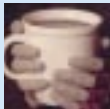


MANNA

True Jesus Church ISSUE 43 JAN-MAR 2004 **Holy Spirit**

The **Big** Decision
Holy Spirit Like **A Dove**
His **Merciful** Grace



Dear Reader,

We hope the New Year is off to a great start for you, and if you have given yourself a spiritual resolution for the year, we hope God is faithful to complete it in you!

While we were working on this issue several things came together in the articles that helped us realize that our relationship with God is really a holistic experience that requires spiritual growth in various aspects of our life, and not just one area.

When we talk about being filled with the Holy Spirit, we cannot ignore the subject of purity and holiness in our lives. Although these secondary themes don't surface in the theme section, they are mentioned everywhere else, and this is a good reminder for all of us who desire to draw closer to God and to hear His voice.

Not only does the Holy Spirit work within us, its fruit is expressed in how we make decisions, how we are strengthened by its power in our daily walk, and how it gives us a deeper sensitivity of God's place in our lives.

So as you read this issue please keep the holistic picture in your mind, take time to absorb the words slowly, and let God take you wherever He leads you to understand Him better.

THE EDITOR

MANNA

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Holy Spirit

“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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Holy Spirit



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He asked God for permission to talk to a sister at church. He cared this much about what God thinks about the decisions he makes, this is what prompted me to discover more for myself.

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His Merciful Grace

Irene Chua—Singapore

COMING TO THE LORD

In 1996, I had a gut feeling that I should take my mother to visit her eldest son in China. Something also told me that it would be her last trip. My mother was not well throughout her stay.

After spending half a month in Swatow, her hometown, we came back to Singapore. The next day, I had to rush her to the Singapore General Hospital because she felt very weak.

The doctor decided that she needed to be hospitalized after some tests. On that particular day, though, the hospital was full and could not take her in. I checked with another hospital and was told they had no available beds either.

There was a third hospital which could accommodate her, and they even had a geriatric ward. I wasn't keen on sending my mother there, but her

condition at that time left me with no choice.

During her stay in this hospital, my mother was put through so many tests she nearly died. But God showed us His merciful grace.

One of the tests was a colonoscopy. I was not aware that she had to fast for one full day before this test. Anyway, a barium enema was inserted into her anus to remove the feces from her large intestine.

My mother, already weak and small in stature, could not stop purging for two days after the colonoscopy. In fact, she went into a state of shock and could not even sit up by herself.

In that extremely weakened state, she prayed to Jesus, saying, "Jesus, I am Irene's mother. Although I pray to idols,

she believes in You. If You allow me to sit up, I will go to church and worship You."

The next day, my mother was able to sit up by herself unaided! When the ministers of the church came to visit her, she told them about her prayer. They, in turn, told me about her prayer, and I was full of joy and excitement.

After her discharge from the hospital, my mother joined me in worship at church.

The Power of "Hallelujah"

In 1997, tuberculosis (TB) scars were found in my mother's lungs. My father had died from pulmonary tuberculosis in the early 1960s. According to the doctor, my mother had been infected but the virus remained in the Window Phase.¹

So when my mother's health

deteriorated, the virus resurfaced. I resigned from my job to care of her. After two rounds of medication, my mother recovered. Thank God, during this period, my mother learned to put in a lot of effort to pray whenever she felt unwell.

Although TB is highly infectious, God protected me and gave me good health throughout the whole year I spent looking after her.

Later, I took on part-time work. One day while at work, I received a call from my mother. She had had a fall. Amazingly, there was not a single scratch or bruise on her!

My mother said that when she fell backwards on the toilet, she felt a pair of arms supporting her. These arms then gently put her down on the floor.

After this experience, my mother decided that she would get baptized and, on June 29, 1997, she received God's cleansing grace.

Throughout that year, my mother was in and out of the hospital for various ailments. Shortly after her baptism, my mother suffered a mild stroke. Praise the Lord, she recovered within six months and was able to continue to join me in church to worship God.

However, before my mother could build up her faith, she was stricken with Parkinson's Disease. The disease robbed her of all her bodily functions. By 1998, my mother became completely bedridden.

Since my mother's bout of tuberculosis and other ailments that followed, we often prayed together. Through these frequent prayer sessions, the word "Hallelujah" had become deeply instilled in her.

Even today, as difficult as it may be,



Each night, whenever I look at her after a tiring day at work, her peaceful countenance speaks volumes of the grace of God.

she will utter the word "Hallelujah". whenever she is in pain and discomfort. Articulating "Hallelujah" may seem quite ordinary, especially for us long-time believers, but it is no small achievement for my mother.

She has not spoken a single word since she lost her ability to talk. So it always amazes and delights me to hear her say "Hallelujah". It also never fails to smooth out the lines of pain and illness from her face.

Each night, whenever I look at her after a tiring day at work, her peaceful countenance speaks volumes of the grace of God.

RECEIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT

The years from 1998 to 2003 were long and trying years, not just for my mother but for me, too. It was painful seeing her so weak and helpless. My heart was particularly burdened because my eighty-eight-year-old mother had not received the Holy Spirit.

As her condition deteriorated over the years, I grew more anxious. How would I know if she had received the Holy Spirit if she could not talk? It was with this torturous worry and heavy heart the morning of September 27, 2003 that I began my prayer with my mother, as was our normal morning routine.

My heart was heavily burdened as I held my mother's hands. She was again in pain and it showed on her face. But no matter how piercing the pain, she couldn't speak.

God showered His bounteous grace upon us again. Halfway through the prayer, I heard my mother speaking in spiritual tongue. Though short, it sounded light and musical—like someone playing the piano but infinitely more beautiful and melodious.

In fact, I had never heard such a heavenly tune before in my whole life! My joy knew no bounds. Indeed, I felt the way I did many years ago when I had received the Holy Spirit.

Our wonderful God had not only blessed my mother but also granted me my wish to witness for myself that she had received the Holy Spirit. He allowed me to experience and share in the joy of His blessing upon her.

TEACHINGS FROM THE LORD

My mother's journey towards the Lord was also a journey of faith for me.

At the age of eighty, my mother could still climb four flights of stairs without panting. Slowly, with the onslaught of ailments, her healthy and sturdy body deteriorated into a pain-wrecked confinement.

I ached and grieved for her. It was a torment seeing her in so much discomfort but unable to do anything to lessen her pain. Sometimes, the helplessness was too much for me to bear.

My brothers, both non-believers, rebuked me for allowing my mother to be baptized. They even blamed her state of health on her baptism. They said, "If she had not become a Christian, none of

this would have happened.”

Their words pierced like an arrow through my heart. Throughout my life, I had only one wish—for my mother and my siblings to come to know the Lord Jesus. Their hurtful words left me wondering where I had gone wrong.

I would be in denial if I claimed that I had remained strong and positive throughout my mother’s sickness. Actually, I went through a stage of deep depression.



**More than anything,
I learned to do things by
His will and not my own.**

Letting God Bear My Burdens

During the first few years of her ailments, I hardly had an hour’s sleep each night. I would have to get up every five to ten minutes to attend to her as she moaned and groaned in pain and discomfort all through the night.

There was once, in the first year that she was bedridden, when everything just became too much for me to handle. Exhausted by the lack of sleep and her endless groans and moans, I snapped.

I opened the sliding window, intending to throw both of us down from our apartment building. My mind was in turmoil.

Over and over, these words throbbed and echoed in my numbed brain: “Die, and you will be free from all sleepless nights. Even if you don’t die from the fall, your mother will. The worst for you is that you will be paralyzed. But you will be free, FREE!”

I stood by the window for almost half an hour. Somehow, just as I was about to pull her out of bed, I came to my senses. How could I even have thought about suicide?

I really thank God for His intervention. I dread to think of the consequences had God not intervened at that moment.

I had a good cry and resolved then that I would not carry the burden by myself anymore. The Lord Jesus was there for me so I should let Him help me carry the burden.

From then on, whenever my mother hyperventilated, I would sing hymns to her. Marvelously, not only did the hymns soothe her, they also comforted and reassured me that God is always there for me.

More Support Than I Could Have Expected

Another lesson for me was the lesson of brotherly love. Brothers and sisters in church often asked about my mother’s wellbeing. “How is she?” “Is she better?” But they did not ask about me.

Hardly anyone asked, “How are you feeling?” “Are you coping well?” I was a bit hurt. I was also suffering and I also needed some concern, too. But after a while, I realized that, to them, if my mother was well, then I would be at peace and be well, too.

Slowly, my resentment melted.

The Lord further helped to heal my family relationships. My brothers no longer blame me for the plight that my mother is in. They have seen with their own eyes the love that the church has given to both my mother and me.

They have also witnessed for themselves my mother’s peaceful

countenance, although she is usually asleep whenever they visit her.

The Lord’s merciful grace to me extended even to finance. Although my brothers contribute whatever they can to meet my mother’s medical expenses each month, the financial burden is still quite substantial.

During the initial years of her sickness, a member would, through the minister, pass me funds for my mother’s medical bills. Then, about four years ago, a church sister who knew that I was in need of money contributed two thousand dollars for my mother.

Another sister whom I hardly knew at that time, after finding out that my mother had suffered a stroke, offered and took care of our monthly expenses for six months.

This came up to quite a tidy sum. I really thank God for His provision and their love. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all these brothers and sisters for their prayers and concern, as well as their joy when they heard that my mother had received the Holy Spirit.

More than anything, I learned to do things by His will and not my own.

Seeing my mother in pain, I used to plead with God to take her home to the heavenly kingdom so that she would not continue to suffer.

Though my intention was good, it did not occur to me that I was actually praying out of my own selfishness and not waiting for God’s will to be done until a sermon awakened me to my folly. Immediately, I asked the Lord for forgiveness.

Though everyday is a struggle and

my mother is consistently down with pneumonia, I have learned to be grateful for each additional day that God gives her.

Indeed, I have enjoyed the great privilege of witnessing the miracle of my elderly mother receiving God's saving grace and the Holy Spirit.

Truly, God has shown me that He always has a good purpose for allowing us to be in each situation (Rom 8:28). He has also taught me that there is a time for everything (Eccl 3:1-8).

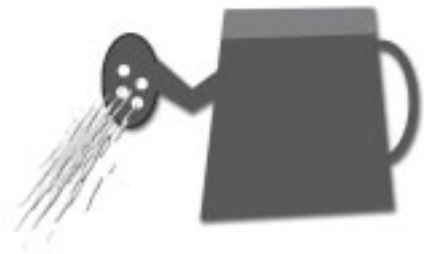
He will always abide with us in His merciful grace.

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

All praise and glory to God. Amen.★

Editor's note: True filial piety finds its strength in God's love, and this testimony is a wonderful example of both His love and our love for our parents. May He continue to strengthen Sis Irene and her mother, who is in need of our prayers as doctors have found a lump in her abdomen. Though she is in great physical pain, she is still able to rejoice in the Lord.

¹The infectious stage when the body has yet to develop antibodies against the virus, masking signs of the virus from blood tests.



a dollar a day...

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You are called to take action for the sake of worldwide evangelism and the spreading of the gospel...with **a dollar a day**. If everyone could daily extend one dollar towards the International Assembly World Evangelism Fund, we could, together, accomplish the commission that our Lord Jesus Christ left behind. Your financial commitment will open up possibilities and resources that will lead us to save many souls.

Please take time to fill out the offering sheet available at your local church, to pass this message on to loved ones and family, and to pray for God's ministry. May the Lord be gracious to you!

To find out more about the dollar-a-day program and donation options, please contact ia@tjc.org.



