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TIME TO REFLECT

Our Life

PART THREE OF THREE

True Jesus Church

LIFETIME MINISTRY

KC Tsai—Toronto, Canada

In this final issue of our *Time to Reflect* trilogy, we consider the meaning of our life, and how to live a life worthy of our calling. How does receiving God's truth and grace of salvation define our existence on earth? Like Paul, once we have been saved, we should dedicate our lives to God. This represents a healthy relationship with God.

A LIVING SACRIFICE

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. *(Rom 12:1)*

Why does Paul beseech in such a way? The "therefore" signifies that there was a reason for his pleading. In the preceding chapter, he writes that we were "cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree" (Rom 11:24). Though we were initially "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12), we have been ushered into the grace of salvation through the blood of Jesus. He suffered tremendously and sacrificed His own life for our sins. Man can never repay such immense love. Seen in this light, presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice to Him becomes a logical and reasonable response. This is why Paul proposes a lifetime ministry for all who belong to the Lord and desire to serve Him. He implores them to present their entire lives unreservedly to God.

But what is a living sacrifice? And why is it holy and acceptable to God?

In the Mosaic Law, man was instructed to offer burnt offerings. The sacrificial animals were killed before being placed on the altar, as no animal would be willingly sacrificed if given a choice. By implication, they were dead sacrifices. Under the new covenant established by the Lord Jesus, man is not forced to make any offerings against his will. This was why the offering of Ananias and his wife Sapphira was unacceptable to God (Acts 5:1–11). After seeing other brethren selling their possessions and offering the proceeds to the apostles, they felt pressured to do the same. Their reluctant offering, and conspiracy to keep part of the proceeds while appearing to offer the whole sum, brought God's wrath upon them, and they died. Therefore, our offerings must be genuine and faithful. If one *willingly* presents his body as a living sacrifice, it is holy and acceptable to God.

DEDICATING YOUR LIFE IN MINISTRY

Everyone who realizes how great Jesus' grace is upon him should embark on a journey of lifetime ministry. But it is even more meaningful to serve without worldly distractions—to serve as a full-time minister.

No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. *(2 Tim 2:4)*

A full-time minister is like a soldier enlisted by the Lord Jesus to fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12). He needs to fight determinedly, untethered from worldly affairs. And through this fight, the worker grows stronger and advances. By studying the Bible constantly and sharing its messages, the worker will mature spiritually and be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, and in purity (1 Tim 4:12). He is like the hardworking farmer, partaking of the crops first (2 Tim 2:6).

A FULFILLING AND VICTORIOUS LIFE

By the end of his life, Paul said: "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand" (2 Tim 4:6). This expresses a sense of relief and contentment, like the sigh of a runner crossing the finish line. He felt his life of ministry was fulfilling and victorious:

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. *(2 Tim 4:7–8)*

Is there any prize more precious than the crown of righteousness? It is a laurel presented by the Lord Jesus. Unlike regular laurels, it is imperishable (1 Cor 9:25). A full-time worker who ministers God's word faithfully and endures to the end will be a laureate forever.

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LIFE'S TRIUMPHANT SONG

KC Tsai—Toronto, Canada

[W]hereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." (Jas 4:14–15)

These verses describe the brevity of life—it is like a vapor that exists for an instant and quickly dissipates. In the context of eternity, man only has a brief moment to grasp the opportunity to know God and have fellowship with Him. We have this limited time to understand His will for our lives and do our best to obey and walk in His will. Only then can we live a life glorifying to God and, ultimately, return to Him.

Elder James adds, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." In all the plans a man makes, there is a fundamental presupposition: he must first be alive! And we can only live for as long as our Lord gives us life.

GOD'S ROLE IN OUR PLANS

We often plan out our day down to the hour. There is nothing wrong with this. If we fail to plan, we are planning to fail. Indeed, we will likely waste a lot of time and be forced to rush at the last minute, perhaps leaving some tasks untouched or unfinished. If we have the foresight to make detailed plans, we can be prepared for every eventuality and use our time efficiently to complete our tasks. For instance, before the end of the year, the church should prepare an annual work plan for the coming year, detailing the dates of training sessions for various church workers, evangelistic events, and the pastoral workers' schedules among the different churches.

While planning is undoubtedly important, of greater importance is God's will and whether our plans are in line with it.

There are many plans in a man's heart,
Nevertheless the LORD's counsel—that will stand. (Prov 19:21)

At the same time, circumstances may change, and our lives may pan out in such a way that we cannot execute our plans.

Do not boast about tomorrow,
For you do not know what a day may bring forth. (Prov 27:1)

Therefore, in our service to God, we need to pray for Him to preserve our lives.

SEEK GOD WHILE WE HAVE TIME

When Paul was at the Areopagus in Athens, Greece, he spoke a moving sermon regarding God's almightiness and the purpose and meaning of our human lives. He said:

"And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' " (Acts 17:26–28)

Everyone in this world has a preappointed time—an allotted period—in which to seek the Lord and find the path that leads to Him. We find meaning in life when we use our time on earth to know and serve God. This period of time is limited, yet many spend it in vain on secular pursuits with little or no spiritual significance.

In reality, all that we do in our lives can be



divided into three categories:

Essential matters: Things we must put effort into, for example, our studies, our career, raising children in the Lord, daily spiritual cultivation, and so on. These are our duties as men, which we must diligently pursue.

Beneficial or bonus matters: Things worth spending time on, for example, spending quality time with our family, exercising to maintain our health, socializing with colleagues and friends with similar values, and so on.

Trivial matters: Things that we should spend less time on, for example, mindlessly scrolling on our phones, playing video games, bingeing films and television shows, and so on. We ought to examine our relationship with such activities.

IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE

When we are young, the days seem long, and we look forward to the future. When I came to Canada at the age of forty, my main concerns were about establishing a home in this new environment, building up the faith of my family, and starting a business—as a novice businessman—that was sustainable and would support us while not impacting our faithfulness to God. I considered how I could embrace the church ministry in an unfamiliar landscape, not putting myself forward for any particular work, but willingly accepting any holy work the Lord sent me to do.

At the time, thirty years seemed extraordinarily long. But I slowly grew older, and today, looking back, those thirty years have flown by in the blink of an eye. And gazing forward, in another thirty years, I may already be with the Lord.

THE GOOD FIGHT OF FAITH

The apostle Paul wrote his final letter, 2 Timothy, not long before he was martyred. He was calm and without fear in the face of death, describing his life being poured out as a drink offering on the altar, offered up amongst the other sacrifices on the burning coals (2 Tim 4:6). He goes on to write:



I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing. (2 Tim 4:7–8)

This, indeed, is a beautiful song of triumph for one's life!

Like an athlete reaching the finish line, Paul seemingly breathed a sigh of relief, knowing he had given it his all. He had a clear conscience towards the visions and revelations entrusted to him by the Lord. He had done his best to finish the journey of faith the Lord had prepared for him. Though the gospel work was not going well, he knew he had played his part to his utmost ability.

We yearn to one day echo Paul and heroically say, "I have fought," "I have finished," and "I have kept," while envying his certainty of having a crown laid up for him. Yet we cannot help but hesitate when we think about the path he walked. How many of us would dare to traverse the same path? After all, that journey is not one that any ordinary person is ready to embark on.

> "In the eyes of the world, if the Lord Jesus truly is almighty, then one who bears witness for Him should receive grace and blessings, not tribulation"

For the sake of preaching the gospel, Paul met with difficulties and persecution. He was struck and slandered. In the eyes of the world, if the Lord Jesus truly is almighty, then one who bears witness for Him should receive grace and blessings, not tribulation. He should receive respect rather than imprisonment. While others may have been ashamed, Paul found strength in his suffering through the power of the Holy Spirit and his deep understanding of the Lord. He knew clearly that his persecution and incarceration did not indicate his defeat or the gospel's failure. Instead, he knew that God watches closely to see whether those who seek Him have a pure faith and a resolved heart, and whether they let the peace of Christ rule in their hearts (Col 3:15). Through trials, God allows us to learn the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, and thereby count everything else as rubbish (Phil 3:8).

Paul could say that he had fought the good fight because he had done his utmost in contending for the true faith. Despite formidable difficulties and dangers, Paul relied on God to walk through them all. He had finished his race with joy, fulfilling the ministry he received from the Lord Jesus, that is, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

"Paul may not have fully understood the severity of the suffering he would face. But he overcame his fleshly weakness and fear"

"And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. 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 20:22–24)

Paul spoke these words to the Ephesian elders when he returned to Miletus at the end of his third missionary journey. At every city on his journey back to Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit testified to him that chains and tribulations awaited him. Yet, Paul still pressed on, despite dissuasion from all his coworkers. Paul may not have fully understood the severity of the suffering he would face. But he overcame his fleshly weaknesses and fear. He could clearly discern what the Holy Spirit was telling him. He knew that when the Holy Spirit revealed the upcoming tribulations, it was not to stop him from going ahead. He also believed these chains and tribulations would bring unforeseen opportunities beyond his great suffering.

DISCERNING THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Before we can discern the working of the Holy Spirit, we must first examine our values and concerns. Are we mindful of the things of God or the things of men? Peter previously could not bear to let Jesus proceed to Jerusalem, where He would suffer many things, be killed, and rise on the third day. So Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked Him. Jesus then turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men" (Mt 16:21–23).

When Paul reached Jerusalem, the Jews from Asia saw him in the temple and stirred up the crowd, causing an uproar in the whole city. They dragged Paul out of the temple and immediately shut the doors. They sought to kill him. But he was saved by the commander of the garrison, who wanted to prevent a riot.

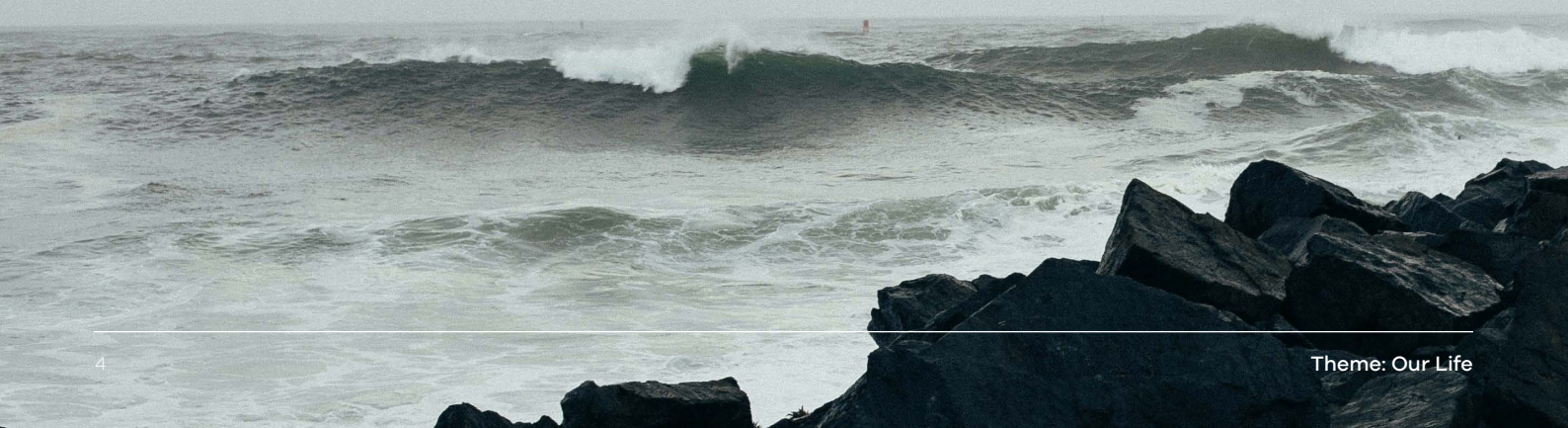
From then on, Paul remained in chains for a long time until he was imprisoned in Rome. On this journey, he stood before the two Roman governors and Herod Agrippa to proclaim the name of the Lord, as foretold by the Lord (Acts 9:15–16). Whenever he had the opportunity, he bore witness to the Lord. After reaching Rome, he wrote letters expounding on the truth while in prison. Indeed, Paul truly testified to the gospel of the grace of God!

Hence, in his final letter, Paul could sincerely write: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race."

This was a good fight because it was for the true faith, and he never gave up contending. Although he endured attacks from false apostles and false brethren, Paul did his best to expound the gospel of salvation amid adversity. He gave his all to preach the gospel within the sphere God had appointed for him (2 Cor 10:13–18).

Having done all this, Paul could finally proclaim, "I have kept the faith." This is the triumphant song of his life. It is the lifelong goal for one who seeks to receive favor—to be able to say with courage and confidence at the end, "I have kept the faith; I can meet my Lord with a clear conscience."

Each of us has an individual triumphant song for our lives, which we ought to sing. In this world, we often face hardships and difficulties, whether in our daily lives or at work. At times, we may experience misunderstandings and conflicts in our relationships. Yet, in all situations, we must know the Lord in whom we have believed and faithfully do our utmost to serve Him. In this way, we can be victorious and sing our triumphant song. And joyously, the crown of righteousness laid up for Paul will also be given to us on that day, according to the Lord's righteousness and faithfulness.



A MORE ABUNDANT LIFE (PART 1):

PEACE AND HOPE

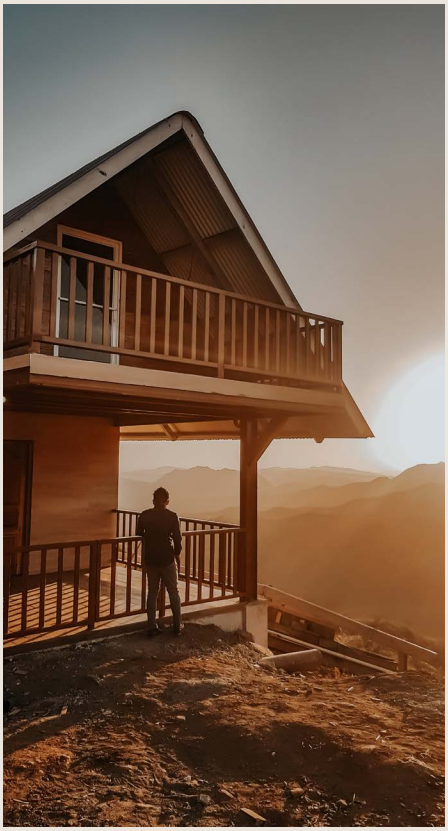
Based on sermons by Raymond Chou—San Jose, California, USA

Society bombards us with many principles and philosophies on how to live a rich and fulfilling life. Many think the answer lies in a rewarding career, and so urge us to hustle until we have achieved success, found our calling, and changed the world. Others believe family comes first, and so recommend that we sacrifice everything to nurture our children and give them a picture-book perfect childhood. Yet others promote an alternative and independent lifestyle, suggesting we live in the moment and chase our happiness, freeing ourselves from familial responsibilities, traditional work, and physical possessions to maximize our time and money for travel and experiences.

These approaches promise a life of abundance, but the great sacrifice they entail often keeps the promise out of reach. For example, those who think money is an infallible safety net push themselves to their physical and mental limits to build their bank balance. Or they obsessively watch every penny they spend despite earning a comfortable wage. In the process, they lose relationships, health and well-being, and even their spiritual lives. Are such people enjoying true abundance?

The Lord Jesus Christ once declared, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (Jn 10:10b). As Christians, we know that the Good Shepherd laid down His life so that we can gain access to eternal life after death. But even in our life on earth, God promises us abundance through His loving grace and blessings.

This article examines two aspects of an abundant life: peace and hope. What is the source of true peace and hope, and how can attaining these help us to live a more meaningful life?



A LIFE OF PEACE

Peace in an Uncertain World

The desire for peaceful lives is a natural human one. This is why we buy various types of insurance, hoping these will protect us in unforeseen circumstances. However, the peace of mind these afford will only last until we are beset by a new danger that the insurance does not cover! Man may have developed a range of sophisticated scientific instruments, technological gadgets, or statistical models to try to predict or minimize the impact of imminent global disasters. But the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis is a harsh reminder of the limits of human ability and the fragility of human peace.

A core message that Jesus proclaimed to the people of His time and to all who would listen today is that He can give true and ultimate peace. Unfortunately, in affluent Western societies, people increasingly think they do not need Jesus—they can live comfortably and peacefully without Him. Church attendance for many professing the Christian faith is limited to baptisms, weddings, and funerals. In contrast, Christians in developing countries demonstrate stronger faith because they recognize that they need God's abidance to get through each day.

BY GOD'S GRACE!

True Jesus Church believers in Africa often say, "By God's grace!" This is no habitual interjection but a heartfelt exclamation because, in their living environment, many things could cause sudden death. On one of my pastoral visits to Ghana, a rainbow-colored creature crawled under my bed as I was about to turn in for the night. The local brother accompanying me could only comment helplessly that this was "very bad, very bad!" Since there was little either of us could do about this, we just trusted in God and went to sleep.

Peace built on human plans or the environment is aptly likened to stained glass windows. These are beautiful yet easily shattered by a small stone. No matter how healthy we are at present or how stable our work or finances, a small stone—sickness, economic crisis, and so on—could take away all the peace we have. For example, in 2018, an emergency message was suddenly broadcast to all cellphones in Hawaii, informing them

that a ballistic missile was on the way to Honolulu from North Korea. This turned out to be a false alarm caused by human error. But before the all-clear assurance came, everyone was terrified. Some church members immediately drove to their children's houses to gather because they did not know if those would be the last moments of their lives.

The Bible often uses the sea to describe the variability of life. When the sea is calm, it looks like a mirror reflecting the sky. The underwater world is beautiful and teeming with wonderful creatures. There are many valuable and desirable things under the sea, just as the world is filled with alluring attractions. But such beautiful serenity can very suddenly become a raging storm, just like life. The uncontrollable pace at which the COVID-19 virus spread throughout the world, the frequency with which the virus mutated, and the unthinkable global disruption are stark warnings—if we mistakenly trust in the peace of this world, we may be buffeted by the waves and perish.

IT'S NOT POSSIBLE!

During a US student spiritual convocation in 2019, I told the students not to take church attendance for granted because the government could forbid people from going to church one day. "It's not possible!" they exclaimed. "We are a free nation, and churches will never be closed." No one then could have predicted that, in 2020, a microscopic virus would utterly disrupt our lives. And indeed, in many countries, church buildings were closed, and members could not gather physically for service.

