us for a little while. Spend some time on His lap and listen to His loving words.

I think Adriane had it right when she threw those measuring cups, wooden spoons, and washcloths aside. She didn't let those toys make her lose sight of what she really needed. She would never settle for a replacement. We, too, shouldn't settle for replacements; instead, we should actively, insistently seek the "Real Thing"—our Father in heaven.

COMPLETE TRUST

Children have no worries, and I think I've figured out why. Whenever they have a problem, they have someone to go to—us, their parents. Granted, their problems are relatively easy for us to solve.

When Adriane is hungry, she comes to me and I give her something to eat. When she's bored, she comes to me and I read her a story. When she falls down,

Contrary to how the world works, God wants us to be reliant on Him, to cast all our cares upon Him (1 Pet 5:7).

she comes to me and I give her a hug and make her feel better. She doesn't have a care in the world, because if she doesn't feel good, can't do it, or can't figure things out, it's okay—just go to mommy or daddy.

Just think... what if there was someone whom you could totally trust and rely on with all your problems? Having problems with the presentation at work? No problem, just go to this person and he'll handle it.

Having problems with a friend and don't know what to do? Just go to this person and he'll give you sound advice. Feeling sick and under the weather? This person will make you feel better in no time. If we had someone like this, we probably wouldn't have any worries too.

Unfortunately, we're all grown up now, and we no longer expect our parents, or anyone else for that matter, to take care of all of our problems.

Besides, there isn't anyone who can handle all of our problems anyway.

Or is there?

Of course there is Someone just like this, and both you and I know who it is—our Heavenly Father.

But many of us do not have this child-like trust and reliance in God. Somehow, we lose this reliant heart as we grow up and learn new things. We start to think that we actually know something, and we actually can do something, so we shouldn't ask for help.

We think that this is a step in the right direction, becoming independent, and doing our own thing. But in reality, it puts the burden on ourselves, a burden too heavy to bear on our helpless shoulders.

Contrary to how the world works, God wants us to be reliant on Him, to cast all our cares upon Him (1 Pet 5:7). In order to do be completely reliant on the



Lord, it takes three things on our part: belief, giving over, and trust.

Belief

First of all, we need to believe that God has the power to solve our problems. Hebrews 11:6 tells us, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” We need to believe that God is there and that He has the power to help us and to do the impossible.

Recorded in Matthew 8:5-13 is a story of a centurion who came to Jesus and asked Him to heal his servant. Jesus highly commended this centurion, who truly believed in Jesus’ power. He had the unswerving faith that Jesus could heal his servant.

Do we truly believe that the Lord Jesus can help us with our problems? Even today, I am amazed whenever God answers my prayers, big or small.

Giving Over Our Worries

A lot of times, we may know in our hearts that God has the power to help us, but we just don’t ask for help. Philippians 4:6-7 tells us,

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

This verse teaches us that in order to receive the peace of God, we need to make our requests known to Him through prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving. This means that it is not enough for us to believe in God’s power

to help us and to trust He will do the best thing for us, but that we also need to ask Him for help.

This seems like such an obvious thing, but it is something that we neglect. God gives us free will to make our own choices and decisions. But if we need His help, we need to ask Him.

Trust

Lastly, we need to trust that whatever God does (or doesn’t do at the moment), it is the best thing for us. Some of us might think, “Okay, I do trust in the Lord, but when I pray to Him, He doesn’t answer me. Either that, or He’ll take too long. God just doesn’t do what I want.”

Part of trusting means trusting in how God answers us and in His timing, too. Sometimes, God will answer immediately; sometimes he’ll have us wait. But we need to trust that “all things work together for good to those who love God, who are called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28).

True Peace

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

True peace lies in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus tells us that He gives us a kind of peace that the world cannot give us. He gives us the kind of peace that Stephen experienced as he was being stoned to death.

He gives the kind of peace that Paul and Silas experienced, so that they could sing hymns to praise God even as they were beaten and thrown into jail. He gives the kind of peace that Jesus experienced as He faced the cruelest

form of torture known to mankind—crucifixion.

Children really have it right when they go to their parents with all their problems. The next time we are worried, afraid, or troubled, let’s remember that there is someone there who has the power to solve all our problems. Let us ask our Lord Jesus Christ to help us through, and trust that He can and will do the best thing for us.

CONCLUSION

People say that childhood is the best time in a person’s life, and perhaps the reason why is because children have such joy and peace from their relationship with their parents. We, too, can experience such joy and peace by strengthening our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Let us remember that only our Heavenly Father can give us true joy and satisfaction in this world, and remember to go to Him the next time we are feeling unhappy, lonely, or depressed. Let’s also remember that we have someone to rely on with all our problems—someone who has unlimited power and unlimited love for us. We can cast all our cares upon the Lord, and He will take care of us.

If we can pursue these two important characteristics and try to revert to a child-like heart, we will be able to live the life of joy and peace that our Lord has promised us. ★



Obedience: The Reality Of Faith

Stephen Ku—Pacifica, California, USA

BELIEVING IN GOD'S WORDS

True faith in God invariably involves belief in His Word. The “Word” refers to both God Himself, as in “the Word was God” and God’s spoken and written revelation in the Scriptures.

There is an intimate relationship between God as the Word and the Word as revealed through the Scriptures—they are one and the same. God reveals Himself through the Scriptures, and the Scriptures, in turn, lead us to God.

While many agree with the concepts of God’s existence and the Christ’s divinity, they do not accept the Bible as the true and infallible Word of God. Such attitude does not qualify as true belief. It is through the message of the Scriptures that we obtain faith in God and His saving grace: “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17).

Faith is accepting the entirety of God’s Word as true and trustworthy. It is also the conviction that the Bible is the authority that governs our Christian life and doctrines. In the New Testament, God’s Word often refers to the gospel of Christ’s salvation, which is also called

“the word of truth.” God saves us by faith in the truth as revealed in the gospel.

But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe. (2 Thess 2:13)

Peter tells us that we received our spiritual birth through God’s Word: “Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever” (1 Pet 1:23).

The Scriptures provides us with the knowledge of God’s way of salvation. Paul reminded Timothy saying, “[you know] that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15).

God assigned the preaching of the gospel to the church. Paul addressed the church as “the pillar and ground of the

truth” (1 Tim 3:15), for it is the responsibility of the collective body of believers to preach the truth of salvation.

There is only one church, since there is only one gospel of salvation. Therefore, among the many churches nowadays that preach different messages on how to be saved, we need to pray and consider the message we have heard to verify that it conforms to the truth preached by the apostles.

ACTING ON GOD'S WORDS

Faith is accepting God’s Word and staking one’s whole life upon it. Simply agreeing with but not acting upon His words does not edify the listener.

Some of Jesus’ followers called Him “Lord” and “Teacher,” but their actions denied Him. So the Lord Jesus pointed out: “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things which I say?” (Lk 6:46) Then, He told the parable of the two foundations.

In this parable, two houses were built: one on a rock, which survived a flood, and one without a foundation, which collapsed completely. Those who

hear and obey the Lord's words are like the house built on the rock, whereas those who hear but do not obey are like the house without a foundation. Confession alone hardly qualifies as faith. It has the appearance of faith but is not built on Christ at all. Only through obedience to the Lord's words can our faith be built firmly on Christ.

