

MANNA

ISSUE 66

Family Focus



• Give Your Parents
the Gift of Honor

• Children Are a Heritage from God

• Rejoicing in Our Labor

“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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Family Focus

Editorial

by T Chen

Dear Reader,

Recently I visited a friend at her new house. As I entered her living room, a beautifully framed wedding photo caught my attention; next to it a three-generation family photo graced the wall... moments of family bliss captured for eternity.

Just like my friend, most of us cherish our families. After all, it's a cradle of love and warmth, a place of refuge, a place where we belong. God understands how much we need love and support, and for this reason He instituted the family when He created Eve as a companion for Adam (Gen 2:18, 21-22). But Eve was not merely a helper in the physical sense; God also intended her to be a spiritual companion to Adam.

Likewise, our family is not only a place of love; it is also where we support one another as we make our journey of faith. Yet God's purpose for the family does not stop here. A family is not only to serve each other; it is also meant to be a cradle of human love AND God's love for the unloved, the needy and those who are still without salvation.

However, does our family radiate this love? Does our family actively attest to God's love and greatness? Or are we content to enjoy our happy family life? Is God the center of our family or does He only appear on the scene once a week or in times of trouble? Are we even entangled in some family problems that seem insolvable? Maybe we are the sole believer at home and are still struggling to bring our family to the Lord?

The writers in this issue share how God's love and principles have helped them to improve their relationship with their family members. They also give practical advice on Christian parenting and on how to build a truly God-centered family life. In addition, they show that we can apply the same principles to our families, even if they have yet to believe in Christ; for God's principle is love. Moreover, we are reminded that God expects all of us to put effort into building a loving family that will glorify Him—whether we take on the role of parent or child. Yet, as we do our part, let us not forget to rely on the Holy Spirit's power through prayer: the secret to a blissful and godly family life.

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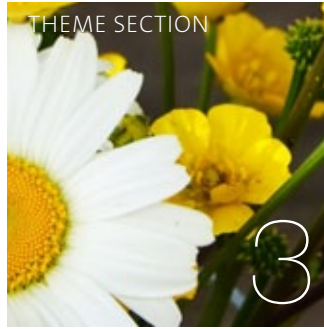
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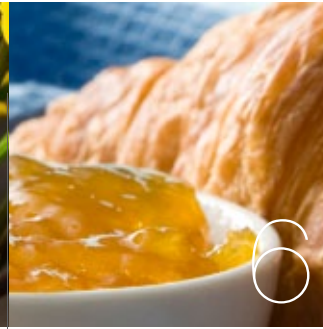
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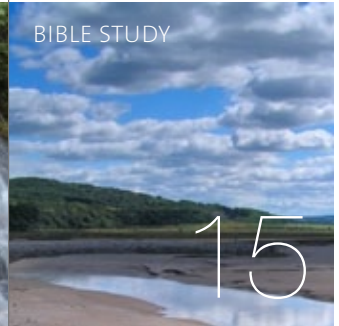
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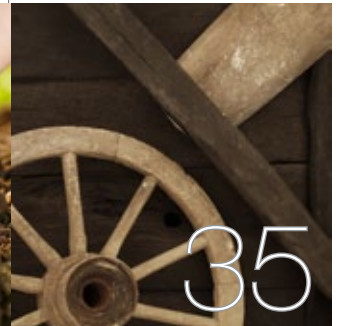
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Family Focus



Building Our Family Altar

Guat Kim Tan—Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

"You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." (Deut 6:7)

This advice given by Moses to the Israelites serves as a scriptural command to build up family worship. Worshipping God begins in the home and includes all family members. For the Israelites, family life and faith were closely intertwined. In the evenings, parents taught their children the laws of God. They were encouraged to memorize and recite God's words, and to inquire about their faith and history (Ex 13:14).

When Abram departed from Haran and entered Canaan, the first thing he did was to build an "altar to the Lord" (Gen 12:7). This altar was a structure used as a place of sacrifice – particularly for animal sacrifice – and it became the focus of Abram's family life. It was a place of worship where he and his family offered to God and acknowledged that they as a family needed His direction and leadership. God honored his sacrifice and blessed him in return.

A family altar means that family members dedicate time to worship God together at home. Building a family altar is a vital and important practice in a Christian home because it affirms that God is the center of our household. We need His guidance, just as Abram did.

A family altar also offers a private setting for family members to worship God, discuss spiritual matters and pray as a family. Establishing a family altar serves as a key building block for building up a strong family in the Lord.

OBJECTIVES

Worship God as a family

A family altar begins at home. Worshipping God together as a family serves as an important conduit for family interaction—a time to sit down together to listen, learn, petition and express thanks. This intimate setting engenders oneness of heart and mind. In turn, family members develop an excellent rapport as they bond as a family. Spending quality time also enhances each family member's spiritual development and fosters spiritual growth.

Root the family in faith and God's word

A family altar gives the whole family an opportunity to be rooted in the word of God, our unerring guide (Prov 6:23). In fact, a Christian home where God and His word are exalted creates an ideal environment for parents to nurture and strengthen their children's faith. As parents, we should strive to establish consistent family worship. By doing so, our children will imitate and follow our footsteps.

Worshipping God in a family setting is a viable channel for God's word to be passed on from one generation to the next. God instructed the Israelites to do just that. A father was to teach his children to "set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments" (Ps 78:7). By establishing their own family altar, families can preserve the faith of future generations.

A fine example was Timothy, Paul's companion. His genuine faith dwelt first in his grandmother and mother (2 Tim

Family altar time should be quality time, during which we can share our problems openly as well as remind and reassure each other of God's providence, presence and involvement in our family.

1:5). Through godly parental influence, he was able sustain a genuine faith.

Bridge the family gap

A family altar is important because it helps to bridge the generation gap at home. Today, family members lack sufficient personal interaction as they struggle through grueling schedules and commitments. Parents may complain that they hardly see their children and likewise, children lament that their parents barely spend any quality time with them! This is becoming very common in the world today.

Undeniably, both younger and older family members have their personal needs and problems. Parents are confronted with financial and work pressure, while children deal with their own issues. If such issues remain unaddressed, there may be breakdowns of communication straining the bond within the family.

For this reason, maintaining a family altar is essential to creating a strong family bond. Family altar time should be quality time, during which we can share our problems openly as well as remind and reassure each other of God's providence, presence and involvement in our family. In this way we will focus on worshipping God only, instead of using such time to criticize church members, focus on church problems or expressing grievances during our family worship time.

More importantly, as a Christian family, we must set our hearts and home right, evaluate our priorities in life and "set our minds on things above" (Col 3:2). When there is good communication, a healthy family altar will strengthen the bond within the family, bridging the gap between parents and children.

Offer prayers at the family altar

"A family that prays together stays together"

Praying together as a family shows its unity in faith. For this reason we must

regularly dedicate time from our busy schedules and gather to pray as a family. Such prayers are a prudent way to remind family members of God's presence and involvement in our lives. As Christians, our house must be a house of prayer where we develop a union with God and man.

Praying together plays a significant role during family worship. As we pray together, our whole family builds a closer relationship with God. We can seek God's guidance, assurance and blessings. In times of crisis, we can bring our family problems to the Lord's attention by praying in one accord. Doing so shows our personal conviction that we are intimately connected with Him and that He is the force, which binds the family much closer together.

Moreover, we should also cultivate the spirit of intercession within our family. Apart from praying for our family, we should also intercede for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who may be encountering personal or health problems. Additionally, we can intercede for our church leaders and ministers, as all are in dire need of God's abidance and guidance. Setting our hearts and minds together in prayer also unites and strengthens the family bond through the Spirit of God.

Therefore let us pray earnestly and "without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17), that the peace of God may guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6-7).

SETTING UP THE FAMILY ALTAR

Setting up a family altar involves every family member's cooperation and participation, which requires personal dedication and sacrifice.

Fixed and convenient time

Family members should agree on the

most suitable time for having family altar. While it may not be easy to arrange a set time, family members must be willing to sacrifice and work together to find the most suitable time. Families should avoid evenings when there are ongoing church services. Ideally, it should be a daily practice, but realistically, families should strive to have family altar at least once a week.

Program

Family worship can be less formal than church services, but must be reverent. It should not be too rigid, but can be flexible instead. The service should be more interactive and lively rather than didactic. Despite being less formal, family worship must never lose its purpose or direction.

Our program should be designed and tailored to suit the needs of the family members. We may study and discuss certain passages of the Bible, share from hymns or study a character from the Bible. Family members can also utilize this time to deepen their understanding of the ten basic beliefs. For the younger members, memorizing Bible verses, learning the Ten Commandments and sharing favorite verses can be an appealing activity as we encourage them to read, understand and commit the word of God into their hearts.

Duration

The length of each family service depends on the children's age group as well as the family members' level of spirituality. While the length of the service is secondary, the quality of the time spent is essential. It also should not be rushed, for the length of time depends upon the spiritual needs of the family.

WHO SHOULD TAKE THE INITIATIVE?

The family altar must first be rooted in the hearts of the parents. The father, the head of the household, must take the initiative to plan and lead the family service.

God has entrusted parents, particularly fathers, with the responsibility to oversee their children's faith. If as parents, we

"A family that prays together stays together"

succeed in establishing a family altar, our children will have deeply rooted reverence, trust and love for God. Therefore, we should teach our children to fulfill their duty to God and obey His voice and commands (Deut 30:2). We should be role models, so that our children can imitate us in faith, love and moral integrity.

Parents can seek their children's participation in leading part or all of the family service, but the father must always remain as the spiritual overseer. Giving

importance of family altar. We may find ourselves thinking that attending Sabbath services and participating in church events are sufficient. There is often reluctance or a lack of enthusiasm, particularly among teenagers who think that family worship would further diminish their leisure time. As parents, we must therefore impress upon our children that family altar time is a priority because it is God's command (cf. Deut 6:7). We also need to teach and remind them of God's blessings if our family worship is pleasing to Him. As

Setting up a family altar involves every family member's cooperation and participation, which requires personal dedication and sacrifice.

children an opportunity to lead at home trains their leadership skills and self-confidence, which in turn prepares them to serve as future leaders in the church.

All family members should have the chance to contribute to family worship because each one must be appreciated for their dedication and service to God.

OVERCOMING HINDRANCES

There is much to gain in building a family altar, because it is a symbol of God's existence in our home. Church worship is still of prime importance but we should not undervalue the importance of family worship. Our Christian faith instilled in church must be reinforced at home. Yet why do we often neglect to do so?

We always seem to encounter setbacks. A common hindrance is time, or a lack thereof. Today, due to our hectic schedules, it seems impossible to gather the parents and children together. Parents often attend to house chores after work and children are burdened with schoolwork and extracurricular activities.

However, we must not allow such drawbacks to be excuses that deter us from building a family altar. Many families can find time to congregate to watch their favorite television programs but are sadly unable to gather for family worship. Such action poses as a serious threat to our faith. If we have a sincere desire to worship God together, we will make the effort to improve upon our time management and discipline, prioritizing our time to build a family altar.

Another setback is the undervalued

children come to understand the value of and willingly support family worship, God will surely bless the family with His abiding presence, peace, love, and joy when we worship together.

GOD WILL HELP US BUILD THE ALTAR

"Unless the Lord builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the Lord guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain." (Ps 127:1)

Building a family altar is a much needed spiritual discipline and should be a priority in every family. While it may be challenging to build a family altar, with sincere commitment, ardent prayers, and an unwavering faith, God will abide with us to build a successful family altar. No hindrances are insurmountable if we diligently seek after the Lord with a humble heart and are empowered by the Holy Spirit. Undoubtedly, it will be a milestone in the spiritual advancement of the True Jesus Church, if every family is able to build a strong family altar—an altar that God would patently approve of and bless. ★





A Father's Thoughts on Christian Parenting

Philip Shee—Dubai, United Arab Emirates

"And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." (Eph 6:4)

As a Christian, fatherhood is an important responsibility given by God to nurture and raise children in the Lord. Since the Bible describes children as "a heritage from the Lord" (Ps 127:3), the role of a father cannot be taken lightly.

Fathers must understand that their primary function is not only to provide for their children's immediate physical needs, but also to support and educate them. While the provision of daily necessities and education are undeniably important, it is paramount that fathers raise their children with the word of God, instilling proper Christian values.

GOING BEYOND INSTRUCTIONS

"For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel." (1 Cor 4:15)

Paul had no children of his own. Yet, in his ministry, he regarded himself not as an instructor, but a father. Paul's reference to fatherhood in his ministry highlights a common understanding: that

a father must take a stronger interest in the cultivation of his children's faith than any instructor would.

Although education involves informing and instructing students, a father should go beyond that and also serve as a role model. Paul urged the Corinthians to "imitate me" (1 Cor 4:16) and further added, "imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). This reminds us that a father's conduct should exemplify Christian values.

One can never overstate children's ability to observe others in their daily lives and their natural tendency to imitate those around them. We can, therefore, imagine the irony of a father teaching his children to be humble, but is then seen by his children bragging about his own or his children's achievements to relatives. Or, if a father tells his children about the importance of paying attention during church services, but dozes off next to them during sermons. Such situations are not uncommon and reflect the inconsistencies of our instruction and conduct.

When was the last time our children witnessed us losing our patience when driving? Do they hear us complaining against God when our lives enter turbulent times? The inconsistencies of our conduct and our instruction may cause confusion, send conflicting signals,

and even "provoke our children to wrath" when we then try to give them instructions to do the right thing.

As fathers, we therefore need to constantly build upon our own spiritual cultivation, and be conscious of our conduct, especially before our children. Isaac must have observed Abraham's own faith and life of worship as he grew up. This was evident in his ability to ask Abraham about the rites in offering: "Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" (Gen 22:7).

Do our children wake up in the morning to the sound of our prayer? Do they see us buried in our Bible when they come and bid us goodnight before they turn in? Are they familiar with our habit of quiet reflection and devotion to hymns, Bible reading and prayer every day? Do they experience the joy and peace that comes from putting our trust in God as a family? Will these impressions surface in their minds as they themselves go through life's various challenges?

All these questions should go through a Christian father's mind consistently as he strives to improve himself before God.

START EARLY BY BUILDING A FAMILY ALTAR

"Train up a child in the way he should go,

*Do our children wake up in the morning to the sound of our prayer?
Do they see us buried in our Bible when they come and bid us goodnight before they turn in?...*

and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Prov 22:6)

Fathers should grasp the opportunity to strengthen the spirituality of their children from the time they are born. Young children begin understanding things and events much earlier than they can actually express their knowledge. When asked to pray, even pre-toddlers can respond by clasping their hands and shutting their eyes.

Fathers can start early by praying with their children before meals and before bedtime. Arrive early to church so they are familiar with singing praises and offering prayers to God. Expose them to Christian hymns at home. This mindset and lifestyle will help develop good habits. When our children grow older, we can share Bible stories with them and send them to Religious Education classes in church. As our children mature, they can even lead family prayers or worship.

When our family altar is established, our faith becomes the center of our family life. Such practices are consistent with the principles of the Bible:

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

(Deut 6:6-9)

A VARIED TEACHING STYLE

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

When we use the word of God as the basis to educate our children,

we must use a balanced approach, appropriately adjusting the method and tone as necessary. Our children should be patiently taught when ignorant, lovingly encouraged when down, promptly admonished when disobedient, firmly rebuked when rebellious and strictly chastised when stubborn. We must learn and be willing to employ each technique as required.

The following passages provide guidance to the balance we need to strike between being overly harsh, or overly lenient:

"Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." (Col 3:21)

Balance requires wisdom and understanding from the Lord. Fathers should pray for guidance from the Lord to properly instruct, correct, and discipline their children.

