

MANNA

ISSUE 83
Spring

**Discernment in the Days of the Latter Rain •
Bring Back the Springtime • Rebirth and Restoration:
Canaanite Cults versus Living Water**

“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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Spring

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit Before the Final Harvest

by Philip Shee

Every year in Israel, the heavy winter rains contribute to the healthy growth of crops. As the land transitions into spring, the crops depend on the spring, or latter, rain to ensure they ripen to full maturity and provide a good harvest. Biblically, the pattern of rainfall in Israel is closely associated with the people's faithfulness towards God, as reflected in the following passage:

“And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the LORD your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the latter rain.... Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, lest the LORD's anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain.”

(Deut 11:13–17a)

In the spiritual context, the advent of spring signals the need for the church to grow into maturity, to be prepared for the harvest, the second coming of the Lord.

Be glad then, you children of Zion,
And rejoice in the LORD your God;
For He has given you the former rain faithfully,
And He will cause the rain to come down for you—
The former rain,
And the latter rain in the first month. (Joel 2:28)

The Lord fulfilled His promise to pour down His Spirit upon all flesh on the Day of Pentecost (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:1–4, 16–18), establishing the apostolic church. The church initially prospered, but started to decline towards the end of the first century when heresies, pagan practices, and immorality crept into the church (Acts 2:38–47; Gal 1:6–9; Rev 2–3). Such unfaithfulness eventually resulted in the Holy Spirit being withheld, just as the latter rain was withheld by God in response to Israel's unfaithfulness (Jer 3:3).

As the seasons of God's plan for humankind continue to unfold, springtime marks the milestone before the final harvest. At this juncture, the Holy Spirit will be poured down again, like the latter rain which God gives in due season. This downpour of the Holy Spirit is to restore the church once again, particularly with the Spirit of truth guiding the church into all truth (Jn 14:16–17, 26; 16:13). In addition, springtime serves to remind us to rely on the Holy Spirit in the pursuit of spiritual maturity.

As we witness history unfolding, it is critical for us to consider where humankind is in the wider scheme of God's plans, and also discern the signs of the times (Mt 16:2–3). As we draw ever closer to the time of harvest, we need to seriously reflect. Have we, and the church at large, grown to maturity in Christ? Are we ready for the harvest?

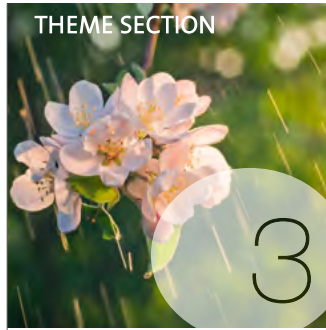
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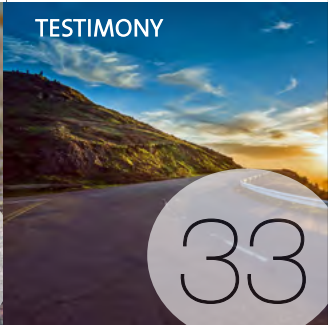
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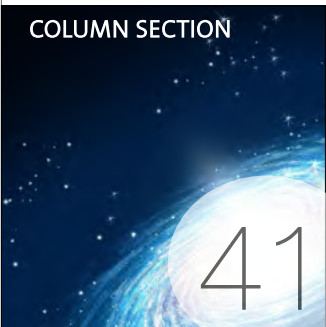
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Peniel

Spring



Discernment in the Days of the Latter Rain

KC Tsai—Toronto, Canada

*“Be glad then, you children of Zion,
And rejoice in the LORD your God;
For He has given you the former rain
faithfully,
And He will cause the rain to come
down for you—
The former rain,
And the latter rain in the first
month...
And it shall come to pass afterward
That I will pour out My Spirit on all
flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall
prophesy,
Your old men shall dream dreams,
Your young men shall see visions.
And also on My menservants and on
My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those
days.
And I will show wonders in the
heavens and in the earth:
Blood and fire and pillars of smoke.
The sun shall be turned into
darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and
awesome day of the LORD.
(Joel 2:23, 28–31)*

Joel's prophecy describes the period in which we now find ourselves—the time of the latter rain of the Holy Spirit. This is when the Spirit will establish the second temple, which is the restored and revived apostolic church (Zech 4:6; Amos 9:11). The True Jesus Church is that very temple, established when the latter rain of the Holy Spirit first descended in China a century ago; her mission is to prepare the way for the second coming of Christ at judgment day (Isa 40:3).

During the springtime of God's salvation plan, the fulfillment of so many prophecies spoken by Jesus and the prophets is proof of God's faithfulness. God has given us all we need to know to be saved. We just need to hold fast, to trust and obey His word. However, the Lord Jesus prophesied that prior to His second coming and the end of the world, “many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many” (Mt 24:10–11). He also said, “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Mt 24:24).

The words of the Lord shall go forth from His mouth, and shall not return to Him void (Isa 55:11)—prior to the last day, many will abandon the truth and depart from the church!

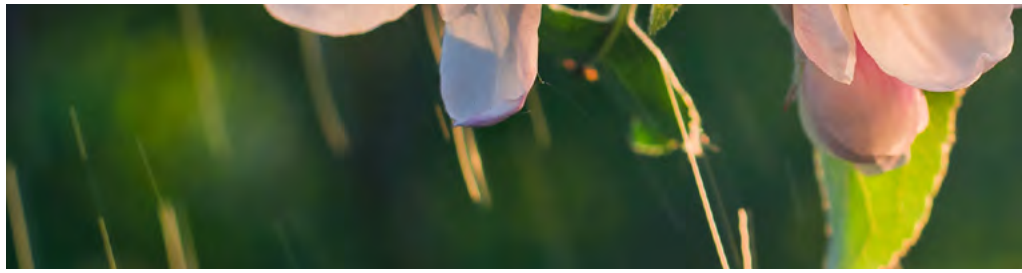
Discernment of the truth takes place in the hearts of man and cannot be compelled. Every member of the true church must make the choice to firmly believe, or else be deceived (Deut 30:19–20). Our fellow brothers and sisters are unable to keep us from deception, they can only pray for the Lord to preserve us (Rev 22:10–12). While the church should provide timely guidance in biblical exposition, every believer must strive to grow in the knowledge of the truth by relying on wisdom from the Holy Spirit.

PERFECTING THE SAINTS

And [Christ] Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some

evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.
(Eph 4:11–12)

This passage describes how our Lord Jesus has bestowed different gifts on different members within the church, making them His servants. He gave these servants various commissions



“*The growth of the church is defined not just by the increase in the number of churches or number of believers. It also refers to the state where all believers have a common faith in the truth and a common knowledge of the Lord Jesus.*”

and responsibilities, in order to equip all believers. This is to ensure that believers are grounded in faith, that they grow in spirituality, actively participate in various divine works, and cooperate with one accord to establish the body of Christ, which is the church.

Knowing that believers are bound to encounter various challenges in the discernment of the truth, training provided by the church should not focus only on the application of biblical principles to daily life. The church must also guide the believers in accurate exposition of the Bible. All Scriptures are inspired by God (2 Tim 3:16). Through the apostles' understanding of the Scriptures, God's words were brought into the lives of men so that men might receive eternal life (Jn 5:39–40). Therefore the Bible is complete, and each part complements the rest. Wisdom in discerning the truth prevents man from expounding individual verses out of context, or becoming deceived by incomplete biblical exegesis.

COME TO THE UNITY OF THE FAITH

Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Eph 4:13)

The growth of the church is defined not just by the increase in the number of churches or number of believers. It also refers to the state where all believers have a common faith in the truth and a common knowledge of the Lord Jesus. The perfect church strongly affirms Jesus' commandment: “love one another [agapaō]; as I have loved you [agapaō], that you also love one another [agapaō]” (Jn 13:34). This type of love (agapē) is to show concern for one another's everlasting life, to love in spirit and in truth (2 Pet 1:7). The love expected by the Lord is not only love between friends, lovers or family members, for this is fleshly love (phileō). The love that He expects of us is that of a higher level, that is, love which bears responsibility for the eternal life of others.

All believers should strive to grow in spirituality and knowledge of the Lord Jesus (2 Pet 1:8–11), to love one another by being responsible for one another's everlasting life. Only in this way will the church grow to become a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

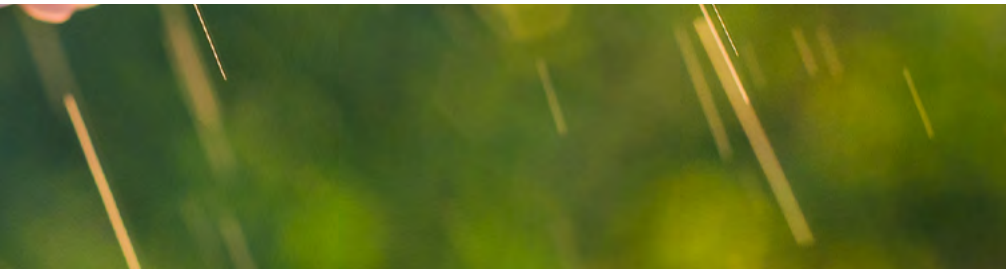
NO LONGER BE CHILDREN

That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting. (Eph 4:14)

Paul said believers who are babes in the teachings of Christ are not spiritual but carnal. These individuals cannot eat solid food but only drink milk; they do not have the wisdom and knowledge to discern the truth, and there is envy and strife among them (1 Cor 3:1–15). What Paul meant was that these people often judge others and behave in a carnal manner, thus making them vulnerable to the deceptions and ploys of others. Such people are unable to discern teachings which have deviated from the truth, but are tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine.

Any individual's own interpretation of the Bible should be avoided on the pulpit of the true church (2 Pet 1:20–21). Famous sayings of prominent people or folk wisdom should not be used to replace the Bible as a basis for spiritual instruction (1 Tim 4:6–11). Inspiration that stems from individual will or worldly viewpoints may not be spiritually edifying. Worse, it may even distract from our focus on seeking and understanding the words of God. Importantly, each believer should accept training from the church in how to carry out proper biblical exegesis, so that we can understand the message in the context of the time in which it was delivered, and the original intent from which the passage is drawn. Only then can we apply these teachings to our present-day lives, without taking them out of context. This is how we can allow God's words to move the hearts of man through His unique power, bringing about spiritual transformation.

The word of God is settled in heaven forever (Ps 119:89). The truth of salvation has been entrusted once for all and will never change (Jud 1:3).



However, man changes—even Paul himself could not guarantee that he would not preach something different from what he had preached at the beginning. This is why he said, “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach [present tense] any other gospel to you than what we have preached [past tense] to you, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:8). What had been preached at the beginning is the pattern of sound words (i.e., doctrine; 2 Tim 1:13; 1 Tim 4:6). If the teachings delivered today differ from the pattern of sound words, we must discern and be watchful of such teachings and whether the person

(Mt 7:15–16). For good fruit trees will bear good fruits, and bad trees will bear bad fruits. They can thus be recognized based on their fruits (Mt 7:17–20).

The workers of God should pursue wisdom from above, which is pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy, making peace, sowing in peace the fruit of righteousness (Jas 3:13–18). If a worker stirs up division in the church, causing members to fall away, then the fruits of their speech and actions are bad, and they are false prophets.

The Lord Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.

consequence for those who depart from the Lord Jesus, the true vine—they will wither away. There is only one body of the Lord Jesus, which has been purchased with His own blood—“the church of God”—the entire true church (Acts 20:28).

Rather, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

(Eph 4:15–16)

“Rather, speaking the truth in love”—this means that the church should esteem the teaching of the truth, this is genuine love (*agapē*), for the truth is in the love of the Lord. When effort is continuously put into this aspect, the church will grow in all areas in accordance with the mind of Christ, who is the head of the church. On one level, we serve Him to the utmost of our ability in accordance to His will; on another level, we complement one another in divine work. In this way, the entire church will certainly grow and be established in love.

This is the process of perfection that the church is continually undergoing. It is without doubt that the church will one day be perfected in the unity of faith, and prepared for the arrival of her bridegroom (Rev 21:2–3). Every individual believer must ensure that he or she remains in the truth, to be part of this saved congregation. Therefore, being able to discern between the truth and false teachings is crucial. Since we are in the period of the latter rain, just before the judgment day, it is even more urgent for believers to stand firm in the knowledge of the truth, and to pray for wisdom to be able to discern. ★

“*Rather, speaking the truth in love*”—this means that the church should esteem the teaching of the truth, this is genuine love (*agapē*), for the truth is in the love of the Lord. When effort is continuously put into this aspect, the church will grow in all areas.

delivering them is a false prophet.

A mature believer is one who is able to deliberate in a calm manner, be deeply rooted in faith, and have faith in the omniscience of the Lord. He knows that God searches all things and has sovereignty over all things. He will never make an inappropriate or abrupt judgment, overlook the truth, or yield to temptation to depart from the grace of salvation.

BUILD YOURSELF UP IN LOVE

The Lord Jesus taught people the way to discern false prophets. He said, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits”

Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” He continued, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned” (Jn 15:5–6).

“You are the branches”—in the context of that era—refers to the apostles. However, the words of the Lord are everlasting. The branches also represent the individual believers, as well as the churches throughout the world. There can only be one



Rebirth and Restoration: Canaanite Cults versus Living Water

Vincent Yeung—Cambridge, UK

One of the positive aspects of travel is encountering new cultures, and seeing things from a different perspective. A brief encounter with a Peruvian tour guide on the Inca Trail left me pondering why people living in the technologically advanced twenty-first century still worship Pachamama (a fertility goddess) as the deity who presides over planting and harvesting, and can sustain earthly life. Things took an even more bizarre turn in Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala. I saw a couple kneeling before a life-sized wooden effigy of Maximón. The worship of Maximón is an indigenous folk cult which has been integrated with the local Catholic faith. Ironically, in the room where Maximón reposed was a wooden statue of Jesus. For some reason, the worshippers did not see the contradiction.

We may chuckle at the follies of others, but syncretism—the amalgamation of different religions and belief systems into one—is nothing new. It even plagued God's chosen people for centuries. Ezekiel witnessed women weeping for Tammuz in God's temple (Ezek 8:14). Josiah found all sorts of paraphernalia of Baal-worship in the temple—wooden images, sacred pillars, ritual booths, and horses and chariots of the sun (2 Kgs 23:4–12).

Why were God's chosen people influenced by these local Canaanite cults? And what significance does this ancient practice of syncretism hold for us today?

THE CANAANITE CULTS

The Canaanite cults associated observations of natural phenomena with

life.^{1 2} Spring and summer ushered in a plenitude of food which sustains life. The harsh winter, with its cold, short days, brought starvation, suffering and death. Since procreation produces life, everything associated with procreation served as symbols of life: penis, semen, breast, milk. These associations constitute the essence of the Canaanite cults. Baal and his consort are the god and goddess of the earth. Ancient people believed that these gods revitalized the forces of nature upon which agriculture depends. Hence, worship rituals involved a sacred marriage which, in turn, comprised sexual acts between male members of the community and sacred prostitutes dedicated to Baal. The man represented Baal and the sacred temple prostitutes, his consort. It was believed that these rituals would cause Baal to send rain to the earth, yielding abundant harvests.

These Canaanite cults proved to be a strong attraction to the Israelites. Many succumbed to the allurements of the fertility-laden rituals and cultic

“The Canaanite cults associated observations of natural phenomena with life. Spring and summer ushered in a plenitude of food which sustains life. The harsh winter, with its cold, short days, brought starvation, suffering and death.”

¹ EW Heaton, *The Hebrew Kingdoms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1968), 42–48.

² JB Pritchard, ed., vol. 1 of *The Ancient Near East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 119, 123, 127, 129.

practices. After Joshua died, the sons of Israel forsook God and followed the gods of the people around them by serving Baal and Ashtaro³ (Judg 2:12–13). Periodically, under the duress of a national crisis and the guidance of God’s servants, the Israelites would put away their idols (1 Sam 7:4). But these temporary returns to the one true God did not last long. Baal-worship was too entrenched in the fabric of Israelite society.

The kings of Israel were not immune to foreign religious influences either. Solomon built a high place for Chemosh on the hill before Jerusalem (1 Kgs 11:7, 33) which was maintained until the reforms of Josiah (2 Kgs 23:13). The Bible describes Omri and his son Ahab as having “walked in all the ways and sin of Jeroboam” (1 Kgs 16:26, 29–31).

Despite such dalliances with foreign gods, the worship of the Lord in Israel never ceased. The Canaanite cults were not a replacement, but an addition, to the traditional worship. On the one hand, people still went to the temple to offer sacrifices (Isa 1:11–13) and call on God’s name (Jer 7:9–10). On the other hand, the prophets prophesied by Baal (Jer 2:8). Clearly, then, serving two masters—God and foreign deity—was the sin that plagued the Israelites of old. But this practice still ensnares the multitude today.