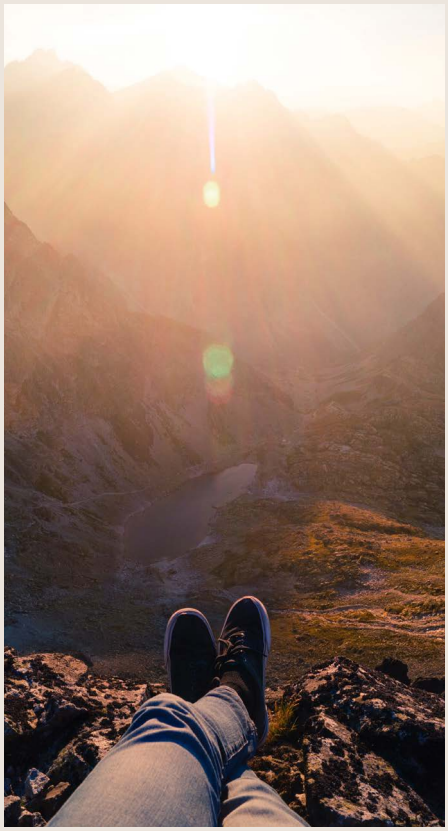
Finding True Peace in Jesus

To have a truly happy and abundant life, we must find true peace—one that endures even if our lives are suddenly and completely upended. Jesus promises such peace.

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

Some people come to believe in Jesus to receive health and wealth. They think that once they believe in Jesus, they will have no problems in life. But this is not always the case. Jesus tells us that Christians will meet with tribulations. We will still experience ill health, accidents, and job loss. The peace that Jesus gives us is not about leading a smooth-sailing life. Rather, it is about having Jesus as our help and reliance during these inevitable storms. This is true peace because it is not dependent on our external situation. No matter how much our circumstances change, the peace Jesus gives us will not change. Even in the most painful situation, we know that He abides with us.

Now when evening came, His disciples went down to the sea, got into the boat, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was already dark, and Jesus had not come to them. Then the sea arose because a great wind was blowing. So when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the



sea and drawing near the boat; and they were afraid. But He said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going. *(Jn 6:16–21)*

One night, Jesus' disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee by boat. Making the crossing in the dark was not out of the ordinary for them, as most of them were fishermen accustomed to rowing in most conditions. They were not concerned because they were experienced. But then a great storm arose. The disciples persevered until they saw Jesus walking on the sea. The disciples were comforted by Jesus' presence, and their fear ceased. When Jesus came aboard the boat, it was miraculously transported to its destination.

> "Believing in Jesus does not mean we will never meet with accidents or difficulties. But it does mean that, no matter what we encounter, we know our God in heaven is with us"

Were the disciples able to manage the situation? Technically, yes. In difficult times, we can often grit our teeth and endure the situation through sheer force of will. But how long would we be able to hold on, and how much pain would we suffer by relying on our own strength?

We may work hard, but this does not guarantee a reward. We may seek solutions to our problems, but this does not guarantee peace. Only when we welcome Jesus onto our boat and rely on Him to abide with us through the storms of life can we receive true peace. Our situation may not change, and the problem we are grappling with still exists, but having peace in our hearts changes everything. The winds may howl, and the storms still buffet us, but Jesus will carry us to the other side.

Believing in Jesus does not mean we will never meet with accidents or difficulties. But it does mean that, no matter what we encounter, we know our God in heaven is with us. This is the true peace that those who believe in God pursue. Even in tribulation, we have peace from above. We may suffer stress, worries, and disappointments, but we will not lose hope because we have an anchor in the Solid Rock. No matter how stormy the weather, our boat will not be blown off course. If such peace abides with us daily, an abundant life will surely follow.

A LIFE OF HOPE

Where Does Our Hope Lie?

Hope—the aspirations of a person—is critical to life. Knowing that we have something to look forward to is what keeps us going from day to day. However, only the right hope will give us an abundant life. If we place our hopes in the wrong things and spend our days chasing after fleeting joys or worthless goals, our lives will lack purpose and meaning. So, what is the right hope?

Many people today place their hope in tangible material possessions. New

graduates hope to get a good job and a car. A few years later, their next hope is to own a house. People of this world often place their hope in things they want to own or in what they aspire to be, and they will invest time and energy to achieve these hopes. Although there is nothing wrong with pursuing personal and material goals, these hopes can never be secure in a life of uncertainty. For example, we would have heard of successful people who seem to have everything—youth, high-flying careers, happy families—suddenly discovering that they have a terminal illness. In times like these, will the large company we own still give us satisfaction? Will our colossal house and powerful car comfort us and give us hope?

While education, jobs, and homes are necessary things to work towards, we must recognize that our lives have a higher purpose.

The Vanity of Earthly Hopes

King Solomon was a successful ancient king widely admired for his wisdom and riches (1 Kgs 10:1–7). Such vast wealth allowed him to gratify every desire.

I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds.
(Eccl 2:4–8)

Who would not yearn for such a life as his? But what did this life bring Solomon?

Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them.
I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure,
For my heart rejoiced in all my labor;
And this was my reward from all my labor.
Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done
And on the labor in which I had toiled;
And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind.
There was no profit under the sun.
(Eccl 2:10–11)

Solomon had many hopes and goals. He wanted to build houses, make pools, and plant trees and vineyards. Achieving these satisfied him—"my heart rejoiced in all my labor." It is only natural for us to be happy when we achieve our goals.

But note that when Solomon looked back on his life, he described it as "vanity and grasping for the wind." Why did his verdict on his achievements take such a drastic turn? And why did he conclude that he hates life and finds everything under the sun meaningless (Eccl 2:17)?

For there is no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever,
Since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come.
And how does a wise man die?
As the fool! *(Eccl 2:16)*

The answer lies in the inevitability of death. If we did not have to die, then it would make sense to pursue pleasure and rejoice in the fruits of our labor (Eccl 2:10). But death brings everything into perspective (Eccl 2:11). Worldly pleasures, gains, and success have value. But their value is limited—this value disappears when we leave the world.

The Heavenly Hope of Eternal Salvation

Death can be a sensitive—and, to some, taboo—topic. But avoiding or denying it does not make it disappear, so we must face it. Eating well and exercising may help us live longer. But no matter how well



we care for ourselves, we must all die one day. In fact, reflection on death is useful as it prompts us to think about the value of life. If today were the last day of our life, would the earthly goals we are toiling for still seem as important?

Better to go to the house of mourning
Than to go to the house of feasting,
For that is the end of all men;
And the living will take it to heart.
(Eccl 7:2)

Another important fact is that death is not the end of everything. Life would indeed be tragic and meaningless if there were nothing after death. But there is hope because death is not the end. After death, there is judgment. God puts the concept of eternity in our hearts (Eccl 3:11). Our lives on earth may be short, but we have a higher purpose and hope.

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation. (Heb 9:27)

The critical question is, what outcome will the judgment bring us?

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. (Heb 11:13–16)

The Book of Hebrews records the heroes and heroines of faith whose hope was firmly fixed on an inheritance far beyond their lifespans on earth. They lived simple lives, hoping for more than physical blessings. Abraham was a rich man, but he never hoped to gain more riches. He never invested in more land or built cities for himself. He lived the life of a sojourner, moving from one place to another. His hope was not in lands or cities—he was looking for something better. What Abraham saw was the eternal glory he would receive in heaven.

Jesus told His disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you" (Jn 14:2b). Today, we do not believe in Jesus just to receive blessings in this world. Perhaps we will receive them anyway, which is God's grace, but it is not why we believe in Jesus. Instead, we seek to stand blameless before God on the day of judgment—to face Him with a good conscience and enter the heavenly kingdom to enjoy eternal blessings. This is the ultimate and most precious goal and the hope of the true followers of Christ. Is it also the goal and hope of your life?

We must be clear about our true hope. Only then will we know the direction and purpose of our lives.

[A]nd that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim 3:15)

There are only two outcomes of judgment: eternal salvation or eternal damnation. What determines our destination? What determines if we receive an eternal reward or eternal condemnation? It is not how much we donate to charities or how many good deeds we have done. It is the Holy Scriptures that give us wisdom for salvation. The Bible guides us to victory on the day of judgment, to receive the hope of eternal life in heaven.

The only way to receive this hope is through knowing and following the Bible. Heaven is for those who strive hard and take faith seriously. If we are diligent about our faith, we will esteem what the Bible says. We will take responsibility for our souls and live out what we learn in the Bible. When we do this, we have an abundant life full of meaning, purpose, spiritual joy, and blessings. And when the time comes for our earthly life to end, we will joyfully receive the life to come.

CONCLUSION

We live in an ever-changing world where life is full of chaos and uncertainty. No matter how tightly we cling to our earthly possessions and achievements to steady us, these are too ephemeral to offer true peace and security. Death brings our dreams and pursuits to nothing.

But with faith in Jesus and the promises of the Bible, we can access the enduring peace and hope that calm the storm in our hearts, enabling us to boldly face any tribulations and walk the correct path toward our heavenly hope (Rom 5:1–5). Grasping true peace and hope will lead us to flourishing and abundant lives.



TIME TO SAY GOODBYE

Daniel Chin—Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Editor's note: This article is adapted from an encouragement given during a church service soon after the passing of Sister Mei Ling Chen in Buenos Aires to remind us to reflect on and treasure the life and grace God has given us.

The passing of a loved one can be hard to accept. When we hear such sad news, we are often overwhelmed by a maelstrom of emotions as we recall our last meeting and unearth memories of our time spent with the deceased.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 tells us that there is a season for everything, a time for every purpose under heaven. The examples in the following passage encompass joys and griefs, partings and reunions, and the ups and downs of life (Eccl 3:2–8). This passage emphasizes that everything under heaven has its season. These events, both the sublime and sorrowful, will all pass and come to their end. And one day, it will be our turn to say goodbye.

From the perspective of eternity, our entire life is a process of saying goodbye. Some lives end after a brief existence; some end before seeing the sunlight. This realization prompts us to reflect on how we will spend our days before our ordained time on earth is over.

We can gain insight from the final words and wishes of those who know it is their time to say goodbye, especially those faithful individuals in the Bible and in our lives. What can we learn about living a meaningful life before it is our turn to say goodbye?



JOSEPH: WHERE IS YOUR HOME?

When Joseph knew his time was nearing its end, he gave his family two prophecies and an instruction (Gen 50:24–26). Filled with the Spirit and God's word, Joseph declared that God would surely visit them. He knew that after he departed from the world, his brothers and descendants would encounter suffering. Speaking these words by faith, he sought to reassure and remind them that God abides and will take care of them.

The second prophecy was that God would bring them out of Egypt. With these words, Joseph reminded his brethren that Egypt was not their home. When God's appointed time came, God would bring them to His promised land. This message rings true today. Our place on earth is not our home. God has already prepared for us an even better Canaan. We cannot return there on our own, but God will bring us there.

> "We invest all that we have here in this world, and instead of rejoicing, we feel sad at the thought of departing and returning to our heavenly home"

Finally, Joseph instructed his brethren to carry his bones to the promised land. He made them swear an oath that they would do so; such was the seriousness of his request. He had faith that God would bring these prophecies to pass and strongly desired that his remains be buried in the promised land of God.

If we have the strength of faith that Joseph did, we would also yearn to return to our heavenly home. We sometimes live as though this world is our home. We invest all that we have here in this world, and instead of rejoicing, we feel sad at the thought of departing and returning to our heavenly home.

A key insight and life lesson can be gained from the grand sweep of Genesis. Genesis begins with the creation of the heavens and the earth but closes with a coffin. Ever since humankind sinned and departed

from God, no matter how hard we work or how high we climb in society, what remains in the end is our coffin. We cannot take with us anything from this world. This is the vanity of life: it is filled with sorrows and toil, and no alternative ending exists.

When I was young, I chased animals for fun. As I came of age, I was captivated by the search for my ideal wife—a beautiful woman with long flowing hair gently blowing in the breeze. In middle age, we tend to be more mature and practical. People are preoccupied with the pursuit of fame, wealth, and success. In our dotage, we may still desire similar things but no longer have the strength to chase them. We gradually become indifferent and disinterested in many things and may find our enjoyment of life diminishing. At the end of our lives, the only pursuit left is the coffin.

"From Genesis to Revelation, there are many teachings, but ultimately, our final request is for God to bring us home"

Joseph, once a slave, rose to become a governor greater than all but Pharaoh. He lived a glorious life, yet what remained after Joseph's farewell was a coffin. Joseph's body was placed in a coffin, but this coffin was not entombed in Egypt—it was only held there temporarily until the children of Israel departed for the promised land. As the children of God, our time on this earth is only temporary. Elder John writes at the end of Revelation: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20b), yearning to be taken away. From Genesis to Revelation, there are many teachings, but ultimately, our final request is for God to bring us home.

Today, if our Lord Jesus were to say that it is our time to go home, we would likely respond, "No, not yet, I don't want to leave this world." The young may say they have not lived enough. But what of the old? If our loved ones are ill or advanced in age, we often beg the Lord not to call them away, even if they are in great pain and need a considerable amount of care and medication. In reality, we are selfish—reluctant to let them go despite their suffering. This response may be understandable if we had no hope of the heavenly kingdom to come. But since we have a better home awaiting us after this life, let us embrace this hope with true faith, declaring, "Lord, I want to return home!"

JACOB: WHAT ARE YOU GRASPING FOR?

Hebrews describes what Jacob did when his death was approaching:

By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.
(Heb 11:21)

He fulfilled his responsibilities towards man and God before he departed. Firstly, he blessed Joseph's sons.

Jacob's life was full of ups and downs.



He experienced the great sorrows of human life—fear, strife, exploitation, and alienation—and escaped death on several occasions. Separately, his brother and father-in-law sought to kill him. When he fled back to Canaan, he faced more trouble from the nations around him.

This was Jacob's life. If not for the many times God appeared and saved him, he would have died sooner. His life was full of labor and sorrow (Gen 47:9). To marry Rachel, he had to work fourteen years in total. Laban cheated him several times. After Jacob established his family, there were many conflicts and a lack of peace in his household. His children harmed and sold Joseph, told their father a pack of lies, and did many things that brought Jacob great shame. Who would consider this a happy or successful life?

When we consider how Jacob blessed others, we can see the great pain and sorrows he experienced. His whole life was marked with scars and bruises. His heart sustained the greatest injuries.

Jacob shed blood, sweat, and tears to gain blessings in his life. He managed to achieve success before he departed this world. At that point, he blessed others. He no longer harbored hatred, complaints, or dissatisfaction. While most of his life had been filled with conflicts and negativity, he chose to bless others in the time he had left, hoping they may be happy, satisfied, and at peace.

As long as we are still alive, we can make the same choice as Jacob. Let us choose to bless others. Let us not continue to harbor grudges, anger, or resentment. There is a saying: if man can only choose something to remember, he would choose gratitude. Choose to remember the good things and be grateful. Before our time is up, if we can say anything, say, "Thank you."

According to Hebrews 11:21, the second thing Jacob did was to lean on the top of his staff to worship the true God. This was Jacob's success, his true faith. Earlier in his life, he grasped onto wealth and wronged many people. He used any means possible—even unscrupulous ones—to obtain what he wanted. Jacob succeeded in the end because he put aside the things of the world and grasped hold of God. Before he died, he gripped his staff to bow and worship God. Are our lives similar to Jacob's earlier life or Jacob's end of life?

In his old age, Jacob relied on a staff to support him. We may think, in his frailty, it would be acceptable for Jacob to lie down and worship God. Instead, Jacob wanted to use his remaining strength and vigor to give his best to God. The Bible says that he leaned on his staff to worship God, and he was received back by God. This is the most beautiful and successful ending one can have in one's faith.

After clinging to the world for most of his life, Jacob understood. Towards the end of his life, he clung to the Lord. While he had breath, he wanted to worship the Lord with the correct mindset, not just offering the minimum. He used his best to truly worship God. This was what Jacob did

when it was time for him to say goodbye—another example of the victorious faith of the saints.

A FATHER'S CONCERN FOR THE CHURCH

At the end of his life, a brother gave a final instruction to his son. With his last breath, he said, "Do not let the church run out of money." Though unusual to us, these dying words must have touched God's heart.

At that time, the church was quite poor. Many members lived in large, beautiful houses, but the church building was dilapidated. The chairs in the church were torn and tattered. Every purchase the church planned was disputed over by the members, so the church would end up buying the cheapest, and least durable, option. All the while, members would not hesitate to buy the best quality for their own households.

This state of affairs weighed heavily on the father's heart. Why did he leave this specific instruction for his son? Because he knew his son's life was very comfortable. Some people may encourage others to love God and offer more but avoid admonishing their own children to do so. This father used what remained of his strength to encourage his son to love God more and to offer more.

Alongside this example, I add further encouragement to my children: other than ensuring that the church does not run out of money, you should do your part so that the church does not run out of people.

"Other than ensuring that the church does not run out of money, you should do your part so that the church does not run out of people"

I received news that our church in a certain country was conducting a spiritual convocation, and only ten people showed up—nine members and one truth-seeker. I was so shocked that I could not sleep! This church was not in a village but in a thriving city with affluent church members.

If we attend church services faithfully with our family, there will always be people in God's church. We must do our part to remain within God's grace and bring up our children in the Lord. As our family grows, so will the church, meaning there will be more hands to serve and more feet to spread the gospel. Thus, God's family will increase. Let us have the same heart as this brother and help the church flourish, both financially and in human resources.

A MOTHER'S CONCERN FOR YOUR SOUL

There was a sister who, as her end approached, repeatedly gave her final instructions to her son. Whenever her son visited her, she would say, "You must go to church." At first, her son did not heed his mother. After all, he had not attended church services for over twenty years. This mother could only say, "Your mother



is about to depart. While I can still speak, I must instruct you in this matter. Listen to your mother's advice; let your mother leave in peace. I do not have many worries for you, only for your soul. You must go to church."

Her son continued to give excuses and soothing words to appease her. But on her last day on earth, after the doctors had informed them she did not have long left, her son saw tears falling from her eyes. He leaned in close to ask his mother what was troubling her. She summoned her energy and uttered her final word, "Church."

She had encouraged him to return to church many times, yet he did not listen. Thank God, her son still had his conscience and was moved by the Holy Spirit. "Mother left me no instructions apart from this one. Mother really loves my soul; she really loves my life! If I do not return to church and worship God, how will I meet my mother in heaven?" This son is now very zealous, serving God with his whole family.

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST: IT IS DONE!

Before our Lord Jesus Christ breathed His last, He said, "It is finished!" (Jn 19:30), which means "I have accomplished." Many in the world judged Him to be a failure. To those already skeptical about His proclamations before He was crucified, His death certainly added more doubt to His identity. Even His apostles, who had followed Him for three years, deserted Him. Yet, when it was Jesus' time to say farewell, He declared that He had finished His work.

When it is our time to say goodbye, we hope to be able to profess this simple yet profound sentiment. The second coming of Jesus is near. Our Lord Jesus brings home all who are holy, love God, and faithfully serve Him. One by one, they are being brought to their heavenly home.

What more for those of us who remain in this world? Are we dwelling on conflicts, envy, anger, or complaints? When a faithful worker departs to receive glory and blessing, we lose a prayerful worker who interceded daily for the church. How should we, who remain, focus our prayers?