The people of Ezekiel's time clothed themselves with piety and came to the prophet, saying, "Come and hear the message that has come from the LORD." But the Lord mocked them for their insincerity:

So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them. (Eze 33:31-32)

Those who trust in God with a sincere faith naturally mature spiritually and bear the fruit of the Spirit, because they are rooted in Christ, the resurrected and living Lord

God gave us His word not for us to agree with but to put into practice. Nor did He save us so that we could continue to live in sin. We need to live a new life, reflecting the eternal life that we have received. The Lord said, "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Lk 11:28)

Faith leads to an obedient life. Paul explained that the goal of the gospel is to enable believers to live a life of obedience to God.

Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name (Rom 1:5).

Therefore, faith and obedience are inseparable.

A LIVING FAITH

True faith is a living faith—it grows. It is dynamic rather than static, because believers with a living faith actively live out God's Word in their daily lives. In this respect, the Thessalonian Church serves as a model for all other churches. The love, joy, and endurance displayed by the members helped the faith of the church to thrive during severe persecution:

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other. (2 Thess 1:3)

In the Lord's parable of the sower, the type of soil on which the seeds were

sown determined their fate. Some never sprouted, some sprang up but withered quickly, and others grew but could not bear grain. But after the seeds fell on good soil, they "sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred" (Mk 4:8).

The good soil is the heart that harbors a true faith. Such faith not only enables the believer to grow stronger spiritually but also directs him toward a Christ-like character, conduct, and lifestyle.

Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, And whose hope is the LORD.

For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters,

Which spreads out its roots by the river, And will not fear when heat comes;

But its leaf will be green,

And will not be anxious in the year of drought,

Nor will cease from yielding fruit.

(Jer 17:7-8)

Those who trust in God with a sincere faith naturally mature spiritually and bear the fruit of the Spirit, because they are rooted in Christ, the resurrected and living Lord: "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life" (Prov 11:30).

Those who are righteous are those who stand in the covenant of grace and have been clothed by Christ's righteousness. Their faith in God enables them to emulate God's life. If we have been born again "through the word of God which lives and abide forever" (1 Pet 1:23), our new life should be one that lives out God's Word. Christians must not only know about faith, they must live by faith. For Paul, a life of faith is fruitful and pleasing to the Lord.

For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Cor 5:7-10)

Paul himself experienced a new life of faith:

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Gal 2:20)

Paul's faith in the Lord was not only a conceptual acceptance, but also the denial of his own lifestyle for the life in which Christ reigns. The nature of faith is to direct our eyes to Christ. And that was what faith did for Paul. Paul's faith made him "transparent." In him, others did not see the mortal Paul but only the living Christ.

Does the Bible really advocate a nothing-you-do-matters philosophy? What we do has a lot to do with our salvation.

PRACTICING FAITH IN REAL LIFE

Many Christians are led to believe that they don't have to do anything to receive salvation, and once saved, they remain in God's saving grace.

Although this concept seems to disprove the idea that salvation can be obtained through works of the law, it also contradicts the truth about faith. The problem with this statement is not its emphasis on the free gift of salvation but with the meaning of "don't have to do anything."

While such a teaching may be intended to uphold God's grace in salvation, it actually does more harm than good. Some professed Christians brazenly indulge in sin, thinking that their actions do not affect their salvation because they

have already believed and confessed Christ. Sadly, their false notion of belief and confession is not true faith at all.

Does the Bible really advocate a nothing-you-do-matters philosophy? What we do has a lot to do with our salvation. Isn't the act of believing in God with our hearts or confessing with our lips "doing something," as much as obedience is "doing something"?

The meaning of grace is not that we will not be held accountable for our deeds on judgment day but that we have a means of entering heaven, even though nothing we do could ever earn us salvation. And there is a world of difference between these two ideas.

God's grace is a promise of heavenly mansions and a transformed life.

Salvation is a life-long aspiration, one that takes more than a simple declaration of "I am saved" to achieve. God saves us through a lasting faith.

In Romans, Paul writes, "For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith'" (NIV Rom 1:17). The NIV translates "from faith to faith" as "faith from first to last," and NRSV as "through faith for faith."

These different translations together bring forth the continuous nature of true faith. This faith marks the entire life of the righteous. Through this lasting faith, God reveals His own righteousness in the lives of the believers.

Paul instructed Timothy to preach by the power of God:

Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began. (2 Tim 1:9)

Our salvation is not due to anything that we have done. But that does not mean that we can remain inactive. On the contrary, God has called us to a holy life. Any professed Christian who has no desire to obey God's Word or renew his life should take a serious look at his own faith. He may still be a stranger to the covenant of grace.

Nothing is more miserable than an unsaved believer thinking that he is saved. Nothing is more dreadful than to hear the words, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (Mt 7:23) True faith takes form in obedience; and only true faith saves. ★



A College Blog:

Youths Sharing Their Faith Through the Internet

A web trend recently spawned—you may have heard of or taken part in it—is the advent and emergence of web logs, or “blogs” for short. These are sites like blogger.com, blogspot.com, movabletype.org, livejournal.com, and xanga.com, which drastically simplify the process of repeatedly updating content on a webpage. In fact, all one needs to do is supply the content, press a submit button and, just like that, it’s automatically published on the web. No knowledge of webpage design, coding, uploading, nor any technical knowledge is needed whatsoever. For that reason a significant portion of the internet community has harnessed this technology to post some sort of an online journal, or blog.

January 24, 2002 Announcement

You are currently staring at our website’s long-awaited redesign. Was it worth the wait? Maybe not; however, I’d say it’s more professional looking, more efficient, less cluttered, yet still packed with the same delicious content.

The most prominent change you will notice from the previous version is the very window you are reading this text in. In this little window of scrollable goodness, Andy and I, as well as several other guest writers will be posting our thoughts, reflections, and tidbits from our daily lives so that through this sharing both writer and reader can be edified and encouraged.

Not only will it contain our contemplations of our common faith, but we will also be sharing light-hearted, silly things that happen during the day, so that there’s a nice balance.

If all goes according to plan, it won’t just be me and my big mouth talking :). Our website can very likely be a daily-visited site, with this constant fresh content.

Anyhow, browse around (especially the stuff under the section “Last Update:”, enjoy the site, and may God smile upon you!

Samuel Kuo 1/24/2002 04:57:27 PM

January 31, 2002 Reflection

The other day I felt that I was in good condition to start running in the mornings again (after being pretty sick for a week now). Having been accustomed to sometimes humming or singing when I run, I started to sing “All I Ever Do Is Love You” that morning. We sang this hymn at senior SC [Spiritual Convocation] this past winter, and it really touched me then as it still touches me now. So it was pretty neat how it applied to the Bible passages I had been reading this week:

I finished up the last few chapters of John this week, and these chapters basically retold the events that happened before, during, and after Jesus Christ’s crucifixion. (This also reminded me of another very touching hymn we’re singing in youth choir called “Is it I?”) From the beginning, all God has ever done is love us. Who are we to ever doubt that love when things don’t go our way after He has given up so much for us? I mean, you can’t even put into words how much he has done for us. Recently, I’ve learned the true meaning of forgiving someone, and it really took a lot out of me to accomplish that task. So imagine God, who knows all our iniquities against Him... He forgives us every time! His love is truly...wow.