"He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly." (Prov 13:24)

We need to avoid being overly harsh, for that discourages or even provokes our children, and may even shatter their self-esteem. At the same time, we must not be like Eli, who was rejected by God along with his house because he did not do enough to restrain his sons' wickedness and "honored [them] more than God" (1 Sam 2:29-34). Such balance requires wisdom and understanding from the Lord. Fathers should pray for guidance from the Lord to properly instruct, correct, and discipline their children.

SECURING THEIR FUTURE

As parents, we should strive to provide a good environment for our children and become their mentor. When Abraham was old and advanced in age, he arranged for Isaac's marriage by making his old servant swear by the Lord that he would not take a wife for Isaac from the daughters of the Canaanites (Gen 24:1-4). This was to ensure that Isaac's faith would not be corrupted or compromised by the practices of the land.

When David knew that his time was up, he urged Solomon to walk in the ways of God and to keep His commandments. He warned Solomon about Joab and Shimei, and instructed him to show kindness to Barzillai (1 Kgs 2:1-10). This heightened

the vigilance of Solomon and allowed him to see and prepare for the danger ahead.

We must do our part to create a good spiritual environment for our children. Preparation for our children's future must be accompanied by our daily intercession for them:

So it was, when the days of feasting had run their course, that Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, 'it may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.' Thus Job did regularly.

(Job 1:5)

Job rose up morning after morning to make burnt offerings on behalf of his children. Doing so exemplified his self-discipline, devotion and dedication towards his sons and daughters. Like Job, we must constantly be concerned about our children's standing before God, a matter we can bring to God on their behalf.

Like Job, we must be constantly concerned about our children's standing before God, a matter we can bring to God on their behalf.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Fatherhood is a rewarding experience. For some, the reward may be the pride of witnessing their children's success and achievements in the world or watching their children lead happy lives starting a family of their own. For others, it may be receiving their children's love and gratitude in return.

As for me, the ultimate reward of fatherhood is summed up in these words: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth" (3 Jn 4). ★



Give Your Parents the Gift of Honor— A Personal Journey

Patricia Chen—Irvine, California, USA

Relationships are filled with both joy and pain. Good relationships can bring us joy, affirmation and the support we need. But what if relationships are not going well? Some of the deepest hurts we will ever know come from those whom we care about most: hurts from bruised relationships within our families. These relationships are the hardest to heal. One of them is the relationship with our parents.

“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you” (Ex 20:12). Honoring our parents—showing respect in word and action, obedience, love, and even praise—is so important that God designated it as one of His Ten Commandments. Honoring them consequently becomes a purpose in life because that is one way to glorify God. But how do we give honor to our parents, especially when the relationship is already bruised?

GOD’S LOVE AS THE MODEL IN YOUR LIFE

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

(Jn 13:34–35)

This commandment takes our responsibility to a whole new level. Our relationship with our parents should be molded not by what we want but by the teaching God provides. God wants His children to honor and respect their parents.

If we are going to live out this command, it is not going to happen accidentally. It is going to take a conscious decision on our part to act toward our parents the way God teaches.

Sometimes, it may seem difficult to love our parents. But we need to make a choice to continue to love, even in the most crushing of circumstances. God will grant us that strength through the power of the Holy Spirit. What we feel is impossible is possible with God (Lk 18:27).

When I was about fourteen, my family went through some major changes. As a result, I argued a lot with my mother. My resentment toward her turned to rebellion. When she wanted me to do something, I would do it grudgingly. It became so bad that I wished she would just disappear. My relationship with her lacked honor, understanding, and warmth.

When I was sixteen, Christ found me—a lost sheep returning to His fold. I discovered how much Jesus loves me. That was the greatest experience I had

ever received: knowing that God laid down His life for me—even when I was a sinner.

I began to see clearly that love is not a feeling; it is a choice and a real commitment.

God created us for a full life and He created us to relate to Him and to others. As I grasped the word of God, I realized how the love of God becomes the foundation for all other relationships. Not only did His love give me new strength in my relationship with Him, it began to flow over to every other relationship in my life, including that with my mother.

My love towards my mother had been conditional; it was based on her performance. I had been waiting for her to change. If she changed, I would begin to love her. But, God’s love simply said, “I love you. Period.”

When I was in college, I heard a sermon in which the preacher asked, “If you were to die now, would you have any regrets?” I thought deeply and the answer was “YES!” I would regret that, while in my early teens, I had never asked my mother to forgive me for my unlovely and disgraceful ways.

On a bus ride back to campus one morning, there was a moment where I felt that Jesus was sitting right next to me; I could feel Him seeing my struggles. I remember the emotions that went along

Honoring our parents—showing respect in word and action, obedience, love, and even praise—is so important that God designated it as one of His Ten Commandments. Honoring them then becomes a purpose in life because that is one way to glorify God.

with that particular ride. I really struggled. I wanted to do something to change this relationship because every time I went home, the tension was there and I could not see any joy on my mother's face.

Tears streamed down my face as the reality of this realization touched my heart. For the first time in my life, I wanted to take God at His word. I wanted to make things right. I wanted to love, honor, and accept my mother just as she was.

I was grateful for this new understanding. It seemed as if the Lord had performed surgery on my heart. But, I knew the real test was to come. Not knowing where to begin, I prayed that God would give me an opportunity to make things right with my mother. I knew it would be difficult and that I would not feel like doing it, but I needed to take the first step.

my own inadequacy. Sometimes, I even wanted to erase my feelings by pretending they just didn't exist. I did not have the power to help myself.

We can go on with life believing that we are truly powerless. But I realized that fighting my weaknesses on my own does not work! Choosing to act upon our faith in God is the only way out.

There is a big difference between honestly telling God our weaknesses and immersing ourselves in feelings of inadequacy. God's teaching is for us to trust Him so that He can turn our weaknesses into His strength.

“NOT MY WILL, LORD, BUT YOURS BE DONE”

It is indeed difficult to pray the way Jesus prayed: “Not my will, Lord, but yours be done” (Lk 22:42). Jesus even looked at those who crucified Him and said,

It is all too easy to find faults in our parents and in others. If we want our lives to have peace, then we need to turn to our Lord; “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You” (Is 26:3).

Let the word of God capture every fiber of your being. There are times when I don't want to love but God wants me to act with love anyway. When everything in me tells me to escape or hide, God wants me to stay and pray for the strength from above. When I feel like giving up, God wants me to act in love and in the obedience of God.

A TURN OF EVENTS

I don't remember how long I prayed to God to change me and redirect my focus. Those prayers had not been easy. They stripped away everything that was not desirable in the eyes of God. God kept reminding me over and over in prayers that to love my mother is to be vulnerable. Don't refuse to love her; don't stop loving her—an even deeper hurt will come about if I choose not to reconcile with her. Time spent alone with God definitely strengthened me. It not only quieted my soul but also broadened

Sometimes, it may seem difficult to love our parents. But we need to make a choice to continue to love, even in the most crushing of circumstances. God will grant us that strength through the power of the Holy Spirit. What we feel is impossible is possible with God (Lk 18:27).

TAKING THE FIRST STEP—HONESTY BEFORE GOD

Most of our struggles or internal hurts are silent. Sometimes, we find that we rehearse them in our mind over and over again. God wants us to talk to Him about everything, “For I am ready to fall, and my sorrow is continually before me. For I will declare my iniquity; I will be in anguish over my sin” (Ps 38:17–18). David prayed and told God about his feelings. At the end of the psalm, his heart was at peace. Perhaps the problem was still there, but David's heart was refocused and settled.

We, too, need to receive inner peace from God through prayer. We need to pour out our hearts and tell God how we feel saying, “Dear Father, this is what is really hurting me in my relationship with my parents.”

At times, I just wanted to focus on

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” This is a complete picture of God's love.

To love God with all of our heart, and not just part of our heart, is not easy. Even amid internal struggles, we have to ask God to work in our hearts and pray thus: “... not my will, but Yours be done.”

If our minds are not filled with God's truth and His love, we will easily drift towards anxious and selfish thoughts. God's truth will lift us up and redirect our focus to His plan for us. If we want to be right with God, we need to cooperate with God.

my understanding about trusting Him.

Trusting God is not something passive. It has to be acted upon when God gives us the right opportunity. I remember praying to God and telling Him that I didn't have the strength to reconcile with my mother on my own. I needed His wisdom and opportunity.

I understood that in life, there are many things that are inexcusable but nothing is unforgivable. The impossible becomes possible through the power of God.

Then, one day, opportunity came.

A few months later, I went home on a Friday night. I had an attitude of love

My love towards my mother had been conditional; it was based on her performance. I had been waiting for her to change. If she changed, I would begin to love her. But, God's love simply said, “I love you. Period.”

Not knowing where to begin, I prayed that God would give me an opportunity to make things right with my mother. I knew it would be difficult and that I would not feel like doing it, but I needed to take the first step.

and acceptance rather than one of being critical and judgmental. As I came home, I behaved gently towards my mother and, in return, she was nice to me. She must have sensed something “different” working in me.

I silently asked God to grant me the opportunity to ask for her forgiveness. It was not an easy thing to talk about as I imagined myself unable to utter a word. But, I had to. I waited until my two other sisters had left the room. I said, “Mom, I have been thinking about when I was fourteen and fifteen, how unloving, ungrateful, and unkind I was. Will you forgive me?”

As she turned and looked at me with love and tears in her eyes, she said words that cut to my very soul: “Yes, I forgive you.” Immediately all the tension drained from my body as a great peace settled over me. I felt the incredible sense of assurance that God was indeed working in this moment.

For the first time, we embraced each other. For the first time, I honored my mother with a new found understanding from God’s word. I gave her respect, love and value. I realized honor is given—we can choose either to give it with the power from God or we can choose to withhold it.

To honor our parents is to recognize their importance and treat them with honor. When we choose to honor our parents, we are choosing to obey God genuinely from the bottom of our heart.

Trusting in God is not just a feeling. I remember when I did not feel like it, God taught me to choose to make things right with my mother. I was so joyful that day. I wondered why I had not done it sooner.

My mother never asked me to forgive her and make things right with her, but God asked that of me and it made all the

My mother never asked me to forgive her and make things right with her, but God asked that of me and it made all the difference.

difference.

WE DON’T HAVE TO FACE PROBLEMS ALONE

Perhaps you have guilt and feel regret about how you have handled your relationship with your parents in the past or even right now. “I wish I had done this. I wish I had said that.” Such regrets may have crossed your mind many times. Bring them to God.

God is a forgiving and loving God. He understands that we sometimes make selfish decisions in our life and He forgives us for that. Bring that to Him in prayers! Don’t carry that guilt and regret.

Maybe you have been hurt by a parent and you’re still holding on to that hurt. Maybe your parents fight all the time, or are separated, or aren’t Christians. You may be tempted to say, “This teaching won’t work for my family.” Not so. All families struggle and have problems. If God’s love only works in perfect homes,

All families struggle and have problems. If God’s love only works in perfect homes, what kind of love is that?

what kind of love is that?

But God’s ministry is that of reconciliation and changing lives, even in the most terrible of situations. No matter what your situation is, believe in the power of God’s love. The bitterness that you store inside hurts all of your other relationships, including your relationship with God. If you think it doesn’t affect your relationship with God, you are fooling only yourself (Mk 11:25).

God has already promised us that we are more than conquerors; we don’t have to face the problems alone. God alone has the power. There is no problem so big that He can’t meet our need. More so, God is faithful and reliable. If we confess our sins, He forgives us and cleanses us from our wrongdoings (1 Jn 1:9).

Blessings wait for those who truly follow Christ. God is with us. He will strengthen us and He will not fail us. When you honor your parents, you receive blessings for yourself and share them with your parents. Honoring your parents is truly one of the greatest gifts you can give them and yourself. ★





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.

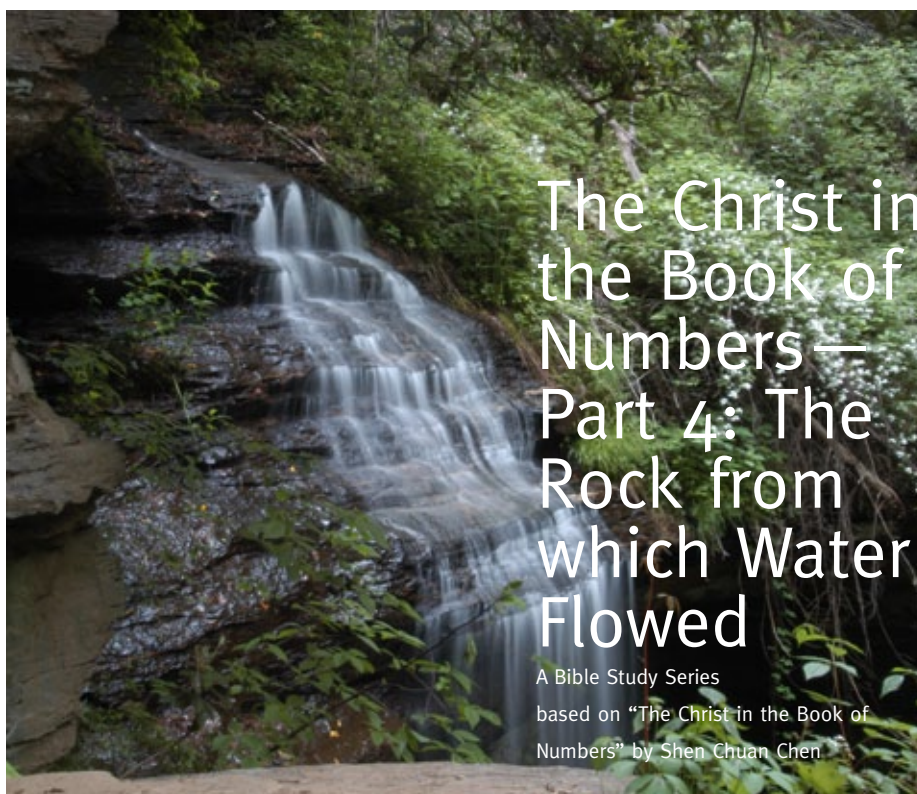
Has a verse recently caught your attention, giving you insight on God’s love and a Christian’s relationship with Him?

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 Christ in the Book of Numbers — Part 4: The Rock from which Water Flowed

A Bible Study Series

based on “The Christ in the Book of Numbers” by Shen Chuan Chen.

1 INTRODUCTION

After the Israelites departed from Egypt and entered the arid and inhospitable environment of the wilderness, the matter of finding water became an immediate and recurring concern.

Exodus 15:22–26 records their first experience of a water shortage in the Wilderness of Shur. Having endured three days of thirst after crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites came to the waters of Marah, which were found to be bitter and undrinkable. At this point, tempers flared and the people complained against Moses. After he cried out for help, God instructed him to cut down a tree and cast it into the waters. Miraculously, the waters turned sweet.

1.1 The Rock at Rephidim

The second incident is recorded in Exodus 17:1–7. After leaving the Wilderness of Sin, the Israelites arrived in Rephidim where they contended again with Moses. However, this time, the people felt so angry and desperate, they were ready to stone their leader (Ex 17:4). At this point, God told Moses to strike the rock to make it issue water.

1.2 The Rock at Meribah

Now, after more than thirty years had passed, history appeared to repeat itself. The people came to the Wilderness of Zin

and camped at Kadesh (Num 20:1), where Miriam died and was buried. When the congregation found they had no water to drink, they gathered against an ageing Moses and Aaron to vent their anger. The complaints were reminiscent of the early days: the unfairness of apparently being forced to leave Egypt and being left to perish in the wilderness—a place devoid of grain, figs, vines, pomegranates and water (Num 20:3–5; cf. 11:1–5).