If the church is not in one's heart, he will be indifferent to the church's concerns. If there is a lack of workers or resources, he may feel it has nothing to do with him

As we reflect upon our heavenly hope, let us repent and begin anew. Let us not only think about money, business, or our enjoyment in life. Let us change and consider how we can love Jesus, care for the church, and serve one another. If we do so, our faith, the faith of our family, and of the church will grow abundantly.

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. *(1 Thess 5:23)*

THE END OF A THING IS BETTER THAN ITS BEGINNING:

THE LIFE OF A FULL-TIME WORKER

FF Chong—London, UK



Serving as a full-time minister in the True Jesus Church has always been considered sacred. Many have desired to serve in this noble cause, but not all have been privileged to do so. And yet, in some countries, the church finds it hard to recruit new full-time preachers. This paradox is worth considering—is serving God full-time still meaningful to the church as a whole? How many of us who love God are willing to dedicate ourselves fully, and for life, to the service of the Lord?

Those currently part of this full-time workforce find it a huge challenge to do their work as God requires. We have seen how some fellow full-time workers have fallen away. These fallen workers had answered the call to dedicate themselves to full-time ministry. However, as time passed, they failed to live their lives in a way that was meaningful and worthy of their work for God. Not only did they fail to complete their God-given tasks, but their actions also brought God's name and the sacred work into disrepute.

Such fallen workers are a warning to us. Acceptance into full-time ministry is not a guarantee of meaningful service to God. The prowling lion who seeks to devour the faithful (1 Pet 5:8) is doubtless even more eager to feast on God's workers. Hence, the latter must constantly strive to better their inner self through the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 9:27). In particular, since full-time workers are often in a position of authority, they must constantly imitate the Lord Jesus in humility, and beware the great danger of hubris, refusing to be directed or restrained by others.

The vision of the temple, revealed to the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 40), illustrates graphically the dangers facing full-time workers. And to better understand this vision, let us first consider the institution of the Old Testament priesthood.

THE PRIESTLY HERITAGE

A priest acceptable to God must be able to trace his lineage back to the Aaronic priestly family. However, God is just and righteous. He does not allow anyone—priest or commoner—to get off scot-free if he has sinned (Ex 34:6–7; Nah 1:3). Hence, the Scriptures record how God severely chastised the family of Aaron. Aaron



himself would have been killed had it not been for Moses' intercession (Deut 9:20). Of Aaron's four sons—Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar (Num 3:2–4)—God killed two for offering Him profane fire (Lev 10:1–2).

"The term 'sons of Zadok' is used to distinguish them from the other priests. We can infer that the latter group must have become unsanctified or unrighteous over time"

The priestly line from Aaron's youngest son, Ithamar, was also removed. One of Ithamar's descendants was Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech and the fourth high priest in descent from Eli. Due to the egregious sins of Eli's priestly family (1 Sam 2:30–34), God had commanded that the priesthood be taken from them (1 Kgs 2:27). Hence, during the reign of King Solomon, the priesthood was transferred from Abiathar to Zadok, the descendant of Aaron's other son, Eleazar (1 Kgs 2:35; 1 Chr 6:4–8). This was God's promise because of Phinehas' brave and decisive action in putting away an adulterous couple, thus averting God's wrath from continuing to burn against His people (Num 25:10–13).

In the temple vision given to Ezekiel, there were two categories of priests (Ezek 40:45–46). One category comprised priests who could trace their lineage from their ancestor Zadok. The other comprised priests whose priestly lineage was not mentioned. This is quite unusual since the Law of Moses had prescribed only one priestly patrilineage from Aaron (Ex 40:15). Hence, for the second category, it could be that their lineage was not of the stipulated Aaronic priesthood, or their priestly ministration was not recognized and accepted by God.

Zadok literally means "sanctified" or "being righteous." The priest Zadok served David and Solomon with great faithfulness (1 Kgs 1:32–40). The term "sons of Zadok" is used to distinguish them from the other priests. We can infer that the latter group must have become unsanctified or unrighteous over time due to their unfaithfulness. So, how did those priests end up being unrighteous and unfaithful to God?

Consider the example of Eli: He was a priest (1 Sam 2:11), so his two sons were also automatically priests. But the biblical introduction to these two is startling: "Now the sons of Eli were *corrupt*" (1 Sam 2:12a, *emphasis added*), which is also translated as "the sons of Belial (Satan.)" In other

words, they became unrighteous in God's eyes due to their constant flagrant violation of their priestly duties. This continual transgressing against God's law is outlined in 1 Samuel 2. Their priestly performance was out of line with the priestly offices they inherited by birth. Their behaviors were far removed from what the law required, turning them into the children of Satan.

THE TEMPLE VISION

In Ezekiel's vision, Eleazar's priestly line is the only surviving one from the Aaronic priesthood. This priestly line focuses on Eleazar's son, Zadok, who epitomizes the faithfulness, sanctification, and righteousness required in serving God. This vision of Ezekiel is highly relevant, particularly to full-time workers in the end-time. It tells us what the church will face and how full-time workers should serve to prevent themselves from serving against the Lord.

"More importantly, the line of demarcation between the two groups of priests will become more and more distinct as the church approaches perfection"

There are two reasons for such extrapolation. First, the messages in Ezekiel are prophetic. They are written not for the prophet himself but for us (1 Pet 1:10–12) and for our learning (Rom 15:4). Second, from the vision of the temple, the priests and the temple were well below the required standard of God. So, these messages function as a lens for us to visualize the church's state before she becomes perfect. More importantly, the line of demarcation between the two groups of priests will become more and more distinct as the church approaches perfection.

How can we ensure we are among the right group of priests?

1. Remain Sanctified

Priests are chosen to bring man to God and to help foster a strong relationship between the two. They are to atone for the people's sins through sacrifices, such as sin offerings. However, the reconciliation of man to God is only attainable when the priests themselves are first reconciled to God by atoning their own sins (Lev 9:7; 16:6; Heb 5:3; 7:27). This is a solemn and essential task. If not done correctly, as mandated by the Law of Moses, the priests will become unsanctified and risk losing their own lives (Lev 16:2, 13).

Preachers are chosen to spread the good tidings to the unbelieving world, winning souls for the Lord. Whenever those who believe in the truth are converted, God is glorified, and His kingdom expanded, as seen in the early apostolic church. One salient factor contributing to the church's stability and maturity is the apostles' efforts to remain close to God through prayer and establishing a sanctified relationship with Him. The converted souls will then remain in the Lord, experiencing the joy God has given to the church, steadfastly following



the apostles' doctrines and worshipping God.

The apostles' closeness to God was evident in the incident that exposed the deception of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11). The work of God to purge wickedness is urgent and necessary for the church to remain sanctified, ensuring God's abiding presence. God works effectively in His church when she is purged. Hence, the church must teach her believers to always seek the forgiveness of sin with a will to draw closer to the Lord. To help themselves and believers to receive the forgiveness of sins, preachers must act faithfully. This is the priority in their service to the Lord.

Preachers in the end-time must be well aware that planning to make the church strong and active in serving must be done on the premise that they are constantly cleansed from all unrighteousness by the blood of Jesus. Confessing their wrongdoings and imperfections before God requires a lot of courage. But it is necessary. Repentance must be genuine, and the penitent must resolve not to repeat the same wrong. God will abide with His church and His workers only when the church remains sanctified. A truly sanctified church with God's abidance can hold on even more firmly to God's truth (2 Thess 2:13).

2. Keep God's Charge

The Lord's commands are to be kept steadfastly and unchangingly. The laws governing the priests are meticulously spelled out (Ezek 44:17–31), ranging from attire to food. At first glance, these regulations appear stringent and restrictive. They are not solely focused on the work the priest performs. God uses these laws governing priestly actions to drive home a vital lesson: priesthood is connected to every facet of a priest's life.

Priests who live consecrated lives are preserved by God's divine principles to teach His people to live a life pleasing to the Lord. These priests are living models to those whom they lead. They are to teach the people verbally by assembling them to hear the Law of Moses (Lev 10:11; Deut 6:4). They are also to teach them by using valuable examples from their own lives. Such priestly teaching would continue until the priest was called back to the Lord. They knew that any misdemeanors on their part would throw the godly order of the community into disarray. For instance, Eli's sons disregarded the law and created an environment in which the people of God abhorred the offerings of the Lord (1 Sam 2:17b).

Preachers with good behaviors are always well respected and will not profane the work they are called to do (1 Pet 3:16). Paul rebuked the teachers of the law. They boast about the law but dishonor the law by breaking it. Hence, the name of God is blasphemed on account of their impropriety (Rom 2:23–24).

How can those who serve the Lord find meaning in their service for the Lord, let alone impart positive lessons in serving to those whom they lead?

Paul teaches that whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, do all to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). This is even more so for preachers. Their lives do not belong to them; they must live for God's glory. Even the simple act of sustaining life must be done with revering God in mind. Nothing

is more critical than bringing glory to God. Preachers must ensure that they do not tarnish their status as a preacher, as this would bring dishonor to the name of God. Therefore, to reflect the sanctity of his work, Paul did not demand food from the churches he looked after, although he had the apostolic authority to do so (1 Cor 9:14–15).

3. Withstand Pressure

An interesting aspect of the temple vision was the pressure placed upon the priests. Many of them yielded to the people's power and will to worship idols (Ezek 44:10). This is both heartbreaking and shocking. These priests had lost the power and wisdom from God to guide His people. Instead of bringing the wayward people back to the right way of worship, the non-Zadokite priests tagged along with the crowd.

"There was massive confusion, particularly since these populist priests were seen ministering in the temple to support the masses' evil desires"

What becomes of the community of God when the priests fulfill the people's wishes rather than execute God's will? There was massive confusion, particularly since these populist priests were seen ministering in the temple to support the masses' evil desires.

But, the Zadokite priests were different. They chose to follow God's way, to their own hurt (Ps 15:4c), rather than succumbing to the pressure the idolatrous masses exerted on them. They served faithfully in the presence of God, unlike their non-Zadokite counterparts. They could uphold their integrity under intense challenges because God abided with them. They sought to please God above all else; they were approved by God.

FAITHFUL PRIESTS IN THE CHURCH TODAY

The temple vision and God's intolerance of unfaithful priests highlight two sobering reminders for the end-time true church. First, we shall come under adverse ideological influences of the world; specifically liberalism co-opting the language of human rights and equality. Satan has captured the human rights cause to present a very attractive case: "Every human being has the right to do what he or she deems is right." Such a proposition appeals to carnal minds. Such people have forgotten—or refuse to accept—that God's standards are what is right and what truly matters. Like Eve, they desire to be like God and set their own standards.

When more and more worldly believers make their way into the ecclesiastical organization, their carnal views will dominate those who desire to submit to the will of God. Workers without spiritual power and understanding will then be swept along, submitting to the will of the majority even though it is against the word of God. This is tantamount to following the people who went after idols (Ezek 44:12).



The second warning is about heretic incursions into the church. If falsehood is not nipped in its bud, it shall spread like wildfire. By the time the church realizes the severity of the matter, it will be too late to rectify. Many will fall prey to the work of the wicked one, including unsanctified, unrighteous, and unstable workers. There will come a time when those who speak and defend the word of truth will be the minority. The majority will callously choose to go against the word of God. They mock the word of God, casting the truth down to the ground (2 Pet 3:3; Dan 8:12).

In such circumstances, the faithful Zadokites must stand firm; they may be put to the sternest of tests because the faithless majority will persecute them. They must unswervingly hold to the principle that the church's authority is top-down: God is the Head of the church. His chosen workers are given power and wisdom to serve *according to His will.* Hence, these faithful workers must make spiritual decisions for the good and growth of the church. They must emphasize following the once-and-for-all delivered truth and have the spiritual resolve to safeguard the truth to the end.

CONCLUSION

Being chosen to serve God full-time is the most honorable of all tasks. This noble status that few have received must be esteemed. However, this noble status itself does not in any way make a preacher better than other believers. In addition, a full-time worker is tasked with heavy responsibilities. But, the duties assigned do not indicate the person's value in God's eyes. He is greatly valued when God is continuously pleased by the things he does. God respects the man who walks humbly with Him (Mic 6:8). God delights in a worker and his work when this worker serves before Him and not merely before man.

To please God, a preacher must be cultivated. Cultivation begins with being sanctified in his service to God by the cleansing of Jesus' blood, to be purged from sin and corruption. This puts him in good stead to keep God's charge. In sanctification, he is given the power to keep God's commands. When the predicted falsehoods arise in the church, he will remain steadfast in his faith and not bow to populist pressures. To do this, day in and day out, until he passes away requires tremendous endurance and trust in the Lord. This is why God holds such a faithful preacher with abundant love and honor; in His eyes, the sun rises and sets on a preacher who is able to stand firm to the end. This constitutes a meaningful serving life of a preacher.

THE JOURNEY OF SERVICE

Ming Chang Wang—Taichung, Taiwan

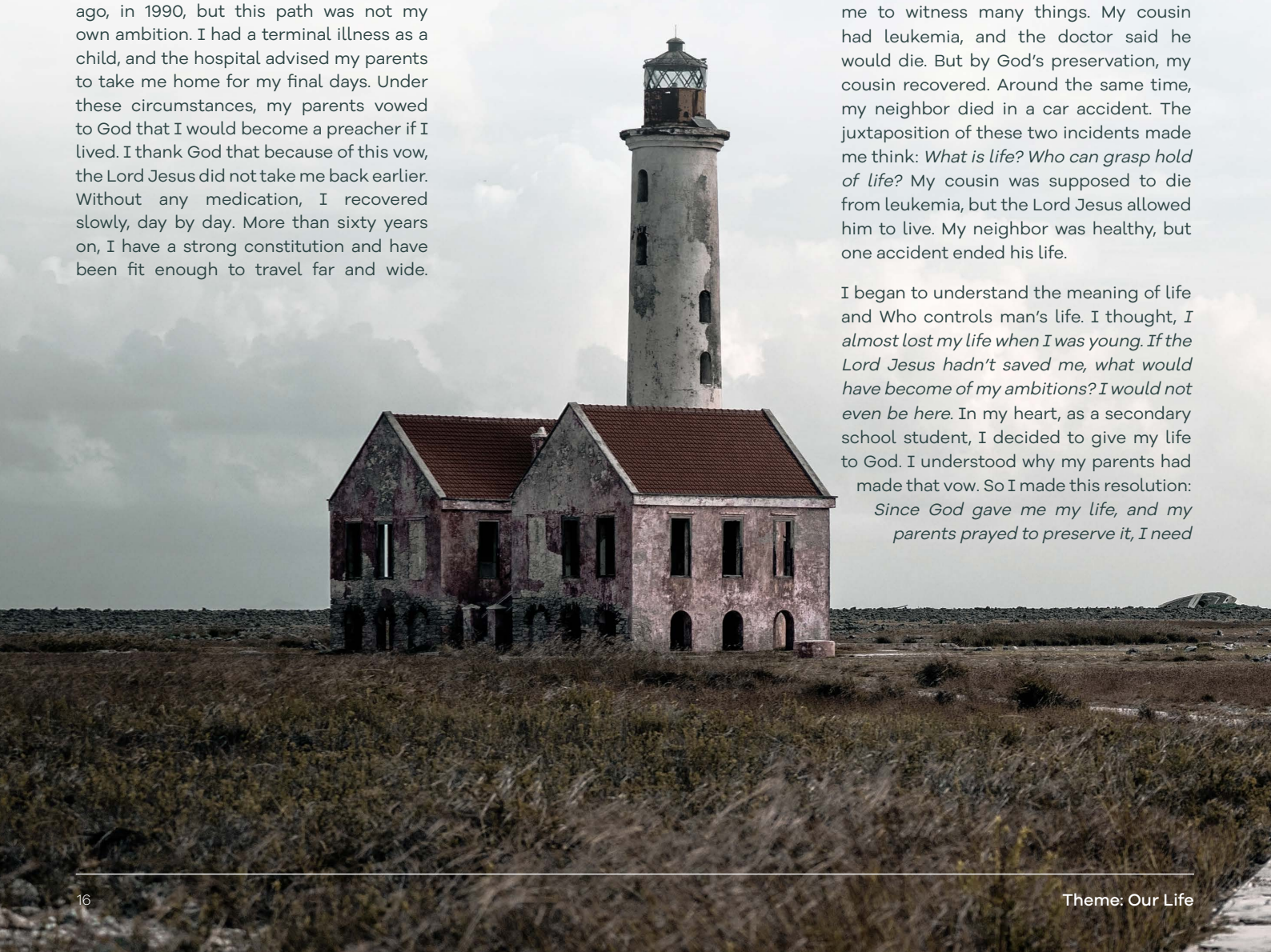
Editor's note: During a youth service in Singapore in July 2023, Preacher Wang shared his journey of becoming a preacher and some vital lessons to remember when we serve the Lord. These lessons are relevant no matter what capacity we serve in, whether as a regular member, a full-time worker, or as a youth aspiring to become a preacher.

MY PARENTS' VOW

I became a preacher thirty-three years ago, in 1990, but this path was not my own ambition. I had a terminal illness as a child, and the hospital advised my parents to take me home for my final days. Under these circumstances, my parents vowed to God that I would become a preacher if I lived. I thank God that because of this vow, the Lord Jesus did not take me back earlier. Without any medication, I recovered slowly, day by day. More than sixty years on, I have a strong constitution and have been fit enough to travel far and wide.

Acknowledging the Vow

Growing up, I discovered my personality was incompatible with being a preacher. I was introverted and timid. If two people stood by the door, I would wait for them to leave before walking through to avoid a potential conversation. However, a preacher must speak on the pulpit, care for believers, and preach to truth-seekers. How could I do these things? This was one reason I shied away from becoming a preacher.



Another reason was that I had my own ambitions. I knew that if I became a preacher, all these dreams would be dashed.

A third reason was that I was naughty as a child. My parents would say, "How can you be a preacher when you're so badly behaved?" I disliked this statement, and, in my mind, I rejected the idea of becoming a preacher. I told myself that when I had the power to make my own decisions, I would defy my parents.

But God works in mysterious ways. In my secondary school years, God allowed me to witness many things. My cousin had leukemia, and the doctor said he would die. But by God's preservation, my cousin recovered. Around the same time, my neighbor died in a car accident. The juxtaposition of these two incidents made me think: *What is life? Who can grasp hold of life?* My cousin was supposed to die from leukemia, but the Lord Jesus allowed him to live. My neighbor was healthy, but one accident ended his life.

I began to understand the meaning of life and Who controls man's life. I thought, *I almost lost my life when I was young. If the Lord Jesus hadn't saved me, what would have become of my ambitions? I would not even be here.* In my heart, as a secondary school student, I decided to give my life to God. I understood why my parents had made that vow. So I made this resolution: *Since God gave me my life, and my parents prayed to preserve it, I need*

to take responsibility for my life and honor the vow my parents made. After secondary school, I embraced this path of becoming a preacher and treated it as my calling.

