Manna

ISSUE 99 / JULY 2026



Mend Our Nets

PART TWO OF TWO

True Jesus Church

A STITCH IN TIME

Marian Shek—Leicester, UK

"A stitch in time saves nine." This familiar proverb elegantly captures the wisdom of making timely repairs to damaged textiles—patching a tear or fixing an unraveled thread straightaway prevents the hole from getting bigger, requiring more time and effort to mend.

We can apply this wisdom in most areas of our lives—from repaying financial debt to weeding the garden to even reconciling conflicts within relationships before resentment sets in. The sooner you deal with a problem, the simpler—and less painful—the process will be. Leaving a problem to fester can lead to further—sometimes irrevocable—damage down the line.

In the previous issue of *Manna*, we explored one facet of our mission to be fishers of men—casting our nets to bring in lost souls (Mt 4:19; Mk 1:17; Mt 13:47–48). This issue will look at the next step: preserving the fish in the net—to safeguard these souls within the church of salvation until the end. This encompasses our duty to pastor and care for those in the community of faith, attending to their physical and spiritual well-being and strengthening our fellowship in Christ.

If our spiritual nets are in poor condition, then many will slip through the net and be lost to the tides. Those who are young in faith, spiritually weak, or in physical suffering and emotional distress may be in danger of drifting away without a strong net of love and truth supporting them (Eph 4:14–16; 1 Pet 1:22; Jude 10–23).

This is why, like fishermen, we must routinely maintain our nets (Mt 4:21; Lk 5:2), carefully examining our spiritual state, both individually and collectively, to find and remove any corrupting elements, fix breaks in the mesh, and reinforce weak points in a timely manner.

As the writers in this issue cover, we must first inspect and fill the gaps in our personal faith (*Strengthen Our Spiritual Defenses*, *Mend the Breach in Our Spirituality*, *Invest in Your Faith*, *Lessons from Mount Everest*). As our relationship with God deepens and grows, so do our sense of belonging and love for His body, the church (Eph 4:1–4, 11–13).

Following this, Christ's love compels us to edify His church and fulfill our pastoral duty towards the newly baptized and long-time believers alike, strengthening the ties that bind (*Winning Back the Next Generation for the Lord*, P*astoring Our New Sheep*, *The Heart of the Good Shepherd (Part 1)*). We are motivated to reach out to the wandering ones, to restore them through the word and the movement of the Holy Spirit (*Seeking the Lost: Seek, Save, Serve*).

Mending our nets is just as fundamental to our work as fishers of men as launching out to preach the gospel, casting our nets for the catch. We may be enthusiastically bringing friends to the church, but if the church is careless with the truth, is beset with interpersonal issues, and the atmosphere is unwelcoming, then we will forfeit our catch—perhaps even losing some who have believed for a long time. Since the work of evangelism must go on, so too must our task of inspecting, cleaning, and mending our spiritual nets as we pastor the flock God has entrusted to us. As we strengthen our cords of faith and love, weaving our fellowship with the Spirit and the light of the word, God will increase our catch and bring us all safely to shore (Jn 21: 6–11; Acts 2:42, 46–47).

EDITOR IN CHIEF: Anna Khoo
MANAGING EDITOR: Marian Shek
DESIGN: Terence Shek
REVIEW BOARD: Andrew Chu (Australia), Tony Kuo (Canada), Elijah Chong, Isaiah Phan, Joel Chong (Malaysia), Joshua Chong, Philip Shee (Singapore), FF Chong, Michael Chan, Vincent Yeung (UK), Lois Kuo, Patricia Chen, Patrick Wong, Richard Pang, Stephen Ku (USA)

Manna (ISSN1528-8617) is published by the True Jesus Church, IA Department of Literary Ministry, 21217 Bloomfield Avenue, Lakewood, CA 90715 USA.
Copyright © 2026 True Jesus Church. All rights reserved.
U.S. Postmaster: send change-of-address forms to 21217 Bloomfield Avenue, Lakewood, CA 90715 USA.
Back issues of Manna can be downloaded at: www.mannamagazine.com. Please direct any enquiries to manna@tjc.org.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations taken from the (NASB®) New American Standard Bible®,
Copyright © 1960, 1971, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved. www.Lockman.org

CONTENTS

02 Theme

02 Strengthen Our Spiritual Defenses
Shawn Chou, USA

06 Mend the Breach in Our Spirituality
KC Tsai, Canada

10 The Heart of the Good Shepherd (Part 1): Faithfulness in Tending the Flock
FF Chong, UK

14 Pastoring Our New Sheep
Eugene Tang, UK

18 Seeking the Lost: Seek, Save, Serve
Barnabas Chong, Singapore

21 Winning Back the Next Generation for the Lord
Timothy Yeung, Canada

24 Special Feature

24 Unity in the Church
Literary Ministry Seminar, UK

26 Exhortation

26 Finish the Race
Xin, USA

30 Testimony

30 Lessons from Mount Everest
Ling Chen, USA

34 Invest in Your Faith
Apphia Yeung, Canada

38 Christian Living Columns

38 Family: Establishing the Family Altar (Part 1)
Isaiah Kao, Taiwan

42 Peniel: He Will Take From Mine and Disclose It to You
KC Tsai, Canada

44 Reflection

44 Reflecting on God's Will through Viral Choreography (Part 2)
Meditating in the Field, Singapore

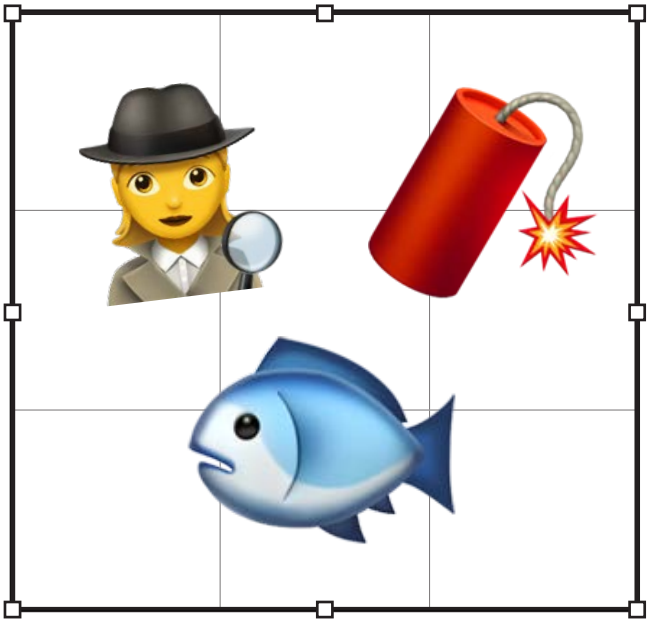
46 IA Media Ministry: Resources

48 Articles of Faith

49 Call for Articles

STRENGTHEN OUR SPIRITUAL DEFENSES

Shawn Chou—San Jose, California, USA



INTRODUCTION

Why do fishermen need to inspect and mend their nets regularly? Because nets are prone to natural wear and tear through continual use. The more they are deployed, the more breaches or breakages will occur.

What constitutes a "breach" in the spiritual sense? A breach is an opening, a point of vulnerability, a weakness in the defenses through which the enemy can enter and gain access to our lives. The gaps may not always be large or apparent, but they often appear at the precise points where the greatest damage can be done in our spiritual lives. Like city walls that defend against enemy attacks, even the tiniest opening or crack can provide an opportunity for the enemy to enter and wreak havoc.

In this article, we will carefully examine three of our most common, most deadly, and most frequently overlooked breaches that the Bible warns us of, and how we can strengthen our defenses through spiritual principles taught throughout the Scriptures.

01 FIRST BREACH
LUST OF THE EYES

Of the five senses, our eyesight is the most difficult to keep pure and protect from sin. We may not intentionally seek to sin with our eyes, but even a passing glance or accidental observation can immediately draw us into temptation and spiritual danger.

The Bible has much to say about this. The "lust of the eyes" is one of three main avenues by which temptation strikes (1 Jn 2:16). Jesus illustrated this by saying that "everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:28). The very act of looking with lustful intent and the harboring of desire is already a sin in God's eyes, and it can lead to the physical manifestation of committing the sinful act (Jas 1:14–15). For example, Eve first saw that the forbidden fruit was "a delight to the eyes" before making the fatal mistake of eating it (Gen 3:6).

Why do the eyes have so much potential to become a significant breach in our spiritual defenses? Because they are the primary gateway through which lust, desire, and temptation enter our hearts. Prolonged study of something will imprint it on our minds; ruminating on it long enough will lead us to act. If we do not carefully guard our eyes, our mind and heart will inevitably be lured in and ensnared.

Today, social media platforms are flooded with short-form videos, many of which are harmless or even

informative. However, if we mindlessly scroll to the next video or let the reels auto-play for more than three minutes, our self-control weakens as our dopamine receptors are triggered with each new morsel of content. After twenty minutes of engagement, addiction has taken hold, and we struggle to put the device down.

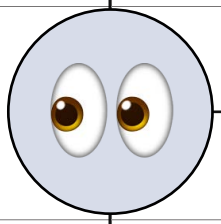
This is a problem that plagues many Christians who genuinely love the Lord. It is not that they lack devotion, but that the world and its endless streams of algorithmically tailored content have captured their eyes. What begins as a few minutes of relaxation suddenly becomes forty or fifty minutes or more, as time slips away unnoticed. When they finally snap out of it, they realize that their precious time has been stolen, their attention and focus diverted, and their thoughts and energy drawn away from the matters of God.

Frequent use of Instagram and Facebook not only steals our time but can also negatively affect our mental and spiritual health by skewing our perception of reality. As people tend to share the positive highlights of their recent experiences, we may feel as though everyone else has better lives, more successful careers, and happier, more fulfilling family relationships. After viewing countless picture-perfect profiles and curated posts, we start to feel as though our mundane existence cannot measure up and that we are failing in every aspect of life. Our eyes become clouded, preventing us from seeing God's blessings in our lives.

This is precisely how a breach in our eyesight occurs: it wears down the spiritual nets we have carefully woven. We may not have sinned outwardly with our eyes, but what we consume can open a breach in our heart and mind. Comparison leads to envy, envy leads to bitterness, and ultimately, this fractures our relationship with God.

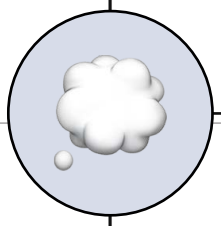


HOW TO MEND A BREACH OF THE EYES



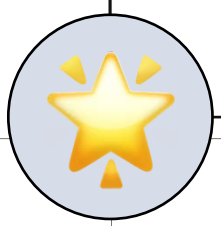
SUGGESTION 1: MAKE A COVENANT WITH YOUR EYES

"I have made a covenant with my eyes;
How then could I look at a virgin?" (Job 31:1)
Pray daily: "Lord, I will not look at things that tempt me to sin or draw me away from You."



SUGGESTION 2: USE THE STOP PRINCIPLE (STOP-THINK-OBEY-PRAY)

When something inappropriate comes across your screen:
- **Stop** immediately
- **Think** about the consequences
- **Obey** the Holy Spirit's prompting
- **Pray** and ask God for help



SUGGESTION 3: FILL YOUR EYES WITH GOD'S TRUTH AND LIGHT

"The eye is the lamp of the body; so then, if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So if the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" *(Mt 6:22–23)*

God's word is light (Ps 119:105), so spend more time reading God's word to gain clear spiritual eyesight. This will fill your heart and mind with God's light, leading to a more positive outlook and mental state. Further enlighten your eyesight by:
- Admiring God's creation
- Reading faith-promoting testimonies
- Viewing edifying content online

02



SECOND BREACH
SIN OF THE TONGUE

The tongue is the repeat offender behind our most commonly committed sins—the ones we tend to minimize or brush off as minor slips. In reality, while we may not kill, hurt, or steal, our tongue can cause deep pain and emotional injury to others. As Elder James warns us:

So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, the very world of unrighteousness; the tongue is set among our body's parts as that which defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. *(Jas 3:5–6)*

Proverbs also says:

Death and life are in the power of the tongue,
And those who love it will eat its fruit. *(Prov 18:21)*

The tongue may be small, but it can bring endless trouble and disaster. The words of the wise promote peace and life, while the words of the foolish create strife and death. That is why the apostle Paul instructs us not to let any unwholesome or filthy word come out of our mouths (Eph 4:29).

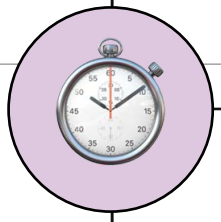
Why is a breach of the tongue such a serious spiritual matter? Because our words reveal the condition of the heart within. Complaints and grumbling find their source in an ungrateful heart, while constant criticism of others reveals a heart that is uncompassionate and unloving. And the devil is delighted when Christians, instead of building each other up, use their tongues to hurt, criticize, and tear down.

A truth-seeker once shared with me the pain her husband caused her. Although he never physically harmed her, his words cut far deeper than a knife ever could, constantly belittling her and calling her useless. Tearfully, she shared, "Those words, more than anything else in my life, made me feel unworthy of love and undeserving of respect."

How many families and marriages have been damaged by a single hurtful word, or destroyed by a sustained pattern of verbal abuse, more so than by physical violence?



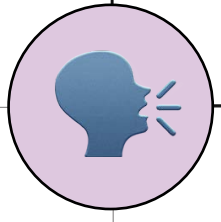
HOW TO MEND A BREACH OF THE TONGUE



SUGGESTION 1: USE THE "THREE-SECOND RULE" BEFORE SPEAKING

Now everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak,
and slow to anger. *(Jas 1:19b)*

Before speaking, pause for three seconds to think about the impact of what you are going to say, especially in emotionally charged moments. Ask yourself: "Is this edifying, true, and kind?"



SUGGESTION 2: SAY A FEW BLESSINGS FROM TIME TO TIME

Make a habit of giving your family, coworkers, and fellow believers encouraging words. The more you bless others, the more you allow the Holy Spirit to control your tongue.

03



THIRD BREACH
THE UNGUARDED HEART

Watch over your heart with all diligence,
For from it flow the springs of life. *(Prov 4:23)*

The Bible clearly reveals that the greatest and most dangerous breach is not in the eyes or the tongue, but in the heart itself. When the heart is not aligned with God, the eyes will seek out unedifying content, and the tongue will speak harmful words. Without a heart centered on and devoted to God, any spiritual discipline or practice becomes impossible to maintain. Unfortunately, a breach in the heart is the most insidious, deadly, and difficult to detect.

Many believers project a conventionally Christian image and lifestyle, with no outward sign of sin or spiritual defect. But inwardly, they could be dwelling in deep spiritual malaise. This can manifest as complacency, unconcerned that they do not sense God's presence; a lack of yearning or hunger for God; numbness, disbelief, and apathy toward all things faith-related; and greater love for the pleasures of the world than for God. Such a heart, in which God is not prioritized, is an open door to spiritual defeat.

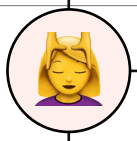
There was a brother who pursued his career with great energy and passion. His heart was set on professional growth, maximizing investments and returns, and boosting his financial status. His goal was to retire early. He did not see how this could be sinful or problematic in the eyes of God, but gradually his heart turned away from God and his faith declined. When a believer's heart turns away from the Lord, his spiritual life becomes dry, withers, and loses its vitality. Eventually, he left the church.

For some parents, their whole identity is so enmeshed with their children that they make them their sole purpose and meaning in life. When their children are thriving, they feel blessed and accepted by God; the moment their children fail or start to founder, they feel as though God has forsaken them. The child becomes the center of their universe, while God is pushed to the periphery or the background as an afterthought.

These examples remind us that "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt 6:21). If God is not the most precious in your heart, then your heart is not with God, and will be left defenseless and vulnerable to attack. So, we must reflect: what do we most treasure in our hearts?



HOW TO MEND A BREACH OF THE HEART



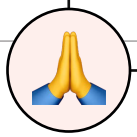
SUGGESTION 1: CULTIVATE A QUIET HEART

Throughout the day, dedicate at least ten minutes of quiet time with God. Switch off your devices and calm your heart to draw near to God. The quieter you are, the more clearly you will hear His voice.



SUGGESTION 2: IDENTIFY THE IDOLS IN YOUR HEART

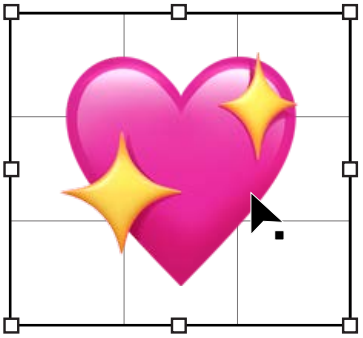
Ask yourself the following: "Who or what do I actually depend on? What am I afraid of losing? What do I care about the most?" That is often your idol.



SUGGESTION 3: PRAY FOR A TRANSFORMED HEART

Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. *(Rom 12:1)*

Pray for and develop a sacrificial mindset toward your service to God. Such a heart is transformed—no longer conformed to the world, but more aligned to God's heart, and able to put His will above all else (Rom 12:2; Phil 3:7–8).



CONCLUSION

To mend the gaps in our spiritual net is to restore God's blessing and favor. An unrepaired breach will result in distance from God, defeat by the enemy, and ultimately, destruction. But if the break is identified and sealed by God's grace, His blessings and abundant life will once again fill us, restoring what was lost.

Nevertheless, prevention is better than cure. Let us faithfully maintain our nets through careful examination, sewing up any tiny rips we find. Let us guard our eyes so that no temptation can enter; restrain our tongues to prevent damaging effects on our lives and those around us; and keep our hearts diligently, so that our spiritual life may flourish and bear fruit.

May we humbly ask the Lord to reveal the brokenness and breaches in our spiritual nets today through His Spirit, to help us repair them, and to strengthen our spiritual defenses.



MEND THE BREACH IN OUR SPIRITUALITY

KC Tsai—Toronto, Canada

After instituting the Holy Communion and just before being taken to the Sanhedrin, the Lord Jesus forewarned Peter that he would deny Him three times before the rooster crowed. This prediction completely shattered Peter's dignity and confidence; it certainly was not the self-image he had! However, the Lord's words were not only a prophecy concerning Peter but also a warning to the other ten disciples:

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to sift you men like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith will not fail; and you, when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." But he said to Him, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death!" But He said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me." (Lk 22:31–34)

There are several key lessons in this interaction.

FROM SIMON TO PETER, THEN BACK TO SIMON

Interestingly, the Lord first addressed Peter as "Simon" (Lk 22:31) before switching to "Peter" (Lk 22:34). This shift is instructive: "Simon" signals a sober reminder and warning, while "Peter" reflects the Lord's expectation of who he was called to become.