As the situation worsened, God told Moses, “Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals” (Num 20:8).

At this point, Moses disobeyed God’s command. Still raw from the people’s attack, he railed against them and struck the rock twice with his rod (Num 20:7–13). By God’s mercy, the rock yielded water, but it did not mean that all was well. On the contrary, God determined that Moses and Aaron had sinned against Him and needed to be punished. The outcome was severe: God forbade them from entering the promised land.

1.3 Analysis

From a human perspective, God’s punishment seems disproportionate and

even cruel. We are mindful that Moses had been a constant and faithful servant over the years, taking care of God's household. Besides, both he and Aaron had to endure continual provocation from their brethren. Was it really fair, then, that God placed the blame solely upon their shoulders and did not even give them a chance to present their case? However, when we view the incident from God's perspective, we realize the seriousness of Moses and Aaron's sin: as leaders, they failed to believe in God's word and to honor Him before the Israelites (Num 20:12). For that reason God could not overlook the matter.

Furthermore, from an allegorical perspective, Moses and Aaron represented the two aspects of the Old Testament order: the Law and the priestly system, respectively. It is noteworthy that both men stopped short of entering Canaan, the land of rest prepared by God (Josh 22:4). In the New Testament Scripture, we learn the significance behind this point, which is that no one could be made perfect or saved through obedience to the Law, including the offering of sacrifices (Acts 13:39; Heb 10:1). It was only through the guidance of the next generation's leader, Joshua—a type of Christ—that one could enter into God's rest.

Finally, there is another teaching, which we will expound later in this chapter, namely that the rock in the wilderness typifies Christ (1 Cor 10:4). For this reason, Moses should never have struck the rock a second time at Meribah, for this would signify the re-crucifixion of Christ (Heb 6:6).

2 PREFIGURATION OF CHRIST

The apostle Paul was greatly gifted in interpreting the Old Testament Scriptures. In his epistle to the church in Corinth, (1 Cor 10:1–4), Paul pointed out that the Israelites had been “under the cloud”—that is, led by the pillar of cloud throughout their journey, and they had “passed through the sea”—meaning they had crossed the Red Sea.

These events prefigured the grace

Paul explained that, in a spiritual sense, the Rock that followed the Israelites and from which water flowed was Jesus. Just as the Rock issued water for the people to drink in the wilderness, so Christ would shed His precious blood for the salvation of mankind.

for Christians in the New Testament era, namely their right to receive water baptism and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Just as the chosen people were baptized into Moses, so Christians would be baptized into Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Paul explained that, in a spiritual sense, the Rock that followed the Israelites and from which water flowed was Jesus. Just as the Rock issued water for the people to drink in the wilderness, so Christ would shed His precious blood for the salvation of mankind.

3 THE ROCK IN THE WILDERNESS

We can imagine that God, through His mighty power, could have provided His people with water in any way He wished, perhaps by commanding water to appear from the ground. Yet, His will was for Moses to strike the rock at Rephidim and to issue a command at Meribah. This aspect of God's plan reveals an important prefiguration concerning Christ and also gives us a number of teachings.

3.1 Strike the Rock at Rephidim

The wilderness in which the Israelites sojourned was a challenging and inhospitable place. Yet, it was in such an environment that God chose to manifest His power, glory and sovereignty. Indeed, not long after leaving Egypt, when the people camped at Rephidim, God told Moses to strike the rock so that it would give water (Ex 17:1–7). Whilst there were other rocks in the wilderness, only this rock at Horeb (Ex 17:6) provided life-giving water because Moses obeyed God's command.

For Christians, this event is significant because the Bible explains that the rock in the wilderness is Christ (1 Cor 10:4). Just as water flowed from the rock when it was struck, so a fountain opened

up from the body of Christ when He was pierced (Jn 19:34). This fountain became a source of renewal and life for believers. Consequently the church has been redeemed through the precious blood of Jesus, and the members are able to receive life when they partake of His blood through the Holy Communion (1 Cor 11:25–26; Jn 6:53–56).

Although these truths were prefigured in the time of Moses and Aaron, their meaning was hidden. It was not until the New Testament that Jesus and the apostle Paul revealed them to the believers.

During the forty-year wilderness journey, God's providential care was evident through the manna that descended with the dew and the presence of the spiritual rock that accompanied the people (1 Cor 10:4). Indeed, the chosen people did not lack any necessities, and their lives were preserved. Unfortunately, they did not praise or give thanks to God—their gratefulness seemed to have disappeared after the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex 15:1–21). Instead, their hearts were often filled with discontentment.

3.2 Speak to the Rock at Meribah

When the second and third generation Israelites arrived at the Wilderness of Sin, the congregation contended once again with the two leaders over lack of water. On this occasion, God told Moses, “Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals” (Num 20:8).

However, Moses, being extremely provoked by the people, lifted his rod and struck the rock twice. Immediately, the Lord rebuked Moses and Aaron: “ ‘Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them’ ” (Num 20:12). From these words, we understand that failing to obey God's command equates to

The moral teaching is that the mistakes we make in our lives, such as errors of speech, have the potential to cause irrevocable damage; therefore we must be careful.

God is impartial and will deal with each person fairly, be it an ordinary believer or a gifted and trusted servant.

"not believing" and "not trusting [Him] enough to honor [Him] as holy".

3.3 The Wrath of God against Moses

What was the nature of Moses and Aaron's sin? The Bible indicates that they were guilty on a number of counts: being arrogant (Num 20:10); striking the rock twice (Num 20:11); failing to believe in the word of God (Num 20:12); rebelling against His command (Num 27:14); not hallowing Him (Num 20:12); and speaking rashly and angrily (Ps 106:32–33). Summing up, the sins fall into three categories: disbelieving God, disrespecting Him and disobeying Him.

In light of this, Moses and Aaron did not commit one small mistake; they committed three major ones. Bearing in mind that God stopped one generation of Israelites from entering Canaan for their acts of disbelief and disobedience (Num 14:20–37), we are left in no doubt of His just nature. Therefore, even though Moses rendered forty years of faithful stewardship and endured his brethren to the point of unsurpassed humility (Num 12:3), God had no option but to punish him and Aaron for their sins, however painful it was on both sides. God is impartial and will deal with each person fairly, be it an ordinary believer or a gifted and trusted servant.

A psalmist in the Old Testament looked back upon this historical incident and commented thus: "They angered Him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses on account of them; because they rebelled against His Spirit, so that he spoke rashly with his lips" (Ps 106:32–33). He saw the failing of Moses as one of anger stemming from provocation, a matter for which he had to pay a high price. The psalmist wrote that "it went ill with Moses", meaning that he was excluded from the promised land.

The moral teaching is that the mistakes we make in our lives, such as errors of speech, have the potential to cause irrevocable damage; therefore we must

be careful. Elder James says:

Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

(Jas 1:19–21)

The lesson from Meribah, that even the greatest and most devout of God's servants can exhibit moments of weakness, serves a sober warning to us all.

3.4 Not to Strike the Rock Again

It was God's will for Moses to give a verbal command to the rock at Meribah. Unfortunately, Moses struck the rock, thereby incurring the wrath of God. Another lesson is that salvation is achieved through the one time sacrifice of Jesus. Since the rock represents Christ (1 Cor 10:4) and striking the rock signifies His suffering—specifically, His being nailed to the cross to fulfill salvation for mankind—we cannot expect Christ to suffer a second time. For this reason, God did not instruct Moses to strike the rock on the second occasion at Meribah.

It is vital, then, that we do not misunderstand that being saved through baptism into Christ equates to being saved forever; we still have to work out our salvation in fear and trembling (Phil 2:12).

Paul writes: "[K]nowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God" (Rom 6:9–10). Peter says, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit" (1 Pet 3:18). The author of Hebrews also says, "By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10). It was God's will to

reveal these prefigurative meanings in the wilderness, but Moses failed to do his part.

For Christians, the incident at Meribah warns us not to continue in sin, because if we do, we put Christ to shame and crucify Him a second time. Jesus died to remove our unrighteousness, but this could only happen once. The author of Hebrews also warns that if those who have tasted the heavenly gift fall away, they crucify Christ again (Heb 6:4–6).

It would be tragic if, after believing in the Savior and being washed clean from the filth of the world, we fail to treasure His salvation grace. In such a case, our end would be worse than our beginning (2 Pet 2:20). It is vital, then, that we do not misunderstand that being saved through baptism into Christ equates to being saved forever; we still have to work out our salvation in fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). In addition, we must take care never to slacken in our faith (Rom 12:11; Heb 6:11–12), lest we forfeit our right to salvation.

Paul teaches us that Jesus is the Rock from which water flows. We must therefore be careful not to be like Moses and Aaron who uttered rash words and disobeyed God by striking the rock a second time. After receiving the Lord's salvation grace, we must live obedient and godly lives and be diligent to serve Him, so that we do not crucify Him again. ★

Sabbath Rest

Based on a sermon from Singapore



The Sabbath commandment is one of the foundational tenets of our church. Today, our churches all over the world have a spectrum of activities from Friday evening to Saturday evening in observance of the Sabbath. But what is the Sabbath really about?

Over time, we may have forgotten the meaning of Sabbath rest, so it is good to realign our thinking regarding the Sabbath day.

SABBATH AND BLESSING

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.... Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.”

(Gen 1:1, 2:1–3)

God Himself instituted Sabbath when He rested on the seventh day, blessed it and sanctified it. This three-fold act reveals the very significance of the Sabbath day.

The word “rest” here does not mean recovering after exerting yourself, as if after a marathon. God does not need

to rest—He has never stopped working. Isaiah tells us that He neither faints nor is weary (Isa 40:28). Jesus Himself said that His Father has always been working (Jn 5:17). Thus God never stopped working even on the first Sabbath.

What does it mean then that God rested? Genesis 2:2 says that He ended His work, which He had done. In short, God rested when He stopped the work that He had been doing during the previous six days.

After resting, God blessed the Sabbath day. Since that time, the Sabbath has been a day blessed by God. What does it mean when God blesses time? His primary objective was not to bless time itself, but to bless human beings through time. For this reason He chose to make the Sabbath for men.

But how do we receive this blessing? This relates to the final part of God's three-fold act: He sanctified the Sabbath day. To “sanctify” means to set apart for a holy purpose just like the holy vessels in the temple were set apart for God's use. For six days in a week, we can do whatever we wish but the Sabbath should be set aside for God.

When we rest from our work and set aside this day for God, we will be blessed.

SABBATH AND SALVATION

Sometimes the question arises: Sabbath

has to do with blessing, but what does it have to do with salvation? Why is it included in our five basic doctrines? Baptism washes away our sins. Footwashing ensures we have a part with Jesus. Holy Communion gives us life. The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our heavenly inheritance. Yet what is the role of the Sabbath in our salvation?

In order to understand, we must realize that blessings are not just good wishes. The Sabbath blessing is directly related to abundant life.

*If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath,
From doing your pleasure on My holy day,
And call the Sabbath a delight,
The holy day of the Lord honorable,
And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways,
Nor finding your own pleasure,
Nor speaking your own words,
Then you shall delight yourself in the Lord;
And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth,
And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father.
The mouth of the Lord has spoken.*

(Isa 58:13-14)

Sometimes we have many work-related and personal commitments on the Sabbath day. We think that this is

God blessed the Sabbath day. What does it mean when God blesses time? His primary objective was not to bless time itself, but to bless human beings through time. For this reason He chose to make the Sabbath for men.

acceptable as long as we keep the spirit of the Sabbath, but in reality it is just an excuse to do whatever we wish.

The prophet Isaiah, however, tells us about the true spirit of the Sabbath—if we truly keep the Sabbath, we do not do what we wish, but rather what God wants us to do. If we take God at His word, we will not only receive an abundant life; we will be fed with the heritage of Jacob. Hebrews 11:8–16 tells us that the inheritance of the patriarchs was actually the heavenly kingdom. The blessing of the Sabbath does pertain to eternal life. If we honor the Sabbath, the blessing of eternal life will follow.

HOW SHALL WE KEEP THE SABBATH?

Our Sabbath observance is influenced by our perspective of the Sabbath for New Testament believers. Our understanding is often self-centered because the focus is on us—Sabbath is for me to rest. In fact, the focal point of the Sabbath should be God, not us.

We may quote Jesus and say that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath (Mk 2:27), hence we can do what we like. The Sabbath was made for man, not to do what he likes, but for him to be blessed through following God's example of rest.

"For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

(Ex 20:11)

This commandment tells us that we should do all our work for six days in a week, but the seventh day is for God (v9–10). Quite often we may feel that we never seem to have enough time to do all our work. No matter how much effort we make, there always seems to be more things to do on the weekends.

In fact, we just have to do all we can in six days, and stop on the seventh to come before God to worship Him, as if all work

had been completed. We must cease from the thought of work itself. Amos 8:5 criticizes the failure of the Israelites who kept the Sabbath with their bodies but not with their mind. They eagerly awaited the end of the Sabbath, so that they could restart their work to cheat more people—a double sin indeed. To set apart the day for the Lord, we must cease from doing and thinking about work, for God demands our body and our mind.

Very often, Sabbath seems to come earlier than we expect. Sometimes we feel disappointed for not being able to finish what we started. Yet God wants us to stop for three reasons.

Our understanding is often self-centered because the focus is on us—Sabbath is for me to rest. In fact, the focal point of the Sabbath should be God, not us.

Firstly, it is a forceful reminder of our limitations. Secondly, ceasing from all our work and entering His Sabbath rest gives our week a sense of completion. If we never stop to work, life would seem very meaningless and exhausting because we would be chasing deadlines after deadlines. By stopping every week, there is a sense of completion. Thirdly, stopping work as if everything were done shows our trust in God's grace and providence—that His grace will be sufficient for us.

Therefore when the sun sets on Friday, we should try our best not to think about work anymore.

BUT WHAT IS WORK?

This begs the question: what is the definition of work? Is it the physics' definition of work? Is work how the Jews

classify it to be? Or is work referring to just what we do to sustain our livelihood? If we take a look at the divine example set by God, He was not doing what He needed to sustain His livelihood. However, creation was what He was doing in relation to the world.

Hence, we could say that whatever we do in relation to the world constitutes work. If we are working adults, we work six days, and rest one day. If we are students, we study six days, and rest one day. The Sabbath is set apart for God, not for our personal use (Deut 5:13–15). Consequently, we should not be anxious about anything if we stop our secular "work" on the Sabbath, for God will take care of everything.

WHY ONCE A WEEK?

Human beings are by their very nature forgetful. Thus the Sabbath serves as a weekly reminder of our relationship with God. Any relationship, in order to be sustained, has to be consistently nurtured. Otherwise, it will gradually die.

The Sabbath is our weekly encounter with God. It is set apart – one entire day – for us to establish our relationship with our Heavenly Father. It is also our weekly realignment of our allegiance, whether it is to the world or to God. Matthew 6:24 says that no one can serve two masters. You can only love one and hate the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon.

We are only part-time employees in this world, but we are full-time Christians. However, as we live in this world and mix with people of the world, we spend most of our time thinking about how we should discharge our secular duties. As a result, there are times we forget that we are not of the world.

Therefore, staying focused is very important for us Christians. Matthew 6:22–23 states that the lamp of the body is the eye. Depending on whether our eye is good or bad, the light in our body will be bright or dark. If our eye is focused on God, our entire life will be illuminated. If we lose our focus on God, we will inevitably look on the things of the world

By stopping every week, there is a sense of completion. Stopping work as if everything were done shows our trust in God's grace and providence—that His grace will be sufficient for us.