The Lord Has Given Me Spiritual Eyes

Baiyun Yang—Baldwin Park, California, USA

In 2002, God guided my parents, my husband, my daughter, and me to believe in Him, and we were baptized at Baldwin Park Church.

On August 29 of that year I suddenly lost sight in my right eye. After an eye exam, an ophthalmologist told me that an artery in my right eye was clogged and that there was only a five percent chance of recovery.

The ophthalmologist also extracted some liquid from my eyeball, hoping to relieve some pressure and increase blood flow to my right eye. But I did not sense any improvement.

After ten minutes, the ophthalmologist shook his head and walked away. I could only see a bean-sized spot of light. My hope of finding a cure for my right eye vanished with his footsteps.

Having to face this sudden illness was a shock for me. I had suddenly lost an eye.

I could no longer read, type on the computer, work, or drive, and it seemed as if all of my wonderful plans in life had disappeared like bursting bubbles.

SEARCHING FOR THE BEST CURE

August 30th was a sabbath day, and after hearing the news of my illness, the members in Baldwin Park Church prayed

for me. On the same day, the church also sent out a global prayer request on my behalf.

Many brothers and sisters, including some of whom I did not know came to visit me in the hospital. They prayed for me and gave me great comfort. I knew they were sent from the Lord.

That afternoon I had a dream: my older brother stood three meters away and held three toothpicks to test my eyesight and I could see them clearly. I was just about to give thanks to the Lord when the nurse came and woke me up. Having to face the reality after my dream, I felt an unspeakable sense of loss.

On September 4th, accompanied by my husband, we flew to the best hospital in China, Beijing's Xie-He Hospital, for immediate treatment. The test results confirmed the diagnosis of the American hospital into which I was admitted.

After examination, the doctor discovered that the original pink-colored blood beneath my right eye had turned grayish-white, that the nerves in my eye had begun to atrophy, and that some of the cells in my eye had already died.

According to reports, the recovery rate for this medical condition is time dependent. The chance of recovery is sixty percent if treated two hours after the initial loss of sight and decreases significantly to twenty percent after four hours. Beyond six hours, it becomes incurable.

It had already been six days since I lost vision and, based on these statistics, it was impossible for me to regain my sight. The doctor had no other method to treat my eye except to insert some blood vessel-widening medication.

Past the Point of Treatment

In my despair, I left Xie-He Hospital on September 7 and arrived at Ying-Zhi Eye Hospital with a hopeful heart. Ying-Zhi Eye Hospital is the most technologically advanced eye hospital in China.

The Chief Ophthalmologist received his Ph.D. degree in ophthalmology from

Harvard University and is a specialist in lower eyelids. He designed a surgical procedure that had never been clinically performed before—he would dissect my eyeball and then apply external pressure towards the artery in my eye.

However, the blood-flow diagram showed that the artery in the right hemisphere of my head, which passes through my eye artery, contained severe blood clots (thrombus), taking this problem out of the realm of ophthalmology.

Ying-Zhi Hospital consequently abandoned the original surgical plan.

We were still unwilling to give up. We went to Tian-Tan Hospital's neurosurgery department, where they performed a nuclear magnetic resonance scan, hoping to find space in the thrombus membrane so that a cover tube could be inserted to prevent the scattered thrombus from entering the brain.

Unfortunately, the thrombus membranes were completely filled and this new surgical plan was also abandoned.

We tried everything we could to cure my eye. On the verge of hopelessness, my family members told me to prepare my heart to face reality.

Even though I knew none of the doctors could cure me, I was still unwilling to give up and was unable to accept the reality of not being able to use my right eye again. I shed many tears during those sleepless nights.

TURNING TO GOD FOR HELP

On September 11, after a sleepless night, I left the hospital and dragged my enervated body to my home in Beijing. On the 12th, in my despair, I beseeched the Lord to help me. I opened the Bible

and handed it to my husband so he could read it to me.

He asked me whether I wanted to hear from the right or the left page. I casually said the right page, and this turned out to be John 9, which contained the story of a man born blind and received sight.

How miraculous! Was this a coincidence? I could not believe my ears and thought of how blessed the blind man was that the Lord Jesus Himself healed him.

Would the Lord heal me?

Since I had exhausted all alternatives for treatment from eye professionals in the United States and in China, the Lord was my only hope left.

Yet my pitiful logic filled me with doubt. Was it possible for me to regain my eyesight now that the blood flow had stopped and the cells had died?

Ever since the day I lost my sight, I prayed to the Lord several times a day. When I arrived in Beijing, I woke up everyday before dawn to pray. Sometimes I prayed in tongues and sometimes I prayed with a prayer of understanding.

I said whatever I wanted to say and prayed wherever I felt like praying. I would tell the Lord all my worries and pains.

Our heavenly Father, dear Lord, in the darkness I kneel before you and I ask that you listen to your daughter's heartfelt words. You have created human beings; every cell and every blood vessel is a part of your masterpiece, and only You can cure our illnesses. I am only thirty-nine years old—I have not finished this journey of life. Human power is limited, but You are omnipotent, and You are my only confidence.



...in my despair, I beseeched the Lord to help me. I opened the Bible and handed it to my husband so he could read it to me.

During my stay in Beijing, my parents and my husband prayed with me everyday. My thirteen-year-old daughter also prayed for me in Los Angeles.

The moment we returned to Beijing, a minister and some brothers and sisters from the Beijing True Jesus Church came to visit me. They also prayed for me on sabbaths.

A MEDICAL MIRACLE

Three days after my husband read to me about the blind man in John 9, a miracle happened! That morning I felt a foreign object on my eyeball. Afraid that my illness was worsening, I went to the hospital immediately.

As I was getting my eye examined, I suddenly felt some brightness and I began to see the top row of the visual chart, then the second row, the third row, and the fourth row. I had regained partial eyesight.



Yet today a miracle truly happened to me. A simple concept of trust had become a deeply moving experience.

The bean-sized spot of light that I was originally able to see had increased to the size of a cracker. But additional examinations of my lower eyelids, cells, and neurons, showed that my physical condition was the same as before, so the doctors could not explain why I was able to see better. This was a medical and clinical paradox.

That night, I had the most comfortable sleep that I had had in more than ten days. When I woke up, it was already past daybreak. My whole family

knelt down and prayed in thanksgiving.

Dear Lord, in darkness we asked for Your help yesterday, and today, You have shown us the light! From the depths of our hearts we know that this is Your mercy and grace. We have personally experienced Your love, and we feel like the most blessed people on earth.

For the next few days, I went through several eye therapies in addition to receiving IV to widen my blood vessels. Even though these were only simple procedures to reduce my illness, my right eye showed dramatic improvement.

The coloring of the blood vessels on my lower eyelids returned to the normal pink; after examination, it was determined that the blood vessels of the left eye had branched out to the right eye to allow blood flow. The doctors and the medical authorities all were amazed and called my cure a miracle.

A SIMPLE CONCEPT OF TRUST

On September 20, a sabbath day, my entire family read John 9 together. We reflected on the past twenty-some days and nights—from losing sight to receiving sight.

From entering three hospitals to being denied four times—each rising hope to each vanquished dream. We thought about how we sought God's help in despair to His appearance and faithful answers; from dreaming of regaining my sight to reading the

passage on the blind man who receives sight.

I could not believe that I had actually regained my sight, but I felt extremely blessed. This was a trial from our Lord; furthermore, it was His grace to my family and me. The experience was painful, but I have gained a deeper understanding towards God's words and God Himself.

Before this, I regarded the many miracles in the Bible as fables to be heard but not to be believed. Yet today a miracle truly happened to me. A simple concept of trust had become a deeply moving experience.

This trust was obtained through an exchange of repeated suffering and hopelessness. Without my wholehearted trust in Him, I would not have been saved. In fact, it was only in dire despair that I truly felt the urgency to lay prostrate before the Lord.

Had there been an inkling of pretense, of relying on human wisdom and strength, of disregarding God's deeds, this miracle would not have happened.

I paid a great price to imprint the truths in my heart that "God steps in when we are at the end of the rope" and that "God's deeds will be manifested in man."

And Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind." (Jn 9:39)

After reading this verse, it dawned on me that the Lord healed my eye so that my spiritual eyes would be enlightened.

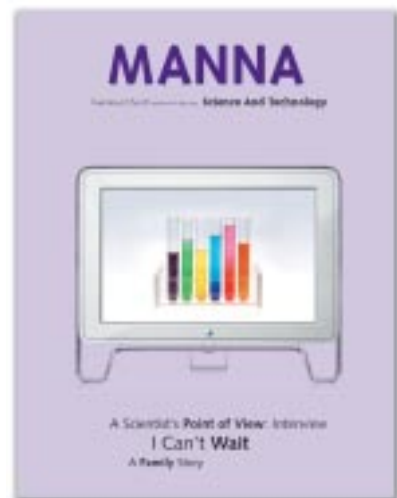
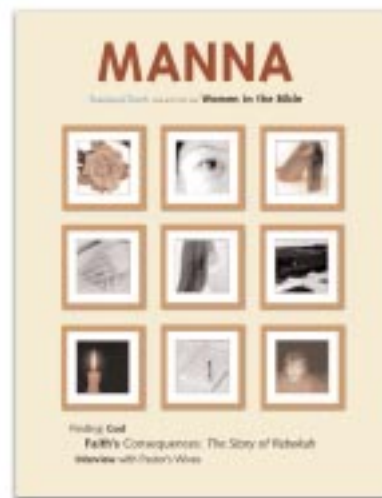
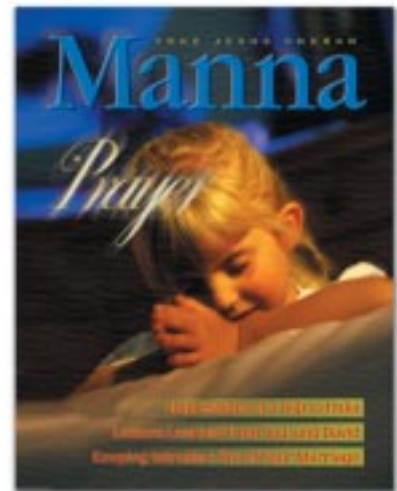
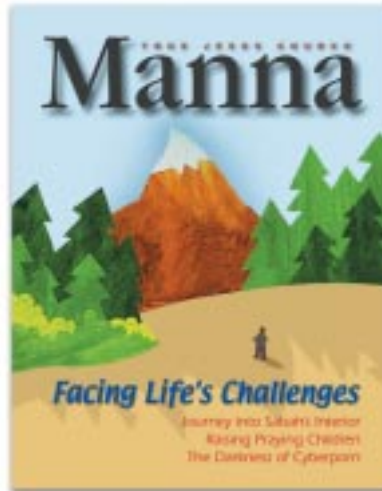
While my physical eyes see worldly things, my spiritual eyes allow me to

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communicate with the Lord, see His will, and prevent me from transgressing against Him after the healing. I will do the things that please Him, and I will strive to work for Him and manifest His great power in my remaining years.

Not long ago, I had another dream. I dreamed that the Lord personally healed me and that my right eye was completely restored. May the Lord open not just my physical eyes but more so my spiritual eyes. Amen! ★



If you missed previous issues of Manna, don't worry because all you have to do is log on to www.mannamagazine.com and view them online. You can also download the PDF Version so that you can print out a hardcopy to read at your leisure. Happy reading!



Cast All Your Care Upon Him

Jason Hsu—Baldwin Park, California, USA

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:6-8)

Apostle Peter encourages us to cast all our care upon God because He cares for us.