"Simon" was the name of an ordinary fisherman by the Sea of Galilee, a man who had neither known nor followed Jesus. When the Lord called him "Simon Bar-Jonah" and declared him blessed (Mt 16:17, NKJV),[1] He was underscoring this very ordinariness—Simon could not have recognized Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the living God, unless it had been revealed by the Father in heaven. That revelation marked the turning point of Simon's faith.

"Peter," meaning "little rock," was the name the Lord gave him when He called him to follow. It expressed Christ's expectation that Simon would grow into a man of conviction and steadfast resolve.

Yet after the resurrection, when Jesus appeared to the disciples for the third time, Peter had returned to fishing. Following the miraculous catch of fish, the Lord again addressed him—not as Peter, but as "Simon, son of Jonah"—and did so three times (Jn 21:15–17, NKJV):

"Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?"
"Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?"
"Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?"

These questions gently exposed the limits and immaturity of Simon's love, while simultaneously serving as a threefold restoration and a renewed commission: to faithfully shepherd the Lord's flock.

This progression speaks not only to Peter, but also to us. We begin as "Simon"—ignorant of who Jesus truly is. But as we walk the journey of faith, the Lord calls us toward becoming "Peter": as firm and steadfast as a rock in the truth we have come to know and believe.

SATAN HAS ASKED FOR YOU

The repetition of his name (Lk 22:31)—"Simon, Simon!"—conveys the Lord's deep tenderness and urgent warning, spoken just before the storm was to break. Yet, while Jesus addressed Peter personally, He used the plural "you" when He said, "Satan has demanded to sift you men." This indicates that Satan's request was not limited to Peter alone, but extended to all the disciples. Every disciple was a target to be sifted like wheat

[1] Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

because each had spiritual vulnerabilities that could invite accusation.

The Scriptures describe Satan as "the accuser of our brothers and sisters…the one who accuses them before our God day and night" (Rev 12:10). This is a familiar pattern. For example, King Saul suffered from a distressing spirit. Although various passages state that this spirit came from God (1 Sam 16:14, 16, 23), it does not mean that God is the author of evil. Instead, the spirit was permitted by God—at Satan's request—to trouble Saul because of Saul's own spiritual failures.

"The distressing spirit troubled Saul because he had given Satan grounds for accusation"

We read in 1 Samuel 18:10: "Now it came about on the next day that an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul." The context is telling. Just a day earlier, Saul had burned with anger and jealousy at the women's song:

"They have given David credit for ten thousands, but to me they have given credit for only thousands! Now what more can he have but the kingdom?" And Saul eyed David with suspicion from that day on. (1 Sam 18:8–9)

The distressing spirit troubled Saul because he had given Satan grounds for accusation. First, he had harbored pride toward God and repeatedly disobeyed His commands (1 Sam 13:13; 15:19). Second, he allowed his jealousy and hatred toward others to fester and grow.

In the same way, Satan "demanded to sift" the disciples because their human weaknesses provided him an opportunity. What are these vulnerabilities that we must quickly address?

SPIRITUAL BREACHES OF THE DISCIPLES

The Betrayal of Judas

And Satan entered Judas, the one called Iscariot, who belonged to the number of the twelve. (Lk 22:3)

Judas was one of the twelve disciples personally chosen by the Lord after a whole night of prayer (Lk 6:12–16). Despite this privileged calling, Satan entered his heart. This did not happen suddenly or without cause. Judas had long harbored spiritual breaches—greed, hypocrisy, and deceit—while continuing to walk among the disciples outwardly.

The Bible reveals these breaches clearly. When Mary of Bethany anointed the Lord with costly oil, Judas protested, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the proceeds given to poor people?" The Gospel exposed his true motive: he spoke not out of compassion, but because he was a thief who kept the money box and helped himself to its contents (Jn 12:4–6). Greed had already taken root in his heart.

Two days before the Passover, that greed matured into calculated betrayal. Judas approached the chief priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me to betray



Him to you?" They counted out thirty pieces of silver, and from that moment on, he sought an opportunity to betray Jesus (Mt 26:14–16).

Even at the last supper, the Lord extended solemn warnings and opportunities for repentance. When Jesus declared that one of them would betray Him, each disciple asked in sorrow, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" Judas, having already taken the money, still dared to cloak himself in false innocence, asking, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" Jesus replied, "You have said it yourself" (Mt 26:21–25). Despite repeated exposure of the evil concealed in his heart, Judas refused to turn back.

Thus, starting with greed, Judas descended step by step into darkness—betraying the Lord while maintaining an outward appearance of discipleship. When Satan entered him fully, Jesus finally said to him, "What you are doing, do it quickly" (Jn 13:27). Judas left the Passover table and walked into the night. His tragic end is a stark warning to all who profess faith yet tolerate hidden sin.

Today, we may not betray the Lord Jesus into the hands of the chief priests as Judas did. Yet if we are captivated by the world—by an excessive pursuit of wealth, pleasure, or vanity—we become, in effect, enemies of God (Jas 4:4). Such a life is itself a form of betrayal.

Therefore, in our daily walk, we must guard our hearts through prayer and the reading of Scripture, continually meditating on God's word. Only then can we resist the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, and prevent spiritual breaches from taking hold within us.

And Satan, having gained Judas, was not content with him alone—he also sought to gain the rest of the disciples.

The Tussle for Position Among the Disciples

And a dispute also developed among them as to which one of them was regarded as being the greatest. (Lk 22:24)

At the last supper, Jesus instituted the Holy Communion, commanding His disciples to do this often in remembrance of Him—of the covenant established by His blood and of His sacrificial death (Lk 22:18–20; 1 Cor 11:25). Yet, immediately after this most solemn moment, the disciples began disputing among themselves as to which of them should be considered the greatest.

"Unfortunately, the world incessantly urges us to climb corporate and social ladders—not to be an anonymous sheep but celebrated GOATs (Greatest Of All Time) of our generation"

Why did such an argument arise? It sprang from selfishness, insecurity, and a love of vain glory. These inner weaknesses gave rise to strife—even on the very eve of the Lord Jesus' suffering.

Such spiritual weakness was not a new problem. On an earlier occasion, the disciples had approached Jesus, seeking to know "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Mt 18:1).

And He called a child to Himself and set him among them, and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you change and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. So whoever will humble himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one such child in My name, receives Me." *(Mt 18:2–5)*

According to the Lord Jesus, every believer ought to humble himself and become like a little child. In the kingdom of heaven—that is, the kingdom of God, or the church—there is no hierarchy of "greater" and "lesser." There is no "greatest" person in the church.

Unfortunately, the world incessantly urges us to climb corporate and social ladders—not to be an anonymous sheep but celebrated GOATs (Greatest Of All Time) of our generation. Hence, the desire to be "great" is one that many pursue earnestly. The Bible identifies this as a spiritual weakness that demands vigilance. The Pharisees loved the places of honor at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, and public recognition—to be called "Rabbi" by the people (Mt 23:6–7). In contrast, the Lord Jesus warned His disciples:

But as for you, do not be called Rabbi; for only One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers and sisters. …But the greatest of you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted." *(Mt 23:8–12)*

God esteems not the one who seeks prominence, but the one who, in prayer, sees himself as small and continually keeps a humble heart before Him. Jesus is our exemplar of One who did not come to be obsequiously served, but to serve and sacrifice.

The Overconfidence of Peter

But Peter replied to Him, "Even if they all fall away because of You, I will never fall away!" Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." Peter said to Him, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" All the disciples said the same thing as well. *(Mt 26:33–35)*

Peter had assured the Lord Jesus that, no matter the hardship or danger, he would stand by His side—even to death. Yet such resolve often requires the proving ground of severe trials to reveal its true strength and sincerity. Human beings frequently misjudge what lies ahead, unable to foresee the weight of the test until it arrives. And so, just as the Lord had foretold, before the rooster crowed, Peter denied Him three times.

In our life of faith, we must guard against overconfidence—the assumption that we can stand firm by our own strength. Scripture warns us soberly:

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let the one who thinks he stands watch out that he does not fall. *(1 Cor 10:11–12)*



There is no doubt that Peter loved the Lord deeply. When Judas came to Gethsemane with a detachment of troops and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, carrying lanterns, torches, and weapons to arrest his Master, Peter drew his sword and cut off the right ear of the high priest's servant. Peter sought to defend his Lord—forgetting that the One he had confessed as the Christ, the Son of the living God, had no need of human defense.

At that moment, Peter was bold, even reckless, driven by intense emotion. Yet later, in the courtyard of the high priest, after Jesus had been arrested and put on trial, that courage gave way to fear. The setting was overwhelming and wholly unexpected. Confronted and exposed, Peter denied even knowing Jesus. Earlier, the Lord had said to him, "[W]hen you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Lk 22:32). The phrase "when you have turned back" already implied that Peter would first fall. The Lord knew what Peter himself could not yet see—that he would not withstand the trial that was coming.

"The setting was overwhelming and wholly unexpected. Confronted and exposed, Peter denied even knowing Jesus"

That night, Peter was questioned three times: "This man was with Him as well." Each time he denied it more emphatically: "I do not know Him, woman!"; "Man, I am not!"; "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" And while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed, just as the Lord had foretold (Lk 22:54–62).

Peter's fall reminds us that sincere love, if not tempered by humility and dependence on God, is insufficient to withstand severe testing.

MENDING THE BREACH

The Lord's Compassionate Look

And then the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had told him, "Before a rooster crows today, you will deny Me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly. *(Lk 22:61–62)*

Amid the accusations of false witnesses and the high priest's harsh questioning, the Lord Jesus turned and looked at Peter with compassion. Jesus did not speak a word. He did not mock Peter for his earlier bravado and promises, or for thinking too highly of himself. What the Lord Jesus signaled was a silent mutual understanding—one look was enough to make Peter go out and weep bitterly.

The Lord had once warned:

"Therefore, everyone who confesses Me before people, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before people, I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven." *(Mt 10:32–33)*

Yet even before Peter denied his Master, Jesus had already made provision for his restoration. He prayed for the disciple who would falter in a moment of fear, and His only charge was that Peter would rise again at the place of his fall and—having learned through weakness—strengthen his brethren. When Jesus turned and looked at him, Peter remembered these words (Lk 22:61).

In this, Peter's experience becomes our own. All of us, in word or in deed, have at times failed to resemble those who belong to the Lord; in effect, we too have denied Him. Have we not often regretted the words we spoke, or felt ashamed of the things we did?

The Lord knows that intimidating circumstances are often more than ordinary people can endure. Even when the spirit is willing, the situation may render us powerless. At such moments, the Lord turns and looks at us—and in that silent glance we sense His understanding and compassion. Moved by His grace, we are led not to despair, but to repentance marked by sorrow.

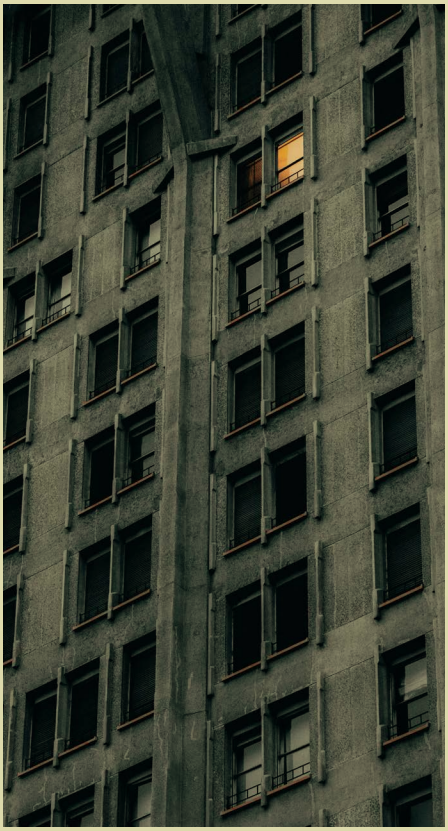
The Power of the Holy Spirit

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but became the chief cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among mankind by which we must be saved." *(Acts 4:8–12)*

"At such moments, the Lord turns and looks at us—and in that silent glance we sense His understanding and compassion"

After Peter received the Holy Spirit, he became a completely different person from who he had been before. No matter how severe the threats of persecution from the Jewish council were, they could no longer break him. His transformation reminds us that, in our life of faith and service, there are hurdles that we simply cannot overcome by our own strength. Only through the wondrous power of the Holy Spirit can we, like Peter, overcome and prevail.

Following Jesus is not a hidden matter; it is something others can see. If our lives bear no visible evidence that we follow Him, we ought to examine ourselves carefully. Peter, who once denied the Lord in fear, stood before the council with unmistakable boldness—confessing Jesus openly, bearing witness to His resurrection, and proclaiming His saving name. The



members of the Sanhedrin recognized that Peter and John were uneducated and untrained men, yet they marveled at their authority and courage, and realized that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).



CONCLUSION: FEAR GOD, FOLLOW JESUS, FIX THE BREACH

Many fear Satan more than they fear God. They dread his temptations, his attacks, and his power to harm. Yet the greatest danger is not Satan's assault from without, but a spiritual breach from within—allowing him access to the heart, as happened to Judas. Once Satan entered Judas' heart, Judas became hardened and resolute in betraying the Lord. In the end, overwhelmed by despair and unable to find a reason to live, he took his own life.

Therefore, we must remain alert to the spiritual gaps within us, constantly examining our hearts, maintaining honesty and uprightness, gentleness and humility. We ought to be strict with ourselves and lenient with others, and be watchful against covetousness, money, and lust. This is how we never give any place to the devil.

Most importantly, when we have sinned, let us attentively sense the Lord turning to glance at us. With sorrow and repentance, and the help of His Holy Spirit, we can once again rise courageously!

THE HEART OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD (PART 1): FAITHFULNESS IN TENDING THE FLOCK

FF Chong—London, UK

Editor's note: For many of us who grow up, live, and work in bustling cities and comfortable physical environs, we have only a vague notion of how difficult shepherding can be. Even more so, the Scriptures emphasize that spiritual shepherding is a ministry that demands faithfulness, endurance, and deep submission to God.

The Heart of the Good Shepherd *and* The Prayers of the Good Shepherd *are a duet of articles, to be published over a series of issues, exploring our service to God from complementary angles. We begin with* The Heart of the Good Shepherd, *which is split further into two parts, examining what kind of shepherd God desires, drawing from the life and ministry of the prophet Jeremiah. Sent to a rebellious people, Jeremiah remained faithful despite rejection, suffering and apparent failure.* The Heart of the Good Shepherd (Part 2): Preparing to Feed the Flock *will follow in an upcoming issue.*



To the world, a good worker in any field or profession is characterized by efficiency, popularity, or visible success. But what does it truly mean to be a good shepherd in God's church?

"Then I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding." (Jer 3:15)

God Himself declared that His primary criterion for a good shepherd is a heart aligned with His heart. And one key attribute of the God we worship is faithfulness (Deut 7:9; Lam 3:22–23). What lessons can we learn from the prophet Jeremiah about faithful shepherding?

1. FAITHFULNESS BEYOND TASK COMPLETION

Faithfulness is often understood as diligently carrying out assigned duties. While this is not unimportant, the Scriptures offer a deeper, more demanding definition. When Jeremiah was called, God did not merely assign

him a role; He imposed a divine requirement:

"Because everywhere I send you,
you shall go,
And all that I command you,
you shall speak." *(Jer 1:7b)*

Faithfulness, therefore, is not about choosing tasks that suit our temperament or comfort. It requires the denial of personal preference—going where God sends and speaking what God commands, even when the audience is resistant, hostile, or dismissive. True shepherding does not allow selective obedience.

Our natural human tendency is to gravitate toward "easier" pastoral encounters—speaking to and caring for those who are receptive, regular, and affirming—while quietly avoiding the difficult, critical, or seemingly recalcitrant. Jeremiah's calling makes it clear that faithfulness requires shepherding all whom God places under our care, not only those who respond well.

As experienced shepherds, we emulate the gentleness and meekness of Moses (Num 12:3), and heed the apostle Paul's advice to constantly let our speech be gracious (Col 4:6). However, there will be times when we must speak firmly to correct, even at the risk of offending. For example, when we see church doctrines preached incorrectly, we must courageously and faithfully speak on the truth that has been given to the church.

2. SHEPHERDING A REBELLIOUS AND BACKSLIDING PEOPLE

Then the Lord said to me in the days of King Josiah, "Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every leafy tree, and she prostituted herself there." *(Jer 3:6)*

Caring for obedient and healthy sheep is immediately gratifying. But we see from Scripture that God repeatedly directs His servants toward those who are rebellious, wounded, or drifting away (Isa 1:4–5; 2 Kgs 17:13–14). Jeremiah was sent to a people whose backsliding was egregious—they turned away from God (Jer 3:21), worshipped idols (Jer 3:6), killed prophets (Neh 9:26), and remained unrepentant even after chastisement (Jer 2:30; 5:3).

Their condition was not ignorance but rebelliousness. God Himself diagnosed the root problem: they followed "the stubbornness of their evil heart" (Jer 3:17; 18:12). Such rebelliousness is a form of spiritual sickness which requires the Lord's healing (Jer 3:22).

Faithful shepherding, therefore, is not



merely about visiting, speaking, or ticking off a pastoral checklist. Its aim is restoration—the good shepherd seeks to bring the wandering soul back to God Himself. The great challenge, however, is that these sheep neither welcome nor are grateful for our efforts, particularly when we have to deliver God's uncompromising messages (Jer 4:22; 5:20–21). Faithfulness as a shepherd demands that we persist.

Today, how many of our peers have left the faith? What have we done to help them return? Do we feel the same great sense of urgency that we would feel in interceding for brethren who are terminally ill and at death's door? Just as Jeremiah was sent to a rebellious nation, our task is to look for those who have left the faith, are weak in faith, or are living in sin. No matter how hostile or disdainful we think they may be, our task is to urge them to return because the judgment of God is looming (Jer 4:5–6).

3. FAITHFULNESS THAT ACCEPTS SACRIFICE AND PHYSICAL DEPRIVATION

Moreover, the Lord made it
known to me and I knew it;
Then You showed me their deeds.
But I was like a gentle lamb
led to the slaughter;
And I did not know that they had
devised plots against me, saying,
"Let's destroy the tree with its fruit,
And let's cut him off from the land
of the living,
So that his name will no longer be
remembered." *(Jer 11:18–19)*

Jeremiah's obedience went beyond just tolerating brief physical inconvenience. His faithfulness exposed him to hunger, confinement, pain, and the constant threat of death. He was beaten and placed in stocks, imprisoned, and later cast into a cistern where he sank into the mire (Jer 20:1–2; 38:6). At one point, his daily provision was reduced to a single piece of bread (Jer 37:21).