Before Moses rested from his earthly labors, God asked him to go up to Mount Nebo where he viewed the entire plains of Canaan. This is symbolic for us—if we truly keep the Sabbath, God will raise our spirituality, which peaks as we enter everlasting rest, with our eyes fixed on our heavenly home.

and gradually sink into darkness, drifting further away from eternal life.

The weekly Sabbath is an important regulator of our lives, timed perfectly for us to be realigned with God.

HIGH UP ON THE HILLS

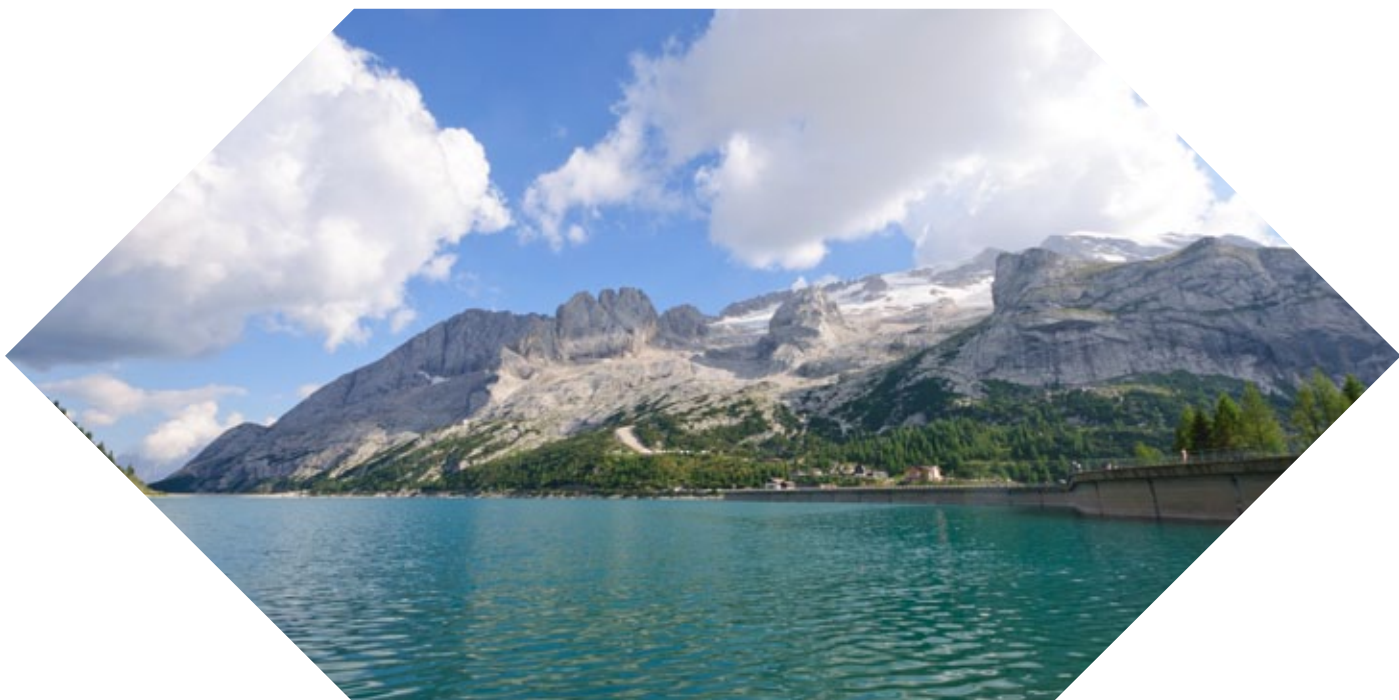
Among the blessings of the Sabbath stands God's promise to "cause us to ride upon the high hills of the earth" (Isa 58:14) if we keep the Sabbath holy. If we set apart our Sabbath for the Lord, we shall soar. If we are just at the foot of the hill, we cannot see very far. However, the higher we go, the further we can see. Before Moses rested from his earthly labors, God asked him to go up to Mount Nebo where he viewed the entire plains of Canaan. This is symbolic for us—if we truly keep the Sabbath, God will raise our spirituality, which peaks as we enter everlasting rest, with our eyes fixed on our heavenly home.

There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.

For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.

(Heb 4:9–10)

Each and every week the Sabbath reminds us of our eternal rest. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest by keeping the Sabbath according to God's will. Let us set that day apart for God to nurture our relationship with Him and to refocus on the significance of the Sabbath rest. ★



Children Are a Heritage from the Lord

Amy Ho—Edinburgh, UK



*“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, The fruit of the womb is a reward.”
(Ps 127:3)*

In the name of Jesus I testify about how God granted us our very own heritage.

LONGING FOR CHILDREN

Ever since I was young, I have been a person who loves children. All I ever wanted was to be a mother and housewife. I never had any career aspirations at all. When my two sisters were born, I would happily sit by their crib and gaze at them, waiting for feeding time so that I could lift them out of the crib and hand them to my mother.

Naturally, after marriage, my husband David and I planned to start a family quite quickly. We naively thought that it would happen as soon as we wanted it to. I thought to myself, if we start trying for a baby now, in nine months' time, we will have one.

However, the months passed, but I did not get pregnant. Initially, I would get upset every month that it didn't happen, especially as people around us seemed to get pregnant easily, and had their babies, and some even had their second ones. It seemed that everywhere, at work, at church, on the streets, there were pregnant women and babies. I had such a deep yearning inside every time I saw them.

TURNING THE FOCUS AWAY FROM MYSELF

Gradually, we accepted our predicament and prayed for comfort from God and for patience to wait for His timing. We realized that life is indeed in the hands of God and not something we can control.

We also heard comforting sermons that really helped us. One was about how God's will is higher than ours. Another was about how God granted Hannah a child once she started to think about what God and His people needed. Both sermons touched me greatly.

I began to try to think more about what God wanted from us. Maybe I had been quite selfish before, thinking that I could have a break from everything once we had a baby. I had only moved to Edinburgh recently—maybe God wanted me to do more first? Ultimately, God's time is better than our time, even if we think we're ready, God's will is always the best. I also heard about some other couples who had to wait for years before they had children.

I stopped focusing so much on my desire for a baby and concentrated on doing more for God. I decided to use my time wisely, to do more for Him while we didn't have a family. God helped me to find joy in doing church work.

Besides, my husband and I did more

I stopped focusing so much on my desire for a baby and concentrated on doing more for God. I decided to use my time wisely, to do more for Him while we didn't have a family.

things as a couple, went to places we wanted to, bought things we wanted to, thought about our careers, etc. But deep down, I always had a sorrow in my heart that something was missing from our lives.

HOPE IN WAITING— REMEMBERING GOD'S GRACE

I wondered if it was God's will that we didn't have children. We both agreed that we wouldn't go for fertility treatment. I was willing to explore the option of adoption because I loved children so much. I felt that I could take any child and love him as my own, especially when I looked at all the children at church. Yet we didn't take this step because David always believed that we would eventually have our own child, and I thank God that he had this simple yet firm faith.

During the few years that we waited, I constantly thought of God's grace to us in the past: When I was very young, I suffered from severe nosebleeds, losing so much blood that my mother would pray to God that she accepted His will if He wanted to take me away. By His mercy, these nosebleeds stopped in my teenage years and I have enjoyed good health ever since. I also recalled how God brought me and David together—from complete strangers to getting married in less than two years after being introduced through a preacher. This helped me to remember His providence, to seek comfort and to keep faith in Him.

In addition, I found comfort from the Bible: how Joseph endured years of tribulation, how God led the Israelites out of Egypt, how God granted children to Rebekah, Rachel, and Hannah.

DREAMS SHATTERED?

In January 2010, we were overjoyed to learn that I was pregnant. We had been waiting for this day for three and a half years! However our joy was very short-lived when I miscarried at nine and a half weeks. When it happened, we were heartbroken. It felt like our world had been shattered. Never did I expect this to happen after waiting for so long. It felt that our future looked very bleak; we had

to start all over again and who knew how long it would take to fall pregnant again?

That day David and I prayed together, asking God for comfort and for us not to murmur but to accept His will. Amazingly, by the next morning, God had dried our tears and we felt peace in our hearts. Truly, this was comfort from God.

GIFT OF GOD

It took another year before I finally became pregnant again; thank God, this time everything went very smoothly and the pregnancy was very enjoyable!

God also granted His grace to us during the birth of our baby. After an hour or so of unsuccessful labor, the doctor examined me and said that although the baby's head was facing down, delivery might be difficult as the baby was facing the front instead of the back. They suggested I try a little longer but then they would have to take me into theatre to try and turn the baby. If they couldn't do that successfully, they would perform a caesarean section. As soon as I heard that there was a possibility of a caesarean section, I prayed to God in my heart, hoping that it could be avoided as recovery would be longer and more painful.

I tried harder but without any success and was finally taken into theatre. It was a quite daunting experience with all the medical staff doing things around me, and my body was anesthetized in preparation for the caesarean section. However, on examination, they found that the baby had turned himself and could be delivered with forceps. I thank God that in the short journey up to the operating theatre, the baby had turned and the surgery could be avoided!

Finally, on September 03, 2011, our son Matthias, meaning 'gift of God', was born. Our happiness was beyond anything that words could describe. We were also overwhelmed to see how

happy our family and friends were for us.

Even now, I often cannot believe that he's here. It is a wonderful feeling that the burden in my heart has been lifted, and I no longer need to walk around with the sorrow that was with me for years. Matthias is a happy and healthy baby: indeed our most precious gift from God.

ALL THINGS ARE IN GOD'S HAND

I thank God that He sustained our faith throughout this period of waiting. During that time, I truly experienced how blessed we are to be married in the Lord, so that we could pray together and support each other to sustain our faith.

Indeed, God will never give us more than we can bear, and He disciplines us or refines our faith because He loves us:

Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful: nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

(Heb 12:11)

Today I appreciate much more that everything is in the hands of God. In this day and age when we're so used to having everything we want at our fingertips, it was very humbling to wait for God and His timing.

No matter how much we make plans for our lives, we should remember that everything is in the hands of God.

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make profit": whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow.

(Jas 4:13–14)

His will and timing may be different to ours, but it is always the best and we need to submit to Him.

With this, I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to God and ascribe all glory unto His name. Amen. ★

Today I appreciate much more that everything is in the hands of God. In this day and age when we're so used to having everything we want at our fingertips, it was very humbling to wait for God and His timing.



Impressions of Zambia: An Apostolic Journey

Andy Wang—Irvine, California, USA

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I testify. In June 2011, I was blessed with the opportunity to participate in a missionary trip to the nation of Zambia. I accompanied Preacher FF Chong of London church (UK) and Preacher Tae-Hoon “TJ” Jung of El Monte church (USA). The purpose of the trip was two-fold—ministering to the Zambian members and evangelizing in remote regions and to members of other Christian denominations.

Our first stop was Kitwe where there were two places of worship—Chimwemwe and Chamboli. Since I spent most of the time in these two locations, they left the deepest impression on me. I stayed at a member’s home in Chimwemwe and made frequent excursions to both places of worship. My assignment was to teach religious education to the children, lead Bible studies for the young adults, and generally to build a bond with the members.

SIMPLE BUT HAPPY

Throughout my interaction with the members, I found that they are the simplest people I have ever met. They live their lives in a self-subsistent and resourceful manner and are very good at making the most of what they have.

For example, on weekday mornings, members of the household woke up as

early as 4 am to make use of the daytime to complete a deluge of chores. They would also take advantage of the well water that is only available at certain times of the day. Little children as young as three were adept at washing clothes by hand. The brisk motion of the wet cloths wringing against their wrists was a testament of the rigorous efforts they put toward their daily endeavors. They demonstrated vigor and willpower. I believe God has blessed them with a thankful and cheerful heart amidst what seems to be adversity.

Although I have attended many fellowships in the US, the experience in Zambia was especially simple and warm. Often, members would gather together after sunset, and sing soulful praise tunes and native folk songs a cappella. At first, I was hesitant to join since the lyrics and melodies were foreign to me. However, their voices were so beautiful and harmonized, I felt compelled to join and quickly caught on. As we sang with all of our hearts by the evening fireside, I immediately felt a spiritual camaraderie with these brethren even though we had just met.

I also enjoyed bonding with the young members through intense football games and invigorating runs on shoddy, uneven dirt roads. A small round mound of crumpled garbage bags served as the

official “FIFA” ball. These members’ soles were toughened with calluses, yet they ran with ease and were as swift as gazelles. There was a true sense of freedom that I could not find in my world of technological advancement in the US.

AFRICAN BEREANS

Apart from their simple and unassuming lives, our Zambian members also have a pure heart of worship and willingness to accept the truth.

During a seminar on the Minor Prophets and essential church doctrines, I observed that the members listened intently. They studied the Bible passages with great diligence and focus just as the Bereans did in Paul’s time. One evening when Pr. Chong was discussing the revival of the apostolic church as prophesied in Isaiah, the members eagerly raised their hands and asked many questions. After the discussion, they agreed that it was indeed God’s grace that had allowed the gospel to spread from East to West, all the way to Zambia. They rejoiced and thanked God in loud applause.

More importantly, my experiences of street evangelism were quite memorable. I have always been quite reluctant to proclaim my faith and preach the gospel boldly. In America, citizens follow all different types of religions and philosophies, from atheism to Islam to

mainstream Christianity. Sometimes, it was hard to figure out how to speak to the target audience and what topics to touch upon.

In Zambia, the citizens are predominantly Christian, ranging from Jehovah's Witnesses to Seventh Day Adventists, Baptists, and even Seventh Day Baptists. For the most part, the Zambian people generally agree on common Christian beliefs that one must call upon the Lord to be saved and that baptism removes sins.

During one of my afternoon evangelism excursions, I met a pastor from a Pentecostal church who was unaware that the correct mode of baptism is crucial to its saving power. I explained to him that we must bow in the likeness of Christ and be fully immersed during baptism. At first, these seemed to be mere symbolic details to the pastor. However, by the grace of God, he was able to understand the importance of following Jesus' example.

Zambia is a rather God-fearing nation. Once the people hear the truth of the gospel, there is not much that will cause them to relent for they know that "the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb 4:12).

RESPONDING TO THE MACEDONIAN CALL

In Solwezi, Preacher TJ, Brother Dilema (a local church worker), and I met a pastor from the New Life Church at the inn where we were staying. He asked whether we belonged to the troupe of itinerant evangelists staying at the inn, and we nodded. This pastor thought it would be a good idea to discuss our church doctrines with him in efforts to merge our church with his.

Knowing that this would not be our intention, we were not sure if it would be worth our time and effort to evangelize to him. However, we agreed that we would meet the pastor in our living quarters later that evening for further discussion. Brother Dilema insisted that it could be a path, which God was trying to open because the pastor was from Kabompo, a region in Zambia that has no place of worship. We then prayed together for one hour, asking God to guide us

according to His will.

Shortly afterwards, the pastor met us in our room. We began to recount our ten basic beliefs, one by one, as we gazed at the pastor's face, wondering if he was receptive to God's word. Surprisingly, he agreed to everything we said and showed a great deal of interest. At the end, he was inspired to learn more about the word of God and insisted that our preachers visit Kabompo. He immediately got up in excitement and made a phone call to his clergymen, inquiring of the idea to hold a spiritual seminar. Preacher TJ, Brother Dilema, and I were deeply touched by God's grace, as we knew this could only be the start of something incredible.

A few days later, Preacher FF Chong arrived in Kabompo and, with the help of Brother Chisala from Chimwemwe, he delivered several days' worth of basic belief classes. The members of the New Life Church were fully moved by the word of God and came to accept the truth. A couple of days later, a special baptism was held in Kabompo and as a result, six leaders of the New Life Church were baptized.