MODERN IDOLATRY

In parts of Asia, it would not be uncommon to see devout adherents of traditional religions bringing offerings of fruits, flowers, or more to man-made images of their deities. However, this would be a rare sight in western society. Nevertheless, worshipping idols is not just about paying homage to an image; for example, Paul equated covetousness to idolatry (Eph 5:5). As well as covetousness, idol worship is manifested in many other forms today. What are the modern “Canaanite cults” that have

the potential to ensnare us?

Liberal Values—“Everyone did what was right in his own eyes”

Some of us live in democracies which allow us to do whatever we like within the constraints of the secular law. However, the law and public opinion change with the passage of time. Behaviors that were once unacceptable have become the norm, and vice versa. Homosexuality was legalized in the UK in 1967, and same-sex marriage was instituted in 2014. The USA also legalized same-sex marriage in 2015. Many people perceive religion as something mired in the past, with teachings that are out of sync with modern society. This is compounded by the information explosion that has become integral to our everyday lives. Besides genuine knowledge, we are constantly bombarded with misinformation, extreme biased views, and values and beliefs that are contradictory to the church’s basic beliefs.

When the Israelites settled in the promised land, the same temptations beset them. From just believing in the one true God, they were exposed to rich foreign cultures, elaborate religious practices, and myriad foreign gods. Seeing what the neighboring nations did, they wanted to do the same.

As previously mentioned, one of the attractions of the local Canaanite cult was the sexual element. Sexual acts were part and parcel of religious activities. Adherence to this form of religion enabled the Israelites to legitimately indulge in licentiousness. At Acacia Grove, the people began to fornicate with the daughters of Moab. To avert the plague that had broken out among the children of Israel, righteous Phinehas pierced through a man and woman during their sexual act (Num 25:1, 8). A psalm describes the couple’s act as “[joining] themselves to Baal of Peor” (Ps 106:28). In the modern context, our members are exposed to the



Worshipping Maximón at Santiago Atitlan.



Syncretism—the images of four holy men, with Jesus Christ third from the top.

³ The plural form of *Ashtoreth*, or *Astarte*, the Canaanite queen of heaven. *Ashtoreth* “became a general term denoting goddesses and paganism.” Source: “Astarte,” *Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.*, last modified November 22, 2000, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Astarte-ancient-deity>.

same enticement. Their secular peers can cohabit, break up, start new relationships, divorce and remarry with impunity—and not necessarily with just people of the opposite gender. Such liberal, carefree norms must seem an attractive alternative to a restrictive biblical regimen characterized by many “dos” and “don’ts.”

God warned His people not to be assimilated by the indigenous people. To enable His chosen people to avoid the pernicious influence of the Canaanites, God commanded the Israelites to completely destroy them—their altars, images, groves, graven images—on entering into the promised land (Deut 7). Intermarriage was forbidden, lest the idol-worshipping locals turn God’s people away from following Him. It was emphasized time and again that the Israelites were a “holy people” and “special” to the Lord (Deut 7:6).

In the New Testament, Paul exhorted the believers to hold on to the word of life, and to shine as lights in a crooked and perverse nation (Phil 2:15–16). We must separate ourselves from the influence of this generation as we are of Christ; we are created in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24). The people in this world may appear free, but they are enslaved by sin (Rom 6:17; Col 1:13). God’s Spirit has set us free (2 Cor 3:17); we are empowered to make the right choice, a choice that frees us from sin and death (Rom 8:2).

The co-existence of religions, ideals and values of the world with true faith is abhorrent to God; such syncretic beliefs have no place in God’s kingdom. God is a jealous God (Ex 20:5) and demands undivided devotion; the first of the Ten



Commandments tells us that we shall have no other gods (Ex 20:3). The incident at Acacia Grove caused many to perish in the wilderness (Num 25:9; cf. 1 Cor 10:8). This should be an enduring warning to everyone who has experienced the grace of God and is baptized into Christ (1 Cor 10)—they should not concurrently hold the doctrine of Balaam (Rev 2:14).

Variety and Innovation—“There is nothing at all except this manna”

The Israelites complained against Moses in the wilderness because they found life monotonous. There was nothing to do other than to trudge along and eat the same food day in and day out. God had promised them a land flowing with milk and honey (Ex 13:5; 33:3; Num 13:27; 14:8). But the people lost faith in this promise, as their minds wandered back to their perceived good lives in Egypt (Num 11:4–6). Things came to a head when Korah revolted, accusing Moses of failing to lead them to the promised land (Num 16:14).

Such impatience to see promises fulfilled was repeated in Peter’s time. People mocked Christians and their hope in the future, asking derisively, “Where is the promise of His coming?” (2 Pet 3:4). Today, it would be easy to sympathize with the sceptics. Two thousand years have gone by, but Jesus has clearly not

come again. No wonder people have lost faith in this promise.

Such disbelief extends beyond biblical promises. There are Christian denominations today that do not believe in the teachings of the Bible; some even reject the existence of heaven and hell. Examples of “Christian disbelief” include the following:

1. Some denominations find it embarrassing to tell non-Christians that they are going to hell. They thus compromise with a Universalist view—all humankind will be saved, even the worst mass murderers of history;⁴ this is an increasingly popular position in mainstream western Christianity.

2. Another group cannot accept that the majority would be condemned and only a handful—those who believe and are baptized—would be saved. They ignore the key biblical message that Jesus died for humankind, and all those who do not believe in Jesus are condemned (Jn 3:18); that no-one comes to the Father but by Jesus (Jn 14:6). Worse, this group compromises by reasoning that the soul is not inherently immortal—unbelievers do not suffer eternal torment, they are simply extinguished.⁵ Some modify the concept of hell to a state of consciousness to be suffered here on earth.

3. Some do not believe in the spiritual effect of sacraments such as water baptism. They de-emphasize the doctrine, but keep the ritual as a symbolic act.

We must thus be wary of this desire for “fresh insights on an old faith.”

⁴ “Universalism,” *Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.*, last modified July 20, 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Universalism>.

⁵ Gavin Ortlund, “J.I. Packer on Why Annihilationism Is Wrong,” *The Gospel Coalition, Inc.*, accessed April 25, 2017, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/j.i.-packer-on-why-annihilationism-is-wrong>.

“We must be wary of this desire for “fresh insights on an old faith.” Modern heresies are prompted by the perceived need to repackage God’s teaching. The proponents believe God’s messages are outdated, that they need to be modernized to meet the need, and gain the acceptance, of the public at large.”



Modern heresies are prompted by the perceived need to repackage God's teaching. The proponents believe God's messages are outdated, that they need to be modernized to meet the need, and gain the acceptance, of the public at large. To them, daily manna is boring—the "same old" biblical teachings need to be embellished to make them palatable for new audiences. Like Job's three friends, they use human thinking to defend God's justice, resulting in muddled, adulterated and confused messages.

For instance, the heresy regarding Satan's self-existence developed as people attempted to address the question of the origin of evil. By saying that Satan is the source of evil, would that imply that God created evil? To "defend" God's absolute righteousness and the goodness of His creation, the explanation of Satan's self-existence was proposed. Unfortunately, such reasoning is only human thinking; the attempt to defend God's righteousness ends up contradicting God's word. Therefore, the Bible warns us to be on guard against "contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge" (1 Tim 6:20b), and we must beware of "philosophy and empty deceit...[that is] not according to Christ" (Col 2:8).

Non-religiosity—"A faithless generation"

Jesus bemoaned the faithless generation who had witnessed miracles and wonders, and yet did not believe (Mk 9:19; Lk 9:41; Mt 17:17). Today we live in an irreligious society—a 2014 British Social Attitudes survey found that 48.5% of the population in England and Wales claimed to have no religion. There is

an increase in the number of people who not only do not practise their faith on a regular basis, but are not even ticking the box as a believer! Another report claimed that for every person they recruit, the Church of England loses twelve followers, and the Catholic Church loses ten.⁶ And among those who label themselves as Christian, not many are practising their faith.

A reason for the decline in religiosity is the conflict between biblical principles and the liberal attitude and ideals of the west. As a result, people choose to reject the Bible and even God's existence. To retain public mindshare, some churches choose to temper the tone of their teachings; like modern corporations,

“The “other gods” in the first commandment does not just refer to Baal or other graven images, but represents anything that supplants or supplements God, or dilutes our trust towards Him. What are some of these usurpers of God’s throne in our hearts?”

they transform to suit the taste of the customers. Instead of proclaiming that Jesus is the only way to salvation, they are prepared to teach that there is no absolute right or wrong—"it is true if it is true to you."

Worryingly, we have True Jesus Church (TJC) members who want to camouflage themselves and blend into such liberal societies. While they continue to maintain their belief in the truth, they are too afraid to tell others about the doctrines of the church, or invite their friends and

family to evangelistic services. They do not want to embarrass themselves or upset their friends with "narrow-minded" teachings about the one true church, the unacceptability of homosexuality, and so on. Some of them may even agree with their non-believer friends that churches should "preach moralism instead of preaching Jesus," because, after all, religion is meant to be a force for good in society. Paul had long warned that people in the last days would hold a form of godliness but deny its power (2 Tim 3:5), leading to the immoral behavior and distorted ethics that we witness around us today (2 Tim 3:3-4). The Bible warns us that God's word brings no profit to those who do not have the faith, believer and non-believer alike (Heb 4:2; cf. Jas 1:22).

After settling in the promised land, the chosen people did not expel the Canaanites as the Lord had commanded (Josh 1). As a result, the same problems were perpetuated for generations to come. God told Samuel that from the moment His people left Egypt, they had forsaken Him

(1 Sam 8:8). When Elijah confronted the people and forced them to choose between God and Baal, the people remained silent because they could not make up their minds (1 Kgs 18:21). This type of half-baked and lukewarm faith has plagued God's elect up till today. Many second- and third-generation TJC believers in the western world have literally lost faith—some no longer believe in the true church, others believe that all religions are the same, and some do not even believe in God. No wonder Paul repeatedly reminded Timothy to guard what had been committed to him, and hold fast the pattern of

⁶ Harriet Sherwood, "People of no religion outnumber Christians in England and Wales - study," *The Guardian*, May 23, 2016, accessed April 21, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/23/no-religion-outnumber-christians-england-wales-study>.

sound words in faith and love, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:12–14). Only when we set our minds to safeguard our faith, and rely on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit—the source of love and faith—will we be able to uphold our faith in the Lord.

Control of Destiny—“Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves”

The Canaanites believed that they could secure their harvest by worshipping Baal. To some extent, ancient cultic religions were a form of primitive science with no methodology, in other words, pseudo-science. Applied to modern contexts, there are many who believe that advances in science and technology can secure our future, obviating the need for religion. It has been argued that religion is a static set of values, whereas science is dynamic and nothing is absolutely true. Religion was once used to explain natural phenomena, but science has now replaced it. Science transfers control of the universe into our hands, while religion takes it away and gives it to a higher power. Science is for people who like facts and not interpretations, for people who like to understand, not to believe. Of course, the above comparison between religion and science is somewhat sweeping. There are many scientists who believe in



God; in fact, they do not need a God at all.

The “other gods” in the first commandment does not just refer to Baal or other graven images, but represents anything that supplants or supplements God, or dilutes our trust towards Him. What are some of these usurpers of God’s throne in our hearts?

1. Money

Money has become an idol for many. Money itself is not evil; instead, it is the love of money that causes man’s downfall. For example, greed can drive people to unlawful actions. During His ministry, Jesus sternly warned that “no one can serve two masters” (Mt 6:24). Inevitably, if we try to have both God and mammon, part of our love for God will be diverted towards the world and its glittering pleasures (1 Jn 2:15). Money can also be a stumbling block if it engenders in us the belief that it can bring power, prosperity and peace. The rich fool in Jesus’ parable was condemned for putting his trust in his wealth (Lk 12:15–21). Paul

time because they took refuge in the strength of Pharaoh and his chariots and horses, rather than trust in God (Isa 30:1–2; 31:1). As a society becomes more developed, its institutions necessarily become more complex in order to meet society’s multifarious and multifaceted needs. People in Samuel’s time demanded a king so that they could have someone to judge them and fight their battles, just like “all the [other] nations” (1 Sam 8:5, 20). Similarly, the modest apostolic church became more institutionalized as it transmogrified into the colossal Catholic Church (Mt 13:32). Modern management theories tell us that a more sophisticated and professional church system, comprising networks, by-laws and governance practices, will mobilize resources more efficiently compared with a group of less educated and disorganized amateurs. However, one cannot ignore the fact that the early church thrived despite such amateurism, and achieved much more than we today. Therefore, the church must know how to balance between “doing our best with God’s help” and “taking matters into our own hands.” We must be vigilant to avoid falling into the trap of hubris based on human sophistry.

3. False teachings

Paul decried the Galatians’ turning to another gospel (Gal 1:6), turning to the Jewish Law (Gal 4:9) on top of believing in Jesus. Specifically, the Galatians were told that believing in Jesus alone was insufficient, and that they needed to be circumcised to make them complete. Today, there are people in the church who over-interpret the Bible and add on many rules and regulations to biblical teachings; they believe these rules are essential guidelines on how

“The Jews seek signs, the Greeks seek wisdom, and the world seeks freedom and enjoyment, but we only have the crucified Christ. The world ignores Jesus and has no trust in Him or His words. As God’s chosen people we must fully trust in Him; only He can give life in its fullness.”

God, and science is indeed critical to our lives. Notwithstanding this, there are people who trust only in themselves, and believe their abilities and actions enable them to manage, if not control, their own future. They thus feel they do not need to trust in

warned the rich that they should not trust in uncertain riches (1 Tim 6:17).

2. Allies

For some, their ability, authority and alliances are their gods. The prophet Isaiah condemned the leaders in his



they should lead their daily lives. However, as the rules multiply, they obscure the original and true meaning of the teachings. Mishna Hagiga 1:8 describes the Jewish Sabbath regulations as “mountains hanging by a hair”—indicating that there is little

Seek Living Water

Jesus reminds us that physical water can slake our thirst, but we will thirst again (Jn 4:14). Physical water represents all the things that man can imagine and invent. No matter how amazing, these earthly creations are

(Rom 8:2). As a result, we are of God, and are worthy to be called His sons as long as we are willing to be led by His Spirit (Rom 8:9, 14).

Remove False Gods and Teachings

The post-apostolic era saw a decline of the church as heresies crept in, and false teachers wrought havoc. As the revived apostolic church of the last days, the true church must be ready to contend for the faith (Jude 3). She must undertake the reforms of Josiah, removing all false teachings from God’s temple. She must seek to be guided by the Holy Spirit to become the pillar and foundation of the truth.

On an individual basis, we must never take our faith for granted. There is no room for complacency. We may have achieved great works for the Lord but we cannot rest on our laurels. Many who drank of the spiritual drink from the spiritual Rock did not make it to the promised land (1 Cor 10:4–5). They failed to enter into the Lord’s eternal rest because the word they heard was not mixed with faith (Heb 4:1–11). Therefore we must cast away our unbelief and strive to enter into His rest (Heb 4:10). ★

“The latter rain has come in the form of His Holy Spirit dwelling in us—the living water that flows out from our heart ushering us into eternal life.”

scriptural basis for many laws. We should be mindful of human traditions that blind us from the true meaning of the Scripture (Mk 7:8; Mt 23:23).

In short, anything that we trust and rely on other than Jesus can constitute an idol that pulls us away from God.

RESISTING IDOLATRY, REMEMBERING THE TRUE GOD

The Canaanites sought rain for their crops by worshipping Baal. But Moses emphasized that the rains come from the Lord (Deut 11:14, 17). He warned the chosen people that they should not be deceived into worshipping other gods (Deut 11:16). God’s people were ensnared because they did not trust in God’s words.

Today, we are surrounded by people who worship foreign gods, be it worldly riches, glamour or status, philosophies of different kinds, or simply dumbed-down Christian teachings. They seek to fill the voids in their hearts with transient and immediate gratification. They are temporarily satisfied but always crave more; human desire and imagination are bottomless pits that can never be filled. They labor for what never satisfies (Isa 55:2).

So wherein lies true and enduring satisfaction?

ultimately temporal, and will soon lose their novelty. In contrast, the living water that Jesus gives springs up into everlasting life (Jn 4:14).

The Jews seek signs, the Greeks seek wisdom, and the world seeks freedom and enjoyment, but we only have the crucified Christ. The world ignores Jesus and has no trust in Him or His words. As God’s chosen people we must fully trust in Him; only He can give life in its fullness (Jn 10:10).