A good shepherd accepts that obedience to God might demand the surrender of basic comforts—food, rest, safety, and dignity. Jeremiah did not negotiate the terms of his calling. He



did not withdraw when service became physically draining or materially costly. He endured.

The apostle Paul eloquently described all the physical torment he endured as God's faithful preacher and shepherd.

Are they servants of Christ?—I am speaking as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent adrift at sea. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers at sea, dangers among false brothers; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. *(2 Cor 11:23–28)*

Very few—if any—of us will be called on to be martyred for our faith, or even to suffer what Paul did. But we may be sent on missions devoid of the comforts we have grown used to, not just once, but repeatedly. Will we only be "faithful" to the extent that our physical comfort is not overly affected? Are we ready to bear physical deprivation for an extended period of time?

Both Jeremiah and Paul were able to endure extreme physical torment, but not because of stoic self-reliance. From the beginning, God assured Jeremiah, "I am with you to save you" (Jer 1:8). When Jeremiah was left to die in the cistern, God raised an unexpected deliverer to rescue him. God did not promise comfort, but He did promise presence. Deliverance came in God's way and in God's time. While God's grace is sufficient, we must do our part to inculcate in ourselves the willingness to serve God to the very end.

4. ENDURANCE IN THE FACE OF REJECTION AND OPPOSITION

"For even your brothers and the household of your father,
Even they have dealt treacherously with you,
Even they have called aloud after you.
Do not believe them, though they say nice things to you." *(Jer 12:6)*



Beyond physical hardship, Jeremiah endured deep social and emotional stress. He was mocked publicly, conspired against by leaders, betrayed by his own hometown, and opposed even by family members (Jer 11:18–20; 12:6). His obedience to God did not shield him from misunderstandings or hostility; instead, it often intensified them. Today, we may experience similar tension within our family. Perhaps our loved ones are unhappy that we spend the whole day in church every Sabbath instead of with them, or that we prioritize church activities over family outings, and so on. In such situations, we can learn perseverance and discernment from Jeremiah and other biblical role models.

"Yet in every trial, God remained faithful. Just as God delivered Jeremiah and Paul, He will grant His servants wisdom to do what is right in His sight"

Faithfulness does not mean ignoring legitimate responsibilities (1 Tim 3:4–5; 5:8; Lk 2:51) or refusing self-examination. Endurance in service must be accompanied by humility and wisdom. Lest we be a stumbling block, we must also reflect prayerfully: Can we adjust our schedules to achieve a better balance between our church and familial commitments? When we are with family, are we fully present for them?

At the same time, Jeremiah reminds us that resistance alone is not a reason to withdraw from God's calling. Obedience to God does not guarantee a smooth path; rather, godly service often attracts resistance. Jeremiah endured not because of personal resilience, but because he trusted the One who called him. His perseverance teaches that shepherding requires spiritual stamina, sustained through continual reliance on God (Jer 18:22–23).



The apostle Paul bears the same testimony. He reminds Timothy that persecution and affliction are not anomalies, but part of faithful ministry. Yet in every trial, God remained faithful. Just as God delivered Jeremiah and Paul, He will grant His servants wisdom to do what is right in His sight.

Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! Indeed, all who want to live in a godly way in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil people and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them. *(2 Tim 3:10–14)*

5. TURNING TO GOD RATHER THAN RETALIATING AGAINST PEOPLE

I have become a laughingstock all day long;
Everyone mocks me. *(Jer 20:7b)*

All my trusted friends,
Watching for my fall, say:
"Perhaps he will be persuaded,
so that we may prevail against him
And take our revenge on him."
(Jer 20:10b)

While endurance speaks to what a shepherd must face, another crucial attribute concerns how he responds. One of the most difficult-to-attain marks of a good shepherd is the refusal to retaliate when wronged.

Jeremiah was beaten and placed in stocks by Pashhur the priest (Jer 20:1–2), falsely accused of treason and imprisoned (Jer 37), and eventually lowered into a cistern where he sank into mire and was left to die (Jer 38:6). These were not abstract trials, but humiliating and frightening experiences inflicted by the very people he was sent to shepherd. But Jeremiah did not respond by seeking revenge, rallying supporters, or defending himself through manipulation or human alliances. Instead, he consistently turned to God. When he discovered that men from his own hometown had plotted to kill him and even his family had betrayed him, he brought the matter before the Lord in prayer (Jer 11:20; 12:1). When mocked daily and surrounded by informants waiting for him to stumble, Jeremiah poured out his anguish before God rather than strike back at his accusers (Jer 20:11–13).

In prayer, Jeremiah did not suppress his pain or pretend that injustice did not hurt. But instead of allowing resentment to harden his heart, he brought his distress before God. This



action preserved both his faithfulness and his spiritual clarity. Jeremiah understood that he could not please everyone or defend himself against every accusation. His role was not self-justification, but obedience. God would vindicate him in His own time.

This posture runs throughout the Scriptures. Moses, when attacked repeatedly by the Israelites and even challenged by his own siblings, fell on his face before God rather than assert his authority (Num 12). David, pursued unjustly by Saul, refused to raise his hand against "the Lord's anointed," choosing instead to entrust his life to God's judgment (1 Sam 24). The apostles, when beaten and threatened, prayed for boldness rather than revenge (Acts 4:23–31). Paul, falsely accused and slandered, committed his defense to God and continued preaching the gospel without bitterness (2 Tim 4:16–18).

Our Lord Jesus Himself embodies the perfect shepherd's response:

[A]nd while being abusively insulted, He did not insult in return; while suffering, He did not threaten, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.
(1 Pet 2:23)

His silence before His accusers and His prayerful submission to the Father were not signs of weakness, but of complete trust in God.

CONCLUSION

Our God sees not as man sees: man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart (1 Sam 16:7). The heart of a good shepherd is one of responsibility, sacrifice, perseverance, and humble reliance on God. Our obedient service may be met with physical violence, criticism, misunderstanding, or rejection. The temptation to defend oneself is real. By turning to God rather than retaliating, the shepherd's heart is kept free from bitterness, ensuring that our ministry leads others not to ourselves but to God.





PASTORING OUR NEW SHEEP

Eugene Tang—Newcastle, UK

There is a saying, "When fishermen cannot go to sea, they repair nets." This means that a key part of a fisherman's success is the work of preparation and maintenance. This wisdom is not new. Even in the time of Jesus, maintaining fishing nets was a core part of their work (Mt 4:21; Lk 5:2). Although it would not bring immediate monetary gains, fishermen recognized that their future efforts would be futile if their nets were not in an optimal condition, even when the opportunity for a large catch arose.

"Our newly baptized members can be like these fish, in danger of being lost if we do not maintain our nets"

By God's grace, we are welcoming more new members into the fold, and we see them progress from curious friends to accepting Jesus as their Savior. We are, therefore, understandably overjoyed when they are baptized into the household of God, like fishermen who have found a big catch, eagerly bringing the net to shore. However, if nets are not maintained, gaps and holes will form, resulting in disappointment and loss. Whilst some fish may remain, many will slip away, despite our best efforts and the time spent bringing them in. Our newly baptized members can be like these fish, in danger of being lost if we do not maintain our nets. As a church, we need to be diligent and active in pastoring our new members so that they can remain in the fold.

RECOGNIZING NEWBORN BABES

Many of our new members have had the opportunity to learn about our basic beliefs, taking part in activities such as truth classes in the lead-up to baptism. However, they have not grown up with the spiritual cultivation that comes from religious education, spiritual convocations, and theological training seminars. Building this foundation is a step that should not be missed. We can see the importance of this in many

biblical examples, including Timothy:

[F]rom childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.
(2 Tim 3:15)

Knowing God from childhood and growing up with spiritual companions are blessings for the development of one's faith. Believers raised in the faith are constantly reminded that it is through Jesus that we have our hope of

"Before baptism, their initial curiosity and desire to know God better through His word led them into God's household, just as it did for the Ethiopian eunuch"

salvation. Many of our newly baptized, especially adults, have not had such opportunities. So, as a community of faith, the first step is to recognize that these fully grown adults are spiritually newborn babes. And the encouraging fact is that newborn babes are at a stage in life where they have a strong thirst for, and a desire to grow in, the word.

[L]ike newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.
(1 Pet 2:2–3)

Our new members have already experienced God's grace and recognize His importance in their lives. Before baptism, their initial curiosity and desire to know God better through His word led them into God's household, just as it did for the Ethiopian eunuch.

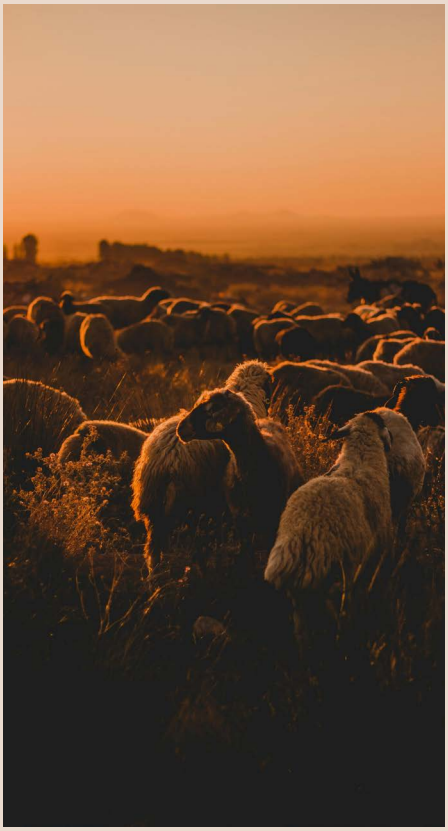
Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. *(Acts 8:30–31)*

The eunuch understood his need for guidance before he could comprehend. But he could only pose the question because Phillip approached him and asked whether he understood. It was this very interaction that made guidance and understanding possible, and it was not passive. It required diligence and effort from Phillip and a thirst from the eunuch; both parties had to work together to achieve this breakthrough.

Such mutual diligence must continue after baptism to ensure that our newly baptized members remain in the fold.

There will be a period where we need to treat our newly baptized members like newborn infants. Newborns crave their mother's milk and are totally reliant on her for nourishment and growth. Like a mother, as a church, we need to be mindful and sensitive to our new members' needs, providing opportunities to supply the spiritual nourishment they seek.

But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not



only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.
(1 Thess 2:7–8)

It may require additional effort and diligence to ask our new members whether they understand what they hear at church or read at home, and this may feel uncomfortable at first. But if we truly have the heart to guide them, this is an effort worth making, as our newly baptized members do not grow from spiritual infancy to adulthood overnight. Just as parents take responsibility for the growth and well-being of their children, the church needs to do the same, helping our newly baptized members build a solid foundation and relationship with our Father in heaven.

A COMMUNITY OF FAITH

Newly baptized members come from a variety of cultures and social backgrounds, so they may take some time to form connections with other brethren. Even those who already have spouses or family members in the church may not immediately feel a sense of belonging within the community of faith.

If we look at the example of the apostolic church, we can see how they cared for newly baptized members and integrated them into the community of faith:

So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.
(Acts 2:41–42)

We can see how the early church valued its newly baptized members. Together, they diligently continued in the doctrine they had learned, had fellowship, and prayed. But they also socialized with one another by breaking bread. The work did not stop once the three thousand souls were baptized. They continued to gather, and they did even more for one another because they were together.

And all the believers were together and had all things in common; and they would sell their property and possessions and share them with all, to the extent that anyone had need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness

"When we bring souls into the household of God, we bring them into the light"

and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who wre being saved.
(Acts 2:44–47)

Here, the early church reached a point where there was no distinction between new believers and those who had already believed. In fact, the Bible says, "all the believers were together and had all things in common." This describes a wonderful stage in the early apostolic church, and we see that God continued to work with the church as more were added daily. There is no segregation in a community of faith, and this unity is cultivated through continuing in doctrine and fellowship in the light. The

importance of remaining in the light cannot be underestimated.

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. *(1 Jn 1:5–7)*

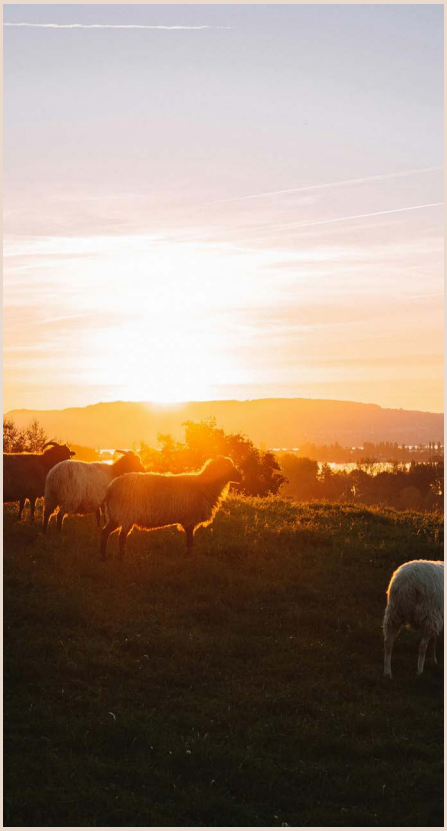
In his encouragement, John reminds believers what true fellowship with one another means: walking in the light, because our Father is Light. When we bring souls into the household of God, we bring them into the light, and they become light *in the Lord* (Eph 5:8).

Thus, as brethren, we need to be observant to ensure that newly baptized members remain in the light. It is rare for brethren to depart abruptly and unexpectedly from the light and the community of faith—there are usually warning signs of backsliding. It may begin with missing the occasional worship service or providing excuses for their non-attendance. It may be a reluctance to receive brethren for activities such as visitation or to attend fellowships when encouraged to do so. Over time, such instances become more common and, ultimately, normalized. There is a danger of losing them to the darkness again, once they stop having fellowship within the light. If we are honest with ourselves, these early warning signs should have prompted timely actions.

As a community of faith, we must do our utmost to be attentive to our newly baptized members' needs so that they can be integrated into the fold. We also need to be ready to step in if we notice any wavering in their willingness to engage with the community of faith, so we can quickly help them recenter their lives on God.

ENCOURAGING HOUSEHOLDS

Although we can provide a community of faith for new members, we should also recognize that they do not exist in isolation. They, too, will have their own communities outside the church—such as their families—which continue to be sources of support and comfort. There may be circumstances when a newly baptized member feels conflicted due to differing priorities and principles.



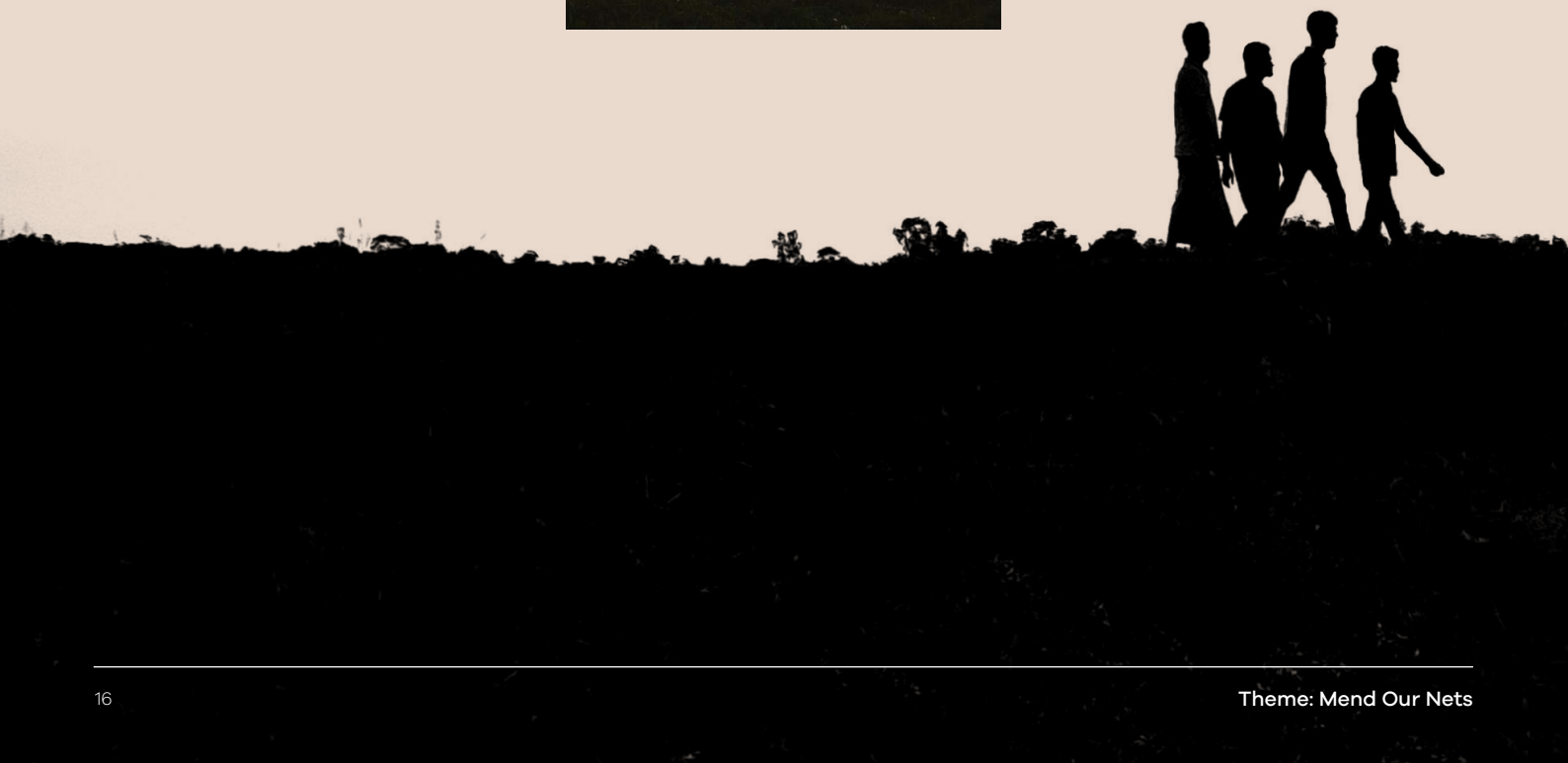
As a church, we need to find ways not only to strengthen our newly baptized members but also to help them become living testimonies of the gospel of truth so that they can draw others into the fold. The first group to receive their testimony would often be their family members who are yet to believe.