When Preacher TJ and I had heard the good news, we knelt down and praised God with pure joy and thanksgiving. We were humbled by God's amazing power and will. Undoubtedly, the Holy Spirit was working all along!

This experience reminded me of Paul's response to the divine call to preach in Macedonia.

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night.

I learned that it is the Spirit of God, which enables the gospel to be preached to places and in ways man cannot fathom. Through His design, wherever a seed is sown, a harvest will be gathered.

A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.' Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

(Acts 16:9–10)

I learned that it is the Spirit of God, which enables the gospel to be preached to places and in ways man cannot fathom. Through His design, wherever a seed is sown, a harvest will be gathered.

RELYING ON GOD

During the trip, I also realized that most of my struggles in Zambia were mental and personal. I felt like my own worst enemy. I had always lived a life of comfort in America and never had to worry about basic necessities. Sometimes, I would even complain about the food I ate or the things that I have or want. But in Zambia, I was suddenly thrust into a world of no electricity, no running water, no laundry machine, no toilets, and no favorite meals. I felt as though I was living in a



Fellowship with Chimwemwe youths.

Baptismal site at St. Dorothy, a town in Northern Zambia. By the grace of God, 8 brothers and sisters received baptism!



different world that I had to adapt to quickly.

Every day, we were constantly on the move, traveling between places of worship, trekking for hours along starlit roads, and walking briskly while members escorted us through the hustle and bustle of downtown. During the first few days, I was anxious

earth. Living in America has caused me to become complacent with the usual church rigmarole and lose sight of what is really important—the spirit of passing on His word that can only be fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit and His abidance. As I was relying on the Holy Spirit to preach in these foreign lands, I really felt His power. It gave me great

Outwardly, I may look different from the Zambians, but when we dig deeper, we see that the same blood flows in our veins—the blood of Jesus Christ that has washed away our sins. It is extremely humbling to know that we are united through the blood and Spirit of Christ, as we fight the spiritual battle. If God meant for us to find a piece of heaven on earth, then He must have placed it in the fellowship with our brothers and sisters around the world.

Praise God for His wondrous blessings. May all the power, praise, and glory be unto His holy name. Amen. ★

I knew I had to turn to God to deliver me from my inner enemy. Our hour-long prayers in the mornings and afternoons really helped me to calm my heart and rely fully on the Lord in all my cares. Gradually everything became smoother, my fears diminished, and joy and peace filled my heart.

about each day's itinerary and worried about my health and tolerance under these "austere" conditions. All these thoughts developed into a mental struggle that even caused me to lose sleep at night. I knew I had to turn to God to deliver me from my inner enemy. Our hour-long prayers in the mornings and afternoons really helped me to calm my heart and rely fully on the Lord in all my cares. Gradually everything became smoother, my fears diminished, and joy and peace filled my heart.

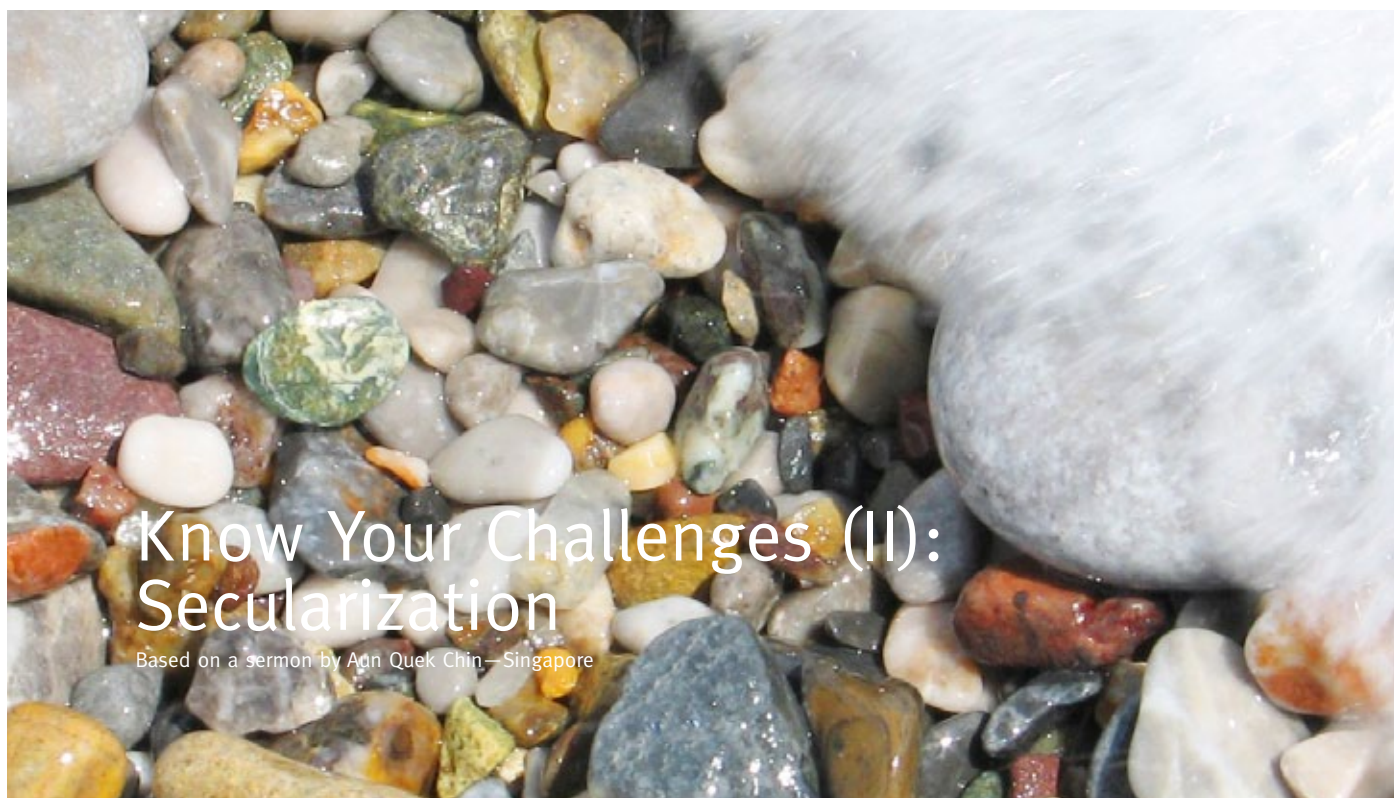
FINAL THOUGHTS

Overall, the missionary trip was an eye-opening experience and taught me a lot about God's great commission to spread the gospel to the end of the

Outwardly, I may look different from the Zambians, but when we dig deeper, we see that the same blood flows in our veins—the blood of Jesus Christ that has washed away our sins. It is extremely humbling to know that we are united through the blood and Spirit of Christ, as we fight the spiritual battle.

encouragement to continue to preach back at home.

In addition, the members in Zambia reminded me how we are one big happy family in Christ. I will always remember their generosity in preparing delicious and hearty meals for us, their hospitality in hosting us in their humble abodes, and their genuine love in praying for us as we pressed on to our next destination.



Know Your Challenges (II): Secularization

Based on a sermon by Aun Quek Chin—Singapore

“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” (1 Jn 2:15).

The Lord Jesus Christ paid a very hefty price to save and transform us from a worldly to a holy people. Sadly, however, many believers today have allowed themselves to be carried away by the wave of secularization sweeping through the Christian world. It is indeed tragic to see people reverting from their holy status to a worldly one. So how can we recognize and protect ourselves against secularization?

SECULARIZATION OF THE GOSPEL
When Christians no longer esteem a gospel that emphasizes the things of heaven, but prefer one that focuses on social issues, they have become secularized.

Contemporary theologians have declared:

“The significance of evangelism today is no longer merely a passive call to repentance. Instead, the new gospel is about working amongst the poor and active participation in social work. We must be the voice of the people, and the champion of their rights.”
“The question is not about how I can find a good God, but about how I can find a good neighbor.”

To these theologians, finding a Good Samaritan is more important than finding a good church; providing food is better than giving someone the gospel. To them, the crux of the gospel is no longer salvation in the kingdom of heaven, but rather things of the world. How can such a gospel still be the pure gospel of Christ?

The Lord Jesus provides an excellent example for us in staying focused on the right ultimate goal. When news of how Jesus had cast out demons and healed the sick spread, many flocked to Jesus¹. But what did Jesus do? He retreated to a solitary place to pray! When the disciples finally found Him, they exclaimed,

“Everyone is looking for you, this is a fantastic opportunity! This is the time for us to work because everyone needs you.” Surprisingly, Jesus said, “Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come.”

The disciples were puzzled: Did the Lord not realize that many were trying to follow and believe in Him? These multitudes clearly needed healing and peace, which He could grant. So why was He not healing them?

In fact, the disciples had failed to see that Jesus’ miracles were not the ends, but simply the means. The ultimate purpose of these wonders was to enable people to know and believe that Jesus is the Savior; that He is God who had come to this world as man in order to save mankind. Unfortunately, the people only wanted to receive physical peace and healing, not the gospel of salvation.

Jesus came to save our souls, not our bodies. He came not to establish a social organization, but the kingdom of God, i.e., the church, so that we can be saved. Thus, He had to reserve His energy and time for His key priorities, even if it made Him appear to be lacking in compassion. Similarly, it is not that Christians are not concerned about matters in society, for there are many Christians who are involved in social work. But the main aim

SECULARIZATION DEFINED

Encyclopedias provide a range of definitions on secularization. In the sociology of religion, secularization broadly refers to the “declining levels of religiosity” in modern society. This article adopts a simple definition – the transformation of what is holy into what is worldly.

MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

When Peter and John went to the temple to pray, a lame man at the Beautiful Gate sought alms from them. Peter said to him, “Silver and gold I do not have, but I will give to you whatever I have.” What Peter had was the gospel of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit and a clear understanding of his commission. Peter knew he could not change society, could not solve the woes of all the poor. But he had something far more precious—the gospel, which gives eternal life. Thus Peter gave the beggar the gospel of Christ so that, upon believing, the latter would have his sins forgiven and be saved.

poorer than those of the world?

And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.

(Deut 8:18)

The theme of Deuteronomy 8 is “Remember the LORD your God.” It sets out a range of things to remember the Lord for, but proponents of Success Theology love to zoom in on this verse. They believe that since God had promised to make Abraham a great nation, grant him peace and great wealth, Christians today ought to pray to God to “claim” this power to be successful in the world.

Prosperity theologians draw many by preaching that God wants to give us abundant material wealth. Poor Christians should pray that God gives them the power to earn money. God will hearken to such prayers because God wants us to be rich and successful. But does God really want us to be successful in this manner? Is the power of God manifested in us so that we can gain wealth in this world?

See what Jesus taught through the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. The rich man was clearly more successful. Every day, he wore purple (designer clothing in those times) and ate sumptuously. Despite the gluttony, he remained healthy. With all this luxury, he appears to be the one who truly “glorified” God. In stark contrast, Lazarus was pathetic. So poor he had to beg and wait for scraps; he could not move on his own and even had sores all over his body. And the great irony was that the name Lazarus meant... “God helps”! How had God helped him? According to Success Theology, Lazarus should be considered an utter failure, the most pitiful man who enjoyed the least grace in life.

While recounting the parable, Jesus astonished his listeners with a twist in the tale. After Lazarus died, he was taken back to Paradise. When the rich man died, he went to Hades. Therein lies an important lesson from the Lord Jesus—the crux of the gospel is not worldly success or material blessings! Treasures on earth are as transient and fragile as a flower. What we should pursue is the imperishable glory. This is found in heaven and is eternal.

of the church is to save souls, and it must stay true to this aim.

Some people claim that the church’s involvement in social work facilitates evangelism. But we must be careful not to end up drawing people to the baskets of bread² rather than Christ. The phenomenal growth of the apostolic church did not arise from a focus on social work, but an unflagging reliance on the Holy Spirit. The door of the gospel was opened through the power of the Holy Spirit.

SECULARIZATION OF THEOLOGY

When Christians no longer place emphasis on the theology of the cross, but on the theology of success, they have become secularized.

“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2).

Although apostle Paul was more highly educated than many of his peers, he had come to realize that his great learning could not bring him (or those around him) forgiveness of sins and eternal life. So he decided to forego all his previous knowledge, understanding that Christ is far more precious and important than anything else³. Paul preached Jesus Christ and how He was crucified for our sakes so that we could emulate and follow Jesus. But what does following Jesus really entail?

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me’” (Mt 16:24).

The theology of the cross emphasizes that we have to suffer with Christ. Even in the face of severe persecution or great

difficulty, we must never give up our faith because it is a faith that will save for eternity. We must be willing to pay the price and endure all pain.

However, there are Christian leaders today who espouse the theology of success, teaching that believers can use any means – including prayer – to obtain success. They base their claim on the fact that our God wants us to succeed, not suffer; to enjoy, not endure! Unfortunately for these Christians, their idea of success and enjoyment is narrowly rooted in this present life.

For instance, they say that God created the universe for man’s pleasure. Good health is a prerequisite for deriving maximum worldly pleasure. Moreover, believers who are physically unwell would not be glorifying to God. Hence, ailing believers should ask Him to perform a miracle and heal them so that they can enjoy this world and glorify Him. Under these types of New-Age theological philosophies, believers do not pray to ask God to grant them faith and endurance in trials. Instead, they demand that God take the trials away to enable them to enjoy His material providence. The emphasis is on miracles, signs and wonders, and healing, not on endurance or suffering.

It is not wrong to pray to God to take away the bitter cup of our sickness but we must remember the important proviso—“nevertheless not my will, but Yours, be done⁴”. To be prepared to suffer is not indicative of a passive or negative faith; instead it reflects an active and steadfast conviction that God’s way is the best way.

These theologians also believe that health without wealth is inadequate. Healthy but poor believers cannot enjoy the world. Poor and poorly dressed believers cannot glorify God. Our poverty would embarrass God; how can the children of the Lord of the universe be

Understanding that we are but sojourners in this world helps us endure worldly suffering. All things, whether good or bad, will pass away; we shall pass away. The most critical issue is what will happen to us after we pass away.

SECULARIZATION OF OUR LIFE

When Christians start to love the world more than God and emulate the world instead of Christ, their lives have been secularized.

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

(Jas 4:4)

certain believers made him weep⁵ by their blatant lack of concern with and contravention of the teachings of Christ. Interested solely in their own bellies, they gave scant thought to whether their actions would glorify and please God. As long as they felt glorious and satisfied, they were happy.

So we need to keep asking ourselves: Are our priorities rooted in earthly or in heavenly matters? Is our aim a comfortable life today or glorious life eternal? Do our lifestyles radiate secularity or reflect the image of Christ?

SECULARIZATION OF PRAYER

When we constantly pray for earthly but not heavenly things, our prayers have been secularized.

FIVE WARNING SIGNS:

- You look forward more to Saturday golf than Saturday with God.
- You update and read your Facebook more often than you uplift your faith through reading God's Book.
- You spend more time asking God to bless your stock portfolio (or career, studies, etc.) than entreating Him to heal your sick brethren or help you grow in spirituality and His service.
- You dismiss your skipping of services and low frequency of prayers and Bible-reading as "only human".
- You do not think backsliding is a big problem.

We live, work and play in the world. Naturally, we have many friends in the world. Does that automatically render us enemies of God?

It is not a sin to conform to local practices, i.e., "when in Rome, do as the Romans do". However, there are certain cultures and traditions that are against the teachings of Christ. Being determined to keep the teachings of Jesus Christ may bring believers into direct conflict with these practices and the people who practice them. Some believers are unwilling to sacrifice their ties with their friends and thus decide to conform to worldly practices that are detrimental to their faith. At this very instant, such Christians have been secularized in their life. They have become enemies of Christ.