WORKING ON MY INADEQUACIES

Acknowledging my calling was one thing, but fulfilling it was another. I had resolved to tread the path of ministry, but I knew I had many inadequacies that made me unsuitable for the role. So, I prayed continuously for God to guide me and give me a willing heart. Every day, I would pray, read the Bible, and attend church services—there was a service every night, so there would be eight services a week. I never missed a single one. I would be the first in church, and I would take notes at every service. Many of my sermons are inspired by this treasury of notes.

> "I had resolved to tread the path of ministry, but I knew I had many inadequacies that made me unsuitable for the role. So, I prayed continuously for God to guide me and give me a willing heart"

During my national service, I had a politics class every Thursday. We would spend two hours watching indoctrination videos followed by one hour of discussion. However, no one was willing to volunteer their opinions, keeping their heads resolutely bowed when asked. I realized this was an excellent opportunity to train myself in public speaking since I would likely not see these people again after my national service. But it took all my determination to stand up before 150 people. I had no interest in politics, so I used the Book of Proverbs as the source of my sharing. I did not know what I was saying when I first took to the stage. The facilitator, who was a Buddhist, was furious. He took me aside and said I was to reflect on the video, not share from the Scriptures. The following week, I did it again. And again, he scolded me. But I continued to do the same thing every week. When he asked who wanted to share, I would be the only one raising my hand. I would speak on Proverbs again, and he could not remove me from the stage. He would reprimand me afterward but could not stop me because we had freedom of speech. It came to the point where he would say, "Okay, Wang Ming Chang, go up and speak."

Over time, my sharing became smoother and more articulate. The first time, I spoke for only five minutes. But eventually, I could talk for thirty minutes. Whether my fellow conscripts listened or not, I manifested the name of Jesus; Jesus' name became attached to my identity. This was a source of pressure whenever I performed badly, but I grew from the stress. It motivated me and prepared me for preacherhood. These one-and-a-half years of training transformed me into a different, more courageous person.

My father was afraid I would change my mind, so he submitted an application on my behalf for the full-time theological training course towards the end of my national service. Phones were rare back then, so he sent me a telegram. Telegrams were only used for urgent messages, so I thought I was receiving bad news from home. But the courier told me not to worry. The telegram said:

Wang Ming Chang, I, your father, have helped you apply for the theological course. Prepare yourself.

I was relieved but afraid: relieved, because it was not bad news; afraid, because I had yet to finish my national service and had no time to prepare. For the first time, I was dumbfounded: I could neither laugh nor cry.

I could not disobey my earthly father or my heavenly One. After two weeks, I took the entrance exam, thinking I would fail because I had not studied. But out of eight applicants, I was one of four who passed. I was not yet twenty-three years old, and my classmates were six or seven years older.

MY COMMISSION, GOAL, AND RESPONSIBILITY

At the seminary, I often used these three Bible verses to encourage myself:

1. *And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* *(Mk 16:15)*

This is our commission from God. As a preacher, I had to all the more fulfill this.

2. *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.* *(Mt 28:19–20)*

This is the goal I set for myself in my work: to make disciples of all nations, to abide by what the Lord has commanded. As a worker, I had to be very clear about the instructions of the Lord Jesus.

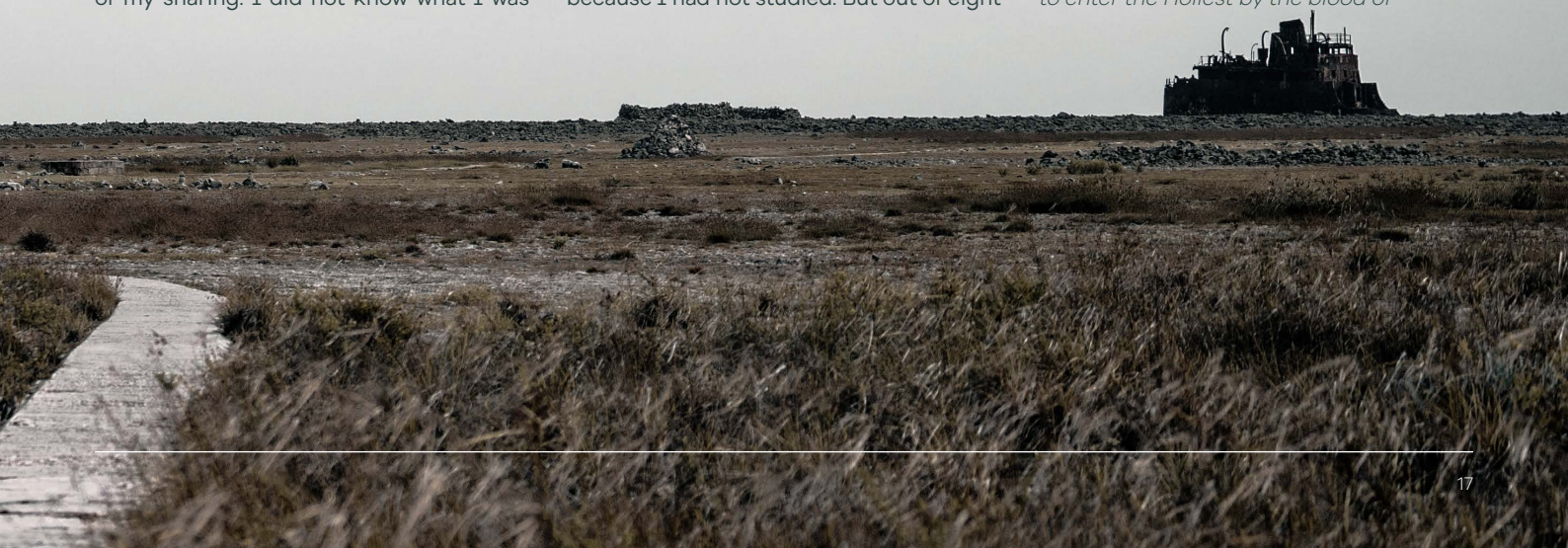
3. *Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying:*
"Whom shall I send,
And who will go for Us?"
Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." *(Isa 6:8)*

This is my responsibility as a worker and someone who has received the grace of God. When the Lord Jesus calls us, we should answer.

At the beginning of my ministry to the Lord, I had to have a sense of commission, to know my goal, and to accept my responsibility. These three Bible verses have followed me throughout these thirty-three years of service.

How would I accomplish this commission, goal, and responsibility? My path of service was not carved out by me but was opened by the Lord Jesus.

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of



Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh… *(Heb 10:19–20)*

The theme of the Book of Hebrews is "a better salvation." We have a better salvation through a better service. Jesus has accomplished this better salvation with a better service. He trod this path of service—the new and living way—and we must do the same to accomplish the Lord's commission, our goal, and our responsibility. In my life of ministry, I am wary not to forge my own path of service—I must always return to walk on the new and living way Jesus has opened, which is the only path of salvation. We must walk in this new and living way when we serve. Only then will our service have value; only then can we attain this better salvation.

So, what is this new and living way?

[Christ Jesus], being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. *(Phil 2:6–8)*

Simply put, Jesus is God. But He chose to lower Himself and come in the likeness of men. This contrasts Satan's origin:

Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;
You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor;
I cast you to the ground,
I laid you before kings,
That they might gaze at you. *(Ezek 28:17)*

"I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,
I will be like the Most High." *(Isa 14:14)*

Satan was perfect in his ways from the day he was created (Ezek 28:14–15), but he was not God. He wanted to be equal to the Most High. His heart was lifted up with pride. This is why he was cast out of heaven and into the pit. He is not God because he is the created cherub; only God is the Creator. This is also the first human sin:

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." *(Gen 3:4–5)*

Satan came to tempt Eve. Eve took the fruit and ate. Why did the angel sin? He wanted to be like God. Why did man sin? Man also wanted to be like God. The creature desired to be equal to the Creator, and sin entered the world. Every child of Adam and Eve has been ensnared in sin, spiraling downward into perdition. Because of this, the Lord Jesus needed to tread a diametrically opposed path—a path that goes upwards. Jesus was God but did not regard Himself to be equal with God. So, all who believe in the Lord Jesus and follow this path will live. It is the new and living way. If we tread the old path, we will be like Satan, cast down into the depths.

There are only two paths: the path of eternal punishment (opened by the devil) and the path of eternal life (opened by the Lord Jesus). Since the Lord Jesus has opened the new and living way, we must forsake the old path and walk the path of service in the same way He did.

HOW TO WALK THE PATH OF ETERNAL LIFE

Philippians 2:7–8 reveals three qualities of Jesus as He treads the path of service:

1. He "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men."

2. He "became obedient to the point of death."

3. He sacrificed Himself and submitted to "the death of the cross."

Humility

Jesus emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant. Jesus' humility enabled Him to walk this path. This tells us that we cannot complete our path of service without humility.

For Christians, especially those serving, humility is not just a virtue but a requirement. It is a necessity as we walk on this new and living way with Jesus. Without humility, one is still walking on the old way with the devil. If we hope to serve, we must empty ourselves, as Christ did.

Humility is a crucial foundation for every servant. Why did the cherub sin? He thought he was perfect and became filled with pride. He dared to desire equality with God. Adam and Eve, through the devil's deception, took the fruit because they thought they could be like God. They trod this path of condemnation. Were it not for



the Lord Jesus opening this new and living way, man's end would be the lake of fire.

The first task in serving the Lord Jesus is to become a humble servant. Humility is essential to preserves us in our journey of salvation because it allows us to serve the Lord.

Obedience

The second important element of service is obedience, even unto death. This means we submit to God's will, even when it seems unreasonable. Consider Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. According to the flesh, the path God wanted Jesus to walk was unreasonable. Was there really no other way? Jesus asked the Father to take away this bitter cup. But only if it was according to His Father's will, not His own. Jesus was obedient unto the point of death.

The Bible's teachings are clear. We may not understand, or we may have our own way of thinking. But we should obey God's will and not oppose the words of the Bible and Jesus' commands. This is crucial. Only through obedience can we serve the Lord. Otherwise, we are just serving ourselves, holding our own thoughts and thinking them to be correct. This is not the new and living way, but a path we forge for ourselves, leading to death.

We must be obedient to the truth and to the church. The church is the body of Christ, so we must submit to the arrangements of the church.

"If we ask for work equal to our ability, then we need not sacrifice. Therefore, we should not ask for work equal to our ability; we should ask for the ability to do the work we are given"

I once went to deliver a sermon to a small congregation; about ten believers were attending the Sabbath service. I sat at the front of the hall as a young boy led the hymn singing. After one hymn, he returned to his seat. I was happy to have extra time to speak my message, but as I readied myself to walk to the pulpit, another even younger boy tugged my clothes to indicate that he was also going to lead a hymn. After him, a girl, the youngest of the three, went up to lead the final hymn. She was so small she could not lift the hymn book on her own. It turned out that the person in charge was the father of the three children. As he laughed, the little girl chastised him, "Papa cannot laugh. I'm leading the hymn in the name of Jesus now. Don't laugh!"

This is a display of submissiveness. The children submitted to their assignments. I submitted to the unusual arrangement of three hymn leaders. And the father was submissive to his daughter's rebuke. Submitting to the church's arrangements is integral to walking this path of service.

Sacrifice

The path of service is a path of sacrifice. The servant must be willing and able to sacrifice. If he does not sacrifice, he is not a servant. A servant cannot do things according to his own will.

From the perspective of service, what is sacrifice? If we ask for work equal to our ability, then we need not sacrifice. Therefore, we should not ask for work equal to our ability; we should ask for the ability to do the work we are given. We should ask the Lord, "What do you want me to do?". Even if we are unsure, we should be willing to sacrifice when the opportunity to serve arises, and pray: "Since you have given me this work, God, please give me the strength to carry it out."

Personally, I do not reject the work assigned to me. If I reject, what sacrifice is there to speak of? Let us not dwell in our comfort zones, for then we would not be walking the same path as the Lord Jesus.

CONCLUSION

As youths in the church, we all aspire to serve God. But we need to follow the path of Jesus—to be humble, obedient, and willing to sacrifice. Only then will we be walking on this new and living way. Though I am lacking, I am eager to walk on this path. May the Holy Spirit stir up the youths of the True Jesus Church to be willing to tread this path of service. May the Lord Jesus add to our strength to improve our service to the church. Amen.



THE SECRET TO LIVING A JOYFUL LIFE

Vuthy Nol-Mantia—Pacifica, California, USA

According to the World Health Organization, more than 700,000 people die by suicide every year.[1] Every forty seconds, someone somewhere in this world has taken their own life. And those who die by suicide are not only the poor, sick, and destitute; suicide affects people of all incomes and backgrounds, even those leading seemingly comfortable lives. Despite everything they own and the loved ones they have around them, some people are overwhelmed by mental anguish or a sense of ennui and meaninglessness. As Christians and God's chosen people, do we also find the shadow of depression hanging heavy over us? Are there times we are unable to view life with wonderment and find joy in our lives?

[1] "Suicide," World Health Organization, published August 28, 2023, https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide.

FINDING JOY THROUGH CONTENTMENT IN THE LORD

With each passing year and each fresh reading of Psalm 23, the words strike a deeper chord within me, and I can understand and appreciate life more. King David opened the psalm with these words:

The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want. *(Ps 23:1)*

Comparing the lives of King David and his son Solomon, we find that David did not have the wisdom, riches, and glory Solomon had. On the contrary, David's life was filled with conflict, trials, and tribulations. Yet, after all he endured, David concluded that the Lord was his Shepherd and he would not be in want (or be found in want). On the other hand, Solomon had peace and obtained wisdom, riches, and glory—all he had ever sought. But ironically, toward the end of his life, he proclaimed that it was all vanity; he found that everything he had gained was empty and hollow. Despite all his attainments, Solomon found himself in want at the end of his life. Reflecting on the lives of these two kings, father and son, the secret to a meaningful and joyful life is revealed with the line, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." When we make the Lord Jesus Christ our Shepherd, we will feel no want within our hearts.

There is nothing wrong with wanting something. We all have things we find pleasurable—it is a blessing from God to enjoy good food or walk along the sandy beach and admire the shore's natural beauty. Pleasures become wrong only when our desire for them starts to overwhelm everything else in our lives. Too often, we see people consumed by their wants and desires. That is why they



cannot be happy—they always want more. As Christians, we can live joyful lives if we curb our desires and are contented with what we have. We know that, for richer or poorer, all that we have are God's blessings (Mt 6:31–34). We can be content, trusting that God will sufficiently provide for us so we can lead meaningful and joyful lives.

"The daily grind eventually caused them to become bitter and disillusioned with their business venture, which manifested in murmurings and complaints"

My wife had always wanted to run a coffee shop, so when we moved to Dallas, she changed careers and opened a restaurant with our niece. The early days of establishing the business were stressful: they were doing renovations, procuring city permits, and frequently working from before daybreak till after midnight, all for meager returns. The daily grind eventually caused them to become bitter and disillusioned with their business venture, which manifested in murmurings and complaints.

When I had the opportunity, I reminded them how blessed they are to be in their position—not everyone who dreams of opening a restaurant or a coffee shop is able to. A third of restaurants in the United States fail in their first year. My wife and niece considered what I said and reflected on their accomplishments. They recognized how blessed it was to establish a restaurant and work together daily. This realization changed their perspective, and now, even though they do not earn much, they are more joyful and content.

But God's blessings did not end there. From the moment they opened the restaurant, my wife and niece were determined to keep the Sabbath and attend spiritual convocations, so they closed their restaurant on Fridays and Saturdays. Initially, their customers were confused—why close during peak business hours? But they eventually discovered that we are Sabbath-keeping Christians. Now, the whole neighborhood knows the owner's husband is the pastor of a nearby church—just up the hill, on the corner. My wife receives visitors seeking God, and I go to the restaurant to speak to them. So, even though the restaurant does not make much money, my wife and niece are much more content and joyful because of their role in bringing the community together and raising awareness of the True Jesus Church.



FINDING JOY IN PEACE AND REST IN THE LORD

He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
(Ps 23:2)

David's depiction of the Shepherd making the sheep lie down is strange—almost as though the Shepherd has to compel the sheep to rest in the safety and comfort of the green pastures. This is perhaps an apt reflection of our busy lives today, where we do not know when to rest. We work all our lives; before we know it, we find ourselves aged and with one foot in the grave. God knows we need to rest, and He teaches us to rest so we can enjoy our life.

I love the outdoors. I started planting trees and flowers in my backyard to bring a bit of the outdoors closer to home. When the plants began to thrive, I was excited to enjoy the view with my wife and niece. However, since they work long hours, they did not notice the change in the backyard or take the time to admire the flowers in full bloom. When trapped in the daily grind, we often forget to pause, quiet ourselves, and notice the little things in life that bring us joy. When we truly make the Lord Jesus Christ our Shepherd, we have

the blessing of Sabbath rest with which to quiet our hearts. Only then can we see and appreciate the little things that make our lives beautiful and blessed. That is the secret to living a joyful life.

FINDING JOY THROUGH RESTORATION IN THE LORD

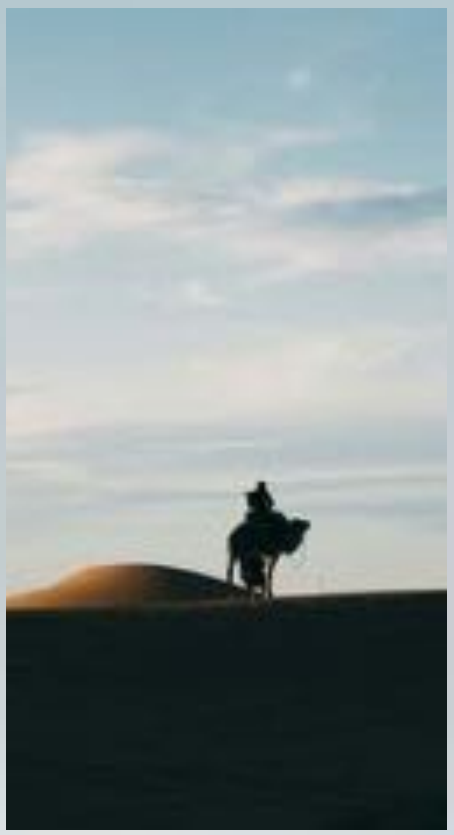
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake. *(Ps 23:3)*

Of course, lying down in green pastures and being led beside the still waters are blessings extending beyond life's physical aspects. In the US, the average age of those who divorced in 2022 was forty-six for men and forty-four for women,[2] and the divorce rates for those above fifty-five have been steadily rising for years.[3] This is the age when many married couples realize their dissatisfaction with each other and break up. Perhaps their children have grown up and flown the nest, leaving them to take stock of their relationship and what they want from life. This demographic also spends more money upgrading their real estate and cars, trading the old for the shiny and new. This all suggests an overcompensation for the emptiness in their hearts and souls; they grasp these things in vain, seeking meaning and joy in their lives. As Christians, do we have the same sentiments, or do we become more thankful with each passing year? Do we feel our souls being restored every day?

