

MANNA

ISSUE 77

Integrating Faith with Life



**On Time and Prayer • Safeguarding the Sheep
• Applying Our Faith in the Workplace**

“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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Integrating Faith with Life

Editorial

by Shawn Chou

If someone asked us whether we professed any religion, we may instinctively reply, “I believe in God” or “I’m a Christian.” At such a reply, how often does the questioner demonstrate a desire to find out more about our faith?

A True Jesus Church member was once asked by her colleagues, “How are you always able to remain so joyful and caring toward others despite your busy workload?” Her selflessness and diligence at the workplace had clearly impressed her colleagues and soon led to a conversation about how her faith enabled her to be so exemplary.

Jesus gave us this principle to live by, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven” (Mt 5:16). In order to shine for Jesus, we must integrate our faith into our lives, rather than separate the two. Faith is not something we practice only once a week. In this issue, our writers look at how our faith must be infused into every part and every moment of our lives.

The term “faith” sometimes feels too abstract to grasp, let alone manifest in our lives. But if we think about it, faith consists of three crucial elements: biblical knowledge, belief, and practical application of God’s will.

First, biblical knowledge forms the foundation of our faith—it allows us to know God and His will. Without a solid foundation, we will easily deviate from the truth and always remain a spiritual infant. We live in a world where the lines between right and wrong are increasingly blurred. Satan relentlessly tries to tempt us to cross the boundary between holiness and sin. To overcome these, we must be well-grounded and steadfast in God’s word. We must find time to read the Bible, listen to sermons, and study the Bible with others to better know God and His teachings.

However, if our faith only consists of biblical knowledge, we are like the scribes and Pharisees. We know the minutest statute and regulation but understand little of the intent behind God’s commands. We spend much time studying the Bible, but do not truly believe God’s word or use it to improve ourselves. The second critical element is thus belief in God’s truth. The author of the book of Hebrews warns us, “For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it” (Heb 4:2).

Finally, we must translate our Bible knowledge and belief into a walk worthy of our calling. We must apply God’s word to our daily life and live for the Lord; not just once a week in church, but at all times and wherever we are. For example, two writers share on how we can apply our faith in our workplaces and at home.

“Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock; and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.” (Mt 7:24–25)

This is often the hardest part of all; we need personal resolve and reliance on God’s Spirit to carry out God’s commands. Hence, prayer must be another pillar of our daily routines—we need to ask God to help us put our faith into action. If we can make our faith an integral part of our lives, we will see God working in our lives. Moreover, the more we trust and experience Him, the more we develop a solid foundation, able to withstand any circumstance.

In short, knowledge, belief, and action are the three core elements of faith that must coexist and reinforce each other. First, we learn about God, next we believe in Him, and ultimately, we become doers of His word. Then, the more we apply His word, the closer we draw to Him and understand Him. And the more we understand Him, the stronger our belief and trust in Him. When all these work together, our lives will be a song of faith that will touch those around us.

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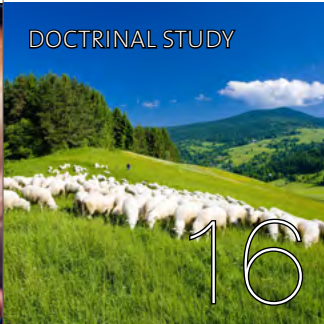
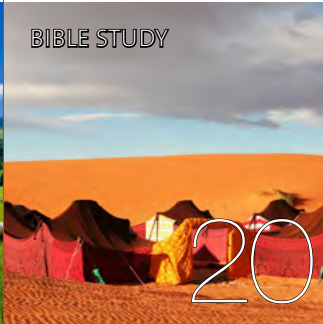



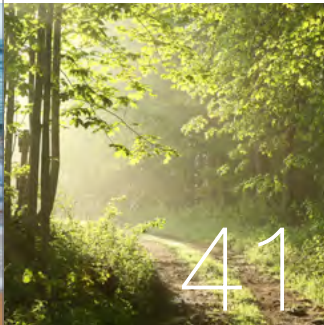

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Integrating Faith with Life



Openly Faithful

Caleb Lee—Singapore

The story of Daniel is familiar to many of us who have heard it from young. But as we grow older, we begin to appreciate this story in the light of our experiences, and our respect for Daniel grows. We see that he was openly faithful and upheld his Jewish faith, despite being in a Gentile land. This can be seen in Daniel 6:1–4:

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, to be over the whole kingdom; and over these, three governors, of whom Daniel was one, that the satraps might give account to them, so that the king would suffer no loss. Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm. So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him.

Daniel was one of three governors who oversaw 120 satraps, and was eventually promoted above his fellow governors. He became the second most powerful person in the kingdom, answerable only to the king. But despite this privileged position, Daniel did not hide his Jewish identity. In fact, it was because of his faithfulness to God that King Darius willingly placed Daniel to take charge of the entire kingdom.

From the start of his exile in Babylon, Daniel was open about his faith. When he was first brought to the court of Nebuchadnezzar, he told the chief of the eunuchs that he was a Jew and hence would not defile himself with the king's food (Dan 1:8). Later, when he was summoned to interpret the king's dream, Daniel gave all glory and honor to God (Dan 2). And when he was called before the last Babylonian king, Belshazzar, Daniel again declared the sovereignty of the Most High God (Dan 5:18). The Persian king, Darius, understood Daniel's faith in God. When Daniel was cast into the lion's den, Darius encouraged him with the words: "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you" (Dan 6:16). Time and again, Daniel declared his faith in the one true God to everyone around him.

As children of God—living, working or studying in society—the question for us today is: Are we as open about our faith as Daniel was?

WHAT IS AN OPEN FAITH?

A Faith that Matches Actions

There can be many reasons why we are not so bold in declaring our faith. It could be our conduct that is holding us back. We realize that our behavior is not becoming of a Christian, and if we reveal our identity, we will bring God's name into disrepute.

In life, there will always be unpleasant people around. They may avoid hard work or responsibility. They may gossip, or only offer negative or snide remarks. Or they may be selfish

and self-serving, caring only for their own success. At work or at school, we hope to avoid these types of people. But have we considered whether we fall under such categories? What kind of reputation do we have amongst our colleagues or fellow students?

Daniel was in a foreign land serving Gentile rulers, and this was not by choice. But it was clear to all that he had an excellent spirit in him (Dan 1:3). Daniel did not let his behavior contradict his identity. If we are to be openly faithful, we must also align our actions with our identity as Christians.

A Faith that Does Not Change with Circumstance

No matter how his circumstances changed, Daniel remained true to God. Daniel served under different kings, during a period where power passed from one empire to the next, and yet his conduct was exemplary throughout. His reputation for having an excellent spirit followed him.

If we stay at a workplace long enough, we will see how a change in management can affect the staff. Employees may use underhand tactics and compromise their values to try to curry favor with the incoming boss and to secure their position under the new regime. As Christians, would we do the same?

Nebuchadnezzar was a proud king, while Belshazzar was foolish. Darius, on the other hand, greatly favored Daniel from the start. But under these three kings, Daniel did not alter his behavior in order to garner favor; he remained openly faithful to God. And it goes without saying that his faithfulness continued under the reign of the final king he served, Cyrus the Persian (Dan 6:28).

A Faith that Has Integrity

Daniel held a powerful position as governor, reporting directly to the king. We know how power can corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Yet, this did not happen to Daniel. Those in positions of authority must make tough decisions, sometimes having to choose an outcome that is for the greater good. This delicate balancing act can



easily lead to corruption, where the powerful elite take advantage of their privilege and reap the benefits, while the majority suffer.

Though Daniel wielded great power, he remained faithful to God and to his office, and no fault could be found in him (Dan 6:1–5). Neither did he take advantage of his privileged position when others plotted against him and he faced the threat of execution for practicing his religion (Dan 6:1–16). It would have been easier, and more politically savvy, for Daniel to hide his faith and act as one of the Gentiles, but he did not do so. Today, we may not face such direct life-threatening pressure to conform to society. Yet do we have the integrity to declare our faith openly, and manifest the actions of a Christian?

A Faith that Is Resilient Against Attack

Another reason why we find it difficult to be open about our faith is that we fear it will be used against us. This also happened to Daniel:

So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him. Then these men said, "We shall not find any charge against this Daniel unless we find it against

him concerning the law of his God." (Dan 6:4–5)

Daniel was upright in all he did, so his enemies had no choice but to use his religion against him. These governors and satraps convinced the king to sign a decree that, for a period of thirty days, anyone who petitioned a god or man, apart from the king, would be cast into the lion's den (Dan 6:6–9). How did Daniel respond to such an underhand attack?

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days. Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God. (Dan 6:10–11)

Daniel's strategy against attack was, counter-intuitively, to be defiantly open in his worship of God, praying to Him for strength.

We may never face such a dilemma, but how would we react if we did? Perhaps we would decide to worship God in our heart and in spirit, and just pray silently. Perhaps we would justify our actions, saying that God will understand; after all, our lives would be at risk if we continue to openly worship Him. Moreover, is this not what Jesus meant when He said that we should be as wise as serpents? Was it wise for Daniel to disobey the king's decree, being fully aware of the consequences? Why, then, did Daniel do as he did?

Daniel probably realized that, no matter what he did to protect himself, his enemies would not stop until they

”As children of God—living, working or studying in society—the question for us today is: Are we as open about our faith as Daniel was?”



had entrapped him. This decree was targeted at him alone; what was to stop them from devising yet more treacherous plots? They could arrange for another decree, declaring that the nation could only eat pork—which was forbidden by Mosaic Law—for thirty days. To avoid this cat-and-mouse chase, Daniel openly faced the challenge and trusted in God. He continued practicing his faith for all to see, in spite of the consequences.

A Faith that Leads Others to Know God

It may be that having a faith puts us at a disadvantage, or that we face prejudice and intimidation because of it. But from Daniel's example, we see that it is better to openly declare our faith. While some will use our faith as a reason to attack us, others will see our righteousness and may be led to know God.

King Darius, who had carelessly signed the decree, was distraught when he realized that Daniel would be punished. He was "greatly displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him" (Dan 6:14b). When he was informed that it was not possible to retract the decree, he tried to comfort Daniel: "Your God, whom you serve continually, He will deliver you" (Dan 6:16b). While Daniel was in the lion's den, Darius could not sleep; he spent the night fasting. So worried was he that early next morning, he hurried to the den, to see if Daniel had been spared (Dan 6:18–20).

It is clear that Daniel's religious openness had made an impact on the king; Darius twice declared the power and mercy of the living God (Dan 6:16, 20). Though he did not have complete faith in these declarations, he could clearly witness God's power

in Daniel's deliverance.

Today, if we do not declare our faith in God, then others will not have the opportunity to see the power of God. Surely, such a positive outcome outweighs any disadvantage we may face when we are honest about our faith.

For Daniel, the positive effects did not end there. God's name was glorified amongst all the Gentiles.

Then King Darius wrote:

“Today, if we do not declare our faith in God, then others will not have the opportunity to see the power of God.”

To all peoples, nations, and languages that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you.

I make a decree that in every dominion of my kingdom men must tremble and fear before the God of Daniel.

For He is the living God, And steadfast forever; His kingdom is the one which shall not be destroyed, And His dominion shall endure to the end.

He delivers and rescues, And He works signs and wonders In heaven and on earth, Who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

(Dan 6:25–27)

By this proclamation, citizens throughout the Empire of Persia and Medes came to know the living God. This was a result of Daniel's open faith and worship of the Lord.

CONCLUSION

Let us return to the question: Are we as open about our faith in God as Daniel was? In the New Testament, Jesus said:

“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Mt 5:14–16)

As Christians in the world, we cannot hide our identity. We are the light of this world and, just as no one would put a lamp under a basket, we must not hide our light. The light that we should shine before men is our good works and our Christian conduct, so that men may see and glorify our Father in heaven. This is what Daniel did.

As we mature and experience the realities of living as a Christian, we can appreciate what Daniel went through, and the integrity with which he practiced his faith. Can we continue to carry out God's will and openly manifest our faith no matter how our circumstances change? Do we have the strength to remain openly faithful when it does not appear to benefit us, or when much is at stake? Daniel did so, and was delivered by God. God's deliverance may not come in the way we hope, or even in this lifetime. But let us maintain an open and obedient faith in God, knowing that His salvation goes beyond this physical life. ★



Jachin—Singapore

*Evening and morning and at noon
I will pray, and cry aloud,
And He shall hear my voice.
(Ps 55:17)*

In this psalm, David wrote that he will pray three times a day: in the evening, in the morning, and at noon. With these words, he expressed his commitment to this daily prayer schedule by which he could pour out his heart, confident that God would hear him. As Christians today, do we have the same commitment to prayer that David had?

Many of us feel that we do not have enough time in our busy lives to pray. We will say a quick prayer in the morning, believing that we have done our Christian duty, all the while thinking about the many tasks on our to-do list for that day. There is always too much to do, and too little time to do it. So when we do find the time to pray, it is often a short, hurried one.

Yet, we know from our own experience that when we do not devote time to speak to God in prayer, our life feels empty. Our day may be fully packed with activities, but when we retire to bed we do not feel satisfied. In fact, prayer is a source of

joy and strength, especially when we are at our busiest. Those who have attended students' theological training courses will know how arduous and packed the course schedules can be. Some students can hardly open their eyes in the morning. And yet, because prayers are significantly longer, the students are spiritually satisfied and rejuvenated at the end of the course. After three weeks of regular daily prayers, from early morning to bedtime, the students feel as though they have touched God.

Even though many of us have experienced the blessings of devoting time to pray, the most common excuse for not praying remains: "I simply don't have time." Why is this so? Is prayer not one aspect of our faith that we need to seamlessly integrate into our lives? Let us look at two examples in the Bible to find the answers.

DANIEL

Balancing Prayer and Work Life

At the end of Daniel chapter 5, we read how Darius overthrew the Babylonian king Belshazzar and ushered in the era of the Medo-Persian Empire. This regime change

resulted in a complete transformation of Daniel's working environment (Dan 6:1–5). Despite this, Daniel's output remained consistent:

*Then this Daniel distinguished himself above the governors and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king gave thought to setting him over the whole realm. So the governors and satraps sought to find some charge against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find no charge or fault, because he was faithful; nor was there any error or fault found in him.
(Dan 6:3–4)*

Daniel worked just as faithfully as he had under his old masters, and excelled in his duties. Even though his enemies scrutinized his actions, they could find no fault—his work was impeccable.

It is well known that Daniel prayed three times a day (Dan 6:10). From the time he entered the Babylonian court, throughout his days as chief administrator over the wise men in Babylon, and continuing after he was appointed as one of the three

governors of Persia and Medes, he kept the same routine—he gave thanks to God three times a day. The question is: How did Daniel find the time to pray whilst maintaining such a high standard in his work?

Some may argue that since Daniel had an excellent spirit (Dan 6:3), he could discharge his duties perfectly without expending much time or effort. After all, God was with him and had blessed him with knowledge and understanding, even more so than his three friends. If we take this to its logical conclusion, then it is no surprise that Daniel was able to fulfill his responsibilities and pray three times a day. Unlike Daniel, no matter how much we try to produce impeccable work, there will always be room for improvement, which requires time and energy. Since we do not have Daniel's extraordinary gifts, how can we hope to excel in our work if we must also find time to pray?

In fact, this reasoning is flawed. First, Daniel could not have produced impeccable work based on talent alone. He would have spent time and effort to learn how best to do things and to iron out errors. Daniel was human after all; even Jesus had to spend time in the temple to learn and ask questions.

Second, although Daniel was gifted with knowledge and wisdom, this corresponded with the work he had to do. God had placed him as governor over the kingdom, and so blessed him with the gifts he would need for this position. For us, we may not be a government official, but God will bless us with the gifts we need to fulfill our duties.

Third, and most important, we believe that whether we can pray, and for how long, is dictated by how much time we have. If we have time, then we will pray; if we have no time, then we will not pray. But for Daniel, it was the opposite: his prayer routines took precedence over his work schedule. Conversely, if we allow our time to be defined by our work and not by our prayers, then we will never have enough time to pray.

Why Are You Busy?

We would do well to heed the words of Jesus to Martha:

And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part." (Lk 10:41–42a)

Like Martha, our problem is that we want to achieve many things in life. Martha wanted to be a good host. You cannot fault her for that, because she was receiving guests to listen to the words of Jesus. Unfortunately, this caused her to become worried and flustered.

In our lives, we want many things as well. We want our work life and family life to be perfect, and we want to have time for leisure. Time for prayer is probably the least important to us.

“If we allow our time to be defined by our work and not by our prayers, then we will never have enough time to pray.”

The thing is that God has given every one of us a fixed amount of time. But we fear sacrificing this time because, to us, time is life. Time devoted to prayer is time we could have used for other activities.

Jesus told Martha, “[Y]ou are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed” (Lk 10:42a). This is an important way to look at our faith—we may worry over many things, but such worries only distract us from more important matters, such as listening to Jesus' teachings.

In Daniel's case, he recognized that the one necessary thing was prayer. It was perhaps easier for him to pray three times a day when he had just arrived in the palace, holding an insignificant position. But to continue this routine when he was appointed chief over all the wise men, and

later, a governor over the kingdom, was indeed commendable. Not only would he have had to manage his own time, he also had to manage the work of many others. This is why the Bible says that Daniel had an excellent spirit.

Even when Daniel's life was on the line for praying to God, he continued to pray constantly three times a day (Dan 6:10). This shows just how committed he was to a life of prayer. In our case, we may never have to choose between preserving our lives and praying to God but we regularly sacrifice prayer time for other, less pressing, reasons. We tell ourselves that we will have time to pray later. But after one task is complete, there will always be other tasks waiting for us. This is why we should look to Daniel and allow prayer to be the priority of our days.

JESUS

Prayer and Divine Work

Hebrews 5:7 notes that when Jesus was in the flesh, He was a prayerful Man. He “offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear.” This verse does not emphasize Jesus' offering of His time, His sleep, or His life upon the cross. Rather, the focus is on His prayers and supplications, and the attitude with which He offered them.

A closer look at the Gospel of Luke reveals that Jesus would not do anything without praying first. He prayed during His baptism, and before He chose His disciples (Lk 3:21; 6:12). He prayed at the transfiguration on the mount and at Gethsemane before His arrest (Lk 9:28; 22:39–46). These were significant moments in His life, but He did not only pray during times such as these.

So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed. (Lk 5:16)

We see that the more divine work Jesus did, the more He prayed, even though He had less time. In Mark 1,

He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath to preach, and there He healed a demon-possessed man. Afterwards, He went to Peter's house and healed Peter's mother-in-law. When the Sabbath drew to a close at sunset, many in the city brought the sick to be healed. If we were to have such a long day of hard work, it would be normal for us to want a good night's sleep and to lie in the next morning. But what about Jesus?

Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed. (Mk 1:35)

Jesus awoke before dawn so that He could pray. The more divine work He did, the more He prayed. However, it is often the opposite for us—the more time we devote to church work, the less time we put into prayer. We feel that action is in the work, not in prayer; we should be active in our work; prayer is passive and cannot get the work done. This is another fundamental misunderstanding of prayer.