We remember the church of Philippi as one that brought Paul much joy. But

Prayer ought to be used to worship and thank God, to acknowledge our sins and seek forgiveness. It is the channel for us to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Prayer is actually a very holy matter. However, it is so simple to pray that we sometimes forget about how sacred it actually is.

To believers in Old Testamental times, the **sacredness of prayer** was constantly reinforced. They could not directly enter into the sanctuary to worship God; they could only worship from the outside. Entering was restricted to the priests. Yet, even the priests could not enter the Holy of Holies. In the sanctuary, a veil divided the holy place and the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest was permitted to enter it once a year on the Day of Atonement.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross for

us, the veil was ripped in two. The author of Hebrews tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ used His blood to tear this veil so that all who believed in Him and whose sins were cleansed through the blood of Christ could directly meet God and truly worship Him. Today, we are able to worship God directly, whenever we kneel down and pray in the name of Jesus.

However, do we treasure this access to the Almighty? Every time we kneel down and pray, do we believe that we are worshipping God? Or have we lost the sense of its sacredness as a means to come into the presence of the Holiest One?

We secularize prayer when we are no longer awed or grateful for this sacred grace, and treat prayer as a mere means for us to call for physical blessings because of our pre-occupation with secular matters and concern for material possessions.

Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a spring; the rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength; each one appears before God in Zion.

(Ps 84:5-7)

The ancient saints rejoiced when they could enter the temple to worship God. Although they had to first pass through the Valley of Baca (Weeping), they did not mind. Any difficulty or grief they had to bear paled in comparison with the joy of knowing they were going up the mountain of God to meet God. They rejoiced because God was their help and they were His people. These people could not even enter the sanctuary and had to remain outside. Yet they were overflowing with joy and hope.

In contrast, believers today have direct access to God. This is a precious and sacred grace that we must never let go of; we must regain our joy of and hope in prayer.

Jesus taught us not to worry over our food and clothing. In contrast, these are the very reasons why the Gentiles worship their deities. They seek material blessings. There are also secular Christians who pray only for earthly things. If they can find some other means of obtaining material blessing, they are quite prepared to forsake God! We, on the other hand, know that the heavenly Father will add

“all these things”⁶ to us—if we keep ourselves holy and pursue after the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

To reiterate, prayer is our communication with God – our time to repent and acknowledge sins, look to God, trust Him and build a closer relationship with Him. Never secularize prayer and lose such grace.

SECULARIZATION OF THE TEMPLE

Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."

(Jn 2:13–17)

The temple ought to have been a place of prayer and worship, but had become a place of profit-making! The sounds of devout prayer had been drowned by the sounds of bargaining, the bleating of sheep and lowing of oxen. The holy temple was no longer holy. The holy people had become common people. What should have been an abnormal scenario had become normalized because of its daily recurrence! They did not even realize that this temple had already been secularized.

Jesus was usually meek, gentle, loving and compassionate. He healed the leprous and enabled the lame to walk. Once, worried that those who had come to listen to His word would be hungry on the way home, He made bread for them to eat. But in this incident at the temple, we see a completely different Jesus.

He was furious. He made a whip out of cords, overturned the tables and rebuked the merchants harshly, “Take all these things away! How can you turn my Father's house into a den of thieves?”

Selling such merchandise in the temple started as a service to facilitate offering. Those coming to Jerusalem from far-off places would find it much easier to bring money to purchase sacrificial animals than to drag the animals across

hills and vales! However, behind the seemingly thoughtful attempt to provide convenience was greed and thievery. The temple priests were in cahoots with the merchants. Priests were supposed to examine the animal, certify that it was without blemish and thus suitable for sacrifice. But dishonest priests would keep rejecting the animal so that the people would be forced to buy another one. In addition, the pilgrims would also be aggrieved at being forced to pay the higher prices within the temple ground. This was literally daylight robbery! For this reason, Jesus said that the covetous priests had turned the house of God into a den of thieves. There was no justice. Consequently, the people's joy in worship was significantly reduced.

When Jesus took action to cleanse the temple of these robbers, He was filled with wrath. He did not care how many people were coming into the temple or to sacrifice. Instead, He wanted to know how many people were truly happy to worship God, held truly to their faith, and truly prayed and worshipped with a heart of reverence.

The Bible says that we are the temple of God. So have our temples become secularized? Have we become a den of thieves? If Jesus were to come today and see this temple, would He take a whip? Would He rebuke us and tell us to take all these things away? Jesus has already warned us. He wants us to cleanse our own temple so that we can draw near to God to worship Him, in spirit and in truth, in holiness and in reverence.

God Himself gave His life so that we who were sinners could regain our status as sons of God. Wouldn't it be a tragedy if we were to cast aside such amazing grace and marvelous love in favor of the world's iridescent but ultimately ephemeral glory? ★

1 Mk 1:34–38

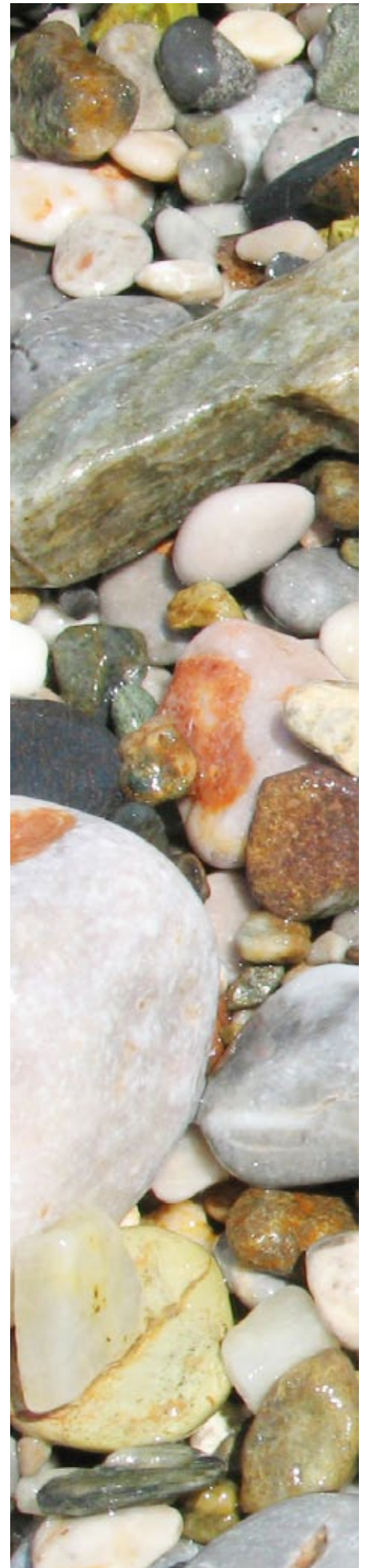
2 Mt 14:13–21

3 Cf. Phil 3:7–8

4 Lk 22:42

5 Phil 3:17–19

6 Mt 6:33





Four Families in the Apostolic Church (I): The Jailer's Family

Based on a sermon by Derren Liang—San Jose, California, USA

The gray and white-haired seated with the ministers (easily identified by their ties); young (or younger) men and women in tiered rows behind them; scores of children crouched, squatting or sitting cross-legged in front; and occasionally a big banner at the back proclaiming the “xx-th Spiritual and Evangelistic Meeting”. They gaze straight into the camera, smiles, accidental frowns or grimaces frozen in time...

This is the typical photograph found in many a TJC commemorative publication. Looking at such, we laugh at the outdated modes of hair and dress or tease brethren we recognize as having “grown in [sideways] stature through the years”. We may smile in reminiscence and thank God for making us part of this one big family in Christ...but do we invariably find ourselves wondering...

How many of those cute-as-a-button children grew up to be strong youths?

How many of the strong youths are still fervently serving the Lord?

How many have gone on to have families in the Lord?

Indeed, how many remain in this big family?

We often hear from the pulpit that just as healthy societies are built on the foundation of strong families, so too is

the church, the body of Christ. And just as maintaining health takes effort, so too does nurturing strong families.

Indeed this message runs through the Old and New Testaments. In the Book of Nehemiah, a critical aspect of Jerusalem's physical restoration were people making repairs “by [their own] house”, just as the priests did “each in front of his own house”¹. Similarly, Paul's epistle to the Ephesians to build a glorious church includes exhortations on the importance of and way to nurture a harmonious and God-fearing home².

Unfortunately, the unstoppable societal wave of broken homes and single-parent families has not spared the church. Although families in the church may remain physically complete, the children have spiritually separated—growing up and away from the faith of their fathers.

How do we arrest this trend? How can we protect our families and ensure that God's word, Spirit and blessing come upon our households, and importantly, remain with us generation after generation?

Four families in Acts have some important lessons for us.

I. THE JAILER'S FAMILY— BELIEVED IN GOD

“He...ran in, and fell down trembling...he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’” (Acts 16:29–30)

Here was a man who, in a few short moments, faced death twice: first from a great earthquake and second, by his own hand. But exemplary behavior and fearless testimony from the Lord's witnesses saved him, first physically and second spiritually.

The jailer had asked what *he* had to do to be saved. When the answer came – Believe on the Lord! – the promised deliverance was not just for him but for *his whole household*. So when he heard this, the jailer hastened to gather “all who were in his house” to listen to Paul and Silas. The event ends on a joyous note—the jailer and his whole household rejoiced, having all believed in the Lord and been immediately baptized³.

Therein lies the first step towards building a blissful family of faith—we must bring our whole family to believe in God.

The Best Gift

Most of us love our family and seek to provide the best for them—education, leisure and all we can afford of life's little luxuries. But whatever “joy” we get out of these is often short-lived; they are only useful while we are alive to enjoy them. One day, inevitably, the string of qualifications, huge house, well-padded bank account or luxurious holidays will cease to matter. It is ironic that such things

We may or may not be able to leave our families large monetary legacies, but what all of us can definitely give them is an inheritance precious beyond compare—Jesus and the hope of salvation. When we do so, we shall experience the jailer's joy.

viewed by many as concrete goals worth toiling for are actually so ephemeral.

In contrast, salvation is not “tangible”. Yet it has true and eternal value because it is about how a person turns from darkness to light, from despair to hope and from eternal death to everlasting life.

... to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.

(Acts 26:18)

Consider the jailer and his family post-baptism. They were sitting down to a simple meal in their own familiar house with two strangers whom they barely knew. There weren't any dramatic changes in physical circumstances, but this whole family rejoiced because a great spiritual transformation had taken place. God was in their midst. Their hearts must have been filled with true contentment as they reflected on the amazing turn of events which was evidence that God has His beautiful will in all things.

We may or may not be able to leave our families large monetary legacies, but what all of us can definitely give them is an inheritance precious beyond compare—Jesus and the hope of salvation. When we do so, we shall experience the jailer's joy.

Sense of Urgency

As the jailer listened to Paul and Silas, he might have recognized the great irony that he had really been the one under bondage all this while. But through marvelous grace, he was now freed; his utter despair was transformed to hope.

As responsible husband/father/son, he was anxious and determined to share this tremendous experience with his family. The Bible succinctly captures his sense of urgency:

Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And

he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and his family were baptized.

(Acts 16:32–34)

So often heard is the injunction to share the gospel with our friends and relatives that some of us might have become numb to its significance. The reality is that they are in bondage! Even worse, they will not know that they are careening towards eternal condemnation if we don't say or do anything.

Sometimes we may feel that leading our family members to believe in Christ is easier said than done. We have tried but have been rejected many times. We have prayed but nothing has changed over all the years.

As our family members are always around us, we may think that there will always be time. We excuse our procrastination—e.g., we did not want to ruin the dinner atmosphere by bringing up the topic of religion, etc. We comfort ourselves with the Bible's words that there is a time for everything. Days into weeks into years, and suddenly when our family member falls seriously ill but has yet to believe, we panic!

Hence, we must constantly place this thought before ourselves: Our family members can only look forward to receiving eternal life along with us if they believe in God and receive forgiveness of their sins. If they remain in the dark dungeons of sin and die in their iniquity⁴, we will have to be accountable⁵.

Entreat God to give us the wisdom to seize each opportunity to save our families' souls; ask the Lord to help us to persevere and to meet every rebuke with patience and forgiveness. We cannot afford to give up in this worthy quest for it is a matter of spiritual life and death.

Perseverance and Wisdom

Sometimes we may feel that leading our family members to believe in Christ is easier said than done. We have tried but have been rejected many times. We have prayed but nothing has changed over all the years. The jailer's behavior is not just a lesson on honing our sense of urgency but also reminds us to persevere.

While the other prisoners were listening to Paul and Silas singing hymns to praise God, the jailer had fallen asleep⁶. But the crisis in his life literally shook him up; it brought him trembling before the disciples, and subsequently opened the way for God's word to be preached to him and his family. Another critical factor was Paul and Silas' response to the earthquake. They chose to stay. Paul chose to speak up when the jailer was about to kill himself.

Analogously, our family members may be more open to Christ in times of sickness, career setbacks or other personal difficulties. But we need to know how to use these opportunities to bring the gospel to them. Think of ways to share our personal faith with them. Be ready in season and out of season to preach to them, be it through word or our exemplary behavior⁷.

Things went quite smoothly for the jailer as his family willingly accepted the gospel and their midnight baptism. However, some believers may continue to face objection from their families after conversion. Their dilemma is whether to lie in order to come to church in peace, or to tell the truth and be rebuked or even abused. The Lord Himself has warned us that His gospel would divide families⁸. He also instructs us to take up the cross⁹ by manifesting Christian virtues; this includes telling the truth about all aspects of our faith. By choosing to lie, we seem to have solved our problem temporarily; but we are in fact taking matters into our hand, and acting according to our own will¹⁰. In contrast, if we choose to be honest, we are entrusting our difficulty and suffering to Him and providing Him with the opportunity to work even more

wonders in our life.

Our Lord is merciful and faithful¹¹, and knows exactly what we are going through, especially in this respect, since His own earthly family was also initially non-believing¹². He won them over by His truth, love and ultimate sacrifice.

So entreat God to give us the wisdom to seize each opportunity to save our families' souls; ask the Lord to help us to persevere and to meet every rebuke with patience and forgiveness. We cannot afford to give up in this worthy quest for it is a matter of spiritual life and death.

Resolution

For those "born into the TJC", our baptism in infancy makes us freed men. It would be utter tragedy if we voluntarily renounced this status, put our families and ourselves into prison and fastened our feet in stocks!

When it is time to set up our own families, we should not ignore the constant exhortation to marry in the Lord. Once we follow our heart instead of our faith and marry a non-believer, we do not want to jeopardize marital bliss by bringing up the sensitive topic of religion. So we make little or no further attempt to convert our spouse.

We should never think, "I can always

For true family bliss, we must learn from Moses' insistence on having the whole family worship together. When Pharaoh attempted time and again to get Moses to compromise on who could leave Egypt, Moses was adamant.

bring him/her to church after marriage. He/she will love me so much, he/she won't refuse." For the many cases of successful "marry-first-convert-later", there are just as many, if not more, "marry-first-lost-later".

We should never think, "You worship at your church, I'll worship at mine" (or "You worship your God and I worship mine"). It may morph into "We worship together at TJC on Saturday, and at your church on Sunday" and eventually, if we are not careful, we will give in and say, "Let's just worship at your church"!

We should never think that "whole family in the Lord" means we can marry Christians from any other denomination. If we do, we are just deluding ourselves; we are placing not only ourselves, but also our children in danger of losing salvation.