In our everyday lives, we often forget that our lives are upheld and sustained because of the Lord's care. If the Lord were to take away His hand from the universe, even for a moment, the universe itself could not stand (Heb 1:3).

However, sometimes our eyes are

blinded to this care and we need God to remind us that it is He who upholds all things in this universe—not just the sun, moon, and stars—but us, too (Ps 63:8).

I will share two spiritual experiences that reveal important lessons that the Lord has taught me. Both experiences have been the result of the weakness of the flesh; yet, they have also been a testament to the greatness of God's grace.

In these last days before Christ returns, we must be even more watchful, for Satan knows His time is near. So we must humble ourselves. Be sober, be vigilant, so that we may overcome to the end of days.

My hope is that my experiences can serve to warn and encourage, but, most

of all, impress upon you the vast extent of God's care for us. God's care and providence go far beyond our limited human understanding; His love is unimaginable.

SPIRITUAL PERSECUTION

I will first share an old spiritual experience that taught me the importance of how our thinking impacts the successful completion of our journey to God's kingdom.

Many years ago, shortly after I believed in Christ, I would do my utmost to continue in my daily spiritual pursuit of God. I would pray hours, not minutes, every day. I would read the Bible by books and not chapters.

I was young back then, but I did my



As I sat on the edge of the bed, ready to go to sleep, I thought to myself, “Wow! It’s hard to be a Christian.” I was ready to give up.

utmost to transform my life radically for the Lord. But then I came to a low point in my faith.

During that time, I faced persecution from my own family and friends about my faith and spiritual pursuit.

The persecution I faced was not the type where I was threatened with bodily injury or death; rather, it was an emotional and spiritual persecution, which can be the most difficult type to overcome.

It is difficult to constantly hear things like, “Why do you pray so much?” “What’s wrong with you?” “You’re strange!” “You’re no fun to be around anymore. Bye.” Soon, you begin to feel as if your life took a seriously wrong turn, even though your heart knows that that is not the truth.

The Bottomless Pit

Faced with this situation as a young believer, I became very depressed one night. As I sat on the edge of the bed, ready to go to sleep, I thought to myself, “Wow! It’s hard to be a Christian.” I was ready to give up.

Then I had another thought: “Maybe hell is not that bad. How bad could it be?” Just as I thought this, I let myself fall back onto my bed, but instead of hitting my pillow I fell in!

Was I transported to another dimension physically? Probably not. Spiritually, however, I felt as if I was falling into a deep hole. For some reason or other, I had a good idea where I was. I was in the bottomless pit as recorded in the book of Revelation.¹

What does it feel like to fall down a bottomless pit?

It is hard to describe the feeling—the complete loneliness, darkness, and confusion you feel—as you descend into a dark and bottomless abyss. I can only imagine that it’s what prophet Jonah experienced as he was cast off the ship and down into the raging sea (Jon 1:15; 2:3).

Even worse is to descend down into the darkness knowing full well there is no bottom to end your plight.

As I was freefalling down this dark pit, I felt like I was spinning out of control. I also felt cold and evil spirits—demons—running through and around my body. When the evil spirits went through me, I sensed their pain and heard their silent cries.

These cold spirits continued to fly around and encircle my body as I spiraled downwards. Finally, I sensed an extremely deep darkness in that pit. Such darkness cannot be compared to any earthly darkness. It was a deep spiritual darkness that smothers you to the point where you feel as if you are suffocating.

As I was falling, I remembered a testimony from a brother in Africa who saw a vision of the judgment day during his prayer. In his prayer, the brother saw himself waiting in a line of thousands of people. Everybody was waiting for their turn before the judgment throne of God.

As he got closer to the throne, the brother saw the Lord Jesus sitting on His throne with eyes like flames of fire

(Rev 1:14).

Surrounding the throne was a multitude of angels. Then the brother observed that when a person was found worthy of God’s salvation, all the angels would sing loudly, and the person was warmly welcomed into God’s kingdom.

But if the angels did not sing, then the person was escorted by two angels, one at each arm, to a large pit. The brother saw these damned souls kicking and screaming as they were escorted to the bottomless pit and forcefully thrown in.

As I was reflecting on this brother’s testimony and comparing it to my own situation in the abyss, I realized that I wasn’t going to get out of that pit without God’s help. So I began to softly say “Hallelujah” and repent for my wrong thinking.

I told God at that time, “I don’t want this. Lord, save me.” Suddenly, I felt as if God’s hand took my spirit and lifted me back to the present world. I was so thankful to be back in my room that I kept praising God.

From that time on, I realized that I could never ever give up on my spiritual life—no matter how difficult the circumstance.

LOOKING FOR LOVE IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

The second spiritual experience I received came with a dream and a vision, as a result of looking for love in all the wrong places.

We often search for love on our own terms and outside the Lord’s blessing. Yet, Song of Solomon 2:7 teaches us not to stir up or awaken love until it pleases. Many brothers and sisters in the church are looking for love, and it often seems

difficult, if not impossible, to find.

Love is a blessing and gift from God; yet, love is not something we should rush to awaken before its proper time. Without God's blessing, no one will find their true love.

Love is also God's highest calling. To find a kindred spirit with whom to share God's highest calling is a beautiful and honorable thing in His sight. But as we look for such a person, we are often faced with difficult decisions and situations among the numerous other hurdles we may encounter.

Fleshly desires are among the toughest obstacles that we meet as we explore relationships with the opposite sex. Lustful thoughts and acts, however, do not produce the righteousness of God or help us establish a true loving relationship.

Instead, acts of lust deteriorate the love relationship between a man and a woman that God intended to be a source of blessing and joy between a husband and wife.

The Path of Indulging the Flesh

Some time ago, while unvigilant in my own exploration of love, I fell into the trap of lust. Because I was unwatchful in my spiritual cultivation I was unable to resist the temptations of the flesh. James 1:13, 14 says:

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

The lustful desires of our flesh, even if not fornication or adultery, are not



Yet, I tested God for my own personal reasons. Because of the confidence I had in the flesh (Phil 3:3), I was so confident that I had things under control that I hadn't realized I had already fallen into sin.

desires God wants us to indulge upon.

Jesus warned us even to take care of how we think about the opposite sex when we look, saying, "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:28).

If we must be wary of even our thoughts, how much more our actions, which proceed from our thoughts?

Unbelievers cannot understand the spiritual ramifications of their thoughts or acts of lust. To them, lust is a natural inclination that should be indulged upon like a hungry man at an all-you-can-eat buffet (cf. Mt 4:2ff).

Why would you deny food to a hungry man or woman? But Romans 8:6 warns us, "[T]o be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

As I sinned against the Lord through the desires of my flesh, I knew with "head knowledge" that what I was doing was wrong; I even knew that my faith was weak at that time and that I should be more careful.

Yet, I tested God for my own personal reasons. Because of the confidence I had in the flesh (Phil 3:3), I was so confident that I had things under control that I hadn't realized I had already fallen into sin.

Learning the Difficult Lessons

Through life's experience and mistakes,

I have learned difficult but important lessons from the Lord.

Sometimes, God's teachings are difficult to swallow, and some of God's prophecies are difficult to speak (Rev 10:9-11). But God's word and truth must always be taken, eaten, and revealed—even in times of darkness.

With love, God brings us out of the darkness and teaches us the difficult lessons—lessons that we may not want to learn or lessons that we think we already know.

1 Corinthians 10:12, 13 teaches:

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

I read these verses many times in the past, but sometimes only life's lessons can teach you the meaning.

To bear our sins is a heavy burden. Only God knows the way of escape from temptation. After I sinned against God, I thought to myself, "Why doesn't God punish me?" I was waiting and praying for a sign from God to show me clearly the direction I should take.

As odd as it sounds, I was actually eagerly awaiting God's judgment upon



Like any sleep, spiritual slumber brings a temporary comfort to the flesh. And on the night God's sign finally came, I was sleeping soundly.

me. I almost wanted God to take away my Holy Spirit or do something so that I could “wake up” from my spiritual slumber. But the sign from God never came...until one night.

THE “BLACK CARD” DREAM

Like any sleep, spiritual slumber brings a temporary comfort to the flesh. And on the night God's sign finally came, I was sleeping soundly.

I had an unusual dream that night, and I do not often have dreams. In my dream, I saw myself in a room with my father. I had in my possession a black card, but I hid the card in a Bible I was carrying.

Somehow I knew that the black card possessed a great and evil power, so I hid the card to keep it from affecting others. I also knew that I wanted to—and had to—destroy the card. What I didn't realize, until later, was how much my dream sounded like a movie plot.

I did not want anybody to see or take the black card, mostly because I wanted to destroy it. So I hid it. For some reason, I understood whoever possessed that card would become the ultimate evil—the anti-Christ. So I felt such an urgency to keep the card, but at the same time, I wanted to destroy it.

Sitting in the room with my father,

he began asking me for my Bible. I remember thinking how odd it was that my father was asking me for the Bible. For those who know my father, he would never read the Bible.

But I started to give my father an excuse because I did not want to give him the Bible. I knew that my father, an unbeliever, did not really want the Bible. What my father really wanted was the black card hidden in my Bible.

Afterward, I saw myself riding in a new car with my sister and her friend, who was boasting about his new car. As we stopped the car and chatted, I began to sense that my sister and her friend were being drawn to the black card that was inside my Bible.

I rushed to get out of the car because I did not want to be trapped in the backseat of the car. As we all got out, I was already wary of both my sister and her friend.

Suddenly the two of them lunged at me for my Bible. Afraid for both my life and theirs, I fled away. I knew I had to get out of there.

VISION OF THE SPIRITUAL WAR

Instantly, I saw a vision of many angels flying before me. There were so many angels that I could not count them all. The angels were gathered on two sides and heading towards one another at great speed and force.

I have never seen such a thing before, but I knew that one group of angels represented the good and the other side the evil.

As the angels sped towards each other, they clashed with such great force that a powerful shockwave ensued. I then saw the beginnings of a fierce spiritual war being waged. I knew that

this war was the same type of spiritual war described in Revelation 12:7, 8.

There was a difference however: in Revelation 12:7, 8, the archangel Michael and his angels prevailed, but, in my vision, the evil angels were winning. At that moment, my heart was shaken awake.

I came to full consciousness in the dark room. I realized this was no longer a vision but real life. Immediately, I felt an evil presence fast approaching from my right side. Satan was coming and approaching fast.

I was in a panic at that time because I knew I did not have much time. I don't think I've ever felt that scared before in my life.

I quickly got up on my knees and started to pray in the Spirit. As I was praying, I began to feel some claws grasp my throat. And a very sharp nail from one of the claws was pressing right into my Adam's apple.

The claw was trying to pierce through me as if to kill me, but something was holding it back. At the same time, I was trying to say, “Hallelujah.” But I could barely speak with the claws around my throat and that



There was a difference however: in Revelation 12:7, 8, the archangel Michael and his angels prevailed, but, in my vision, the evil angels were winning. At that moment, my heart was shaken awake.

nail pressing upon my Adam's apple with a great force behind it.

I felt the great power within the hand of that nail. But I continued to marvel about why the nail could not pierce through me.

GOD'S SAVING HAND AND MESSAGE

As the sharp nail was forcefully pressing and pressing into my neck, I continued to wonder why the nail could not go through. I finally realized that God was protecting me. But I had felt so far from God in those days that I then began wondering why God would still love and protect me.

Suddenly, I felt God's strong presence come upon me, and I began to pray in the fullness of the Spirit. God impressed upon me two important messages during that prayer, which I share with you now.