When the apostles were preaching, they would, when the opportunity arose, include the whole household. The Philippian jailer is one such example:

They said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." And they spoke the word of God to him together with all who were in his house. And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household. And he brought them into his house and set food before them, and was overjoyed, since he had become a believer in God together with his whole household. *(Acts 16:31–34)*

"We need to find ways to help our newly baptized members navigate these obstacles by inviting their families to our church"

It was clear to Paul and Silas that it was important to include the jailer's entire household. When the jailer asked what he needed to do to be saved, he spoke only of himself (Acts 16:30). However, in response, Paul and Silas told him that salvation was intended for him and his



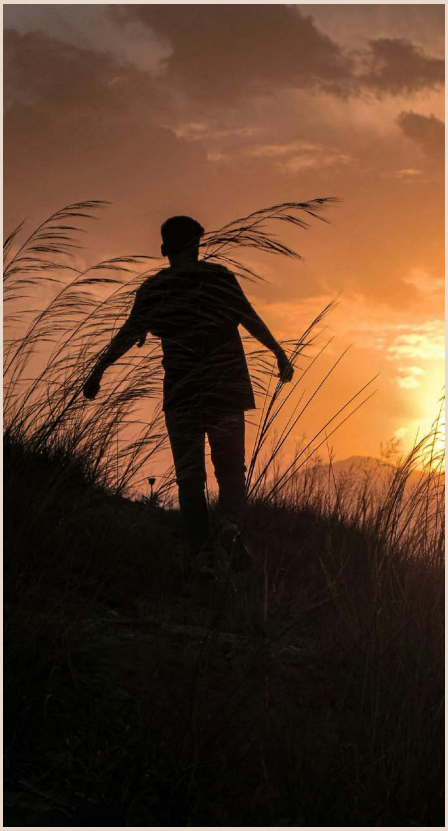
household, and that he needed only to believe in the Lord Jesus. Through these words, the jailer and his household were baptized and saved.

It is often easy to focus on one believer rather than on others around him, particularly if his family members are not part of the church. The unintended consequence of this can be conflict—conflicting values, activities, and ideals. This believer will then find himself caught in the middle and having to resolve these conflicts on his own. On the other hand, these areas of conflict are also opportunities. We must find ways to help our newly baptized members navigate these obstacles by inviting their families to our church and offering them the hope of salvation.

As a church, we need to recognize that, though difficult, it is essential to help preserve our newly baptized members within the community of faith. The difficulty lies in the fact that these household influences may not be clearly visible until after the believer is baptized. We may know little about the believer's family or their attitudes towards the church; they may engage in worldly activities such as celebrating Christmas or Halloween, which are in direct conflict with our faith. The key here is not to ignore this wider household, but to take every opportunity to speak with and meet them.

Let's not become discouraged in doing good, for in due time we will reap, if we do not become weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let's do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. *(Gal 6:9–10)*

As children of God, we need to be mindful to do good at every opportunity, especially toward those already in the household of faith. This extends to doing good to the families of those in the household of faith, with the goal of bringing them into the fold as well. If we are to truly support our newly baptized members, we need to find ways to share the good news with their households, which, in turn, will help them overcome the challenges and conflicts that may arise. There may not be any immediate changes—it may take many months, and likely many years. But as long as we do not become discouraged or grow weary of doing good, then through prayer and encouragement, God will surely help us in every aspect of this work.

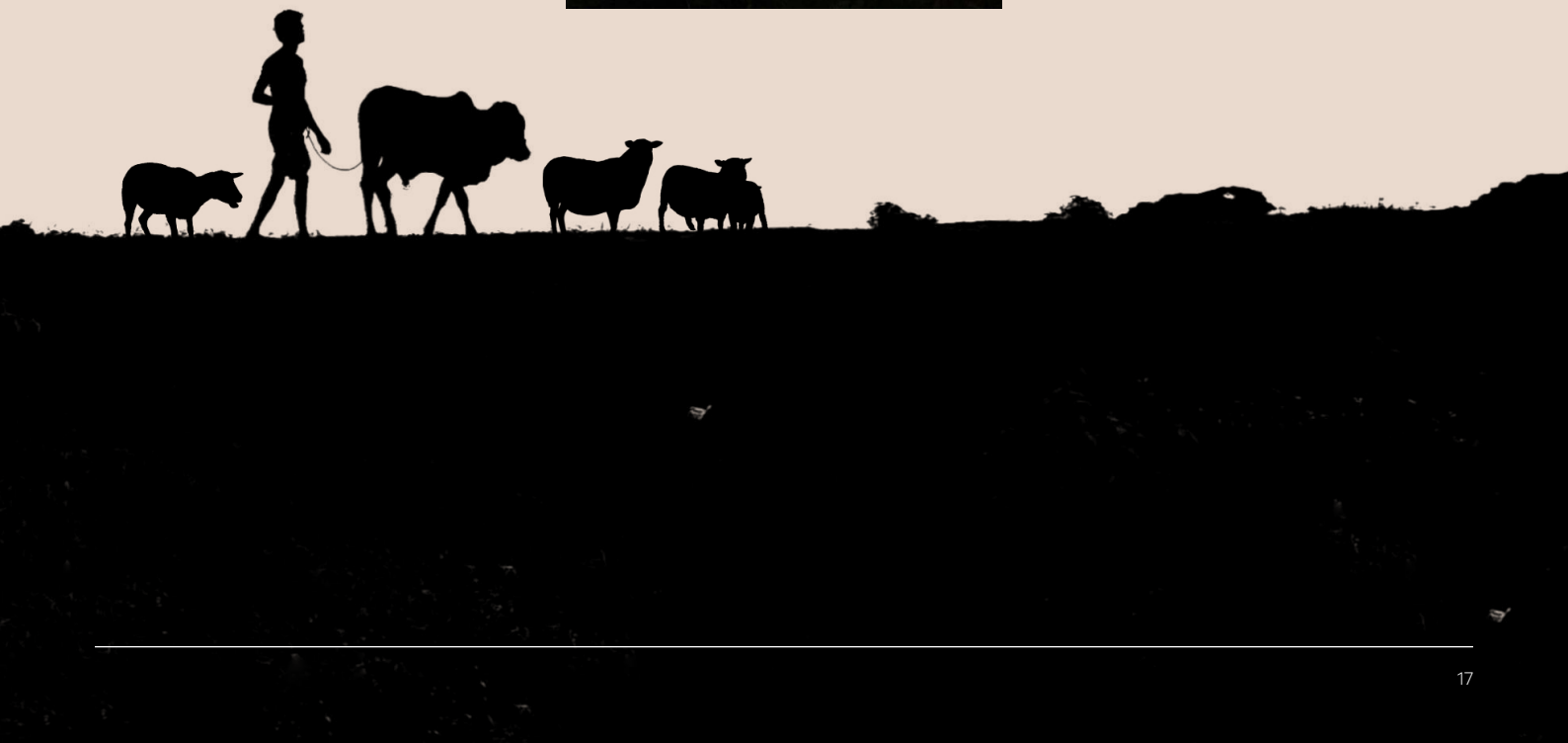


CONCLUSION

Our missions to preach and to pastor are not mutually exclusive—they go hand in hand, particularly as we guide newly baptized members early in their spiritual journey. Looking at a fishing net, the strength of a repair lies not just in the material used but also in ensuring the damaged area is trimmed before twisting and weaving new material into the gaps. It takes time and effort to inspect and repair. The same attention needs to be given to all members, especially the newly baptized.

[T]hat their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and that they would attain to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself. *(Col 2:2)*

Whilst we may not be skilled fishermen, weaving in new twine, we can work toward knitting together our community of faith in love, fully embracing and supporting our new members. The goal of any repair is to match the original as closely as possible—this is even more important when the pattern and material dictate the strength of the fishing net. The aim is to make the repair almost indistinguishable. Over time, our new members will become an integral part of this net, so that they, too, can bring more into the fold. Just as the apostles believed together, we must diligently continue to pastor newly baptized members so they feel part of the community of faith. Through spiritual nourishment, they can continue to grow and, ultimately, be saved with their entire household.



SEEKING THE LOST: SEEK, SAVE, SERVE

Barnabas Chong—Singapore

When we look around at our brothers and sisters, we may notice some are missing. Many who once worshipped with us, perhaps even served alongside us, are no longer present. This is a reality today across all age groups. Friends who grew up attending religious education with us may have gradually drifted away. These are the lost sheep of God's flock.

Jesus saved each one of us, and through Him we have the hope of heaven. Individually, we have the responsibility of nurturing this hope within us, to ensure our own salvation and to remain steadfast in the one true church (Phil 2:12). For this reason, we cannot force members to stay or compel them to return against their will—especially by our own methods. However, Jesus has commissioned His church to care for His sheep, including bringing back those who have strayed. So, how should we approach the difficult task of seeking the lost?

SEEK

"What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the other ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he puts it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost!' I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance." *(Lk 15:4–7)*

Jesus' parable of the lost sheep illustrates the active nature of seeking the lost. A shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep to seek the lost one, and rejoices upon returning with it. Our human inclination may be to accept the loss of a single sheep, focusing our attention on the remaining ninety-nine. We may consider the search for the missing one to be too great an effort, given the vast wilderness and the need to tend to the rest of the flock. From a business perspective, we would accept a calculated loss rather than sacrifice significant time and resources for such a small return.

> "We understand how precious these sheep are, and the urgency and effort with which we should seek"

The faithful shepherd does not think in this way. He goes in search of this single sheep simply because this lost sheep belongs to him. Jesus implores us to have this same tenacious spirit when seeking His lost sheep.

Consider our response when we lose something important, like our keys or mobile phone. We search tirelessly, looking high and low, for as long as it takes, until we locate the lost item. On the other hand, if we misplace something insignificant, we may not even search for it. When it comes to seeking the lost sheep of God's flock, which attitude do we have? We understand how precious these sheep are, and the urgency and effort with which we should seek. But we give up at the first hurdle, or are reluctant even to begin, because of the persistence and endurance required to undertake the search.

When I first became a preacher over a decade ago, I perused the church members' directory. I did not know half of the members, so I made an effort to get to know my flock. Sadly, I discovered that some individuals around my age had stopped attending church many years ago. Finding such long-lapsed believers presents a significant challenge—how do we even begin?

We must begin with hope—holding fast to the hope that God will not cease in seeking His lost sheep. With this trust that God will find a way, we will think creatively to overcome any obstacles that arise. For example, if the contact details we have for the lost sheep are out of date, we can explore alternative ways to reach them. This may include connecting through relatives or through members who were once close to them.

When faced with difficulties, it is easy to focus on challenges that seem insurmountable, and despair may set in. But we must press on to search with single-minded determination.

"Or what woman, if she has ten silver

coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, because I have found the coin which I had lost!' " *(Lk 15:8–9)*

Jesus illustrates this single-mindedness in the parable of the lost coin. A woman diligently sweeps her house, searching every dark nook and cranny, until she finds her lost coin. This is the focus we need when seeking the precious lost souls.

SAVE

"I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance." *(Lk 15:7)*

"In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." *(Lk 15:10)*

These verses highlight the immense weight of the task before us and the great significance of that which we seek. The lost sheep is one of a hundred, and the lost coin is one of ten, reflecting how valuable they are to their owners. It is no surprise, then, that their owners would want to celebrate with friends and neighbors when they are found. In the same way, the lost sheep of God's flock are even more precious in God's eyes: when one returns, all the angels in heaven rejoice!

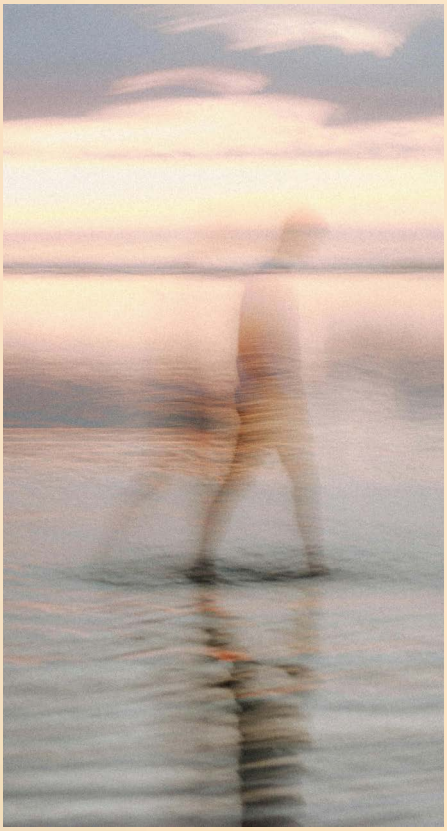
My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you strays from the truth and someone turns him back, let him know that the one who has turned a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and cover a multitude of sins. *(Jas 5:19–20)*

When we find a lost sheep and turn him from the path of sin and destruction, we save his soul and cover a multitude of sins. Are we willing to participate in this soul-saving work?

[S]ave others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh. *(Jude 23)*

Jude vividly imagines the lost as being in the fire. If we knew that our friend was on fire, what would we do? It is often the case that when someone is in danger, witnesses at the scene take out their phones to document the event. We may wonder why nobody is lending a hand. It is most likely that they are unwilling to risk their lives to save a stranger. But if a friend is in trouble, we would naturally attempt to save them, even if we may be harmed. We would not stand by and watch them burn alive.

Similarly, if a friend or relative has stopped attending church for a long time, they may be on the path of destruction. Do we dismiss the spiritual jeopardy they are in and give up simply because it requires significant effort to pull them from the flames? We should genuinely consider how to save them



and make every effort to do so. The only reason to relinquish the fight is if there is no longer any hope for them:

For if we go on sinning wilfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. *(Heb 10:26–27)*

Some of our lost sheep have already reached this state of spiritual death, having turned apostate or breaking the commandments willfully or unrepentantly. Sadly, we can no longer intercede for such sheep.

"Understanding why someone has gone astray allows us to reflect on how best to encourage them to return. We must patiently care for the weak with empathy and humility, seeing things from their perspective"

Among the lost, some may be difficult to find or unwilling to return. In such cases, we can set aside our active searching, yet continue to intercede and entrust them to God in prayers. By God's grace, He may open an opportunity for us to resume the search in the future—timing and approach matter. For example, a lost sheep who once did not welcome contact with the church may be more receptive after some time has passed and emotions have mellowed. Another mistake would be rebuking a lost sheep from a position of superiority, which would only cause further alienation. So, what is the best approach?

For though I am free from all people, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may gain more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might gain Jews; to those who are under the Law, I became as one under the Law, though not being under the Law myself, so that I might gain those who are under the Law; to those who are without the Law, I became as one without the Law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might gain those who are without the Law. To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak; I have become all

things to all people, so that I may by all means save some. I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it. (1 Cor 9:19–23)

Paul explains how he tailors his approach to each individual he preaches to. Coming from a place of empathy and understanding, he is able to share the message with people from diverse backgrounds in ways that resonate with them. He is mindful of those whose faith is not as strong as his own, so that they, too, can accept the gospel of salvation.

We cannot have an attitude of superiority and reproach toward a lost sheep. Even the phrase, "I haven't seen you for a long time," could be interpreted as a rebuke by someone who is already feeling self-conscious. Understanding why someone has gone astray allows us to reflect on how best to encourage them to return. We must patiently care for the weak with empathy and humility, seeing things from their perspective.

More importantly, let us not have the mindset of the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son. When the younger son returned, the older brother despised him and was filled with indignation:

"But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you never gave me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.' " (Lk 15:28–30)

While his grievances were valid, his father's attitude was different.

"But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.' " (Lk 15:32)

We should manifest the father's warm, welcoming attitude when a lost sheep returns, so he will no longer stray. The shepherd, rejoicing that he has found the lost sheep, lays the sheep on his shoulders, because he does not want it to go missing again. If a sheep is unwilling to be carried, it cannot be brought back. For those who are reluctant to return, we can entrust them to the Lord and continue seeking other sheep, trusting that the Lord, in His own way, will bring back His own.

SERVE

"Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." (Mt 28:19)

This commission from Jesus is the basis of our service to God, but it is often interpreted as referring only to preaching. In reality, Jesus is commanding us not only to preach to all nations, but to make disciples. There



is a distinction between someone who believes in God and a disciple. Some members are content to attend one Sabbath service a week, but show no zeal for serving God. While afternoon Sabbath services are often at full capacity, other services, fellowship sessions, and divine works have low participation levels. Discipleship demands that we follow the Lord and carry out His work, rather than just enjoying a weekly hour of worship.

The task of bringing back lost sheep does not end when the believer has returned to the fold. We must continue to care for them as they rediscover their faith and reconnect with our heavenly Father. During this precarious time of transition, they may still be vulnerable to temptation and attack. We must serve and tend these sheep with love and persistence (Jn 21:17), until they are strong enough to start serving God themselves. This is one way to accomplish Jesus' command to make disciples.

It may seem far-fetched to hope that a lost sheep could return to embrace discipleship and become a zealous worker. But we see that the apostle Peter underwent a very similar trajectory. Even though he stumbled and denied Jesus three times—the nadir of his faith—by God's grace, he stood back up. That is the hallmark of a disciple.

As we seek to cultivate discipleship among the returned sheep, we must also do so ourselves:

Pay close attention to yourself and to the teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will save both yourself and those who hear you. (1 Tim 4:16)

When we pursue Christian virtues with those who call on God from a pure heart (2 Tim 2:22), we forge strong bonds of fellowship and support. This forms a network of pastoral care, so that we can help one another remain in the fold.

CONCLUSION

When we are aware of the Lord's saving grace in our lives, we will actively and determinedly seek the lost, saving them from the fire, and serving them so that they no longer stray. Our ultimate hope is that they, too, will embrace discipleship and serve God alongside us. As we grow in unity and faithfulness, supporting one another in spiritual companionship, the likelihood that any of us will become a lost sheep will significantly diminish. This is the hope that we must hold on to as we embark on this work.

Let us all faithfully participate in this ministry of seeking the lost sheep, entrusting them to the One who is able to find and bring back those who belong to Him. Amen.

WINNING BACK THE NEXT GENERATION FOR THE LORD

Timothy Yeung—Calgary, Canada

There is a Chinese saying: "The later waves of the Yangtze River push the earlier waves forward." It reminds us of the steady passing of generations. Children grow into adults; adults grow old; one generation gives way to the next. Yet, while time moves forward, the mission of God's church remains unchanged. The work of the church must continue.

As workers and faithful believers, we know well the church's mission to preach the gospel and to contend for the faith. However, in our zeal to reach those outside the church, we may overlook a more immediate responsibility—the hearts and spiritual well-being of our own children, the next generation within the household of faith. This is a battlefield that is equally critical and even more urgent because our children—properly nurtured—are the future of the church.

Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, The fruit of the womb is a reward.
(Ps 127:3, NKJV)[1]

As parents, we naturally want our children to have more comfortable or more secure lives than we had. So, material provision immediately comes to mind when considering the legacy we hope to leave our children. But Scripture reminds us that children themselves are a heritage entrusted to us by God. Among all the inheritances we might pass on, one surpasses the rest: a living faith in God that endures beyond this life.

"If we do not intentionally nurture and strengthen our children, what happens tomorrow is not guaranteed"



What are the many dangers that threaten the building of this inheritance?

RECOGNIZING THE ENEMY'S STRATEGIES

Beware Amalek: Attack From the Rear

"Remember what Amalek did…how he confronted you on the way and attacked among you all the stragglers at your rear when you were tired and weary; and he did not fear God." *(Deut 25:17–18)*

As Israel journeyed through the wilderness, they encountered many adversities and adversaries. But Moses specifically mentioned Amalek, who attacked the stragglers at the rear. This enemy did not strike the strongest at the front but preyed on the weary and vulnerable. We often interpret these "stragglers" as spiritually weak believers. But they could also include those who are still young in faith—such as our children, who have yet to establish their own spiritual foundations.

Many of us assume that children will "grow into" faith naturally. Faced with the occasional childish or rebellious teenage lack of interest in faith and church activities, we tell ourselves that one day they will stand firmly on their own. But spiritual growth rarely happens by accident. If we do not intentionally nurture and strengthen our children, what happens tomorrow is not guaranteed.

Our adversary, the devil, does not overlook the young. He prowls back and forth, seeking precisely those whose convictions are not yet firm, and those who are used to a "cushy" faith journey where other brethren can fight their spiritual battles for them. These are easily distracted and lured away. This is why we need to encourage spiritual companionship among the young, so they learn to "flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" (2 Tim 2:22).

Beware Pharaoh: Killer of Sons

[A]nd he said, "When you are helping the Hebrew women to give birth and see them upon the birthstool, if it is a son, then you shall put him to death; but if it is a daughter, then she shall live." *(Ex 1:16)*

Before Joseph died, the Israelites enjoyed prosperity and protection in Egypt. After

[1] Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



his death, a new Pharaoh arose in Egypt who "did not know Joseph." Fearing the fast-growing Israelite population, he ordered the Hebrew midwives to kill the newborn sons. It was a calculated and clever strategy aimed at the future: with no men, the women of Israel would "marry into" Egypt, and gradually the nation of Israel would disappear.

In every age, the struggle for the next generation is decisive. Those who have matured in faith remain steadfast through long practice and conviction. Church attendance and service to the Lord are non-negotiable priorities. The young, however, are still forming their identity and priorities. Moreover, the pressures faced by youth everywhere are real: academic competition, career ambition, social expectations, relational influences, and relentless digital distraction. Without guidance, these can quietly crowd out spiritual concerns. In time, the slow drifting culminates in a complete departure.

ANCHORING OUR SONS

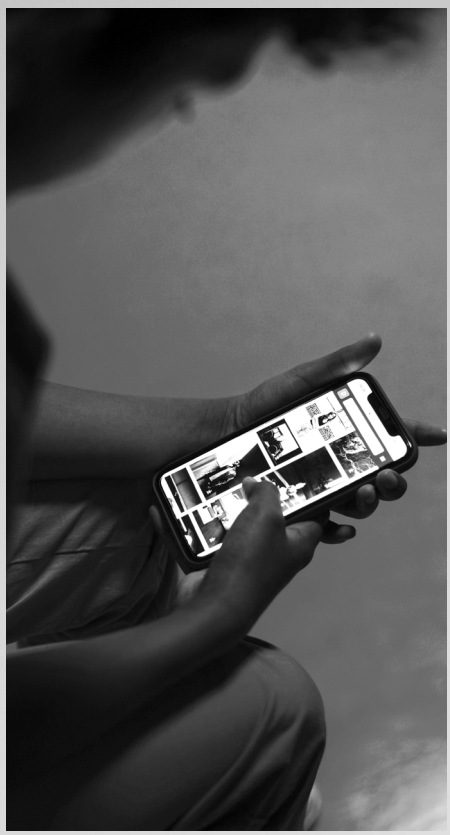
For a long time, religion research has found that women tend to be more religious than men.[1] Indeed, in some locations, True Jesus Church members observe that sisters seem to be more fervent and faithful from a young age. In addition, researchers have noted that excessive digital consumption, as well as sexual temptation and pornography,[2] are key challenges for adolescent males. Let us therefore beware the evil one's targeting of our sons.

Beware the Dragon: Raging Deluge which Sweeps Away

And the serpent hurled water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood. ...and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. *(Rev 12:15–17)*

The imagery of a serpent spewing a massive torrent to sweep away the woman suggests great intensity and persistence. Satan's opposition of the true church manifests in two ways.

First, it may be overt—persecution, restriction, or hostility toward Christian worship. For example, in certain places, authorities prohibit believers from attending church services until they reach legal adulthood. When the habit of worship is not formed in youth, it becomes far less likely that one will cultivate it later in life. Therefore, for those of us who do not face such restrictions, we ought to cherish the freedom we have to gather openly for worship and to take our children along with us. Such freedom is not merely a civil privilege; it is a precious opportunity



to establish—as a family—a close relationship with our heavenly Father, shaping young hearts while there is still time.

Second, Satan may use a more subtle approach—assimilating our young into the "course of this world" (Eph 2:1–3), where values, ambitions, and desires are shaped by human nature rather than by divine revelation. This demonic strategy is much more dangerous precisely because it is less conspicuous. Our young are bombarded by irresistible entertainment, digital media, and new ways of "living their best life." Faith—"what the church says I should do"—becomes compartmentalized, reserved only for the Sabbath or whenever they are in church. Worship becomes routine rather than central.

Parents themselves are also vulnerable to these societal norms. We pack our children's weekends with a slew of activities designed to enrich their minds and heighten the likelihood of academic success. If church attendance becomes only one activity among many, children may reasonably conclude that it is not essential.

THE RISE OF SECULARISM

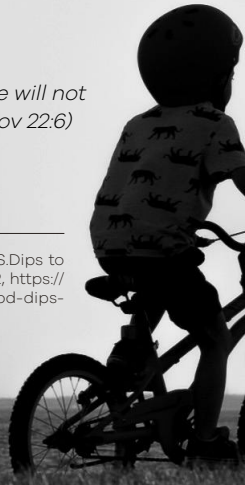
Some scholars have noted that in Western countries such as the United States and Canada, Christianity and the belief in God continue to decline.[3] Many millennials who once considered themselves religious are no longer practicing traditional religion but are taking on more secular ideologies. Western governments and their constitutions were founded on God's word and Christian principles, and their schools used to teach the Bible and values based on it. However, these societies are increasingly secular; laws no longer adhere to Christian values, schools cannot mention the Bible, and the adults of this generation are less religious than before. Let us beware of the impact these have on our household's faith.

How can the true church fight back and overcome these mighty adversaries?

STRATEGIES TO DEFEAT THE ENEMY

Train Up the Child

Train up a child in the way he should go,
Even when he grows older he will not abandon it. *(Prov 22:6)*



[1] Marta Trzebiatowska and Steve Bruce, *Why are Women more Religious than Men?* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

[2] Alejandro Villena-Moya, Marc N Potenza, Roser Granero, et al, "Sex differences in problematic pornography use among adolescents: a network analysis," *BMC Psychology* 13, 347 (2025), https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-02624-0.

[3] Jeffrey M Jones, "Belief in God in US.Dips to 81%, a New Low," *Gallup*, June 17, 2022, https://news.gallup.com/poll/393737/belief-god-dips-new-low.aspx.

This verse is frequently cited during religious education (RE) training or special RE activities, to reiterate to our RE teachers the critical role they play in guiding these little lambs for the Lord. But we must recognize that the responsibility for spiritual formation cannot be outsourced entirely to church programs and RE teachers.

A few hours each week cannot outweigh the example children observe daily. They watch how we respond to stress, how we speak about others, how we treat worship, and how we order our time. If we wish our children to value worship, they must see that we value it ourselves. If we hope they will honor the Sabbath, they must see us preparing for it. If we desire them to listen attentively, they must see our own reverence.

None of us is a perfect parent. We may feel stretched—balancing work, responsibilities, and expectations. Yet, what shapes children most is not perfection, but sincerity. When they see that we genuinely seek God, that we repent when we fail, and that we try again, they learn how to practice their faith.

TEACHING OUR CHILDREN HUMBLE REPENTANCE THROUGH EXAMPLE

A father once told his son, "When you go to school, don't smoke, and don't pick up bad habits from your friends."

The son replied candidly, "But Dad, why do you smoke? You don't smoke in church, but I know you smoke at home."

The father answered, "It is all right for me because I am older; you should not smoke while you are young."

The son would have been puzzled by the double standards—what difference does age make when something is clearly wrong? A better response would have been for the father to say, "You are right. I should not be doing this either. I will change for your sake—I will stop smoking, and you can hold me accountable." Though he had erred, his humility and resolve would become a far stronger lesson for his child than mere words.

Remember Our Identity

Hear, Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! *(Deut 6:4)*

This declaration, often known as the Shema, was central to Israel's faith. Through it, God reminded His people not only of who He is, but also of who they were—a people set apart to belong to Him and to love Him with their whole lives.

As members of the true church, we too have the spiritual identity of God's children and citizens of heaven. The question is whether that identity is visible in our priorities.

From a young age, children naturally



compare themselves with those around them. They notice what their friends own, what activities they attend, and what opportunities they receive. As parents, we may also feel the pressure to keep pace with our peers. When these concerns gradually take center stage, our spiritual identity quietly fades into the background.

For I see him from the top of the rocks,
And I look at him from the hills;
Behold, a people that lives in isolation,
And does not consider itself to be among the nations. *(Num 23:9)*

Cherishing our identity as God's people means making choices that differ from prevailing norms. It means truly observing the entire Sabbath day.

Also I gave them My Sabbaths to be a sign between Me and them, so that they might know that I am the LORD who sanctifies them. *(Ezek 20:12)*

Keeping the Sabbath is a covenantal sign between God and His people, whom God has separated from the world. Therefore, observing the Sabbath is a visible marker of our identity, and should be upheld with joy and gratitude.

We need not feel ashamed to be at odds with the surrounding culture, especially if we are declining certain opportunities in order to observe the Sabbath, keep God's instructions fully, or serve in church ministry. Although we live in the world, we are not of the world (Jn 15:19; 17:16).

CONCLUSION: A FAITH TO BE HANDED ON

Previous generations persevered through persecution, heresy, and the allure of the world; they held fast to the faith and handed this to us. Our present challenges may appear different—constant connectivity, distraction, and busyness—but the calling remains the same.

The call before us is not merely to bring children to church, but to bring God into our everyday life—in conversation, in decision-making, in gratitude, and in prayer. When children see that faith shapes how we respond to success and disappointment alike, they learn that it is not peripheral but foundational.

We cannot control every outcome. Ultimately, each person must respond to God for himself or herself. Yet, we can faithfully fulfill our responsibility: to pray, to model, to teach, and to persevere.

Let us entrust our children to the Lord who loves them more than we do. Let us examine our own lives honestly. And let us quietly, steadily labor so that the faith once handed to us may also be handed to them.

UNITY IN THE CHURCH

Literary Ministry Seminar—UK

Editor's note: In April 2025, the UK Department of Literary Ministry (DLM) held its annual Literary Ministry Seminar (LMS) in London. A group of writers, editors, and graphic designers came together to hone their skills for the ministry, while reflecting on the importance of unity in the church. As a community of faith and spiritual body, redeemed and sanctified by the blood of Christ, the church is united by more than shared interests. Attendees learned that true fellowship within the body of Christ depends on each member walking in the light, meaning that the cleansing power of Christ's blood continues to take effect (1 Jn 1:7). If we encounter divisions and disagreements in the church, we must reflect on our own relationship with God—are we righteous in His eyes, and sufficiently humble and submissive? Conversely, if we keep God's word together, we become like-minded in obedience, able to manifest the kindness, patience, and forgiveness of Christ to one another. The peace of God will rule in our hearts, and God's love will bind us in perfection (Col 3:12–15).

So, how can we begin to engender such a heart of unity in ourselves and our fellow brethren? Here is a selection of devotionals written during the writers' workshop, exploring how to reach out to one another and strengthen unity in the church.

LOVE OTHERS AS CHRIST LOVED US

IS—Sunderland, UK

When we gather in church, do we find it hard to engage in conversations around us? Perhaps we are not close to certain members or are not confident in group settings. Introversion and shyness are normal, but they can hinder us from fostering relationships with our brethren and forming deep spiritual connections. But what if there is more to overcoming our shy nature?

We often forget the purpose of fellowship, and, on deeper reflection, may even be unwilling to participate. But staying in our own corner not only robs us of relationships we could be cherishing, it also shows a lack of care and love for our brethren. We need to love each other just as Jesus commanded His disciples:

"I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another." *(Jn 13:34–35)*

We love one another because God first loved us. So, when we witness God's unfailing love toward us, we should feel compelled to allow the love we have received from Christ to flow out to those around us.

Being an introvert has pushed me to grow in my faith. It was only after my first year of attending the Youth Theological Training Course (YTTC) that I started participating in various fellowships at my local church and at the church near my university. This step shaped my faith, helping me to grow and not be so closed off and anxious about sharing with brothers and sisters. This was not easy at first, but the more I attended, the less daunting it became. I truly experienced a connection with my fellow brothers and sisters. I could better care for them by getting to know them and their circumstances, sharing encouragement, and praying with them. Together, we were able to carry one another's burdens and receive consolation from one another.

Often, we wait for nudges from others to push us along our journey of faith. But if we rely solely on others to keep us on the right path, can we truly grow in our faith? We must first cultivate our own relationship with Jesus to understand His great love, so that we can also love others. When we take practical steps to manifest His love, we can be joined together in unity as one body in Christ. This opens up the possibility of working together, helping one another reach our goal as spiritual companions. Therefore, let us take the opportunity to go beyond just attending services by drawing closer to one another in fellowships and at church events. Stand tall, step out of our comfort zone, and work within the body of Christ. Let the love of God move us to overcome feelings of shyness that hinder us so that we can be knitted together in love and unity.

FREEDOM TO SERVE

Chris Yau—Limerick, Ireland

For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but serve one another through love.

(Gal 5:13)



We are all familiar with the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. A young man who inherits his father's wealth, feeling on top of the world, goes out and squanders it all, only to return pleading to be reclaimed. The feeling of freedom when we begin to live independently, especially during university, will always have an element of thrill behind it. We may have just transferred to a new place, been given a generous allowance from our parents, or received a nifty student loan. We control our own time, with nobody to dictate what we can or cannot do. "The world is our oyster," as it were. But have we thought about what goes beyond that? What is the true freedom that God has given us, and what are His good intentions behind it?

Freedom—or "liberty"—is something God has actually called us into. But oftentimes, we use our freedom for selfish gain or as an "opportunity for the flesh." We prioritize going out to play ball over our cleaning duties, or going to visit a new restaurant over getting to know a brother we have not spoken to before. Our liberty is being free from the bondage of sin (Rom 6:20–23), yet we end up entangling ourselves back in it.

We should see freedom in the limitless opportunities we have to serve the true and living God and His church. As Jesus mentioned, "to the extent that you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of Mine, you did it for Me" (Mt 25:40b). When we serve our fellow brethren, we are following God's command to love one another, as He has loved us (Jn 15:12). Is it not right that we repay God's love in this way?

So, when was the last time we spoke to that auntie sitting by herself? When was the last time we volunteered to hoover the chapel when we saw there were not enough helpers? When was the last time we decided to speak with a truth-seeker, to help guide them toward salvation?

The world promotes personal freedom as something positive, yet if we are not careful, it can pose a great risk to our spirituality. God always intended us to be free, but specifically, free from sin. That being the case, what do we consider a meaningful use of our liberty today? What do we currently spend most of our time on? And how can we start utilizing our God-given liberty to help the church grow?

STIR UP LOVE AND GOOD WORKS

Sophia Shek—Newcastle, UK

Imagine this: you have just walked into an unfamiliar church, and you step into the dining hall. You are overwhelmed by the number of new faces you see before you. As you stand frozen on the spot, your eyes scan the mass of people. Everyone seems to be neatly organized around the tables, immersed in conversation with one another. You do not know where to go.

As humans, we are creatures of habit, and that is no different in church. It is likely that we have a few people we feel comfortable talking to or a particular seat we like to sit in during tea break. However, if someone at the periphery notices this—whether it be a truth-seeker, visitor, or even a local member without a "table"—it could leave them feeling isolated, without a place to fit in.

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as it is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.
(Heb 10:24–25, NKJV)[1]

This verse encourages us to take action by stirring up love and good works within the church. This is done through mutual exhortation. Therefore, we cannot just listen to the teachings or encouragements of others; we have a duty to share our faith with our brethren. The author of Hebrews recognized that some Jewish members forsook assembling with and exhorting other members, and the Greek text indicates that this had become a habit. Thus, gathering and reaching out to mutually encourage one another should actually become habitual, almost second nature. Since exhortation is a good work, if we do not do our part, or neglect to exhort those we see on the periphery, we are in fact sinning by omission (Jas 4:17).

So, next time you are in the dining hall, enjoying your beverage of choice, assess your surroundings. Instead of disregarding everything going on around you, scan the room to see if there is anyone who seems to be alone. Maybe they are standing at the side of the room. They could even already be at a table, but with no one to talk to. If you spot someone, invite them over or join them for a chat. While you may feel apprehensive about talking to someone less familiar, remember that you already share a common foundation in Christ upon which you can build rapport. By sharing spiritual matters with these members, we extend the hand of unity to others in the church, showing them that they, too, can experience the love and joy that come from mutual exhortation. Step out of your comfort zone and do your part in this good work.

[1] Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.





FINISH THE RACE

Xin—California, USA

It was the ninth mile of my first half-marathon. As I watched my pace group drift farther ahead, I began to question whether I could continue. My legs were burning, and my resolve was flagging. Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I saw a baby stroller rolling by. The woman pushing it moved steadily, even speeding up as I fell behind. I was stunned. If she could press on while pushing a baby in a stroller, what excuse did I have to quit? I dug in, steadied my pace, and followed her as best as I could.

Running a race is an analogy that Paul used several times to describe our faith and ministry. Long-distance running is a particularly apt metaphor for the Christian journey, reflecting the long years of perseverance through trials and hardships as we press toward the prize of eternal life. During this journey, we may encounter seasons like my ninth mile when we feel spiritually tired. Prayer becomes mechanical; Bible reading feels dry; serving God and attending services feel like routine. Although we may not abandon the faith outwardly, inwardly, our hearts grow lukewarm, numb to our own apathy. We begin to wonder if we can finish the race.