Ruth Huang 1/31/2002 02:40:37 PM

February 3, 2002

Comment

Hey. It's Sunday again *groans* Homework deadlines are dangling in front of my face and yet I haven't budged at all. I blame it partly on going to Houston this weekend :) Well, since I'm on the topic, I'll share w/ u guys what I learned in the sermon that Pastor Chen gave this Sabbath.

He basically said two things that really hit me: 1) don't be an onlooker and 2) don't hit the bench when people say GO!

1) He said in a typical football game there are thousands of spectators watching 22 men battling the game out on the field. This is often true also inside the church—many onlookers watch a few members taking it upon themselves to do all the work. Those workers are the ones who really need the rest—just like the players in the football game. Yet the spectators are the ones sitting down doing nothing but watching them play. In the same way, the church members who are lounging around do not really contribute or participate in holy work or related activities but find the time to analyze those few who are working and, at the same time, find stuff to criticize. So the lesson here: don't be onlookers—be players.

2) He also said that, usually before a team charges onto the field, they'll huddle and the coach will yell "GO GO GO!" and everyone will rush off into the field all pepped up and ready to go. But a lot of times in the church, you'll hear God yell "GO GO GO!" but no one goes. Everyone seems to have retreated to the locker room or sit on the bench. A lot of people mention there is work to do and are enthusiastic, but they're nowhere to be found when the time comes. Without the players on the field—without soldiers in a battle-field—there is neither game nor battle. That means the game has been forfeited to the advantage of the opponent. So note: don't let Satan win without a fight! Everyone gird yourselves and let's GO GO GO!!

Alright :) hope u guys are edified. Keep fighting! See "y'all" in the field :)

marred jar 2/3/2002 11:30:27 PM

April 11, 2002

Quote

The other night I was looking through a prayer book that was given to me before I left Houston last fall. To be exact, it is "God's Instruction Book on Prayer." Anyway, as I sifted through the pages, one particular quote caught my attention. This is how it goes: "The value of persistent prayer is not that He will hear us...but that we finally hear Him."

I find this quote to be particularly interesting because it made me ask myself, why do I sometimes pray so much for something? It might seem trivial, but what is the purpose of praying so earnestly so often? I'm not going to go into detail, but think for a moment about what your prayers are typically like? Have they allowed you to gain a better understanding of God, or is it merely a "God, I want to do this, show me the way" or "God, please don't let this happen." Prayer is one of the most powerful tools that we possess; surely we can utilize it better than that. It's like having a Dual Athlon XP 2000+ with 1 gig of DDR 333 Ram, a GeForce 4, a Sound Blaster Audigy, Klipsch Pro Media 5.1 speakers, and a 21" flat panel monitor to play solitaire on. It's pretty sad.

Enoch Chang 4/11/2002 12:56:50 AM

April 17, 2002

Reflection

I was going to post this earlier last week but wanted to straighten out my thoughts first. Most Christians know of Isaiah chapter 6, whether having read the book of Isaiah or not. It recounts the story of how Isaiah, a major prophet in the Old Testament, was convicted of his wicked tongue, living among people of unclean tongue, and how he cried out “Woe is me, for I am undone!” A seraph flew to him, having in his hand a live burning coal, and touched Isaiah in the mouth. Isaiah was cleansed of his sin.

Shortly after, God called out, “Whom shall I send, And who will go for Us?” Isaiah responded with an emphatic, “Here I am! Send me.”

It is important to note that before anyone does any work for God, he must be purified of his sin like Isaiah was. Especially when the bulk of Isaiah’s work required the use of his mouth, which once was dirty and shameful but now honorable and used for God’s glory. This reminds me of 2 Tim 2:21 about the vessels: “Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work.”

Sure, there is a deeper understanding of this passage. But most importantly, the words of God must be applied in our own respective lives. So after finishing the chapter, I gave my usual morning prayer. I kept thinking and wondering, which part of me do I need to be touched by a live coal? What must be purged away? As I got up from prayer, it hit me.

The heart. My heart.

Can someone with heavy responsibilities in the church seriously and fervently serve God? If the heart isn’t there, the answer is no. Complaint and frustration soon cloud the mind and tongue. Why? Because the love of God and the Spirit of God has not filled his heart.

Therefore, if one really wants to serve God, it must start from the inside out. Because the bulk of the work would consist of using his heart—once dirty and shameful—now honorable and used in His glory.

Samuel Kuo 4/17/2002 12:20:38 AM

May 3, 2002

Observation

The coolest thing happened to me on the bus going home today. A guy sitting behind me was whistling “Amazing Grace” and “How Great Thou Art.” It was hard not to break into a smile. Though not a great whistler, as he often was out of tune, it kept me great company in my heart while I sang the lyrics inside my head. It amazed me how he was willing to whistle inside a moving bus. Not many people nowadays seem to whistle, much less in a bus! It also made me believe how much joy he must have had within his heart! The short 15-minute ride home suddenly became so rewarding inside. He probably had no idea that such a small action, maybe annoying to some, could have impacted someone’s day, my day, this much. Thank God.

marred jar 5/3/2002 07:54:07 PM

May 17, 2002

Comment

For the record, this is written in all sincerity and love. In no way do I want to come off seeming unconstructively critical.

I was awakened this morning with pain in my teeth—I had attempted to wear the retainers I haven't worn for about a year. So six o'clock in the morning I'm lying in bed and, being a thinker/dreamer, something came to mind:

The internet presents the wonderful opportunity to publish anything you want. You are your own publishing company. With recent user-friendly content management (journal) systems, such as blogger, livejournal, and xanga, publishing one's own ideas is even easier.

However, we all must realize the very fact that publishing means making public. Hence, the same root word “-pub.” As followers of Christ, we cannot merely follow what everyone else is doing—posting all of our feelings and actions without any concern for our readership. Who is our readership? The PUBLIC, meaning anyone, from your next door neighbor to your school mates to some stranger searching the internet to your little sister, mother, pastor, or, perhaps, younger believers in Christ who cannot discern yet what is right or wrong. The latter is my main concern.

An owner of a blog must question the purpose of his/her blog. What's its point? A place to encourage, exhort, edify? To entertain, to vent, rant, and rave? Or just a place to let folks know what's going on?

My main point is, if you have a blog or are planning on creating a weblog, consider your readership and the point of your blog. I believe most intend their readership to be other TJC friends. In that case, please watch what you write—there are younger ones (physically or spiritually) that will not benefit from certain types of posts. Those go in your own personal journal, not on the internet. If we are going to be a generation that simply follows trends without foresight, we are in some deep trouble. We ought to use technology to our advantage.

I am happy to say that the guest writers on this site have exemplified this, and, in fact, at times write too little! If we could only have more of their learning experiences and acquired wisdom! Our guest writers, including myself, go through the same deal most people go through—fun, laughter, sadness, spirituality struggles, and personal problems. But a PUBLIC blog, especially from a TJC believer, should follow the teachings of Ephesians 4:29: “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your [fingers], but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the [readers].” Therefore, blog in moderation with nothing excessive, avoid unnecessary posts, and privatize in your own handwritten journal.