Firstly, prayer is an action, and must always be the prelude to any work we do for God. To work before praying means that you are focused on doing the work yourself. To pray before starting the work means you acknowledge that it is God's work, which He will guide to completion.

*"The Lord GOD has given Me
The tongue of the learned,
That I should know how to speak
A word in season to him who is
weary.
He awakens Me morning by
morning,
He awakens My ear
To hear as the learned." (Isa 50:4)*

This is a prophecy about Jesus. It says that God awakens Him morning by morning, and awakens His ear to hear as the learned. When Jesus rose up to pray before daybreak every morning, this is the heart He had—He would awaken His ear to listen to God. This is why He was able to proclaim,

“Jesus’ servitude was one of sacrifice: He had no resting place, and often went without sleep (Lk 9:58); He would go without food in order to preach the gospel (Jn 4:34). But when He had to choose between unfinished work and time in prayer, prayers took precedence over work.

“I always do those things that please Him” (Jn 8:29). By spending time in prayer, communing with God, Jesus was able to carry out God's will. This is why we should always pray before we work for God.

Secondly, although it seems that time spent in prayer is time taken away from our work, the opposite is true—God often adds to our time through prayers. We think that time is wasted in prayer, but it is through prayer God gives us wisdom to be effective in what we do. And through prayer, we are able to prioritize what is important to do in life. We must have the faith that whatever we offer to God, including our time, will surely not return empty.

Thirdly, we often think that work takes precedence over prayer, when in fact, it is prayer that takes precedence over work. Jesus' servitude was one of sacrifice: He had no resting place, and often went without sleep (Lk 9:58); He would go without food in order to preach the gospel (Jn 4:34). But when He had to choose between unfinished work and time in prayer, prayers took precedence over work.

However, the report went around concerning Him all the more; and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities. So He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed. (Lk 5:15–16)

And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray. (Mk 6:46)

These two verses record how the crowds came to hear Him and to be healed by Him. Jesus had much work

to do. But instead of continuing in His work, He withdrew to a solitary place to pray!

Today, we often talk about being constantly connected, making ourselves available at all times. If our friends or colleagues contact us, we are expected to reply immediately. But when Jesus was in the flesh, He was not always available. There were occasions when He would dismiss the multitudes so He could spend time alone in prayer. Let us learn from Jesus, to have the discipline and resolve to temporarily set aside our work and spend time to connect with God in prayer.

CONCLUSION

From the examples of Daniel and Jesus, we learn that we cannot neglect prayer, no matter how busy we are in our careers and in church work. We should let prayer be the priority of our daily schedules. We ought to recognize that we must first pray before we do any work for God, so that the work can be guided by Him. And finally, between unfinished work and time for prayer, prayer must take precedence over work. ★



A Christ-centered Family Life

Vincent Yeung—Cambridge, U.K.

The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes ... (Jer 7:18a)

This is a vivid description of a functional family whose members work in harmony—a dream that we all hope to achieve. In modern society, the activities in Jeremiah's portrait are no longer commonplace, but the basic aspects of family life remain. Parents give direction to their children, sharing their experiences, acting as role models, and passing on their values, social skills and sometimes technical skills, in order to prepare them for independence when they come of age. Children obey and learn from their parents, often helping out with household chores. Some children even support their parents in their livelihood. Parents and children alike share a common goal: the social and economic advancement of the family as a whole.

Because parents want the best for their children, they will work hard to give them a good education. For some, this may mean paying for private education so that their children stand a better chance of entering a

“Our children could have successful careers, yet we would have failed them if they are not rooted in their faith, leading a life that is not according to the truth.”

top university. To prepare them for a successful career, not only must they excel academically, children also need to participate in extracurricular activities such as sports, music, speech and drama. These develop the children holistically, equipping them with the right social and leadership skills.

However, everything comes with a price—and not only in financial terms. All these activities take time: parents have to chauffeur their children from lesson to lesson, waiting for them to finish before moving on to another appointment. Important dates are dotted on the calendar—music exams, concerts, sport fixtures, competitions, etc. The tussle for time between family, work, and church life is a pressing issue—how often are we late for church services or have to rush off because of our children's activities? Yes, we console ourselves: “It is only a one-off; surely God understands.” However, as parents, should we not look at the bigger picture? What is our priority in life for ourselves and

our children?

If we return to the description of the harmonious family in Jeremiah, we will notice that they are in fact working together to serve, not God, but an idol—the queen of heaven. Are we similarly leading a life that serves other gods rather than working for the riches of the inheritance that God has prepared for us?

CELEBRATING THEIR SUCCESS YET GRIEVING QUIETLY

We are undoubtedly proud of our children's achievements; indeed, the Bible describes children as “the crown of old men” (Prov 17:6). Children are our support and strength (Ps 127:3–5), and we treasure the material things they bring to us. Consider the gifts we receive on special occasions, invitations to expensive restaurants, paid-for holidays, and even the occasional professional help from them. Take the biblical example of Isaac and Esau. Isaac loved Esau, as Esau was a capable hunter and

brought Isaac the game he loved (Gen 25:28). Isaac enjoyed these gifts and was probably proud of Esau's prowess.

But when our children grow up, they will lead an independent life and do whatever they think fit, such as in Esau's case. When he was forty years old, Esau took two Hittite women as wives and his actions were a "grief of mind" to his parents (Gen 26:34–35). Or take a look at Samson, who demanded from his parents a Philistine girl as his wife. His parents could only question him timidly as to why he wanted to marry someone with a different belief (Judg 14:2–3). Samson's marriage was doomed and ended tragically (Judg 14:20; 15:6).

Our children could have successful careers, yet we would have failed them if they are not rooted in their faith, leading a life that is not according to the truth. Whatever material gain, social standing, or success they have, will not compensate for the grief their wayward behavior will cause us. We will have a constant sense of guilt, frustrations, and sorrow, which could burden us until the end of our life. So, what should we do to ensure our children remain steadfast in their faith?

LIFE WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE AND GOD

Jeremiah depicted a family life that was offensive to God (Jer 7:18). There was nothing wrong with gathering wood, kindling a fire, or kneading dough. However, the family was working in unison to worship a false deity, the queen of heaven.

In modern times, the "god of this age" blinds the minds of the unbelieving (2 Cor 4:4). Many families work in harmony because they pursue the world and the things in it, the modern day "queen of heaven." For this reason, God has no place in their lives (1 Jn 2:15).

Children are molded in the image of their parents. The innocent boys whom Jeremiah depicted did not know what they did was wrong; they were simply following instructions. When they grew up they would take



a wife and instruct their children to gather wood to prepare sacrifices to the idol, and thus continue the same offence. Therefore, it is vital for parents to provide spiritual guidance and to walk on the right path for their children to follow.

The spiritual backsliding in the time of the judges was partly a failure of parental guidance. The new generation did not know God and the works He had done (Judg 2:10). Naturally, they followed their own desires and did evil in God's sight (Judg 2:11). Micah's mother did not chastise him for stealing her money; instead, when the money was restored to her, she used part of it to make a graven image as if it were an offering to God (Judg 17:1–5). Micah even anointed one of his sons to be the idol's priest. This sad story shows us that the mother lacked moral and spiritual insight, a deficiency that was passed on to her son and grandchildren.

As parents, we have not completed our duty if we simply go through the motion of taking our children to church.

Whenever we visit True Jesus Church (TJC) members who have lost contact with the church, their common responses are: "All religions are the same; they all lead people to do good," or, "All churches are the same. It is inconvenient for you to visit me; it is easier for me to go to a local (non-TJC) church." It is no surprise that, in turn, their children become influenced by their reluctance to come to church and will often lose their faith.

A LIVING FAITH—EDUCATE BY EXAMPLE

Perhaps we comfort ourselves that we have done our part by taking our family to church regularly. Our children have gone through the religious education (RE) system, and they should be rooted in the faith by the time they grow up. The responsibility of nurturing our children's faith appears to have been passed on to the RE teachers. It is not uncommon for parents to complain to RE teachers when their children are misbehaving. As parents, we have not completed our duty if we simply go through the motion of taking our children to church. We need to reflect on our own faith and way of life. We need to have a faith that is manifested in our life so that people around us and our family are blessed.

The Bible tells us to train and teach our children so that they will not depart from the way when they are older (Prov 22:6; Deut 6:7). This is a holistic process. It starts from how we lead our life—when we are walking, sitting, lying, or rising up, God's words should be in our heart (Deut 6:6–7). And the love of God should manifest from our heart in all we do (Deut 6:5). We cannot just tell our children, "Do as I say, not as I do." Jesus deemed the Pharisees to be hypocrites as they did not practice what they preached (Mt 23:2–3). In contrast, Paul did not just preach the gospel of salvation and uphold the doctrines, but also presented his way of life in Christ Jesus as an example (1 Cor 4:7). He exhorts us to imitate him as he imitated Christ (1 Cor 11:1). We need to actualize this Christ-like image in our daily living to allow our family and other people to see Jesus in us. This transformation should come from within (Rom 12:2), a character change that transcends



Abraham's faith was reaffirmed and Isaac experienced God firsthand (Gen 22:11). Isaac witnessed God's power, purpose, and good nature. In both cases, Abraham's obedience, good behavior, and faith allowed his family to personally experience God, which in turn strengthened their faith.

CONCLUSION

We should long for the immeasurable and unfathomable treasures of God rather than for achieving greatness in this world. This means striving to lead a life that is worthy of our calling, and in such a way that brings opportunities for our family to experience God and develop their own relationship with Him. The whole family works in unison for a common goal—to serve God and to project a Christ-like image in our life so that our family and friends can experience God through us. In this way, we will have no regrets in our old age—only sweet memories of God's lifelong blessings upon our family. ★

”Worshipping God is not confined to a few hours per week in church; it should be our way of living. Daily prayers, regular Bible reading and study, and sharing spiritual experiences gained at work and in church, are key components of this family altar. We should take every opportunity to instill this way of life and Christian values in our family members.

the outward display of piety by the Pharisees (Mt 6:2, 5, 16).

Elder Peter exhorts us to answer, in meekness and fear, those who ask us the reason for our hope (1 Pet 3:15). Why would anyone ask us about our hope if we have not exhibited this hope in our behavior? If we act, behave, and speak like non-believers, no one will see that we have a hope that is different from anyone else's.

Knowing the impact of Christian living on our family, we need to prioritize and refocus our life, making room for God and cutting back on unnecessary worldly pursuits. The church has advocated the setting up of a family altar for a number of years. Worshipping God is not confined to a few hours per week in church; it should be our way of living. Daily prayers, regular Bible reading and study, and sharing spiritual experiences gained at work and in church, are key components of this family altar. We should take every opportunity to instill this way of life and Christian values in our family members through our day-to-day interactions with them. Moreover, we should create opportunities for our family to experience God and to receive His blessings.

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR FAMILY TO EXPERIENCE GOD

Faith is not simply an assent to doctrine, as the Catholics put it. It begins with the knowledge of God, which can be learned during church services, Bible study, RE classes and theological training. However, faith is not grounded in knowledge alone. Having a personal relationship with God is another matter. Our understanding of Him begins with knowledge. But we

need to augment our knowledge with wisdom and spiritual understanding as we experience God on our journey of faith. We may become discouraged by failure and mishaps, but with trust and perseverance, our knowledge of Him will gradually take shape as we walk in the Lord (Col 1:9–10). This is why we must lead our children to not only know God, but also to walk with Him and develop their own personal faith.

Jacob was brought up in a family of faith, yet to him God was the God of his fathers (Gen 31:5; 32:9). His faith finally became his own when he encountered God, and was subsequently delivered by Him (Gen 32; 35; cf. Gen 28:21). He cleansed himself and his household, removing all strange gods from their midst (Gen 35:2–4). And on his deathbed, he recalled his lifelong experience with God, acknowledging Him as the God who fed him throughout his life (Gen 48:15).

For a positive example of how to create opportunities for our family to experience God, we can look to Abraham. Hebrews 11:11 describes Sarah as faithful because she believed she could deliver a child when she was past the age. However, she initially doubted God's promise (Gen 18:13; 17:16, 19, 21). Her faithlessness was laid bare when Abraham unknowingly received God (Gen 18:1–2, 14). Abraham's hospitality and good work allowed Sarah to encounter God and to reflect on her own shortcoming. And through this experience, her faith and trust were strengthened.

Additionally, Abraham's obedience and trust in the Lord had an impact on his son Isaac. Abraham followed God's command to sacrifice his only son, and when the angel appeared,



Applying Our Faith in the Workplace

Audrey Chan—Leicester, U.K.

INTRODUCTION

The city of Leicester, where I work, is a wonderfully diverse place. According to the 2011 UK Census, the combined ethnic minority communities now make up the greater part of the local population. The city is home to people from a myriad of backgrounds—Caucasian, South Asian, African, African-Caribbean, Chinese, and Eastern European communities, all co-existing peacefully, or at least more peacefully than some parts of the U.K., where there have been overt racial tensions.

This diversity was particularly evident in one of my previous places of work, where twelve of the fifteen members in my team were from a Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic background, and nine of us professed a religious faith—Islam, Christianity and Hinduism—or held spiritual beliefs of some sort. During the occasional lull in our busy working day, those of us on duty in the office would sometimes have profound discussions about life and faith. The Muslim colleagues in the team would make their daily prayers in a quiet place and fast during the month of Ramadan, all the while stoically tackling their work

commitments. I look back with fond memories, thankful that we shared time together and felt comfortable enough to express who we were.

However, even with the freedom that many of us living in a developed country enjoy, there may still be times when we, as Christians, feel inhibited to uphold the name of Jesus and reveal our faith in an unapologetic manner. Sometimes we may just want to blend in, to keep matters of faith out of our conversations, and to practice our beliefs in the privacy of our own homes or in church where we are with like-minded people. But doing so would make us lopsided Christians; our faith should be integral to our identity and our behavior, wherever we are.

UPHOLDING OUR FAITH

Declaring the Name of Jesus

One thing I learned from working in Leicester is that it is good to make your faith known to others. Our faith is a fundamental part of who we are, and letting others know helps them to understand us and our stance on certain matters. It may not always be appropriate to preach directly

to colleagues or clients, as there are usually policies or codes of conduct in place to prevent this, but we can at least make known the fact that we are Christians. We can reveal which church we attend and bring up issues that may be relevant to our working relationships. If people are interested in knowing more, then we can share as the opportunity arises.

If we do this, our colleagues will realize what we are doing when we bow our head in thanksgiving at lunchtime, and when we decline work or social events on the Sabbath day. No matter whether they agree with what we do, at least they will understand. To hide and to be surreptitious of this aspect of our identity would be strange, as if we were ashamed of our belief in Jesus.

In a small way, when we make known our faith, we are introducing people to the true God. And we will be following in the footsteps of the saints of old—people like Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah, who served among Gentile masters and colleagues while shining the light of God through their daily actions. Looking at it another way, if we feel ashamed about our faith in Jesus, it could lead to mutual

sentiments: "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels" (Lk 9:26).

Sabbath-Keeping

I have been fortunate that, in over twenty-five years of working life, I have not been required to work on the Sabbath. However, recently, prior to signing a contract for a new post, I looked at the offer letter and saw there was a requirement to work occasional weekends. This was a first for me. So I went into the new office to speak to the Human Resources Officer. She went away to have a word with my new line manager, who then ushered me into a quiet room for a chat. He politely explained that he needed to clarify something: *Why could I not work on Saturdays? Was it because of religious reasons?* I proceeded to explain about the Sabbath, and he was obviously intrigued, asking if I was a Seventh Day Adventist (he knew something about their beliefs). He also wanted to know when and how I kept the Sabbath. Thank God, after our conversation, my manager said he would respect my request on religious grounds and would work around it, even though at least one major work event was due to take place soon on a Saturday.

In hindsight, I realize that my new employer had to take into account UK equality legislation which supports the rights of employees to practice their religion. But I was also grateful to God that I was already in a job, and had the option to decline the new post if working on Saturdays turned out to be mandatory. It would have been a dilemma if I did not have an

“Our faith is a fundamental part of who we are, and letting others know helps them to understand us and our stance on certain matters.

alternative and our family's livelihood depended on me taking the job. That would have been a real test of faith—one that I imagine others might have to go through.

While Sabbath-keeping is one of the Ten Commandments, in practical terms, no one can compel another to refrain from working on this day. Observing the Sabbath has to be done from personal conviction and a heart of trust in God's blessings. In Old Testament times, God enforced the Sabbath strictly during the wilderness years and the settlement period, like a father teaching his young child the elementary principles. Harvest time or otherwise, God required the chosen people to cease from their labors (Ex 34:21) and stipulated punishment for the transgressors (Ex 31:14). In this era of grace and spiritual maturity, God has etched His law onto our heart, to enable us to keep it from the heart (Jer 31:33). For this reason, there is no more compulsion; the Holy Spirit's motivation, if we are attentive to it, should be sufficient (Ezek 36:26–27).

LIGHT OF THE WORLD

“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden...Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Mt 5:14, 16)

Avoiding Gossip and Backbiting

*Where there is no wood, the fire goes out;
And where there is no talebearer, strife ceases.
As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire,
So is a contentious man to kindle strife.
(Prov 26:20–21)*

Many people would agree that one of the banes of working life is office politics. Staff will often talk about fellow colleagues and managers: who has done what, and who has failed to do what. It creates a bit of drama in what can be a humdrum working life. I have noticed that it is during periods of organizational change that there is often an increase in the level of gossip and complaints. People seem to need an outlet for stress and uncertainty. I have to confess that I have become embroiled on occasions. There is something initially cathartic about venting and putting the world to rights when you feel helpless or aggrieved. But my personal experience is that I do not feel good afterwards; in fact, I feel sullied. I have no doubt that this is the Holy Spirit pricking my conscience. Gossiping and backbiting fuel negativity and partisan feelings in the workplace; taking part means we grieve the Holy Spirit, whose nature is peace, goodness, kindness, longsuffering, and self-control (Gal 5:22–23)—the opposite of what we are indulging in.

A good rule is that if an issue does not concern us and we have no role in finding a solution, then it is best not to talk about it. If others want to, we should leave them to it, change the subject, or even distance ourselves, if possible. If it is in our power to do something about a problem, we

“Sometimes we may just want to blend in, to keep matters of faith out of our conversations, and to practice our beliefs in the privacy of our own homes or in church where we are with like-minded people. But doing so would make us lopsided Christians; our faith should be integral to our identity and our behavior, wherever we are.

should do so through the proper channels—for example, by raising the matter in a constructive manner directly with the person concerned or with our supervisor. If that still does not work, and depending on how serious the matter is, then it might be time to review if we are in the right place.

Taking part in office politics can create problems and taint our character. God's word instructs us to do things without complaining and disputing, so that we can shine and be above reproach.

Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world. (Phil 2:14–15)

Faithfulness

Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. (Col 3:22–24)

We have probably come across certain colleagues who try to do the minimum in order to get by, those who watch the clock, or grumble their way through tasks. Such people can sap the energy from a team and hinder progress. The Bible teaches Christians not to be like this.