For true family bliss, we must learn from Moses' insistence on having the whole family worship together. When

Pharaoh attempted time and again to get Moses to compromise on who could leave Egypt, Moses was adamant:

"We will go with our young and with our old; with our sons and our daughters, with our flocks and our herds we will go, for we must hold a feast to the LORD." (Ex 10:9)

This will not be an easy resolution to make and maintain. But for salvation's sake, we must. The jailer freed his family. Let us not imprison ours. ★

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- 1 Neh 3:23, 28, 30
 - 2 Eph 5:22-6:4
 - 3 Acts 16:33-34
 - 4 Ezek 3:17-18
 - 5 1 Cor 9:16-17
 - 6 Acts 16:25, 27
 - 7 2 Tim 4:2, 5
 - 8 Mt 10:34-36
 - 9 Mt 10:37-38
 - 10 cf. 1 Sam 13:11-14
 - 11 Heb 2:17-18
 - 12 Jn 7: 5; Mk 3:21

3 LESSONS FROM THE JAILER

- **DO FREE OUR FAMILIES**
Knowing Jesus and His salvation is the best gift we can bring to our family. Have a sense of urgency about preaching to them.
- **DO PERSEVERE**
Preaching Jesus and His salvation may be difficult. Pray for wisdom to seize opportunities. Move them by your exemplary conduct.
- **DO NOT LOSE YOUR OWN FREEDOM**
Rely on God in matters of marriage. Resolve to marry in the Lord so as to keep our family in Christ.



Literary Ministry at Work

K.C. Tsai—Toronto, Canada

LITERARY MINISTRY AND EVANGELISM

Before His ascension, the Lord Jesus commissioned His disciples to go and make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19) and to observe all things that He had commanded (Mt 28:20).

Our Lord's commands are everlasting and transcend time and space. For this reason, the above commissions can be considered as commissions for us today.

As we take on these two commissions, a sincere heart and joyful attitude is key.

WONDERFUL WORD OF THE LORD

The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.

(Ps 19:8-10)

The psalmist reminds us that the Lord's commandment is not to burden, but to enlighten. In fact, we can taste the sweetness in God's word by sharing His word and His grace with others. When we share through our writing, we provide a pathway for God's will to reach out to readers across different national boundaries.

Throughout the Bible, we see a whole range of writing styles, historical events and spiritual values. The various authors of the Scriptures were faithful in their descriptions of God's acts. Although these authors lived during different times and at different places, they were inspired by God to collectively demonstrate similar divine attributes: justice, righteousness, faithfulness, grace, and a willingness to forgive.

Through the authors' experiences with God and from their written words, His overall plan of salvation is revealed to us today. In actuality, God is the true author and chief editor of the Bible—the greatest piece of work in literary ministry.

LITERARY MINISTRY IN ACTION

Yet God's literary work does not stop there—He continues to work through the literary ministry of the True Jesus Church. Following are some examples of how the church's literary ministry, like the angel flying in the midst of heaven (Rev 14:6), has helped to spread the gospel throughout the world.

Sabah, Malaysia

In 1926, Deacon John Voon of the True Jesus Church in Singapore mailed a copy of the *Holy Spirit Times* to his friend, Mr. En-Fook Tsen, a leader in the local Chinese community in Sabah, Malaysia.

Mr. Tsen was too busy to read through the publication thoroughly. So, he forwarded it to one of his friends, Mr. Siak-Lin Lee, in Sandakan. On the publication, Mr. Tsen wrote: "A true church has arisen".

Deeply touched by what he read, Mr. Lee sailed to Singapore during the lunar new year 1927 to learn more about the truth. After locating the True Jesus Church, he spent much time and effort to study the truth. Eventually, he was baptized on the 11th day of the first lunar month 1927, and received the Holy Spirit three days later.

At Bro. Siak-Lin Lee's request, Elder Chien-Sing Tan and Deacon John Voon accompanied him to Sandakan, Sabah, to preach the gospel. Within days, the Sandakan church was established. Before Elder Tan and Deacon Voon left for Singapore, they ordained three people to be responsible for the church's religious affairs—Deacon Mark Chin, Deacon Philemon Ho and Deaconess Phoebe Kong. Bro Siak-Lin Lee was appointed as secretary.

As of today, there are more than one hundred churches in Sabah with a membership of over fifteen thousand.

The Philippines

A young minister named Ernesto Torres from Bacolod City in Mansilingan was attending the Bible Seminary of the



When we share through our writing, we provide a pathway for God's will and His spiritual values to reach out to readers across different national boundaries.

United Pentecostal Church in Manila when he accidentally stumbled upon two dusty parcels in a corner of the library. Curious, he opened these parcels and found the first and second issues of the *Words of Life*, a booklet published by the True Jesus Church. After reading through the booklets, he realized that the hidden truth of salvation lay right before his eyes! He therefore distributed these booklets to his relatives and fellow believers of the United Pentecostal Church.

Martin Balaston, an Elder of the United Pentecostal Church, studied the core beliefs of the True Jesus Church through the publications *Words of Life* and *Christian Basic Faith*. In addition, Deacon John Chin from Singapore conducted correspondence lessons for him by mail. On June 11, 1983, Elder Balaston wrote a letter to Deacon Chin expressing his willingness to be baptized into our church, and asking for missionaries to visit him.

Less than two weeks later, Deacon John Chin and Preacher Simon Chin were on a plane bound for Bacolod city. Elder Balaston and Pastor Torres met them at the airport. For the next four days (June 22–25, 1983), one of which was a Sabbath day, more than twenty truth-seekers gathered in Elder Balaston's house to study the doctrines and to pray for the Holy Spirit. Some received the Holy Spirit during these prayers. After the Sabbath services, they acknowledged the truth and asked for water baptism in Jesus' name.

The next morning, a vehicle was rented and a total of thirty people went to a river about twenty kilometers away. Twenty-six people were baptized. After the Footwashing and Holy Communion sacraments had been performed, they decided to establish a local church at Elder Balaston's house.

By the wonderful will and grace of God, the seed of the gospel sprouted in the Philippines by means of a couple of *Words of Life* booklets. Indeed, His sheep heard His voice and followed Him, and He brought them back into His fold.

Today, there are more than two thousand members in the Philippines.

Kenya

In 1994, while Reverend Charleston, a bishop of a religious group called the Bibleway Church of Christ, was walking along a street in London, UK, he saw a booklet on the ground. He picked it up and looked at its title, *Words of Life*. He read it and was touched by the truth of salvation revealed in it.

After he returned to Kenya, Reverend Charleston wrote a letter to the International Assembly of the True Jesus Church (IA) to ask if a minister could be sent to help his group understand the

When a sermon is delivered in the chapel, it can edify hundreds or even thousands. But when it is written down and published, the message is no longer limited by time or space. The Bible's message can reach anyone who has the heart to read it, regardless of where they are or when they read it.

truth. In response, the IA sent a preacher to hold a five-day seminar in Kenya in 1995.

More than forty people attended the seminar that was held in Busia, a town near Kenya's northwestern border. Besides members of the Bibleway Church of Christ, a group called the Evangelistic Fellowship, led by Bishop Coronel, also attended. At the end of the seminar, on March 4, 1995, the participants declared that they had decided to change their Sunday worship to the Sabbath day.

The following year, during the IA's second missionary trip to Kenya, the first baptism was performed.

Literary ministry is holy work that we can all take part in. We do not need to be excellent writers—any testimony or biblical reflection that we write down and share has the potential to touch others and bring them closer to Christ.

Today, there are about three thousand members in Kenya.

Liberia

In 1981, four preachers from the True Jesus Church were on a missionary trip in Nigeria when the local police came to harass and rob them. So their trip ended abruptly, and they had to return home. Their return flight required an overnight stop in Monrovia, Liberia.

Since they had brought a box of gospel flyers and booklets with them, they decided to distribute these materials in the surrounding area. A few of these pamphlets were later delivered to a local church minister. After he read the contents, he was convinced of the truth of salvation. He forwarded these pamphlets to one of his relatives, a leader of four local churches. When his relative read the pamphlets, he was deeply touched and immediately accepted what was written in them.

One night, he dreamed of a great mountain with glorious light covering the mountaintop. In the dream, he saw himself leading an entire congregation up that mountain. When he awoke, he understood that the True Jesus Church was the true church established by God. He contacted the IA and renamed his church the True Jesus Church.

In 1985, the IA sent workers to preach to and baptize the Liberians. During one of the trips, our missionaries met a businessman who laid aside his business and followed them. After studying the truth for three days, he decided to get baptized. He then preached to other Liberians, leading them to the truth. He also brought the gospel to Ghana.

For the past twenty years, Liberia has been troubled by civil wars. Political instability has caused chaos and poverty in the country. Our missionary work there has been hindered because of domestic troubles, and many church members have fled to nearby countries. Today, there are slightly over one hundred members in Liberia.



THERE'S WORK FOR YOU AND ME

In addition to the above examples, there are numerous cases in which people have come to believe in Christ through simple gospel pamphlets that they were given. This shows the importance of literary ministry in the work of evangelism.

When a sermon is delivered in the chapel, it can edify hundreds or even thousands. But when it is written down and published, the message is no longer limited by time or space. The Bible's message can reach anyone who has the heart to read it, regardless of where they are or when they read it.

Paul, for example, preached the gospel of salvation through his epistles even when he was in prison. In the same way, we do not always need to leave our homes or travel long distances to impart a message. Living in the Internet age, the written word of God can be spread far and wide with a tap on a computer keyboard.

Literary ministry is holy work that we can all take part in. We do not need to be excellent writers—any testimony or biblical reflection that we write down and share has the potential to touch someone and bring them closer to Christ.

The International Assembly's Department of Literary Ministry is looking for testimonies, devotionals, and Bible study articles for Manna magazine and for its website. We also need multilingual brothers and sisters to help translate published Chinese and English books into various languages. If you would like to help or receive more information, please contact ia@tjc.org or manna@tjc.org. ★

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Five Loaves and Two Fish

Resilience – Renewal like An Eagle

Mar 05, 2012 — by gale



"What's wrong with me?" I asked myself. My heart sank as I saw the requests and problems coming into the email inbox when I was on call. After four years of being on the same post, I knew that I could handle most of them with no sweat. Why was I bothered and somewhat reluctant to handle these on call duties? Perhaps I was tired of the high demands of 12 X 7 on call responsibilities. Or was I losing my fighting spirit of gaining job skills? Or was the job too stressful for my age? In my prayer, I thought to myself how I should ask God to help me. The favorite Bible verse of my late father came into my mind. Continue reading +

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He Looked Beyond My Fault

Mar 22nd, 2012 — by gale



"As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him." (Ps 103:13)

Heartyhearted, I knelt down and prayed as soon as I came home from a most humiliating 30-minute interview. Had my heavenly Father already seen my deep sorrow and regret incurred from this unfitting and failed interview on the train ride home? I was immediately comforted by the Holy Spirit that He looked beyond my fault and saw my needs. The door of opportunity was soon opened for me and I found a job thereafter. Truly the Lord took pity on me as a father pities his children.

We may have many iniquities, but the Lord is ready to forgive all. What we need to present to God is "a contrite heart" (Ps 51:17). A contrite heart means being broken down with grief and repentance, deep sorrow for sins, and being humbly and thoroughly penitent. In our spiritual battles, we can be caught up in the lust of the flesh. We may fail to be watchful and stumble, yet God is gracious and full of mercy. He understands our weakness and will not harbor anger against us forever. A broken and contrite heart – these our God will never despise.

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Want Free in the House of the Lord

Mar 08, 2012 — by gale



"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." (Ps 23:6)

Life is wonderful when we focus on God, and find peace, joy, and contentment in the house of the Lord. When we value our relationship with our God Shepherd, Lord Jesus, more than anything else, we can attain a life want free. Lord Jesus once said, "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it." (Jn 14:14) And again in John 15:7, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you." This is the promise that Lord Jesus gives to His friends those who

About

A place where we can nourish our souls and offer the little that we have. May God feed all who pass this way.

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FIVE LOAVES AND TWO FISH

is the True Jesus Church weblog where you can share God-given inspirations and reflections with others for mutual edification and God's glory.

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Don't hesitate to offer your loaves and fish to the Lord today.

Visit <http://blog.tjc.org> and start reading and contributing!



What Can I Do?

En Chia Hsieh—Singapore

There is a children's hymn, entitled "We All Can Do Something for Jesus". The hymn reminds us that everyone can serve the Lord, even if it is just through a word of kindness, a simple hymn or a cup of cold water.

WHY SERVE FROM YOUNG?

In addition, the hymn tells us that serving the Lord requires training, which needs to start early. From Israel's history, we can see that the earlier the next generation was trained, the better their quality as servants.

Serving the Lord is to bear the yoke for Him. Although we may not be able to bear a heavy yoke at a young age, we must be willing to be as a soft lump of clay, ready to be molded by the potter.

Every wise farmer knows that an ox needs to bear the yoke from young, while he is still flexible and able to learn. In this way, he will work hard, learn to bear hardship, and will eventually be of optimal help to the farmer. On the contrary, an old ox is stubborn in his ways and difficult to teach, less efficient, and may even end up as a burden to the farmer.

When a farmer trains a young ox, he usually puts him together with an experienced ox, so that the younger may observe and learn from the older one. Under the influence of the older

ox, the young animal will gradually learn the skill to serve and develop a spirit of longsuffering.

The same pattern is evident throughout the Bible: When Moses talked to God in the tent of meeting, Joshua would be there, listening too. Elisha served Elijah before he was handed the baton. Paul chose Timothy at Lystra to accompany him on his missionary journey. Observing and learning from others will help us realize our strengths. For this reason, we should take up the opportunity to accompany experienced workers and participate in various church works, learning on the job.

HOW CAN WE GET INVOLVED?

Today, holy work is much more diversified compared to the time of the early church. The purpose, however, is the same: to cater for the believers' needs and to create a better worship environment. Today, we can serve God in many different areas of church work. The following are starting points, from which we can delve into further fields of service.

1. Evangelism:

Youths are one of the groups most receptive to the gospel. So, as youths we are the most suitable candidates to preach to our peers. Youths are also often perceived as the engine of the church. If

we do not have the enthusiasm to preach, who else can the church count on for such zeal? We may feel that we lack the ability to evangelize, but we can all share personal testimonies, how our families came to believe and our experiences of the Holy Spirit. Even merely inviting our friends to "come and see" can lead people to the Lord. Most importantly, through our actions, we can touch those around us who are yet to believe.

2. Bible studies and sharing:

Moreover the church often lacks members who are willing and able to care for truth-seekers and to lead truth-seeker Bible study classes. Only those who truly love the word of God and have the heart to "rightly divide the word of truth" (2 Tim 15) are competent enough to take on this task. Willing youths can shadow their elders who are experienced in this field to answer queries and expound the truth regarding Christianity, as well as the True Jesus Church articles of faith.

3. Work in pioneering areas:

Today there are many pioneering areas that require pastoral care. Those who work in this field need to contact members, sermonize, lead Bible studies, and visit local members and truth seekers, including those in developing countries. Visiting such places can broaden our



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horizons and help us develop a better understanding of service to God. Quite often, members who visit brethren in less-developed countries will gain a wider perspective and realize how insignificant their own problems are in comparison. Moreover, while these brethren's lives are not materially abundant, they may be more joyful.

4. Care for the elderly:

Due to the aging of society, there are more and more elderly members in church who need our care and concern. As physically able youths, we should extend a helping hand to those who use walking sticks or are bound by wheelchairs, and talk to them during free time on the Sabbath day. When the church arranges visits to the homes of those with long-term illnesses, the presence of youths can add vitality and joy. At the same time, youths can learn from the wisdom and experience of the elderly.