June 6, 2002

Reflection

I saw the first lightening bug of the summer last night! I was walking to my car late at night after my physics lecture and I saw one of those guys light up. Pretty cool, huh? Summer is here. =)

Besides that, while Sam and Andy are off working and gaining experience, I'm stuck here commuting almost 2 hours total a day taking torture classes. However, one thing nice about summer classes is that I have a lot of time to myself (I have a morning lecture and night lecture), so I can actually think about a lot of stuff. Well, I finally got to reflect about the past year, and it's made a big difference in how I approach life now. It's funny how great epiphanies come to me in the strangest places, too. Haha, so anyway...

Being on your own really tests you in every aspect: habits change a little. Without the supervision of my parents, I unconsciously slacked off a little (mentally, physically, spiritually). What I once thought I was so absolutely strong about started to become shaky with exposure to different ideas and perspectives from the variety of people I've encountered. I made all these goals for myself before each semester started, and when I couldn't meet all of them I realized that I didn't really know myself. However, one endures and realizes that things eventually happen for a reason. If I had to sum up the past year in three words, I'd say, “God is awesome.”

A lot of ups and plenty of downs can happen within a year. Let's not disappoint God by growing bitter from the downs. Fight on.

Ruth Huang 6/6/2002 04:47:29 PM

Samuel Kuo 5/17/2002 08:06:33 AM

June 7, 2002

Comment

Being on my own has taught me something else, too—the importance of earning and spending money wisely. I never knew that a simple lunch would amount to 6 bucks...and then there's dinner and gas. Seriously, your wallet is looking nil by the middle of the week. So I was thinking about it lately—how my parents really work hard to support me and put food on the table. I never could relate to this struggle, but now, when you're on your own, it's hard to make a buck and to provide for yourself. Also, I feel like I'm more of an adult now—I feel more resourceful and responsible. Like Ruth said, when you're on your own, you really do have a lot of time to think about yourself: your accomplishments, your wrongs, your spirituality, and life in general. It is really a time you should cherish. I think I've done more reflecting in the past week than for the whole year. Pretty cool stuff.

Andy Wang 6/7/2002 02:31:58 AM

September 9, 2002

Reflection

We often ask for “God’s guidance” in our prayers. Yeah, “God’s guidance.” I noticed that I say those words out of habit. In fact, those words are almost automatically inserted into my prayers, whether in understanding or in the Spirit. I can just hear myself right now, “God, please guide me today...” or “God we ask you to guide our ___ today...”

But it wasn't really until yesterday (Sunday, 9/8) that I really thought about those words. “Guidance” infers that there is a leader and a follower. And since we're asking for the guidance, we are the follower. But I noticed that rarely do I look for God's guidance in my daily life. I just simply ask for it in my prayers, but there really isn't any action in my daily living. If God is really to guide our day, then we have to actively follow, no? How can one desire guidance from one place to another, if he is not really going to follow? It would be absolutely pointless to ask in the first place. So the next time we ask God to “guide our day” or “guide our week” or “guide our future,” we really ought to follow God and LET HIM LEAD.

And how do we do that? How do we let him guide our day? Sometimes it's obvious, as in the pillar of cloud and fire that led the Israelites for over 40 years. Obviously, one way to let God lead our lives is to live according to the Bible. So we have to read it. Other times, God's guidance is less obvious, and it takes the movement of the Holy Spirit. So we have to be one with the Spirit through prayer for Him to guide us. In any case, we have to be observant enough to let Him lead.

Hold His hand. He'll lead you through.

Samuel Kuo 9/9/2002 01:15:17 AM

Conclusion

The experiences that we have encountered over the past several months during the breadth of our college career have produced quite a bundle of Internet postings on our blog. In retrospect, these posts, intended to edify the readers through sharing, probably helped the writers as much as, if not more than, the readers. Blogging on daily Christian living (specifically our time while on campus or in summer activities) enables us to reflect, ponder, and express those thoughts, thereby meditating on and applying the words of God. We hope to validate our words with our actions and life.

Just as many other Internet sites come and go, the future of our blog is uncertain. Nevertheless, for however long we decide to keep blogging, we hope we can continue to build up others. Perhaps you can join us in this wonderful technology and start a blog, too.



Personal Reflections On Singlehood

ShuHong Lin—Chicago, Illinois, USA

As a teenager, weddings held in church were great moments of thrill and anticipation for me. Pews decorated with ribbons and laces, flowers everywhere and trays of delicacies set on long tables lined with beautiful skirts.

And, of course, the red-carpeted aisle, down which the brides would walk in slow motion, steps in sync with the tune of the bridal march. Growing up on a considerable dosage of fairy-tales, I would imagine myself walking down the same aisle...someday.

Yes, like many others, I had believed that someday, somewhere, some church brother would come my way. But, years whisked past without my noticing. Friends who chattered with me excitedly at many weddings had their own weddings. One by one, they became immersed in their lives, with their special someone by their side.

And, one day, news had it that a former student from a religious education class I once taught got married. It was then the realization hit me: it's time to count myself as having "missed the boat", as some would put it. Girlish dreams of getting married were gradually replaced by practical and realistic plans on how to spend the rest of my life without a special someone.

When the request came for me to write an article on "singlehood," my first reaction was to laugh. I wondered if I was seen as a "singlehood guru." My

mind conjured an image of myself sitting in the lotus pose in a cave somewhere, spouting gems of wisdom to young, wide-eyed would-be singles.

The truth of the matter is, I know little about singlehood! Yes, I am aware of my single status when most of my peers are married with kids. Nevertheless, there are far too many things about being single that I have not rationally thought through.

What does God say about staying single? Should there be a point when one should abandon hope of getting married? What advice does the Bible offer to singles? What would be a healthy approach to being a single Christian?

Those are questions I am still working on, with no sight of arriving at a verdict, if one exists. At any rate, a personal sharing of what I have experienced to date is all I dare to aspire to.

THE SCOPE OF DISCUSSION

Perhaps I should delineate the scope of “singlehood” for this article before going any further. The word “single” conventionally refers to the marital status of “not married.”

High school adolescents are not generally viewed as nor do they think of themselves as single, though they are not married. Unmarried young adults in their early to late twenties who are single are too young to lose hope that they will meet someone with whom to spend the rest of their lives.

Singlehood becomes a consideration and reality when you find yourself “single” while almost all of your peers have settled down and established their own families. In addition, you are resigned to the fact that the likelihood of your finding someone is low.

This is partly because the pool of potential partners decreases inversely with age after a certain point. Another reason, among others, is that you probably have moved on in life, ideally happy and settled at heart, and you no longer feel the inclination nor have the desire to engage in marital pursuits.

In any case, being single means you have grappled with the reality of being alone and know you face the potential of being so for the rest of your life.

THE GIFT OF MARRIAGE

God finished His creation in six days. “God saw everything He had made, and indeed it was very good” (Gen 1:31). However, God said, “It is not good that man should be alone, I will make him a helper comparable to him” (Gen 2:18).