[2]Christy Bieber, JD, "Revealing Divorce Statistics in 2023," *Forbes Advisor*, updated August 8, 2023, https://www.forbes.com/advisor/legal/divorce/divorce-statistics/.

[3]Benjamin Gurrentz and Yeris Mayol-Garcia, "Love and Loss Among Older Adults," United States Census Bureau, April 22, 2021, https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2021/04/love-and-loss-among-older-adults.html.

God restores our souls, but not through the vain acquisition of material possessions or the temporary satisfaction of our lusts and desires. When I visit people in the hospital, no one talks about how much money they have or what car they own. When we are on our deathbed, with our mortality in plain sight, we will realize that our possessions and desires truly count for nothing. All of us will undoubtedly die one day. Hence, we ought to orient ourselves toward our true Shepherd, who restores us through contentment, peace, and rest. Moreover, we have comfort in knowing there is nothing to fear when we die in Christ because we will be restored to a blissful eternity with our Lord Jesus.



FINDING JOY DESPITE TRIBULATION THROUGH THE LORD

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
(Ps 23:4)

All Christians must walk through the valley of the shadow of death at some point in their lives. Our thoughts and feelings reflect our relationship with Christ during those times. In his psalm, David states that he will fear no evil. Do we share that same attitude? Despite all his difficulties, David could see that God was always with him and that God's rod and staff were always there to safeguard him from the troubles surrounding him. This is the same mentality with which we should face troubles and tribulations. If we acknowledge that our Shepherd stands beside us, we will not become despondently fixated on our suffering. Instead, we will see the rod and staff of our Shepherd gently guiding us out of the valley of the shadow of death.

FINDING JOY IN VICTORY OVER OUR ENEMIES THROUGH THE LORD

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over. *(Ps 23:5)*

Being a Christian does not mean that God will remove our enemies and free us from those who wish us harm. David had many enemies throughout his life, but he trusted in God, and God always gave him victory. It is just the same for us. God does not

remove our enemies, but He has prepared for our victory—a seat with Him at the table of celebration before our enemies—if we place our trust in Him. The psalm goes on to depict the blessing that comes with victory—our heads are anointed with oil, and our cup runs over. The blessing that comes with trusting in God is bountiful and greater than we can even comprehend.

FINDING JOY IN OUR ETERNAL HOPE IN THE LORD

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD
Forever. *(Ps 23:6)*

The closing verse of Psalm 23 reminds us that no matter what we face today, our ultimate goal is not found in this world. Our goal is to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. If we can hold on to this thought fervently, nothing in this world can faze us because we know that whatever we possess or achieve on earth is fleeting. The life to come, with our Lord Jesus Christ, is eternal. Yes, we may suffer and have to walk through the valley of the shadow of death for a time. Nevertheless, our finite years on earth are nothing compared to the infinite and bounteous blessings our Lord Jesus Christ has prepared for us.

CONCLUSION

Make the Lord Jesus Christ our Shepherd today. Only then will we find contentment and appreciate the simple things in life. Only then will we have a Shepherd who cares for us, makes us rest, and restores our souls with each passing year. Only then will we become more righteous and joyful the longer we live. We know He is always beside us, and His rod and staff comfort us. He will give us victory over our enemies, even over Satan, the biggest enemy of all. He has prepared a table for us and provides us with blessing after blessing. This is how I feel nowadays: my life is full of blessings. God has given me a beautiful family, and He has given me peace and joy in my heart, which only life in Christ can bring. My destination is to be with God forever. If this cannot bring me joy, nothing in this world can. May the Lord grant us all this joyful life in Him. Amen!





HEARING OF GOD'S GRACE

Jonathan Chou—Hillsborough, New Jersey, USA

I would like to share what I have experienced in the True Jesus Church since I was young until today. I was baptized as a baby and have been in the true church for about seventy years. In 1981, I started theological training, and began pastoring as a trainee in 1984. In 2017, after serving for thirty-three years, I was able to retire by God's grace and guidance.

GOD'S GRACE UPON MY FATHER

At the age of forty-two, my father contracted a serious illness and fell into a coma. The doctor's prognosis was dire; they said he did not have much time left. On the night that they said would probably be his last, a relative was visiting my father. This relative, a member of the True Jesus Church, told my grandmother there was another way: to pray to the Lord Jesus to save him. "If you want to believe, I will ask my church brethren to pray for you."

My grandmother and father were devout idol-worshippers. My father even managed all temple activities, including the building of new temples, in our community. But in this hopeless time, my grandmother accepted the intercessions of the church brethren. Many brothers and sisters came to pray for my father. And miraculously, he awoke!

After the crowd left, my relative gathered my family to pray together. In this prayer, my father saw a vision. He witnessed the entire roof of the house disappear to reveal a magnificent house of crystal above. A bright light shone on him. He felt his body being lifted up, and he started bouncing up and down while kneeling on his bed—even though he had been at death's door not so long ago. His body was vibrating, and he was speaking in tongues.

After praying for a long time, my relative began to worry about the strain on my father's body, so he laid hands on him and said, "Amen." My father was sweating profusely, so they tried to help him lie down, but the Holy Spirit filled him once again, and he got up to pray. This happened three times. And so, my father was healed.

The Lord Jesus spared my father's life and saved our family from despair. My father started serving as a preacher in his fifties and continued to travel and lead services even after his retirement at the age of eighty-one.

In 1990, I was sent to the United States by the Taiwan General Assembly (GA) to support the holy work. On June 15, the day I landed on US soil, I received a call that my father had been hospitalized. He was eighty-eight years old. He had a growth in his stomach, which pierced his stomach lining and caused fluids to leak into his abdomen. The doctor suggested that, since my father was advanced in age, we should not medically intervene. But my brother responded by asking him to do his best, and we would pray. So they performed surgery and removed four-fifths of my father's stomach. A month later, he recovered and was discharged from the hospital.

In 2000, when I was in Hawaii on a pastoral trip, I received news that my father was in the hospital again. He had blocked arteries, but the doctor did not dare to operate. So, I rushed back to Taiwan. My father passed away exactly ten years after his previous hospitalization. God had granted him another ten years and called him to return to our heavenly home peacefully at the age of ninety-eight.

GOD'S GRACE IN MY EARLY MINISTRY

Growing up, I had always admired those who served in the church. Many elders encouraged me to serve, so I entered



the theological training program after ten years in the workforce. By then, I was married with two children. Having a family to support made the decision difficult and, initially, I hesitated. But the Bible tells us that as soon as the soles of our feet rest in the waters, the waters shall be cut off (Josh 3:13). So I trusted in God and left my job.

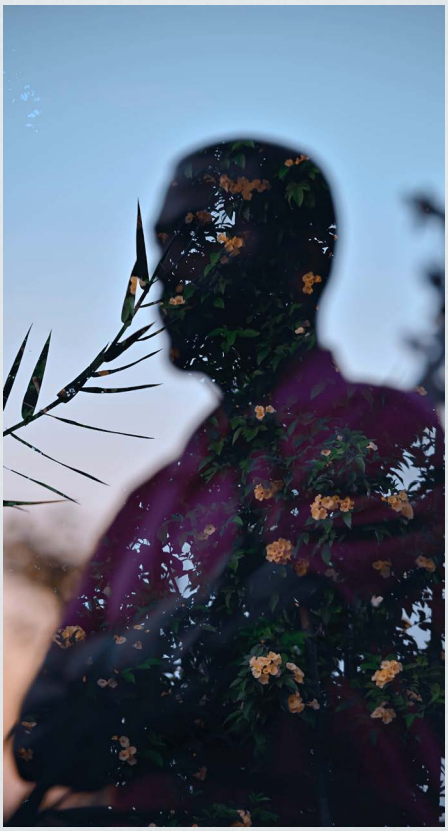
God Will Provide

When I first entered training, I knew the salary for full-time workers was low, but I was shocked at how low—not even one-sixth of my previous income! I broke out in a cold sweat when I received my first paycheck. How would we survive on such a meager salary? An elder acknowledged that it might not even be enough to rent a house. I did not respond; I realized that I should rely on Jesus for my needs, since I had already made it so far.

> "This home was indeed a house of grace, descended from heaven"

I thank God that whoever trusts in the Lord will lack nothing. It is, as Paul writes, "as having nothing, and yet possessing all things" (2 Cor 6:10). When I left my previous job, I was surprised to receive two sums of money from the company. And after I entered the training program, my wife landed a job with a salary higher than my previous one. My father-in-law had an empty property we planned to borrow for only the first year of my training, but he allowed us to live there until I graduated. When it was time to move out, we found a house through God's arrangement. My wife had visited a sick colleague, whose wife informed her that the house next door was for sale. Even though my wife informed her that we could only afford to rent, she convinced her to view the house. To our surprise, the house owner wanted to give us the deed of the house, even though we were strangers. We simply had to go to the city office to transfer the house ownership, and a church sister helped us get bank financing. By God's grace, we bought the house.

We lived in this house for six years and paid the entire mortgage. When I was sent to America, we sold the house for three times the amount we paid, and we used half of the proceeds to pay for our children's university expenses. Later, we used the rest of the proceeds as the first down payment for a new house in



southern Los Angeles. This home was indeed a house of grace, descended from heaven.

God's Healing Power upon My Wife

I was initially sent to the US East Coast for two months. The second time, I was seconded to the GA of the United States (USGA) for six months. During those six months, the church helped me to apply for permanent residency. In the eighth month, I got my green card, and four months after that, my family received approval from the United States government to move over.

After receiving my green card, I returned to Taiwan to resign from the Taiwan GA so I could be re-employed by the USGA. Two weeks later, my wife found a lump on the right side of her waist. She consulted one of the nurses in the school where she worked, and the nurse instructed her to get it checked at a hospital. My wife followed her suggestion, even though she did not feel unwell. After an ultrasound scan, the doctors found a tumor measuring more than ten centimeters behind her womb. They operated on her immediately, and our return to the US had to be postponed.

The doctor showed me the tumor post-surgery, explaining that its irregular shape and clustered blood vessels suggested it was malignant. Based on his experience, this kind of tumor was malignant ninety percent of the time. I felt a crushing anxiety, like a stone weighing down on me. In contrast, my wife was in good spirits after the operation. She could eat, sleep, and chat with people around her. So, I did not tell her about the diagnosis.

I remembered the testimony of a brother who had brain surgery to remove a malignant tumor. On the preacher's encouragement, the brother prayed for the tumor to become benign. Amazingly, he was told the tumor was benign at the following checkup. This testimony had a significant impact on me; I prayed often, beside my wife's bed. We waited a week for the final diagnosis. Usually, the doctor made his rounds first thing in the morning, but he came at 10 p.m. that day. He gave her a physical check and, just before he left, said, "It looked bad, but after testing, it turned out to be a benign tumor." He explained that it could have been on the cusp of becoming malignant. However, I believe that doctors would not make such judgments casually. This was indeed the mercy of God. My wife experienced no side effects or discomfort; she just found the lump, and it was removed. If we had discovered the tumor after we left for the US, we would have struggled to navigate an unfamiliar and foreign healthcare system.

Since my wife had her womb removed in the surgery, she was entitled, as a school teacher, to a disability payment of more than USD $3,000 from the government. We used this money to purchase our flight tickets to the US. The unexpected grace of God is woven throughout this whole period of our lives. My wife had to have annual

reviews for the next five years, but she was fine. Thank God and our brothers and sisters that my family settled in well after arriving in the US.

MEMORIES OF GOD'S GRACE

I have a complete and unwavering conviction that the True Jesus Church is the only church that is saved. I have witnessed many works of God in the true church—many of which became formative childhood memories.

The congregation in my hometown church was small, but it was a rich source of testimonies about God's grace. Most nights, we would make visitations to pray for those who were sick or demon-possessed. The church would announce during services that they would be visiting people to conduct evangelistic services that night, and advised members to come to church to pray beforehand. We would then spend one or two hours walking around to people's houses and praying for them before returning for a late dinner. I would join these visitations even as an elementary school student.

I have seen many signs and miracles from a young age, especially the healing of the demon-possessed. The church was so renowned for having the presence of God's power that if a patient could not be cured, the doctor would tell them to go to the True Jesus Church!

The Mentally Distressed Youth

When I was in high school, a youth around my age had mental health problems and often loitered around. He piled up all the idols in his home, sat on top of them, and told people to worship him. We went to his home to pray for him. He was locked in a small room and spent most of his time chained up. He could dig a hole in the hard floor with his bare hands, sometimes so deep that he could dig a path right out into the road. Thank God, after we prayed for him, he was well enough to attend church, and the church members interceded for him too. He was healed. He eventually got married, had children, and had a career.

The Frail Infant

In Southern Central Taiwan, there was a brother whose three-month-old baby was diagnosed with intestinal cancer. The child could not feed and was close to death. After he was baptized, he was fine for three days. But on the fourth day, his condition deteriorated again. His mother was originally from a rural church by the beach with about ninety members. Although it was a small church, Sabbath attendance was almost one hundred percent. The couple returned to this church to specially pray for their son. After breakfast, the father went into the chapel to pray. Twenty or thirty minutes into the prayer, he started feeling tired and got up to walk around. But then a thought came into his mind: if he stopped praying, the baby would die. So, he knelt again and asked God to help him concentrate on his prayer. True enough, when he was focused in prayer, he saw a vision. He saw a bright road and many layers of clouds. He followed the path into the clouds. He entered a huge house and saw his baby on an operating table. Many angels surrounded the baby as if they were performing surgery. He persisted in praying. He did not know how long he prayed because he was praying in the Spirit. After some time, a child patted his shoulder and told him to return home for a meal. He then realized he had been praying for three hours. Thank God, eventually, his baby was healed and grew up healthy.



The Mysterious Dying Fish

In the same church, there was a deacon. Other than working in the sugarcane plantations, his family owned a pond of fish. There was a time when they would find a few fish floating belly-up daily. Because the fish had died recently, they could still sell them at the market. Non-believers saw this and scorned the Christians who were selling dead fish. The deacon was sad to hear this. He prayed, "O Lord Jesus, how can You allow me to sell dead fish every day? Why do the fish others have reared not die? I do not know Your will, but those non-believers have blasphemed Your name." His fish kept dying for no reason, but he was able to sell them until all the fish were gone. Suddenly, the entire area was flooded by seawater, and the fishponds overflowed. All the fish from the neighboring ponds were flushed out, and some fish ended up



in the deacon's pond. At that moment, he realized it was the will of God. Although he had sold dead fish, at least he managed to cover his costs and did not suffer the loss others did. Truly, God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isa 55:9).

The Resurrected Truth-Seeker

I moved from South Taiwan to the North, to another church with many signs and miracles. There was a truth-seeker who had a neurological condition. She was admitted to the National Taiwan University Hospital, and after a period of serious illness, she died. Two sisters had been caring for her in the hospital and were very sad when she passed away. She was survived by two young children and a husband who did not care for his family. The two sisters did not know what to do.

As an elder spoke to the immediate family about funeral arrangements, the two sisters went to the storage room next door to pray. They did not know what to pray for; they simply asked Jesus why things had turned out this way.

When they emerged from the room half an hour later, one of the sisters noticed the patient's intravenous drip was active again. After a patient dies, the IV drip should stop

> "It is indeed a blessing for us to be in th true church and witness such wonderful miracles and grace from God"

working. They quickly approached a nurse, and everyone returned to the ward. When they confirmed that the drip was indeed working, they resuscitated the truth-seeker. She survived and was eventually discharged from the hospital. She lives to this day and is still healthy, and a devout believer. She works next to the church and comes in to pray twice daily, before and after work.

The Premature Baby

The final testimony is something I witnessed with my own eyes. There was a sister who, at three-months pregnant, was hospitalized due to abnormal bleeding. She stayed there until the baby was born prematurely at seven months. The baby was placed in an incubator and hooked to many tubes and wires. His lungs were underdeveloped, and he stopped breathing many times, turning his skin maroon. There was a possibility that he could die at any moment.



The members prayed for him for one hour every day. A brother saw a vision during one prayer after the evening service. He witnessed the Lord Jesus standing at the edge of a cliff. He was holding a baby, and the baby was shining. Hearing of this vision encouraged and strengthened the faith of the family. If the baby were to die, he would be in the bosom of the Lord Jesus. Every morning, the family fasted and prayed. They decided to do two things. Firstly, they would take the baby out of the hospital to be baptized. Because the child was so frail, they would leave everything in God's hands after the baptism. Secondly, they would dedicate the child to the Lord if he survived.

The hospital was reluctant to discharge the baby, but they eventually agreed. The parents were convinced they would not need to bring the baby back to the hospital. They immediately brought the baby for baptism and then went to church to pray. The brother who saw the vision recognized the baby as the one he had seen in the arms of Jesus. In the hospital, hooked up to the machines, the baby had been unable to feed, but after he was brought home, he could drink milk. Thank God, the child continued to grow and develop without needing to return to the hospital. Later, when his mother brought him back to the hospital for immunizations, the doctors and nurses were shocked to see the child so healthy. By God's grace, the child grew up and is now a preacher serving in the Taiwan GA. His name is En Chao Yang.

It is indeed a blessing for us to be in the true church and witness such wonderful miracles and grace from God. The True Jesus Church is the ark of the last days. We must have this conviction. God has given us the commission to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth so that the church can be established and completed. Then, the Lord Jesus will come again.



TO BE CHOSEN BY GOD IS A BLESSING

Timothy Yeung—Calgary, Canada

Hallelujah, in the name of the Lord Jesus, I share my testimony of how I came to know and serve the Lord.

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. *(1 Cor 15:10)*

In this verse, Paul says, "I am what I am." We are constantly changing throughout our lives; we may be different from when we did not know the Lord, and we all have different journeys of faith. Some were born into the faith, and some were converted as adults. But we all come to the Lord Jesus because we have experienced His love.

For me, I was brought to the True Jesus Church by my mother and baptized as a baby. I may have had no choice, but this was the greatest blessing since I did not have to struggle to find the right path. My maternal grandmother was also a member, so I am a third-generation True Jesus Church believer, like my namesake in the Bible (2 Tim 1:5). And, like his, my mother and grandmother were also full of faith.

THE FAITH OF MY GRANDPARENTS

My maternal grandparents were born during World War II, and their families fled from China to Hong Kong. Life in Hong Kong was impoverished and challenging. Back then, you would keep having children until you had a son. So, my grandmother gave birth to four daughters before having my uncle, a much-longed-for son.