Rather, we should have a good work ethic and be faithful employees. The key is to have the right attitude



and realize to whom we are truly accountable. Paul says we should do our work “as to the Lord” and know that we are actually “serving the Lord.” One person who operated by this principle was Joseph. Sold into slavery, he had every reason to be an incalitrant worker in Potiphar's household, and in the prison cells to which he was later banished; after all, he had hardly chosen his career path. However, he rose above his circumstances to become a model employee. He did his jobs so well that his masters did not need to supervise him; they trusted him to get on with the work, which he did in a most faithful manner (Gen 39:5-6, 21–23). And God, who was his ultimate Master, recognized his efforts and blessed his working life. Most pertinently, it was evident “that the LORD was with him and that the LORD made all he did to prosper in his hand” (Gen 39:3). In short, Joseph's work ethic became a testimony to his Gentile masters that there is a true and living God.

In past years, I did not have much reason to think about Paul's words in Colossians 3:22–24—at least not until things got difficult at one of my workplaces. Management changes led to practices that felt unreasonable, unfair and authoritarian to many of us in the team. Needless to say, morale was at an all-time low. Up until then, I always did my best, but now I was wondering what the point was: if the

company did not value its employees, why put in so much effort? However, in the recesses of my mind, I recalled Paul's words. I made up my mind that, while I would tender my resignation, I would continue doing my job to the best of my ability up until my departure date—as for God, not man. From that moment, it was very liberating: I was able to do my job and feel at peace, knowing that God would approve. It was much better than wasting time and energy wallowing in resentment. Much to my amusement, this approach puzzled some of my colleagues, one of whom asked me directly, “Why are you continuing to do things for them?” She was obviously expecting me to wind down, which was tempting, to say the least. In that difficult period, a number of us resigned from the company in quick succession. On a personal level, I was able to leave the organization with a clear conscience, knowing God had blessed the work I did, leaving no loose ends. I then went on to experience His guidance in the next leg of my employment journey.

Integrity

The people with whom we share office space will have different personalities, backgrounds, ambitions, motivations, and even levels of morality. To this day, what some employees are capable of doing still astounds me. In the workplace, I have witnessed arguments, dishonesty, falsification of records, lateness, theft, unfair employment procedures and bullying. I could go on. What is even more disconcerting is that managers have been complicit in some of the issues. One might wonder, *What is the world coming to?*

“*Taking part in office politics can create problems and taint our character. God's word instructs us to do things without complaining and disputing, so that we can shine and be above reproach.*”



had to bear, our mundane problems pale in comparison. And we may find that our troubles can be redefined through a change of perspective and an increase in spiritual cultivation.

CONCLUSION

The workplace is one arena in which we need to live out our Christian life, and this is important simply because we spend so much time there. We should therefore endeavor to use it well to witness for God through our daily interactions with those around us. God's standards, which are higher than any workplace standards, challenge us to declare our faith before others, keep His commandments, be kind and considerate in our speech, serve as faithful employees, and act with integrity. By doing these things, we can shine the light of Jesus Christ in a small but significant way. ★

The fact is, we will probably witness things in the workplace that are just not right. But we should not be surprised. When people do not know or fear God, or lack a conscience, they will simply do what is right in their own eyes, or whatever it takes to reach their own ends. What is important for us is whether we are able to conduct ourselves professionally and with integrity, even when those around us do not. And more importantly, can we proactively shine for God?

Elder Peter exhorts us to keep our behavior "honorable among the Gentiles" (1 Pet 2:12). What they see of us will form a testimony in the future judgment. And so, in this lifetime, we should not give anyone grounds to bring shame to Jesus' name. We need to be careful to act with integrity at all times. Our speech and actions should be in line with our status as children of God. Where necessary, we may even need to go against the grain. For example, if we see colleagues being bullied, we can try to change the culture through our own speech and actions. How we deal with others can help change team dynamics, leave an impression, and hopefully cause those around us to reflect on their own behavior.

Also, if it is in our power to do so, we should highlight unacceptable and illegal behavior, through the proper channels. This is both a professional and a moral duty. It may entail speaking to one's line manager or a more senior manager, alerting them to take stock and make changes. If nothing happens despite our feedback, and we cannot tolerate the status quo, then we have the privilege of asking our heavenly Father to guide us to find a better employer. But we

need to remember that the world is an imperfect place, and I doubt there is a workplace that does not have problems. There is much to be said, then, for Elder Peter's advice, which reminds us that if we cannot change a negative situation, we might need to change ourselves:

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. (1 Pet 2:18-19)

”What is important for us is whether we are able to conduct ourselves professionally and with integrity, even when those around us do not. And more importantly, can we proactively shine for God?

Here, Peter tells us to bear with a harsh or unreasonable employer—for the sake of God. Indeed, to retaliate would hardly bring glory to Him. Easier said than done, we may think, but it is by no means impossible, when we think of the attitude of Jesus. While He never shirked from defending the things that mattered in relation to His salvation ministry—the truth and the rights of the oppressed—He meekly endured being wronged on a personal level, time and time again, even to the point of death on the cross. When we consider the degree of suffering He



Safeguarding the Sheep

FF Chong — London, U.K.

THE IMPERATIVE

One theme that runs through the entire Bible is “to safeguard ourselves.” One reason behind the need for safeguarding is man’s inclination to sin. When the first progenitors were created, they were commanded not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God warned that failing to obey would result in death (Gen 2:17). The divine command was absolute and immutable. The first couple enjoyed abundant blessings when they faithfully obeyed. But when Adam and Eve violated this command, not only did they suffer the consequence of being separated from God, they also doomed their descendants—generation after generation—to death. God, being full of mercy, could not bear to see the struggle of His people caused by their severance from His grace and abidance. Time and again, He raised up deliverers, such as prophets, judges and kings, to rescue humanity from their plight. Although God’s salvation has been unceasingly provided in the history of humanity, the fight to stay in the Lord poses a real challenge to believers in every generation.

The second reason necessitating safeguarding is the rise of false teachers. We have seen this recur through the history of the elect. Not only had the people of God strayed, more frighteningly, those who were supposed to render help to God’s people had themselves veered horribly off the path of the Lord. In the Old Testament, they hailed from the ranks of the prophets, priests, and kings (Zeph 3:3–4). Likewise, in the New Testament, false teachers and prophets alarmingly emerged from within the community of faith (Acts 20:28; 2 Pet 2:1–2). As these misguided guides are already in the midst of the sheep, they cause even more severe harm to the sheep. Unchecked, these false brethren can cause catastrophic damage to the church, crippling her and stifling her growth.

Christ has already warned His followers of the inevitable rise of false teachers. There will be clear signs of the relentless increase of falsehood (Mt 24:5,11,24). This is the great tribulation and the severest test facing the true believers of God. Satan’s deception will emerge from within the church of God. So persuasive will

the prince of darkness’ deception be, there is a danger that no flesh would be saved. So for the sake of the elect, Christ will shorten those days (Mt 24:23–24).

A TEST FROM GOD— SAFEGUARDING OURSELVES

Some may wonder why God would allow this to happen to His elect. The struggle with falsehood in the church is a test from God to disclose who we really are (Deut 13:3). The battle for truth will also be a moment of truth that reveals how much we love God. Genuine love for God is always reflected in the will to walk in His way wholeheartedly, regardless of cost (Deut 13:4). Holding on to the doctrines for salvation imparted to us by God through the church, and shunning the suppositions and deductions of man are essential manifestations of our love for and faith in Him.

When falsehood appears in the church, inevitably, some believers would be affected. This occurs because in their capacity as shepherds, false teachers are well-placed to develop strong bonds with believers. Inspired by their eloquence and

charismatic preaching, and touched by their affability and personal charm, some believers start to root their faith in these human pastors, rather than solely in God. Unlike the Berean believers, they do not search the Scriptures to find out for themselves whether what they have received from the church is accurate (cf. Acts 17:11). Such trusting sheep put themselves in a precarious position because they are unable to discern the truth. Hence, to safeguard the church, believers must be properly and comprehensively taught the word of God. On their parts, believers must make every effort to root themselves in the basic beliefs of the church.

As humans, we are wont to be influenced by the things we see, read, and hear every day. Thus, we must shun away from reading their writings and listening to their words. Such false teachers are experts in twisting facts to champion their cause. Paul once taught Timothy to reject profane and old fables (2 Tim 4:7) so as not to be corroded. Likewise, we risk losing godliness when we tolerate profane words and lend our ears to falsehood. More damagingly, false teachings will cause division amongst brethren and drive a wedge in the church (1 Tim 1:3–4), giving ground to the wicked one to instill unbelief in the hearts of the unstable.

SAFEGUARDING THE CHURCH

Clearly, false teachers have been able to reach their level of insidious influence because they were able to hide their true intentions and employed deceitful plots to achieve their selfish ends (cf. Eph 4:14). Therefore, besides equipping believers with God's word, the church has the duty to employ precautionary measures to deal with these false prophets.

Expose the False Prophet

A lengthy section of the Mosaic Law is devoted to safeguarding against falsehood (Deut 13). A prominent message is about exposing the false prophet, who is termed the evil amongst the people (Deut 13:5). The reason is straightforward—he is

able to influence the community of faith to turn away from the LORD, to walk on a path other than that God has instructed. His influence can be contagious for he comes with signs and wonders, which lend credence to his false claims.

Some people may consider exposure of these false teachers “draconian.” Citing the need to show consideration for these false teachers and their families, they advocate not exposing the matter. However, the Law of Moses starkly clarifies: ‘You shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or even conceal him; but you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be the first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people’ (Deut 13:8–9).

“Some may wonder why God would allow this to happen to His elect. The struggle with falsehood in the church is a test from God to disclose who we really are (Deut 13:3). The battle for truth will also be a moment of truth that reveals how much we love God.”

Those who are spiritually alert must be prepared to take the drastic measure of exposing false teachers and their ploys (Deut 13:8). This is to allow the community of faith to steer clear of them. The longer false teachers are tolerated, the greater the damage they shall inflict on the church. If timely action is not taken with faith in God, the word of God will be confused and desecrated beyond recognition (cf. Rev 2:20). The pattern of the word of salvation will be clouded and blatantly twisted in denial of what God has done for the church. The spiritually alert must thus also consistently knock down the pillars of false teachings propagated by these teachers.

The moral lesson we can gather from Moses' instruction is that when we hear of people spreading words contrary to the beliefs of the church, we should diligently investigate this (Deut 13:14) and identify the recalcitrant perpetrators of falsehood.

To some, this may appear to be a witch-hunt. But the Bible itself provides a precedent for naming false teachers. Tracing and removing all possible sources of and contributors to heresy is an act of love for the household of God. False teachings can cause division amongst brethren and drive a wedge into the church (1 Tim 1:3–4), giving ground to the wicked one to further instill unbelief in the hearts of the unstable.

Stand Against the False Teacher

To sway more people to their cause, false teachers may appeal to the believers' emotions and/or use examples of human relationship issues. They use conflicts as the smokescreen to cover the trail of their false teachings. They always present

themselves as the victims, suffering for Christ. Once believers show pity on them, their sense of discernment will be clouded. If the church is to maintain the unity of faith, she must help believers clearly distinguish between false doctrine and human relationship problems. Also, the one body of Christ must use the word of God to repair broken relationships while continuing to battle false teachings. The false teachers always strive to split up the church when given a chance, creating conflicts to support their twisted beliefs.

The importance of unity in faith bears reiterating. In fact, the Bible teaches us to strive for unity of the church in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3). This means giving priority to the interest of the church above our own, and doing all things for her good. In contrast, false prophets seek to further their own interests and are even prepared to destroy the church by saying the True Jesus Church (TJC)

is no longer the only true church that is saved. However, Prophet Ezekiel declared that anyone who says that Judah—a reference to Mount Zion and the church (cf. Ps 78:68)—is just like other nations, would have to face the full force of His judgment (Ezek 25:8, 11). While the church is not perfect yet, those who truly love her will seek to build her up, not destroy her.



Re-educating Religious Educators

To safeguard the church, we must check on one another's spiritual well-being. One area the church needs to pay particular attention is Religious Education (RE). Children are not mature enough to discern doctrinal truth for themselves. They are particularly vulnerable and their minds can be easily polluted by inaccurate teachings. Secular history is replete with examples of politically-indoctrinated children who turned on their parents or who were even trained to carry out terrorist acts. As RE teachers are a key channel by which our lambs receive the word of God, the former's grasp of doctrine must also be sound lest they end up drawing children away from the truth. If there are RE teachers who are known to have been influenced

by false teachings, they should be re-taught the word of God.

Excommunication

Finally, false prophets who remain intransigent are no longer in the truth. An indication of their intransigence can be gleaned from their unceasing attempts to attack the core doctrines of the church. One example is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.¹ This is very dangerous because confusion and any dilution of the teaching on the Holy Spirit will lead to the lifeline of the church being cut off. Scripture clearly commands that recalcitrant rebels must be excommunicated (cf. Deut 13:9—put to death).

According to Paul, no truth shall ever come out from those who are reprobate concerning the faith; they will only grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived (2 Tim 3:8, 13). Paul's approach with such

false brethren was decisive—he did not yield submission to the false brethren for an hour (Gal 2:4–5). Similarly, false prophets whose only response to the church's efforts to restore them is retaliation pose a danger to the church. In such situations, the only recourse left to the church is excommunication. This is done with sorrow, not hatred; out of necessity, not vengeance. Excommunication safeguards the sheep by drawing a line between the apostates and the church, their deviant teachings and the teachings of the church, and their works and the divine works of the church. Such a distinction will reveal those who set out to cause division in the church—for such do not have the Holy Spirit (Jude 19).

BIBLICAL PRECEDENTS OF EXCOMMUNICATION

In Galatia, there were people who

FALSE TEACHINGS: WOULD YOU HAVE BEEN DECEIVED?

False Claim 1: Satan is self-existent.

The Bible clearly teaches that "I am the LORD (self-existent God), and there is no other" (Isa 45:5–6, 18). This is the self-declaration of the LORD, which completely rules out the possibility of Satan's self-existence. To claim that Satan is self-existent is tantamount to calling God a liar. This is blasphemy.

False Claim 2: History is in the past. Even the all-powerful God is not able to change the history of the TJC.

This claim is designed to support the idea that God does not know the way of the wicked. Such a claim not only denigrates the power of God, but even subtly redefines the infinity of God. This claim fails to recognize that God does not change history, not because He is incapable, but because He is a principled God. For example, God did not reverse the fate of Adam after he sinned. God always has a purpose for allowing things to happen. He does not relent as human being do (Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; Jer 4:23).

False Claim 3: The Holy Spirit comes upon the believer at baptism and not when he speaks in tongues.

In the New Testament, the receiving of the Spirit is always accompanied by the speaking in tongues. This is evident when Peter ascertained that the Spirit had come upon Cornelius and his household upon hearing them speak in tongues, like the apostles did on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 10:44–48; 11:15; 15:8). Speaking in tongues is the sole evidence used to determine the receiving of the Spirit in Acts.



preached a gospel other than what the apostles taught. What they were saying amounted to denying the efficacy of the work of Christ on the cross. They were thus confusing believers regarding the right way of salvation. Paul told the Galatians that such false teachers must be accursed (Gal 1:8, 9). The original word for “accuse” is “anathema,” which literally means to be “cut off.” The cutting off here is to be severed from Christ. This is excommunication. Paul, in fact, did not just mete out this judgment once. He had done it before (Gal 1:9), signaling the seriousness of the case. In fact, Paul repeatedly accursed those who troubled the church with falsehood (Gal 5:10, 12). They were to bear their own judgment.

In our context, claiming that the True Jesus Church is not the only true church is tantamount to saying God has established His church inconsequentially. The false prophet is guilty of making the blood of Jesus common (Heb 10:29–30). He has tasted the goodness of God and yet has willfully gone against what he has been brought up with. This is not just a case of going against man. But rather, it is a case against the very work of salvation, which Jesus has achieved on the cross. It is against God himself. This is intransigence at its worst state. Thus the church has to exercise her authority from God to excommunicate. This is in line with the apostolic practice.

Another example is Hymenaeus and Alexander (1 Tim 1:19–20). The two had rejected the faith (belief) they once treasured. They were blasphemers. The concept of “blasphemy” at times is used together with the concepts of contradiction and

opposition (Acts 13:45). The apostolic account brings out the full extent of the work of the blasphemers (cf. 2 Pet 2:2). They ridiculed, belittled, and sought to destroy the apostolic faith. According to Paul, such perpetrators have judged themselves to be unworthy of everlasting life (Acts 13:46). In another account, Paul’s response to blasphemers was even harsher—declaring that the latter’s own blood was upon their own heads (Acts 18:6). Effectively, this was a pronouncement of death. Remember! Both the apostolic accounts are concerned with non-believers of Jesus. How much more severe it is for a preacher to blaspheme his own beliefs?

To stop them from further blaspheming against the church and the word, Paul handed Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan. This in effect is to excommunicate them since “belonging to Satan” indisputably signifies severance from the body of Christ. Excommunication was necessary so that their heresies would not spread like cancer (cf. 2 Tim 2:17–18). Again, excommunication draws a clear line between the beliefs of the church and heresies. It is an unequivocal reiteration that the church does not have two sets of contradictory beliefs. Excommunication maintains the purity of the church’s faith (cf. 2 Cor 11:2).

CONCLUSION

To safeguard the church and ourselves, the beliefs of the church must be upheld. This is the pattern of sound words that God has given to the church to save (Rom 6:17–18). Warnings must be issued against those who preach another gospel. The church is duty-bound to rebut

and root out every false teaching that arise in church, and to ensure that these false teachings have no place in believers’ hearts. Such a practice was common in the early church. The followers of deviant beliefs were identified and made known to the community of faith (cf. 2 Thess 3:14) that they may be ashamed.

Scoffers will abound in the end-times (2 Pet 3:3). Their threat is insidious because they are not outsiders baying for the church’s destruction. Instead, they are part of the church who slowly introduce destructive heresies to lure the believers to themselves. Their teachings confuse the minds and trouble the spirits of their listeners. These false prophets are puffed up and walk in their own lusts, refusing admonition and advice. Not only do they turn a deaf ear to the warning of the church, they embark on an all-out assault on the church, going so far as to slander her. In these situations and as a last resort, the church must bring excommunication to bear so that the true and precious sheep of the Lord are safe. ★

¹ See False Claim 3.

The Church in the Wilderness

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HEAR, O ISRAEL!