Seeing that it was not good that Adam was alone, God made a woman,

Singlehood can be an opportunity for drawing closer to God and appreciating the many wonders that God has granted His creation to experience.

Eve, after all creation had been formed. Indisputably, the gift of marriage is a wonderful thing in the eyes of God.

The happiness God’s gift brought to Adam needs no further explanation, as evidenced by his response upon seeing Eve: “This now is the bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23). Marriage, handled well and cherished, is a many-splendored thing.

Growing up, I constantly heard people mention the “gift of singlehood.” Much of this kind of talk is based on Paul’s discourse in 1 Cor 7, where he is often cited as advocating singlehood.

He says, “I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress” (v.26). Upon closer examination, Paul’s case for singlehood appears to be a conditional one, in view of the “present distress” of his time.

In every age after the dawn of Christianity, believers have seen themselves to be living in the end times. It is no doubt the right attitude to have in order to be always prepared.

We may not know when the Lord’s second coming will be, but that surely does not preclude us from living our life on this earth and enjoying God’s gifts to us. There is no case here for total abstinence, such as rejecting marriage and embracing ascetic lives as hermits.

Apostle Paul provides an explanation for why he wishes “that all men were even as [himself]” (1 Cor 7:7). Here is his

rationale: “he who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord, but he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife” (v. 32, 33).

Rather than simply concluding that singlehood is to be desired above marriage, a more positive approach to Paul’s view on singlehood is to read it in the light of what the Lord says: “And he who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me”(Mt 10:37).

Marriage that takes you away from God is not good. In marriage, giving God first priority should be the guiding principle. Marriage in the Lord actually brings with it opportunities for personal growth and training in love. Having a spouse with whom to walk in faith is certainly a beautiful thing many married believers have come to appreciate.

Paul concedes, “Concerning virgins: I have no commandment from the Lord” (1 Cor 7:25). Singlehood is not a “gift” in the same way the Holy Spirit is a gift. It should not be seen as something “predestined” by God. Whether one ends up single or not is often the result of an interplay of many different factors, not least one’s choices and one’s circumstances.

Whatever the process by which we end up single, we should not see singlehood as a bleak signal of the end of all joy in life. Singlehood can be an opportunity for drawing closer to God and appreciating

the many wonders that God has granted His creation to experience.

Being single can also mean being spared of some of the burdens associated with marriage. Of course, singles should not cry “sour grapes” where marriage is concerned. There is beauty, of different natures perhaps, both in being married and being single.

Whether one is married or not, as children of God, we will be blessed as long as we keep His Word. And, seeking God and His righteousness should always be the first priority of our lives.

The take-home message is that we should reverently seek God’s guidance through prayer, if we have not already done so.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNT Embracing Reality

Be still and know that I am God. (Ps 46:10)

Bystanders cannot always fully understand the predicament of involved parties. I have come across comments made about certain singles, which are not necessarily fair judgments.

Very few singles I know are single by choice. Singles like us end up single because of various reasons. I know of a sister who missed her chance because throughout her “marriageable years”, she had to take care of her ailing father.

There are some who were never noticed by marriage counselors in church and never found someone in church who was attracted to them. Each single person has his/her own story.

Being single is not a transgression, and singles, albeit often misunderstood,

should not feel stigmatized. It is so easy to simply say, “His (her) standards are too high, and that’s why he (she) is single now!”

There is a significant difference between being “choosy,” using worldly, non-biblical standards, and being wise enough to realize that a common church membership alone should not be the only criterion in choosing a spouse.

If you are single because you understand that marriage is not about closing one’s eyes and accepting just about anyone from church, you really should not be offended when

non-sympathetic remarks are being made or when you are tagged with labels like “Mr. Choosy” or “Miss High-Criteria.”

While trying to affirm ourselves amid misunderstandings, we should also allow a bit of room for self-questioning. It is possible that singlehood may just be a transitional phase for us to re-think some of our values and expectations that may not be in conjunction with what God wants us to look for in a spouse.

This column has run several good articles advising singles on how to “find the right one” according to the will of the Lord. With agreement to most of the messages, I leave it to my fellow single brothers and sisters to read them.

The take-home message is that we should reverently seek God’s guidance through prayer, if we have not already done so. For all you know, the moment you forsake those expectations that God had not intended for you to have, then—

voila!—you find your Adam or Eve standing right in front of you.

Lonely but Never Alone

Whom have I in heaven but You? And, there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (Ps 73:25, 26)

Singlehood is a very lonely experience. For many, it is not an unfamiliar experience to come home to an empty apartment. Buying groceries and making dinner for just one person can sometimes give you an ineffable feeling of being forlorn and forgotten.

There have been times of sickness or deep sorrow when I longed for a hug from somebody, but no one was readily available to listen or give me a hug. In those moments, God and God alone was all I could turn to.

Many parents wish to see their children married for fear that their beloved children would have to live life all alone. My father always tells me he is worried that I will be all alone in this world after he and my mother pass away.

When he tells me such things, my heart breaks. But, I also wish so much that he would understand my conviction about God’s abidance, as long as I hold fast to His commandments and grace.

Having established that singlehood can be really lonely, I have to say that being single has compelled me to rely on God more than I would have if I always had someone to turn to.

The graphic on the cover of a planner I had some years ago showed a lonesome little lamb seated on a rock by itself. But, in the reflection from the

Single or not, if we keep ourselves pure and true towards God, then all things will work out for the good of those who love Him (Rom 8:28).

stream beneath the rock, there was the little lamb and someone else by its side—the Shepherd. Indeed, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want” (Ps 23:1). Simple basic truth. Great profound assurance.

God’s providence also comes in the form of people who show practical care and concern. Being single has taught me to learn to receive love and kindness from concerned parties.

On festive occasions, counting invitations from church members alone, I am always “double-booked,” if not more. Coming from a small church with merely a few families, it is amazing how I am invited by so many families to spend holidays with them.

It is a wonderful feeling, knowing that brethren in church are making an effort to make sure singles like me feel less lonely.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Though I have shared much about how singlehood can be a blessing, I do not think anyone should look forward to being single. Singlehood ought to be unintentional or born of necessity.

It is important for singles to plan on being happy and living a secure life without a significant other. Single or not, if we keep ourselves pure and true towards God, then all things will work out for the good of those who love Him (Rom 8:28). However, we should always keep a little bit of our hearts open to possible surprises from God.

If anyone has a wish to be married, it

is actually a beautiful thing. For “he who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord” (Prov 18:22). I suppose the same can be said about finding a husband.

As mature adults, we should have the capability to take care of our own affairs—instead of relying on others. Singles should not passively sit and wait for God to drop their spouses from the sky. Neither should they shirk responsibility for their own happiness and leave it completely to marriage counselors in church to find someone for them.

It is well and good if there are resources in church to help us in “the search.” But happiness lies in both God’s and our hands. Whatever we do, folding our hands and waiting passively is not going to help God answer our prayers.

I’ll end by dedicating a song to the single readers out there. Many years ago, a teacher taught me this song and told me I should always have faith that God has prepared someone for me. Here’s part of the song: “Someday, somewhere, someone beyond compare, will come your way, forever more to stay...You prayed so long, when you were very young, you prayed that God will keep him/her pure and sweet. And you’ll know, God made him/her, and you’ll know God made him/her just for you.” ★





Serving God In My Youth: Self Doubt or Self Confidence?