God is a faithful God (Deut 7:9) and He fulfills the promise of giving rain in its season (Deut 28:12). Likewise, the coming of the Messiah, and the giving of the Spirit to all who seek Him in the last days are God’s eternal promises (Heb 1:1–2; Acts 1:16; 2:33). We have every confidence that His promises will come to fruition because God has given us His Spirit as a guarantee (2 Cor 5:5). The latter rain has come in the form of His Holy Spirit dwelling in us—the living water that flows out from our heart ushering us into eternal life (Jn 7:37–38). We have the abidance of God because He dwells in us and has given His Spirit to us (1 Jn 4:13). The Spirit teaches us all things (Jn 14:26), sanctifies us (Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 6:11), renews us (Tit 3:5), instills God’s love in us (Rom 5:5), and sets us free from the law of sin and death



Bring Back the Springtime

Timothy Yeung—Toronto, Canada

*When in the spring, the flow'rs are
blooming bright and fair
After the gray of winter's gone,
Once again the lark begins its tuning
Back in the meadows of my home.*

*Lord, make me like that stream that
flows so cool and clear
Down from the mountains high
above;
I will tell the world the wondrous
story
Of the streams that flowed from
Calvary.*

Chorus:

*Lord, to my heart bring back the
springtime,
Take away the cold and dark of sin;
O return to me, sweet Holy Spirit,
May I warm and tender be again.¹*

Every time I sing this hymn, I am reminded of my first experience of winter in North America. After the beauty of the fall season, everything became quiet and desolate. As the temperature dropped, many animals prepared for hibernation and sheltered

”As with seasonal winter, we may also face spiritual winter. What kind of situation can put us into deep spiritual winter and take us far from the warmth of God’s love? And how can we bring ourselves back to a springtime of spiritual renewal?

themselves in order to survive the long and chilly winter. Leaves fell, flowers withered, and it seemed everything had come to a pause. The snow softly fell on the dry ground, and the lakes and rivers froze, yielding to the bitter cold of winter. There was little sign of life as temperatures dropped to sub-zero. Everything seemed lifeless; people became weary, and some even became depressed.

After more than twenty years living in Canada, I have learned to survive the cruel and severe winter. And yet, each year, I still appreciate the wonderful springtime that follows.

As with seasonal winter, we may also face spiritual winter. What kind of situation can put us into deep spiritual winter and take us far from the warmth of God’s love? And how can we bring ourselves back to a springtime of spiritual renewal?

THE WINTER CAUSED BY SIN

After David sinned greatly against God, he experienced a spiritual deep freeze. He implored God:

*Have mercy upon me, O God,
According to Your loving kindness;
According to the multitude of your
tender mercies,
Blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my
iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.*

(Ps 51:1–2)

David, like many saints in the Old Testament, enjoyed an amazing closeness with God. He felt God’s presence, guidance, and blessing daily. However, after he committed adultery with Bathsheba and plotted the murder of her husband Uriah, David’s conscience was seared.

¹ Hymn 437 of *Hymns of Praise*, published by True Jesus Church, USA (1993). Kurt Kaiser, “Bring Back the Springtime.” Copyright: 1970 by Word Music (a division of Word, inc.).

Although he hid his evil deeds from everyone, he could not deceive his own conscience, which is the lamp of God (Prov 20:27). As he tried to cover his transgression, he also covered himself from the light of God's face, which shines on those who fear and love Him.

David could pretend that he did nothing wrong when he took Bathsheba, but deep down in his spirit, he must have suffered constant guilt and regret. The burden of telling lies to cover his sin would have been stressful; he would have felt far from God. His soul wandered in the wilderness of deep winter—destitute, lonely, and hiding from the truth, fearful that his evil deeds would be exposed and judged.

For a person who has experienced God, there is nothing more dreadful and hopeless than what David went through: God had stopped listening and speaking to him. How painful would it be for us today to experience such estrangement from God? Yet, when we choose a path of sin and selfish denial, we will find ourselves in the deep freeze of spiritual winter.

*Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened,
That it cannot save;
Nor His ear heavy,
That it cannot hear.
But your iniquities have separated
you from your God;
And your sins have hidden His face
from you,
So that He will not hear. (Isa 59:1–2)*

that cannot be filled, and our heart cannot be satisfied. We might pray to God, "Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me" (Ps 51:11). But the root of the problem does not lie outside, but rather, it rests deep inside our heart.

HOW TO BRING BACK THE SPRINGTIME

A Transformation of the Heart

When the prophet Nathan confronted David, David chose to do the right thing and admit his guilt to God. With a contrite heart and a humble spirit, he begged God for forgiveness. This was David's turning point, opening the way for him to rebuild his relationship with God.

The transformation of the heart starts when we acknowledge our sin, both privately and publicly. As David wrote:

*For I acknowledge my transgressions,
And my sin is always before me.
Against You, You only, have I sinned,
And done this evil in Your sight—
That You may be found just when
You speak,
And blameless when You judge.
Behold, I was brought forth in
iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.
(Ps 51:3–5)*

In this psalm, we see that David decided to face his sin, rather than to hide or defend it. How hard it must

that only by confessing to God and humbly accepting the consequences could he be pardoned and, perhaps, received by God once again.

Have you ever done something terrible or wrong that you regret? Have you ever tried to hide yourself from your past, or from God? Have you tried to start afresh with a clean slate, but failed because you did not address the mistakes of your past? Have you ever blamed others for your misfortune? Or do you simply blame your environment, or even God?

Winter occurs when one hemisphere is furthest from the sun, owing to the tilt of the earth's axis and the position of the earth in its orbit around the sun. It is not the absence of the sun that causes the arrival of winter, but where the earth is in relation to the sun. In the same way, a spiritual winter is not caused by God's departure, but by our own maneuvering away from Him—to end the deep freeze, we must be the one to change.

Newness of Heart

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within
me. (Ps 51:10)*

Winter does not arrive overnight, and it takes time for a lake or a river to fully freeze over. Similarly, a heart grows cold over a period of time. When David was in distress, being pursued by his enemies, his heart was very close to God because he needed God at every moment. David's dedication to God was unwavering and sincere, and his love for God was as fervent as the love of a newly wedded couple. However, over time, as David was blessed with power, fame, and wealth, secular desires gradually occupied his heart. The pursuit of sensual pleasure replaced his earlier thirst for spiritual fulfillment, and God no longer held first place in his heart. This process happened so gradually that David failed to notice his heart was no longer the same. The point to note is that it was not God, but David's heart, that changed. What's worse, David did not realize

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Have you ever experienced this kind of spiritual winter? On the surface, we appear close to God, but spiritually we can neither feel His presence nor hear His voice. There is a deep void

have been for a king to admit, "I am wrong; I am a sinner." But David no longer cared about his reputation—he acknowledged his sins and decided to face God, the Source of life. He knew

winter had arrived until the sunset of that fateful evening.

This picture may reflect our own spiritual decline over the years. In the midst of secular enjoyment, countless work commitments, and pride over our own achievements, has our heart departed from God? This is why Jesus said:

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.”

(1 Jn 2:15–16)

To re-establish our relationship with God and bring back the springtime of spiritual vitality, transforming our heart is key. Let us reflect: Has our heart changed from the time we first loved God? Do we give ourselves, our hearts, and our love fully to the Lord Jesus alone?

“If we pray with humility, earnestly seeking the Holy Spirit’s guidance, then He will teach us where we need God’s loving hand to redirect our ways.”

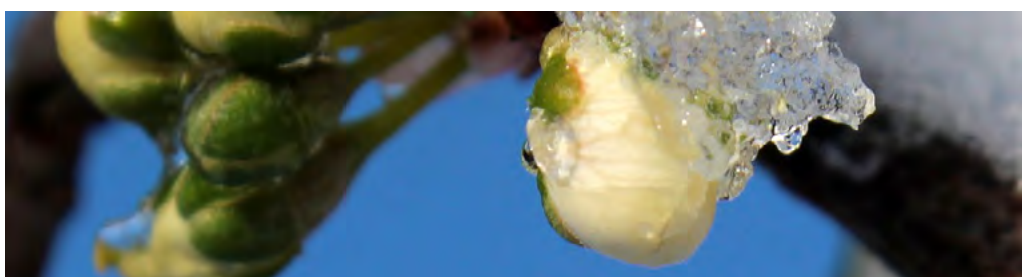
God tells us, “My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways” (Prov 23:26). How deep is our heavenly Father’s longing to own and fill our heart with His wonderful love! Let us not disappoint Him.

Seek Help from the Holy Spirit

*Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit. (Ps 51:12)*

David understood that he was solely responsible for the spiritual winter he was in. But he also knew that God could melt the deep freeze and turn it into a warm spring of life, restoring him from spiritual death.

Just like a dilapidated old building, our spiritual life needs to be restored and maintained. We need a master



craftsman who possesses the skill and patience to rebuild us from the ground up. A building cannot restore itself, and we cannot transform or revive our own spiritual life through our own efforts. Jesus highlighted this limitation clearly to His disciples: “Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Mk 14:38).

David knew the limitations of his flesh, so he sought God’s generous Spirit to help him overcome his weaknesses and embrace the warmth of God’s love. If only we had such self-knowledge; instead, we attempt to face temptations, trials and

of God’s Spirit he could not possibly change himself. But how does the Holy Spirit’s transforming power work? It is only through prayers that such transformation is possible.

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

(Rom 8:26–27)

Restoration starts with prayer, but only if we know how to pray and what to pray for. There are times when we pray for the wrong thing, with the wrong attitude, or with the wrong aim. But if we pray with humility, earnestly seeking the Holy Spirit’s guidance, then He will teach us where we need God’s loving hand to redirect our ways. The Holy Spirit will reveal to us the weaknesses that hinder our spiritual growth, whether it be hidden pride, lack of trust, or deep anxiety caused by lack of faith. When the Holy Spirit shows us our imperfections, we must submit and allow ourselves to be fine-tuned to His will, so we can be redirected to where God wants us to go. By the end of this process, our prayer will be in harmony with the intercession of the Holy Spirit, and we will regain strength from the transcending peace of God. When we are facing spiritual winter, we should not pray for God to give us things or to do things for us; we should ask the Holy Spirit to teach us.

tribulations with our own strength, unable to admit how weak we really are. When we are defeated, we crumble in hopelessness. We need to remember that God is faithful, and has offered His Spirit to uphold us:

And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

(Jn 14:16–17)

The Holy Spirit is our helper, and He is the Spirit of truth. If we seek His help, He will guide us into the truth, unlock the mystery of the truth for us, and help us to walk in the truth. David knew that without the help



”There is no winter without end, and no destitution without the chance of restoration. God is always there to embrace us, if and when we are willing to return to Him.

*And though the Lord gives you
The bread of adversity and the water
of affliction,
Yet your teachers will not be moved
into a corner anymore,
But your eyes shall see your teachers.
Your ears shall hear a word behind
you, saying,
“This is the way, walk in it,”
Whenever you turn to the right hand
Or whenever you turn to the left.
(Isa 30:20–21)*

*Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be
clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than
snow.
Make me hear joy and gladness,
That the bones You have broken may
rejoice. (Ps 51:7–8)*

When prayers are heard, sins pardoned, guilt removed, anxiety calmed, and our relationship with God rebuilt, then the springtime of joy and gladness will slowly return. It could be a long and hard process, with many setbacks, but the joy that comes afterwards is worth the effort. This period of pain and distress causes our faith to grow and mature.

There is no winter without end, and no destitution without the chance of restoration. God is always there to embrace us, if and when we are

willing to return to Him. The choice is ours: to remain trapped in the deep freeze of spiritual winter, a self-imposed exile from God's grace, or to let the springtime of God's love return to us again.

*For His anger is but for a moment,
His favor is for life;
Weeping may endure for a night,
But joy comes in the morning.*

(Ps 30:5) ★

Moses Returns to Egypt (II)

Adapted from sermons

by Aun-Quek Chin—Singapore

MY SON, MY FIRSTBORN

We know God's fearsome command to Moses before he left for Egypt to free his Hebrew brothers:

"When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: "Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn."'"

(Ex 4:21–23)

These words, solemn and threatening as they are, are strangely comforting. They show a Father willing to do anything to rescue a cherished child, willing even to trade life for life. With this, we come to the main theme of what we can learn from

the story of Moses as he journeyed back to the land of his youth in order to redeem and restore God's chosen people: sonship.

Sonship is a major theme in Christianity. Jesus is the Son of God (Mt 3:17), and so are we. From the moment we rise, new and restored, the waters of our baptism still fresh on our skins, God becomes our Father and we join a global family of brothers and sisters. A family, true and eternal, awaits us at the doors of our redemption. With this comes certain things that we must always remember—reminders that God also saw fit to give to Moses just before he departed to perform one of God's greatest works. Let us explore them.

BELIEVE IN YOUR SONSHIP

"Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: "Israel is My son, My firstborn."'" (Ex 4:22)

This verse captures one of the greatest moments in man's history. Here we have God, the *Elohim*, the Alpha and the Omega, squaring off against Pharaoh—in his time quite possibly the most powerful man on earth, with an army at his command that could make the earth tremble beneath them. And God is telling the man who thought he could have everything he wanted—who was used to getting everything he wanted—that some things he simply cannot have. In this instance, he had no claim over God's children.

Herein lies the first thing we can learn from God's words to Moses. Being a son of God means that we belong to no other. We are liberated from worldly dominion and all the fear, pressure and sinfulness that come with it. We are, fully and always, God's children. Simple as this is to understand, it can be difficult to faithfully hold on to over time. This conviction is tested by the numerous problems that we constantly face in our personal lives. How is it possible, we ask bitterly, that the supposed sons and daughters of the eternal God could be suffering so harshly and so unrelentingly? This may even cross

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the mind of our unbelieving friends, who watch with pity as we Christians languish in our troubles while we weep in our prayers, begging for just a little reprieve. Fundamentally, it can be hard to believe, much less confidently declare to our unbelieving neighbors, that we are the treasured sons of God when it too often seems that we have been left as orphans, alone and defenseless in the vast wilderness of the world. What does the Bible have to say on this?

There is a pattern that recurs throughout the Bible. In every story, in every lesson and parable, there is a sense that faith, worship and sonship are all processes. And while it may seem that God is faint and inconspicuous in the midst of our daily lives, the Bible tells us that we can be sure that God will be there at

all the Israelites who would hear of this that slavery was not their true calling, Egypt not their true home, and Pharaoh not their true lord. God was telling them that they were only pilgrims, that there was somewhere else they needed to be, and there was work to be done to get there. The same is true for us today. We are not promised a quiet and uninterrupted life in the Egypts and Babylons of the world. We are promised hardship and toil. For we are pilgrims, making our long and arduous way to the promised land, where our Father stands ready to greet us as sons and heirs.

TO SIGH AND WANDER

On the topic of the Christian son and his trials, we can learn another valuable lesson from God's counsel to Moses.

From being sons and daughters on earth, to kings and priests in heaven—that is God's promise to us. This idea of there being a process, an evolution, to our Christianity and this assurance of our vindication means one important thing. It means that we have to do more than merely possess our sonship, we have to believe in it and work at it

the end, waiting to receive us into a greater glory. So reads Revelation 1:6–7: “[To Him who] has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.”

From being sons and daughters on earth, to kings and priests in heaven—that is God's promise to us. This idea of there being a process, an evolution, to our Christianity and this assurance of our vindication means one important thing. It means that we have to do more than merely possess our sonship, we have to believe in it and work at it. When God chose to call the people of Israel His sons, He was telling Moses, Pharaoh, and

We read in Exodus 4:21 of God's famous guarantee to Moses that He would “harden [Pharaoh's] heart, so that he will not let the people go.” This passage continues to puzzle many first-time, and even veteran, readers. Why, if God truly wanted to free His people through Moses, would He deliberately sabotage Moses' efforts? While there are various and meaningful answers to this question, we will look at one of them which sheds light on what it means to be a son of God today.

God allowed Pharaoh's heart to harden because He wanted Moses and the Israelites to understand that being sons of God did not entail a trouble-free life. Under God's direction, Moses would perform a whole slew of miracles, but even until the very end, these were not enough to sway Pharaoh's will. God told them

that Pharaoh would be stubborn and difficult, but the sons of God are not apathetic and lazy. The ten plagues were impressive, yes, but the Israelites also had to fight off despair at every turn and preserve an inner optimism that was quickly losing faith in itself, and worse, God. Armies of locusts and streams of blood filled the streets of Egypt, but one of the most significant battles was waged by the will of every Israelite, who had to stand behind Moses as he did the will of the Lord.