First, God impressed upon me that we cannot survive or even stand without His grace and loving protection. I knew that truth before, but I did not really understand it. But during that prayer, God opened up the eyes of my heart anew, and I understood that truth crystal clear. It was God's grace that kept me alive and upheld me throughout my sin and weakness.

We know many truths with "head knowledge," but until God reveals them to our hearts and in the spirit, we often cannot fully understand His truths.

The truth that God alone can uphold and protect us against evil is not new or revolutionary; rather, it is a petition found even in the Lord's prayer: "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Mt 6:13).

The second message God delivered to me was this: "You must testify about

your experience for Me—for the sake of other brothers and sisters." As many thoughts began to race through my mind, I asked God, "Do I have to?" God did not have to answer with a loud thundering voice, for He had already placed the answer in my heart.

But I delayed sharing it and, perhaps, tried to forget it. For this sin, I must again repent to the Lord and apologize to the people whom God loves. Though I tried to forget, God would not let me forget.



We know many truths with "head knowledge," but until God reveals them to our hearts and in the spirit, we often cannot fully understand His truths.

So I told God that I would write it out, which I have now done. And so I share this message with you.

For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Mt 10:26-28; cf. Eccl 12:14)

After my experience, I briefly wondered about why the Lord was so insistent upon my testimony.

I understood two things: (1) God wanted to teach me a humility I had forgotten and that there is no such

thing as selfish pride in His kingdom; and (2) God revealed to me that there are other brothers and sisters in the same sin or worse.

I encourage those brothers and sisters to take my experience to heart and quickly turn back to the Lord and His way.

I end as I began, with this encouragement: cast your care upon the Lord for He cares for you. All of us, at times, will face the difficulties of life's

pressures. All of us will meet with the anxieties of life's decisions. But let us meet them with the Lord. It is not that He doesn't care, it's that we haven't realized how much He does.

Through His care, God will deliver us into His kingdom.

I pray that the Lord will use my witness as He intends. May all the glory and honor be to the King of glory, who alone is worthy of our honor and praise. Amen. ★

*Cast your burden on the Lord,
And He will sustain you;
He shall never permit the righteous to be moved. (Ps 55:22)*

¹ Rev 9:1, 2; cf. Lk 8:31; Rom 10:7; Rev 11:7; 17:8; 20:1, 3

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You may be surprised by what you find if you look deeper into a droplet of water or an oxygen atom—nature has a message for you!

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Christian Living

Live Like Jesus

"But Christ Jesus made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." (Philippians 2:7)

The truth of this verse hasn't really dawned on most people. They mistakenly think that Jesus was able to work wonders, to perform miracles, and to live above sin because He had divine powers that we don't have. Thus, they have never really applied to live like He lived.

"Oh me," they say with great humility, "I could never live like Jesus did. After all, He had an advantage. He was God!"

They don't realize that when Jesus came to earth, He voluntarily gave up that advantage, living His life here not as God but as a man. He had no innate supernatural powers. He worked wonders, not by His own power but by the power of the Father, saying, "...the Father who dwells in Me does the works." (John 14:10).

And when He prayed, He prayed not as a divine One who had authority as God, but as a man who walked obediently with God. And, as Hebrews 5:7 says His prayers were heard not because of His deity, but because of His godly fear.

The Lord Jesus, the divine Son of God, set aside the privileges and powers of deity for a time and lived as a man on earth. Once we grasp that, it will absolutely thrill our soul! Why? Because it means that we can be a reborn child of God filled with the same Holy Spirit as Jesus was and have the same opportunity to live as He lived on earth. In fact, that is exactly what He intends. In John 17:18 He said to the Father, "As You sent Me into the world, also have sent them into the world."

Jesus has sent us into the world to live as He lived. When we are baptized into Christ we are born anew. Through the new birth, He enables us to exchange the sinful nature of Adam for the sinless nature of God.

He's given us the ability and the command to live above sin, to live in fellowship with the Father, to preach the gospel, to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to cast out demons, and to make disciples.

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Lessons Learned From Running

Willow Tree

I often find that the longer I am in Christ, the harder the journey seems. There have been many times when I feel the end is too far, and I don't have the energy or the stamina to continue on this spiritual race anymore.

Somehow though, during the most difficult times, God is always been there for me; supporting me and nudging me on. I often compare my spiritual journey to my running and am amazed at the many parallels we can draw from the sport.

Here are some of my thoughts.

LOOK TOWARDS THE FINISH LINE

I remember the feeling when I was nearing the finish line of a half-marathon. I felt both intense pain and sheer joy. Joy

because I had finally made it and was nearing the finish. Pain because I was running with a sore hip the last couple of miles.

Even though it hurt to run, I kept on going, running through pain and fatigue because I had my eyes set on finishing the race. I told myself that I trained so hard not just to run the race but to finish it.

Even though the journey to the finish line was gruesome, with many hills to overcome, leg cramps, and muscle spasms, none of it prevented me from eyeing the end.

Apostle Paul understood the difficulty of running the race when he firmly reminded us to “[forget] those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead...press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:13, 14).

This is exactly what runners have to do to keep on going: forget about the

pain and strive towards the goal. It is also what we, as Christians, must do.

The only way to accomplish this is through the Spirit of God. A training guru said, “The five S's of sports training are stamina, speed, strength, skill, and spirit, but the greatest of these is spirit.”

This is true in running.

The Greatest of these is Spirit

We may have all of the first four qualities, but if we do not have the spirit to keep on going and to overcome our minds, which keeps telling us that we cannot go on anymore, then those qualities may not drive us to the end.

Likewise, in our spiritual journey, we may have the strength, the skill, and the stamina to walk the heavenly way, but without the Spirit of God in us, we are unable to complete this journey.

Have you not known?

Have you not heard?

The everlasting God, the Lord,

*The Creator of the ends of the earth,
Neither faints nor is weary.
His understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the weak,
And to those who have no might He
increases strength.
Even the youths shall faint and be weary,
And the young men shall utterly fall,
But those who wait on the Lord
Shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,
They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.
(Isa 40:28-31)*

As the passage above states, God's spirit gives us strength when we are weak. It gives us the power to continue—to run without feeling weary. What a runner's dream that is!

To be endowed with all this strength when we run this heavenly race is a great blessing indeed.

If we ask God daily for His spiritual strength to dwell in us, we will be amazed at the power we receive from above. It will provide us with the stamina and endurance needed to complete this race.

Whenever I am feeling down and think that it would be easier to quit, God reminds me with His precious words, "...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith..." (Heb 12: 1, 2).

Through these verses, I have learned to be far-sighted and to have hope. We need to overcome our present situation, our current difficulties, and look beyond to the glorious blessing that lies ahead.

These verses tell us that Jesus is the author and finisher of our faith. This means that since He started our race for

**If we ask God daily for His spiritual strength to dwell in us,
we will be amazed at the power we receive from above.**

us, He will also help us finish it.

We need to hold on to that promise and continue running. Don't let our pain or our fatigue weigh us down. Instead, ask the Lord to fill us with His spirit so that we can be energized to carry on.

"KEEP ON GOING!"

At around mile eight of the half-marathon, I was faced with a short but steep hill. I braced myself for it and ran up. Once I reached the top of the hill, I was exhausted! But I made myself keep on going because I refused to let myself drop out after all the training I had put myself through.

Up on the hill, there were many supporters encouraging us to "keep on going!" Hearing these people cheer me on gave me the extra boost I needed to keep on running. I was also fortunate because I was running with a colleague's friend who had run half-marathons before.

She ran with me most of the way and continuously encouraged me to keep it up. Even though she didn't say anything at times, her quiet but steady presence provided me with the encouragement I needed.

Oftentimes on this spiritual journey, we are faced with many difficult external circumstances, which may make our faith waiver. It is at these times that we need the support of close brethren in Christ.

Sometimes, I feel so burdened and overwhelmed with problems that I feel

very weary. I tell God that I cannot handle it anymore and that I can no longer keep on going. It is amazing how God has listened to my cries and pleas and released me from my burdens and instilled in me a heart of peace and joy.

I remember once I went into work even though it was a day off. I felt a heavy burden on my shoulders and unable to cope with my problems any longer. It was just at that precise moment, at my lowest point, that a brother called and encouraged me.

I didn't even have to say anything to him. He knew.

I truly thank God for this brother's words of wisdom. It helped me put things in perspective and gave me the strength to continue on this journey. I know that God was using this brother to help me, to provide me with the encouragement I needed. Through this brother, I gained the energy to continue with what I had already started.

The Lord never promised us that this spiritual journey was going to be easy. He did say that "narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life" (Mt 7:14).

Even though that may be the case, it is important that we continue.

We may think that we're running this race at too fast a pace. We may feel tired. Then slow down. Walk. Replenish our energies.

Most important, however: DON'T

QUIT! Surround ourselves with close brothers and sisters who can encourage us with the word of God and prayer.

All the pain, all the difficulties, all the tears—none of it would matter anymore because I would have finally reached the goal and endured.

WHAT A GLORIOUS DAY THAT WILL BE!

When I finally finished the race, the sister who came to cheer me on congratulated me by quoting apostle Paul's words of wisdom: "[You] have fought the good fight; [you] have finished the race, [you] have kept the faith" (2 Tim 4:7).

When I heard these words, I felt a sense of accomplishment and I couldn't stop smiling! All the pain and fatigue I had felt disappeared. None of it seemed to matter anymore.

The most important thing was that I had reached the goal. I had finished the race! I was in seventh heaven! I couldn't believe that I had finally done it. What a wonderful feeling it was!

I remember thinking to myself how wonderful it would be when I actually finish the spiritual race and my Lord would say those words to me. That would truly be a joyous occasion.

All the pain, all the difficulties, all the tears—none of it would matter anymore because I would have finally reached the goal and endured. I would finally be able to see my Savior face to face. Oh, what a glorious day that would be!

*There is coming a day when no heartaches shall come,
No more clouds in the sky, no more tears to dim the eye;
All is peace forevermore on that happy golden shore—
What a day, glorious day, that will be.
What a day that will be when my Jesus I shall see,
And I look upon His face – the One who saved me by His grace;
When He takes me by the hand, and leads me through the Promised Land,
What a day, glorious day, that will be.¹*

The lyrics to this hymn give me much peace, joy, and hope to continue with this difficult but most worthwhile race.

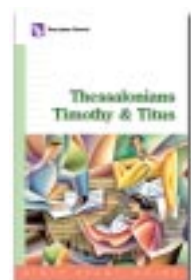
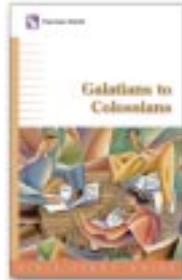
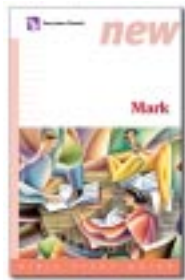
Now when I run this race, I focus all my energy on Jesus, as He is the only one who can replenish our soul and reenergize us with His spirit.

That is why I have decided to run this race and stick with it. I want to be able to see my Lord face to face. I want to be able to hold His hand and to give Him a great big hug. See you at the finish line! ★

¹Hymns of Praise (True Jesus Church, 1993).
No. 523

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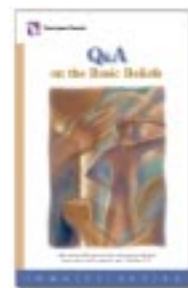
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Holy Spirit

Before our Lord Jesus ascended to heaven, He promised His disciples that, in His place, would be a Counselor that would guide them into His truth, and to empower them in their ministry. Today, the same Spirit functions the same way within us.