PCC—USA

Youth. Youth plus college. Youth plus college plus church work. Does this sound familiar? In an ideal world, laboring for the Lord is smooth and victorious. In reality, unfortunately, being entrusted with holy work usually creates stress.

The life of a student often is a constant struggle to balance the demands of schoolwork, friends, and activities. The life of a Christian student carries

with it the added requirements of setting aside time for spiritual cultivation and holy work.

There are times when we may find ourselves hesitant to accept certain responsibilities, not because we are too busy (although we might claim as such) but because there is something within ourselves that is holding us back. What is that something?

SELF DOUBT

Before we answer this question, let us first examine some commonly held stereotypes about youths.

On one extreme, college students are seen as lost souls—filled with uncertainty about what they like and who they are, and riddled with doubt about their own self-worth and capabilities.

On the other extreme, students are portrayed as overconfident know-it-alls, who, regardless of whether or not they really do know it all, have no respect for the advice of elders or those in authority.

When I started college, I began to attend youth Bible studies held every Friday night. An informal list of names was put together, and those less-than-a-dozen youths would each take a turn to lead the Bible study.

Although I was a religious education teacher and had had some other teaching experience, I was filled with fear at the thought of having to lead a Bible study for the first time. Since most of the youths were taking turns to lead, I was soon asked to also take part.

My first reaction, fortunately not expressed aloud, was, “yeah right!” My attitude stemmed not from laziness or defiance, but rather from a “who, me?” type of mindset. What right did I have to tell other people, some of whom were several years older than I was, what to do?

I didn’t even know what to do myself sometimes! However, after awkwardly resisting several gentle requests to add my name to the schedule, I finally agreed, realizing that this was a duty that the other youths had willingly and even joyfully accepted.

For some, leading an informal youth Bible study might not seem like such a

When we are aware of our own limitations, we rely on God to make up for our deficiencies—in essence, when we are weak, we are strong.

big deal, but for others, the mere thought of it can be enough to set off the butterflies in our stomach. In my case, public speaking wasn’t particularly a problem, but I had little faith in myself and doubted that I could edify others.

Although I don’t quite remember the specific details about what leading Bible study for the first time was like, I do know that, despite my concerns, things ran relatively smoothly.

The week leading up to my turn to lead a Bible study, I found myself becoming more worried. Yet, instead of letting my inabilities inhibit me, I found myself drawing closer to God as I asked Him for help.

What I came to realize through this small but not insignificant experience was that self-doubt could hinder our spiritual progress if we allow ourselves to be consumed by worries over our inadequacies.

Depend on God

If we channel that self-doubt into dependence on God, we can actually be quite successful. In fact, many great figures in the Bible who were called by God did not possess extraordinary gifts or talents. Some even possess certain traits that we would think might hinder their work.

For example, Moses himself was reluctant to lead the Israelites because he was “slow of speech and slow of tongue” (Ex 4:10). A person who characterizes himself right off the bat as an ineloquent speaker hardly seems like the ideal choice for someone who would be expected to

persuade well over a half-million Israelites, excluding women and children, to risk their lives to follow him and who had to first convince the Pharaoh to set them free (Ex 12:37).

Similarly, when chosen to be the leader of the Israelites, both Gideon and Saul replied that they were from the smallest tribes of Israel, of the least important clan within those tribes, and, as Gideon himself stated, was the least within his own family (Judg 6:15).

Choosing an unlikely candidate to assume an important role seems illogical, but God’s methods are profound. When we are aware of our own limitations, we rely on God to make up for our deficiencies—in essence, when we are weak, we are strong.

Furthermore, others can see God’s work and glorify His name. If God had chosen a fearless, charismatic leader to save the Israelites from their bondage, it is quite possible that many might have put their faith in that person and not in God.

By choosing workers whom the majority of people would consider to be the least likely, others can see that subsequent victories are clearly the result of God’s almighty power and not that of man. As 1 Cor 1:27-28, 30 explains:

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the

world to put to shame the things which are mighty... that no flesh should glory in His presence

Having Faith in His Power

If we do not know to turn to God with our insecurities and continue to doubt ourselves, we actually doubt God. While we may have faith in God's existence, if we cannot believe that God can help us, we, in effect, doubt that God's almighty power can change us.

For instance, when Peter stepped onto the water to meet Jesus, he began to sink when he saw the boisterous wind and waves about him. Jesus then rebuked him, saying, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

However, Peter did believe in Jesus' saving power, for as soon as he began to sink, he immediately cried out, "Lord,

If we do not know to turn to God with our insecurities and continue to doubt ourselves, we actually doubt God.

save me!" So why did Jesus scold Peter for his lack of faith? Because without the confidence that God's abidance makes all things possible, our faith is incomplete.

SELF-CONFIDENCE

So let's say that we've pretty much gotten over our self-doubt and are ready to take on some more holy work. Does confidence in our own abilities to serve God mean that we are being proud? Again, that all depends upon what we decide to do with that self-confidence.

Relying on My Own Efforts

After having become more comfortable with leading Bible studies on Friday nights and occasionally with a small



group during Sabbath services, and also having been given the opportunity to lead various types of religious education activities, I began to recognize that I had certain capabilities that could be used to serve God.

At the same time, I began to question whether this assurance in myself meant that I was proud. Well aware of the fact that pride leads to destruction, I began to wonder whether my newfound confidence might instead be cleverly concealed pride.

To find out, I decided to try my best to "act humble." Unfortunately, it turns out that I had a misconception about humility as well. Not known as an outwardly shy person and at times

probably considered to be quite the opposite, I began to force myself to become quieter.

I knew that on occasion, well-intentioned youths could be a bit too headstrong in that their fervency to serve God causes them to become easily frustrated with what they perceive as the inefficient efforts of older members. Therefore, I wanted to try extra hard to please and submit to other church workers.

I remember leading one Sabbath Bible study in particular and was so caught up in worrying about coming across as a pretentious youth that I wound up sounding completely unsure of myself.

Very few people were edified during that session, and I realized that I couldn't expect others to be assured of what I was saying if it didn't seem like I was completely convinced, either.

Counting on God

I soon realized that no matter what, I could not please everybody. What really matters is pleasing God first and foremost. The apostle Paul possessed a similar attitude: “I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men” (Acts 24:16).

While we must try our best to get along with others, we must not lose sight of the fact that pleasing God is more important than pleasing man. Paul, too, recognized that we must make every effort to not offend others, but note how he clearly placed having a clear conscience in front of God before having a clear conscience in front of men.

My failed attempts to appear humble only resulted in me finding myself right back where I had started—filled with self-doubt and still somewhat confused.

While meekness and knowing when and what not to speak are invaluable qualities, outward quietness does not necessarily mean that one is more spiritual or humble.

However, it is essential to recognize that God gives those talents to us for a special purpose—to glorify Him and not ourselves.

After all, it is quite possible to have an outward appearance of modesty while still feeling rather self-righteous inwardly. Through these trial-and-error processes, I’ve come to learn that self-doubt does not and should not be equated with humility.