God wants the true church to understand the same thing. Sonship, as with many things, guarantees privilege but not always pleasure. Similar to the Israelites, salvation and freedom lies patiently at the door, and it is for us to reach out and take it. We have been blessed with this promise and privilege. But Jesus has disclosed that the Christian would sigh and wander in his life, just as much as he hopes for signs and wonders. Our problems will be as persistent and stubborn as Pharaoh, and it is likely that no army of frogs and locusts will come to our rescue. But the battle that truly wins the war against sin is the battle the Israelites first won as they made their exodus from Egypt. It is the spiritual battle within.

THE SPIRIT AND THE SON

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

(Gal 4:6–7)

We have been made sons of God by His grace. Sin had rendered us orphans, but by grace Jesus came to die that we may once more be restored as sons of God.

There are three things we can learn about the grace of our sonship.

Firstly, this means that we have to pray earnestly and repentantly for the Holy Spirit to be with us, and in us.

God has made us His sons—“adopted” us, as the apostle Paul puts it (Rom 8:15–17)—so we are

His heirs, made manifest by the Holy Spirit who testifies of His presence in us and of Jesus who reconciled us to our Father. The Holy Spirit is an indispensable part of our spiritual sonship. He not only testifies of our salvation (Eph 1:13–14), but also serves as a powerful daily reminder that we are blessed beneficiaries of an undeserved and boundless grace.

While this sounds very pleasing in theory, the less glamorous part dawns upon us when it comes to actually praying for the Holy Spirit. For most of us, receiving the Holy Spirit was a long and, sometimes, wearying struggle. Long nights, swollen knees, clammy palms and parched throats—many of us have experienced these in the process. Beyond the body, what is the best spirit to have when we pray for the Holy Spirit? When we pray for the Spirit, we should pray as more than a believer, a Christian, or church member. We should pray as a son—a son of God. We must believe in God's promise, and its fulfillment, as the birthright of the children of God. Above all, we must never forget that God *wants* us to receive His Spirit. With this knowledge, we can be confident when we bend our knees and bow our heads, knowing that we are sons reaching out to grasp an inheritance that is already ours.

“Our problems will be as persistent and stubborn as Pharaoh, and it is likely that no army of frogs and locusts will come to our rescue. But the battle that truly wins the war against sin is the battle the Israelites first won as they made their exodus from Egypt. It is the spiritual battle within.”

FIRSTBORN

Interestingly, God does not just declare Israel His son. He goes on to emphasize to Moses that Israel is His firstborn. From this, we learn the second point about the grace of sonship: God greatly esteems His people, and while most of us True Jesus Church (TJC) Christians might not be of the original chosen, we are



now, by God's grace, His spiritual sons and are each of utmost importance to Him. The elder Peter describes us as those “who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy” (1 Pet 2:10).

We were once orphans. A long time ago, humanity had turned away from God through unrepentant sin. We had disqualified ourselves from God's goodness. Peter's simple before-and-after formulation tersely drives the message home: because, and only because, God's mercy and love for us could cover all our sins, we Gentile believers have the chance to participate in His great salvation plan. Not just that, we need to embody the grace we have been given and spread the good news of our salvation, for we are not merely members, but active emissaries, warriors, and ministers of God and His kingdom. Which is why Peter declares: “But you are a chosen

generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). We were once lost stragglers on earth, but God's grace has made us pilgrims on our way to heaven.

Although we should be proud of our Christian status, God does not want

us to merely luxuriate in our salvation, but rather obey our noble commission to be world-changers—to preach the gospel, fight for the weak, and be an example to others that they might see the beauty of what it means to be a son of God.

RIGHTEOUS GRACE

“So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn.” (Ex 4:23)

This message for Pharaoh was delivered matter-of-factly by God. God, the Creator and Sustainer of life, does not treat the lives of His creation carelessly. The stakes here must have indeed been very high. While this is again further evidence of the great depth of God's love for His son Israel, we learn from this the third lesson about the grace of our sonship: God's grace, and by extension our sonship, is not a free pass to do whatever we want in this lifetime. Just as we understand that grace is not a panacea for all our problems, we must see also that grace does not exempt us from the consequences of God's righteousness.

Pharaoh certainly learned this lesson firsthand. The Egyptian ruler faced the full measure of God's wrath, motivated by the fullness of God's love for His people, as well as His abhorrence of evil. People might fall for the illusion that, as baptized believers of God, their sins might be judged more leniently than those of the arrogant tyrant of a heathen land. Nothing is further from the truth: this myth mistakes leniency for love. It is precisely because we have been faithful church-going hearers



and practitioners of the word that God holds us to a higher standard. Blessed with the truth of salvation, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the guidance of the true church, TJC Christians are, to borrow from Paul, “without excuse” (Rom 1:20).

Have we repented? This question has nagged at and irritated many a conscience-pricked Christian. But it is a question worth repeating because our response matters. God is not looking for perfect sons who live perfect lives. He knows we were once orphans, unsure of where we belonged, or where we were headed. And God knows that even after we have come to Him, some of us might still be searching. What God seeks, therefore, are sons who, although human and bound to stray, know deep in their hearts that in God they have a Father, and in the church and heaven, a home. God has given us time to find our spiritual rest. We must seize it before that time, along with our salvation, passes us by.

HUSBAND OF BLOOD

After Moses set off for Egypt, it was not long before drama found him again. This remarkable incident spans only three verses (Ex 4:24–26), but it tells us the final lesson we ought to know about our sonship. God does not treat promises lightly—just as He keeps all His covenants, so does He expect His children to be faithful to the promise of our election and salvation.

Many things must have weighed heavy on Moses’ mind. It seemed like the fate of an entire nation rested on his shoulders, and what stood between him and his mission was one of the mightiest kings and his armies. Moses’ wife, Zipporah,

similarly, had her plate full. An abrupt departure to embark on an uncertain journey to a strange land must have been challenging, to say the least. Is it possible, then, to pardon these two unsettled parents for not circumcising their child? No, was God’s fearsome reply. The Bible draws a stark picture: God wanted to “kill” Moses for his negligence. Why?

“God does not want us to merely luxuriate in our salvation, but rather obey our noble commission to be world-changers—to preach the gospel, fight for the weak, and be an example to others that they might see the beauty of what it means to be a son of God.”

The age of Abraham was a long time ago. Circumcision, the mark of God’s sons, was similarly ancient. But God loved His sons and wanted them to be a separate people, a holy people. God would not allow the passage of time to dilute His love for His people, and their faithfulness to His word. In a way, this was an act of assurance for Moses. *I have made you a promise, God was telling Moses, and I keep my promises—you will free My people from Egypt and be their leader.*

To Christians today, the message is the same. The Bible tells us again and again that we are treasured sons and heirs of God, destined for an inheritance that surpasses all things. We are told also that to qualify we

must truly believe in our Christian convictions, and truly be, in our daily lives, a son of God. God has shown us, with Moses as an example, that He cares very much about how we live up to our titles as His sons. God remembers His sons.

CONCLUSION

Sometimes, it may be hard to see what the fuss is all about. Sons, priests, the chosen, the elect—so many titles, but what do they all mean? Why are they so important? Moses showed us. He was an ordinary Hebrew, a shepherd, a husband, and a father. He no longer held any titles of significance. But Moses learned what it meant to be a son of God, even before God created the appointment for us. Our sonship is the Holy Spirit within us—the Spirit of trust in God’s deliverance, the Spirit of endurance, the Spirit of faithfulness. Today, God welcomes anyone willing to receive and be led by this Spirit to be part of His glorious family. He is calling for His sons. It is time to respond. ★

My Ways Are Higher Than Your Ways

Philip Shee—Singapore

*"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," says
the LORD.*

*"For as the heavens are higher than
the earth,
So are My ways higher than your
ways,
And My thoughts than your
thoughts." (Isa 55:8–9)*

It is generally difficult for human beings to accept people who are better than they are. Oftentimes we resent those who put themselves above us, believing that we know better. However, in the above passage, God tells us clearly that His ways are higher than our ways. Can we truly accept this fundamental truth?

There is a useful litmus test of our acceptance. If we truly accept that God's ways are higher than our ways, we will be very submissive and stoic in our lives of faith. We remain calm in every situation because we entrust everything to God. And there is wisdom in this, as a famous Chinese story about an old man and his horse illustrates:

Once upon a time, there was an old man who lost his horse. On the surface, this was a disaster

God tells us clearly that His ways are higher than our ways. Can we truly accept this fundamental truth?

because he had lost a very precious possession. But some time later, this horse returned with another horse. The old man was happy as his misfortune had turned out to be a blessing in disguise. With this horse's return, the old man's son decided to go for a ride. But he fell off the horse and broke his leg. It appeared, then, that the horse had brought bad luck to the family. Not long after, the country went to war and the authorities came to conscript all the able young men in the village. The only young man left behind was the old man's son. None of the village's young men returned from the war. Only the old man's son survived and lived to a ripe old age—all because he broke his leg riding on a horse which had once run away.

The underlying point of this story is that no one knows whether an incident will eventually turn out to be a blessing or a loss. This is because our human perspective is limited by time, space, and our intellectual capabilities.

In contrast, God's perspective is multi-dimensional. He can see through all of time, and every interaction between every event happening in the universe, at all times.

We often come to very simplistic conclusions because of our one-dimensional thinking. For example, losing a horse equals a loss; the return of two horses equals a gain; and a broken leg equals a loss. Consequently, we tend to be too preoccupied with minor matters, which leads to negativity. When it rains, we complain that we will get wet. When it does not rain, we complain about the heat. We often compare ourselves with others and wonder why we are not taller, richer, smarter, better-looking, and so on. We often forget that our disadvantages may be advantages in a different situation. For example, a person who is short may not be able to reach the highest shelf. But then again, he is more comfortable than his taller counterpart in the cramped confines of an economy class seat on an aeroplane.

We must thus learn to accept that God allows seemingly adverse things to happen to us for our own good. We accept, knowing that His ways are higher than our ways. The Bible contains many good examples which illustrate this simple truth.

1. JOSEPH: GOD ALWAYS MEANS IT FOR GOOD

Joseph was an exemplary son who was obedient to his father, and his father loved him. He had a privileged and happy childhood. Unfortunately, his brothers were jealous of him and plotted to kill him. But Reuben, the eldest brother, persuaded the rest of his brothers to cast him into a pit without harming him. Later, Judah convinced them to sell Joseph to slave-traders headed for Egypt instead of killing him (Gen 37:26–28). Joseph must have been baffled by his siblings' hatred. He had done nothing to hurt them. Why did they conspire against him?

It would have been traumatic. In one moment, Joseph's privileged and happy childhood was ripped away. If we were to meet with a similar predicament, how would we respond? Would our faith be shaken? Would we question God and demand to know why He allows these calamities and injustice to beset us? Many people would start to doubt God if they encounter such senseless circumstances, or suffer unfair treatment.

In Egypt, Joseph ended up as a slave in the house of Potiphar. But interestingly, God blessed him so that everything he did went well. Joseph prospered in Potiphar's house. Consequently, Potiphar honored him and promoted him to chief of his household, second only to Potiphar himself in authority. Joseph's fate appeared to have changed. But his master's wife soon started noticing the handsome young supervisor.

And it came to pass after these things that his master's wife cast longing eyes on Joseph, and she said, "Lie with me." (Gen 39:7)

Joseph did the right thing—he refused to sin against God and betray his master (Gen 39:8–9). But, angry with Joseph's rejection, the master's wife framed him. She falsely accused him of trying to violate her.

When we hear or read about these events in Joseph's life, we may dismiss them as just a movie-style melodrama. Or we may think that the ultimate happy ending enjoyed by Joseph should render his suffering bearable. But we must remember that when Joseph was going through these experiences, he had not the slightest inkling what the next day—let alone the next stage of life—would bring. It would have been devastating enough to be sold by one's own brethren to foreigners. But just as his luck started to improve, he was falsely imprisoned—and for trying to do the right and honorable thing!

Joseph's brothers were very worried that Joseph would take revenge. But Joseph was far wiser. Although he did not initially understand why suffering dogged him, he finally realized that God had everything under control.

Today, there are those who want to take revenge on society because they feel they have been unfairly treated. They feel justified in victimizing others because they believe they have been victimized. In stark contrast, Joseph never once murmured against God. In return, God was with him wherever he went. Hence even in prison, he flourished. He was well-liked by the prison keeper. He interpreted dreams for his fellow prisoners, the royal butler and baker, respectively. When the butler was reinstated to his position, Joseph must have thought that it would only be a matter of time before he too would be released. But Joseph had to wait another two years before the butler remembered.

When Pharaoh had a dream that nobody could interpret, the butler suddenly recalled Joseph's ability. Joseph was brought before Pharaoh, and successfully interpreted his dream. God's revelation through Pharaoh's dream enabled Egypt to be prepared

for a seven-year famine. As there was also famine in the land of Canaan, Jacob sent his sons to Egypt to buy grain. This set the stage for Joseph's reunion with his whole family. After their reconciliation, Joseph's family settled in Egypt.

Upon the death of Jacob the patriarch, Joseph's brothers were very worried that Joseph would take revenge. But Joseph was far wiser. Although he did not initially understand why suffering dogged him, he finally realized that God had everything under control. And so Joseph told his brothers, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God?" (Gen 50:19).

Joseph understood that there is One who is much higher, whose ways and thoughts are much higher. God has a higher purpose that we do not always see.

...but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.
(Gen 50:20b)

Had Joseph not been in Egypt at the right time, many people would have died, including Jacob and his family. Jacob's family were instrumental to God's salvation plan. Jacob would become Israel, and his children, the fathers of the Israelite nation—God's chosen people. Every incident happened for a purpose and at the right time. Why was Joseph sold? So that he would go to Egypt. Why did he have to go to Egypt? So that he would end up in prison. Why did he have to be in prison? So that he would meet the royal butler. Why did the butler forget him? So that Joseph could be summoned in time to interpret Pharaoh's dream.

From Joseph's perspective, this series of unfortunate events certainly would not have made any sense at the time.

False imprisonment would not have been easy to bear. But he persevered, and when he looked back, it all made sense. It was to fulfill a much higher purpose. We should not trust our perspective because we look at things from a single dimension. But God has the entire picture. God means it all for good. If we view things from a single dimension, we can never see it. So we must accept that God's ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts higher than our thoughts.

This is faith. If we have this kind of faith, at the very end, we will say, "Amen. I now know why."

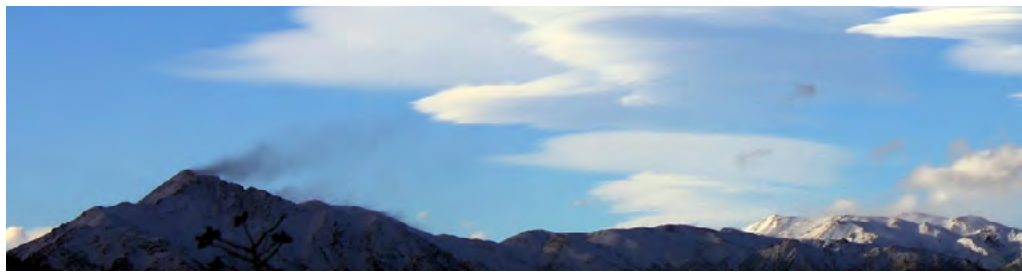
2. ABRAHAM: GOD'S TIMING IS PERFECT

God told Abram to leave his homeland, Ur of the Chaldeans, and God would lead him to the promised land. But Abram would not possess this land, and it would take many generations before his descendants would. God also promised that Abram would be a great nation, but Abram would not live to see it. Further, God revealed to Abram that his descendants would be strangers in a foreign land; they would have to serve foreign masters

"We want God to bless us in our lifetime, if not immediately. We certainly do not want to wait for four generations. We think that God is dragging His feet or being stingy with His blessing because we only consider a single dimension—our personal perspective. But God considers many factors; in modern parlance, He takes a holistic view."

and suffer this affliction for four hundred years. What God told Abram was fulfilled much later, after Jacob and his family settled in Egypt (Gen 15:12–16).

Abraham's ability to have faith in all that God had promised is exemplary. We often fall far short of this example. Sometimes, we expect God to bless us because we have been a good Christian and have done what the Bible says we should. And we want God to bless us in our lifetime, if not immediately. We certainly do not want to wait for four generations.



We think that God is dragging His feet or being stingy with His blessing because we only consider a single dimension—our personal perspective. But God considers many factors; in modern parlance, He takes a holistic view. In the context of the Israelites, the fourth generation of those who settled in Egypt would return to take possession of the land that God had promised them. Because that is when the "iniquity of the Amorites would be complete" (Gen 15:16). God would bring His people back to execute justice. The Israelites were to drive the Amorites out of the land because, in God's eyes, they no longer deserved the land. God had given the Amorites that piece of land for all these years. But these Amorites responded to such providence by worshipping false gods,

and sacrificing their children in their religious rituals. Their way of worship was also immoral. As a result, when their sins had reached their full extent of egregiousness, God would let the Israelites inherit the promised land.