It was traditional practice to feed newborn babies a herbal tea made from *Coptis chinensis*, to prevent inflammation. However, that year, the crop had been contaminated because it was planted close to strychnine trees, which produce toxic fruit and seeds from which the poison *nux vomica* is derived. Many babies had already died from drinking the poisonous infusion, but unfortunately the midwife forgot to warn my grandmother. Indeed, after drinking the tea, the baby fell very ill and became unconscious. The doctors declared there was no remedy as the poisoning was too severe. But my grandparents were full of faith; they took the baby home and prayed earnestly throughout the night for the Lord's mercy. Soon after the prayers, the baby cried out and was able to drink milk. By God's power, his condition quickly improved and he fully recovered. He grew up as a healthy child and is now over sixty years old.

During the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, the occupying forces could stop anybody in the street and kill with impunity. One day, a Japanese soldier stopped my grandfather and told him to kneel. My grandfather figured he would be beheaded or shot on the spot, so he started to pray

in tongues, imploring the Lord Jesus to save him. After a while, the soldier kicked him away and told him to leave! We heard these testimonies from our grandparents when we were children, and their faith was passed down from generation to generation through such sharing.

INHERITING THE FAITH

It is God's blessing that I am here today. When my mother was carrying me, she almost miscarried. But she prayed and relied on God to preserve the fetus growing inside her. My being born into the faith may seem coincidental by human logic, but it is God's arrangement and choosing. Some people are chosen as infants, some when they are old. Regardless of when we are chosen, it is a blessing and an opportunity to be treasured. Parents who choose to bring up their children in the true church must cherish their faith.

Train up a child in the way he should go,
And when he is old he will not depart from it. *(Prov 22:6)*

I was not a smart child and did not do well in school. However, my mother never worried about my school work; instead, she insisted we attend church services. Not only did we attend Sabbath services on Saturdays, but we would attend Wednesday and Friday evening services without fail. My mother was a busy career woman who would rush home after work, feed me and my two younger brothers, and take us to church. Night services were from 8 to 9 p.m., so we would get home around 10 p.m. and still need to get up early the following morning. But my mother was determined never to miss a church service. We enjoyed those evenings because we did not have to do homework, and the chapel had air conditioning. Night after night, Sabbath after Sabbath, we heard many sermons, and God's word gradually became a part of us. My mother did not organize many extracurricular activities for us. On Saturdays, we would only go to church, so we learned to embrace the concept that worshipping God is more important than anything else. As children, we could not express this idea in words, but we understood implicitly that these were our mother's values, which had a tremendous and lasting impact. At home, we witnessed her reading the Bible and praying into the night, even when she was tired. This seed of faithfulness was planted deep in my heart.

CHANGED BY GOD'S LOVE

As I was growing up, I went through a difficult stage. I was not intentionally rebellious but I could not concentrate or sit still. Today, I would likely be diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and placed on medication. When getting my hair cut, I would be unaware that I was moving until the barber told me to hold still. I could not absorb what teachers were saying and would ask many questions. I made frequent trips to the washroom during lessons. On the first day of the student spiritual convocation, I broke a window. I was a constant headache for my teachers. They never expected such a child to become a preacher. So be merciful to naughty kids because God's mercy can change a person. And one day, they will remember and thank you.



"I was young then, and people were already frustrated with me. But he said, 'He's not a naughty child. I can train him.' "

How did God change me? Through two events. First, I met Preacher Shek, a resident preacher of Hong Kong, who was very loving. I was young then, and people were already frustrated with me. But he said, "He's not a naughty child. I can train him." He took me aside and said, "Timothy, stand here; look at the clock for a minute, and don't move." I said that would be too long, so he shortened the time to thirty seconds. We repeated this exercise every time I went to church, eventually increasing the time to a full minute. He lived across the street from my school, so I started going to his house to study and have lunch before school. He told my mother it was not that I could not study but that I was distracted by my brothers' presence. I was touched by this preacher's love. If I grew up only hearing, "You're so bad. You're so hopeless," I probably would have believed



it and become bad. The more you criticize and deny someone's abilities, the more he will prove you right. But this preacher's faith in me helped me not to give up on myself. Love can change even the worst person, but it takes commitment; the more you encourage, the more he will improve.

Second, I received the Holy Spirit. In the True Jesus Church, we have the presence of the Holy Spirit.

[N]ot by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. *(Tit 3:5)*

Receiving the Holy Spirit is invaluable because He continually renews us in our lives on earth and also allows us to enter the heavenly kingdom to come. I received the Holy Spirit at a student spiritual convocation, aged twelve. The preachers encouraged us to pray fervently for the Holy Spirit so that we could change and enter heaven one day. They told us to pray out loud, saying, "Hallelujah." I had found prayers boring and unpleasantly hot in the past, so I would often escape. But this time, I prayed harder than I had ever prayed in my life.

The Holy Spirit can truly transform a person, no matter how deep their issues. God changed me in several ways. I became obedient and stopped being naughty at school and in religious education class. My school teachers thought I was acting strangely and asked if something had happened at home. I did not know how to testify at that age, but I assured them everything was fine at home. I also started to enjoy doing things related to God and my faith. The Holy Spirit inspired me to love God's word. I would write notes during sermons, even when listening to sermon cassette tapes at home. I would read the Bible on my own and loved to pray. I would pray at home by myself for at least thirty minutes. Most miraculously, my ADHD-like symptoms, which had been very serious, disappeared.

MATURING IN FAITH

Of course, we go through highs and lows in our faith. I prayed fervently when I first received the Holy Spirit, but this did not last more than a year. I gradually returned to my old self. Because I did not continue diligently in prayer, I became weak. During my adolescence, I attended church without enthusiasm or experiencing anything special. It was a routine, like going to the grocery store. In 1993, when I turned eighteen, my family immigrated to Canada. We moved to a small town in Calgary where my aunt lived. It was only when we got there that we realized there was no church and that winter temperatures would be sub-zero. The population was tiny, and the only other church member living there was a student.

"Previously, my faith was given to me by my parents. But now, I began having my own thoughts and experience of God"

This was a time of trial in my faith. Even though we learned English as children, my conversational skills were appalling. At eighteen, adjusting to a new environment and entering a good college were difficult. I started to reflect: *This is a turning point in my life, but how can I go forward? I'm not as smart as others, I don't have friends, and my parents can't help me*. But I do have God. From then on, I learned to trust in God. This was when I truly made my faith my own. Previously, my faith was given to me by my parents. But now, I began having my own thoughts and experience of God.

As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So pants my soul for You, O God. *(Ps 42:1)*

In Hong Kong, we could attend church services every day, but in Calgary, we had to have service at home. Every night, after dinner, my mother would lead our family service. We read the Bible, sang hymns while my youngest brother played the piano, and prayed. During Sabbaths, we listened to sermon tapes sent to us from the church in Pacifica, California. We would start the service in the name of the Lord Jesus, and after the prayer, we would "invite" a preacher from the US to speak by pressing "play." Halfway through, we would have to flip the tape, but sometimes the other side would be blank, so we learned to check the tape beforehand. Thinking back to those years, our hearts were full of fervor. Even though no speaker was standing before us, God's Spirit was moving us, and God's word touched our hearts. Gradually, God led truth-seekers to join us. It was miraculous to see God working to move the truth-seekers, even through a recorded sermon, and some received the Holy Spirit in our



home. By God's grace, we established a house of prayer in Calgary.

CALLED BY GOD

This was also my first year attending the US National Youth Theological Seminar (NYTS). When my mother asked if I would like to sign up, explaining it would be two weeks of staying in church and studying the Bible, I was not keen. I complained that I would find it boring. But since she promised we could go sightseeing in San Francisco afterward, I agreed to go. This event significantly impacted me—the church was filled with youths, and they loved God so much. The speakers and their testimonies touched us immensely. Preacher Derren Liang showed us videos of missionary trips to Africa, and I was inspired by God's great love. So many people in the world need Jesus, but we have so few preachers in the True Jesus Church. I thought: *If God wishes to use me, I want to be used.* I realized my English was poor, and I was not good at studying, so I could not absorb the course materials as well as my peers. But if God was willing to use me, I would eagerly say yes. I might not know where Africa was, but I would be willing to go if God sent me.

> "It is a blessing that God does not reject us but uses us and accepts our offerings, whatever sacred work we engage in. You are not making a sacrifice to God; you are actually gaining treasure"

Many people ask me why I became a preacher. It sounds like a great sacrifice, but it was not. If God esteems me and allows me to be a minister, I need to be thankful. Paul says, "I am what I am." God does not have to use us, but He accepts our service. Imagine the wealthiest person in the world who always has the best of everything. What could you possibly give him? Similarly, everything belongs to God (Ps 50:12). Who am I? What can I possibly offer to God? It is a blessing that God does not reject us but uses us and accepts our offerings, whatever sacred work we engage in. You are not making a sacrifice to God; you are actually gaining treasure.

After graduating from college, I worked for half a year. The International Assembly (IA) was recruiting students for the Overseas Ministry Program. Graduates of the program were required to serve in Africa for at least five years. I was excited for the opportunity, so I signed up. However, the IA could not start the course immediately because I was the only applicant. Then God moved a brother from France to join the program, so there were enough students. By God's grace and mercy, He allowed me to serve Him despite my poor English, and He has guided me thus far in my ministry.

CONCLUSION

Is it hard to be a preacher? No, it is not because God's grace is with you. We work hard, just as working in the world requires effort, but working for God is an exceedingly great blessing. Wherever I go, I am well taken care of and experience the love of the brethren. I have made many friends and gotten to know so many brothers and sisters along the way.

This was my personal path to knowing God, being moulded by Him, and responding to His call to serve. But it does not matter when or how you came to know God, whether as a child or an adult. You must respond when God calls you to believe, serve, or make a change in your life. Then, you will experience His grace and realize more blessings will come.



ESTABLISHED BY GOD: LIFE AS A PREACHER'S WIFE

Various

Editor's note: In this issue, we feature many grace-filled testimonies of God calling His servants to full-time ministry. Such stories are familiar to us, but often, little focus is given to the spouses who support and walk alongside these workers. A preacher's wife holds a special role and is, like her husband, called to walk a path of sacrifice and service. She dedicates her partner-in-life to the Lord's work and accepts more responsibility at home—juggling work, bringing up children, caring for elderly and ill family members, and her own church duties—so that her husband can be fully committed to the ministry. This may sound like a heavy burden, but as the testimonies below attest, such a life is not to be feared. They experience the abundant blessings and mercy of God, who not only prepared these sisters for this path but also supply their every need to establish their families and their lives in His grace. And even in times of danger and distress, they are enfolded by God's protection and a peace that passes understanding, guarding the heart and mind.

WHY I BECAME A PREACHER'S WIFE

Eunice Chiang—Dalin, Taiwan

[F]or it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. (Phil 2:13)

On May 28, 1973, my classmate brought me to the True Jesus Church for the first time to attend the Sabbath service. I stayed until evening to attend the Intermediate Youth religious education (RE) class and received the precious Holy Spirit during the prayer session. I was baptized on September 25 the same year. All of this happened when I was seventeen years old.

PLANTED IN MY HEART

Normally, students in vocational school would have to wait until their fourth year, when they turn eighteen, to attend the spiritual convocation for university students. However, the church helped me sign up early, while I was in my third year, so I could participate three times in total. Each time, I was in a different church in another region. It was during a service at one of these spiritual convocations that a speaker said, "I hope that all sisters can resolve to become a preacher's wife." In hindsight, it is clear that God had already determined that this would be my path. After the service ended, I felt the Holy Spirit continuing to move me, which made me a little scared as I had never considered such things before. Once I returned to my



local church, the thought of becoming a preacher's wife lingered in my mind. I said to God in my heart, "Let Your will be done. If this is Your will, please help me to become a competent preacher's wife." After that, the idea of being a preacher's wife faded into the background.

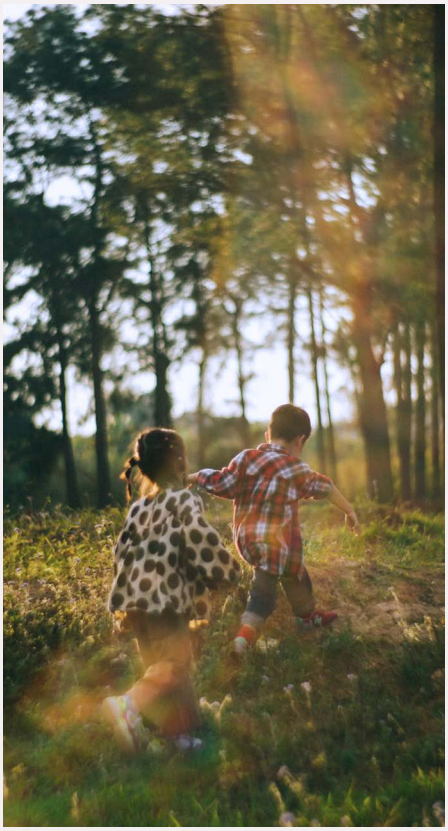
After graduating from vocational school, I started to work. I also became an RE teacher to teach the younger children in church. The days passed, and time flew by. At one point, the church ministers began to show concern and asked if they could introduce a potential partner to me. My workplace colleagues also asked similar questions. At that time, I did not seriously put the matter of marriage into my heart. I was the eldest daughter and my siblings were still young. My father had already retired, but his friend cheated him of his meager pension. So, I needed to contribute to the family finances. Marriage had not crossed my mind. I told the church ministers that I had no plans at present, and I declined the help of my colleagues, explaining that I was only interested in marrying a True Jesus Church member. The truth was that I had long forgotten about becoming a preacher's wife.

FOLLOWING GOD'S WILL

Because my field of study had been computer-related, I would go to church straight after work to help the church secretaries. My involvement in this ministry meant I began interacting more with church coworkers and resident preachers. While socializing during a break, I learned that one of my coworkers, Brother Ko Chang Chiang, wanted to become a preacher. This was because his mother had made a vow when he was a child, hoping that he would grow up to become a preacher. At that moment, I suddenly remembered being moved by the Holy Spirit during the student spiritual convocation and how the desire to become a preacher's wife had entered my heart. Coincidentally, Brother Chiang was searching for a suitable wife at that time. One day, he asked me whether I was willing to become his wife, which is how it happened! The fact that God had moved my heart and intersected our paths at exactly the time my husband was looking for a wife shows that this was God's arrangement. Later, my husband mentioned why he asked me—the key reason was my independent personality. I do not know how God had shaped me for this role, but, all in all, the will of God came to pass.

TRUSTING IN GOD

When faced with the reality of being a preacher's wife, I told myself that my



husband belongs to God—he is a worker of God. Nothing at home should trouble him. The Lord would always take care of us.

There were complications during the births of our two sons. However, in both cases, I experienced God's grace and care. When I was in labor with my firstborn, I was admitted to the hospital on the evening of March 5, 1981. The delivery was difficult because my son's head was large in proportion to his tiny body. I prayed for God's mercy, and finally, my son was born at 9:08 a.m. the following day, without the need for surgery.

The birth of my second son was even more precarious, and this time, my husband was not with me. Towards the end of my pregnancy, the baby was in a breech position, so the doctor suggested some exercises to encourage the baby to turn himself into the head-first position before birth. However, I found these exercises very uncomfortable, so I did not follow the doctor's advice.

> "I asked the nurse why there was no baby's cry, but she did not respond as they worked to save him"

My waters broke on the evening of November 10, 1982, and my parents-in-law drove me to the hospital. When I arrived at the emergency department, the doctor asked if I had discussed the possibility of a cesarean delivery with my physician. I told him I had not. But as we spoke, I felt the baby was about to be born. My son emerged feet first, and his shoulders and head were stuck. Because this was a critical situation, my in-laws were alerted in the waiting room. There was silence when my son was finally delivered. I asked the nurse why there was no baby's cry, but she did not respond as they worked to save him. Finally, the silence was broken by my son's cry. He was placed in an incubator for a few days before being discharged. Thank God, my two sons have grown up and are both married in the Lord.

After giving birth to my first son, I left my job and moved in with my husband's family. There were four generations living under the same roof. Living with the older generations allowed me to enjoy the peace and joy of the whole family believing in the Lord, and we could take care of my children together. It was a great blessing for my sons to be loved so dearly by their elders. On the inevitable occasions when my children fell ill, there was never any need to panic as the seniors were on hand to help. If the children cried at night, we would just pray.

Recollecting from when I first believed in the Lord until today, the only steadfast conviction in my heart has been to look to God.

"But as for me, I would seek God,
And to God I would commit my cause."
(Job 5:8)

GOD'S LOVE AND PROVIDENCE IN MY ROLE AS A PREACHER'S WIFE

Lisa Liew—Portsmouth, UK

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, I testify how God has shown His grace, mercy, and guidance in my life as a preacher's wife.

EARLY PROPOSAL

My husband, Daniel, and I grew up together in our local church. After our studies, we reconnected as friends. We were working youths and would talk and get to know each other, as many youths do. I remember when he brought up the topic of serving God as a full-time minister. It was before we started our relationship, and he shared with me the possibility of him dedicating his life as a preacher if it was God's will. After we revealed our mutual feelings for each other, he shared that if I were to be part of his life, I needed to prepare for the challenges of becoming a preacher's wife. I was a little taken aback, though not in total shock. Firstly, we had not yet started courting, and secondly, I wondered, *Is this some kind of pre-proposal?* I thought long and hard about the possibility of being a preacher's spouse.



In the UK, the preacher's family stays at home, and the preacher is required to travel to his assigned churches or places of worship within the UK, Europe, and Africa. This means, most of the time, the wife looks after the family by herself. Would I be willing to commit to Daniel, knowing he would rarely be at home, and would travel to various churches pastoring the brethren, preaching to save souls, and putting God above his own family? *Am I willing?* We both agreed to put this matter into prayer and discuss it after Daniel returned from the Youth Theological Training Course (YTTC). I had a lot to consider: *Would I be able to be independent? Can I sustain my spirituality without a spouse at home? What are the expectations of a preacher's wife?* Although these questions seemed quite far-fetched at the time, they were relevant to what I would face. After much consideration and time spent in prayer, we decided to move forward with our relationship.

Thank God, through His arrangement, Daniel and I married in 2009. Before we were married, we discussed his hope to be a preacher and how it would affect our future. I learned that I had to see the bigger picture from God's perspective: "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few" (Mt 9:37). My priority is to put God first in my life, even if it means letting my husband serve Him for the rest of his life. My role as a preacher's wife was not only to support my husband but to know how I could support God's ministry in my local church, care for the brethren, and labor for God to prosper His church.

IN GOD'S TIME

In the early years of marriage, we talked about how starting a family would fit around my husband joining the theological training program (TTP). Would we have children first and wait for them to grow older before he applied for TTP? Or would we think about starting a family after he joined TTP? Would I be able to cope as a solo parent?