What then, is the difference? Self-doubt can cause one to place too much emphasis on our own human efforts, or lack thereof, while true humility makes one recognize that, in strength and

in weakness, we must always count on God.

Putting God First

So then what about that other question of whether or not self-confidence equals pride? Again, the key to that answer lies in where we place God in all of this. We can and need to have an awareness of our own abilities. If we didn’t recognize our own talents, how would we know how we could best serve God?

However, it is essential to recognize that God gives those talents to us for a special purpose—to glorify Him and not ourselves. To prevent that ever-present threat of pride from sneaking in, we need to simultaneously have confidence in God to help us use our abilities wisely.

As 1 Cor 4:7 reminds us, “For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you have not received it?”

As we become entrusted with church work, it is only natural to want to do the best job possible. But we must constantly ask ourselves whether this need arises from a desire to protect or boost our own reputation, or whether we seek solely to exalt God’s name.

While I have made some embarrassing mistakes since learning these lessons, I tell myself to look forward to the ones I

will surely make in the future, for mistakes are channels through which I can learn how to better serve my Lord. ★



Working Hard Or Hardly Working?

Richard Solgot—Tampa, Florida, USA

In a world that has changed tremendously in recent years, it seems few things have changed as fast as employment and economic situations. Not that long ago it was common for a person to work for himself or learn a trade and work for one employer for most, if not all, of his working life.

Most people started working for one company, and it was virtually a partnership for life. It is no longer the case. That kind of security and loyalty—from employer to employee and vice-versa—is a thing of the past.

It's now much more common for people to work for several employers over a lifetime and to learn many skills and hold several kinds of jobs over the course of their career.

In an increasingly competitive world of business mergers, acquisitions and bankruptcies, seniority and experience no longer necessarily equate to job security. People can lose their jobs through downsizing and layoffs with little or no warning.

In many advanced nations, entire categories of jobs have been eliminated, replaced through computers and automation or exported to poorer nations where workers will perform the task for a fraction of the cost.

In a world that is so far removed from the life and times of the Bible, do the Scriptures offer any guidance on how to be successful in our job and career?

A CHANGING WORLD DEMANDS VERSATILITY

Obviously, one key to economic survival is versatility. Only in recent generations have we seen such a remarkable move toward specialization, and that driven largely by technological advancements. These advancements constantly alter our world, creating new business and job opportunities virtually overnight while just as quickly rendering others obsolete.

We might liken our world to the biblical world of two thousand years ago in terms of versatility. In biblical times, most people were self-employed and had

to learn many skills out of necessity.

Theirs was not a throwaway society in which if something broke you simply went to the store and bought a new one. People made the most of what they needed and repaired it when necessary. Of necessity they learned many skills to provide for themselves and their families.

Similarly, people today often have to learn many job skills out of necessity in a fast-paced, fast-changing world. Those who don't learn to grow and change with the times can fall behind and have to struggle on their own.

Some Things Never Change

Even though we live in a world of constant change, some things have not changed for thousands of years. Our world is far removed from that of the Bible, yet its pages reveal timeless principles that apply just as well today as they did when they were first written.

The book of Proverbs is especially helpful, not just in offering us guidance for how to be successful on the job but in

advising how to succeed in all areas of life. Notice how, in the first few verses, King Solomon expresses the purpose of the book of Proverbs:

*The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel:
To know wisdom and instruction, to perceive the words of understanding,
To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment, and equity,
To give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion—
A wise man will hear and increase learning, and a man of understanding
Will attain wise counsel. (Prov 1:1-5)*

Simply put, the book of Proverbs is a book to teach us wisdom.

It records hundreds of observations on all aspects of life and our relationships with one another. It offers hundreds of gems of advice that have been proven over time. Let's examine some of the advice it offers to help us succeed in our jobs and careers, whether we work for others or ourselves.

When circumstances are good, make the most of them, recognizing that it won't always be this way.

SOLOMON'S WISDOM

Solomon was a multitalented man. He was a gifted writer, teacher, and composer, as well as a student of nature who recorded his observations about the natural world around him (1 Kgs 4:30-34). One of his first recorded principles for success on the job, and in all areas of life, for that matter, came from observing one of the tiniest of God's creatures—the ant.

Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her supplies in the summer and gathers her food in the harvest. How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? A little sleep, A little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep—so shall your poverty come on you Like a prowler, and your need like an armed man. (Prov 6:1-6)

Solomon tells us we can learn much about how to be successful in life from the lowly ant. First, the ant doesn't require someone tell it what to do. It recognizes what needs to be done and takes care of it.

Any supervisor recognizes the value of an employee with such an approach—someone who learns his job, does it, and doesn't have to be reminded what to do. Those who must constantly be told what to do are rarely successful because they not only drain the time and energy of their managers but also show little or no initiative or potential for advancement.

The ant in Solomon's observations instinctively recognizes the need to prepare for the future. When the opportunity is there to gather food, it willingly and diligently works hard to store up provisions for lean times ahead.

Likewise, we should recognize the need to prepare for the future. When circumstances are good, make the most of them, recognizing that it won't always be this way. When opportunities present

themselves, we should learn to recognize and act on them while circumstances allow. Otherwise, they might not present themselves again.

Talk Produces Nothing

One lesson learned from Solomon's meditations on the ant's behavior is unmistakable: to be successful requires hard work. The ant instinctively seems to know it must work hard to survive. Too many people have yet to figure that out.

No one wants to hire (or keep) a person who is lazy, passive, undependable, and always looking for excuses or ways to get out of work. Such people usually are more trouble than they are worth. Solomon points out where such people usually end up—suffering from poverty and scarcity.

Curiously, Solomon's comments imply that these consequences strike the lazy person unexpectedly, like a bandit or robber who strikes suddenly and without warning. Apparently, some such people lack the foresight even to see the inevitable consequences of their laziness.

Perhaps you've seen incompetent employees go their merry way, unaware of their behavioral problems until they are fired. Solomon even notes that some people are so oblivious to their own shortcomings that they seem impervious to reality (Prov 26:16).

Solomon adds that we should learn from the examples of behavior we see around us. We should recognize cause and effect, he tells us, to learn what leads to success and what leads to poverty.

I went by the field of the lazy man, and by the vineyard of the man devoid of understanding; and there it was, all overgrown with thorns; its surface was covered

with nettles; its stone wall was broken down. When I saw it, I considered it well; I looked on it and received instruction; a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest; so shall your poverty come like a prowler and your need like an armed man. (Prov 24:30-34)

The Proverbs repeatedly tell us that, when it comes to success, there is no substitute for diligent work: “In all labor there is profit, but idle chatter leads only to poverty” (Prov 14:23).

Talk by itself, as Solomon pointed out, produces nothing. Good intentions are just that—intentions. “The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made rich” (Prov 13:4).

Good intentions without follow-up actions bring nothing. Diligence, however, pays off. Solomon noted that those who don’t want to work always come up with creative excuses.

“The lazy man says, “There is a lion outside! I shall be slain in the streets!” (Prov 22:13) Excuses, too, are no substitute for getting the job done.

think he is intelligent, productive and effective—in other words, if he’s diligent.