In short, faith is about accepting God's timing because His ways are higher than ours. The best plan is God's plan.

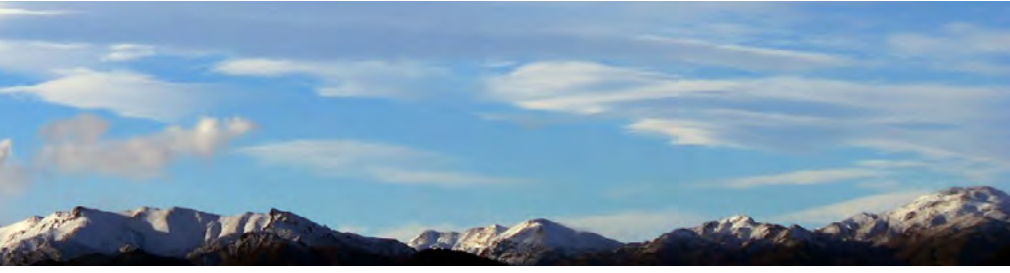
3. MOSES: GOD KNOWS THE TRAINING WE NEED

There was another reason why the Israelites had to dwell in Egypt.

At that time, Egypt was the most advanced civilization in that region. In contrast, Israel was just starting out as a nation. The Israelites had worked four hundred years in Egypt. Although they worked very hard, they were oppressed by their Egyptian masters. But God said He would judge Egypt, and the Israelites would come out with great possessions (Gen 15:14). Indeed, when the Israelites left Egypt, they had cattle, silver, gold, and even Egypt's national reserves (Ex 12:35–36).

Moses was chosen to lead them out of Egypt. Growing up as an Egyptian prince, Moses had been trained in all the knowledge and wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in words and deeds (Acts 7:22). His life in the palace of Egypt had not rendered him impervious to the suffering of the Israelites, his people. So the forty-year-old Moses wanted to take them out of Egypt. But instead of fulfilling His promise to Abraham at that time (Gen 15:13–14), God sent Moses to Midian. There, Moses spent the next forty years tending sheep.

At first glance, this course of action does not appear to make sense. Surely the dynamic, passionate forty-year-old prince would be far better equipped to lead than the reluctant and reticent eighty-year-old shepherd? On deeper reflection, God's way makes perfect sense. For the first forty years, Moses learned knowledge. But in the second forty years, he gained character. Forty-year-old Moses was very aggressive, mighty in words and deeds. This certainly qualified him to rally the Israelites, but could he manage them? In the wilderness of Midian, Moses spent forty years gazing at sheep and learning to be patient. It was only



as we are faithful to God, as long as we keep doing the right thing, regardless of what may happen right now, remember that we can only see one dimension. God's ways are much higher. He manages multiple dimensions. Have faith and trust. Take a step back, keep calm, and watch the wonderful will of God unfold before our eyes. ★

after this period that the infinitely wise God considered him ready to fulfill the real purpose of his life in his final forty years. Without the heart of a shepherd, Moses would not have had the patience to deal with the Israelites in the wilderness. Moses, the seasoned shepherd, had seen how headstrong and stubborn sheep could be. They did not always heed the shepherd, and often plunged themselves into danger by wandering off, even to dangerous places the shepherd had warned them against. In short, while Egypt could only train Moses to lead, the Midian years were necessary to equip Moses with the ability to lead the Israelites through all types of conditions, and, particularly, lead them in the wilderness for forty years.

Ultimately, God's way is always the better way. His higher ways and higher thoughts are infallible.

4. PAUL: GOD KNOWS WHERE AND HOW WE CAN BEST CONTRIBUTE

Paul was a very able preacher and a key worker in the ministry. The Holy Spirit revealed to him that he had to go to Jerusalem, even though chains awaited him there. He knew he would be arrested and imprisoned (Acts 20:22–23). Any logical person would have urged him not to go. After all, there were many places where he could preach; there would be many people, elsewhere, who needed to hear the gospel. But Paul went and, as expected, he was arrested. He was brought to Rome and placed under house arrest for two years.

If we were in Paul's shoes, we may think that being allowed to move about freely to preach the gospel would be the best way to serve God.

However, God had other plans. He wanted Paul to stay put and write under the inspiration of His Spirit. In His omnipotence, He can bring fish to the fisherman; He would bring people to the preacher.

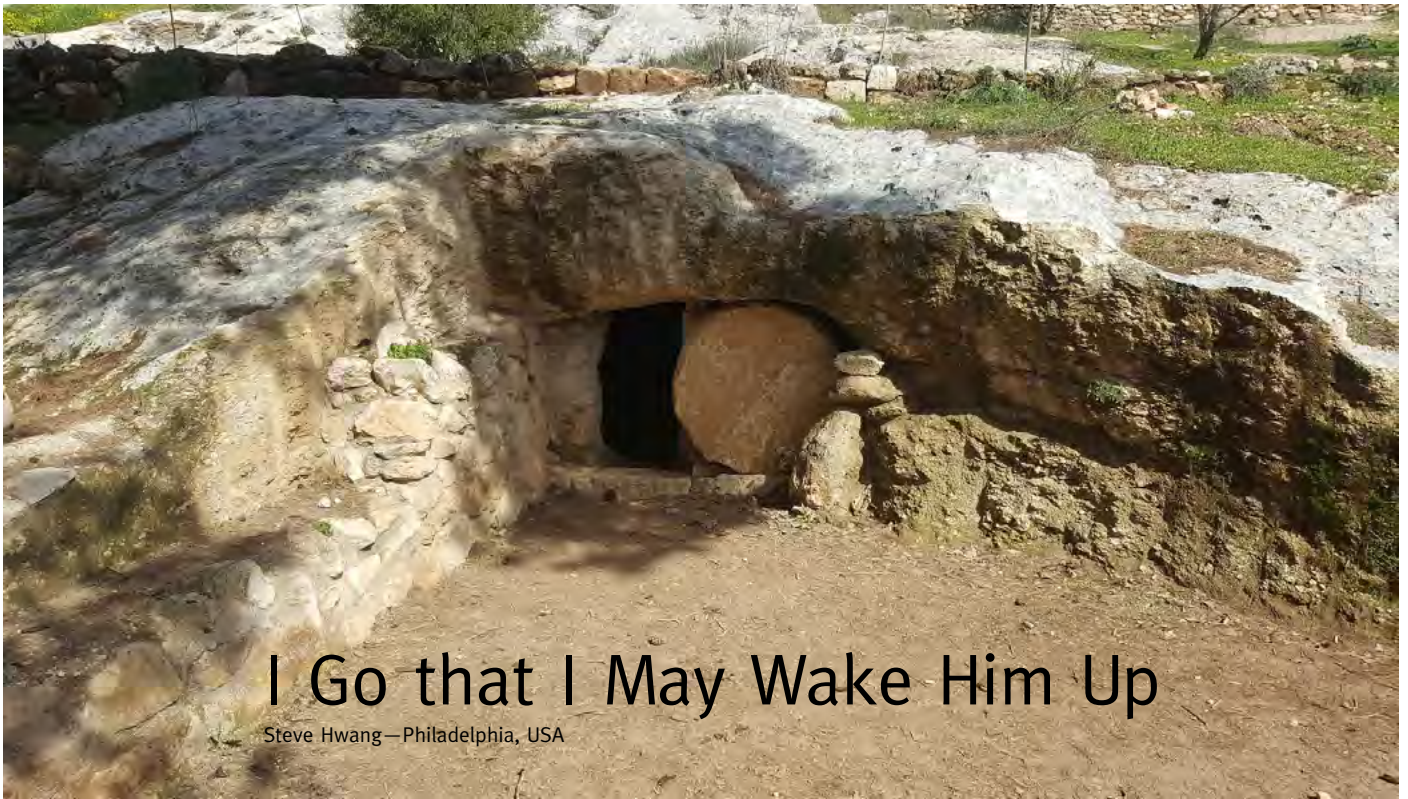
Indeed, in those two years, Paul was allowed to have visitors. He could still preach freely. People came to him, but most importantly, during that time, he wrote the prison epistles, which became part of our New Testament. What Paul wrote has been printed and passed down for generations. Millions across time and all over the

”*My ways are higher than your ways. My thoughts are not always your thoughts.” We must believe this. And believing this, we must conduct our life of faith correspondingly—in adversity and suffering, do not complain.*

world have read these writings. So in those two years in prison, Paul was able to preach to more people than he could ever have preached to in his lifetime, even when free.

CONCLUSION

This is how God the Omnipotent and Omniscient works. “My ways are higher than your ways. My thoughts are not always your thoughts.” We must believe this. And believing this, we must conduct our life of faith correspondingly—in adversity and suffering, do not complain. As long



I Go that I May Wake Him Up

Steve Hwang—Philadelphia, USA

Since I pastor the churches in both Philadelphia and Washington, DC, I often have to drive between these two cities. The journey is long, and I sometimes start drifting off behind the wheel. Thank God that my wife is always beside me in case I start to fall asleep. In these situations, having someone to wake us can help us avoid many dangers.

The Gospel of John records how Jesus resurrected Lazarus. Curiously, although He knew that Lazarus was dead, Jesus said: “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up” (Jn 11:11; cf. Jn 11:13–14).

In this passage, the waking of Lazarus finds a parallel with the spiritual awakenings of his sisters, Mary and Martha. Not only did Jesus wake Lazarus from the sleep of death, but He also woke Martha from deepest confusion, and Mary from the depths of sorrow. Let us see how Jesus woke each of them, and revived their faith, respectively.

MARTHA: AWAKENED FROM CONFUSION

The Lord told Martha three times, both directly and indirectly, that Lazarus’ sickness would not lead to

“The waking of Lazarus finds a parallel with the spiritual awakenings of his sisters, Mary and Martha. Not only did Jesus wake Lazarus from the sleep of death, but He also woke Martha from deepest confusion, and Mary from the depths of sorrow.

death. The first time was when they sent a message asking Jesus to come, before Lazarus had died.

“Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, ‘Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.’ When Jesus heard that, He said, ‘This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.’” (Jn 11:3–4)

The second time was when Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Jesus’ words were even more direct: “Your brother will rise again” (Jn 11:23). But still, Martha was confused—she thought Jesus was referring to the resurrection on the last day (Jn 11:24). Even as the stone was being removed from the opening of the tomb, Martha was concerned that there would be a stench from Lazarus’ decomposing body (Jn 11:39). Finally,

Jesus reassured her, “Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?” (Jn 11:40).

On three occasions, Martha heard Jesus’ words, but her mind could not decipher their meaning. She might have heard how Jesus had twice before performed the same feat—bringing a widow’s only son back to life, and reviving Jairus’ daughter. But perhaps, like many of us, she might not have considered that her own family could be on the receiving end of such a miracle.

Although confused, Martha was not totally without faith. She appears to have made some progress since the time she invited Jesus into her home (Lk 10:38–42). At that time, she complained that Mary was not helping to serve guests, but Jesus explained that Mary had chosen the good part by listening to His

Believers who put effort into strengthening their faith will no doubt keep advancing, but it does not mean they are immune from confusion. We may know Jesus and His teachings well, but we might not fully believe in every single one of His promises. Sometimes, our hearts are slow to believe.

teachings. Perhaps Jesus' words made an impact on Martha; by the time of Lazarus' death, she believed in the resurrection—a belief that even the Sadducees did not accept—and that Jesus is the Savior, the Christ who was to come into the world (Jn 11:27). Why, then, was she confused?

Believers who put effort into strengthening their faith will no doubt keep advancing, but it does not mean they are immune from confusion. We may know Jesus and His teachings well, but we might not fully believe in every single one of His promises. Sometimes, our hearts are slow to believe (Lk 24:25).

If the Lord made a special promise directly to your heart, would you believe? If He told you that your brother would rise from the dead, your heart might be slow to believe, or your faith might be tempered by human reasoning and logic. We must ask the Lord to give us a responsive heart—a heart of flesh—so that we can experience the grace of God. Then, we will be able to grasp the promises of God.

At which point did Martha finally believe that Lazarus would be resurrected? Was it when Jesus lifted up His hands in prayer? Was it when she heard Jesus cry out, "Lazarus come forth"? When her brother walked out of the tomb, Martha's heart must have jumped as the meaning of Jesus' words finally became clear.

Today, we must ask the Lord to

touch our heart so that we may fully believe, without doubt, in His every promise, so that in the midst of a confused state, we can be awakened.

MARY: AWAKENED FROM SORROW

Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, "She is going to the tomb to weep there." Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.

(Jn 11:31–33)

This passage reveals the heart-wrenching sorrow that Mary was experiencing. When she rose to leave the house, her fellow mourners commented that she must be going to weep at Lazarus' tomb—perhaps she had done this often since his burial. Even though he had been in the ground for four days, Mary's heart was not at ease. How long would she have continued to mourn if Jesus did not raise Lazarus? When Jacob was told that his son Joseph was still alive after so many years, his heart stood still out of disbelief. But, when he realized it was true his spirit was revived (Gen 45:26–28). We can see how profound one's sorrow can be after a loved one has died.

Jesus' reaction to this scene is telling: "He groaned in the spirit and was troubled" (Jn 11:33). In the original text, "groaned in the spirit" has connotations of mild anger or irritation. Earlier, Jesus had said, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe" (Jn 11:15). From God's perspective, this was to be a joyous day. When Jesus was resurrected, He asked Mary Magdalene, "Woman, why are you weeping?" (Jn 20:15). The day of Jesus' resurrection was not to

be a day of sorrow, but one of joy and victory. Similarly, Lazarus' death enabled God's glory to be revealed, but Mary's weeping was so excessive that it troubled Jesus. He viewed the situation from God's perspective. But then, he switched to the human perspective:

And He said, "Where have you laid him?"

They said to Him, "Lord, come and see."

Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" (Jn 11:34–36)

When Jesus saw that the people could not understand God's plan, He wept in compassion. The onlookers could feel how much Jesus loved Lazarus. This is reminiscent of the hymn lyrics, "He looked beyond my fault and saw my need." The Lord Jesus has a heart of compassion and empathy. Empathy is when one is able to understand and feel what the other party is going through. We rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep (Rom 12:15). This is the only way others can be comforted.

When Jesus wept, was Mary awakened from the depths of her sorrows? Perhaps not. But when Lazarus walked out of the tomb, she would have been filled with joy. In the same way, a person can be awakened from despair through understanding the truth of resurrection, and

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experiencing the love of God.

There was a sister whose husband passed away when she was in her forties, leaving behind three children for her to look after. She cried her eyes out every day, and could not accept God's arrangement. But one day she had a dream: she met her husband in paradise, and he showed her his home there. The sister marvelled at how beautiful and perfect it was, and told her husband that if she knew he was in such a wonderful place, she would not have cried so much. God had given her this vision to comfort her, to show her that her husband was not dead, but alive in Christ. The affirmation of this truth was enough to bring her out of her sorrows.

There was another sister who had been happily married to her husband for sixty years. Understandably, she was distraught when her husband died, and her tears flowed non-stop. On one occasion, when she was partaking of Holy Communion at the church in Queens, she saw a vision behind the pulpit. She saw Christ being crucified, the crown of thorns piercing His skin, and blood dripping down His face. She saw the spear-wound in His side and the blood that had poured out. Suddenly, the love of Christ filled her heart. The immense feeling of Christ's love woke her up and lifted her from her grief, and she would no longer shed any tears.

When Mary saw her brother alive and well, her sorrows immediately vanished. Lazarus' death was not permanent, he had merely been asleep (Jn 11:11); it had not been a meaningless death, it had been for the glory of God. Through this miracle, Mary finally saw the truth of resurrection, and experienced the love of Christ. These two things woke her from the depths of sorrow.

LAZARUS: AWAKENED FROM DEATH

The true extent of Jesus' love can be seen in the resurrection of Lazarus. This may seem a bold claim if we consider that Jesus did not immediately go to Lazarus when he fell ill—in fact, Jesus stayed where He was for two



more days (Jn 11:6). By the time Jesus reached Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days. Jewish tradition holds that the soul departs from the body three days after death. Both Martha and Mary were adamant that Lazarus would not have died if Jesus had come on time (Jn 11:21, 32); they would not be suffering such torment.

The message the sisters initially sent Jesus was: "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick" (Jn 11:3). But is this how a true friend would treat a loved one—to deliberately allow them to suffer, and even die? Is this the way Jesus loves us?

In fact, Jesus' delay and Lazarus' death heralded an opportunity for the

who is being patient with us. When we sorrow, the Lord Jesus is enduring the sorrow with us. But He does not come to our aid immediately—He bears with us.