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. 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 6:4-9)

Shema Yisrael (Hear, O Israel) is the centerpiece of the morning and evening prayers of Jews today. This prayer phrase, often shortened to *Shema* (or *Sh'ma*), is integral to Jewish lives. The first thing that a devout Jew does each morning and again at the end of the day before he sleeps is to recite the *Shema*—in keeping with the Mosaic instruction to “talk about them when they lie down and when they rise up” (Deut 6:7). In Jewish

homes, a small, slanted case is affixed to the doorframe of the front door as well as on every doorway which is more than forty inches high and sixteen inches wide. This small case, known as *Mezuzah*, contains a piece of parchment on which the *Shema* is written. When members of the household pass through these doors, they would be able to touch and kiss the *Mezuzah*—in keeping with the Mosaic instruction to “write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deut 6:9). After a Jewish boy turns thirteen, he must strap two small boxes – the *tefillin* – to himself, one on his forehead and the other on his left arm, during his daily morning prayer. The *Shema* is written on parchment and placed within the boxes—in keeping with the Mosaic instruction to “bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes” (Deut 6:8).

Determined to hold fast to the oracles that had been entrusted to them, Jews today adhere to God’s instructions conveyed through Moses with extra caution. They constantly remind themselves of their status as the elect through every minor detail of

their lives, restraining themselves with various regulations. Such reverence for God is indeed admirable, possibly resulting from their remorse at having failed the God who exclusively loved them (Deut 7:7) and at forsaking His covenant (Deut 31:16). Unfortunately, despite their religious activities and strict ceremonial abidance of the laws and rites, they could not find Lord Jesus to whom the Law testifies (Jn 5:39-40); nor were they able to serve the Lord in the newness of the Spirit (Rom 7:6).

DEUTERONOMY

Forty years after the Israelite exodus from Egypt, on the first day of the eleventh month, on the plains of Moab east of River Jordan, Moses instructed the people according to God’s command. These words became the last book of the Pentateuch—Deuteronomy. Moses was well aware that he would not be able to cross River Jordan to enter the promised land (Deut 3:25–27). As decreed by God, in another two and a half months, the Israelites’ forty years of wandering in the wilderness would end (Num 14:33–35). Moses knew his time on earth would not exceed

seventy-five days. In fact, if the thirty days of mourning by the people following his demise were excluded, Moses' remaining days on earth were indeed few.

Therefore, Deuteronomy comprises Moses' parting instructions. He repeatedly urged the people, "Listen to the statutes and the judgments that I teach you to observe." Moses also listed each mistake made by the Israelites. They had continually gone against God's teachings despite enjoying His continual mercy and forgiveness. This is an enduring reminder of God's endless love despite man's irrepressible stubbornness.

Moses' final instructions pertain to men's choices in life (Deut 30:15–20): if the people obeyed the word of God and abided by His commandments, they would be blessed; otherwise calamities would befall them. Moses clearly set out the choices that the people had—life or death, calamities or blessings—and implored them to select life.

The Hebrew name of the book of Deuteronomy is 'elleh haddebarim (These are the words), which are the first few words in the book of Deuteronomy. This book is said to be Moses' reiteration of the Law as he neared the end of his life. When the Lord Jesus faced the temptations of Satan (Mt 4:1–11), He cited phrases from Deuteronomy on three occasions to overcome them (Deut 8:3; 6:16; 6:13). These citations by the Lord Jesus reinforces the importance of the book of Deuteronomy.

CONGREGATION IN THE WILDERNESS

"This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us." (Acts 7:38)

In his address to the Sanhedrin, Stephen referred to the people led by Moses as the congregation in the wilderness. During their forty years in the wilderness, the Israelites

continually received the words of God—the living oracles.

Stephen used the word "congregation," which is translated as "church" in the King James Version. In Greek, the word is *ekklēsia* (called out). The same word is translated as "church" in Ephesians 1:23 ("the church is the body of Christ"), Ephesians 3:10 ("now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places") and Hebrews 12:23 ("to the general assembly and church of the firstborn"). They are the people of God whom He has called out from the land of Egypt (the bondage of sins) (Ex 19:3–6).

"I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am the Lord their God." (Ex 29:45–46)

“The believer must consciously choose life and work out his salvation (Phil 2:12). He cannot only be a listener of the word, but he must be a doer (Jas 1:21–25), obeying God's word and keeping all His commandments.

The importance of being called out must never be underestimated. God reiterated that He brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt so that He may dwell among them. In other words, when the Israelites were still residing amongst the Egyptians and were still slaves of the Pharaoh, God would not dwell among them. Similarly today, the church has been called out of the bondage of sin (cf. 1 Pet 2:9). Those who are called but refuse to come out, choosing to follow the world and unwilling to uphold biblical principles, will lose God's abidance.

God referred to the Israelites who came out of Egypt as "My son, my firstborn" (Ex 4:22). The firstborn refers to those who have been consecrated and who belong to God

(Ex 13:2; Num 3:11–13, 40–51). From a spiritual perspective, the biblical true church was called out by God from the world. She belongs to Him and is the assembly of the firstborn (Heb 12:22–24). She is in the world but not of the world (Jn 17:15–16; 18:36). She has the guidance and instruction of God; she knows how to worship and give praise to God, walking on the path as desired by God.

When Moses said, "Hear O Israel!", he was obviously referring to the Israelites standing before him. However, in the last portion of Deuteronomy, when he was going to establish a covenant with the people, he said, "I make this covenant and this oath, not with you alone, but with him who stands here with us today before the Lord our God, as well as with him who is not here with us today" (Deut 29:14–15). He emphasized that he was establishing the covenant not only with the Israelites then, but also with those who were standing before God, i.e., those who earnestly serve

Him (1 Kgs 17:1), as well as with those who were not present then. The latter comprise people who truly serve God: the descendants of the Israelites as well as the biblical spiritual true church. This true church is the spiritual firstborn to whom God referred. They become the sons of God through believing in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:26), making them also the descendants of Abraham (Gal 3:27–29). They are also the Israel referred to in "Hear O Israel!", the firstborn of God (Heb 12:23).

The covenant that God had instructed Moses to establish with the Israelites in the land of Moab was also to be inherited by the biblical true church. This is a covenant pertaining to blessing and curse. Moses had called on heaven and earth as

witnesses, setting before the people life or death, blessing or curse; urging them to choose life (Deut 30:15–20). In other words, the gospel message preached by the true church is not the doctrine of eternal security (i.e., once saved, always saved). The believer must consciously choose life and work out his salvation (Phil 2:12). He cannot only be a listener of the word, but he must be a doer (Jas 1:21–25), obeying God's word and keeping all His commandments.

Hebrews 11 lists the extraordinary acts of faith of the ancient saints. Moses was commended for looking to Christ by faith and for seeing that which cannot be seen (Heb 11:27). When Moses was giving instructions to Israel, the church in the wilderness, he might have seen indistinctly that this church did not just exist during the forty-year journey in the wilderness, but transcended time and space. She—the true church—is the heavenly Jerusalem, the holy mountain of God, the oft-cited Zion of the Bible (Heb 12:22).

FORTY YEARS OF TRAINING

The Israelites had to wander in the wilderness for forty years as punishment for their disbelief in God's promise: all those who were numbered, twenty years old and above at the time of the exodus, were not allowed to enter the promised land (Num 14:26–35). However, viewed from a macro perspective, this was actually God's exclusive love (Deut 7:7–8) and His wonderful arrangement. The exodus would have been quite meaningless had the Israelites departed pagan-worshipping Egypt only to directly enter pagan-worshipping Canaan. What God wanted His elect to do was to depart from the surrounding evil! Although departing from Egypt was difficult, it was accomplished within a night, and just by crossing the Red Sea. However, breaking away from Egyptian pagan worship, morality and way of life, and learning anew how to discern between the sacred and the secular would require time and guidance. In Canaan—the land that

the Israelites would be entering—the locals were idol-worshippers who practiced child sacrifice (Deut 12:31), an abomination to God. The Canaanites were no better than the Egyptians. They made their children pass through the fire, practiced witchcraft, and called up the dead; they were soothsayers, interpreters of omens, sorcerers, conjurers of spells, mediums, and spiritists (Deut 18:10–14). It would have been a calamity in faith for the people of God to depart from Egypt in order to enter an even filthier place. Therefore the purpose of those forty years in the wilderness was not only to punish, but to let them dwell alone, to depart from secular lifestyles, to devote themselves to learning the laws and commandments of God, and to learn to fear Him. Indeed these forty years were a manifestation of God's deeper love.

“The God served by the biblical true church is not the “Trinity” God. In fact, Scripture does not contain the word *Trinity*. Nor was this concept ever a belief taught to the people of God. The God in whom the biblical true church believes is the only God.

Moses said that the forty years in the wilderness was God's trial and test for His people (Deut 8:2), training them to abide by His teachings and commandments and to fear Him (Deut 8:6). God chastised them in those forty years just as a man would chasten his son (Deut 8:5). In the original text, “chastise” connotes instruct, teach, and transform. God used forty years to mould His people so that His laws and commandments would become part of their lives making them ready to serve Him.

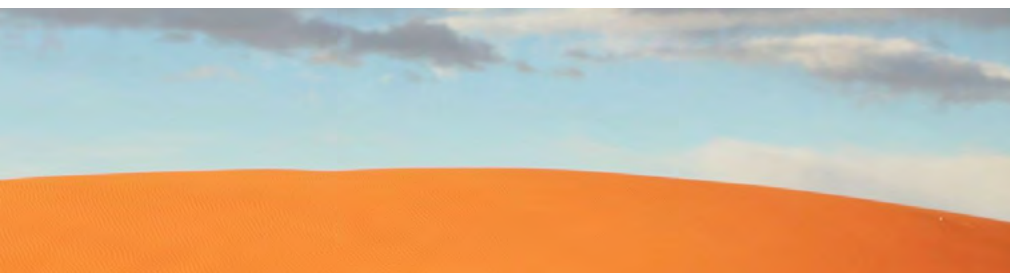
GOD THE ONLY LORD

“The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’” (Mk 12:28–31)

This was the Lord Jesus' reply when He was asked about the most important commandment. The LORD our God is one! This concept—oft-repeated throughout Deuteronomy—is also the most important belief in the new covenant, which the Lord Jesus had established with His blood (Lk 22:20). Moses' declaration (cf. Deut 6:4) was a timely warning to the Israelites who were about to cross River Jordan and enter the land where multiple pagan gods were worshipped. It is also a critical

warning to the biblical true church to ascertain that the Lord they serve is the one and only God.

“The LORD our God, the LORD is one” was not just a teaching given to the Israelites then; it is an inviolable part of present Jewish faith and, even more so, the core faith of the biblical true church. The God served by the biblical true church is not the “Trinity” God. In fact, Scripture does not contain the word *Trinity*. Nor was this concept ever a belief taught to the people of God. The God in whom



the biblical true church believes is the only God; He is Spirit (Jn 4:24); He fills all in all (Jer 23:24; Eph 1:23, 4:10); He descended from heaven and is still in heaven (Jn 3:13)—the only God Who was manifested in the flesh (1 Tim 3:16). As the Lord Jesus said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev 1:8).

THE TABERNACLE OF MEETING IN THE CENTER

Everyone of the children of Israel shall camp by his own standard, beside the emblems of his father's house; they shall camp some distance from the tabernacle of meeting. (Deut 2:2)

After the Exodus, on the first day of the second month of the second year, God spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai. In the tabernacle of meeting, God instructed Moses to take a census of all the males amongst the Israelites (Num 1:1–18). God also instructed that the tabernacle of meeting be set up in the center of the camp, with three tribes each camping on the east, west, south, and north sides of the tabernacle respectively. The ark of the covenant was placed in the tabernacle of meeting. From above the mercy seat, between the two cherubim on the ark of the testimony, God would tell Moses what He wanted conveyed to the children of Israel (Ex 25:22).

The tabernacle of meeting was the center of the Israelites' life in the wilderness. God gave them manna from heaven so that they did not need to “toil all the days of their lives in order to obtain food from the ground” or to “eat bread in the

sweat of their face” (Gen 3:17–19). With such providence from God, daily food was not the focus of their lives. Instead, they could devote themselves to worshipping before the tabernacle, to the offering of sacrifices, as well as the teachings of God that Moses brought out from the tabernacle.

God intended His church in the wilderness to concentrate on learning all His instructions in those forty years. Similarly, the biblical true church must give priority to learning His word and will. Just as the tabernacle of meeting was in the camp center, the true church has God's word as the center of her life. Besides serving the Lord daily, believers learn to take spiritual principles from the Bible as the guide to making important decisions in life. Thus, religious education emphasizes the memorization of key scriptural passages (Deut 6:7) to equip children with the Bible's abundant teachings, enabling them to make decisions based on God's word and to lead victorious lives.

“God intended His church in the wilderness to concentrate on learning all His instructions in those forty years. Similarly, the biblical true church must give priority to learning His word and will.”

DWELL ALONE

After the Exodus, on the first day of the fifth month of the fortieth year, Aaron the priest went up to Mount Hor at the command of the Lord, and died there

(Num 33:38). Following the demise of Aaron, the people came to the plains of Moab east of River Jordan. These were the last few months of the forty-year journey in the wilderness. God provided a conclusion to the Israelites' journey in the wilderness through Balaam the son of Beor. At that point in time, Balak, the king of Moab, had summoned Balaam to curse the Israelites. However, when Balaam looked at the Israelite camps from the top of the rocks, he took up his oracles and said:

How shall I curse whom God has not cursed?

And how shall I denounce whom the LORD has not denounced?

For from the top of the rocks I see him,

And from the hills I behold him;

There! A people dwelling alone, not reckoning itself among the nations.

Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number one-fourth of Israel?

Let me die the death of the righteous,

And let my end be like his!

(Num 23:8–10)

Balaam's oracles show that God does not allow anyone to curse (or slander) those whom He has chosen. The church in the wilderness consists of people who dwell alone; they are not to be reckoned amongst the nations, for they are the special chosen people of God. Even Balaam wished to be one of them and was willing to die with them!

In the wilderness, there was no mixed multitude living amongst the people. The people were alone with the word of God that Moses had brought out of the tabernacle of meeting. The people were reformed and purified in morality, ethics, values, and in their worship and service to the LORD; they could differentiate between the sacred and secular.

God used the pillar of fire and pillar of cloud to indicate when they were to move and when to stop (Num 9:15–23). With the ark of the covenant, He directed their path (Num 10:33–36). He bestowed manna upon them daily and gave them water from the rock

“Today, the true church on earth is as in the worldly wilderness; she must consecrate herself and be determined to dwell alone in the way of the Lord.

to quench their thirst, so that they would understand that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Deut 8:3). God's word was the source of life that sustained them through their journey in the wilderness.

And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” Therefore “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”

(2 Cor 6:16–18)

In the Old Testament, God revealed His will through Balaam. He wanted the people on earth who belonged to Him to dwell alone and not be reckoned amongst the nations. However, after they entered Canaan and experienced the period of the Judges, they demanded a king from Samuel, for they wanted to be “like all the nations” (1 Sam 8:5). Israel wanted to imitate the surrounding nations! God said they had rejected Him from reigning over them (1 Sam 8:7). They had chosen to adopt the secular system and practices, refusing to allow the word of God to exclusively govern them.

Today, the true church on earth is as in the worldly wilderness; she must consecrate herself and be determined to dwell alone in the way of the Lord. She is not reckoned amongst the nations, meaning that she does not allow herself to be swept away by society's tides nor would she indiscriminately borrow from the system and activities of the world.

Believers of the true church have the words of God as the basis of their thoughts and behavior, leading a life free of the strange customs of the world. They measure their church life, worship, and service against the yardstick of biblical teachings, discern between the secular and sacred, adopt values which are pleasing to God, and uphold deeds and virtues based on the truth.

Like Moses who entered the tabernacle of meeting to faithfully bring out the word of God (Heb 3:5), the pulpit of the true church serves to convey God's message. What is spoken on the pulpit must thus be the word of God, not the words of man (1 Thess 2:13). The pulpit is not meant for the exposition of human ideology. Instead, it is a place where biblical teachings are conveyed faithfully, presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus (Col 1:28).

TRANSCEND THE WILDERNESS

*Yet He had commanded the clouds above,
And opened the doors of heaven,
Had rained down manna on them to eat,
And given them of the bread of heaven.
Men ate angels' food; He sent them food to the full.*

(Ps 78:23-25)

Manna and bread of heaven refer to spiritual food, which can satisfy one's spiritual hunger. Paul said the people ate the same spiritual food (“spiritual meat” in King James Version. In the original text, this phrase refers to meat that has been cleansed in accordance to the purification laws) (1 Cor 10:3). Spiritual food refers to Jesus who came down from heaven to give life to the world (Jn 6:33); the body and the blood of the Lord (Jn 6:51–56); as well as His

words, which can bestow life (Jn 6:63).

For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. (1 Cor 10: 4)

On the last day of the Festival of Booths, the Lord Jesus extended a sincere invitation: “ ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive” (Jn 7:37–39), which is the spiritual drink spoken of by Paul.

The biblical true church has the spiritual drink given by the Lord—the Holy Spirit—as well as the bread of heaven—the words and life of the Lord. Amongst a perverse generation, it will be impossible for man to rely on his own strength to live in the way prescribed by God. Only God's Spirit and God's word can enable man to truly transcend the wilderness in the world.

THE ORACLES OF GOD

This is he who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the Angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers, the one who received the living oracles to give to us. (Acts 7:38)

In his testimony, Stephen said that Moses' work was to convey the oracles of God to [us]—the Jews (Acts 7:38). The Israelites had a very important task in the wilderness, i.e., they were to receive the oracles of God. Paul said that the Jews have the advantage of being entrusted with the oracles of God (Rom 3:1–2). “To entrust” literally means “to put in trust with.” From this we infer that there must have been a rightful recipient for the objects placed in trust. In other words, the Jews had been entrusted with the oracles of God and it was mandatory of them to pass these to the rightful recipients. Therefore, Paul went on to explain:

Now to Him who is able to establish

you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith ... (Rom 16:25–26)

This mystery refers to the mystery of Christ, i.e., in Christ Jesus and through the gospel, the Gentiles would be fellow heirs of the same body and partakers of His promise (Eph 3:4–6). When the mystery is revealed, which is also the appointed time of God, the oracles that have been entrusted to the Jews shall also instruct people of all nations. They would then be able to receive the gospel and enter the truth of salvation.

The church in the wilderness—the Israelites—was chosen from amongst the nations to become the people of God, a priestly nation, a holy nation (Ex 19:5), enjoying the privilege of receiving the oracles of God (Acts 7:38). God set His tabernacle amongst them to walk in the midst of their camps (Lev 26:11–12)—to abide with them and to talk to them (Ex 25:22; 29:43–44). But the Israelite race is not the ultimate recipient. These oracles were entrusted to them to pave the way for all nations to know God.

Similarly, the biblical true church is a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people (1 Pet 2:9). Through the Holy Spirit, God establishes the tabernacle within the true church, to enrich her life through His gracious words and to guide her into the direction willed by Him. This also illustrates the responsibility entrusted to the true church: she is obligated to search God's will through the oracles, look up to His magnificent acts, witness how He works with her, allow His glory to fill her, and fulfill her duty to bring people to Him (Mt 28:18–20). ★

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.