In these situations, how do we find the strength to continue? What are the ways to overcome our spiritual torpor and lukewarm faith? How can we renew our determination and zeal to finish this spiritual race?

TRAINING

Paul describes his mentality in running this race: he relies on disciplined training and endurance, fueled by hope, to finish.

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

(1 Cor 9:24–27, NKJV)[1]

The ability to endure a long-distance race begins with training. It is the many miles run before the race that determine whether you can finish it. Similarly, we must undergo training in our spiritual lives if we are to finish the spiritual race. However, unlike race training, which is separate from the race itself, our lives are both the training ground and the race. Thus, our lifestyles must be built around spiritual training if we are to last to the end.

Discipline And Self-Control

"And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things" (1 Cor 9:25, NKJV). Temperance means discipline and

[1] Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

self-control. Elite runners become great not by heroic bursts of effort, but by doing the basics—good nutrition, exercise, and sleep—day after day, year after year. In our spiritual lives, doing the basics well and consistently is also decisive for success: daily prayer and Bible reading, and weekly Sabbath worship. These form the structure and foundation for spiritual growth. If we neglect these, we should not be surprised when our faith weakens.

"When one beats the air, one is going through the motions rather than actually boxing. In our spiritual life, it is possible to look busy while accomplishing little that pleases God"

Daniel demonstrates what it means to preserve time and space for the basics. Even when praying meant real danger, his prayer life remained steady. His priorities were clear: he would not trade closeness with God for safety or convenience. We are constantly pressed for time—work demands, family responsibilities, endless distractions—but these cannot be excuses for spiritual neglect. We should build our schedules around our spiritual lives, not try to fit God into the time that remains.

Doing the basics consistently is good, but it is not enough if our worship is hollow. "Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air" (1 Cor 9:26, NKJV). When one beats the air, one is going through the motions rather than actually boxing. In our spiritual life, it is possible to look busy while accomplishing little that pleases God. We may serve out of obligation and perform daily Bible reading and prayer out of habit. However, service without love is empty, and words without obedience become hypocrisy. God looks at the heart and seeks true worshippers who worship Him in spirit and in truth (Jn 4:24).

Do we bring to God a repentant heart of flesh (Ezek 36:26), or do we just present Him with a busy schedule? Let us put effort into our daily cultivation to turn the soil of our hearts into fertile ground. This may mean spending more time in meditation or journaling to reflect on our spiritual state and how to apply God's word to our lives.

An Active Pursuit

Another aspect of discipline and self-control is active pursuit, not a passive state of refraining. An important part of physical training is pushing our bodies and challenging our muscles and cardiovascular systems. Our muscles only grow stronger under tension and stress. Likewise, spiritual growth requires strict obedience: forgiving when we would rather hold a grudge, confessing when pride wants us to hide, serving when we are tired, speaking the truth when silence feels safer, or giving when we would rather keep.

Paul's mindset is an example of constantly pressing onward and doing hard things



(Phil 3:12–14). He always pushed himself to go to new places and talk to new people, even risking imprisonment, public stoning, and death. We need to emulate this mindset of pushing ourselves forward.

Growth requires us to leave our comfort zones, dare to be different, go above and beyond, and delay gratification, while putting effort into something that may not show immediate results. Let us ask: how have we challenged ourselves spiritually? If instead of challenging ourselves we have settled into complacency, then we should not expect endurance to appear when trials come.

Active pursuit requires us to be certain about our direction. "Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty" (1 Cor 9:26, NKJV). Uncertainty means lacking the conviction that we are doing the right thing or going in the right direction. Do we have any doubt about the doctrines? Do we truly believe that this is the only true church? Do we truly believe that speaking in tongues is the evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit? If we have any doubts about the path we are on, then we will not sustain our faith in the long miles. If we have uncertainties, we must resolve them. We must ask questions. We must pray in the Spirit. We must learn. We must do these until our uncertainties become certainties.

Paul's words also carry the sense of not running aimlessly, without purpose. A runner trains with purpose: endurance runs, hill sessions, speed work—each run has a goal. In our spiritual life, purpose matters too. Otherwise, we may believe for decades yet remain unchanged: the same temper, the same pride, the same spiritual laziness—just older. We need to ask ourselves: *How is God shaping me right now? Where do I need to grow? What specific training does my soul need?* Perhaps it is repentance in a particular area, humility in a strained relationship, or patience in ongoing trials.

We should also seek our purpose in the ministry. Do we have any ambitions for God? Do we want to do something for God, the way David wanted to build God's temple? What is God's purpose for you? Why did God put you here at this time? A sense of purpose gives meaning to the race and strength for the distance.

SHEDDING EXCESS WEIGHT

Training also means shedding what hinders spiritual progress. A runner cannot be burdened by excessive weight. A serious competitor would not run a race carrying a heavy backpack. God also wants us to "lay aside every weight" that will hamper us in the spiritual race (Heb 12:1, NKJV). Sometimes the weight is obvious sin; other times, it is an attachment that constantly



pulls our hearts away—love for the world, craving for comfort, or the stubborn insistence on our own way.

Paul had all the things this world values—he was a Roman citizen during the pinnacle of the Roman empire, trained in all the Jewish laws and customs, a Hebrew of Hebrews (Phil 3:4–6). But through the power of the gospel of salvation, Paul learned to see all those things as rubbish compared to the excellence of the knowledge of Christ (Phil 3:7–10, NKJV). Likewise, we must let go of our love for the world, our self-will, and mastery over our lives. To run well, we must learn self-denial and allow God's will to direct us.

Reliance on the Holy Spirit

This is where the Holy Spirit's help becomes essential. Self-control is part of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:23). Without the Holy Spirit's help, we may not have the ability to control our desires. When we pray in the Spirit and yield the reins of our hearts to Him, the Spirit will reshape our desires. We will want to please the Holy Spirit and avoid what the Spirit abhors. Many members who used to have addictions to tobacco or substances have testified how they were able to quit when they received the Holy Spirit—not by sheer willpower, but by the Spirit's renewal. Spiritual discipline is the daily practice of yielding again and again until the Spirit's desires become our own. Let us make it our daily prayer to submit ourselves to the control of the Spirit.

What is the status of our spiritual training ground? Is it being built up day by day, or have we quietly settled into stagnation? If our faith has weakened, let us return to the basics and reset. Spiritually, we are all marathoners running a race that cannot be finished without intentional, constant practice. If we are not training, then we are not progressing, and if we are not progressing, then we will not reach the finish line.

ENDURANCE



Training shapes us for the race, but endurance is what carries us through the long middle—the years when the path feels tedious, and trials seem to outlast our strength. Many believers do not stumble in one dramatic moment; instead, they slowly lose pace, become distracted, and stop pressing forward. This is why Scripture repeatedly calls us to watchfulness and perseverance. To finish well, we must both guard against disqualification and keep our eyes fixed on the prize.

Disqualification

In a race, what matters most is not how we begin, but how we end. A strong start can be undone by a poor finish, while a weak beginning can be redeemed by perseverance. Paul recognizes this seriousness, writing that he disciplined himself "lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Cor 9:27, NKJV). Disqualification occurs when a runner violates the rules. In our race of faith, we need to race according to the rules set by God and revealed in the Bible. We must adhere to the teachings of the Bible and follow God's will, not our own preferences.

In Matthew 7:21–23, Jesus said that He never knew those who did amazing things in His name, only those who do the Father's will. This reminds us that spiritual activity is not the same as spiritual obedience. To finish well, we must seek God's will and do it.

Matthew 25 reinforces this warning through three parables that show what God expects from His servants. The parable of the wise and foolish virgins teaches us that we must be watchful by being filled with the Holy Spirit. The parable of the talents teaches us that we need to be faithful stewards of what we have been given, putting all that we have to good use for the Master. The parable of the sheep and goats teaches us to serve God's people with love. These are difficult standards. If we lack any of these, we may be disqualified from the race of faith.

Anchor Our Hope

To finish the race successfully, we must also have the endurance to run to the end. What is spiritual endurance? It is the unyielding faithfulness that Paul calls "steadfast" and "immovable" (1 Cor 15:58, NKJV), founded on the conviction that our labor in the Lord is not in vain, for our God is faithful. It is the patience to continue doing good when results are delayed, trusting in God's timing for the harvest (Gal 6:9). It is the ability to endure suffering, allowing trials to produce perseverance, character, and a deeper hope in God (Rom 5:3–4). Spiritual endurance is faith trained over time—faith that trusts God's promises, timing, and purpose.

How can we build spiritual endurance? Hebrews chapter 12 gives us two anchors:

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight,

and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.
(Heb 12:1–2, NKJV)

First, we should consider the cloud of witnesses around us: those who have gone before us or who are running the race of faith alongside us. We learn from their testimonies, experiences, and examples of perseverance. We need spiritual companions to keep us steady and accountable.

"Likewise, spiritual endurance grows as we repeatedly train our hearts to return to Christ—refusing distractions and discouragement, and choosing obedience again and again"

During my half-marathon, I ran with a pace group that was aiming for a certain time. This helped me stay on target. Along the way, there were also people holding signs of encouragement, cheering, and handing out water. At mile nine, the lady with the stroller inspired me to keep pushing. In the same way, we should look for inspiration from our brethren who are also working hard towards the final goal. Let us nurture our spiritual fellowships and willingly share our experiences with our brothers and sisters, thus stirring up love and good works (Heb 10:24–25).

Second, we must fix our eyes on Jesus. Near the finish line, a runner often discovers unexpected strength to power to the end. Nothing else matters in those last moments—the stitch in the side and the cramp in the leg fade away as the runner's entire focus becomes crossing that finish line. This is mind over body: your mind commanding your body to do the things your body does not want to do.

Likewise, spiritual endurance grows as we repeatedly train our hearts to return to Christ—refusing distractions and discouragement, and choosing obedience again and again. This means not allowing any negative experiences we may have in the church to shake our faith in God's plan.



It means not allowing the ugliness of the world to overshadow the beauty of God's work. The more we practice this focus on ordinary days, the more we can endure the hard days.

When the finish line seems far away, we should focus on what comes with the finish line—the imperishable crown (1 Cor 9:25, NKJV). Runners compete for a medal that will fade, for achievements that will be forgotten, and for men's applause that will pass. But the crown God promises does not tarnish, and the pain we endure He will not forget. We must constantly set before us the prize we are running for—to one day be with Christ and receive all that He has promised.

CONCLUSION

Our God did not call us merely to begin the race. He called us to finish it—to endure through pain, discouragement, delays, and trials until the end. We must hold on to the belief that God, who began the good work within us, will be faithful to complete it (Phil 1:6). He will help us through, and He is waiting for us at the finish line with open arms to welcome us into His joy.

Therefore, let us keep the ending in sight. Let us live each day preparing for our final moment. Let us understand God's will so that we do not become disqualified. Let us run with endurance the race set before us. By God's grace, we may one day say, "I have finished the race" and receive the crown that the Lord has prepared for those who love Him (2 Tim 4:7–8, NKJV).

LESSONS FROM MOUNT EVEREST

Ling Chen—Sacramento, California, USA

Mount Everest is well known as the highest mountain in the world, rising to an elevation of 8,848 meters (29,032 feet). For those unable to summit Mount Everest, there is an iconic trek to Everest Base Camp (EBC) full of incredible views of majestic mountains and picturesque villages. So when a friend and I saw a package deal for the EBC trek, we leaped at the opportunity.

DEVELOPING A LIFE-THREATENING ILLNESS

In the months leading up to the trek, I trained extensively and completed a local trek that reached over 9,000 feet in elevation. I was confident I would reach EBC. My friend and I arrived in Kathmandu, Nepal, on a cold November night. Two days later, we flew to Lukla with our Nepalese guide and began our trek. We made good time to the lodge, and apart from being shocked by how cold it was on the mountain at night, we were able to get a good night's rest.

On the second day, my friend developed knee pain from a prior injury, so we took our time trekking to Namche. The third day was an acclimatization day, during which I took in my first view of Mount Everest. The world's highest mountain is rather unassuming, shaped like an upside-down bowl, and outshone by surrounding peaks such as Ama Dablam.

The following day, my injured friend decided to stay at Namche, while I set out with the guide for the next village, Tengboche. I passed a sleepless night there owing to the extreme cold and a worsening headache from altitude sickness. During the trek to the next village, Dingboche (elevation 4,410 meters or 14,470 feet), I experienced such severe shortness of breath that I had to stop often to recover. I thought this was due to insufficient altitude acclimatization and to the fact that no trees grew at such high elevations, making oxygen even more scarce.

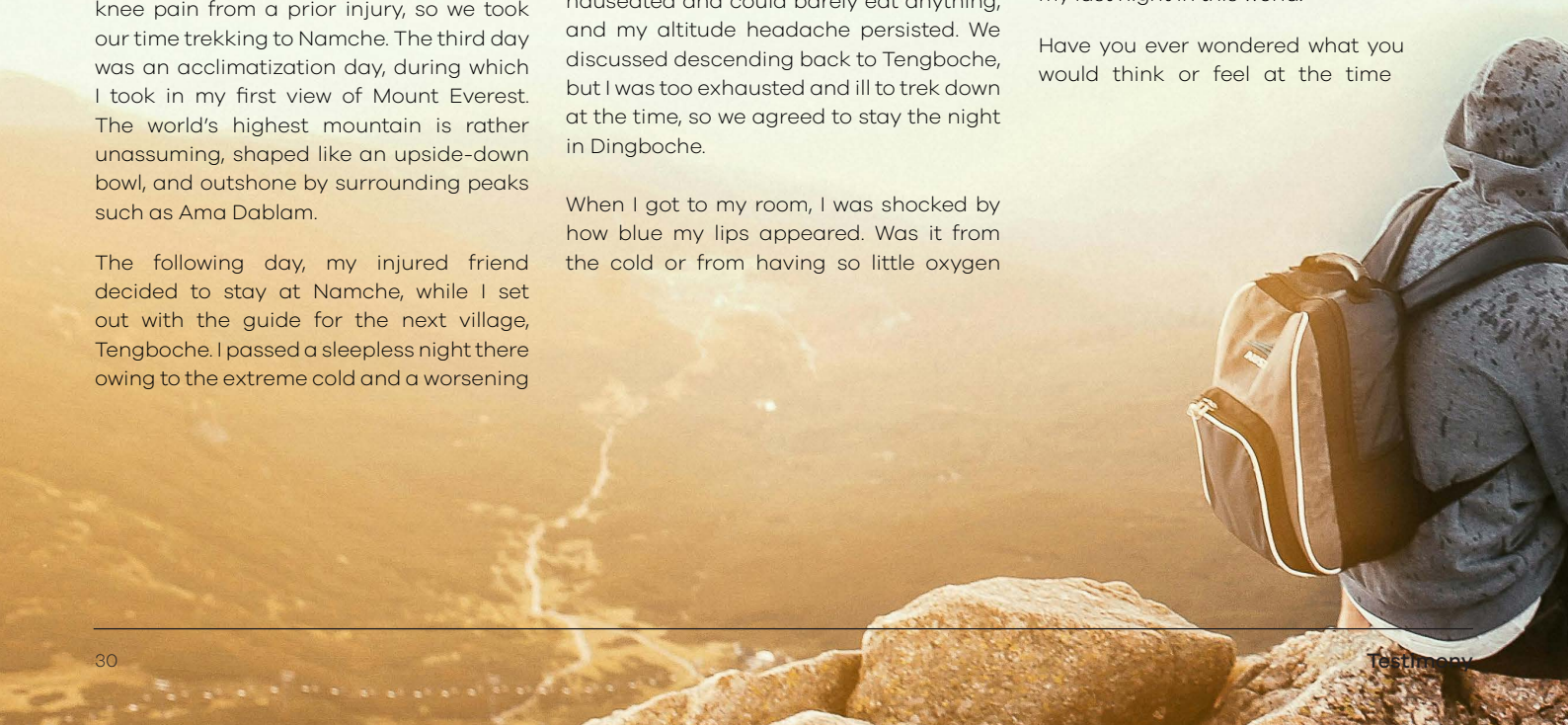
> "In that dark, freezing room, I realized I might not survive this trek. This could, in fact, be my last night in this world"

At Dingboche, my guide checked my blood oxygen saturation with a pulse oximeter. My saturation was only 65 percent—it is normally close to 100 percent at sea level. My guide warned me that anyone with a saturation below 75 percent should not proceed, as ascending to higher elevations would be unsafe. I was extremely nauseated and could barely eat anything, and my altitude headache persisted. We discussed descending back to Tengboche, but I was too exhausted and ill to trek down at the time, so we agreed to stay the night in Dingboche.

When I got to my room, I was shocked by how blue my lips appeared. Was it from the cold or from having so little oxygen in my blood? Despite my fatigue, sleep eluded me. My head felt like it was in a vice, and my body shivered constantly from the bone-deep cold. When I lay flat, my breathing worsened, and dry coughing spells wracked my body, leaving me struggling for air. I could hear a crackling sound in my lungs, a cardinal sign of pulmonary edema, or fluid in the lungs. It dawned on me that I had a condition called high-altitude pulmonary edema (HAPE)—a severe form of altitude sickness that, left untreated, has a mortality rate of about 50 percent. I had read about this condition before, but believed my fitness level and the slow pace of the trek's ascent would keep me safe. Where did I go wrong?

The only treatment for HAPE is to descend to a lower altitude. But at 10:00 p.m., that was not an immediate option. Dingboche is a remote village accessible only by foot or helicopter. There were no emergency response services or supplemental oxygen, so nothing was available to treat HAPE. As I lay propped up on pillows in that dark, freezing room, I realized I might not survive this trek. This could, in fact, be my last night in this world.

Have you ever wondered what you would think or feel at the time



of your death? As I lay there struggling to breathe, I was surprised by my own calm and objectivity. Most people would probably consider this a sad way to go—alone, in the cold and dark, on a remote mountain where no one knows you. Instead, I felt overwhelmingly grateful. I began to pray to God, thanking Him for all the incredible experiences and the years of life He had given me, for choosing me, and for giving me salvation. As I prayed, I wondered whether I would soon see the Lord Jesus and be led by His hand to the promised land. There was some uncertainty in my heart about this—despite my focus on serving God as a youth, I had, in recent years, begun to pursue my own goals and worldly things. My service and worship had become routine and lukewarm. I regretted not serving Him with all my heart, soul, and might. I worried about my elderly mother—who would take care of her when I was gone? And I also felt annoyed that I had not prepared a will, so I could leave my savings to my local church, which was in the process of purchasing a new chapel.