Diligence and hard work are the opposite of laziness. The fruits of diligence and hard work are also the opposite of the consequences of laziness. What does Solomon tell us about the reward of diligence? “The hand of the diligent will rule, but the lazy man will be put to forced labor” (Prov 12:24).

Those who are enthusiastic and motivated in their work are those who naturally will get the promotions and greater responsibility. If you want to be considered for opportunities for advancement, cultivate and develop these traits. Do your absolute best in your current position to show that you can handle additional responsibility, and it will likely come.

No one who takes a passive, disinterested approach to work should expect additional responsibilities, or the additional pay that comes with them. “He who has a slack hand becomes poor, but the hand of the diligent makes rich” (Prov 10:4). The results of work habits Solomon noted almost three thousand years ago haven’t changed.

Does he [the master] think that servant because he did the things that were commanded from him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, “We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do. (Lk 17:9-10)

An unprofitable servant, said the Lord Jesus, does as he is told. He exactly—and barely—meets his responsibility. Such a servant, Jesus said, is unprofitable.

Our Lord Jesus didn’t spell out what makes a servant profitable. He didn’t have to. His meaning was clear: a profitable servant must go above and beyond his duty. He must go beyond what his master (employer) expects.

In times of economic uncertainty and financial instability, there is probably no better way to ensure your employment security and growth than to follow Paul’s admonition to work for your employer as if you were working for the Lord Jesus Himself. In doing so, you will fulfill Christ’s description of what we must do to be truly profitable servants. ★

Do your absolute best in your current position to show that you can handle additional responsibility, and it will likely come.



Diligence Pays Off

Hand in hand with hard work is a trait the Bible often refers to as diligence. We might call it many things—initiative, motivation, enthusiasm, drive, or foresight. Curiously, the Hebrew word “diligent” is translated “sharp” in several verses. Today we refer to someone as sharp if we

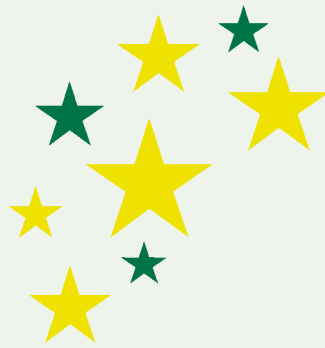
WHICH SERVANT ARE YOU?

Perhaps no other biblical approach to success on the job and in our career is better expressed than that summarized by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He noted the difference between a servant—an employee—who is profitable to his employer and one who is not:

The Baby Room—

A Mother's Reflection

Audrey Chan—Leicester, United Kingdom



Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven—Matt 18:10

The soundproof baby room at the back of the chapel—most churches will have one of them. In our case, it is a modest twelve-by-five-foot partitioned room with glass panes and rickety sliding wooden doors that have not been working for as long as anyone can remember.

And ours is not soundproof. Ah, how many young parents have had the pleasure of sitting in this room with their young, noisy charges during services.

This is a room where you sit with Junior and have problems listening to sermons for about three years until he toddles off to religious education classes. I've just finished doing time in one and can breathe a sigh of relief as my youngest is now off to kindergarten.

I now have the pleasure of listening to a sermon from beginning to end, no longer needing to make up a feed, to entertain, or to referee a fight.

I often sympathize with the poor sermon-giver, who has the unenviable challenge of trying to concentrate on delivering his message while witnessing parents keep lively children from using the pews as an obstacle course.

Only a few months ago, while I was engrossed in looking up a Bible verse, my two-year-old dangled himself on all fours on the back of the pew whilst triumphantly shouting, "Spiderman!"

before crashing loudly onto the floor.

He was sufficiently embarrassed not to cry out loud, so he sheepishly climbed onto my lap as the whole congregation turned around to look at the culprit. The speaker bravely continued amidst stifled giggles.

Junior, bless him, does not understand proper church etiquette and, specifically, the need for quietness and solemnity. Inside the baby room is another world, where he has to learn these rules from scratch, but never, it seems, at any great hurry.

I do believe that my two youngsters have been the most raucous of all its occupants to date. "No, it's mine!" or "I want..." amidst great wailing has been heard most Sabbath days in the baby room as Christian virtues are expounded on the pulpit.

With a bit of perseverance, something does eventually sink in. It is in here that Junior starts to learn the practice of formal worship with hymnal singing, prayers, and sitting quietly while someone speaks on the pulpit.

Not only that, but useful by-products include Junior learning how to share (admittedly toys) and taking turns without resorting to fist fights. It does not seem like Junior is taking anything in as he plays, chatters, and bargains with his fellow

inmates, but he does.

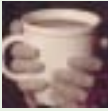
And not only that, but Junior watches your every move and copies you by 'reading' the Bible and standing up to 'sing hymns'. So it's worth us parents setting a good example. If we chat during services, we show Junior it is OK for him to do so as well.

In my limited experience, it takes a good two to three years of training and many gray hairs for the parents before children sit reasonably still and quietly through a service. This is unless they have inherited quiet genes (alas, they skipped a generation in the case of our kids).

But even then, things do not always go according to plan. Last week, during Holy Communion, I was feeling quite proud of my youngest as he helped himself to the bread and the cup with the appropriate level of decorum.

All went well, until he spied a friend, walked over, clinked his cup with hers, and called out, "Cheers!" Oh well, it's back to the drawing board for this mom...





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

Christian Living

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

Bible Study

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

Doctrinal Study

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

Exhortation

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

Testimony

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

Creative Writing

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

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

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

Manna
General Assembly of True Jesus Church
22932 El Toro Road.
Lake Forest, CA 92630 USA

Please direct any questions to manna@tjc.org or +1-949-859-6818 phone/
+1-949-859-6836 fax.

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

Call For Articles

Author Guidelines & Editorial Calendar

EDITORIAL CALENDAR

Issue #41

Theme: The End Times

Articles due: Feb 28, 2003

This theme will focus on the end-times, or the last days. Is the world really going to end? What are the signs of the end-time (trials, persecutions, warfare, false prophets/miracles, etc.)? Is the second coming of Christ literal or metaphorical? What does Jesus say about the end-times in the gospels? How can we prepare for it?

Issue #42

Theme: Science and Technology

Articles due: May 31, 2003

This theme will focus on the recent advancement of science, and its affect on our faith. How do we reconcile scientific discoveries with our faith in God? How do we deal with recent developments in biomedicine, and where do we draw the line between relying on medicine verses relying on God?

Issue #43

Theme: Holy Spirit

Articles due: Aug 31, 2003

This theme will focus on the promised Holy Spirit. What is the nature and role of the Holy Spirit, and how do we discern between different spirits? What does it mean to submit to God's spirit?

GENERAL WRITING GUIDELINES

CONTENT

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

GRAMMAR/STYLE

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



A ROOM WITH MY NAME (Jn 14:1–4)

*Beds of roses; golden pathways,
Every room that knows its name.
Hear the angels' music making,
O this paradise of fame.*

*There our Father went
To inscribe the letters of your name;
On that special door He purchased,
With crimson blood and valiant shame.*

*This was your hope, and now your present glory—
To find a room with your name.
And you have seen the angels singing,
Yes, His paradise, at last, to claim.*

*He said: Child, you know the way.
Where I am, you'll be some day—
Trust My voice, and I will lead you there.o*