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, did He take time to eat or rest before visiting Mary and Martha? No, when the fourth day arrived, Jesus went straight to them. When the time of our suffering is complete, Jesus will not delay in helping us, He will not let us suffer more than we need. Joseph was allowed to suffer for thirteen years, but that was the limit—God did not allow him to suffer one day more. Jesus loves us with this kind of longsuffering. And He holds our life,

Today, when we have a need, we hope and pray that Jesus will immediately come to our aid. But, often, He may delay. This is the love of Jesus—in the grand scheme of things, we may suffer for a moment, but such experiences will help us to establish a firm and mature faith.

glory of God to be manifested. Today, when we have a need, we hope and pray that Jesus will immediately come to our aid. But, often, He may delay. This is the love of Jesus—in the grand scheme of things, we may suffer for a moment, but such experiences will help us to establish a firm and mature faith.

And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? (Lk 18:7)

When we are suffering, it may feel as though we are patiently waiting on the Lord, but it is actually the Lord

as He did Lazarus' life, in His hands. Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. (Jn 11:25)

We need not fear death, because we have life in Jesus. Hebrews tells us that some people are enslaved by their fear of death (Heb 2:15). Our brethren in South Africa—where there is a high incidence of crime and robbery—used to have such fear. Some members felt that it would be safer to keep the Sabbath at home. They live in a beautiful country, but they did not dare venture out of their houses. Eventually, they freed



” *Jesus holds the power of life and death in His hands; He has the power to revive and wake us when we have doubts, feel depressed, or are spiritually lifeless. Let us seek to be awakened through His word and the experience of His love.*

raising Lazarus, Jesus allowed Martha and Mary to see the truth of His words and the extent of His love—Lazarus died and rose again so that he could testify of Jesus. They may each have suffered, but it was all for the glory of God.

Jesus holds the power of life and death in His hands; He has the power to revive and wake us when we have doubts, feel depressed, or are spiritually lifeless. Let us seek to be awakened through His word and the experience of His love. ★

themselves through faith—they encouraged one another that, if they died before God deemed it to be their time, then He would raise them from the dead. When Paul had been adrift for many days at sea, the Lord promised him that He would preserve him and everyone else on the ship. When Paul was shipwrecked at Malta, he was bitten by a viper, which caused the locals to speculate that he was fated to die. However, as God promised, Paul was unharmed. Jesus had said to Martha, “And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (Jn 11:26). We must have complete faith in the authority of Jesus. He holds our lives in His hands, so we can live without fear.

CONCLUSION

Today, we might face times of confusion, of sorrow, of suffering and fear for our lives. But Jesus is willing to wake us with His word and His love. Martha was confused in her faith, and lacked a complete belief in Jesus' words. Mary was trapped in the depths of sorrow. And Lazarus had been dead for four days. But by



Do Not Be Choked by the World

Jeffrey Lin—Seattle, Washington, USA

The parable of the sower illustrates four types of ground (the wayside, rocky ground, thorny ground, and good ground) to represent the different hearts of men, and the difficulties we face when receiving and keeping the word of God (Lk 8:4–15). As believers who have heard the word, kept it, and allowed it to take root in our hearts, we might not relate ourselves to the first two types of ground (Lk 8:12–13). However, living in this world, we are naturally exposed to various “thorny” environments. Let us examine the potential dangers we might face in our spiritual lives, so that we may gain a heart of wisdom and overcome the trials and tests of the thorny ground.

A SEED AMONG THE THORNS

“And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it.” (Lk 8:7)

Just like a seed, a thorny plant needs time to grow. The verse states that “the thorns sprang up with it,” which is an explicit warning to us that thorns will not only grow when we stray from God’s word, but even when we

have God’s word in our hearts.

Our hearts are like a piece of land with a limited amount of space. The environment around us and our lifestyle choices—the people we associate with, the decisions we make—are all factors that directly impact our spiritual lives. If we spend a good amount of time each day with God, through prayer and meditation on His word, we are cultivating the seed and giving it more space to grow. If we do not set aside time to cultivate the seed daily, we allow space for the thorns to grow and thrive. Similarly, if we are setting aside only minimal amount of time for God, we must beware that the thorns are also constantly competing for the land. As thorns grow along with the seed, the things of this world can allure us if we are not careful, no matter how spiritually strong we think we are.

IDENTIFYING OUR THORNS

“Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.” (Lk 8:14)

Jesus defines thorns as the “cares, riches, and pleasures of life,” which can become of greater importance to us than the word of God. Before we can uproot a thorny weed, identifying and knowing which thorns are in our heart helps us to target the areas in which we need to change and improve.

Worrisome Cares

The cares of this world cause us much worry and anxiety—whether it is our future, our career, our relationships,

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there is always something to worry about. Worrying can cause us to stumble in our spiritual lives, especially if we decide to take matters into our own hands, without considering God. It is not that we will never be without worry in our lives, but whenever we are anxious, we should look to Jesus and fix our thoughts on Him. Giving our lives to Him and letting Him take full control is the first step toward an anxiety-free mind (Prov 3:5–6). A God-centered lifestyle helps us to establish our trust in Him, alleviating our worries. Rather than looking at our problems, we can instead focus on the promises of God, and find security in Him.

Deceitful and Seductive Riches

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

(1 Tim 6:9–10)

”Worrying can cause us to stumble in our spiritual lives, especially if we decide to take matters into our own hands, without considering God. It is not that we will never be without worry in our lives, but whenever we are anxious, we should look to Jesus and fix our thoughts on Him.

The world and the people around us are focused on earning, gaining and finding success. We all want to strive for a better, more comfortable life. While this is not necessarily bad, we need to evaluate whether the things we pursue are necessities or personal desires. We may attend church services, pray and read the Bible, but if our desires take precedence over our faith, we are giving more space for the thorns to grow. True diligence in our spiritual lives is greater than doing just the bare minimum. It means that we are vigilant about our personal

pursuits that are motivated by desire, greed or impulse, and we strive to live "soberly, righteously, and godly" (Tit 2:12).

Lust for the Pleasures of Life

"[T]hat you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts." (Eph 4:22)

When we seek after things that please our senses, rather than that which pleases God, we will start to justify our actions. Eventually, the roots of our lust can run so deep that they become almost instinctive: the need to satisfy our lusts will grow stronger, while our sensitivity to sin will grow numb. As humans, we cannot avoid lust and are in constant battle with it. However, let us not forget that our Lord Jesus was very much human as well (Heb 4:15), and He was able to overcome lust during His lifetime. He is living proof that lust can be defeated as long as we walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16). Walking in the Spirit means that we rely on the Holy Spirit to renew us and cleanse us daily. If we are willing to draw closer

to God and let His Spirit renew us, we will find that lust will no longer be an adversity for us.

CHOKED BY THORNS

"Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."

(Jas 1:15)

The process of thorns growing and choking one's faith can be slow, gradual and even silent. We need to be mindful of this. When our desire

for God no longer exists, it is the result of our lives being choked up by the thorns of the world. Eventually, we may gain all that we want in this life, but we will lose God, His promises, and our home in heaven. Therefore, let us always remind ourselves to evaluate and reflect upon the state of our spiritual lives, as well as the choices we make from day to day.

A SEED STRONGER THAN THE THORNS

At times, the thorns which pose a great threat to our spiritual lives seem to be too deep-rooted. No matter how hard we try, it seems like these thorns will never stop growing. Despite the difficulty of removing these thorns, we must remember that the seed of God's word can grow stronger and faster. We have God, and in Him we can always find hope and assurance. God knows our hearts and is willing to offer His strength and guidance to us. However, we must be willing to take that first step. Once God has freed us of our thorns, let us not forget His grace and mercy, and resolve to live a new life—a life that is worthy and pleasing to God, filled with His hope and blessings.

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever."

(1 Jn 2:15–17) ★



A Letter to Our Youths: Make Good Use of the Time

Simon Chin — Perth, Australia

Greetings of peace to our youths-in-Christ.

When I consider the situation that you, as youths of the True Jesus Church, are in—the positive spiritual environment within your local churches, the availability of religious education and theological courses, and the ample opportunities to serve the Lord—I can't help but feel envious. This is because, when I was young, such opportunities were very limited.

In light of these favorable conditions, you should make good use of your time, while you are in your prime. The apostle Paul wrote, "See that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Eph 5:15–16).

The last days before the Lord Jesus' second coming are indeed evil and full of dangers. The Bible has told us very clearly:

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents,

Human life is short, and we will soon pass away; yet, human beings desire many things—including things detrimental to the soul. We must re-evaluate our priorities, and use our limited days wisely.

unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

(2 Tim 3:1–5)

For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the

love of the truth, that they might be saved.

(2 Thess 2:7–10)

Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them."

(Eccl 12:1)

Alas, it is a sad fact that some of our youths do not use their time wisely. It has become quite normal for youths to love the world and pursue worldly ambitions, while their faith becomes neglected, even to the point where they imitate the carnal behavior of wider society. If you act in such a way, it will jeopardize your status as children of God and, ultimately, your salvation. The danger is that you can fall into sin and be caught by the snare of the devil, before you even realize it.

Do take heed of the warnings from the prophets of old:

How long will you slumber, O sluggard?

When will you rise from your sleep?

*A little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to*

sleep—

*So shall your poverty come on you
like a prowler,*

And your need like an armed man.

(Prov 6:9–11)

*The days of our lives are seventy
years;*

*And if by reason of strength they are
eighty years,*

*Yet their boast is only labor and
sorrow;*

*For it is soon cut off, and we fly
away.*

*Who knows the power of Your
anger?*

*For as the fear of You, so is Your
wrath.*

*So teach us to number our days,
That we may gain a heart of wisdom.*

(Ps 90:10–12)

In the above passages, we are reminded that human life is short, and we will soon pass away; yet, human beings desire many things—including things detrimental to the soul. We must re-evaluate our priorities, and use our limited days wisely, so we spend more time storing up for ourselves an eternal inheritance in heaven.

How should you, as a youth, conduct your life, so you can have a rich reward in the heavenly kingdom?

ESTABLISH A STRONG FOUNDATION IN FAITH

Timothy was taught the Holy Scriptures from a young age, giving him the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (2 Tim 3:15; 1:5). The word of God is Spirit and life; it testifies of Jesus (Jn 5:39; 6:63). When we study the Bible, and humbly pray for God to enlighten us in the process, the Holy Spirit will guide us to understand the beliefs of the true church. The faith that we

build will be strong and founded upon spiritual principles, leaving no room for doubt. As youths, now is the ideal time to lay down this foundation.

OFFER A LIFE OF SERVICE

The apostle Peter calls us living stones, filled with the life of Jesus. We are being built into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, with the capacity to offer up spiritual sacrifices of service which are acceptable to God (1 Pet 2:4–5).

Paul wrote, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:1–2).

And the LORD listened and heard them;

So a book of remembrance was written before Him

For those who fear the LORD

And who meditate on His name.

“They shall be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts,

“On the day that I make them My jewels.

And I will spare them

As a man spares his own son who serves him.” (Mal 3:16–17)

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:

Fear God and keep His commandments,

For this is man’s all.

For God will bring every work into judgment,

Including every secret thing,

Whether good or evil.

(Eccl 12:13–14)

When we fear God, we will depart from evil and forgive our enemies as God has forgiven us. In this way, we will remain safely within God’s grace until we reach eternal life.

These words of Peter and Paul epitomize the life of Timothy. His life was such that he sought the things of God, rather than his own. Together with Paul, Timothy served the Lord Jesus, and they took care of the church with the same mind, working together in the manner of father and son (Phil 2:19–22).

As youths, you can learn much from Timothy, and set an example to the believers in your speech, conduct, love, spirit, faith, purity, and life of service (1 Tim 4:12).

FEAR THE LORD AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS

Fearing the Lord shows that we recognize Him as a merciful and loving God, and at the same time, acknowledge that He is righteous and will execute judgment on the last day.

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another,

The fear of the Lord must be cultivated from a young age.

Joseph is a good example. He was seventeen when his brothers sold him to Egypt. He worked faithfully as a slave in Potiphar’s house, but then his mistress tried to seduce him. Joseph’s reaction to this was, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen 39:9). From this, we can see that Joseph had been instilled with the fear of God from a young age. Joseph’s firm foundation enabled him to avoid temptation and remain holy (Prov 3:7). Later, when he was promoted to be the prime minister of Egypt, Joseph forgave his brothers when they came to him seeking food during a famine (Gen 45:4–8). He provided for them and had no thought of revenge, for he knew that it was God who had paved Joseph’s way to save his people (Gen 50:19–21).

In fearing God, we need to keep His

EXHORTATION

commandments and love Him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. We should also love one another (Mk 12:29–31) as God has loved us. When we fear God, we will depart from evil and forgive our enemies as God has forgiven us. In this way, we will remain safely within God's grace until we reach eternal life.

“As youths of the True Jesus Church, you should take up the Lord's commission to preach the gospel of salvation to the world. This is making good use of your time, and will help you to stay focused on your faith. Do not let this glittering world lure you away from God.

BE A FAITHFUL WORKER

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

(2 Tim 2:15)

But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

(2 Tim 2:20–22)

It is essential for you, as youths today, to heed Paul's exhortation to be useful and faithful workers. To achieve this, there are two things you must do: first is to handle the word of truth correctly; second is to clean

yourselves from youthful lusts and aim for righteousness, faith, love, and peace. We who are baptized into Christ are His workmanship, created to do good works (Eph 2:10).

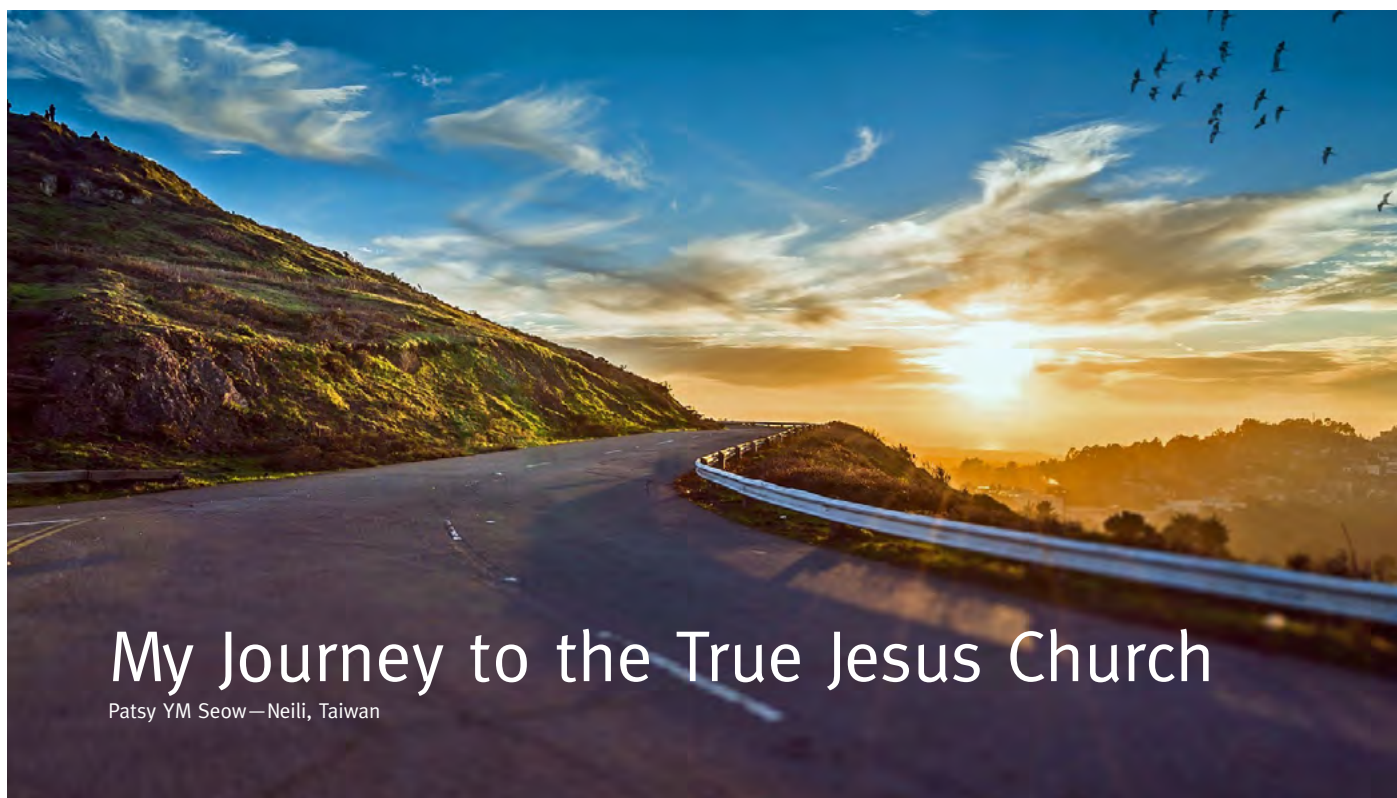
Jesus said to His disciples, “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (Jn 9:4–5). “A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light” (Jn 12:35–36a). Today the light of Jesus is with us. Therefore, we must walk while we have the light; the night will come when no one can work.