"My heart should have stopped. My brain should not have been functional. I knew then that God was supporting me"

Suddenly, it occurred to me to ask for intercession from brothers and sisters. By God's grace, there was sufficient internet service to send a message to the Sacramento church council. Soon afterwards, several members texted to ask after my well-being and to share that they were all praying for me. I felt loved and cared for, even though I was so far from them. I believe the prayers of these members helped persuade God to allow me more time in this world. Since this event, I feel so indebted to the church and to the members, who are so loving. In part, I owe them my life. I am more motivated to serve and love them to the best of my ability.

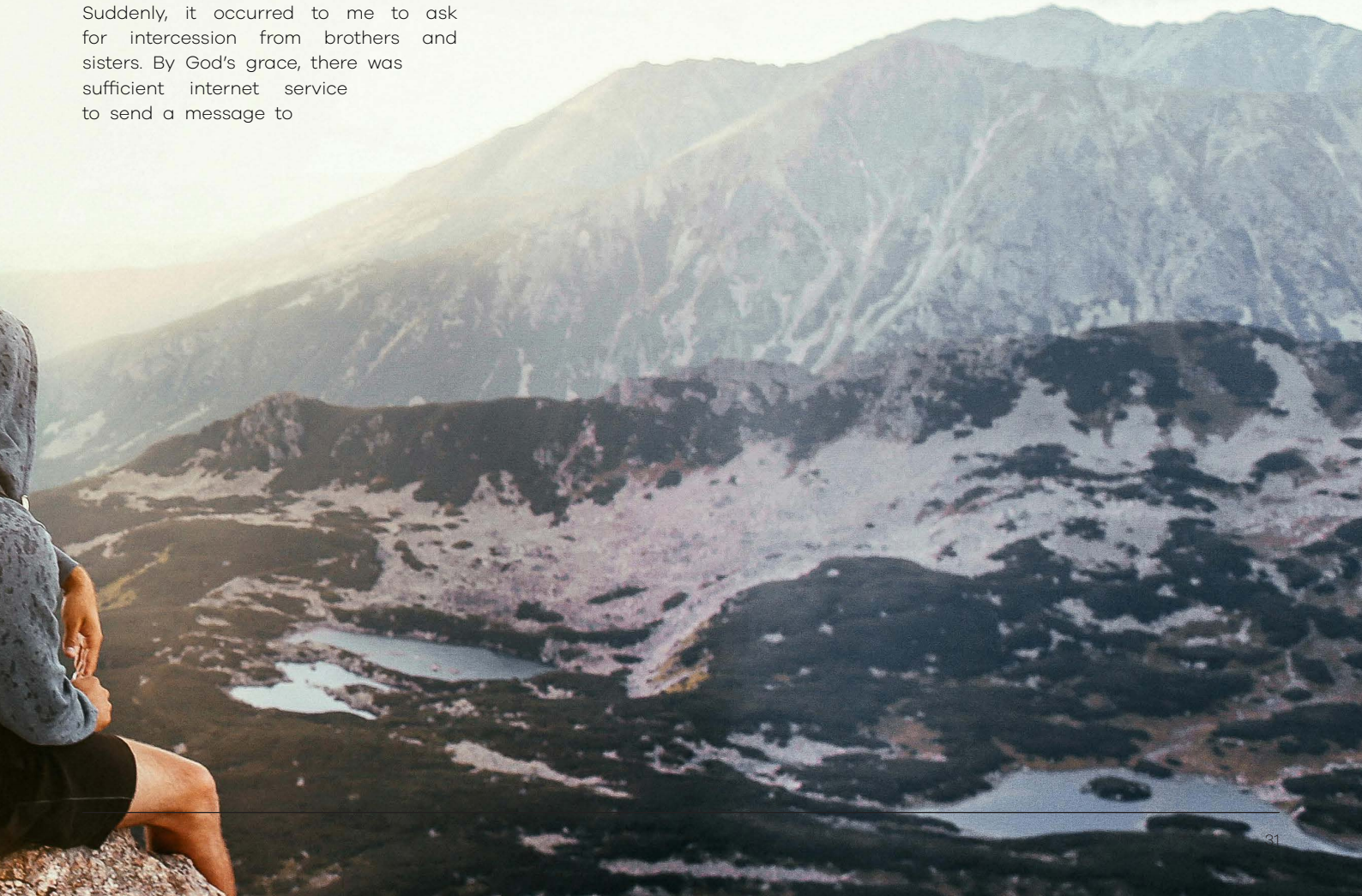
GOD PRESERVED MY LIFE

I spent the remainder of that long night in and out of restless sleep. I woke almost every hour, feeling thankful each time that I was still alive, and more hopeful that I would see the daylight. Around 5:00 a.m., my guide came to check on me, and I explained the situation. He worked with my tour manager to plan a helicopter evacuation for around 8:00 a.m. Preparing to leave, I had to pause to pant for air between putting on each hiking boot. I could not even put away my sleeping bag—my guide had to help me pack.

Before we set out, we were notified that the helicopter would be delayed due to inclement weather, so we waited at the lodge. While waiting, my guide rechecked my oxygenation. It read only 35 percent. My guide's face changed when he saw it. Later, he told me he had never seen a reading that low—that is when he realized how truly ill I was and began to feel scared for me. In over fifteen years as a physician, I have never seen a living person with an oxygen saturation that low—a sentiment echoed by other doctors I have asked since this trip. I did not think it was possible to be still alive. My heart should have stopped. My brain should not have been functional. I knew then that God was supporting me.

After an hour, my tour manager told us he had arranged for another helicopter to come. Given this news, we trekked twenty minutes to Dingboche's helipad. Along the way, I almost fainted several times and had to stop to pant for air. I knew that if I fainted, I would die because I was experiencing a very severe form of pulmonary hypertension. I was like a dead person walking—I should not have been able to continue. And yet, I made it to the helipad and endured through thirty minutes of frigid, windy weather waiting for the helicopter. This was the grace and help of God.

Although the views from the helicopter were amazing, I could not enjoy the ride and only hoped to get down to a lower altitude as soon as possible. We stopped



by Namche to pick up my friend and arrived in Lukla, where we waited two hours for the final helicopter to Kathmandu. During this time, I began feeling better: my headache let up, and my breathing eased. When we met the hospital ambulance at Kathmandu's airport, my oxygen saturation was 80 percent, and they immediately administered oxygen via a nasal cannula. At the hospital, the doctor confirmed that I indeed had HAPE and treated me with medications and nebulizers. By the next day, my oxygen saturation was above 95 percent on ambient air, so I was discharged. Thank God, I eventually made it back home and can now share this testimony.

REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

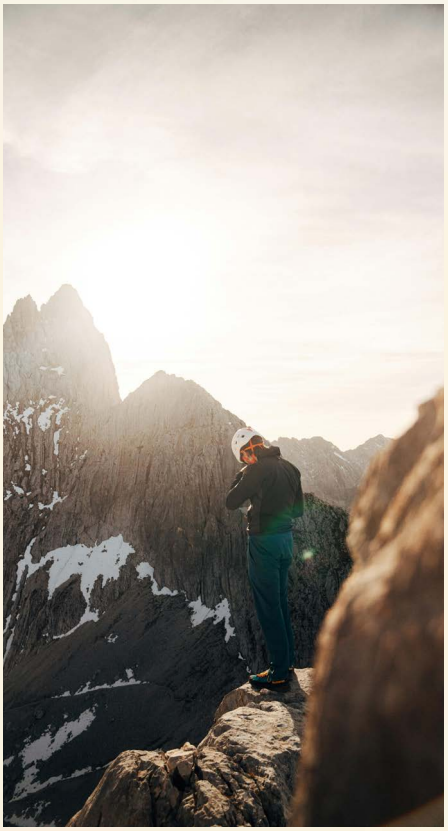
After reflection, I have realized some important lessons God wanted to teach me.

Do Not Trust in Physical Strength

First, God wanted to humble me and remind me not to rely solely on my own abilities. I did my best to stay in good physical condition. I took pride in my exercise routine and whole-food, plant-based diet. But no matter how healthy or fit we are, our bodies are limited. God can stop our hearts anytime. We should not think we are capable of anything by our own determination or preparation. Many other trekkers did not appear as physically fit—some appeared overweight, and others were several decades older than I. I remember thinking it was so unfair that I could not make it while others could. But while it is important to maintain good health so we can better serve God, we cannot rely solely on our bodies. We should also not become proud of our own physical fitness or health, since these are also from God.

Strive for the Spiritual Mount Zion

Second, we should not allow worldly ambitions to exceed our ambition for God. Mount Everest represents the top of the world, the highest achievement man can attain. Those who seek to summit Everest must spend at least a month going back and forth between camps to acclimate to ever higher altitudes before the final summit. They must also prepare a great deal of resources (equipment and manpower) and risk significant bodily injury or even death. This experience led me to reflect: What was my Mount Everest? What had I been spending my time, energy, and resources on? In recent years, Mount Everest has become my own leisure and selfish ambitions. I enjoyed traveling the world and exploring exotic places, and I had spent increasing amounts of time and money satisfying this hobby. Foolishly, I remember feeling proud of myself for doing this iconic trek. God used my experience to show me that there is no meaning in being seen as "cool." While gaining unique life experiences may be better than gaining material



things, this should not become our life's goal or purpose. In the end, they amount to nothing because these experiences cannot fulfill God's commission for us to preach the gospel or tend His sheep.

There is another mountain we should instead be looking to climb: Mount Zion. The physical Mount Zion, where ancient Jerusalem was built, is but a hill compared to Mount Everest. But the spiritual Mount Zion is God's temple and church, the heavenly city, and our true aim in life. In the eyes of the world, Mount Zion seems small and insignificant, but in the eyes of God, she is treasured and perfect in beauty. We should strive to remain in the church of God to the end so we can stand among the saints on the spiritual Mount Zion (Rev 14:1). We should spend our energy, time, and resources on the march toward Mount Zion rather than our personal Mount Everest. Mount Everest also notoriously holds not a small number of dead bodies—unfortunate mountaineers who did not survive their summit attempts.

In the same way, in pursuing our worldly goals, we may lose our spiritual lives. What is your Mount Everest? What have you done to try to conquer it? In contrast, what have you done to march toward Mount Zion, the beautiful city of God?

Redeem Our Time for God

The third lesson was that I need to make the most of my time (Eph 5:16). When I recall that dark, cold night, I wonder why God did not take me then. I believe God was merciful toward me because I was not ready to meet Him. I have not yet completed the work He has prepared for me, and my character still requires improvement. If I had met God that night, I am not sure He would have said, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Mt 25:23, NKJV),[1] as the master said to the first two servants in the parable of the talents. Instead, perhaps He would have said, "You wicked and lazy servant" (Mt 25:26, NKJV), as the master said to the servant who buried his one talent. This parable shows us that God does not look at absolutes—those with five talents and two talents were similarly praised. God, instead, expects more from those who have been given more (Lk 12:48). Reflecting on my attitude toward service in recent years, I realize I have received so much from God—not only education and capabilities, but also time and opportunity. Yet I have been wasting these, not putting them to full use for God, half-burying them in the earth like that slothful servant.

Earning 100 percent back for God means

[1] Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

shifting from using what we have been given for ourselves to using it for God. We should consider how all we have can be used for God's kingdom. God's commandment is to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength—with our totality (Mk 12:30). In my life, I had drawn boundaries between time for God and time for myself. I thought it was enough just to give God my time, even when my mind was often set on worldly things. Thus, there was no life in my service to God—no zeal, no conviction, and, most importantly, no love. I had also become selfish with my time, hoarding my precious vacation days for my own enjoyment and hobbies. I had taken over mastery of my life rather than humbly following God. It is impossible for us to fully repay the debt we owe Him with our limited resources and lives. What God wants from us is a fully dedicated life, the living sacrifice that is pleasing to Him (Rom 12:1–2). I realized I had not fully dedicated my life to God, keeping parts of it to myself and making my own plans without consulting His will. I was no longer a living sacrifice.

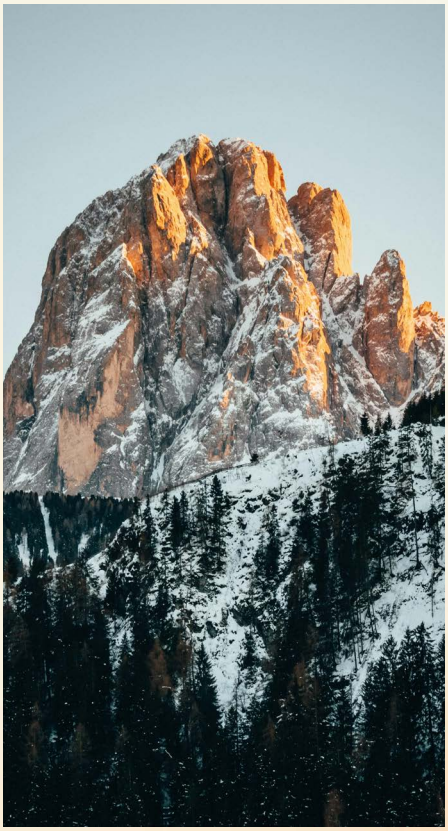
"The next time I face death, I do not want to feel any uncertainty in my heart. Instead, I want to be ready to give an account to God for all the talents He has given me"

We do not know how much time we have left in this world. I did not think my life could end at the age of forty-one. But in fact, each day could be our last. A few days after my discharge from the hospital, my local church's daily Bible reading was 2 Kings 20, when Hezekiah asked God to extend his life. I read that chapter and thought about how my life had been extended as well. I feel grateful for the time I now have, which feels more precious than before. But examining Hezekiah's extra fifteen years, it seems all he accomplished was showing off his treasures to the Babylonians, thus contributing to the future downfall of his people. I do not want my extra years spent in such a way—in vanity or in contributing to the downfall of His people. I hope to put my extra time to better use.

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

(Gal 2:20)

I now feel a tangible motivation to live my life for Christ. The next time I face death, I do not want to feel any uncertainty in my heart. Instead, I want to be ready to give an account to God for all the talents He has given me. And because I do not know when that time will be, every day I must seek ways to love and serve God. This means putting my heart into all I do for God, knowing each time may be the last.



CONCLUSION

This experience has deepened my understanding of God's love. He chastens His children to help them grow, and I feel truly chastened. But I also feel so deeply loved, for I understand that God disciplined me for my good, that I may share His holiness and bear the fruit of righteousness (Heb 12:10–11).

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

(Ps 23:4)

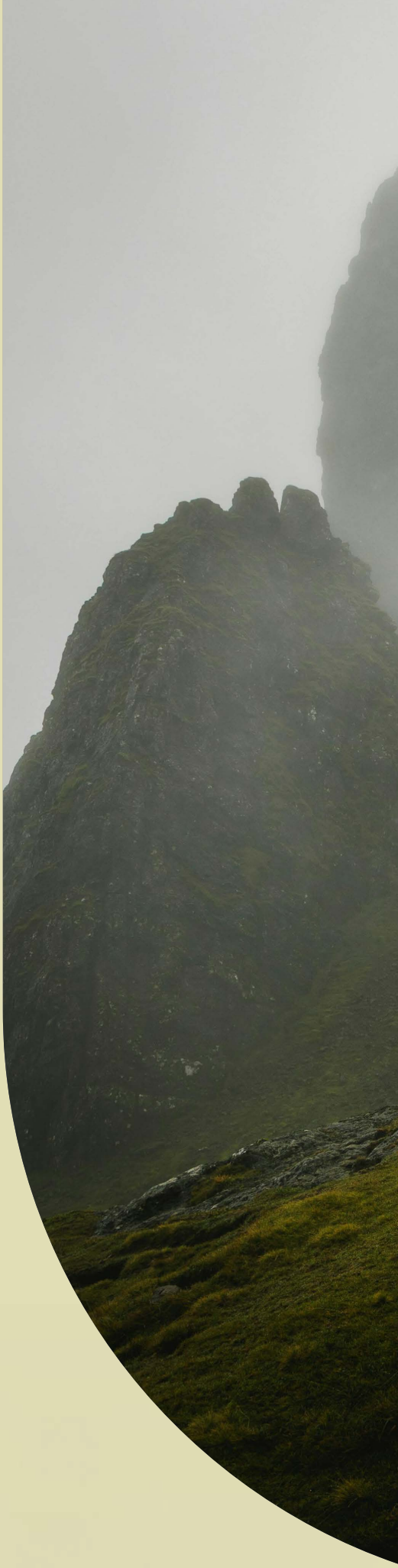
God's rod and staff helped me awaken from my lukewarm faith, showing me I was wandering toward a dangerous path. And not only were His rod and staff there, but His loving arms have always been upholding me. His steadfast love has never departed from me, even when my heart strayed from Him. He is constantly watching over the faith of His children, carefully tending to their growth to ensure they reach His heavenly kingdom.

May this testimony encourage us all to redeem our time in this world, work diligently in serving our Lord, and prepare ourselves to be ready for that day, whenever it may be. May all glory, honor, and praise be unto the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.



INVEST IN YOUR FAITH

Apphia Yeung—Calgary, Canada



During a church training event a few years ago, the leader asked us, "When did you meet your salvation?" At first, I thought this could only refer to my baptism at age three. However, the leader went on to explain that we can encounter salvation through an everyday event or even a few words that transform us. We may think our faith journey is pinned on one or two pivotal experiences from our past, but in reality, we encounter God's salvation in even the most seemingly inconsequential, everyday moments.

Throughout my walk with God, I have experienced many blessings. My family and I have experienced life-and-death situations and emerged from them in peace because of God's faithful abidance and loving mercy. But this testimony is not about the dramatic events and interventions of God in our lives; it is about the multiple moments of salvation that accumulate as we invest in our faith.

I grew up in church with a disciplined upbringing. My mother instilled in me a lifelong habit of taking notes during church services, and I participated in a wide range of holy work, seminars, workshops, and theological courses. On the surface, I ticked all the boxes for what is expected of a "good Christian."

But looking back, I cannot say that I had a genuine relationship with God. Prayer was a chore. I was free-spirited and curious, wanting to find a balance between God and the world—to be a good Christian while enjoying the things I loved.

BECOMING A NEW PERSON

My favorite pastime was watching movies and dramas. Viewing these taught me about the lives of others, and long-distance flights were never a problem for me because I always had an endless selection of shows to help me pass the time. I thought that as long as the media I consumed was harmless and did not contradict my faith, I could continue doing as I pleased.