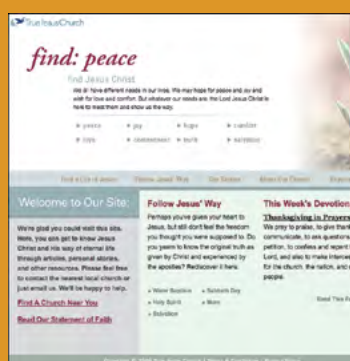
A devotional is a pithy article (300 to 350 words) inspired by biblical teachings.

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.





She Went After Many, But Me She Forgot

Colin Shek—Sunderland, U.K.

I recently read about a piece of flat-pack furniture from a well-known retailer that has been dubbed “the Divorce Maker.”¹ A leading couples’ counselor in America has claimed that assembling this do-it-yourself shelving unit with your spouse is the ultimate test of your relationship. As part of couples’ therapy sessions, this counselor asks her clients to construct the flat-pack furniture together, to see how they work as a team. During this exercise, the couples would often argue, and some even contemplate divorce. The idea is that if your marriage survives the test of assembling the shelving unit, with its thirty-two pages of instructions, it can survive anything.

Of course, it is not just furniture assembly that defines a healthy husband-and-wife relationship. There are greater hurdles when it comes to maintaining a good marriage. When we think about our spiritual relationship with God, which the Bible refers to as that of a husband and wife (Hos 2:16–20), this is even more so!

The prophet Hosea ministered during the reign of King Jeroboam II in the northern kingdom of Israel. In this period, the relationship between God

and His people became strained—so much so that God threatened to divorce His wife (Hos 2:2) and to separate Himself from His people (Hos 1:8). Why would God want to do this? What caused the breakdown in this special relationship? As we study and ponder upon these questions, we can learn how to preserve and maintain a close relationship with God today.

GOD HAS GIVEN US A SPECIAL IDENTITY AND STATUS

At this point in Israel’s history—following Solomon’s prosperous reign (Hos 1:1) and before the fall of the northern kingdom (Hos 10:5, 6)—the Israelites were living in relative comfort and thriving economically (Hos 2:5; 4:7). Amidst all the prosperity, it seems that the people of Israel forgot their God. One key concern that God had was that His people had forgotten their special status as His chosen people:

*“Bring charges against your mother,
bring charges;
For she is not My wife, nor am I her
Husband!
Let her put away her harlotries from
her sight,*

*And her adulteries from between her
breasts;
Lest I strip her naked
And expose her, as in the day she
was born,
And make her like a wilderness,
And set her like a dry land,
And slay her with thirst.”*

(Hos 2:2–3)

God declared that He was no longer husband to Israel and that His people were no longer His wife. Israel had played the harlot with other gods and forgot her status as God’s holy nation. God was angry that His chosen people had forgotten their special relationship and instead were running after the deities of the land.

In the world around us, there are many ways our identity can be shaped, and many facets we can adopt. People like to be seen as good students or good parents, or experts in their profession. Additionally, many strive to achieve certain standards of beauty, fitness and social status. We often dedicate much time and many resources to developing these identities. Students spend hours revising for exams. Some professionals hoard those dreaded textbooks as they

“Israel thought that the gods of the land provided her with the necessities and blessings in life. In other words, they thought all of life’s blessings came from Baal. ... Today, it is easy to fall into the same trap of attributing our success or blessings to sources other than God.”

spend their evenings preparing for certifications or pursuing professional development. Parents work hard to provide for their children, yet feel guilty about not spending enough quality time with them. And the self-employed struggle to separate work from their personal time. Juggling competing priorities and time constraints seemingly never stops and is a typical part of our lives today.

When it comes to our Christian identity, we may make the mistake of treating it like our other identities. Some may think that it is too much hard work to maintain. In fact, our status in Christ does not depend on our works or deeds. Rather, God has graciously given us this new identity (Rom 3:23–26). Jesus died on the cross, took away our identity as a sinner, and gave us the glorious identity that He Himself has. What we must do now is to live by the Spirit, upholding our holy status (Rom 8:13).

We must cherish our identity as the children of God, which prominence we have reached through none of our own effort. While we are undeserving recipients, God saved us by His grace and mercy.

By submitting our lives to the Spirit, our identity in Christ supersedes our other worldly identities. We are beloved children of God first and foremost. Everything else—our education, career, wealth and social standing—is secondary. This is what the Israelites forgot. They focused instead on the other gods of the land and forsook their relationship with God.

So what kind of attitude would we have if we cherish our status as the beloved children of God? How will we think and behave? One of the things that the Book of Hosea speaks about

is our attitude towards the blessings in our lives.

GOD IS THE SOURCE OF ALL BLESSINGS IN LIFE

The people of Israel mistakenly attributed the source of their blessings to the gods of the land:

*“I will not have mercy on her children,
For they are the children of harlotry.
For their mother has played the harlot;
She who conceived them has behaved shamefully.
For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers,
Who give me my bread and my water,
My wool and my linen,
My oil and my drink.’ ” (Hos 2:4–5)*

Israel thought that the gods of the land provided her with the necessities and blessings in life. In other words, they thought all of life’s blessings came from Baal. They failed to see God as the true source of their blessings.

Today, it is easy to fall into the same trap of attributing our success or blessings to sources other than God. For example, we may think:

1. My business is only successful because of its prime location.
2. My career continues to be successful because I have a manager who has the heart to develop my skills through further training.
3. Our only hope in life is in

politics and government intervention, where new policies will protect social welfare and services, support the self-employed, and preserve the education of our children and well-being of our citizens.

4. My success is down to my own hard work and ambition—I only got to where I am today through my own tenacity.

As Christians, we must realize that success and wealth come from God. It is God who provides the opportunities and gives us the means to receive such blessings. Any departure from acknowledging that God is the giver, will lead to us believing in our own capabilities and in the opportunities provided by society. This feeds into an idolatrous mindset. If we attributed our success to things other than God, we would elevate such things to be our god and source of blessings. That was Israel’s downfall, as they forgot about their true God (Hos 2:13). They were living as though God did not exist. Their focus on Baal instead of God fed into their idolatrous lives.

If we want to maintain a strong relationship with God, a healthy attitude to have is to see God as the sovereign ruler and sole provider in our lives:

1. When our business is healthy and profitable, we recognize that God has given us the power to earn (Deut 8:18).

2. When we receive good exam results, then we know that it is God who blesses us with the knowledge and ability to learn (Dan 1:17).

3. When we look at our comfortable lifestyles, we know that God has blessed us with the opportunity and conditions to build a life—the right schools and the right government for the time.

By acknowledging God as the source of our blessings, we will be spurred on to worship Him and offer our praises with a heart full of thanksgiving.

“If we want to maintain a strong relationship with God, a healthy attitude to have is to see God as the sovereign ruler and sole provider in our lives.”

“God wants us to look beyond His blessings. Anything that is more important to us in our life is simply an idol.

GOD IS OUR ULTIMATE BLESSING

God was clear in His warnings against such idolatrous behavior from His chosen nation. He would return to take away His blessings and providence (Hos 2:9), uncover her lewd ways (v.10), cause all her feasts to stop (v.11), destroy her vines (v.12), and punish her for her adultery with Baal (v.13). Such severe judgment was required because the LORD said, “She decked herself with her earrings and jewelry, and went after her lovers; but Me she forgot” (Hos 2:13).

The reality was that Israel was not truly interested in God. She was interested in food and wealth. If Baal could provide these, she would go after Baal. But if she thought that the LORD could give them more physical blessings, she would go after the LORD: “Then she will say, ‘I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now’” (Hos 2:7b). She did not seek God Himself, just His blessings.

God wants us to look beyond His blessings. Anything that is more important to us in our life is simply an idol. Those believers who maintain a healthy relationship with God are those who continue to worship Him whether times are good or bad. Just like a marriage, there is a vow to cherish each other in good times and in bad, no matter how materially blessed we are.

The important thing is that God is our ultimate blessing. He wants us to pursue Him, and not His blessings only.

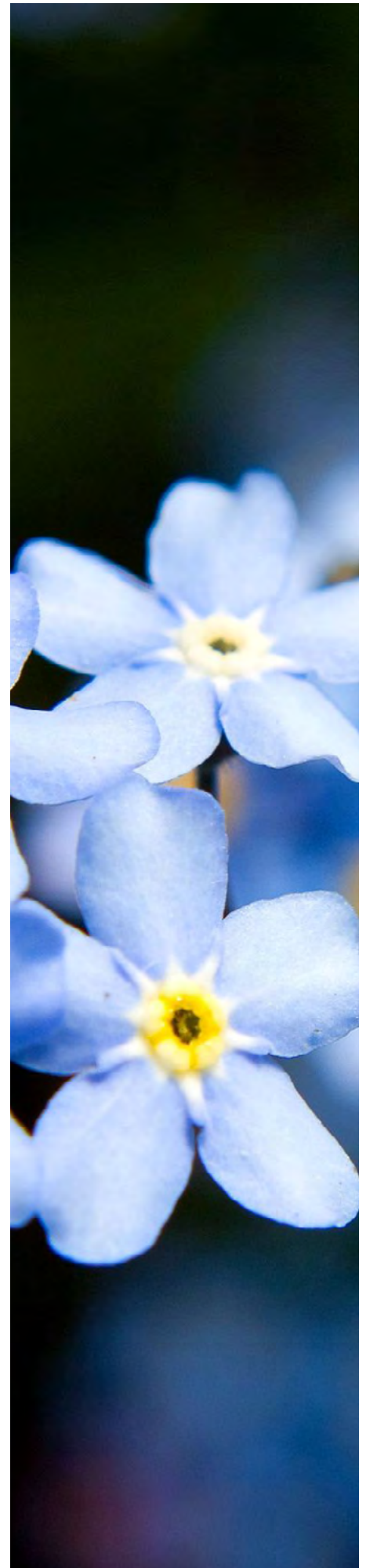
CONCLUSION

Hosea’s message still applies to us today. In a competitive world, where so much of our focus is on carving out

our own place in society, we should consider whether we have forgotten about our God-given status. We were bought and glorified by the blood of Christ. We must put our focus on how God’s salvation was graciously given to us. This is one thing in life that we can never achieve by our own effort. This is why we must cherish our precious status in Christ and pursue a stronger relationship with God.

We must recognize that as God’s special people, we are lavished with His blessings. Let us acknowledge and praise God as the source of all our blessings and successes. And may we strive to look beyond these blessings and focus our pursuit on God Himself, who is the ultimate blessing, in good times and in bad. With this mindset, our husband-wife relationship with God will remain strong no matter what may come our way. ★

“Those believers who maintain a healthy relationship with God are those who continue to worship Him whether times are good or bad. Just like a marriage, there is a vow to cherish each other in good times and in bad, no matter how materially blessed we are.



1 <http://www.express.co.uk/life-style/life/572720/know-your-relationship-will-work-Try-IKEA-rage-test>



Living for the Lord (I)

Adapted from a sermon series by Simon Chin—Singapore

INTRODUCTION

For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. (Rom 14:7–8)

Writing to the believers in Rome, Paul said that since they had been baptized into Christ, they should no longer live (or even die) for themselves. This message would be meaningless to those in the world who do not know God. But for believers who have been purchased by the blood of Christ, we know we belong to Him and have a duty to live for Him.

The Bible contains many examples of believers who lived and died for Christ. An example is Stephen, one of seven disciples chosen to distribute daily rations of food to the members. He was given this task because he was a man of faith, filled by the Holy Spirit and wisdom, and of good repute (Acts 6:3, 5).

On one occasion, when he was contending for the faith before learned members of a Jewish sect called the

“*Has Christ formed in us? Have we been transformed to be like Jesus?*”

Synagogue of the Freedmen, Stephen spoke with such courage and wisdom that they could not uphold their case. So they resorted to inciting false accusations against him. Eventually, he was brought before the Jewish council to stand trial, and then dragged outside the city to be stoned. But even at such a distressing time, he knelt to pray for his persecutors; he practiced his faith. He lived for Christ and died a martyr.

What about us? Do we live for Christ?

As True Jesus Church (TJC) believers, we are abundantly blessed: Jesus came to the world to die on the cross—to redeem us from our sins and grant us the grace of being called the sons of God and the privilege of inheriting everlasting life. Even though TJC is small and unsophisticated compared with other denominations, we have the rich and abundant grace of Christ, and are able to experience signs and wonders. For example, members from across the world have witnessed the

blood of Jesus Christ during water baptism—a phenomenon unique to TJC. Such visions are the work of the Holy Spirit affirming that our baptism has the power to cleanse, justify, and confer sonship.

Freely we have received this grace, and freely we should give our lives for Him.

WHY DO WE LIVE FOR CHRIST?

Because He Emptied Himself for Us

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. (2 Cor 5:14–15)

Jesus Christ came to the world to bring salvation to humankind. In order to do this, the Almighty and Most High God had to first empty Himself. He was born into the family of a lowly

carpenter and raised in the small town of Nazareth. His time on earth was marked by hardship, insecurity and the lack of physical comforts. Jesus Himself remarked that the birds of the air had their nests, foxes had holes, but the Son of Man had nowhere to lay His head (Mt 8:20). Paul pointed out that though Jesus was rich, He chose to become poor for our sake. And finally when He died, He died for our sins.

If we can understand the significance of Jesus' sacrifice and the great grace He has bestowed upon us, we will resolve to live for Christ.

Because He Shed His Blood to Purchase Us

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's. (1 Cor 6:19–20)

The price that Jesus paid for humankind's salvation was to be crucified and to shed His precious blood. Apart from the physical suffering that this entailed, Jesus also experienced mental anguish. Whilst on the cross, He cried out, "Eli, eli, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mt 27:46). At this point, He was carrying the weight of our sins and was separated from the Father's presence.

Even though we were unworthy, Jesus saved us and poured out His Spirit on us, transforming our lowly bodies into the temple of the Holy Spirit. Many of us can testify how Jesus Christ brought us to the true church: some of us were born into the church; others believed on account of friends or relatives preaching to them. Either way, it is God's grace. God did not choose us because we loved Him, but because He first loved us.

We ought not receive the grace of God in vain (2 Cor 6:1–2). Unknowingly, we could be those whom the Bible refers to as "enemies



of the cross of Jesus" (Phil 3:18b). They continued to live for themselves. They failed to understand and appreciate the grace of God that had come upon them and continued with their secular lifestyle even after believing in Christ.

The question we should ask ourselves, then, is: Who do we live for? Are we believers who do not put in effort to strengthen our faith, and continue to live for ourselves?

The downpouring of God's grace is like rain being poured out on the earth. We need it in order to bear good fruit for the Lord. If, on the other hand, we bear thorns and briers, despite having known Christ and tasted His goodness, it is as if we crucify Jesus all over again. We will then be rejected by God (Heb 6:4–8).

When we submit to God's word and obey Him, we live for Christ.

Because He Promises Eternal Life

If there were no eternal life or judgment, we would have no reason to live for Christ. We could live for ourselves and pursue all that our heart desires. But if we believe that Jesus has promised us eternal life, we have to live for Christ.

Apostle Paul regarded his faith and his work as a race; striving for an imperishable crown (1 Cor 9:24–26). Athletes understand the glory of clinching the prize. This goal motivates them to dedicate long hours of strenuous training to prepare for the race. They discipline themselves, not just in training but also in the way they live their life. They invest so much effort just for a perishable

crown. We, on the other hand, have an imperishable crown awaiting us, all the more we must fight the good fight and keep our faith.

This is one reason why we must live for Christ so that we can win that imperishable crown and receive eternal life.

HOW TO LIVE FOR CHRIST

Die to Sin and Live to Righteousness

One underpinning principle of Christian life is to be dead to sin. This means not letting ourselves be overcome by temptations. Instead, we strive for righteousness, doing what God wants us to do.

Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. (1 Pet 2:24)

Elder Peter quotes from Isaiah 53:5, reminding us that we should be dead to sin because the stripes of the Lord have healed us. If we continue in sin, neglecting to use the shield of faith and the breastplate of righteousness, we will not live for Christ. This is the situation of some believers today: those who indulge in their lusts—e.g., viewing pornography, reading unedifying books, and watching inappropriate videos. When we allow such things to feature in our lives, we have not died to sin, and we are certainly not living for Christ.

Living for Christ also has implications for our character.

My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you. (Gal 4:19)



One of Paul's earliest letters was written to the believers in Galatia, where some teachers were trying to propagate Jewish traditions, disturbing the members' faith. Paul wrote to these members, telling them to make sure that Christ be formed in them.

What about us? Has Christ formed in us? Have we been transformed to be like Jesus? We cannot develop a dual character where we behave in one way inside church, and another way outside: if we behave in this manner, our thoughts, words and actions will not conform to Christ. We need to be transformed and have the nature of Christ in us; always ready to receive the word of God and have the Holy Spirit work in us to change us. Only then can we die to sin and live to righteousness.

Serve the One True God, Not the Things of the World

When we submit to God's word and obey Him, we live for Christ. This is not easy. There will be challenges along the way: we will face criticisms, misunderstandings and obstacles, even from family members and friends; but still, we should strive to live for Christ.

When Agabus prophesied that Apostle Paul would be bound in chains should he go to Jerusalem to preach, the brethren pleaded with Paul not to go (Acts 21). Their intentions were good, but it was not helpful to Paul, who had already made a resolution—not to only be bound, "but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13).

Paul knew that his ministry was to accomplish the will of God, to preach to the ends of the earth, and to live and die for Christ. As it transpired,

he was indeed arrested in Jerusalem and taken to Caesarea, where he was detained for two years before being sent to Rome and put under house arrest. Nevertheless, he said:

But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.
(Acts 20:24)

Paul resolved to fulfill the ministry of the Lord. He did his utmost to preach the gospel widely. Even after his third missionary journey, he did not feel that his work was complete; rather, he desired to fully accomplish the Lord's will.

While imprisoned in Rome, Paul wrote to the Philippians: "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil 1:21). He expressed his desire to depart and be with the Lord, who would grant him the crown of righteousness. But he knew his work on earth was not complete—the believers still needed him. He therefore expressed his hope to see them again, to pastor them and to witness their abundant joy in Jesus Christ (Phil 1:21–26). This was by no means an easy ambition of Paul, as he would have been more

than sixty years old by then and had suffered much for the ministry. During his ministry, Paul submitted totally to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and relied on God's power to help the believers become mature in Christ. By the time of his second imprisonment, Paul could declare, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness" (2 Tim 4:7–8a).

Deny Ourselves

Self-denial often entails choosing between God and ourselves, between God and the world, and between God and family.

In church, many workers freely offer their time and resources—despite having their own personal commitments—to God and His church. They have put God first. We can see their faithfulness to God's work: they serve in church unceasingly, even when they are busy or unwell. Even retired workers continue to serve, sometimes on a full-time basis, travelling abroad to preach in inhospitable environments.

Such members sacrifice much for the Lord, but what do they get in return? Criticisms, misunderstandings, and rebukes from others? Despite this, they persevere and continue serving the Lord. Why? Because they have denied themselves and taken up the cross to follow Christ (Lk 9:23).

"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after

"If there should come a time when we must choose between the wishes of God and that of our parents, family members, or ourselves, God comes first. One who loves Christ should be willing to make sacrifices. This is not easy in our world today, where personal interests and materialism are seen as top priorities.