In 2012, two life-altering events happened. The first was the passing of my late mother-in-law, and the second, a couple of months later, was our daughter's birth. My husband was a church board member and the church was facing challenges at the time. There was a need for church workers. My husband raised the possibility of applying to TTP earlier than we had planned. After losing his mother and witnessing God's blessing with our daughter, we perceived the fragility of life. As the Bible reminds us:

[W]hereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. (Jas 4:14)

There were many questions to be answered. Still, we could only put this matter into the hands of God. As Proverbs 16:9 says, "A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps." I knew whatever our plans may be, God would reveal His path for us. We need not worry if we seek God's will first (Mt 6:33). To understand what my life would be like, I asked a couple of preachers' wives to share their experiences. I truly thank God for their sharing and encouragement. Their reassurances made me realize how important it is to trust in God's arrangement for my family and for His church.

Daniel applied for TTP towards the end of 2012. Since there were no other applicants in 2013, he could spend that year at home. We enjoyed our time together as a young family. In 2014, by God's grace, Daniel was accepted into the TTP. By 2015, we were blessed with another child. Our children were young—our daughter was at nursery, and our son was a newborn. Daniel was meant to be trained in the US for his first semester but could not attend TTP in person because of visa complications and circumstances beyond our control. Instead, he attended classes online. Around six months later, he obtained a visa for his second year of TTP in Taiwan. This was when the reality of raising two young children single-handedly really sunk in.

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

On one occasion, my daughter caught chicken pox and hand, foot, and mouth disease in quick succession. These spread to my son, one illness after the other. As they were recovering, I caught stomach flu, which swiftly infected my children. I prayed to God to have mercy upon our family, and I wondered why He would allow us to become very sick when my mother was abroad visiting family. It was the time when I needed my husband the most. Most days, I found myself slumped on the table without the strength to feed my children. *How can I possibly look after my children when I can't even look after myself?* I thought. I felt weak, helpless, and hopeless. It seemed God had immediately put me in at the deep end to test my faith. My husband, who was in Taiwan, was naturally very concerned and asked his TTP classmates to pray for

his family. There was little else he could do apart from praying for us. He was only allowed to come home a couple of times a year, which was a difficult adjustment for us. But by relying on God and His mercy, I could get through this trial without my husband or mother by my side.

In times of physical and spiritual weakness, I knew I had to muster the strength to pray for God's mercy. Even when I could not pray for long, I was still comforted by God's presence in our young family. I learned God truly knows what we are capable of and how much we can endure (1 Cor 10:13).

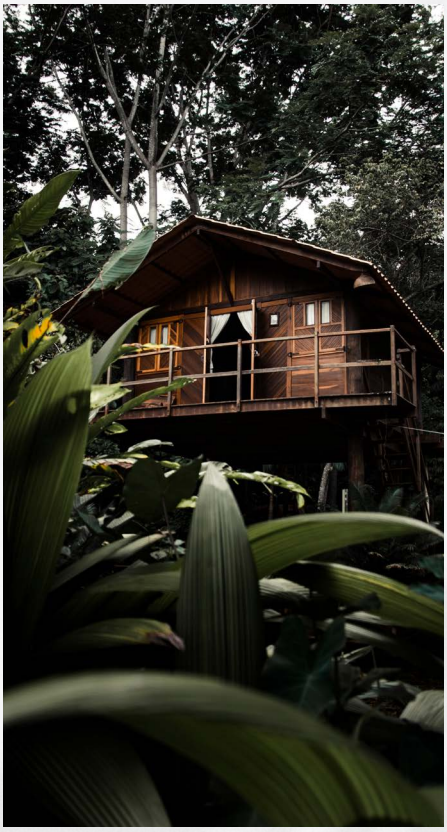
My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.
(Jas 1:2–3)

He may not remove our sufferings, but He tests us through the trials we face, hoping we obtain patience. He knows our weakness and will strengthen us (Phil 4:13). I thank God for providing me with the physical strength to recover. He helped my children heal without any complications or chicken pox scars. What seemed like an eternity was only a few weeks. With the help of family members and church brethren, we could return to full health. I look back and realize that God had planned it this way. Had my children and I had one infection at a time, there would have been separate episodes of illness throughout the years. Instead, God allowed my children and me to suffer from multiple illnesses relatively quickly. Those few weeks made me ponder and reflect on the importance of seeking God first in my life, especially when my husband is away. This is the lesson God continues to teach me daily.

RAISING A FAMILY IN THE LORD

As a preacher's wife, we often have to face challenges alone, and we realize that not everyone will be able to empathize with us since our family life is quite different from other sisters in the church. Daily life can be overwhelming, stressful, and exhausting, especially when our children are young. I often found myself out of my comfort zone with jobs around the house that my husband would usually deal with, or juggling childcare, running the household, and fulfilling church responsibilities. It can be quite hard to be independent without my husband's presence. A wife and husband share household responsibilities and discuss everyday issues. Without my husband, I had to make executive decisions and solve problems concerning the children, house matters, and unexpected emergencies. But the most difficult challenge is raising the children in the Lord. I often find myself playing the roles of mother and father in one.

Naturally, children grow up and are influenced by worldly trends. They often ask questions about the world, their faith, and their identity. Every parent in the faith is responsible for instilling the importance of spiritual cultivation from an early age. When my husband is away from home, with the help of technology, we can at least pray and talk together as a family. It is essential that my children know their father can help them in their faith despite not being physically present. I remind my children that, although they are preacher's children, they should not feel the added pressure to be extra well-behaved. Regardless of what role we have in God's church, all parents have been given the same responsibility to



bring up godly children so they can grow up to serve God. I see how my children recall teachings we learned from reading a chapter in the Bible, and how they share their testimonies of praying silently at school when they faced difficult situations. God has planted the seed of His word and principles in them, enabling them to grow in their faith. This is such a precious blessing to witness as a parent.

DO NOT WORRY

I have learned that God provides for our physical needs, even if I feel we are lacking. I have learned to put my whole trust in God and not doubt His love and care for His children. It is natural to worry about our children and spouse, but we should not become overly anxious to the point where we doubt God's grace and power.

I was encouraged by separate conversations with a couple of preachers' wives, and the common theme I came away with was do not worry. It sounds so simple, but the worries of life can often bring uncertainty and anxiety. Letting these feelings overpower us can make us doubt God's providence. I often think about the encouragement I received from other preachers' wives, and it gives me great comfort knowing that other sisters are in the same boat. Remember, God is the One who is in control of all things. If God looks after a sparrow, why would He not look after His child, who is even more precious?

"Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." *(Mt 10:31)*

"And do not seek what you should eat or what you should drink, nor have an anxious mind. For all these things the nations of the world seek after, and your Father knows that you need these things. But seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you."
(Lk 12:29–31)

Despite the challenges, I have seen the blessings God has showered upon our family, such as in the small gestures of generosity from neighbors and church brethren. Despite the modest salary of a preacher, we do not lack materially, and I have learned to be content with what God has provided us. Blessings are poured out upon us continuously. Sometimes, we cannot see it because we are too focused on the sufferings in front of us and the negatives around us. We all go through difficulties at some point in life, even preachers' families. God wants to see how we respond to suffering; He wants us to reach out and turn to Him and not rely on ourselves.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding.
(Prov 3:5)

I hope through this personal sharing, God will encourage sisters who may eventually become preachers' wives not to worry about their role in their family and the household of God. Give your best to God by letting Him fulfill His purpose for His church through the church workers. He will be watching over you and your family, and He will be your source of strength throughout your life.

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. *(Rom 8:28)*

THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

Apphia Yeung—Calgary, Canada

In the name of the Lord Jesus, I testify of God's protection during a distressing incident early in my husband's ministry. My husband, Preacher Timothy Yeung, was enrolled in the International Assembly (IA) Overseas Ministry Program, which included serving five years in Africa. Hence, after we married, we relocated there to participate in the pioneering and pastoral work across East and West Africa.

This incident happened in Nigeria on November 8, 2001, when we were staying in a member's house. This member was wealthy, so the place was spacious, with an inner courtyard and security guards at the entrance. However, this security was not enough to keep us from harm.

At 3 a.m., we woke to a loud banging on the door. The maid hurriedly told us to go upstairs to the master bedroom and locked the door to the stairway behind us. We looked out the window to see a gaping hole in the outer wall and seven or eight men smashing the lights that encircled the courtyard, leaving only darkness and the sound of banging and crashing. We were filled with fear, and we were praying hard. As I was praying, I wondered if the police had been called. But my question was answered when someone commented that the phone line had been disconnected due to unpaid bills. There was no way of contacting the police.

We continued to pray while the banging noises continued intermittently. It was most unnerving when the noises stopped because it signaled that the intruders had managed to break into the house. Once they were in, they used a sledgehammer to break through the doors and searched all the rooms. When they came to a metal security door, they broke through the wall next to it. We were in the master bedroom with many locks on the door, but they smashed through the middle of the door and entered. They started to beat us and demanded to know where our bedroom was. Some men took me and the preacher downstairs while the rest remained in the master bedroom.

When we reached our bedroom, we found it had been ransacked. The robbers beat and threatened us, demanding to know where our money was. The only cash we had belonged to the church—USD $1,500 for building a church in the village. Because the whole room was turned upside down, we had to search for the money bag while they continued their intimidation. When we handed them the cash, they were satisfied and left. But more men entered to beat us and demand money. That was when we realized that they were not a single gang working together but individuals stealing what they could for themselves.

Then, the preacher and I were separated, so we could not protect each other. Two men took me upstairs and dragged me into a bathroom. One was only wearing shorts, so I was scared of what would happen and resisted his demand to turn around. He used a rod to beat me, catching my face and cutting my eye. When the two men went downstairs, I hid. Later, the maid came looking for me and told me they had gone. She was shocked when she saw me.



My face was bloody, bruised, and swollen, and my arm was broken and bleeding.

The preacher came up from downstairs and was devastated to see my injuries. He seemed fine, but he told me they had broken off the wooden door and used part of it to beat him across the back. After they beat him to the ground, one asked, "Do you want to kill him?"

At that moment, the preacher felt at peace. He told God in his heart, "Lord, if You are willing to keep my life, I am willing to come back here and keep serving You."

Then the other man said, "No, we don't need to kill him." They beat him some more to ensure he could not retaliate, and then they left. We did not know if they would return, but God gave us calm and peaceful hearts.

The robbers had taken most of our luggage and food, so we packed our remaining belongings into plastic bags. The next day, we moved into a hotel; as we walked into the lobby, visibly wounded and carrying plastic bags, people stared. That night, I prayed, "God, please don't let me have nightmares." Thank God I slept well. While we sorted through our possessions, we sang the hymn *Count Your Blessings*. We could not take photos to capture the aftermath because our camera had been taken. Thank God, the days passed peacefully after this.

Afterward, we flew to Taiwan to recuperate. When my friend picked me up from the airport, she cried. The wounds on my face were still evident. She was surprised that I did not want to seek counseling. She said, "If I were you, I would need to see a psychologist. Weren't you traumatized by what happened?" After she asked this, I realized that the peace that Jesus gives is so great:

The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters. …
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
(Ps 23:1–2, 4)

I truly experienced these words. This is the peace that Jesus gives. Even though we are Christians, it does not mean we will always be at peace—healthy and free of troubles. Yes, the Lord can give us peace in the world, but more importantly, He provides us with a peace that surpasses understanding and guards our hearts (Phil 4:7). In times of distress, we can hold on to our Father's hand. He is the stabilizing force that calms us during a storm. This is the power of peace through Jesus Christ alone. Without this peace, we would not have been able to continue the ministry. By God's grace, we did not give up and experienced His blessings while working in Africa for the remaining five years. We arrived in Africa as two but left as a family of five.

May all glory be to God! Amen.

GOD'S ENDURING LOVE

John Alexander—Cerritos, California, USA



In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I testify.

It brings me great joy to testify of God's amazing grace on my journey of faith. My story does not contain any momentous miracles, but this is not a question of whether God could perform these in my life. Rather, God knew a better way for me. I experienced His enduring love, which, to me, is miracle enough.

EARLY EXPERIENCES AS A CHRISTIAN

From the beginning, I was baptized into the Catholic faith and attended Catholic school. However, our family's faith seemed to be based on tradition, passed on from my grandparents, rather than having a personal relationship with God where we looked to God daily. I went to a public high school and did not pursue my faith. I would only attend Catholic mass on holidays or when we planned to eat out afterward. I did not see the point of making an effort because I already believed in God and thought I was a good person. I felt my faith was good enough even though I valued many things in life more than God.

By the end of high school, I had started attending mainstream Christian churches, which motivated me to build a relationship with God. I started looking to God whenever I was sad or struggling. Going to those churches always made me feel better about myself. After high school, I was drafted to play minor-league baseball. Touring with my team, I ended up attending churches all over the country. My faith helped me overcome family issues and struggles in my baseball career. I did not differentiate between denominations—I would attend one church on Saturday night and another on Sunday morning. I

would also participate in Catholic services. Little did I know that each church has a different set of beliefs. Back then, I did not understand what doctrine was and never thought of questioning each church's beliefs. I would stay if they had a good message and music band. But still, going to church was not a top priority. I would only go to church if I had had a bad week, was going through a difficult time, or had nothing else "better" to do.

Spiritual Decline

The older I got, the more satisfied I felt with life. My baseball career ended, so I decided to go to college. I was coasting through life—working and going to school—but I had no idea I was slowly dying a spiritual death. I had so much pride and based my self-worth on my academic and social status. However, I started becoming obsessed and fearful of germs. I was unconcerned about sin because I believed God loved me and would forgive me. The Bible felt like a textbook; I could not understand its deeper meanings. I gravitated towards reading daily Christian devotionals and did not pray—I thought God had already predestined my life, so what was the point? For a short time, I believed Christians should not eat pork, and I even denied the existence of hell. I only knew one dimension of God, which was love, because I was living in the darkness of the world. I look back and realize that my understanding of God was based on how I wanted to perceive Him. My idea of God was created by my own wants, logic, and opinions. Moreover, my beliefs would change as time went on, influenced by the words of others. I had a wavering faith that was easily swayed. Yet, I never looked to the Bible for answers because that would have been too much effort.

COMING TO THE TRUE CHURCH

In the spring of 2017, I met Kelly, who told me she was a Christian too. Meeting a Christian who cared more about her faith than I did was rare—I was the most "Christian" out of everyone I knew. Kelly shared about the True Jesus Church (TJC), and I was curious about seeing this church she cared so deeply about.

During my first Sabbath service, I discovered this church sings hymns. Previously, music worship was a big part of my faith. I enjoyed attending churches with loud praise bands because the music stirred my emotions; I would use these strong emotions as motivation. On this occasion, I could not join in singing the hymns because I did not know how to read music. But the simplicity of the lyrics deeply touched me.

Even though I intended to continue with my other church, I never returned after that first service at the TJC. It was not that I accepted everything about the TJC that first Sabbath, but rather, I felt a deep urge inside me to keep coming back.

I was eager to study and learn why TJC was so different from all the other churches I had attended. I could also see a future with Kelly, so I knew if I wanted to be with her, I needed to find out if God was in this church. I had my doubts, but Kelly never



pressured me to believe. She would answer any questions I had and simply supported me throughout.

Understanding the Sabbath

The Sabbath day was a concept I found difficult to accept. Every church I had ever known or heard of worships on Sunday. Even Chick-Fil-A, a well-known US chicken shop chain founded by a Christian, closes on Sundays. How could everyone be getting this wrong?

I learned that the Jews observe the Sabbath, and the Catholics observe on Sunday, which they call the "Lord's Day." So, I concluded that even the Catholic Church recognizes that the Sabbath is on Saturday; they choose to worship on Sunday based on their own reasoning. No one refutes any of the other Ten Commandments, so why should we skip the Fourth Commandment? When I read Genesis 2:2, I am encouraged that God rested as an example for us to follow:

And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.

What I appreciate about the TJC is that we research history and question human tradition to ensure we follow the truth of the Bible, not man's thinking.

Letting Go of Ego and Pride

Kelly explained the Holy Spirit to me before I attended church for the first time. However, I was apprehensive. My only knowledge of speaking in tongues was that it happened inside cults and "weird" churches. I quickly realized the TJC was the farthest thing from any of those institutions. When members spoke in tongues, they were fully aware of what was happening. They could stop at any time. No one was falling backward or losing control. Even knowing all of this, it took me a few months to muster the courage to pray and ask God for the Holy Spirit.

> "I realized that even though science appears absolute, it is not. It changes when new studies are conducted and new information is discovered. In this light, I could now accept the Bible as absolute truth"

This delay had a lot to do with my pride, ego, and wanting to maintain control over my life. I had built up walls to protect myself mentally. I did not want to think of myself as a fool or someone who would be laughed at by people of this world. At the time, this was what mattered most to me. I believed in science and trusted in my own abilities. As time passed, I realized that even though science appears absolute, it is not. It changes when new studies are conducted and new information is discovered. In this light, I could now accept the Bible as absolute truth.

I had to surrender my prideful ego—the part that wanted to know it all. The walls I had built to protect me kept God out. Just as it says in 1 Corinthians 3:18–19:

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone

among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness."

My prayers gradually became longer and longer. I was not used to lengthy prayers because I grew up praying for less than a minute or two in words of understanding. These extended prayers made me feel so close to God—a closeness I had never experienced. My past experiences were very surface-level compared to this. After a year of coming to the TJC, I was ready to commit and trust that God's Holy Spirit, evidenced by speaking in tongues, was real. I wrote this in my journal, adding, "No turning back," and signed it at the bottom.

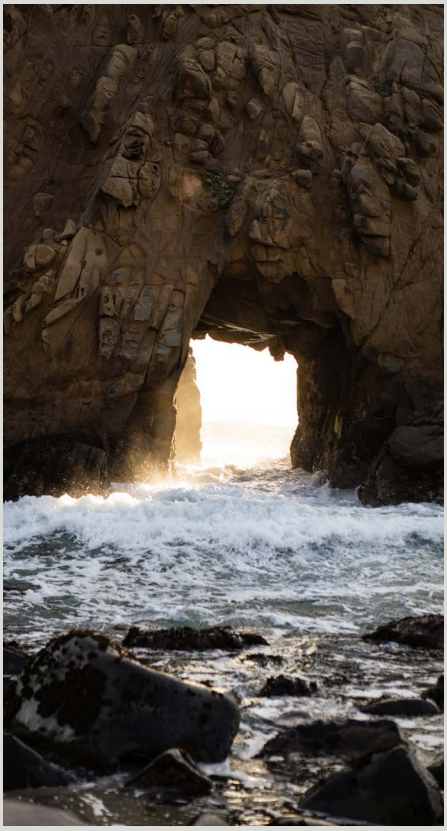
THE JOURNEY OF BELIEF AND BREAKING BARRIERS

I do not change very quickly, but when I decide to change, I fully commit. I remain skeptical up until I am not. This is the approach I took with our church doctrines. I looked at the doctrines skeptically but studied to find the truth. I appreciate that the TJC members do not blindly follow and accept the pastors' words. They pursue the truth of our basic beliefs. Attending the young adult and basic beliefs classes at Baldwin Park TJC helped me understand our doctrines more deeply. There was no specific moment when I fully believed; it was a slow, methodical process of coming to believe through seminars, Bible reading, and prayer. This is by God's grace because He knows I do not believe things so easily or quickly. I enjoyed studying church history because I could see how, historically, church doctrines were changed by church and world leaders. I realized God's truth is absolute; man cannot change God's instructions. What gives me great confidence in the TJC is that our doctrines align with what the Bible says, and not the declarations of a single person.