If there is one thing that can teach us the deep things of God, it would be the Holy Spirit that He has sent, which is also the guarantee of our place in heaven. Unfortunately, its importance and role in the lives of Christians are often missed nowadays.

The theme writers for this issue put things into perspective for us, teaching us about its significance in our daily lives and showing us its attributes for us to follow. When we understand how the Spirit of God works to direct our lives, we will more clearly value our place and our ministry for Christ on this earth.



Holy Spirit Like A Dove

Adapted sermon by Huei-Chia Chou—California, USA

The Bible uses different metaphors to describe the Holy Spirit so that we may be able to understand its profound function and spiritual meaning more clearly. These metaphors make use of familiar things to describe something more abstract.

One very important metaphor used to describe the Holy Spirit is its likeness to doves and their unique and noble characteristics; not only their characteristics but also their historical significance in Noah's time to the apostolic era to the present day.

VIRTUOUS ATTRIBUTES

Faithful Lovers

Doves are known to be faithful to their

partners. They rarely seek a second mate in their lifetime. This is a characteristic we ought to emulate.

I sleep, but my heart is awake;

It is the voice of my beloved!

He knocks, saying,

"Open for me, my sister, my love,

My dove, my perfect one;

For my head is covered with dew,

My locks with the drops of the night." (Song 5:2)

Written by King Solomon, the Song of Solomon is thought by some to be a memoir of his love life. Even though Solomon had many concubines, it is said that he had only one true love—the Shulamite woman.

Some also say that the song is Solomon's description of his most beloved; but in actuality, it is not describing the carnal love that people understand. Rather, it portrays the spiritual and intimate relationship between God and His beloved.

God's beloved is the Israelite nation, and He has chosen them to be His people. Today, we are the spiritual Israelites and He has chosen us to be His special nation. Together, we make up the body of the church that Christ considers as His bride.

To His bride, God gives His undivided and devoted love, just as a husband loves his wife and the same way in which doves remain true to their partners.

Devoted love requires commitment to one another. If there is any sign of infidelity in a marriage, there will be problems and strife.

The book of Proverbs says that it is impossible for a man to take fire into his bosom and not be burned (Prov 6:27), and this is the same for those with adulterous hearts towards God.

The Lord expects us to love Him exclusively, and if we turn our love elsewhere we will incur His wrath.

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? (Jam 4:4, 5)

God loves us with godly jealousy (2 Cor 11:2, 3), and He has betrothed us to one husband in Christ Jesus. If we lose sight of Him and become attracted to

and tempted by the world, our minds will be turned away from the simplicity that is in Christ.

Just as Jesus said, a man cannot serve two masters: either our hearts are turned towards God or turned towards evil.

He also gave us the Holy Spirit so that we might always remember His love and experience Him in Spirit. The Holy Spirit is faithful to God and to those who love Him. If we chose a master apart from God, the Holy Spirit will not continue to dwell with us.



When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we naturally take on the characteristics and virtues of Christ.

Gentle Creatures

Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. (Mt 10:16)

This passage tells us that another characteristic of doves is gentleness. They are innocent and docile, attributes that the Holy Spirit shares. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we will also become gentler.

The Lord Jesus Himself was a kind and gentle man. His heart was always meek and humble, and it is these virtues that He wanted and encouraged us to learn from Him.

During His ministry, Jesus was filled with compassion for the sick and the demon-possessed. The Bible tells us that He does not destroy a bruised reed nor will He extinguish a withering flame.

Instead, He will cause the reed to grow again, and He will rekindle the lamp. This, too, is how the Lord Jesus treats us—with meekness, compassion, and mercy.

When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we naturally take on the characteristics and virtues of Christ. Through the fullness of the Spirit, we are shaped and refined to be more like Him.

A Sign of Peace

There are many social events where people release doves as a sign of peace. In the same way, the Holy Spirit is our counselor and our peace, and it will reconcile us with God and motivate us to live in harmony with others.

In the epistle that Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he reminded the believers that it is by the gracious salvation of Jesus Christ that we can be at peace with God. It is through the Holy Spirit that the Jews and non-Jews are reconciled and made as one body in Christ.

Peace is one part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. If we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we are able to live at peace with everyone. Without the Holy Spirit, it is hard for us to be united in one mind and recognize God's will.

If each of us is filled with the Holy Spirit, we will find it easier to have peace and humility in the body of Christ, and we will be able to bear one another and to serve Him harmoniously.

*The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,
The leopard shall lie down with the
young goat,
The calf and the young lion and the
fatling together;
And a little child shall lead them...
They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My*

*holy mountain,
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge
of the LORD
As the waters cover the sea. (Isa 11: 6, 9)*

This is the sign of harmony on the mountain of God—everyone will come and receive His word, which will transform and enable us to live side by side without strife.

Those who were vicious as lions in the past will become like lambs after the transformation of the Holy Spirit. All will come to this mountain in meekness and humility so that the mountain of God will be filled with peace.

PREFIGURATION OF THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Early on in history, we see the use of the dove in Noah's time during the great flood.

After forty days and nights of rain, Noah, his family, and all the animals in the ark waited until the right time to come out. In order to find out how much water had receded, Noah first released a raven. The raven did not return so Noah released a dove in its place.

The dove returned because it did not have a place to rest its feet. Seven days later, Noah let out the dove again, and this time it returned with an olive leaf. Noah sent the dove out a third time a week later, and it did not return—a sign that the land had dried.

The sending of the dove prefigures the three historical periods during which the Holy Spirit worked.

The dove returned the first time because there was no clean place to set its foot and it didn't want to defile itself. The dove returned the second time, bringing with it an olive leaf, but it did



The sending of the dove prefigures the three historical periods during which the Holy Spirit worked.

not return the third time.

In the Old Testament times, the Holy Spirit strengthened the servants of God by empowering them to carry out God's work. But when the work was completed, the Holy Spirit returned to God and did not remain with the servant, just as the dove was sent to do its work the first time only to return to Noah when the work was done.

Only after the grace of salvation through Jesus Christ, on the day of Pentecost, did the Holy Spirit descend and dwell among God's people. The apostles received this Spirit and began to preach the gospel with power, thereby establishing the apostolic church.

At the end of the apostolic era, the Holy Spirit returned to God because the word of God began to deviate and Christians began to turn away from Him. But the work of the apostles was not in vain just as the dove had returned with the olive leaf.

The olive leaf is a metaphor for the fruits of the labor of the apostles who worked tirelessly to spread the gospel of salvation to Jews and Gentiles alike. They sowed the seeds of God's plan to redeem and save us through the blood of His one and only Son, Jesus Christ.

The third time that the dove was sent out, it did not return, and this is the sign of the end times in which we now live. The Holy Spirit is the latter rain that will re-establish the true church.



The Holy Spirit will dwell with the true church until the second coming of the Lord Jesus, and it will empower the work of God's ministry until the very end, when we will enter into the new heaven and the new earth.



Without Him, our life would feel empty and dissatisfied, but the Holy Spirit brings us a new hope and a new sense of fulfillment.

A NEW CREATION AND NEW LIFE

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (Gen 1:1, 2)

The first two verses of the Bible records that the Spirit of God hovered over the waters. The meaning of the word “hover” in the original biblical text is likened to a dove preparing to fly over the water.

Another Jewish text commonly used as a biblical reference describes this passage to be the Spirit of God as a dove descending upon the water, and this is probably the earliest record of the dove as a metaphor for the Holy Spirit.

When God first created the heavens and the earth, the earth was formless and empty, and it was filled with darkness. It was the Spirit of God that transformed the earth from its lifeless form to a life-giving place (Psalm 104).

This is true of our spirituality. Apart from God, our spiritual life would be in desperation and darkness. Without Him, our life would feel empty and dissatisfied, but the Holy Spirit brings us a new hope and a new sense of fulfillment.

The hand of the LORD came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. (Ezek 37:1)

God explained this new life to the prophet Ezekiel through a vision. He brought Ezekiel to a valley of dry bones and asked him, “Can the dead bones be revived?” Ezekiel replied that he did not know.

Then God told Ezekiel to prophesy to the bones so that a new life may enter into them. True to His words, these dead bones grew tendons and flesh, and they rose and became a vast army.

God explained to him that these dead bones represent the house of Israel. They were like dried dead bones without hope, but when the breath of God entered into them, they came alive.

This is also true for us today—the spiritual Israelites. It is through the Spirit of God that we are able to have hope of a new life, for His Spirit will renew us, and we can overcome the dominion of sin and death and become a new creation. ★

The Work Of The Holy Spirit

YM Yang—Paris, France

WHAT KIND OF POWER?

But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

“You shall receive power!” But what kind of power was the Bible referring to?

In Christendom, many evangelists who claim to perform wonders define this power as the power to perform signs and miracles, a definition that is generally accepted.

Nowadays we often hear people say, “The Holy Spirit is not as powerful as before,” referring to the diminishing evidence of miracles. But when Jesus said He would send the Holy Spirit, He did not associate its power with miracles as most people would understand it.

To understand the power of the Holy Spirit, we must recall the courage and the faithfulness of the apostles who followed Jesus during the three years of His ministry, before they received the Holy Spirit.

What kind of power did they not have? The power to perform signs and wonders, heal the sick, and cast out demons? The power to preach the message of repentance that the kingdom of heaven is near?

No, Jesus allowed the apostles to share in these powers with Him long before the descent of the Holy Spirit and before He was glorified through His death!

So, the power that accompanies the Holy Spirit must be so unique that without the Holy Spirit we would not be

empowered to be witnesses for the Lord Jesus Christ to the world.

IT UNDERSTANDS THE MYSTERY OF GOD’S WORD

Before the Lord departed from the world, He taught the disciples devotedly and told them, “There are many things I would tell you, but you cannot understand now.”

How can this be? The all-knowing and almighty Lord could not enlighten the twelve apostles in three years? This was not a matter of pedagogy or aptitude.

The ability to understand mystery requires the power of the Holy Spirit from above, not simply claiming that “the Lord had personally taught me” or that “such scholar supports such a view.”

The Lord said, “When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13).

Paul was a Pharisee who gained repute for his devotion to the Scripture. On the way to Damascus, the Lord called him. At that moment, he was shocked that what he had learned before was rubbish.

Writing about this abrupt turn of his understanding of God’s word, Paul quoted the Scriptures:

But as it is written:

*“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard,
Nor have entered into the heart of man*

The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God... Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. (1 Cor 2:9-13)

Moreover, the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost fulfilled the words of the prophet Joel, “And also on My menservants and on my maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days” (Joel 2:29).

They would prophesy, as was evidenced by Peter, who testified before the rulers of the Jews with great spiritual power though he was unschooled. Even scribes were astonished by the conviction of his statements:

“This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven give among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:11, 12)

From the experiences of Paul and

Peter, we see that the Holy Spirit goes beyond inborn talents and education, and it gives the faithful servants of the Lord the ability to understand the mystery of the truth.

This power was absent in the Old Testament and in the disciples before the Lord was glorified through the His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

That was why the Lord wanted them to wait. For if they only preached the message of repentance without imparting the truth and the Holy Spirit that renew lives, how were those who heard the message to receive eternal life?

Apollos was an eloquent man and well-versed in the Scriptures.

This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. (Acts 18:25)

This shows that Apollos had not heard of the Holy Spirit and knew only the baptism of repentance (Acts 19:1-6). He could call people only to repentance and to return to the Lord, but he could not teach them about the requisite Holy Spirit and the truth for salvation.

That is why Priscilla and Aquila took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately (Acts 18:26).

IT EMPOWERS THE WORKERS

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles and they received the power that the Lord had promised them.