Me cannot be My disciple. ... So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple." (Lk 14:26–27, 33)

These verses describe the price of discipleship: self-denial and sacrifice. What Jesus teaches is not that we can hate our parents—far from this, as the Ten Commandments require us to honor them. Rather, His message is about priorities: if there should come a time when we must choose between the wishes of God and that of our parents, family members, or ourselves, God comes first. One who loves Christ should be willing to make sacrifices. This is not easy in our world today, where personal interests and materialism are seen as top priorities.

In fact, when we deny ourselves, we will not lose out; rather, we will gain more grace from God. We can see, for example, how God has blessed TJC's early workers for all that they have done for the Lord. We see His grace upon them in terms of their faith and their family life. Indeed, it is because of God's blessings upon that generation that some of us are in Christ and have the hope of a heavenly inheritance.

CONCLUSION

By the mercy and grace of our Lord Jesus, we have come to the knowledge of the truth. We were brought into the true church, where His blood has washed away our sins. Therefore, with this understanding, let us be fruitful. Let us live for Christ all the days of our lives. Then when death comes upon us, we will die in the grace of the Lord and receive the crown of righteousness. ★

Five Loaves and Two Fish

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Love as Brothers

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"Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble." (1 Pet 3:8 | NIV)

We are privileged to belong to God's family, a community with Jesus Christ as the founder and foundation. Everyone in this community is related – we are all brothers and sisters, loved equally by God. God teaches us to love one another. But sometimes we may feel that it is much easier to love God than to love others. It is easy to say that we love God when it doesn't cost anything more than weekly attendance at church services. But the real test of our love for God is how we treat the people in front of us – our family members and fellow believers. We cannot truly love God while neglecting to love people around us in God's family.

Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (1 Jn 3:15)

Does this mean that if you dislike someone, you aren't a Christian? John's words focus on the attitude that causes us to ignore or despise others, to treat them as irritants, competitors, or enemies. Christian love is not a feeling but a choice. [Continue reading →](#)

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The Practice of Love – Humility

"[Love] does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud." (1 Cor 13:4 | NIV)

Our Lord Jesus Christ commands us to love one another. What is brotherly love? It goes beyond our affection for each other, our sense of belonging, or our social group. Biblical love is not envious, proud, or self-centered. The practice of brotherly love encompasses humility.



Love does not envy. Do we bicker out of jealousy? When Jesus saw Nathanael coming, He addressed him as an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile. This is a compliment to the honesty and sincerity of Nathanael. We need to affirm the good qualities and achievements of our fellow believers. Rather than criticize each other, we should encourage and become advocates for each other. [Continue reading →](#)

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MANNA

Welcome to Manna on the Web

Welcome to Manna on the Web

June 29



Manna Magazine Issue 76

by IMPSP2010\jmanma.webd on 6/29/2015 4:09 PM

Commission

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Before Jesus ascended to heaven, He entrusted two great commissions to His disciples: to preach the gospel, and to pastor His sheep. The Lord's disciples took up the first commission and preached the gospel from Jerusalem, to Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). Why did these disciples have such a fervent heart, overcoming all difficulties in order to complete this commission? It was because they were effectively trained by Jesus. When He had first begun to preach the gospel, Jesus chose and called His disciples to follow Him. He later sent them forth to preach the gospel. Within the three years of His ministry, He also spent time with them so that they could witness His compassion—how He preached the heavenly gospel, revealed the authority of the heavenly kingdom, healed the sick, cast out demons, fed the hungry, and solved man's problems. His resurrection and ascension gave man a living hope. The disciples saw, heard and touched the manifested Christ. They had a deep understanding and a vivid experience of the Lord Jesus (1 Jn 1:1-3). Preaching the gospel was proclaiming the Lord Jesus who had dwelled with them. The disciples each shared a deep love and a personal relationship with Him. Preaching the gospel not only fulfills Jesus' command, but repays His love. If we preach with such a heart, then our deeds will be pleasing to the Lord.

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Overcoming Trials and Temptations (II): The Snare of Temptations

Based on a sermon series by Aun Quak Chin—Singapore

As part of their journey of faith, Christians have to handle trials and temptations. The first part of this series considered Elder James' guide on how to distinguish between trials and temptations; the second part looked at the joy of trials. In this final part, we focus on how we can avoid the trap of temptations.

THE SOURCE OF TEMPTATION

Human Justifications and Excuses

The natural tendency for humans is to look for something or someone else to blame when they have erred. Many who have fallen to temptation blame God, the devil, or both!

We are convinced that we are the victims; we blame God for allowing the devil to harm man. We even justify our first ancestors' sin! We reason that without the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve would not have been enticed. And even if the fruit were there, Adam and Eve would not have touched it had it not been for the smooth-tongued serpent.

The Origins of Temptation

ENTICED BY OUR OWN DESIRES

Elder James tells us that the above reasoning is wrong. Humans are tempted and enticed by their own desires (Jas 1:14–15). The origin of sin, and the relationship between sin and man, stems from man himself, not the devil. Temptation does not arise

Common excuses:

"If God had not allowed the devil to tempt us, we would not have been tempted to sin and fall."

"God knew that the devil was out to tempt and destroy man. Why did God not immediately destroy this evil one? It was God who allowed the devil to survive and carry on tempting and killing. I should not be blamed for sinning; it is all God's fault for permitting this malevolent being to continue his heinous mission!"

from the existence of the forbidden fruit, but from the desire within us. According to Apostle Paul, sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin (Rom 5:12). He did not say that sin entered the world through the devil, and death through the devil. In short, the apostles were consistent in their teaching—those who sin should not blame either the forbidden fruit or the devil.

Some insist that temptation would not have arisen had the fruit not existed or the devil not been present. Such arguments overlook

or deliberately ignore the fact that humans have freedom of choice. The fruit hung from the tree, but man had choices at different points: of walking toward the tree, of reaching out to touch it, of plucking it, and of eating it.

It is no sin to look at the fruit or to touch it. But doing so brings us to the dangerous frontier. The single act of reaching out, plucking the fruit and eating it would push us over the border into the realm of disobedience to God, i.e., sin. Clearly, this action is of our own volition. We can, or

should, blame no one else.

The important question that we must consider is why we choose to succumb to our desires.

DID NOT CURB OUR DESIRES

Some rapists blame their crime on their victim. They claim that the woman was too beautiful or provocatively dressed. Clearly, no clear-thinking judge or jury would accept such a rationale! We cannot stop birds from flying over our heads, but we can stop them from building a nest in our hair. Similarly, we cannot stop a beautiful woman from walking past us, but we can stop ourselves from following her with our gaze (Job 31:1).

David was a mighty warrior who defeated the towering Philistine Goliath in his youth. But as king, he was defeated by his own uncurbed desires. The sight of beautiful Bathsheba in the bath led him to inappropriate thoughts and, eventually, sin.

This is often what happens to us. Our first view of inappropriate material—pornography, for example—may have been pure coincidence. But because we allow our thoughts to dwell on these images, our desires are aroused. Even when concerned brethren warn us, we dismiss them, and may even accuse them of being nosey, overly suspicious, and prudish. We refuse to make a conscious and concerted effort to curb our desires and avoid these opportunities to sin. Finally, and fatally, we cross the boundary into sin.

David had a thousand ways to justify inviting Bathsheba to his palace after that first accidental view: *She is a neighbor to whom I should demonstrate hospitality. She is the wife of my loyal warrior to whom I want to show gratitude.* And thus his desire grew until they both committed adultery.

Therefore, an indispensable spiritual

workout for us is to exercise control over our hearts; to prevent sinful desires from germinating and drawing us into making choices against the will and commands of God. When Jesus Christ comes again to judge man, He will judge according to each one's work (1 Pet 1:13–17). It would be futile then to blame the devil or somebody else.

THE DEVIL'S METHODS OF TEMPTATION

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the devil is tireless in his efforts to tempt man (1 Pet 5:8). There are generally two broad approaches that he employs.

First, he makes it a huge disincentive for man to remain faithful to God. This could take the form of extremely difficult circumstances. For example, both Job and his wife were put through great suffering. While Job persevered, his wife surrendered her faith in God (Job 2:9).

Second, the devil instigates man to go against the word of God. This second approach is more complex and insidious. Many have fallen by this strategy. The devil used this to tempt the Lord Jesus. In fact, he tried three times to use the word of God to tempt Jesus to go against God!

The First Temptation: Challenging Our Identity

Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' " (Mt 4:3–4)

This first temptation is a challenge to prove our identity. It was no mere test

of Jesus' ability to perform miracles. What was the devil's true intent?

Just before the Lord Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Spirit, He had been baptized. When Jesus came out of the water, the heavenly Father proclaimed that Jesus was His Son, and sent His Holy Spirit to prove that Jesus was His Son (Mt 3:16–17). By challenging Jesus to perform a miracle, the devil was implying that the heavenly Father's endorsement of Jesus' identity was not enough; the devil wanted Jesus to prove His own identity by demonstrating His power.

The devil knew Jesus had fasted for forty days and was hungry. So he tried to drive a wedge between Jesus and His Father by suggesting that his way was superior to the heavenly Father's method. By turning the stones to bread, Jesus not only proves His identity but also feeds Himself.

This was the devil's stratagem. He provided an incentive for Jesus to go against the word of God; he challenged Jesus to use a miracle to prove that He was the Son of God, and to resolve the problem of hunger. As humans, we would find the devil's reasoning logical and appealing. If Jesus was truly the Son of God, God would not allow or want Him to go hungry. Performing a miracle both proves Jesus' divine power and status, and generates food. The devil could then be silenced.

But Jesus immediately rejected the temptation, saying, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Lk 4:4b). By this, Jesus was emphasizing that He would rather forego miracles and food than cast doubt on the heavenly Father's testament to His sonship. Jesus' priority was to affirm and submit to His Father's words.

Had the Lord Jesus yielded to the natural human impulse of performing a miracle in order to kill two birds with one stone, He would have effectively obeyed the devil, rather than His heavenly Father. He would have denied the Father's wisdom and way, and the sufficiency of the Holy Spirit's testimony.

We may also encounter a similar temptation today. God uses the truth

”Temptation does not arise from the existence of the forbidden fruit, but from the desire within us.

and the Holy Spirit to testify that we are children of God. The truth that saves tells us that baptism in the name of Jesus washes away our sins, making us the sons of God. Then when we pray for and receive the promised Holy Spirit, this Spirit of sonship will prove that we are children of God (Gal 4:6). However, in our afflictions (e.g., poverty, unemployment, illness) the devil tempts us with insinuations that God has abandoned us: "Are you really a son of God? Then why are you hungry? Why are you so ill? If you are truly a child whom God loves, you should pray and ask God to perform a miracle, to resolve all your problems, to heal your sickness! If God heeds your request, you have proved that you truly are a child of God!" The unspoken corollary hangs in the air: "But if God does not heal, are you truly the son of God? Does God really love you? Perhaps He's not the right God for you"

While this may sound farfetched when we are strong in faith, many Christians have yielded to doubt; many have left to pursue other beliefs that can bestow more and immediate "blessings" (2 Tim 4:10). The truth they know—sin-cleansing baptism, the testimony of the Holy Spirit, etc.—is cast aside. These Christians need miracles to prove that they are children of God. Miracles have usurped the truth and the Holy Spirit as primary testators.

Hence, we must be alert to the devil's lure. Counter him as Jesus did: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." We believe and affirm whatever God has said and whichever approach He chooses. We are not deterred by the absence of miracles, lack of food, or impending death. The heavenly Father has given us the truth and the Holy Spirit to testify that we are children of God and we are saved—this is enough.

The Second Temptation: Challenging Our Physical Wellbeing

Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You



are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.' "
Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.' "

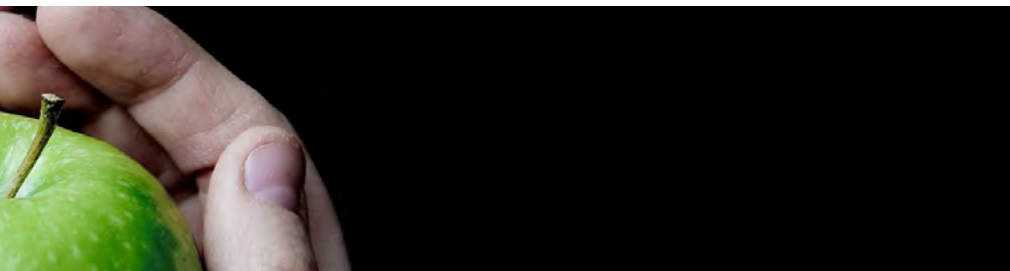
(Mt 4:5–7)

"In our afflictions (e.g., poverty, unemployment, illness) the devil tempts us with insinuations that God has abandoned us: "Are you really a son of God? Then why are you hungry? Why are you so ill?"

This second temptation is a challenge to our physical wellbeing. The devil taunted Jesus with "God will protect you." The reference to Psalm 91:11–12 shows that the devil had not misquoted Scripture. However, he misinterpreted and misapplied it. The complete Psalm 91:11 is "For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways." The phrase "all your ways" refers to ways which are according to the word of God. It definitely excludes situations where we choose to go against the word of God. If we walk according to the word of God, and walk on His path, He will protect us. But if we deliberately defy Him by walking on the wrong path, how can we demand God's protection?

The devil was implying that the Son of God deserved God's protection in every way even if Jesus deliberately threw Himself off the pinnacle of the temple—because it had been recorded that God would protect Him. But this is wrong. Putting ourselves in harm's way in order to compel God to demonstrate His love for us is tempting God. If God does not protect us, He will be accused of not keeping His word. But if He stretches out His hands to protect us, we have treated the Lord of the Universe as a servant whom we have compelled to fulfil our whim in our foolish desire to refute the devil's taunt. But Jesus was wise enough to see through the devil's manipulation and unequivocally rejected him with "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.' "

Today, we may unknowingly fall into the devil's trap. For example, someone may challenge us to pray for a seriously ill person, with the words: "If he recovers, I will believe, because it proves that God is with you." In our eagerness to prove that our God is true, we quickly accept the challenge, and then proclaim a fast-and-pray drive. In our prayer, we tell the Creator what a wonderful opportunity this is for evangelism and order the Creator to perform this miracle of healing. And if after countless announcements and prayer sessions, the potential convert is not healed and leaves to join another religion or Christian denomination, are we tempted to secretly rebuke God? Are we tempted to demand that God helps us to keep up with churches of other denominations whose pastors appear to be performing so many miracles that they attract new believers by the thousands? Indeed,



the Lord Jesus promised that signs, miracles and wonders will accompany our evangelism (Mk 16:15–18), but these are performed as and when God wills; not as and when to rebut the devil's challenge.

The Third Temptation: Buying Our Loyalty

Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.' "

(Mt 4:8–10)

This third temptation is the attempt to buy loyalty. The devil knew that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; he sought to bribe Him with the highest price possible. The devil offered no mere billions or trillions, but all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory—literally, the whole world. But Jesus was terse: "Away with you Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.' "

The devil—through people in the world—will try to bribe us by offering us the world and all its pleasures. Can we reject these glittering prizes as Jesus did? Jesus dismissed the devil's offer without a second thought because He knew that only one Being is worthy of worship. Similarly, our ability to reject such a proposition ultimately depends on whom or what we allow to have power over us.

Logically, the authority over all

life—absolute sovereignty—belongs to God since He is the Creator of man and the source of all man has. However, the loving God gave man the freedom of choice. Hence we can decide whom we want to worship and to whom we cede control over our lives. The devil will try to persuade us not to worship God by warning us that following Christ means having to bear the cross. He will remind us of Jesus' words—those who believe in Him will be rebuked for His name's sake; persecution, imprisonment and even death are likely outcomes (Jn 15:18–21; Mt 24:9). It takes a lot of willpower to choose the narrow path of Jesus when the devil dangles a smooth and easy way before us. It would seem insane to turn down glory, honor and riches for persecution and death.

Another of the devil's favorite tactics is to strengthen his offer with visual allure. When the devil attempted to buy Jesus' loyalty, instead of just describing the reward he was offering, the devil took Jesus up to an exceedingly high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. Looking down, Jesus certainly saw all the world's glory, honor and riches. But Jesus also saw beyond that. Jesus saw a world that would ultimately be destroyed when the kingdom of God comes. Hence He could reject the temptation.

The secret to help us reject the bribe offered by the devil is the ability to see the ultimate destruction of this world, no matter how glittering and attractive it appears at present. The kingdom of heaven often seems an abstract and nebulous concept compared to the concrete reality of everyday life. This is exactly what the devil is tirelessly trying to convince

us: to exchange the incorruptible, immutable, but invisible, heaven for immediate material gain. So we need to see further and perceive what is the most precious; we need to see through the devil's wiles. We need the Holy Spirit to help us believe and trust in the eternal glory that God can offer. In His incorruptible kingdom, we can enjoy everlasting life. So God is the only One worth ceding the authority over our lives to (Eph 1:18).

CONCLUSION

To overcome the snare of temptations, it is not enough to know God's word. We must believe in and hold fast to the words of the Lord Jesus. We must also be ever vigilant against attempts by the devil to sow doubt in us regarding God's promises. We must not yield to the devil's instigation to prove our identity, secure our physical wellbeing, or gain the world at the expense of losing our Savior.

In our weakness, we may go astray occasionally. But we must not allow ourselves to be mired in this weakness or push the blame for our transgression onto others. Instead we must quickly realize our mistakes, ask God to forgive us, to help us walk on the right path once again, and no longer succumb to temptation and sin. ★

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Lost to Worldly Ideals

Elizabeth Yao — Nanjing, China

I was baptized into the True Jesus Church (TJC) at Queens, New York, on August 23, 2003 when I was seventeen. During the following seven years, I attended the National Youth Theological Seminar only twice and went to Sabbath services irregularly. There were many reasons for this, some of which, but not all, were beyond my control.

My parents were baptized around the same time as I and, as new believers, we did not make spiritually-driven decisions. I chose to go to a college with no church nearby, and my belief system eventually degenerated into one consisting solely of worldly ideals. At that time, I did not know that I was in the world, when I should have been in Christ. In fact, I knew nothing about what it meant to live for God, and how amazing such a life could be.

My prayers reflected my weak spirituality. I would pray only when I needed something from God. When He answered me, I would be very thankful, but would later forget all the things I had promised Him in prayer. And when life became empty and unbearable, because I stubbornly followed my own will, I would once more kneel down and unashamedly

say: “God, I can’t take this anymore. I give up!” Then, unanswered prayers would drive me once again to seek solace in other places.

There were times when I tried to reconnect with God and improve in faith, but I felt a huge divide between myself and other church members. I felt that somehow they met the secret “standard” that meant God would always be there for them; I was not part of that world, and I doubted if God even still loved me.