Reconciling Doubts, Simply Trusting God

In the summer of 2018, I felt ready to give my life to God and be baptized. I would also attend the National Youth Theological Seminar (NYTS) and ask Kelly to marry me that summer. However, Satan was working against me. My overthinking had gotten extreme. I started doubting God's existence and the concept of eternity. So, the NYTS came at the perfect moment. The thought that I could not let God down, since He had blessed me with this opportunity, kept me going during this time.

During the NYTS, a pastor shared with me that faith is like a tree. You cannot force the branches to grow faster. It takes time for faith to grow and develop. Just like everything else, it is a journey and a process. I struggled through every emotion during this seminar—from anxiety to joy to doubt to fear and to a spiritual depth I had not experienced before. I was edified through fellowship with the brothers and sisters and received a lot of intercessions and encouragement. It was truly touching. I enjoyed digging deep into God's word during the classes. In one, we discussed Psalm 84:11–12:



For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
The LORD will give grace and glory;
No good thing will He withhold
From those who walk uprightly.
O LORD of hosts,
Blessed is the man who trusts in You!

These verses perfectly summarized what I needed at that time. I did not receive the Holy Spirit at this seminar, but in my heart, I knew He had a better time.

Around this time, a member encouraged me to use my doubts as motivation to draw closer to God. She also explained that humans exist within time and space, so we cannot fully comprehend eternity. If man could fully comprehend God, then what kind of God would that make Him? I realized it was not about having all my questions answered. I used to seek Bible verses to prove things to myself, but I now use the Bible to support my faith. Praying, singing hymns, listening to sermons, and attending NYTS allowed me to conclude that having simple faith and trusting in the Lord was all I needed. I had instinctively kept my struggles to myself because of shame, and the fear of judgment and appearing weak. However, it helped to talk about them and bring them to light. I could hear other perspectives, and in turn, the brothers and sisters could pray for me.

"During my baptism, I was overwhelmed with so much emotion that it was difficult to express my feelings. I broke down and wept as I entered the water"

Thank God, I received the true water baptism in the fall of 2018. During my baptism, I was overwhelmed with so much emotion that it was difficult to express my feelings. I broke down and wept as I entered the water. I was moved by



John Alexander with his wife, Kelly

God's love and how arduous the journey had been to get to that point—the internal struggles and walls I had to break down to accept God wholeheartedly. I felt profound peace and cleanliness—my sins had been truly washed away.

Receiving the Holy Spirit

My next goal was to receive the Holy Spirit; the more I learned, the more deeply I believed. Just as Jeremiah 29:13 says:

And you will seek Me and find Me,
When you search for Me with all
your heart.

What helped me believe in the Holy Spirit was our basic beliefs. I would ask myself, *Why don't other churches do the things the TJC does when they make so much sense and are so clearly stated in the Bible?* The answer to this question is the Holy Spirit. Without Him, we cannot fully understand the Bible (Jn 14:26; 16:13; 1 Cor 2:10–11). The promised Holy Spirit is written and spoken of by Jesus Christ, the prophets, and the apostles throughout the Bible.

In April 2019, I received God's promised Spirit. It had been almost a year and a half since I sincerely started praying for the Holy Spirit. I had not been praying much because I was sick and had a sore throat. But that night, I wanted to kneel and pray for a particular person and the situation they were going through. All of a sudden, I felt a strong feeling of motivation, and my tongue started vibrating. I was in disbelief. Afterward, I called Kelly, who said it sounded like I had received the Holy Spirit!

However, I was not so easily convinced. I spent the next couple of weeks doubting and testing if I had indeed received the Holy Spirit or was vibrating my tongue on my own. But thank God, a pastor confirmed it, and I slowly began to believe more and more, becoming filled with the Holy Spirit.

I now see that the Holy Spirit would not overpower me in an out-of-control way. Receiving the Spirit is about surrendering, letting go, and letting His living water flow freely. Even during that period of uncertainty, I felt peace and contentment to not lust after the world. I distinctly remember this feeling and change. This encourages me to believe that this is God's true Spirit because even though I doubted, I still experienced a clear difference in myself.

Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. *(Rom 5:5)*

MOTIVATED BY GOD'S LOVE

On reflection, I was encouraged early on by the love of the brothers and sisters. Before coming to the TJC, I would not participate in church activities or talk to anyone at my previous churches. I would show up, worship, and leave. Members of the TJC would approach me and share their testimonies; we would eat together and clean together. I was so touched by the shared sense of family. The Sabbath day is a full day of rest, where before, I would worship God for just one hour and go home.

The TJC is the only church that motivated me to change my life. Other churches would proclaim what we should do as a slogan, but as much as I tried or had good intentions, I could not follow through. I had used God's love as a crutch; now, it motivates me to improve. I am continually encouraged by this verse:

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." *(Mt 7:21)*

Let us all continue this race of faith together as one family. I thank God for all the brothers and sisters who continue to labor, pray for, and support me on this journey. I thank God for His patience and enduring love. As Jeremiah says:

The LORD has appeared of old to me,
saying: "Yes, I have loved you with an
everlasting love;
Therefore with lovingkindess I have
drawn you." *(Jer 31:3)*

May the glory, honor, and praise be to our heavenly Father. Amen!



GROWING AS A FAMILY IN EVANGELISM

Alvin and Sabrina Leung—Newcastle, UK

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we share our personal experience of serving in the evangelistic ministry as young parents of a three-year-old daughter and a baby on the way.

Before marriage, we were already involved in our local evangelism planning group (EPG), particularly in Outreach and Events, which includes planning events such as gospel tea and evangelistic services, and Follow-Up, which involves setting up truth class curriculums and supporting truth-seeking friends in different ways. In the beginning, we joined the EPG work without much thought. But the more involved we became, the more we realized how important this work is for the church's growth. Not only is it the great commission given to us by our Lord Jesus, but we know that the apostolic church grew in strength and might because the believers preached wherever they went (Acts 8:4–8). As members of the end-time true church, every part does its share to cause the body to grow (Eph 4:16). Because of this, we feel a real sense of responsibility and duty to fulfill God's instructions. Furthermore, seeing the church's needs and the lack of human resources in this area also drives our zeal to do this work. Our experience in serving God is that the more you do the work, the more your heart grows towards those matters. So, even if you are in a new stage of life, your heart and love for the matters of the church do not change—as long as you continue to keep God as the

priority. Although there may be new needs to focus on, such as your relationship with your spouse or parenthood, you do not develop tunnel vision and *only* think about your own needs and your family's needs.

MAKING A RESOLUTION

Before we got married, we became aware of a trend: married youths would step back in attending certain church activities and holy work, which would continue as the family grew. We resolved before tying the knot to continue attending fellowships and participating in church works. We give thanks to God as we are not alone. Most of our close friends also made this resolution, and we observed good examples of other married couples doing the same. Collectively, we were trying to break this trend.

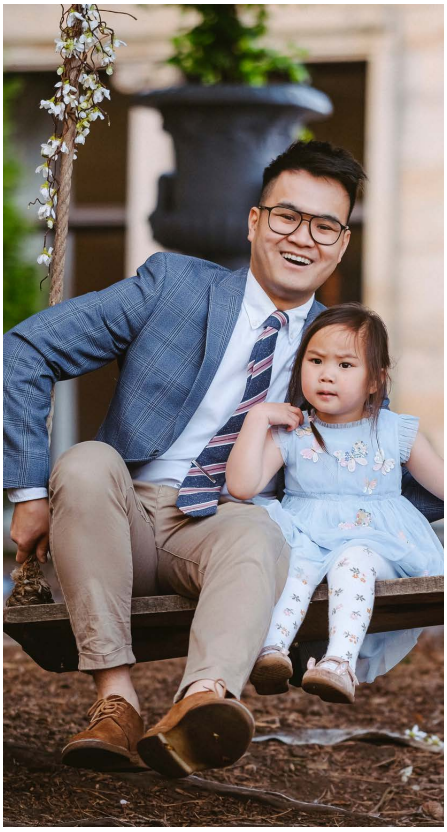
> "We should serve all the more as a family because children are a blessing and should not be seen as a hindrance to our faith"

When our family grew, we understood we would face new challenges. But with good role models around us, we knew that however difficult it may be, it would not be impossible to serve Him. We both shared the mindset that if God had blessed us with children, it would not make sense to step back from church work. Instead, we should serve all the more as a family because children are a blessing and should not be seen as a hindrance to our faith. However, nurturing and supplementing this mindset with prayer is essential because, even with the best intentions, our strength is not enough without God's strength to maintain this heart.

Sabrina: Before our daughter was born, I would pray for God to help us and give us the strength to continue our faith and service to Him after our daughter arrived. I was worried that no matter how good our intentions were, the reality could be different when we became parents. I prayed that God would help me to prioritize Him because I was worried that my priorities would change—even during pregnancy, my mind would be occupied with planning and preparing for the baby's arrival, so I knew I needed God's power to do this. Thank God, when there is a willing mind, He helps us complete the good work (2 Cor 8:10–12, Phil 1:6). The key to balancing holy work with having a young child is a heart of willingness. Where there is a will, God will make the way.

MAKING ADJUSTMENTS

That being said, it is not always easy. Some things have had to give because of the timings of certain activities. For example, attending youth fellowships in the evenings with a baby is a struggle.



Alvin Leung and his daughter

However, there are certain things that, as a family, we could not compromise, especially in upholding the Sabbath. So, we are committed to attending the Friday evening Sabbath service. When we were child-free, this was relatively easy, but bringing children to church in the evenings presents its challenges. Sometimes, our daughter had not napped or was acting up, and we were tempted to stay home to livestream the service. However, we know that we need to come before God to honor the whole Sabbath day—not just for an hour or two or when it is convenient for us to do so. It is a commandment from God and must be upheld (Deut 5:12). Therefore, we wanted to instill in our daughter from a young age that we go to church to keep Sabbath day. Even though there have been times when she was tired or playing up at church, we can already see that she understands what the Sabbath is and what we should do on the Sabbath. We thank God for this and pray she can continue building on this understanding.

Balancing family life and church life does require more effort and planning from both parents. For example, if we intend to be in church for the whole day, one of us wakes up earlier to prepare the meals while the other gets our daughter ready and dressed for breakfast before we leave for church. Doing this means we can spend a whole day in church, so losing a bit of sleep does not feel troublesome or burdensome. A shared calendar is a great tool to help us organize our church work schedules. We can see each other's workload and meetings and work around each other's schedules. Of course, we still discuss our plans for specific days and try our best to give each other time to cultivate and attend activities without distractions. Although we may not be able to participate in as many church activities as before, it is essential to make the most of what we do attend, not "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together," as it allows us to be encouraged and stirred up to do the good work (Heb 10:24–25). For example, our local church has a tea break sharing after Sabbath services where members share about their week. We have been encouraged by many of the youths sharing about preaching to their friends and colleagues, which stirs us up to strive to do the same.

Alvin: In recent years, I have been involved in the broader works of the EPG. I have been exposed to other areas related to the ministry, such as design, literary ministry, training, and encouragement. There have also been opportunities to serve on a national level, assisting in the English-speaking national evangelistic services, which take place online. The workload may increase, and we may be fatigued, but we should remember that we serve by the grace of God. We do not solely look at the results but give thanks for the chance to sow the seed and participate in the commission.

Sabrina: We serve God to the best of our abilities, in the capacity that we have. I have primarily been involved with follow-up works over the last few years, which include maintaining contact with the truth-seekers and building a rapport with them when we see them in church. Again, this was easier to do before we

had children as we could take our time to speak with visitors and give them our undivided attention. It is a struggle to do this when I am taking care of my daughter, and I cannot sit with the truth-seeker in the chapel and speak to them. However, my experience has reminded me of the importance of working with coworkers to support the truth-seekers. My coworkers can do more where I am limited, and vice versa. We do not use our physical limitations as an excuse but strive to do our best, with what we have, to serve God and adapt to serving in different ways. For example, when I could not accompany the truth-seekers during service or tea break, I took the opportunity to attend the truth class with them and be more involved in this aspect of their journey. With the support of my husband, who took care of our daughter and all her needs during the truth class, I could be fully present and worry-free. It was initially intimidating, but thank God for the wonderful opportunity to speak more about the doctrines with our truth-seekers.

MAKING BREAKTHROUGHS

As we sail through life, we will inevitably face new challenges and barriers at each stage. However, we can look toward Jesus, who always gives us an excellent example to follow. In John 4:3–4, He left Judea in the south and departed to Galilee in the north. But He needed to go through Samaria. It was considered a Gentile land, and the Jews often traveled around Samaria to avoid going through it. But Jesus needed to go through Samaria. Why? He was determined to break through this barrier to preach to the Gentiles. While in Sychar, He preached to the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:5–26). Even though she put more barriers before Jesus, He broke through each one. *You're a man, I'm a woman. You're a Jew, I'm a Samaritan. You worship in Jerusalem, I worship on this mountain.* Whatever barrier she threw at Jesus, He was determined to break through it to preach. We can all learn to have more determination, like our Lord Jesus. Whatever barriers we face in life, we can break through them to fulfill the evangelistic ministry committed to all of us.

PREACHING MUST BE THE GOAL

We often forget to preach daily because it is not at the forefront of our minds. However, if we surround ourselves with like-minded brethren, talk about the evangelistic ministry more often, and hear how others preach, we will naturally preach in our daily lives. For example, a member shared how they use festive holidays as an opportunity to talk about their faith. Simply answering, "No, I don't celebrate," closes the door. But saying, "I don't celebrate because it's against my faith," opens the door to sharing more. Some may assume that we do not participate in festivals because of our ethnic or cultural background, but actually, it is because it is contrary to our faith. That is the key message we should share with our friends and colleagues.



"We need not be afraid of how others see us. When the opportunity arises, we frankly and openly tell them we believe in Jesus and go to the True Jesus Church"

Alvin: We sometimes need to be brave and open our mouths to speak. We cannot bring others to know Jesus if we do not say anything. We need not be afraid of how others see us. When the opportunity arises, we frankly and openly tell them we believe in Jesus and go to the True Jesus Church. For example, sometimes, I play football with people who do not know Jesus. Sometimes, they ask me to play at the weekend, but this would conflict with the Sabbath or church activities scheduled on Sunday. I will tell them that I cannot because I have church. Over time, the more I repeat this, the more curious they are to find out about the church I attend. It creates an opportunity to raise awareness of the one true church and Jesus Himself.

Coupled with the consistent Sabbath routine, we are trying to instill this "no-shame" mindset in our daughter. Growing up, we often place barriers—such as feeling "awkward"—around sharing our faith with non-believers. Admittedly, this is something we battle with ourselves. However, we want to ensure that preaching is normal for our daughter and there is nothing awkward about it. When she asks if she will see a particular person at church—a non-believer or someone who does not often go to church—we encourage her that, though they will not be there today, she can invite them to come in the future. Thank God she is aware it is almost Sabbath when we pick her up from nursery on a Friday and that we are going to church. She has even chastised us when we forget to switch the car radio off in preparation for the Sabbath. Her nursery teachers tell us that she informs her friends and carers, "After nursery, *I go to church.*" We hope, in these small ways, she can build up the courage and the practice to preach in her daily life.

Undoubtedly, there is a lot more we can do for the evangelistic ministry. Not only is it related to the salvation of others, but also our own salvation since we have been charged to preach to the ends of the world. If we ignore this commission, "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom 10:14b). If we take one moment to open our mouths bravely, the effect could be eternal. God has put eternity into the hearts of men (Eccl 3:11), and we need to help others reach eternity through the wonderful gospel of Jesus.

May all glory be unto Christ! Amen.

True Jesus Church

ARTICLES OF FAITH

JESUS CHRIST

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.

TRUE JESUS 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.

WATER 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.

LORD'S SECOND COMING

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.

CALL FOR ARTICLES

Issue #97: Spiritual Nurture: God's Word
Articles due: February 1, 2024

Issue 97 will be the second part of a duology dedicated to spiritual nurture, looking at two pillars of our Christian life and how they help us grow in faith. Following from issue 96, which focuses on prayer, issue 97 will consider God's word and its relationship with our spiritual cultivation

Both prayer and God's word are so ingrained into our faith and worship as to be almost unremarkable. Kneeling to pray and reading the Bible can become merely routine, to the point that we absentmindedly mumble a quick prayer before we rush out the door in the morning or skip our daily Bible reading when we feel busy or overwhelmed. Even if we have an impeccable habit of prayer and Bible reading, we may take it for granted and not reap the full spiritual benefits.

We must remember that God's word is precious and powerful; it is central to our spiritual health and relationship with God.

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 4:4)

God's word is spirit and life (Jn 6:63), from which we gain nourishment to sustain us spiritually. It is unchanging (1 Pet 1:23), yet it remains relevant throughout the ages to every living soul, regardless of background or circumstances. It has the power to build us up in faith, reveal our sins, sanctify, and make us wise for salvation (Acts 20:32; Heb 4:12; Rom 10:17; 2 Tim 3:15).

So, how do we feed ourselves with the word of God? What attitude should we have towards Bible reading, listening to sermons, and receiving the truth spoken in love from our brothers and sisters (Eph 4:15)? Have we experienced the blessings and goodness that come when we trust in God's eternal and unchanging promises and apply His teachings in our transient and ever-changing lives? And how do we ensure we are speaking through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to deliver God's message faithfully and correctly interpret the word of truth as stewards of God, so that others may be saved and edified (Acts 4:31; Jn 3:34; 2 Tim 2:15; 3:16)?

GENERAL WRITING GUIDELINES

Content

- Content should be biblically sound and adhere to biblical principles.
- The article should be organized and have a logical flow of thought.
- The main point or teaching of the article should be clear to the reader.
- Readers should be able to apply what they have read to their daily lives.
- Do not plagiarize the work of other writers or institutions, published either in print or online. Any quotations, ideas, or concepts taken from other sources must be properly referenced.

Grammar/Style

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

Manna only accepts submissions written by True Jesus Church members. 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
Creative pieces include poems, parables, or short stories that illustrate a biblical teaching or idea. Keep in mind as you are writing: how will this edify the reader?

Submission Information

Please email articles as Microsoft Word documents to manna@tjc.org, including your name, mailing address, email address, and telephone number.
By submitting an article, you consent to it being edited and published in Manna, in print and online, distributed globally and promoted on social media. If accepted for publication, your article may also be edited and/or translated for other True Jesus Church publications and websites.

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Our Life

True Jesus Church

CONTACT INFORMATION

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

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