Peter, whom the Lord rebuked for having disbelieved Christ's resurrection, stood up and quoted from the Scriptures after he received the Holy Spirit to

expound on how Jesus Christ overcame death and was raised from death.

The people were cut to the heart and asked, "What shall we do?"

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

With such simple words, Peter established the fundamentals of the forgiveness of sins and salvation. If the Holy Spirit had not directly taught him, where would Peter have received such revelation about the importance of baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit?

Similarly, the Greeks desired wisdom and the Jews wanted miracles. But Paul deliberately refused to wow the Greeks with His excellent speech and wisdom nor the Jews with signs and miracles.

Paul's preaching was only a demonstration of the Spirit's power. In other words, he did not preach with persuasive words of human wisdom. He spoke in words that the Holy Spirit taught, comparing spiritual things with the spiritual.

However, the Greeks and the Jews who were of the flesh could not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they were foolishness to them (1 Cor 1, 2). If Paul had not had a profound understanding of the Holy Spirit and the truth, he would not have such courage and conviction in the One he has believed.

As the believers of Christ Jesus, we should pursue the fullness of the Holy Spirit so that we may come to a deeper

understanding of His truth and live a Christ-like life by the renewing of our spirit and mind.

We need to recognize that the work of the Holy Spirit is the authority given to the true church in the last days to preach the mystery of God's words and to empower the workers of God. It is this precious Holy Spirit that distinguishes the true church from others.

We must comprehend the fact that preaching the gospel of repentance, casting out demons, and performing wonders can be done in the name of the Lord Jesus alone—even by those who work lawlessness (Matt 7:22). Therefore, such authority does not need to be associated with the Holy Spirit. ★



How The Spirit Guides Us Into All Truths

FF Chong—London, United Kingdom

One of the great divine initiatives of Jesus' departure is to open a way for us to follow; that where He is, we may be also. Jesus, being the Holy Spirit Himself, will direct us from within to help us reach our ultimate destination—the heavenly kingdom.

The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to guide us into all truths concerning Jesus Christ, and this truth is given to us in writing through the Bible. It is the blueprint that instructs us to live the way Jesus expects us to live.

In this light, understanding the truth in the Bible through the help of the Holy Spirit is one of the most important pursuits of our life.

Recognizing that the two complete and reveal the truth in each other will keep us from misinterpreting the truth, generating different views of God's teachings, and causing conflicts in our faith.

How, then, does the Spirit guide us into all truth?

THE BIBLICAL PERIMETER

The Bible tells us that Timothy was a good coworker of Paul, and Paul often urged Timothy to consider his teachings about the truth. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul encouraged Timothy that God will give him understanding in all things (2 Tim 2:7).

Similarly, the Spirit guides us when we are keen to submit to Him and to seek out "all truth." What the Spirit reveals is what God wants us to know, but it must fall within the biblical perimeter.

Three components of the Bible form the perimeter in which the Holy Spirit works to reveal God's truth. They are Jesus' words, the Old Testament Scriptures, and the apostolic teachings.

Together, they form the canonized Bible. There is an apparent explanation for their connection—they revolve around Jesus Christ, the source of all truth (Eph 4:21; 1 Cor 3:11).

Jesus' Word

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)

Jesus mentioned "all things" twice and the second qualifies the first. Here, He defines the perimeter of what the disciples would know to be His teachings through the Holy Spirit.

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak... He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you. (Jn 16: 13-15)

But we must not over-read the intended meaning of Jesus in this passage. Otherwise, we might mistakenly think that God's truth is incomplete in the Bible.

We might be led to believe that this is the proof that there is no limit to His revelation through the Spirit; as if the Spirit overrides biblical teachings, or that it reveals additional truths outside of the Scriptures.

Since Jesus is the complete embodiment of the truth, as the truth is in Jesus (Eph 4:21), and whatever the Spirit imparts would not exceed what He has said and what He wants the Spirit to say about things concerning Himself.

The Spirit, according to John, works at the instruction of Jesus (Jn 16:13), and the Spirit is there to testify of Jesus and His work (Jn 15:26).

The Apostolic Teachings

He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me. (Lk 10:16)

Jesus knew there were many things the disciples could neither yet know nor accept if He chose to tell them at the moment when He first found them. So He allowed the Spirit to reveal His truth to His followers later on (Jn 16: 12, 13), when it was time.

Obviously, there are things that the disciples teach that are not found in the gospels. Examples include baptism in the name of Jesus, speaking in tongues as evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit, and the understanding that we receive salvation through grace.

Jesus, foreseeing the need to make His word complete, authenticated the word of His disciples (Lk 10:16, Jn 15:20; 1 Jn 4:1ff).

Take the case of circumcision. When it was time to reveal that circumcision should not be enforced on gentile believers, this truth had to come through revelation because the apostles had only the Old Testament Scriptures at the time, which did not include the salvation of Gentiles.

God had to unfold His truth through His Spirit to the apostles in order to resolve the growing tension and conflict in the church. The Holy Spirit gave the apostles authority to shed light on this controversial issue.

This revelation was the key to helping the community of faith understand that salvation was no longer under law but under grace (Acts 15:1ff).

But can this be considered an additional truth revealed by the Holy

Spirit outside the biblical perimeter, since the salvation of Gentiles and their exemption from circumcision was never mentioned in the Mosaic Law?

We will return to this question a little later.

Old Testament Scriptures

These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me. (Lk 24:44)

Many of Jesus' teachings find their basis in the Old Testament Scriptures (Mt 22:27ff; Lk 4:18ff). Jesus preached and even defended His actions often by referring to Old Testament prophecies.

In fact, the entire Old Testament Scriptures point to Him (Jn 5:46). God's awesome and transcendental revelations are found in Him (Jn 5:39), and they are part of the "all truth."

Therefore, when Jesus came into this world, His plan and completion of salvation also fulfilled everything that God revealed to His prophets and the promises He made to His chosen people, the Israelites.

At times, an Old Testament quote may illustrate or develop into a totally new teaching in the New Testament.



whatever the Spirit imparts would not exceed what He has said and what He wants the Spirit to say about things concerning Himself.

One example is the teaching of “an eye for an eye”, which was replaced by the call to “love [our] enemy” (Mt 5:38).

The “eye for an eye” rule was established on the ground of civility (Ex 21:24; Lev 24:20; Deut 19:21). Since it was a civil law, the offender would receive a punishment equal to the degree of damage inflicted upon the sufferer.

These laws focused on those who were in authority, and had the obligation to look after the welfare of the people. At the same time, the laws served as deterrents to keep the people of God from infringing upon the rights of their fellow countrymen.

In the New Testament, Jesus shifts the focus to the sufferers themselves, who must show great strength in their faith to love their enemies. This has, in fact, been the spirit of the Old Testament Scriptures (Lev 19:18), which is part of the moral law.

THE BIBLE IS COMPLETE

This leads us back to the important question: Does the Holy Spirit reveal additional truths outside of the Scriptures, and do these “truths” override the teachings of the Bible, as in the case of circumcision and the shift from “an eye for an eye” to loving our enemies?

The Spirit does not and will not reveal any teaching that is not biblically founded. What the Spirit does today is to lead us into greater and fuller understanding and realization of the Scriptures.

It does not disclose of further or additional truth to what is God-inspired in the holy Bible. Otherwise, we can probably write other books of equal authority to the Bible.

Rather, the Holy Spirit further unfolds the meanings and mysteries of God’s

teachings and the message of Jesus Christ, which leads us closer to the “all truth.”

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. (2 Tim 3:16)

This reminds us that the Scriptures, in this case the OT Scriptures, was given by God’s inspiration. It is the basis of our faith in Christ Jesus, and it is through the Bible that we have a future hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ Himself (Col 1:27).

The Old Testament was written for believers of the apostolic times and today (Rom 15:4), and it is consistent. Unless we can confirm that the Bible cannot give us the spiritual wisdom to receive salvation and have hope in Jesus, we are required to hold on to its absolute truth faithfully.



Rather, the Holy Spirit further unfolds the meanings and mysteries of God’s teachings and the message of Jesus Christ, which leads us closer to the “all truth”.

THE SPHERE OF THE SPIRIT’S WORK

Identifying the sphere of the Spirit’s work further helps define the perimeter of the truth.

The work of the Spirit is well detailed in the many pages of the Bible; the most notable passage is John 16:8-11:

And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and

of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

These are the three areas of the work of the Spirit.

The first is the sin of unbelief. Gentiles do not believe in God despite the testimonies to His existence by the existence of the universe (Rom 1:20). Many, although having seen His works and power, and heard His gospel, refuse to believe in Him.

This disbelief is a sin (2 Thess 1:7, 8). Peter, by the power of the Holy Spirit, awoke many to their senses to become aware of their sin of unbelief, which had led them to crucify Jesus (Acts 2:22; 3:13ff). Today, the Spirit does just that.

The second is to disclose the righteousness of Jesus Christ. A righteous God is both just and merciful, and the

outpouring of the promised Holy Spirit after Jesus’ ascension firmly underlines the righteousness of Jesus (Acts 2:33).

Though we have neither seen Jesus in person nor heard His teachings from His lips, our conviction remains steadfast in His word. The work of the Spirit here is to help us believe in the word of Jesus, which is written in the Bible.

The third is His judgment. Here, Jesus specifically talks about the judgment that

David in his weakness for Bathsheba. In fact, David was so weak that he did not even recognize his own sin until it was pointed out to him (2 Sam 12:7-12).

Usually, people don't normally see that they are taking the wrong turn. By the time we realize that we have, it's because we're already knee-deep in spiritual trouble.

To make sure we are able to avoid things that dampen our spiritual sensitivity, we must be careful not to be lazy and fall into spiritual ennui, where worship and spiritual cultivation become merely habits.

When not alert, our good habits can turn into a mechanical routine. We should stay alert by asking ourselves the following questions:

- When and why did I start reading the Bible and praying daily?
- What experience from God moved me to do so?
- Do I still feel that same burning desire in my heart when I read the Bible?
- Am I understanding and practicing the spiritual teachings I learn?
- What am I really praying for?
- Do I still feel God's joy, peace, and love as deeply as I did the first time?
- Is the power of the Holy Spirit working mightily through me?

So what happens when your conscience feels clear and you can't find anything else to repent for, since you've avoided all that you could to stay spiritually sensitive?

Recently, I've been wondering the same thing. The answer came to me while I was reading Paul's letter to the Corinthian Church. He said, "My conscience is clear, but that does not

make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me" (1 Cor 4:4).

It's true that it is God who judges us for our sins, even those that are deeply hidden in our hearts. Since only He knows us better than we know ourselves, we need to go to Him in humility to reveal to us sins that we have forgotten and those we committed unknowingly.

We need to pray.

To make sure we are able to avoid things that dampen our spiritual sensitivity, we must be careful not to be lazy and fall into spiritual ennui, where worship and spiritual cultivation become merely habits.

WE NEED TO PRAY

I still remember my deepest and most intimate prayers with God. Those were the moments that built up my relationship with Him. And the deeper I walked into the chamber of my heart, the easier I was able to find God there.

It is in prayer that God reveals to us the things that we have to correct and change about ourselves—when He reminds us of things we have forgotten and things we want to forget.

I'm able to hear His voice clearly when I pray to Him in the Spirit. He is Spirit and, as His followers, we must worship Him in Spirit (Jn 4:24). This tells us that we cannot have true spiritual sensitivity—a true relationship with God—without prayer.