And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts. (Rom 13:11–14)

The end is at hand. Everyone should use their time wisely to secure their own salvation (Phil 2:12–13). Finally, as youths of the True Jesus Church, you should take up the Lord's commission to preach the gospel of salvation to the world. This is making good use of your time, and will help you to stay focused on your faith. Do not let this glittering world lure you away from God.

May the Lord bless you, so that you can be future pillars of the church. ★

Simon Chin



My Journey to the True Jesus Church

Patsy YM Seow—Neili, Taiwan

THE JOURNEY BEGINS: SEARCHING FOR GOD

Growing up in Malaysia, my childhood was far from ideal. My family would often have quarrels and fights, and sometimes the police had to come to our house to settle these disputes. These experiences affected me emotionally, and I could not comprehend why my family life was so chaotic. I envied my peers because their families seemed so normal. Gradually, loneliness began to seep in, especially when I could not find solace in other people. In search of answers, I began to seek God in my life.

At the age of nine or ten, I first heard about Jesus through my two older siblings who had attended Christian Sunday schools. I later learned more about Christianity by reading free publications. When I was fourteen years old, I attended a Christian event organized by a group of churches in Malaysia, and I decided to become a believer. At the church I attended, the congregation was taught how to “speak in tongues,” and sang lively hymns. Nevertheless, I did not experience God’s presence there. Over time, I started to doubt God’s existence, and stopped going to church.

MY TIME IN THE UK: BEING LED TO THE TRUE CHURCH

In September 1997, I arrived in Portsmouth, UK, to complete my undergraduate studies. Towards the end of that year, two Malaysian friends on my course, who were members of the True Jesus Church (TJC), invited me to the church in Portsmouth.

During my first visit to the TJC, I felt uneasy about the way the members prayed in tongues, and praying on my knees was uncomfortable. I was not interested in returning, but my two friends were persistent. They kept preaching to me, and one of them would even invite me to church activities after we both returned to Malaysia. But I would always decline.

A SECOND CHANCE AFTER EIGHT YEARS OF WANDERING

From January 2002 to June 2003, I worked at a non-profit organization based at the Asian Institute of

Technology (AIT) in Thailand. I was sad when it came time to leave, but I had a feeling that I would be able to return in the future. A month later, I returned to Malaysia and found a job. But after a while, working life became meaningless and monotonous. Every morning I would commute to work, spend the whole day in the office, and go home when the sun sets. When the weekend came, I would either be at home resting or doing chores, or hanging out with friends. I felt that there must be more to life—I sensed that God must exist, and my desire to find Him grew stronger.

In a bid to experience God, I started to attend services at different churches. There was one particular church I felt good about, where I fitted in nicely with the church members. In August 2004, I accepted their baptism in a bathtub. Yet, during the time I spent in this church, I did not experience God.

”My family life was so chaotic. ... Gradually, loneliness began to seep in, especially when I could not find solace in other people. In search of answers, I began to seek God in my life.

After this, I decided to further my studies, and took up a language course in Italy in April 2005. The following June, I went to the UK to visit the Malaysian TJC sister who had remained there. Again, she invited me to Sabbath service at Portsmouth TJC. After the service, she asked me to give the TJC another chance when I returned to Malaysia. “Just attend for one month,” she said. But then she changed her mind, “It would be better if you attend for at least two months.” I promised, reluctantly, that I would.

It had been eight years since I last stepped foot into the TJC, but this sister did not give up on me, and neither did God. And this time, I realized that if I wanted to personally experience the true God, I needed to humble myself and be submissive to His guidance.

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STUDYING IN THAILAND: EXPERIENCING GOD IN THE TRUE CHURCH

In June 2005, I returned to Malaysia from Italy, but it was not long before I would leave again. After two months, I flew to Thailand to undertake a master’s degree in information management at the AIT.

During the first year of my master’s, I was very busy with my coursework so I could not fulfill the promise to my friend in the UK. But in my second year, with only my thesis to write, I had more time on my hands.

So in October 2006, sixteen months after making the promise, I finally found myself at the TJC in Bangkok attending Sabbath service. I travelled for hours by public transport to get there, but when I arrived, I could not find the church. I contemplated giving up. But thankfully, after a phone call to



the church, someone came to pick me up. At the church entrance, despite mental and physical exhaustion from the four-hour journey, I was filled with an indescribable joy.

The Sabbath service was conducted in Chinese and Thai—two languages in which I lacked proficiency. But this time, I willingly knelt down to pray. During the prayers and hymn singing, the conversations I had with my friend in Portsmouth suddenly came to mind—I was moved as I recalled

order to confirm that the TJC is indeed the true church.

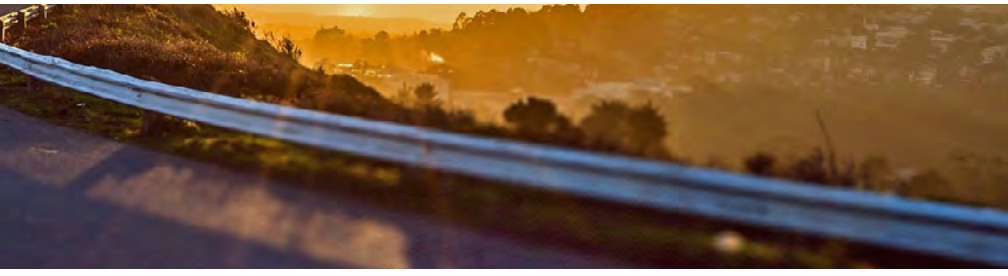
From then on, even though the journey to Bangkok TJC took more than three hours, each visit brought me joy. During my third Sabbath there, my arms shook so much as I prayed that I thought the pew was unstable. I continued to pray diligently for the Holy Spirit, at any given opportunity, with support and encouragement from the brethren.

One night in November 2006, I attended evening prayer service at church and stayed overnight. Even though I had prayed fervently during the service, I still had not received the Holy Spirit, so I decided to continue praying in my bedroom. Within an hour, I started to speak in tongues, and I cried tears of joy. I had received the Holy Spirit!

Just before I completed my studies and returned to Malaysia, I was baptized into the TJC at Bangkok on May 20, 2007. I had wandered for almost ten years since my first encounter with the true church. In fact, I had been searching for the true God since childhood, and had finally found Him in the True Jesus Church. It was God’s timing and grace that finally brought me to His church.

RETURN TO MALAYSIA: THE STRUGGLE TO STAY ON THE PATH

When I returned to Malaysia in June 2007, I started attending Sabbath services as a TJC member. However, the congregation was much larger than in Bangkok, so I felt somewhat lost in the crowd. I started to lose interest in church, and my faith declined further as I struggled to find a job. When I was able to find employment, I had to work on



Sabbath days, and found myself becoming stressed and overworked. After changing jobs several times, I decided to return to my studies—this time to pursue an overseas doctoral degree (PhD).

A key criterion in deciding which university to attend was whether there was a TJC in the area. I ended up applying for the PhD in information management at Yuan Ze University of Neili in Taoyuan, Taiwan. Even though I only achieved an average grade for my master's degree, I was awarded a full four-year scholarship to the PhD program. This could only have been God's wonderful guiding grace. While I struggled to maintain my faith in Malaysia, where I was more focused on achieving financial independence, God sent me to Taiwan so that I would again seek Him with all my heart, and strengthen my faith.

SENT TO TAIWAN: BEING FED IN THE WILDERNESS

In August 2010, I landed in Taiwan. Living alone in Taiwan was not only challenging but, at times, lonely. Because of this, I learned to rely more on God, and to pray fervently, even over trivial matters. God also arranged my circumstances such that going to church was very convenient—initially I lived about twenty minutes' walk from Neili TJC, but in August 2014, I moved to accommodation that is less than a minute's walk away.

Unlike in Bangkok, where I was driven by spiritual thirst to travel for hours to attend church, God brought me to Taiwan so that I would have no obstacles in drawing closer to Him. He sent me to the wilderness, away from the distractions of family life and my non-believing friends in Malaysia. He led me away from the

comforts and patterns of my old life, and the worries and pressure of work, so that I would rely and focus on Him alone. Even though God had placed me in an ideal situation, I still had to avoid distractions so I could stay on this path of spiritual cultivation. Studying towards a PhD requires round-the-clock commitment, but I made the effort to attend church services regularly, and avoided secular activities on Sabbath days.

Throughout my time in Taiwan, I can see how God has changed me. I used to be impatient, and constantly quarreled with my parents. But living in a dormitory with up to three roommates for four years taught me to become more tolerant and patient towards others. When I visited my parents in Malaysia, they were taken

”I finally understood the basic beliefs and acknowledged that this could be the true church. To my mind, the teachings of the church seemed to be pure, genuine, and true. So, for the first time, I began to pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I prayed to receive the Holy Spirit, in order to confirm that the TJC is indeed the true church.

aback by how much more patient and less quarrelsome I had become. I even started to play hymns from the TJC hymn book on our old piano. My parents had previously been uninterested in the TJC, but upon seeing this change in me, they willingly started to attend church events. In essence, our Christ-like behavior allows others to acknowledge that Christ indeed lives in us (Gal 2:20).

Another way that God has changed me is through church work, and the gifts He has bestowed upon me along the way. When I first came to Taiwan, I could barely speak Mandarin Chinese; so I began to seriously learn one of the world's most difficult languages, praying for God's spiritual wisdom and guidance to help me. It took me almost two years to write Hanyu Pinyin for more than four hundred hymns in my Chinese hymn book. As my Chinese improved, I could begin to participate in church work. I started off with catering duties, then ushering, and then I spent three years as a member of the adult choir. I was eventually able to testify and lead discussions in Chinese, and interpret from Chinese to English. By God's grace, since arriving in Taiwan with very little Chinese, I can now serve Him with my new language skills.

GOD'S GRACE AND WISDOM ARE SUFFICIENT FOR MY ONGOING JOURNEY

Throughout my time in Taiwan, I have experienced constant grace and blessings from God. Though I spent much of my time at church, I obtained good grades for my PhD coursework and my research papers were readily accepted for publication. These results could only be possible through God's blessing. Furthermore, I could survive financially despite being unemployed for over seven years. I lived a frugal life, but God has never let me go without. I have experienced, firsthand, that He blesses and provides for us if we put Him first in our lives (Mt 6:33), and that His grace is indeed sufficient (2 Cor 12:9).

CONCLUSION

The twists and turns of my spiritual journey have not been coincidental, nor have they been according to my own plans. Instead, my footsteps have been guided by God's higher will. As the Lord declares in Isaiah 55:9:

"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."

Ever since I began searching for God in my childhood, God has guided me and opened the way for me to find Him in the true church. Although I turned away several times, for years

on end, God patiently waited for me to turn back. Although I still have much to learn, and a long way to go, I know I can trust in His loving grace. And my sincerest hope is that my non-believing family and friends will give the TJC a chance, or in some cases, a second chance, just as I did all those years ago.

May all glory be given to God. ★

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Out of Dark Depression

Lina Pang—Irvine, California, USA

The first twenty-five years of my life were amazingly joyful because of God's blessings and abidance. In first grade, God saved me from a crazed-dog attack. My secondary school and college years overflowed with His blessings. When I started working life, I experienced God's fullness during a repentant prayer—He was surrounding me, within me, and flowing out of me.

To help me grow, God allowed me to go through a more challenging stage in my life—the dark period.

DESCENDING INTO AN ABYSS

At the time, my life was going well. Relationships, career, and family were all working out. But darkness unknowingly seeped into my heart.

I do not know why and when this dark depression started afflicting me. All I knew was that I felt a black hole within my heart. It was a very deep, dark void. Soon, this expanding black hole had taken over my whole heart. A blanket of gloominess was my constant companion. I could no longer smile naturally.

Each morning, I woke up only to wish I had not woken up. Death appeared to be a far more attractive

prospect compared to being alive. When I walked around, I felt strangely detached from my body; almost as if my spirit was a separate entity watching my physical body go about the day's activities. I felt like a zombie. I lost interest in what I used to like. There was a vast emptiness in my heart.

It was at that moment that I thought I understood the vanity of life. As Solomon had described it, life was an endless cycle, with one day the same as the next. I felt that life in general had neither meaning nor value. Convinced too that my existence was void of meaning and value, I could only conclude that death was far better than remaining alive. The apostle Paul had expressed the same sentiment (Phil 1:23) but his motivation was completely different. To him, death was welcome, but only because he had finished his mission

on earth and was looking forward to seeing God.

I experienced the strangest phenomena. One day I went to watch *The Lord of the Rings* with my family members and friends. During the part of the movie when the evil character was pursuing the protagonists, I felt the dark spirit actually fly out from the screen. These spirits then flew all around the cinema, surrounded me, and even tried to fly into my heart. So while my family was enjoying the movie, I had to keep muttering "Hallelujah" throughout the entire movie to drive away the demonic spirits around me.

During this period of darkness, I seemed to become very sensitive to the existence of dark spirits. In retrospect, I learned many important lessons. First, I was reminded that spiritual battles are all around us and happen every day even though

“I do not know why and when this dark depression started afflicting me. All I knew was that I felt a black hole within my heart. It was a very deep, dark void. Soon, this expanding black hole had taken over my whole heart.”

we may not see them. Second, I realized that when we are spiritually weak, the devil can easily enter our hearts. Sometimes this takes the form of a dark thought, or an erroneous concept. These little spots of darkness keep assailing us. They are not from God because they are neither consistent with God's divine nature nor with God's words. These little spots of darkness accumulate and intensify. So, even though we are not demon-possessed, the devil's influence can become so great that it controls us. He is indeed like a roaring lion stalking us, looking for someone to devour.

I was too embarrassed to talk to anyone about the darkness I was feeling because, as a Christian and a worker in the church, I was supposed to be joyful. I had the indwelling Holy Spirit, yet I could feel neither joy nor life in me. All I could feel every day was darkness.

Depression was also very frightening for me because I just could not feel God's presence. I did not want to confide in others because I knew they would just advise me to pray, read the Bible, rely on God, and repent of any sins I had committed. I was already doing all these, but to no avail. I did not understand why this was happening to me because I had no reason to be unhappy. All I knew was the abyss of darkness was deep in my heart and there was absolutely nothing I could do about it. I felt utterly helpless.

CLINGING TO HOPE

Even though I could not feel God, I knew God exists. Since young, I had heard innumerable testimonies of His abidance; I myself had deep, personal experience of Him. So, although a spiritual wall seemed to have cut me off from Him, I clung to the memories of these experiences. I told myself that while I might not know why I was going through this, God knew I was suffering. I believed He would take me out of this spiritual suffering in His time.

So I prayed to God every day to help me, believing without any doubt that there would be light at the end of the

tunnel if I remained faithful to Him; that was the hope I grasped tightly on to. I continued to pray to God, read the Bible, go to church, serve God, and wait for God to rescue me.

*Why are you cast down, O my soul?
And why are you disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him
For the help of His countenance.*
(Ps 42:5)

*I would have lost heart, unless I had believed
That I would see the goodness of the LORD
In the land of the living.
Wait on the LORD;
Be of good courage,
And He shall strengthen your heart;
Wait, I say, on the LORD!*
(Ps 27:13–14)

I knew no human hand could pull me out of this mire of depression;

Even though I could not feel God, I knew God exists. Since young, I had heard innumerable testimonies of His abidance; I myself had deep, personal experience of Him. So, although a spiritual wall seemed to have cut me off from Him, I clung to the memories of these experiences. I told myself that while I might not know why I was going through this, God knew I was suffering.

only God could. So, as in the psalm, I just waited for God to rescue me. I had faith and hope in the goodness of God. This hope sustained me for nine months. When darkness drowned me, and thoughts of death overwhelmed me, I chose to believe in God and His goodness.

If I did not let go of God, God would never let go of me. Buoyed by this hope, I started feeling better each day. Then one day, I noticed that the darkness was no longer overwhelming; I felt normal again. All the abnormal feelings—thoughts of dying, flying evil spirits, emptiness—just disappeared. I was so joyful, I could not stop praising God!

Around that time, I stumbled upon an online article about depression.

As I read through the checklist of symptoms, it dawned on me that this was what I had been going through for the past nine months. If I had been clinically diagnosed, I would have been put on medication. But without this knowledge, all I could do was trust in God, and He healed me.