MENTAL AND PHYSICAL TURMOIL

In June 2011, I was in New York preparing for summer classes. By then, my life was devoid of God and I was at my lowest spiritual ebb. My lifestyle was spiritually unhealthy although daily life went on as normal. Then, one day, out of the blue, an area of my lower back started to hurt. The pain increased daily and would shoot down the nerves of my legs whenever I moved. I worried that I might eventually lose the ability to walk. Two weeks later, I rang my parents in China. Since I had no health insurance and no one to take care of me, I had to drop everything and go home.

Back in Nanjing, China, I visited countless doctors in at least three

different hospitals. For the first three months, I underwent medical examinations, misdiagnoses, injections of strong antibiotics, and endured many painful, sleepless nights. The intense pain rendered me immobile. And my condition remained undiagnosed.

As weeks turned to months, I was engulfed by mental turmoil and often burst into tears at the smallest things. Although initially concerned, even my parents began to think that the pain and everything else was purely imaginary. To them, I was just idling away at home and moping.

I did turn to God, but in prayer, I struggled with anger, doubt, sadness, fear, and aimless questioning. I was remorseful over my past, and begged God for spiritual and physical healing. But I wanted God to grant me these immediately; I did not want to put in too much effort. Not surprisingly, my prayers were unheeded.

SELF-EXAMINATION IN PRAYER

With no other option left, I continued to pray. I recalled the time when I received the Holy Spirit, and the times I was most fervent in faith. Deeply examining my heart and humbling myself led to true repentance. I

“Instead of just demanding healing, my prayers became: “Help me God to learn from my past, and teach me how to change. I understand there is a reason for my pain. Please give me strength in my heart to know how to pray. Keep me one more day.”

acknowledged my past mistakes and shortcomings, and accepted the consequences of my actions. This experience, I realized, was not only God's firm reminder to turn from my former ways, but also a sign of how far from Him I had become. I felt this urge to throw out all my sins, like waste to be disposed of. Hence, instead of just demanding healing, my prayers became: “Help me God to learn from my past, and teach me how to change. I understand there is a reason for my pain. Please give me strength in my heart to know how to pray. Keep me one more day.”

With every prayer, I felt renewed. Attending church at Nanjing TJC more regularly also helped to entrench God's word in my heart. As God's strength flowed into me, I felt strengthened and more willing to yield my will to Him. As God urges:

“Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies, Therefore turn and live!” (Ezek 18:31–32)

BREAKTHROUGH

The more I allowed God's Spirit to strengthen me, the more I was able to empty myself of past wrongdoing. The less I focused on myself and selfish wants, the closer to Him I felt. I knew I needed His strength to overcome my fear at the thought that my back might never be healed.

This process of self-examination forced me to consider important questions such as whether I would be tempted to leave God if He did not heal me. I reflected on my life since baptism. I thought about the things in my life that I had held dear, believing that these would bring me

happiness, and I realized that I had been looking in all the wrong places. At that moment, all the bling and glamour that Satan had used to adorn the fleeting pleasures of this world suddenly turned to dust. As God's Spirit shone His truth into my heart, I knew that I needed God in my life no matter what happened.

Understanding this led to new breakthroughs in the way I prayed and perceived my life. The power that helped me do this was not of this world or myself. God was giving me a step-by-step tutorial of what it meant to rely on Him. God's Spirit dwelling within us, strengthening our inner man, is powerful beyond measure (Eph 3:16). God's power and truth work inside us through His words. The more we draw on the Spirit, the more we can cast aside our burdens, weaknesses, and fears.

As God's Spirit moved me, I learned to be more God-centric and less egocentric in prayer. I sought His will. I became more patient and longsuffering, characteristics many would not associate with me. There were still days when I felt hopeless—when I would kneel down to pray many times, but could not find a position that was without pain. This made me aware of human frailty in a way that I had never known before, and reminded me about putting God's will above mine.

UNDERSTANDING HIS WILL

One day, a family member suggested that I get a bone scan. Up until that point, only my internal organs had been examined. A full-body MRI scan, revealed a herniated disk in my spine. This was bad news, but my heart was bursting to praise God. When I arrived home, I knelt before the Lord and poured out my gratitude. The three months I spent waiting and learning to trust Him were affirmed by this

sign that He had heard me; He was guiding me to a deeper relationship with Him, to understand His will, and to fear His almighty power.

Identifying the problem with my back allowed me to start looking for interventions. Though still eager to return to a normal life, I was not anxious anymore. God had taught me through those three months how to trust in His strength and love, how to patiently pray and wait for His will to be done, and also, how to be thankful. In fact, the healing that was occurring in my inner man, the transformation of my heart, had started prior to any obvious sign of hope. As Paul said:

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. (2 Cor 4:7–9)

LIVING BY GOD'S STRENGTH AND DIRECTION

In mid-September 2011, I started acupuncture, which had to be carried out over a month or more in order to be effective. It is an enduring source of wonder to me how I survived those days. Acupuncture dulled the pain, enabling me to walk and be functional in daily life, which was important as I started work as a teacher. However, pain, though less intense, was a constant companion. Moreover, thrice a week, my father would shuttle me to the acupuncturist, who would prick needles into my body and pass an electric current through them. I dreaded these sessions. Only that complete reliance on God got me through this period.

In late December, my parents took me to see a doctor in Changzhou, three hours away from my home town. This doctor was known to have “cured” many other patients suffering from herniated disk problems with his special methods which involved injecting nutrition into the spine, medical massages, manual chiropractic treatment, as well as daily exercises.

At first, the pain increased because the treatment reactivated the nerves in my back that had been numbed by acupuncture. But once the treatments were complete, the doctor pronounced my back cured. He qualified that it would take at least one to three years for it to fully heal and advised me not to travel by air for at least a year.

I was really thankful and directed all my lingering worries into prayers. Though healing would take time and back pain remained, I had learned how to trust that God's will would be shown according to His time.

COMPLETE RELIANCE

Once my teaching assignment had ended, I started planning my possible return to college in New York in the spring. My level of trust in God led

am so thankful for Your guidance, grace, and strength. You have led me and kept me until today. Here I am. I trust You completely. I am here alone and will be for the rest of the school year—I don't know if I can handle a flight back, or if my disk would be herniated again. I have only You, and You are powerful beyond measure. I know you can heal me if You are willing, but if it's not Your will, I will accept it. Because no matter what, I will follow You all the days of my life, as long as You are with me always."

That following Saturday, I prayed before I left to attend Sabbath service at Brooklyn Prayer House. I cannot quite explain why but I just had a strong feeling that God would heal me as soon as I got there. During the 20-minute cab ride, my back ached, but I felt an indescribable peace. And

Back in 2011, I was a blind prodigal child who hoped to crawl back home to her Father's house. God did not stand aloof but was there for me every step along the rocky path. He showed me that:

For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor 4:17–18)

I now have a hope that transcends worldly suffering, and I know for certain that He has watched, and will always watch over me. Amen. ★

Though still eager to return to a normal life, I was not anxious anymore. God had taught me through those three months how to trust in His strength and love, how to patiently pray and wait for His will to be done, and also, how to be thankful. In fact, the healing that was occurring in my inner man, the transformation of my heart, had started prior to any obvious sign of hope.

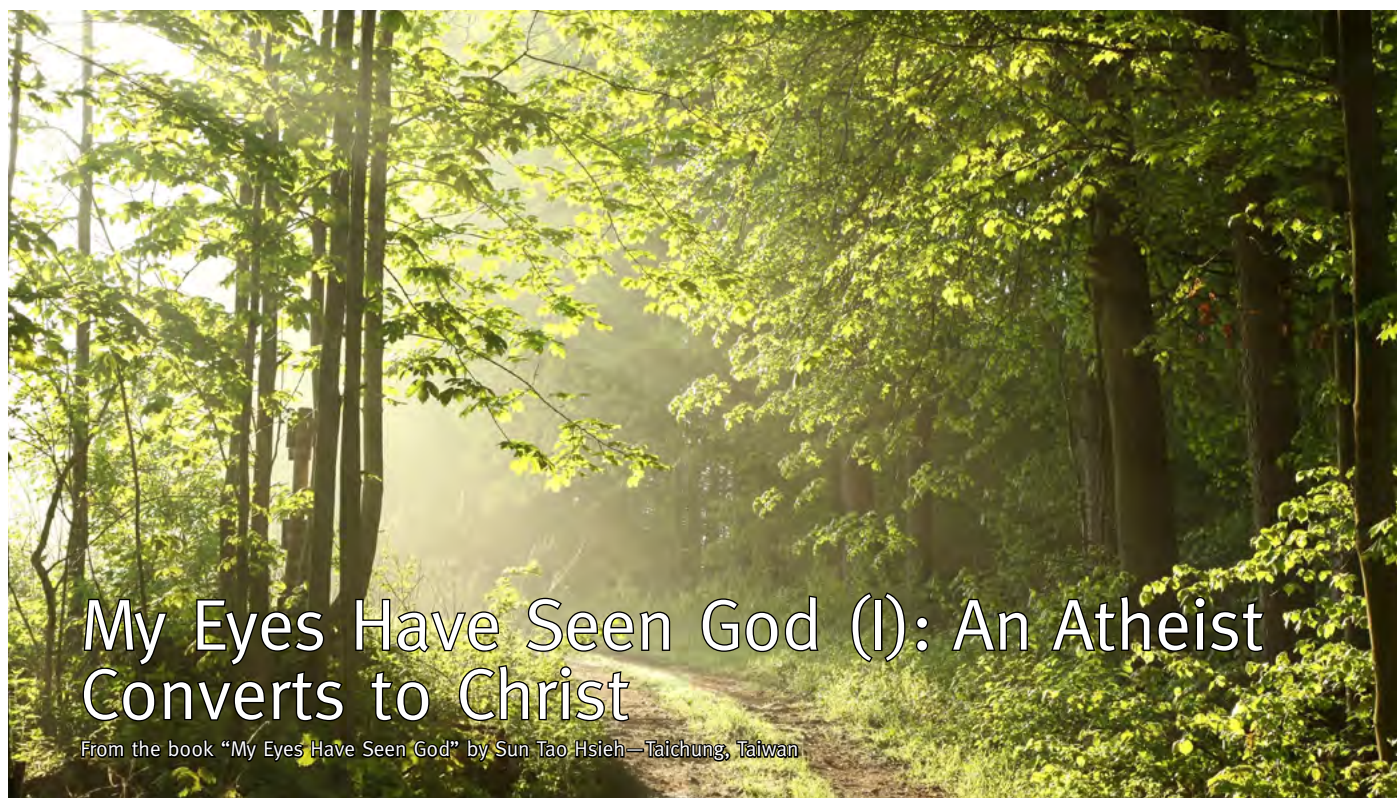
me to do something that most people would consider foolhardy. The college semester would be starting at the end of January 2012 and I did not want to remain idle in Nanjing. I felt that if God was with me, there was no reason to put my life on hold because of fear or human logic. However, I did not want to tempt God by defying medical advice either so I prayed a lot about this. Something in my heart told me to ignore the doctor and trust God.

I thus took a flight to New York. I had been forewarned that the pressure changes during takeoff could cause my herniated disk to pop out again. My back was painfully sore for the entire flight and continued to hurt even after a night's rest back in New York. So I prayed and told God: "I love You so much. I have learned a great deal in these recent months and

the moment I stepped inside the place of worship, the pain disappeared. I knelt down, and at this point, I knew how to pray. I cried. I thanked God. It was the joyful prayer of someone who had been healed physically. But, all the more, one in which I felt my soul had been completely revived by God's awesome grace.

BACK INTO THE FATHER'S ARMS

In the past four years I have witnessed how God used that point in my life as the beginning of my spiritual journey back to Him. It has been a struggle at times, but whenever I despaired or doubted, whenever I felt lost with no way back, the strength and perseverance I gained during that six months have been critical in helping me resist the tide of my former life. He has always led me back to His embrace.



My Eyes Have Seen God (I): An Atheist Converts to Christ

From the book "My Eyes Have Seen God" by Sun Tao Hsieh—Taichung, Taiwan

In his book "My Eyes Have Seen God," Elder Sun Tao Hsieh shares how he and his family came to worship the true God and how they have personally experienced God. He also describes his journey to full-time ministry and the mighty works of God that he has witnessed while serving the Lord. In this first installment, Elder Hsieh relates his journey to conversion.

FIRST BELIEF

Before Believing in the Lord

On 15 August 1945, the emperor of Japan announced on the radio that Japan had surrendered to the United States, marking the end of World War II. Following this, on 25 October, power in Taiwan was transferred from Japan back to the Taiwanese.

At the time, I was in my third year at the Agricultural Polytechnic School in Huwei, Taiwan, and had been educated by the Japanese educational system. I am only able to speak Mandarin and write Chinese because I taught myself, which is why my Mandarin is imperfect and tinged with a Taiwanese accent. In September 1946, I began studying at Nanshi Teaching Academy, a teachers' college in the city of Tainan. Even though we were no longer under Japanese rule, there were still students who carried on living the old way of life—they spoke Japanese and would beat us if we failed to salute them in the streets.

The following April, in 1947, I withdrew from the teachers' college. I was nineteen years old. I had originally enrolled to lighten my parents' financial burden—the school was publicly subsidized so I did not need to pay tuition, and I even received a stipend. But after eight months, I was certain that I did not want to continue my studies. Before I believed in the Lord Jesus, I was very ambitious. I figured that if I finished the course, the best I could hope for was to become a school principal, something that I no longer considered to be such a great achievement. I withdrew from college against the advice of my father and my teachers, and started studying day and night so I could retake my university entrance examinations.

I was born in the tiny township of Tuku in Yunlin County. My older sister, who is six years older than me, was married and lived in Huwei, only five kilometers away. In June of the same year, she invited me to stay with her while I prepared for my exams, so

I could have a more peaceful study environment.

At the time, my sister and her family were pursuing the gospel at the True Jesus Church in Huwei, but they were not yet baptized. Nonetheless, they were quite zealous and attended services every night. On Saturday, the Sabbath, they would rest from their work and go to worship. Not only that, my sister would preach and testify to everyone she met, and would not stop until the other person had really had enough.

Before I had a chance to get comfortable in her house, she started to preach the gospel to me, saying, "You should come and believe in Jesus, for worshipping Jesus is to worship the Creator of the universe, the Almighty God."

I asked her, "How tall is your God? How fat or thin is He?"

She paused to think, then replied, "We can't see God with our eyes, so how would I know how tall, short, fat or thin God is?"

Then I said, "Since you can't see

God, how do you even know there is a God? There's no God in the universe, because anything that cannot be proven scientifically is not worth believing in. If I had to guess what God is, then I'd say that God is the conscience within every one of us. So I don't believe in God; I believe in myself!"

My sister replied, "I'm not that acquainted with the truth, so I don't yet know how to answer you. But if you really want to know the answers, you can come to church and ask the minister."

I thought to myself, "This will be a good opportunity. I'll go to church tonight and challenge the minister. Let's see how he responds."

Pursuing the Truth

That night I went to church. This marked the beginning of my pursuit of the truth. I listened very closely to the sermon that night, not because I wanted to believe in Jesus but because I wanted to find fault with the minister's message.

In those days, I loved arguing with others and found great joy in winning debates. I relished the thought of defeating the minister in an argument and making him suffer the humiliation. I could not wait to see the expression on his face when he lost the debate to me, so I listened intently to the sermon. However, the minister spoke of nothing but the Bible from beginning to end. Even if he had made a mistake, I would not have known, since I had never touched a Bible before. I had no questions for



the minister that night, which left me quite frustrated.

I made up my mind to not only go to church every night to listen to the message, but to also study the Bible on my own so that I would become familiar with it. Then, I would surely be able to catch any mistakes the minister might make. I had originally gone to stay with my sister to prepare for my exams, but I ended up putting aside my books to study the Bible and to listen to the word of God.

I continued to do this for about a month, but there were two things that made me anxious. The first was the appearance of the believers when they were filled by the Holy Spirit. When they prayed, they spoke in tongues, so observers could not understand what they were saying. Furthermore, their bodies would tremble and shake. If they were pretending, why did they assume this less than graceful form? Perhaps they were not pretending; perhaps there really was a power emanating from within them. The second thing that gave me pause was the presence of divine miracles. During that time, there were many miracles and wonders at the church in Huwei. Many who were ill were

healed after coming to church to pray. After seeing these miracles, I began to think that perhaps there really was a God in this church.

The fact that I was experiencing a 180-degree change of heart caused me to doubt myself. One could say I was confused—but my consciousness was very clear. Or one might say that I was being flippant—but my attitude was very serious. Maybe I was weak—but I had a very stubborn personality. Or maybe I compromised—and yet how could I do so as a committed atheist? Why did I experience such a dramatic change? I can only say that this was a miracle, that it was the compassionate love of God and the movement of the Holy Spirit.

By this time, I had found the answers to the questions I had raised with my sister:

First, Jesus Christ possesses both a human and a divine nature. In terms of His human nature, He was a Jew, the descendant of Abraham and of David. In terms of His divine nature, He is above all things and prior to all things. All things were made through Him and are sustained by Him. He is the God who is eternally to be praised (Mt 1:1–18; Rom 9:5; Col 1:15–17).

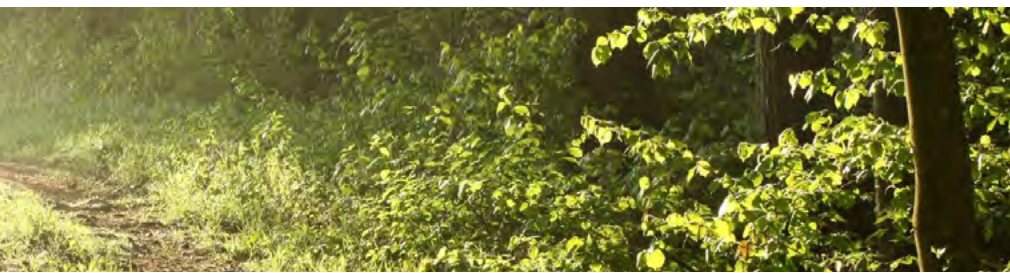
Second, God is Spirit and not a physical entity. He cannot be seen with human eyes nor touched with human hands (Jn 4:24). He is so large that He can fill the universe, and so small that He can dwell within a person (Ps 139:7–10; Eph 4:6). Thus, humans cannot determine how tall or large, short or thin, God may be.

Third, this world can be divided into two realms: the physical and the spiritual. Science seeks to solve questions concerning matters within the realm of things, and deals with objects that take their form in the

“I asked her, “How tall is your God? How fat or thin is He?”

She paused to think, then replied, “We can’t see God with our eyes, so how would I know how tall, short, fat or thin God is?”

Then I said, “Since you can’t see God, how do you even know there is a God? There’s no God in the universe, because anything that cannot be proven scientifically is not worth believing in.”



material world. Religion, however, seeks to solve questions that relate to the world beyond things, dealing with matters of formless spirit. Thus, even though science has no means to verify the existence of God, God undeniably exists (Rom 1:19–20).

Fourth, the spirit of a man is the lamp of the Lord and can perform the function of God in examining the innermost being (Prov 20:27). It can also help a person determine what is right and wrong (Rom 2:14–15). Thus, the conscience is a result of the working of the spirit, but the conscience is not God and cannot help people gain the power to abandon evil and follow good (Rom 7:18–20). I had always thought I could rely on my conscience, but in the end it cannot be relied upon (Rom 7:21–24).