When we get closer and closer to the Light, He will shine upon us and expose us to our own mistakes. Once God has removed our sins, there will no longer be a barrier between Him and us, and we can once again enjoy this spiritual closeness with Him.★

He has brought upon Satan; the ruler of the world. Jesus Christ is infinitely more powerful than Satan. Otherwise, Satan cannot be brought to justice for all his evil deeds against God and His people.

The Holy Spirit confirms that Jesus has overcome Satan by His redemption, which He has freely offered to us (Rev 12:11). By relying on the Holy Spirit, we can be victorious over the evil forces and see through all of Satan's schemes.

These, then, have been the key focus of the entire Bible. And we can see that our understanding of the truth is within the scope of the Spirit's work, and the two agree and confirm all truth to the believers of Christ.

Anything outside the perimeter of the Scriptures and not revealed through the Spirit puts us at risk of corrupting the word of God.

OUR ATTITUDES AND APPROACH

It is when we start to interpret the Bible using our own understanding without relying on the Holy Spirit that we start to encounter differences in opinions about the word of God.

In searching the truth, we must unite our minds by giving up our wills in the sovereign will of the Lord and resolve our disagreements over His teachings.

This unity in the truth is made possible by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which draws us closer to one another in doctrines, in works, and in understanding.

Humility must come into play as well so that we are able to think with spiritual astuteness. To admit that at times we can be wrong in our interpretations of the Bible, something that is human nature to resist, will enhance the Spirit's

guidance in our pursuit of His word.

The church must also establish a set of biblical principles on which ordained workers must agree in order to govern the interpretation of the Bible, and to prevent misinterpretation of the truth from confusing the believers.

The word of God follows a pattern within which our understandings must fall (Rom 6:17; 2 Tim 1:13). It is important for us to come to the truth in the Bible through the right patterns.

We must also be unafraid to improve upon our understanding of the Bible where previous misinterpretations may have prevented us from seeing further into the God's truth.

With the proper attitude and approach, we will make ourselves conducive for the Spirit to guide us into understanding all truths. ★



Spiritual Sensitivity

IN TUNE WITH GOD'S FEELINGS

One of the best things about summer vacations for college students is that we are able to take time off to attend theological seminars with our fellow brothers and sisters in church. I always learn so much, and those days spent at church really draw me closer to God, so that, during the school year, I am able to stay rooted in my faith.

I remember one particular testimony shared by a brother during last year's seminar that really touched me. He told us how he prayed to God about talking to a particular sister.

This really surprised me because I had never in my life asked God's permission for something so trivial. Such sensitivity towards God's feeling! What struck me was his closeness with God that he would inquire of the Lord in small and big issues

of life.

It was this testimony that prompted me to find out for myself what spiritual sensitivity is all about and how to acquire something so valuable in my life.

Spiritual sensitivity is the ability to perceive and respond, by the movement of the Holy Spirit, to God's will, His love, and our own wrongdoings. A spiritually sensitive person is often very in tune with God's heart.

One thing about being young is that we have a tendency to speak our minds or find our own opinions noteworthy. If we are attentive to God, we will naturally think about what God wants us to say instead.

If we don't pursue spiritual sensitivity, then our hearts will gradually harden and be without feeling to God's

commandments, even His love, and God's spirit will no longer be able to move us.

When we are able to feel His heart full of love for us, we will be constantly motivated to love and serve Him zealously in return. If we are able to feel His heartache for our mistakes, we will not repeat our sins against Him.

Even the smallest mistake will prick our conscience, and we will strive to purify ourselves to be holy in the eyes of God.

The further along we get in life, the more questions we will have about what God's will for our future might be—questions about our academic decisions, our career, our marriage, and our family.

In appreciation of how much He loves us, we will naturally consider what

Every time David asked God for His will, it showed how much he valued God's thoughts and feelings. It is no wonder that David was called a man after God's heart.

He wants us to do, where He wants us to go, what He wants us to be. The deeper we understand God's heart, the clearer the answers to those questions will appear in Him.

So how can we be spiritually sensitive in our youth?

DAVID'S SENSITIVITY

David was a man who had this special sensitivity towards God. Many times before or during a battle, he would ask God what to do.

When the Philistines heard that David was anointed king over Israel, they wanted to seek him and most likely take his life. Faced with this threat, David did not gather all his wise men together for advice or to strategize their defense.

Instead, he looked to God for advice:

David inquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You deliver them into my hand?" And the Lord said to David, "Go up, for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into your hand."
(2 Sam 5:19)

Faithfully, David asked God an important question and he was spiritually sensitive enough to hear His answer. Not only did God listen and answer him, David also listened and followed His instructions.

When we ask someone for advice, what we are really telling them is that

their thoughts are worth a great deal to us. Every time David asked God for His will, it showed how much he valued God's thoughts and feelings. It is no wonder that David was called a man after God's heart.

Keeping Pure

How was David able to remain so sensitive towards God all those years? With his own words, he writes of his constant desire to be found clean before God.

*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow...
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.*
(Ps 51:7, 10)

Our God-given conscience tells us what is right or wrong, good or evil, and through the Holy Spirit, we are constantly reminded to examine our thoughts, speech, and actions.

Nevertheless, it is not so easy to keep pure, especially in the college years. Temptations and sins pile up quickly, like bricks lain on top of each other until a wall of separation divides us from recognizing the Spirit's admonition.

Meditating on God's Word

David was always meditating upon the words of God (Ps 19:14). He didn't do this out of habit or obligation; he paid

great attention to God's teachings because he loved Him very much.

When we love someone, that person is constantly on our minds. Similarly, if we love God, He will constantly be on our minds. Jesus once told us that where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also (Mt 6:21).

If we keep the words of the Bible and read them everyday, then God will be in our thoughts and our heart. For me, I've learned to set aside time just to meditate on God's words.

There are a few things that I do to remind myself of God. I read the Bible at the end of my day so that I can fall asleep thinking about God, dream about God, and wake up thinking about Him.

I also have Christian decorations in my room to surround myself with things that remind me of God. I listen to hymns to inspire me, and I attend fellowships to listen to others share their life lessons from Him.

Spiritual Insensitivity

Being spiritually sensitive means that we are always on the alert and that we are aware of Satan's tricks to ensnare us.

It is usually when we fall into spiritual ennui that we become lax in our efforts to draw nearer to God. The problem is, Satan usually recognizes these crucial weak moments in our lives much faster than we can recognize them ourselves.

Otherwise, he wouldn't be called the prowling lion ready in waiting. So we need to "be sober, be vigilant; because [our] adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Pet 5:8).

It was in this exact moment of spiritual carelessness that Satan caught

David in his weakness for Bathsheba. In fact, David was so weak that he did not even recognize his own sin until it was pointed out to him (2 Sam 12:7-12).

Usually, people don't normally see that they are taking the wrong turn. By the time we realize that we have, it's because we're already knee-deep in spiritual trouble.

To make sure we are able to avoid things that dampen our spiritual sensitivity, we must be careful not to be lazy and fall into spiritual ennui, where worship and spiritual cultivation become merely habits.

When not alert, our good habits can turn into a mechanical routine. We should stay alert by asking ourselves the following questions:

- When and why did I start reading the Bible and praying daily?
- What experience from God moved me to do so?
- Do I still feel that same burning desire in my heart when I read the Bible?
- Am I understanding and practicing the spiritual teachings I learn?
- What am I really praying for?
- Do I still feel God's joy, peace, and love as deeply as I did the first time?
- Is the power of the Holy Spirit working mightily through me?

So what happens when your conscience feels clear and you can't find anything else to repent for, since you've avoided all that you could to stay spiritually sensitive?

Recently, I've been wondering the same thing. The answer came to me while I was reading Paul's letter to the Corinthian Church. He said, "My conscience is clear, but that does not

make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me" (1 Cor 4:4).

It's true that it is God who judges us for our sins, even those that are deeply hidden in our hearts. Since only He knows us better than we know ourselves, we need to go to Him in humility to reveal to us sins that we have forgotten and those we committed unknowingly.

We need to pray.

To make sure we are able to avoid things that dampen our spiritual sensitivity, we must be careful not to be lazy and fall into spiritual ennui, where worship and spiritual cultivation become merely habits.

WE NEED TO PRAY

I still remember my deepest and most intimate prayers with God. Those were the moments that built up my relationship with Him. And the deeper I walked into the chamber of my heart, the easier I was able to find God there.

It is in prayer that God reveals to us the things that we have to correct and change about ourselves—when He reminds us of things we have forgotten and things we want to forget.

I'm able to hear His voice clearly when I pray to Him in the Spirit. He is Spirit and, as His followers, we must worship Him in Spirit (Jn 4:24). This tells us that we cannot have true spiritual sensitivity—a true relationship with God—without prayer.

When we get closer and closer to the Light, He will shine upon us and expose us to our own mistakes. Once God has removed our sins, there will no longer be a barrier between Him and us, and we can once again enjoy this spiritual closeness with Him.★



The Big Decision

*He who finds a wife finds a good thing
And obtains favor from the Lord. (Prov 18:22)*

From this verse, we know that it is a good thing to get married. We also know that such a union pleases God. The tough part is the process of finding and waiting that causes a lot of confusion.

In this article, we'll try to address some of the common questions and issues that Christian singles often come across and to perhaps dispel some misconceptions about the process of making this big decision.

HOW DO I KNOW IF HE/SHE IS THE ONE?

Before we answer this question, it is important that we realize that God has laid down some basic guidelines for us in His word. God established marriage for us so that we may build each other up in

our faith and raise godly children.

Through marriage, we are also better able to understand our relationship with God and to take closer steps towards Him each day. That's why it is so important to marry in the Lord.

When we get to the appropriate time to think about marriage, we have to start off with these larger principles and constantly keep them in prayer as we seek out God's help. Are we putting God as our first priority when we are looking for our spouse?

God's intention for married couples is for them to have a companion to help them in their faith journey, for He knows two are always better than one (Eccl 4:9), and since His intention for marriage is good, the best thing we can do is ask for His favor and guidance.

He also looks at our motivation when we are choosing our spouse. He wants to

see that we are choosing our spouse based on these Christ-centered principles and keeping our hearts open for His direction.

At the same time, we need to continue to grow in our faith and pursue our relationship with God. Before we can find a good spouse, we must work on our own spiritual maturity.

God gives us free will to choose whom our heart is inclined towards. As long as we make the decision to make our faith and His principles the foundation of our marriage, we can have His assurance and blessing.

That is why it is important that we establish a close and intimate relationship with God first, so that we are aware of His guidance. If we often seek the Holy Spirit's counsel, it will work within our hearts and confirm our choice.

This is more important than always

asking “Is he/she the one?” The further we are from God, the harder it is and the more confusing it will be for us to find the answer to this question.

So it is not very beneficial to us to find out if a certain person is predetermined by God to be our spouse. What is important is that we put our faith in God and make responsible decisions based on the principles He has given us through the Bible.

If we approach God faithfully and prayerfully, He will move our hearts with His Spirit to recognize that this brother or sister is a suitable person with whom to continue our journey in faith.

WHAT ABOUT RELYING ON SIGNS?

The Lord very clearly showed Abraham’s servant that Rebekah was to be the woman he would bring home for Isaac, and this revelation was God’s blessing because Abraham chose to find a wife for his son from his country and his family, and not among the Canaanites (Gen 24:3, 4).

The servant asked for a sign from the Lord and he was lead to Rebekah (Gen 24: 12ff). However, we should be careful not to focus heavily on just the sign. A very important criterion when we look for signs from God is that we must have true faith and be open to His guidance.