FROM BEING HELPLESS TO HELPING OTHERS

Soon after my recovery, I was chatting with my religious education students from J1 and J2 (Junior and Intermediate Youth). I noticed that many of them were depressed. It was more common than I had thought! I then understood why God had allowed me to undergo that bout of depression. It was to enable me to support others who were going (or would go) through a similar trial. What I had gone through allowed me to assure them with the fullest conviction that God could, and would, help.

In general, people who are healthy cannot completely empathize with those suffering from depression. As the symptoms are internal, and there is no discernible external cause for their prolonged sadness, depressed people are often told to "get over it." However, they are really unable to pull themselves out of the abyss. Such tough love can lead a sufferer to think that no one understands, causing them to become more depressed. Worse, they are afraid to confide in others and request intercession because they fear being despised for not being spiritual enough. From my experience, many sufferers of depression feel a lot better after meeting someone from church who understands them and listens to them.

“God indeed taught me humility and thankfulness. Leading an ordinary life is already God’s blessing. The life in us is the manifestation of His power sustaining us. I thus learned to humble myself by recognizing God’s power and sovereignty in every little aspect of my life.

A few years later, I met another member who was experiencing depression. She felt so helpless because her medication was not really helping. Thank God, I was able to share my experience, and she felt very relieved. She had the faith and the hope to know that God would help her. Years later, when I met her again, I was pleased to see that she looked happy.

From this experience, I was reminded that God has His beautiful will and purpose for our suffering. Sometimes, it is because He wants to test our faith, to see if we will hold on to Him no matter what. Another reason is because He wants us to help others who go through the same thing in the future.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. (2 Cor 1:3–4)

JOURNEY TO HUMILITY

A few years after the bout of depression, I went through another dark period in my life. It started with a prayer to God to show me one thing that He would like me to change. During that prayer, I had a very strong feeling that God wanted me to learn humility. I was shocked because I never thought of myself as a particularly proud person. However, searching my heart, I did indeed find pride. Unfortunately, I did not know how to get rid of it. So I prayed and asked God to teach me how to humble myself. And He did so—through sickness and through workplace challenges.

Graves’ Disease

About a year later, I was diagnosed with Graves’ disease, which causes hyperthyroidism.

Although I ate triple the amount that I usually eat, I lost a lot of weight. In fact, I lost so much weight that I looked malnourished. My hair fell out, my nails began to chip, my hands shook, and my eyes bulged. I had a goitre in my neck, and I experienced heart palpitations and anxiety attacks.

People with Graves’ disease experience emotional rollercoasters. I am known as a generally calm person who can control her emotions, but with the disease, my emotions were very volatile and extreme. My muscles were perennially tense and painful, and I could not sleep at night. I would just lie there, listening to my heart thumping as loudly as a drum, with my whole body pulsing to the beat.

Work Challenges

At work, I was also facing a major challenge. I was a kindergarten teacher with about thirty kids in my class. Of this, half had behavioral problems—an unusually high number. Unsurprisingly, my work life felt like an endless series of crises. While I was dealing with one student’s behavior, another would do something that required my attention immediately. As I dashed over to the second student, another situation would start—imagine having to deal with this all day!

To compound matters, one child in my class was particularly extreme. He would run about on all fours in the classroom. When I asked him to sit, he would stand up; and when I asked him to come to me, he would run away. He had even tried to strangle one of the other teachers.

I was certainly ill-equipped to handle such a child because another symptom of hyperthyroidism is the inability to think clearly. Decisions which could be made within thirty seconds took me three hours. In addition, I had completely lost my voice. Faced with all these, I felt helpless once more. I had trouble just doing laundry—how was I supposed to face my class of children, half of whom had additional needs?

Once again, I had to grasp onto God for help. Every morning I would pray to God before I went to work. Besides that, I spent half an hour reading the Book of Psalms in order to receive enough strength to get through the day. This was the first time I noticed that when I read the word of God, it gave me strength. Subsequently, I received medical treatment for the hyperthyroidism. In these six months, as I read the Psalms and prayed every day, God worked. He slowly took care of my problems one by one.

From these events, I was reminded that the Lord is God. As the Creator who made us, He is the One who gives us the capability to do everything that we are able to do. We owe our careers and achievements to Him. But while the Lord can give, He can also take away. I may be an eminently capable teacher, but an illness could completely debilitate me and prevent me from teaching.

So God taught me humility and thankfulness. Leading an ordinary life is already God’s blessing. The life in us is the manifestation of His power sustaining us. I thus learned to humble myself by recognizing God’s power and sovereignty in every little aspect of my life.

[F]or in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of our own poets have said, “For we are also His offspring.” (Acts 17:28)

*It is God who arms me with strength,
And makes my way perfect.*
(Ps 18:32)

*Give to the LORD the glory due His name;
Bring an offering, and come into His*

courts.

*Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty
of holiness!*

Tremble before Him, all the earth.

(Ps 96:8–9)

CONCLUSION—MY LORD, MY TEACHER, MY GOD

During the first twenty-five years of my life, God demonstrated His unfailing abidance through blessings. In the next stage of my life, by leading me through a period of darkness, God taught me that He is there even though I could not feel His presence. From my bout of depression, I learned that God's arm is not shortened. He can save me—and everyone who is willing to trust Him—from the deepest suffering. From my hyperthyroidism, I learned that God is the One who sustains us and enables us to do everything we are able to do.

My Lord, my Teacher, my God!

May all the glory be unto Him. ★

Call for Devotionals

“I will meditate on Your precepts,
And contemplate Your ways.” (Ps 119:15)

Most of us regularly read the Bible and ponder upon God's word and His works. However, not many of us may take time to actually pen down our thoughts. But if you do, you may actually be writing a devotional.

A devotional is a pithy article (300 to 350 words) inspired by biblical teachings.

Has a verse recently caught your attention, giving you insight on God's love and a Christian's relationship with Him?

Write it down and share this spiritual nourishment!

If you wish to read recent and archived devotionals written by our church members, go to www.tjc.org and members.tjc.org.

To submit your devotional, please indicate “Devotional” in the subject line and send it to manna@tjc.org.



The Only Potentate

KC Tsai—Toronto, Canada

"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor 12:9b)

GRACE WITHIN THE THORN

The apostle Paul, a loyal servant of the Lord, was troubled by a thorn in the flesh. He called it a "messenger of Satan." It is possible that this was a health condition (2 Cor 12:9), or a metaphor for "deceitful workers," who disguised themselves as apostles of Christ to attack and confuse the gospel that Paul preached (2 Cor 11:3–15). Paul pleaded with God three times to remove the thorn, but the Lord answered, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9b). Paul then realized that the thorn was actually God's grace, to prevent him, as one who had received many spiritual revelations from God, from becoming proud. Although Satan had an evil purpose to disrupt the gospel through this affliction, God masterfully turned this deceitful scheme to benefit His servant. Through the thorn, Paul was guarded against pride.

In fact, God does not need Satan's help to cultivate those whom He loves. With or without Satan's attack

"From the many events recorded in the Bible, we see that, through man's mistakes and failures, God can manifest His wonderful will

on Paul's ministry, God reigns over all things. God is the only Potentate (1 Tim 6:15). He is the Source of all things, the Manager of all proceedings, and the Master of all endings. "[T]here is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Heb 4:13).

Therefore, it is necessary to pray for the mercy of God when we suffer and are in need. Through our sufferings, we learn to search for God's good purpose, and introspectively seek for improvement. When we are faced with brethren whose actions do not align with the teachings of the Bible, we ought to correct them with sincerity. Beyond that, we need not strive with them or be overly worried on behalf of God. God is the Potentate who needs no assistance or consolation. We can entrust the outcome into His almighty hands.

From the many events recorded in the Bible, we see that, through man's mistakes and failures, God can

manifest His wonderful will.

GRACE IN SLAVERY

Joseph was an innocent young man sold into slavery in Egypt. On one hand, his fate was the result of his brothers' wrongdoing, but on the other, it was God's arrangement to enable Joseph to become a ruler in a foreign land, where he could save his family and all of Egypt (Gen 45:8). God's purpose did not stop there. He nurtured the spirituality of Joseph to such a point that the material splendors of Egypt meant little to him. On his deathbed, Joseph sought assurance that his bones would depart with the children of Israel to the land that God had promised to his fathers (Gen 50:22–25). In the beginning, Joseph's brothers had meant to harm him, but God's will prevailed and could not be hindered by man's sin.

God also does not need the sin of man for His will to be executed. In fact, He is on top of all things, irrespective of how obedient man



is. All things work together to fulfill His purpose. For instance, through His unfathomable love, God allowed the children of Israel to be enslaved and to suffer in Egypt. But at the appointed time, after 430 years, the armies of the Lord departed from the land (Ex 12:41). God had foretold of this event, confiding in Abraham long before it transpired (Gen 15:13–14). God knew that Pharaoh would enslave His people, but He would dramatically deliver them from Pharaoh's dominion.

“God also does not need the sin of man for His will to be executed. In fact, He is on top of all things, irrespective of how obedient man is. All things work together to fulfill His purpose.”

IN YOU ALL NATIONS SHALL BE BLESSED

The promise God gave to Abraham when He called him out of his home country could be summed up in one sentence: “[I]n you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:3b). The message is clear: the blessing of God will extend to all nations. Although this message was repeated in the Old Testament prophecies, the chosen people, the physical descendants of Abraham, failed to understand it. Before the downpour of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, all non-Jews were called the “uncircumcision” and were regarded as outsiders of the commonwealth of Israel—strangers to the covenant of promise.

After Cornelius' household had accepted the gospel and received the promised Holy Spirit, the apostle Peter returned to Jerusalem to report that God's salvation grace had reached the Gentiles. The reaction of

the Jewish believers was harsh: “You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!” (Acts 11:3). According to the understanding of the chosen people in the Old Testament, God's love was exclusively reserved for them. Throughout history, there was an irreconcilable barrier between the Jews and others. How could God's promise of extending His saving grace to all nations be fulfilled? Before the promised Holy Spirit descended to dwell with His church, this mystery of Christ was hidden in God Himself (Eph 3:5–10).

WITNESS OF GOD AGAINST HIS PEOPLE

Shortly before Moses died, God instructed him to write a song and to teach it to the children of Israel (see Deut 32:1–43). It would serve as God's witness against His people, of how they would turn away from Him after entering the promised land. Prior to this, God had warned of the consequences of disobedience. The people would be “tossed to and fro among the kingdoms of the earth” (Deut 28:25, ASV), be uprooted and exiled (Deut 29:28).

But who could have imagined that Israel's breaking of the covenant would lead to the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, that in him all nations would be blessed? When the Lord Jesus came to establish the new covenant through His blood, the song composed by Moses long ago had all along witnessed that it would be the chosen people who would break the old covenant. And God had foretold of their failure.

EXILE TO FOREIGN LANDS

In 722 B.C., the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians.

Many were captured and taken to Assyria, where they were placed in Halah, by the Habor, the River of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes. This was the consequence of the Israelites worshipping the golden calves in Bethel and Dan, and serving other Canaanite idols.

In 586 B.C., the southern kingdom of Judah was destroyed by the Babylonians, who burned the temple of God and the houses in Jerusalem. They also destroyed the city walls, and captured and exiled the inhabitants of the city.

*By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down, yea, we wept
When we remembered Zion.
We hung our harps
Upon the willows in the midst of it.
For there those who carried us away
captive asked of us a song,
And those who plundered us
requested mirth,
Saying, “Sing us one of the songs of
Zion!”
How shall we sing the LORD's song
In a foreign land?
If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
Let my right hand forget its skill!
If I do not remember you,
Let my tongue cling to the roof of
my mouth—
If I do not exalt Jerusalem
Above my chief joy. (Ps 137:1–6)*

Only when they became captives did the Israelites realize how precious the status of being God's people was. They remembered God's temple in Jerusalem, the place where God chose to dwell (2 Chr 6:4–6). Now they desired to serve Him. However, the Pentateuch dictated that they could only worship God and offer burnt offerings at the place where God



chose to put His name (Deut 12:5, 13–14). How could they do these things in a foreign land? In their state of physical and spiritual exile, the people of God had turned into the dry bones depicted in Ezekiel's vision (Ezek 37:1–10).

have sinned against You."

(2 Chr 6:36–39)

It is intriguing that King Solomon included the above supplication in a prayer offered at a time when his kingdom enjoyed peace and

did so using the Greek language, and were able to reach out to people of different ethnic backgrounds.

The Jewish exiles realized the impact that ignorance of God's word was having on the younger generations, who, over time, had lost their mother tongue. Therefore, the rabbis decided to translate the Pentateuch into the Greek language so that the children of Israel could learn the teaching of the Scriptures. The Greek Bible, the Septuagint, was completed in 132 B.C. Subsequently, Gentile believers were able to listen to God's words in Greek, in the synagogues on Sabbaths (Acts 15:19–21). Paul wrote his epistles in Greek and cited the Greek Bible to encourage the members and reveal the mystery of the truth to the church.

“The Lord our God is the only Potentate. His strength is made perfect in man's weakness. He can make use of human history to execute His will and perform wonders. Nothing is surprising or impossible for Him. When it comes to accomplishing God's plan, all we need to do is put our complete trust in Him, and He will guide and lead the way.

WORSHIP IN FOREIGN LANDS: THE SYNAGOGUE

“When they sin against You (for there is no one who does not sin), and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to a land far or near; yet when they come to themselves in the land where they were carried captive, and repent, and make supplication to You in the land of their captivity, saying, ‘We have sinned, we have done wrong, and have committed wickedness’; and when they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity, where they have been carried captive, and pray toward their land which You gave to their fathers, the city which You have chosen, and toward the temple which I have built for Your name: then hear from heaven Your dwelling place their prayer and their supplications, and maintain their cause, and forgive Your people who

prosperity. He asked that, in the event of the people sinning and being exiled, God be gracious to forgive them when they turned their hearts back to Him and prayed toward Jerusalem. God accepted Solomon's prayer (2 Chr 7:14–16). Later, when the people were indeed exiled, they remembered to worship God in the foreign lands. In 2 B.C., the Jews built the first synagogues where they could listen to the Scriptures and sing praises to God. It was in these synagogues that the apostles, such as Barnabas and Paul, would later evangelize and debate with the worshippers.

A COMMON LANGUAGE

Alexander the Great rose to power in 336 B.C. By 323 B.C., he had conquered a vast area, including southern Europe, northern Africa and western Asia. He launched his famous strategy of Hellenization—imposing the adoption of Greek culture and language in the lands he had conquered. When Barnabas and Paul preached, they

SOVEREIGNTY OVER ALL

Before Paul was sent out to preach the gospel of Christ, God had silently prepared everything Paul would need to accomplish his mission. The scale of the preparation was immeasurable—encompassing the exile of God's people, the establishment of synagogues, the emergence of a Macedonian king, and the translation of the Scriptures into the Greek language. All these had come about because of the failures of the chosen people. But man's failure cannot hinder God's will. All these had happened to fulfill the promise God gave to Abraham, that all nations would be blessed through him.

The Lord our God is the only Potentate. His strength is made perfect in man's weakness. He can make use of human history to execute His will and perform wonders. Nothing is surprising or impossible for Him (Jer 32:17). When it comes to accomplishing God's plan, all we need to do is put our complete trust in Him, and He will guide and lead the way. ★

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: 2500-3000 words.

Doctrinal Study

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

Exhortation

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

Testimony

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

Creative Writing

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

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

Please email electronic files of articles (Microsoft Word) to manna@tjc.org.

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

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

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Author Guidelines and Editorial Calendar

Issue #85:

TJC at 100: Towards the Triumphant Church

Articles due: August 1, 2017

The year 2017 marks the centennial of the True Jesus Church, the restored apostolic church established by the Holy Spirit during the latter rain period. As the end-time true church, founded on unshakeable truth and equipped with power, we are commissioned to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth.

While the preceding issue will reflect on God's past grace upon the church, the second issue of our centennial series will examine what is ahead for the church. According to biblical prophecy, and observations of current world trends, what are the future challenges for the church? How prepared are we to face these challenges? And how should we pass on the baton to the youths, and equip them for what is to come?

The Bible promises that, at the end of this age, the triumphant church will be victorious over Satan, and the glorious New Jerusalem will be presented as the bride, adorned for the Lamb of God, in eternity. But, as individuals, will we be part of this perfected church? Rather than sitting back and passively waiting, what should we do to ensure we do not lose our place in God's kingdom?

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.
- Do not plagiarize the work of other writers or institutions, published either in print or online. Any quotations, ideas, or concepts taken from other sources must be properly referenced.

GRAMMAR/STYLE

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

True Jesus Church

Articles of Faith

Jesus the True God

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

Holy Bible

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

Church

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

Baptism

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

Holy Spirit

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

Footwashing

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

Holy Communion

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

Sabbath Day

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

Salvation

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

Last Day

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

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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