Coming to the Lord

On Saturday, 5 July 1947, a Sabbath day, the church in Huwei held a special service and also offered water baptism for those who wanted to be baptized. My older sister's family registered for baptism. She asked me, "Would you like to sign up too?"

I replied, "Let me think about it." "What is there to think about?" she said. "No one has listened so intently to the sermons as you. What other doubts do you have? If you still have questions, just ask the minister. Baptism doesn't happen that often—in fact, only once a year, or at the most, twice. If you don't get baptized this time, who knows when you'll get another chance."

After my sister's encouragement, I began to give this question some serious thought. If I missed this opportunity, I might not get another one again. Moreover, since I had seen how the believers were filled with

the Holy Spirit and had witnessed numerous miracles, I felt this faith was worthy of acceptance. I decided to be baptized. I did so without obtaining my parents' approval, because my father was a stubborn man who was always teaching me with the words of Confucius. If I wanted to believe in Jesus, I knew that he would object. However, I considered believing in Jesus as something wonderful, and not to be given up just because of opposition. I decided not to tell my father: he would surely rebuke me when he found out, but I would deal with that when the time came.

“The conscience is a result of the working of the spirit, but the conscience is not God and cannot help people gain the power to abandon evil and follow good (Rom 7:18–20). I had always thought I could rely on my conscience, but in the end it cannot be relied upon (Rom 7:21–24).”

Twelve were baptized that day. Before the baptism, everyone stood in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to personally guide the baptism. Then we sang a hymn as each person went down into the water to receive baptism. The whole scene was quite solemn. After being baptized, my heart felt relaxed and at peace, and was filled with an unexpected joy. I felt that I was starting a new life as a disciple of Christ.

Among those baptized was an elderly sister from the countryside who had never received formal education and was very simple at heart. When she entered the water, she said in a surprised voice, "Why is the water red?"

The believers replied, "How blessed

you are! You've seen the blood of the Lord Jesus!" This sister's testimony greatly encouraged me in my own faith.

Afterwards, we returned to the chapel to pray for the Holy Spirit. Many received the Spirit, but I did not.

I asked the brothers and sisters, "Why have I not received the Holy Spirit?"

They told me, "Your faith is still not sufficient and your prayers are not fervent enough."

I asked them how I should pray, and they replied, "You can fast and pray, which would mean not eating or drinking in the mornings." I did this without difficulty, but I still did not receive the Holy Spirit. I returned to the brothers and sisters, and they said, "You're still not praying enough."

I felt that maybe fasting for one meal a day was not enough; maybe I could try fasting for nine meals over three days. That should do it! But by the end of the three days, I was

hungry, thirsty, and tired as well. I asked the brothers and sisters again for advice, but they said I was not praying enough. I thought, "If fasting for three days is not enough, should I go up to five days?" I simply could not continue in this way, so from then on I changed tactics and only fasted every morning.

It was around this time that my older sister decided to visit my parents and invited me to go with her. As soon as we entered the door, my father noticed that I had lost weight.

"Why are you so thin?" he asked me.

I dared not reply, but my sister responded, "He's started to believe in Jesus and is very fervent. He's been fasting for nine meals over three days

“I prayed for over an hour and my legs grew numb, but there were still no signs of His Spirit. I thought, “Forget it, I’ll try again tomorrow.” But when I realized how long I would have to wait till morning came, I thought, “If I give up now, it might be even more difficult for me to receive the Holy Spirit in the future.” So I continued praying.

and is earnestly seeking the Holy Spirit!”

My father grew silent. It was as if oppressive black clouds were hanging low in the air. I could feel a storm was coming.

My father was angry, but to my surprise, he spoke with deliberate calm: “You believe in Jesus? You haven’t eaten for three days? Do you want to starve to death?” He then said, “How dare you! Why didn’t you tell me you were converting to Christianity? Did any of our ancestors ever worship Jesus? Since you don’t seem to acknowledge me as your father, I will not acknowledge you as my son!”

I thought to myself, “I’ve committed no crime in believing in Jesus! But if I can transform my character and become even more filial and obedient to my father, maybe he will change his mind.”

Later that night, my sister was to return home. She asked if I wanted to come back with her.

I replied, “Sure. I need some shelter from the wind and rain.” And so we went back to Huwei, and I continued going to church.

Thank the Lord, my father eventually came to respect my faith. Whenever a new year or a holiday came around, he would instruct my mother to prepare a portion of the meal that had not been sacrificed to the idols. This was because he knew that I held fast to the biblical teaching of not eating foods offered to idols (Acts 15:28–29; 16:4–5).

Receiving the Holy Spirit

The 14th of July marked the tenth day after I had received water baptism. Everyone had gone home after the

evening service, but I stayed behind to pray by myself in the prayer room.

I knelt down before God and sincerely addressed Him: “Hallelujah, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ I pray. Praise the Lord! Please let Your Holy Spirit fill my heart.” I then made the determination that if I did not receive the Holy Spirit that night, I would pray until the next morning. Perhaps God wanted to test my faith, so He did not grant me His Holy Spirit immediately. I prayed for over an hour and my legs grew numb, but there were still no signs of His Spirit. I thought, “Forget it, I’ll try again tomorrow.” But when I realized how long I would have to wait till morning came, I thought, “If I give up now, it might be even more difficult for me to receive the Holy Spirit in the future.” So I continued praying.

At that moment, there was a sudden power that flowed down from above. I thought, “Could this be the Holy Spirit?” So I prayed even more fervently. Then my body began to shake and my tongue started to roll. My heart was cleared of all of its burdens, and I experienced a joy that no pen could ever describe. I realized this was true inner peace, a joy in the Lord that I was experiencing for the first time in my life.

I thought everyone had gone home, but a pastor and a brother were in fact waiting for me. I heard the pastor very clearly telling the brother that I had received the Holy Spirit, so I continued to pray zealously. During my prayer, I saw a bright light flash three times. It was a very powerful light, like lightning. Even though I had my eyes closed, I could see it clearly, which made me even more joyful. After my prayer, I asked the pastor

what those three flashes of bright light were. He said, “Thank God! You saw the glorious light of God.”

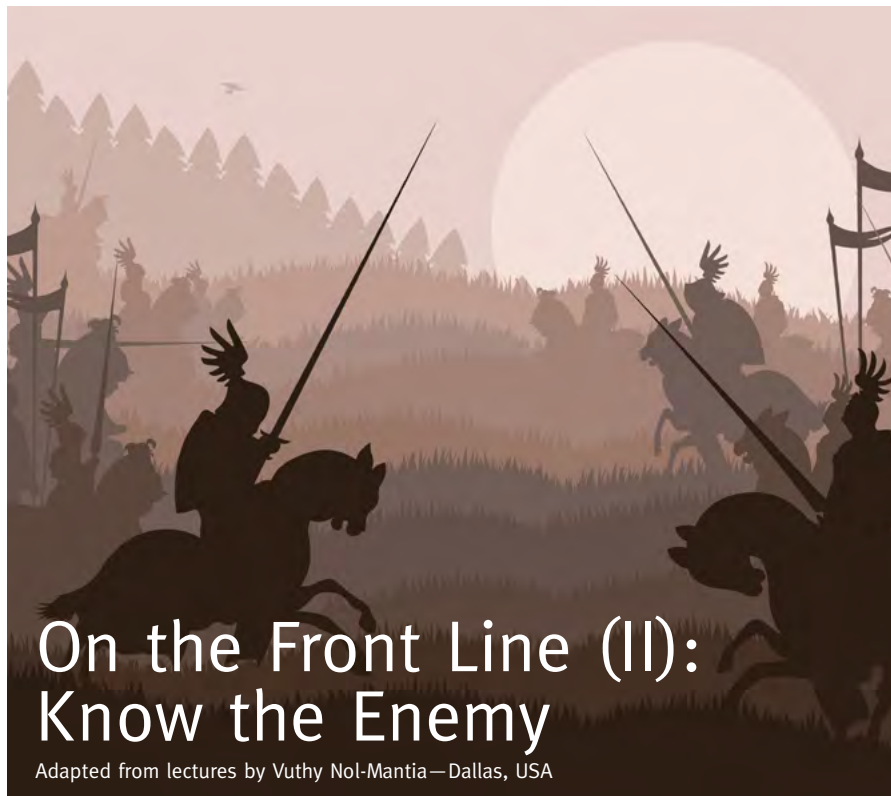
This was my experience of receiving the Holy Spirit.

Jesus once proclaimed:
“So I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”

(Lk 11:9–13)

In my experience of receiving the Holy Spirit, God’s words were completely fulfilled. I understood that whoever seeks with sincerity and urgency will certainly receive the promised Holy Spirit. For those who have not yet received the Spirit, do not be discouraged, continue to ask of Him. You too will one day be filled with the Holy Spirit and share the same joy I have experienced.

[To be continued ...] ★



To fight effectively on the front line, we must first understand our role. Part one of this series focused on establishing our identity as soldiers of Christ. In part two, we learn to understand our enemy.

IDENTITY OF THE ANCIENT FOE

It is human nature to treat someone who has deeply offended or hurt us as our mortal enemy. People may also have such extreme differences in opinions that they bear lifelong grudges. Such conflicts happen at workplaces, within families and even in the church. However, Paul urges us not to regard our brothers and sisters as our enemy. Our true and terrifying enemy is an invisible being who cannot be defeated with physical weapons and strategies.

Paul warned the Ephesians that believers wrestle not against mere flesh and blood but “against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12).

Our cruel and unrelenting enemy is Satan, the ruler of darkness in this age. We must never underestimate the intensity of the battle we have to wage with Satan. No matter how strong we are, we will not be able to withstand Satan’s might without the Spirit of God.

Apart from knowing the identity of the enemy, we must also understand his nature. This allows us to be better-prepared to battle him.

NATURE OF THE ANCIENT FOE

Satan’s Pride

In Ezekiel’s lamentation (Ezek 28:12–15), the king of Tyre is an allegorical reference to Satan. Satan, or Lucifer, was described as the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect

in beauty. This is a stark contrast to the descriptions of other angels in the Bible; the archangel Michael and the angel Gabriel are defined less by their appearance and more by their duty.

In Lucifer, God had created a cherub who was perfect and beautiful. However, God gives free will to His creatures; i.e., God allows us to think and decide for ourselves. Lucifer became Satan when iniquity stemming from pride was found in him.

*“How you are fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer, son of the morning!
How you are cut down to the
ground,
You who weakened the nations!
For you have said in your heart:
‘I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the
stars of God;
I will also sit on the mount of the
congregation
On the farthest sides of the north;
I will ascend above the heights of
the clouds,
I will be like the Most High.’ ”*

(Isa 14:12–14)

“We must never underestimate the intensity of the battle we have to wage with Satan. No matter how strong we are, we will not be able to withstand Satan’s might without the Spirit of God.”



Isaiah's record reveals the thoughts and motivations of Satan. These were all centered upon himself, as can be seen from the number of times he said "I". Satan's thoughts also highlight his pride—the critical weakness that led to his literal downfall. He had the recklessness to think he could usurp the position of the Most High God. God then demonstrated His infinite superiority—He knew exactly what Satan was thinking. God took decisive and punitive action. As Jesus recounted: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Lk 10:18). Like a flash of lightning, Satan's fall was very quick.

Satan's plummet from Son of Morning to Father of Lies, from anointed cherub to the evil one, teaches us two things about pride. First, pride will bring us down very quickly. Second, pride works from within. Like an undetected hemorrhage, it may kill us before we even realize it! Hence, we must always be wary of pride, lest we fall as Satan did. Paul understood that status and position may turn men's heads. Thus Paul advised Timothy that a bishop should "not [be] a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil" (1 Tim 3:6).

History—both biblical and secular—is replete with examples of downfall caused by hubris. But why does pride persist in us? This is because man is often unable to detect his own flaws, especially pride (cf. Lk 6:42; 18:11–12). We are often complacent and numb to these warnings, thinking that they apply



to other people. Nebuchadnezzar had been warned by God through Daniel not to think too highly of himself but still ended up suffering the consequences of pride (Dan 4). Hence, we must always examine ourselves and quickly root out the smallest weed of pride from the garden of our hearts. Our intelligence is a gift of God, and our knowledge is acquired through opportunities given by Him. These should not make us exalt ourselves above others. The more we know, the more alert we should be to pride in our hearts (1 Cor 8:1). The branch that bears more fruits should hang lower. We may claim to be abundant in fruit but if our branches are pointing upward, we are clearly bearing no fruits at all.

Satan's Deception

Elder John warns us that when Satan is released, he will use his full power to deceive (Rev 12:9). In addition, he will go out to the four corners of the earth to create his army, Gog and Magog, to wage war with the army of God (Rev 20:7–8). So as we approach the last day, we must be on the front line, ready to fight. When that day arrives, there will be no more time for us to prepare ourselves, and those who are unprepared will be deceived and lost.

What are some of Satan's weapons of mass deception?

Weapon #1: Re-interpreting the Bible

Jesus described Satan as the father of lies (Jn 8:44). Right at the beginning in the Garden of Eden, from the serpent's conversation with Eve, we can see how brilliantly he could twist God's word and instructions. Satan subtly suggests re-interpretations, and the potency of these lies in their apparent reasonableness and resemblance to

God's teachings. Satan's lies will be so close to the teachings of God that it will be difficult to discern right from wrong, unless we have good spiritual eyesight.

For example, the Bible has very clear injunctions against homosexuality. Romans 1:26–32 talks about men who lust after other men, and women who lust after other women, leaving us with no doubt that homosexuality is wrong and is an act "deserving of death." But Christians are increasingly persuaded to accept that a loving God loves everyone regardless of sexual orientation. The implicit suggestion is thus: whatever mankind does "in the name of love" will be tolerated by the Father. As homosexuality becomes socially and globally acceptable, we too may become more ambivalent towards it. We may not accept it but we do not unequivocally reject it. We ought not to be deceived into such "neutrality."

In His love, God forgives sin. But a just and holy God does not declare sin to be righteousness. So while we continue to love people around us, we must boldly reject their deliberately sinful acts. If we are asked whether the practice of homosexuality should be allowed, good soldiers of Christ must be ready to step forward to the front line to say, "No." Do not be deceived by Satan whispering, "Are you sure that God would not allow two people who truly loved each other to be together?" Our answer may hurt the listener or get us branded as narrow-minded and unloving but doing otherwise would jeopardize the salvation of both our listener and ourselves (Rom 1:32). Do not allow Satan to persuade us to risk salvation for the sake of feelings or human relationships.

”Satan subtly suggests re-interpretations, and the potency of these lies in their apparent reasonableness and resemblance to God's teachings.



“The minute we feel pride in our hearts, it is imperative that we kill it, lest we sin and suffer the same condemnation as Satan.

Weapon #2: Leveraging Neutrality

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” (Gen 3:1)

Satan used the serpent to tempt Eve because the serpent was “more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made” (Gen 3:1). The serpent was a neutral party, but he allowed Satan to use him as a mouthpiece to deceive Adam and Eve. Likewise for us, we may accept all that is said to us with a neutral mind, but this may give Satan the opportunity to deceive us, turning us against our brothers and sisters in church and making us a child of Satan. Therefore, whenever we listen to a speaker on the pulpit, even if they were ordained ministers, we must discern if the message is according to the Bible. We must not simply accept any teachings concerning God without checking it against the Bible. The truth must act as a spiritual filter for everything we hear from anyone, otherwise we risk our own spiritual lives.

Weapon #3: Stirring Pride

Satan fell on account of his pride. Hence he will seek to stir up our pride and cause us to fall.

Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

(Gen 3:4–6)

This passage shows what drove the woman to eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The fruit was good for food and pleasant to the eyes but there were other trees in the Garden which surely had fruits pleasant to the sight and appealing to the palate. The unique selling proposition that Satan dangled and which persuaded Eve was that eating the fruit could make one wise; appealing to her vanity and pride.

We also see that Satan does not just restrict himself to the deployment of single weapons of deception. In the Garden of Eden, he had started off by subtly insinuating that there could be another meaning of God’s command—“has God indeed said?” (Gen 3:1b) He then blurs the boundaries between right and wrong—“you will not surely die” (Gen 3:4a). Eve was no match for the combined assault of Satan’s weapons of re-interpreting the Bible and stirring of one’s pride. Like Satan, she desired to be like God. She ate the fruit and convinced Adam to do the same. They were driven out of the Garden of Eden. Sin and death entered the world. This familiar incident should be a constant reminder—the minute we feel pride

in our hearts, it is imperative that we kill it, lest we sin and suffer the same condemnation as Satan.

COUNTERING THE ANCIENT FOE

As soldiers of Christ on the front line, we are under constant attack from our enemy. He will use every weapon in his arsenal to do this – deception, pride and temptation – and if we fall into his trap, he will seek to recruit us to his side. Therefore, we should be ever vigilant against Satan’s schemes. The Prince of Darkness is a master manipulator so we must safeguard both our hearts and minds. We protect our hearts by ridding our hearts of pride. We shield our minds by pursuing the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16) and holding fast to the pattern of sound words (2 Tim 1:13). Then, Satan will hold no sway over us.

[To be continued ...] ★

“As soldiers of Christ on the front line, we are under constant attack from our enemy. He will use every weapon in his arsenal to do this – deception, pride and temptation – and if we fall into his trap, he will seek to recruit us to his side. Therefore, we should be ever vigilant against Satan’s schemes.

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

Christian Living

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

Article length: 1500-2000 words.

Bible Study

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

Article length: 2500-3000 words.

Doctrinal Study

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

Article length: 2500-3000 words.

Exhortation

An Exhortation encourages and admonishes the reader in different aspects of the Christian faith.

Article length: 2000-2500 words.

Testimony

A Testimony recounts an experience in the Lord that will encourage and edify the reader.

Article length: 1500-2000 words.

Creative Writing

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

SUBMISSION INFORMATION

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

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

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

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Author Guidelines and Editorial Calendar

Issue #79:

Topic: Religious Education

Articles due: **November 1, 2015**

What comes to mind when we hear the word "religious education"? Most likely, we will picture a group of children listening to Bible stories. But is this all there is to religious education? The Bible tells us that religious education is life-long.

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success." (Josh 1:8)

Religious education is more than just teaching the next generation about God. Rather, it is about equipping every believer with the Bible's abundant teachings, enabling them to make decisions based on God's word and to lead victorious lives.

So what does life-long religious education entail? What is the role of the church in this endeavor? What is our own role in religious education?

In any field of study, mastering the subject takes time and perseverance, and religious education is no different. Inevitably, we will encounter challenges along the way. How can we overcome these challenges?

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.

True Jesus Church

Articles of Faith

Jesus the True God

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

Holy Bible

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

Church

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

Baptism

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

Holy Spirit

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

Footwashing

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

Holy Communion

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

Sabbath Day

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

Salvation

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

Last Day

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

TRUE JESUS CHURCH CONTACT INFORMATION

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

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