Even when God brought Rebekah before Abraham’s servant, she and her household still had the choice to follow him back to his master (Gen 24:49, 58). In this case, everything worked out to God’s glory because of the faith of everyone involved, and their reverence and understanding of God’s larger plan.

We should not be fixated on specific revelations or divine intervention alone.

This is not a prescribed method of God’s approval. Through persistent prayer and faith of the family and the couple, God might encourage a couple with a sign or a dream, but that sign or dream should only reinforce everything else.

If signs and revelations from God encourages a couple towards each other but causes them to ignore their family’s concerns, biblical principles, and other relevant issues, then it is not a good thing.

There have been cases where brothers and sisters prayed very hard, relying simply on God, and were blessed with a wonderful marriage. The emphasis here is not so much the signs or revelation from God but their simple faith and trust in Him.

Unfortunately, many people are afraid to make choices or they don’t want to be responsible for their decisions. They expect God to tell them the answer by showing them signs and visions about which person they should marry. By thinking this way, they have already gone off course.

We have missed the point if we have many expectations and criteria in our hearts about whom to marry and then proceed to ask God for a sign that directs us to the person that meets those qualities, because that is not the purpose of signs.

If our intentions and motivations are skewed; indirectly, by relying on these signs, we are giving ourselves the false comfort that our choice has been protected by God’s larger will to put two particular people together—in other words, self-validating our decision.

What’s worse than reading the signs wrong and having the wrong motivation is to discover, some time into the

marriage, that this was not what we bargained for. More often than not, disillusioned husbands and wives begin to blame God for making the mistake; forgetting that they were also present at the wedding ceremony and that they made the choice to say, “I do.”



Through persistent prayer and faith of the family and the couple, God might encourage a couple with a sign or a dream, but that sign or dream should only reinforce everything else.

The Bible never teaches us to expect signs from heaven. What it does teach us is to love God and love others; desiring justice, mercy, and humility. These are some of the principles to go by.

WHAT AM I LOOKING FOR?

God made us in a way that man and woman are attracted to each other, and most people don’t go into marriage purely on intellect. However, if we base our choice mainly on attraction, then we risk being sidetracked.

People have the tendency to look at superficial things: Is she pretty? Is he successful? Is she slim? Does he have a sense of humor? This is natural, but as we get to know a person more, we will discover attractive things about the person that goes beyond appearance.

But if we are not able to look past the outward appearance to get to know someone for the invisible spiritual qualities they possess, than we have to

re-evaluate our values, because what we are looking for is not the complete picture of love.

That is not to say that it is wrong to appreciate someone's beauty or success, but if physical appearance is the foremost priority in our decision, over and above our relationship with God, then we need to return to the biblical principles.

In some ways, our choice is a reflection of our values and our relationship with God—what we think is important in life and what is important to God.

Compatibility

It's also important to look deeper and understand a person's relationship with God, with others, and potentially with us.

Here are some constructive questions to ask ourselves when we are considering someone for a spouse:

- Does this person make an effort to draw close to God and to grow spiritually?
- How is his/her relationship with others? With you?
- Can I accept this person for who he/she is?
- Do I share his/her goals and priorities in life?
- What does he/she do with his/her time when he/she is alone?
- How does he/she handle money?
- How does he/she handle his/her body?

Making the right choice goes back to whether or not the person you are considering will bring you closer to God, and whether or not you are able to glorify God together in your marriage.

We all want to marry someone who looks good on the outside, but we have to get past the look and focus on the person's relationship and character with God.

These are things that we should consider, and if we have a close relationship with God, then we are able to make good choices.

Keep in mind that marriage is something that we have to work at on a daily basis, whether it is during the get-to-know-you process or after marriage, and how we communicate is just as important as how often we correspond.

Marriage is not often happily-ever-after right from the wedding day. It's something that we all have to invest prayer, time, and sacrifice to make work.

Even if our spouse-to-be is a very spiritual person, he/she will also face trials and low ebbs in their faith. As long as both parties are committed to seeing each other through difficult times, the relationship will grow deeper with time.

Purity

This is a very important command that God wants us to follow—that we should avoid sexual immorality before and after we enter into marriage (1 Cor 6:9).

God has mentioned many times that we should keep ourselves pure because He will judge the fornicators and the adulterers (Heb 13:4).

Surprisingly, keeping pure has a lot to do with how far we truly get to know



Keep in mind that marriage is something that we have to work at on a daily basis, whether it is during the get-to-know-you process or after marriage, and how we communicate is just as important as how often we correspond.

someone and how clear we know that he/she is the one.

When we engage in a lot of physical contact, our minds are not thinking clearly because we are focused on the pleasures of the flesh. If we are constantly pulled towards these desires, it's hard for us to make rational judgments because we are focused on the pleasure and not on God.

Your body doesn't know that you aren't married, and it won't tell you that you should stop. It will only tell you what feels good, and, when it feels good, it doesn't remember that it is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19).

On the other hand, when we make the commitment to keep pure and keep away from physical closeness, we are exercising self-control. The Bible encourages us to be renewed in the spirit of our mind because it is true holiness (Eph 4:23, 24).

It's nice to see that some couples buy each other purity rings to constantly remind themselves that they have made a commitment before God to keep holy and pure.

The Perfect Timing

There is a time for everything, and this is a very important element when we are considering marriage. Otherwise, if one side is ready but the other party is not, things often end with much heartache.

*I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
By the gazelles or by the does of the field,
Do not stir up nor awaken love
Until it pleases. (Song 2:7)*

If we are not ready for marriage, we should not get involved with someone out of curiosity about dating or what it would feel like to be in a relationship. Our heart is the wellspring of our spirituality—if we give this up too early, we will find ourselves in regret (Prov 4:23).

It is important that we pray that God show us the right timing to know that both parties are ready and spiritually mature. This requires a lot of patience on our part, as well as wisdom from God. This would be a good time to practice waiting on the Lord.

The lack of patience is often replaced by pangs of worry and anxiety. Just like in the case of purity, it is hard for God to comfort and to lead us if we are filled with restlessness about our future marriage.

The Lord Jesus told us that even the grass of the field finds assurance in the Lord. How much more would we, being His special and chosen ones, find assurance in something that He instituted and deemed good? (Mt 6:25-31)

By waiting in patience for His timing, we are expressing our faithfulness and trust in the Lord.

When the timing is right, we will realize how smoothly things fall into place. When the timing is right, falling in love is a most beautiful experience because God's love is assuring us.

There will be moments of fear and doubt—even at the altar. But God does tell us that He doesn't give us a spirit of fear but of love and of a sound mind (2 Tim 1:7). Having fears is very normal, but we need to overcome those fears by casting our anxieties onto our Lord Jesus.

As long as we keep going back to Him, God will give us the strength and assurance that we need to know His will for our marriage. ★



Recently, a good friend of mine came out to Southern California for a visit. I wanted to do something special because I knew she put in much effort to make the trip out here from the East Coast of Canada.

Time Stands Still On The Hills Over There

We decided that we would drive up to Northern California for a few days and to see the city of San Francisco, and I do believe San Francisco stole her heart. We had a wonderful time sightseeing and enjoying the beautiful weather with which God had blessed us, despite the gloomy forecast.

But the best part of the trip was the drive back down to Southern California on the Pacific Coast Highway, otherwise well-known as Highway One. The highway bends and hugs the mountain ranges down the coast of California made famous by the setting of John Steinbeck's novels.

It was the most indescribably beautiful creation of God that I had ever seen.

Time stands still on the hills over there.

Lush green grass covered the mountains like the silhouette of someone safe and sated beneath soft duvets. The hidden waterfalls in between the creeks and the grand rocks left me awestruck, and the endless miles of winding paths humbled and reminded me how small and insignificant I was in comparison.

Then there was the Pacific Ocean. Words would only take away from how magnificently the waves adorned the glassy sea. The liberating scent of salt water and the wind in my hair made me too pensive to speak.

Over the ten hours or so it took to complete the journey the one lingering thought of the dream I so unjustly called a road trip was this—it is impossible to behold the beauty of the Lord and not recognize His great love for us and His almightiness.

Just as we thought that there could be nothing better beyond the scope of our horizon, the praise CD that was playing in the background switched to a new song:

Over the mountains and the sea

Your river runs with love for me

And I will open up my heart

And let the healer set me free

I'm happy to be in the truth

And I will daily lift my hands

For I will always sing

Of when Your love came down

I could sing of Your love forever

I could sing of Your love forever

—Martin Smith, Delirious



We smiled at each other as we quietly soaked in the lyrics and thanked God for the wonderful gift of that day.

I do believe that God's great creation is best experienced, and He has truly put in our hearts a longing to know Him more. Once you see something as great as what I had seen, you would be without an excuse to praise Him, too.

After I got home, I knelt down to say a thanksgiving prayer, and God helped me realize that in very similar ways, experiencing nature fills us with the same intimacy with God as the experience of the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

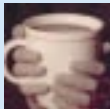
Trying to describe how it feels to be filled with the Holy Spirit is like trying to describe how impressive this voyage was for me, and this spiritual joy and journey with God is something we have to experience for ourselves.

Further out into the ocean, we could see sunny breaks bursting through the clouds and it lighted some parts of the sea like spotlights from heaven—that was how His love came down. The scene was so serene and breathtaking.

It was the gentlest reminder of His presence and His assurance of love for us when we search Him with all our heart. The deeper we see into His beauty, the more intimately and clearly we know Christ—the more we cannot get enough of meeting Him in prayer.

The Lord has put within us a desire to find Him and we need to go right to the source that is the wellspring of our soul, spirit, mind, and strength. Over there, where we taste His love and are struck with His beauty, time stands still. ★

*Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,
Measured heaven with a span
And calculated the dust of the earth in a measure?
Weighed the mountains in scales
And the hills in a balance?
Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD,
Or as His counselor has taught Him?
Have you not known?
Have you not heard?
The everlasting God, the LORD,
The Creator of the ends of the earth,
Neither faints nor is weary.
His understanding is unsearchable. (Isa 40: 12,13, 28)*



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:

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Phone: +1-714-533-8808
Fax: +1-714-533-8878

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

Call For Articles

Author Guidelines & Editorial Calendar

EDITORIAL CALENDAR

Issue #45

Theme: A Life of Servitude

Articles due: May 31, 2004

How do we serve in our respective roles, what are the attitudes of serving God, and how do we make service a life-long commitment? What can we learn from biblical exemplars of the faith?

Issue #46

Theme: Evangelism

Articles due: August 31, 2004

This theme will address the precious gospel entrusted to the true church. How do we equip ourselves to spread the gospel; what are the correct approaches and attitudes to evangelism? And how does this involve me?

Issue #47

Theme: Worship

Articles due: November 30, 2004

What is the meaning of true worship? What kind of relationship do we want to build with God? What are the elements of worship and how can it benefit my life?

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

GENERAL WRITING GUIDELINES

CONTENT

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

GRAMMAR/STYLE

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

True Jesus Church

Articles of Faith

Jesus the True God

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

Holy Bible

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

Church

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

Salvation

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

Baptism

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

Foot Washing

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

Holy Spirit

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

Holy Communion

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

Sabbath Day

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

Judgment Day

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

TRUE JESUS CHURCH CONTACT INFORMATION

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

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HOLY SPIRIT, TRULY MINE

*Come, Holy Spirit, now
To dwell within this soul
And become
Truly mine*

*Fill this heart to capacity
And teach it love
Wider and deeper than
What it used to know*

*Mold this character
And give it patience
To endure hardship
Refined through hope*

*To admit sin and fault
And repent
Self, will, and pride
To resign*

*Until I am no more
And what is left
Truly can be
Wholly Yours*