WHOM DO WE SERVE?

Youths must also understand whom we serve, so as not to strive to please men more than God. We do not serve to receive men's praise. King Saul was more concerned about the voice of the Israelites than about God's voice; he was more afraid to lose the support of the people than the abidance of God. Thus, Saul went beyond his authority to offer sacrifices, losing the abidance of God and, eventually, the heart of his people.

We must therefore examine our attitudes: are we afraid to hinder the divine work or are we afraid to lose face? In other words, is our service to God motivated by the desire to glorify God or

ourselves? The skills for serving God can be cultivated—we need not worry. More importantly, we must adopt the correct mindset as we serve the Lord. Service that pleases God is not to do what others do or are pleased with, but to understand the needs of the church and to do our best without shrinking back when others criticize us.

“I'M NOT GOOD ENOUGH”

Sometimes we may feel we are not qualified to serve God because we think that we are not charismatic, eloquent or educated. Yet we need to remember that God looks at our hearts, not our abilities.

Mary of Bethany might not have been able to do what the disciples did, but she gave what she had: she freely broke that expensive alabaster flask of fragrant oil to anoint Jesus, while everyone around her was staring at her. These people did not understand why she had done so, and even rebuked her for her action. Yet Jesus praised her because she understood the Savior's heart. Other such examples from the Bible include Abigail who

counseled David and prevented him from doing harm to others in his anger, the Canaanite servant girl who advised Naaman to seek help from the Israelite prophet, and Dorcas who cared for those whom nobody wanted to care for.

All these people made use of the opportunity to do something for the Lord while they were able. For this reason, God remembered and blessed them.

So, let us “remember now [our] Creator in the days of [our] youth, [b]efore the difficult days come” (Eccl 12:1), and seize each opportunity to serve God. Let us serve Him to the best of our ability, no matter how great or small our task may be—for we all can do something for Jesus. ★

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Rejoicing in Our Labor

Based on a sermon by Steve Hwang—USA



In times of economic uncertainty, many people experience hardship in their jobs. Some may lose their jobs; others may have increased work pressure. These situations often create much stress in us; as a result, we may complain or worry unceasingly about our job. In light of this, how can we find joy in our work?

As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor--this [is] the gift of God.

(Eccl 5:19)

Among the many blessings of God for man, one is for us to rejoice in our labor. From the verse in Ecclesiastes, we can learn three points.

PURSUE LOVE INSTEAD OF WORK

In the world, people pursue jobs, and this is natural. We seek after different types of jobs according to our interest or skills. Having a job is an important means for us to survive in the world. But even more important for us Christians is to pursue love. In fact, Paul encourages us to do so:

"Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy." (1 Cor 14:1)

Where there is love, there is joy. This statement holds true even when one may not be living a life of luxury. The Bible gives us this exhortation to remind us that a life with love brings about joy and is infinitely better than a life filled with negativity:

"Better is a dinner of herbs (vegetables) where love is, than a fattened calf with hatred." (Prov 15:17)

Pursuing love in our work is something that comes through learning. We may need to put in effort and discipline to love the people we encounter at our workplace, but it is something that we definitely have the ability to do.

Consider Jesus' teaching on the greatest commandment, where He taught us that we ought to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. If we relate this to our work, we are exhorted to serve our earthly masters, as if we were serving the Lord. So when we have this mindset, we understand that our role in our earthly job is to serve our employers to the best of our abilities. For as long as we are working, we work as though it is unto the Lord. When we do so, we will receive blessings from the Lord (cf. Eph 6:7-8).

In a practical sense, this means that in whatever job we do, we can do so with love and bring some form of

encouragement to others. If you are a bank teller, serve your customers with a smile. If you work in an office, treat your colleagues sincerely. When we learn to do so, we bring some beauty into the world. Furthermore, we will find meaning in our work because we are doing it unto Christ.

When we learn to pursue love in our work, we also actively avoid murmuring. Our mindset changes as we seek to create joy and beauty in our work environment. As we do so, we allow the love of God to shine through in our work place and we bring about hope to those around us. In this way, we gradually discover that we will no longer pursue riches nor will we care only about the pay cheque at the end of every month. These things fall off our priority list when we pursue love in our work.

SETTING OUR PRIORITIES RIGHT

When we show love at our workplace, we also love God. Admittedly, it is not always easy to do so. Sometimes, this requires us not only to change our mindset, but also to make certain rearrangements in our lives. From Isaac's example, we can learn how to set our priorities right.

After Isaac's servants had successfully dug three wells in Gerar despite external problems, he went to Beersheba and "built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord, and he pitched his tent



Whatever job we do, we can do so with love and bring some form of encouragement to others. If you are a bank teller, serve your customers with a smile. If you work in an office, treat your colleagues sincerely.

there; and there Isaac's servants dug a well" (Gen 26:25).

As Isaac moved on to Beersheba, we see three actions. The digging of the well is akin to his career, and the pitching of the tent is akin to his family life. But above all, the building of the altar symbolizes his pursuit of a life of faith. And in the pattern of things, he chose his faith first. Consequently the Lord blessed him in his work (cf. Gen 26:26–33).

The lesson here is very clear: we need to first and foremost have a life of worshipping the Lord. Isaac's example also teaches us that once we put God first in our lives, it becomes easy for us to pursue love and find joy in our work—for God is the source of love and joy. We can then spread the fragrance of Christ in our own work even in the face of challenges.

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ENTER THE GARDEN OF EDEN

When God allowed the first man, Adam, to tend to the garden of Eden, that was a form of exercise (cf. Gen 2:15). His work enabled Adam to exercise both his mind and his body. Since all things were good in the eyes of God then, this was truly a grace for man. In fact, Adam and Eve led a simple life and found rest in God's garden.

However, when sin entered the world, man was driven out from the garden and had to toil for his daily bread. This caused a change in the way man perceives work in the world. Admittedly, most jobs today exert certain pressures on us, which can be stressful.

Despite our busy work schedules, we need to enter into the spiritual garden of Eden today. Only then will we have true

peace and joy in the Lord. Yet how do we enter this spiritual garden?

"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." (Mt 6:33)

We enter into the garden of Eden when we choose a life that places God as our top priority. As we seek first the kingdom of God, He gives us the assurance that all these things – be they food, clothing, or necessities – will be given to us.

Most people reverse the order of things and toil and labor for the sake of material needs. They live a life "under the sun", which is the norm for the people of the world. But as the chosen ones of God, we are called to lead our lives above the sun. We can do so by placing God first in our lives, knowing that our daily work is but a means to our temporary survival on earth.

Today, just as we have entered into Christ, so too must our hearts enter into the spiritual garden of Eden to find rest and blessings. It is inevitable that we face pressure and worries as we work. Nonetheless, let us take comfort in knowing that God will surely not allow His people to starve or face lack of daily necessities (cf. Prov 23:5). As far as testimonies in the church go, God shows His love to our fellow brethren. Seldom do we hear of brethren who love God but suffer from need. Let us have faith in Him and put God first in our lives. When we trust in His word, we will receive this blessing from Him.

RELY ON GOD, NOT ON WORK

Realistically, our source of income is our work and it is unsurprising that many of us regard our work as very important. We

live in the world and we have real world issues to handle. Mortgages, loans, and other monthly premiums are necessary overheads and financial realities for us. It is therefore natural that we rely heavily on our work to pay these bills.

Concurrently, another reality is that our work will not always stay with us regardless of how much importance we place on it. In times of economic uncertainty, there is always the risk of losing our jobs. As much as no one likes the thought of it, troubled times can occur to anyone. Even in the Bible, the people of God had to experience seven years of famine after the initial seven years of plenty. This is the very reason why we need to rely on God; only He does not change.

God certainly will not allow His chosen ones to go hungry, and Abraham's life is a testament to this fact. Despite his times of weaknesses and spiritual lows, the father of faith pursued God throughout his life. While living in Egypt, Pharaoh unexpectedly gave him much livestock to enable him to return to Canaan a rich man. When his possessions grew to the point that he could no longer live in the same place as Lot, he allowed Lot to choose first where to settle. Although Abraham ended up dwelling in the poorer land, God still blessed him and he remained bountiful.

In contrast, Jacob was a man who spent much of his youth grasping for things. Yet after serving Laban many years, he ended up with nothing. Only after God inspired him to crossbreed the goats did he gain possessions for himself.

From such examples, we learn that God's blessing is the most important. If God desires to give us wealth, He will do so. And if He decides not to, He has the prerogative as well. Nonetheless, He will still grant us contentment and happiness, if we truly rely on Him.

Finally, the question arises again: How do we find joy in our work? King Solomon's wisdom sounds out to us again:

Most people reverse the order of things and toil and labor for the sake of material needs. They live a life "under the sun". But as the chosen ones of God, we are called to lead our lives above the sun. We can do so by placing God first in our lives, knowing that our daily work is but a means to our temporary survival on earth.



Another reality is that our work will not always stay with us regardless of how much importance we place on it. This is the very reason why we need to rely on God; only He does not change.

blesses us with the ability to work and to sustain our livelihood. No matter what type of job we have, we ought to rejoice in this blessing from God.

As we go about our daily work, let us always remember that we should rely on God wholeheartedly, for He alone truly has the power to sustain us, bless us, and cause us to rejoice. Amen! ★

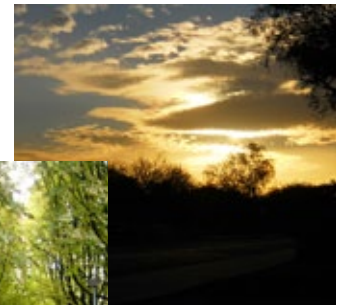
*“As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor--this [is] the gift of God.”
(Eccl 5:19)*

We find joy by pursuing love, by entering the spiritual garden of Eden, and by relying on God above all. Our work is but a means for us to lead our lives on earth, and ultimately our possessions and wealth are blessings from God. According to our individual portions in life, God

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Photo themes: nature & scenery, images from the Bible (e.g. salt, light, sheep, servant, etc.)



Seasoned with Salt

ANON—West Malaysia

More than twenty years ago there was a TV advertisement in Malaysia (in Cantonese Chinese) for a national car model that was about to be launched. The setting was an old Chinese coffee shop where three men sipped their coffee and ate breakfast—an ordinary day-to-day scene in Malaysia. The two younger men were discussing the launch of this new car and the question arose as to whether purchasing the car would be a good decision, especially since this was a new made-in-Malaysia brand, which had yet to establish itself. The younger men were indecisive and unenthusiastic as they were not sure about the quality of the car.

The older man, having finished his coffee and having listened intently to the conversation of the younger men said in Cantonese, "...in my lifetime, the salt I have tasted is more than the rice you have eaten". He then continued to advise the younger men. Since this is a car advertisement, no prizes for guessing that the older man recommended purchasing the car, saying it was good value for money.

HONOR THE PRESENCE OF AN OLD MAN?

The statement comparing salt with rice, a famous Chinese idiom, points to the experiences and wisdom of the "grey-

haired" amongst us—those who have walked the path of life and journey of faith before us. This idiom reminds us to take counsel from our elders and seniors, who are much more experienced and thus much wiser. Moreover, the Bible also exhorts us to "rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man" (Lev 19:32). Unfortunately, even in the context of the church, this standard of respect has changed and morphed into something unrecognizable as successive generations pass.

In the time of my parents, honor and respect meant complete subservience and deference. The voice of the elders mattered the most and children were meant to be seen but seldom heard.

When it came to my time (those between thirty and fifty, who are themselves parents now), this standard of respect towards parents and seniors began to change; with the changing times came the "new age" of "children's rights", i.e., children were meant to be seen and they were finding their voices. They were allowed a degree of flexibility to state and make their case before parents, going as far as making certain decisions for themselves (within a limited spectrum). With the dawn of this new age came the concept of "personal space", where children had a small private realm to call their own.

Even though we may have had some room to "wriggle" and personal space, we still would not run far from having our parents or elders infuse a liberal dosing of "salt" and wisdom into our lives, where they were able to share their thoughts, experiences and "advice", urging us to head towards a particular direction. This "salt factor" was very much a part of our lives, coupled with ample communication (many times one-way traffic from the perspective of parents and elders). Such "seasoning" added color, perspective, and much needed wisdom and direction into our lives. The salt that was on offer broadened our spectrum of thought as well as depth, even if most communication ended up as a parental monologue.

What about the "children" of today? Those on the cusp of adulthood, yet still adolescent in terms of their thinking (thirteen going on thirty)? Things have continued to change and have become a lot more complicated. The world is colder and relationships harder as well as more strained. Time, which was well spent in my generation on being seasoned with salt, just evaporates in the world of the Internet, the Blackberry, the iPods, the Play Stations, Facebook and social networking and the all too familiar, "leave me alone".

How many of us younger ones have experienced the benefit of open sharing

with our parents or our more experienced elders? Do we only focus on ourselves, think highly of our own abilities and experiences (limited though they may be)? Do we discard our older generations' wisdom and encouragement, dismissing them as the rumblings of the old and foolish? When our parents advise or correct us, do we "switch off" because we think they don't understand the needs and challenges of the 21st century? Do we even claim that they do not love us and throw our tantrums? Do we purposely or perhaps unwittingly relegate our parents and elders to the status of maid, nanny, cook or even nothing but a personal bank?

Be honest, how many of us find time to engage in open sharing and discussion with our parents or elders? If we do, is it on a regular basis? Put this into perspective and then reflect on how much time we spend on other less constructive or useless deeds...

LOVE AND HUMILITY IS KEY

As young people, we seek to be loved and respected. So do our parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles as well as senior members at church. Why then, don't we try to love and respect them in the same way we hope our offspring will do to us? The first step we can take is to submit to them in love and clothe ourselves in humility as the apostle Peter exhorts us to do (1 Pet 5:5). If we listen to them while they are still with us and share our lives openly with them, there's every chance that we will naturally grow closer to them at heart.

Think about our parents' and elders' love and sacrifice for us. Because of them, we have the opportunity to lead the life that we now have. Let us not be wise in our own eyes; but instead seek wisdom and guidance from our Lord and from our parents, elders and seniors who have walked the path before us and tasted much more of the salt of life than we have. Seek counsel from our elders—their

thoughts and wisdom will certainly enrich us and save us many painful lessons.

I often recall a very wise saying of an old lady who has since been called to the Lord, whose wit and mind was sharp till her departure from this earth... "Remember to walk upright, do good in life and to others, and don't be disheartened by what others would say to you or about you."

Let our lives in the Lord be seasoned with salt for it will enrich our lives ever more. ★

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Christian Living

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

Bible Study

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

Doctrinal Study

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

Exhortation

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

Testimony

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

Creative Writing

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

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

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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 #69:

Topic: One True Church

Articles due: August 15, 2012

In a world that promotes tolerance, the concept of One True Church seems to be outdated. Moreover, claiming to be the only true church seems to go against the very essence of Christianity: love.

How do we, as members of the True Jesus Church today, respond to those who question the church? How do we pull back those who have lost faith in the true church? What do the Scriptures tell us about the One True Church, and why does God provide only one channel to salvation? Are we clear about God's stance on this issue? Do we really understand it?

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

GENERAL WRITING GUIDELINES

CONTENT

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

GRAMMAR/STYLE

- Use active instead of passive voice.
- Write concisely.
- Use concrete words and ideas instead of abstract concepts.
- Use "plain old English" instead of obscure, academic language.
- Use the NKJV version when quoting Bible verses.
- Use American spelling, if possible.
- Adhere to the IA Style Guide in its latest edition.

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

Holy 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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