However, some verses suggest our relationship with such pastimes should change once we come to know Christ:

For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. *(Gal 3:27)*

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts. *(Rom 13:14)*

[I]f indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former way of life, you are to rid yourselves of the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you are to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. *(Eph 4:21–24)*

The key phrases are "to rid yourselves of the old self" and "to put on the new self." The old self is not restricted to the state of unbelief, prior to knowing God. We are still putting on the old self even after baptism if we continue to follow our physical desires. We unconsciously erode our faith as we assimilate the world's sins and desires. We not only indulge in worldly entertainment, but begin to lust after the markers of success that society and the media sell us—a stellar career, luxurious vacations, a magnificent mansion, and expensive cars. Our prayers are centered on peace, health, and prosperity in this world rather than on spiritual growth, wisdom, and faith.



In contrast, when we put on the new self, our ambitions are focused on pleasing God, on pursuing holiness and righteousness in God's eyes. Our lifestyle becomes more Christ-like as our thoughts become more aligned with the mind of Christ.

"Are we walking as children of light, with the intention of pleasing our Lord? Are we bearing fruit of light in goodness, righteousness, and truth?"

[F]or you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), as you try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. *(Eph 5:8–10)*

Some of us have believed for many decades and may even be second- or third-generation believers. We attend church every week without fail and participate in many church activities. If we judge by outer appearance, we are doing very well by every metric. However, according to the verse above, if we evaluate ourselves by God's standard, we may find ourselves falling short.

We can use this verse as a metric to determine whether we have put off the old and put on the new: Are we walking as children of light, with the intention of pleasing our Lord? Are we bearing fruit of light in goodness, righteousness, and truth? Or do we continually return to the darkness of the world?

Being a child of the light means our thoughts, behavior, and actions become Christ-like, transforming our lifestyle from the inside out. Without this transformation, we would not have become new creations.

This is the journey I have been on over the years—the transformation from a "good person" to a "new person" in Christ, through investing in my faith and reaping the spiritual renewal that follows.

GOD IS SPEAKING TO YOU

In 2021, I experienced some strange symptoms. It began with what I thought was a cold sore on the right side of my mouth. Two days later, my right eye started to hurt. Over the following week, the symptoms started to rack up: sores

under my nose, neck pain, accompanied by a lump, and a headache, all concentrated on the right side. No matter what medication or ointment I used, these symptoms persisted. When I finally went to the doctor, he diagnosed me with shingles, but by then, the infection was too advanced for anti-viral treatment to be effective.

In my experience, a period of illness where no amount of medication or treatment seems to help is a sign that God is speaking to you. So, I started reflecting on what God was trying to tell me: what did I need to change? I realized that I was seriously lacking in prayer and found no joy in it—an embarrassing admission for a preacher's wife. God knew my shortcomings but also knew that I wanted to be a better Christian, so He reached out to discipline me.

I prayed to God, "If You are teaching me about prayer, please let me know."

The next day, I woke up fully healed. God's intention was clear. So, I prayed again, promising that the first thing I would do every morning, after drinking water and visiting the washroom, would be to kneel in prayer for thirty minutes.

After a few days of this new morning routine, the Holy Spirit started teaching me. For example, previously, I had thought spiritual cultivation was simply praying and reading the Bible. But the Holy Spirit taught me that these practices were not the end goal but important tools by which we are renewed to become a new person. If we pray and read the Bible each day, yet our character does not change, then we have not become a new person.

INVESTING IN MY FAITH

During a spiritual convocation in 2022, a preacher reminded us that God is the King of kings and that we will reign with Him if we endure in our faith (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 20:4–6). This brought to mind God's command to the Old Testament kings:

"Now it shall come about, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this Law on a scroll. …And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, so that he will learn to fear the LORD his God, by carefully following all the words of this Law and these statutes." (Deut 17:18–19)

A small voice in my heart told me that, since I would reign with Christ in the future, I should copy the Scriptures as the kings did, to learn them more thoroughly. So, I started copying the Scriptures in English, which also helped improve my interpretation skills.

This opened a new field of discovery for me, uncovering many treasures I had not noticed while reading the Bible in Chinese. If my spiritual investments—the time I spent in prayer and reading the Bible—could be compared to depositing into a basic savings account, then now, it was like I was investing in a subsidized savings or pension program in which the government matches or tops up the amount you deposit. However much you put in, God will add to the pot—in my case, He doubled what I invested.

Return on Investment

After I began investing in my faith, I experienced many surprising and wonderful transformations. One



example is that I no longer have the urge to watch movies. I took thirteen separate flights when I toured Asia in 2025, and I only ever touched the screen to turn on the reading light.

In the past, I have always loved sleep, staying in bed until the last possible minute before frantically rushing to get ready. But since I vowed to preserve a special prayer time after waking up, I once found myself getting up in the middle of the night to pray before catching an early flight. We planned to leave the house by 4:00 a.m., so I would have to wake up at 3:00 a.m. Nevertheless, I had resolved, so before going to bed, I set an alarm and prayed to Jesus to forgive me if I slept through it.

To my surprise, my eyes automatically opened at 2:58 a.m., and I managed to fulfill my promise to God. Only a truly new person will prioritize prayer above sleep.

WHAT I HAVE GAINED

Here are a few more examples of how God has increased my investment in my faith.

Lessons in Service and Worship

Before a recent evangelistic spiritual convocation in Edmonton, I planned to go to bed early on Friday night so that I would have energy for the Sabbath and the long day at church. However, when I went to bed around midnight, I could not fall asleep. After half an hour, I got up to copy the Bible. I was copying Genesis 22, where Abraham offers Isaac to God. Every word echoed the truth that God does not desire offerings and sacrifice (1 Sam 15:22; Hos 6:6); rather, He wants us to put Him first in our hearts, above the things we most value in this world. Isaac was Abraham's beloved son—miraculously born to him in his old age—through whom God's promises were to be fulfilled. And yet, he was willing to offer his most precious son in obedience to God's command.

This made me reflect on my relationship with God: was I serving God out of routine or a sense of duty, or because I truly placed God above all else in my heart?

> "He returned to me what I had lost by sleeping late, so I could gain more spiritual blessings during the convocation"

The next day, I had more energy than usual, despite having gone to bed at 2:00 a.m. Because I had spent time reflecting on God's word and learned a valuable lesson, He returned to me what I had lost by sleeping late, so I could gain more spiritual blessings during the convocation.

There is another insight I gleaned from the Scriptures that has further shaped my attitude toward worship.

But Jesus, turning and seeing her, said, "Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well." (Mt 9:22a)

But He turned and said to Peter, "Get

behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's purposes, but men's."
(Mt 16:23)

But Jesus turned to them and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." *(Lk 23:28)*

In each of these examples, Jesus responds to different scenarios: a woman suffering from a hemorrhage of twelve years, Peter's misguided reaction to His impending suffering, and the women grieving as He was led to His crucifixion. The common thread in these accounts is that Jesus turns His head. It made me think: what did Jesus see and feel each time He turned His head?

If Jesus turns His head and sees that I am in church but am constantly on my phone, how would He feel? What if He turns His head and sees that I have believed for many decades, but have not changed my character? Or that I am unwilling to lift my cross and follow Him?

This is a sobering and worthy question for every believer to reflect on as they come before the Lord to worship and serve.

Lessons in Reconciliation

There was one occasion when I had a disagreement with my mother. I was copying Romans chapter 2 at the time when I reached this passage:

[If you] know His will and distinguish the things that matter, being instructed from the Law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to people who are blind, a light to those in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, possessing in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth—you, therefore, who teach someone else, do you not teach yourself?
(Rom 2:17–21a)

The chapter describes those who have learned the law, who know God's will, and believe they can discern right from wrong, yet do not practice what they teach others to do. As I scribed these words in my own handwriting, I asked the Lord Jesus, "Are you talking to me? Is this passage about me?"

I struggled with my conscience until the last sentence:

But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from people, but from God. *(Rom 2:29)*

If I follow God's law from the heart, I will receive God's praise. After I finished copying this verse, I went to reconcile with my mother.

Close Communion with God

When you commit to drawing closer to God through His word, you begin to have a more intimate communication with Him in your daily life. When my children were young and rebellious, there were many nights when I went to bed heartbroken. The morning after one such night, before I opened my eyes, I asked God in my mind, "Which hymn are you going to give me today?"

A melody came into my head—it was a seldom-sung hymn from the hymnal in church. I tried to remember the words as I hummed the tune:

No one understands like Jesus when the days are dark and grim.



No one is so near, so dear as Jesus.
Cast your every care on Him.

I realized that the Lord was comforting me.

To read and take in God's word is one thing, but to act them out is another. When you ask God to help you to do the latter, abundant peace will follow as you witness each wave of trouble being calmed by Jesus' words.

One morning, I prayed, "Lord Jesus, I don't want Your coming to the world to be wasted on me. I don't want to have been washed by Your precious blood in vain."

As if in response, the Scripture that I copied that day happened to be:

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.
(Eph 4:1)

These are just a few examples of the many teachings and insights I have gained from copying the Bible. It is like having a close conversation with God, where questions arise, and answers are supplied, and we gradually gain a fuller understanding of God's nature and His will. God no longer feels distant and unknowable, only to be feared and called on in times of emergency.

If we do our best to become imitators of God, as His beloved children (Eph 5:1), we will surely please Him, and our praise will come from Him.

CONCLUSION

In 2 Peter 1:5–11, the path to the heavenly kingdom is outlined. It starts with faith—believing that God is our heavenly Father—and progresses through moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and finally love. We not only come to know God but also allow that knowledge to be translated into good deeds and restraint, enduring in faith as we become more like Christ. We grow from loving our brothers and sisters to loving all humankind—seeking to save souls.

For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they do not make you useless nor unproductive in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the one who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brothers and sisters, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choice for you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.
(2 Pet 1:8–11)

To walk this path of faith is to have the opportunity to receive the grace of salvation. Therefore, we must abound in all these virtues. We do not know what the "passing grade" is for entry into the heavenly kingdom. Will we be eligible to enter if we achieve 60 percent? Since we do not wish to fall short of God's entry requirement, we must diligently pursue this path and abound in these qualities. We must put off the old man and become a new person and invest in our faith to receive abundant spiritual treasures in His eternal kingdom.

ESTABLISHING THE FAMILY ALTAR (PART 1)

Isaiah Kao—New Taipei City, Taiwan

THE FAMILY ALTAR AND THE CHURCH



The term "family altar" does not appear in the Bible. However, in recent years, the role of the family in religious education has gradually waned as reliance on church-based religious education has increased. Despite continual improvements in teacher training, teaching materials, and even teaching methods, church-delivered religious education alone cannot adequately raise a child in the Lord. This is why the term "family altar" was coined by the True Jesus Church—to focus on parental responsibility within the religious education of our children, teaching them God's way, and guiding them in their faith.

First, let us consider an important prophecy of God:

The Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed?" *(Gen 18:17–18)*

This was a blessing given to Abraham, the father of faith. It also prophesies of the true church in the last days.

Spiritual Descendants of Abraham

How is God's promise to Abraham connected to the true church of the last days? Because the Scriptures say:

For you are all sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise. *(Gal 3:26–29)*

So, who are the true spiritual descendants of Abraham? Those who "were baptized into Christ." This refers to members of the True Jesus Church, the only church whose baptism has the efficacy of cleansing sins. To be baptized into Christ and become a descendant of Abraham, the method of baptism must be biblically correct, including full immersion and being conducted in the name of Jesus.

The promise given to Abraham prophesies that his descendants would "become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed." This reveals the trajectory of the true church in the last days. At the main entrance of the True Jesus Church Taiwan General Assembly, there is an engraved stone plaque with this verse:

Now it will come about that
In the last days
The mountain of the house of the Lord
Will be established as the chief of the mountains,
And will be raised above the hills;
And all the nations will stream to it. *(Isa 2:2)*

This verse reaffirms that, one day, the True Jesus Church will preach the gospel of salvation throughout the world. People everywhere will eagerly seek the truth and stream to the mountain of the Lord—the true church—the only place the truth can be found. The true church will surely rise, according to God's promise.

God's Plan and Mission

When God spoke His promise, it was in the context of revealing His plan for Abraham:

For I have chosen him, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him." *(Gen 18:19)*

God chose Abraham for a mission that would fulfill His promise. The mission entrusted to him was to command his children and household to "keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice." God instructed Abraham to teach his family—in other words, to build a family altar—so that all nations may be blessed through his household (Gen 18:18).

This passage reminds us of the duties we ought to fulfill today as Abraham's spiritual descendants. The mission to preach throughout the world and bring God's blessings to all the nations continues in us. But we can only accomplish this mission if we establish family altars in our households and teach our children the way of the Lord. In doing so, we not only preserve our children in the Lord, but also revive the true church and her mission. Of course, even if individuals do not establish a family altar, the true church will still rise, for this is God's will. However, those who do not follow God's plan will suffer loss and fail to receive God's reward.

THE PURPOSE OF THE FAMILY ALTAR

From God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 18:19, we learn three key elements about how and why we should build the family altar :

1. Know the Way of the Lord

The first aspect is knowing God's word. God expected Abraham to "command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD." However, before Abraham could teach his family to keep God's way, he must first understand God's way himself. This is the foundation of the family altar.

Therefore, when building the family altar, parents must read and meditate on the Bible. Without understanding the truths of the Bible, one will not realize the importance of the family altar or know how to build it on the solid foundation of God's word.

2. Teach God's word

The second aspect is that Abraham was to "command his children" in God's word so that they can "keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice." This means sharing God's word with his children regularly, passing on the knowledge of how to live righteously in God's eyes. This practice is essential to the family altar.

Setting up a family altar involves regularly setting aside time for the whole family to read a passage of Scripture together, share God's word, apply biblical truths to guide the family's footsteps, and pray together. In short, a family altar is a means of integrating faith into daily living, rather than separating faith from life.

3. Lead the Whole Family to Believe in the Lord

The third aspect is that Abraham was to share God's commands not only with his children but also with others in his household. "Household" can refer to extended family, relatives, friends, and even neighbors.

In leading people to believe in the Lord, it is especially important not to forget our own family members. We should take inspiration from Acts 16, where the jailer and his entire household believed in the Lord, and the whole family rejoiced.



BUILD THE ALTAR IN FAITH

Today, the True Jesus Church worldwide has faced, to varying degrees, the challenge of raising our children in societies that stand in opposition to our beliefs. The Bible shows that the scale of our struggles often lies not in the strength of external challenges but in the weakness of faith. Once we return to God's original commands and faithfully carry them out, we will be able to overcome these challenges.

Building family altars is central to God's plan for our families, helping resolve many of the issues we face in raising our children in the Lord. When we turn our focus back to religious education at home, teaching our children to walk in faith, we will no longer over-emphasize or push them to pursue academic achievement or ambitious careers out of fear for their survival in a competitive world. For the Lord said:

"Do not worry then, saying, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear for clothing?' For the Gentile eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided to you." (Mt 6:31–33)

May the Lord help each family establish a family altar, where parents learn the knowledge of God through daily Bible reading, forming a firm foundation to teach their children and lead the whole family to the Lord.

HOW TO BUILD THE FAMILY ALTAR



God's word is the foundation of the family altar. Deuteronomy 6:6–9 provides four guiding principles for building the family altar on God's word:

1. Establish a personal Bible-reading habit (Deut 6:6):

"These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart."
One must first understand God's commands through reading the Bible.

2. Teaching by word in the family altar (Deut 6:7):

"And you shall repeat them diligently to your sons..."
One must speak forth God's commands.

3. Teaching by example in the family altar (Deut 6:8):

"You shall also tie them as a sign to your hand, and they shall be as frontlets on your forehead."
One must put God's commands into practice.

4. Teaching by environment in the family altar (Deut 6:9):

"You shall also write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."
One must set up a living environment according to God's commands.

HERE, WE WILL LOOK AT THE FIRST PRINCIPLE.



STEP ONE

ESTABLISH A PERSONAL BIBLE-READING HABIT

The first step to building a family altar is to establish a routine of personal Bible reading. Since we are to pass on God's word to the next generation, we must first learn it ourselves. If we do not understand God's commands and carry them out, how can we teach our children, much less appreciate the importance of having a family altar?

The church worldwide recognizes the urgent need to establish family altars, but promoting the concept can be difficult at the local level. This may be because some believers do not see the necessity of incorporating a family altar into their lives, or the gravity of failing to do so—which is to disobey God's command. Such awareness only comes from studying the Bible and having a firm foundation in the truth.

The Knowledge of God

After both kingdoms of Israel and Judah had fallen, God spoke through the prophet Hosea:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.
Since you have rejected knowledge,
I also will reject you from being My priest.
Since you have forgotten the Law of your God,
I also will forget your children. *(Hos 4:6)*

The primary cause of their destruction was the "lack of knowledge," or failing to understand God's commandments. Today, such a "lack of knowledge" includes neglecting to listen to sermons or to read the Bible regularly, and being ignorant of God's commandments.

In today's competitive world, children may have a constant stream of homework and activities. As a result, parents may emphasize academic achievement and compromise in matters of faith, leading children to think, *I don't need to read the Bible, but I must get good grades.*

However, the passage above presents a sobering truth: if we reject knowledge, God will reject us as His priests. A priest intercedes before God on behalf of others. The



priesthood is a blessing, through which God hears our prayers. So, if we do not continually engage with God's word, God will no longer recognize our priestly role, and our prayers will become ineffective.

Furthermore, God says that if we forget His law, He will also forget our children. This is a serious and spine-chilling warning. If parents do not learn the truths of the Bible, their children will struggle to remain in the Lord. No matter how successful they are in their careers, these children will no longer enjoy God's care and protection, and may ultimately forsake their faith.

Conversely, if parents value God's commands, they will faithfully establish a daily Bible reading habit, diligently study the truth, and put it into practice. As the Scriptures say:

"Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I am commanding you today, that the LORD your God will put you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings will come to you and reach you if you obey the LORD your God: … Blessed will be the children of your womb."
(Deut 28:1–4a)

The "children of your womb" can refer not only to the next generation, but to future generations. If parents truly love their children, they would diligently observe God's commandments and establish the family altar to pass on their faith. Then, God's blessings will not only fall on them, but also on their children and grandchildren.

HOW TO ESTABLISH A BIBLE-READING HABIT



There are several approaches for setting up a personal routine of Bible reading:

1. Read the Bible at a Consistent Pace

The simplest method is to read one chapter of the Bible a day. The Bible has 1,189 chapters; at the rate of one chapter per day, one can complete it from cover to cover in just over three years.

2. Read the Bible at a Consistent Time

Schedule a specific time in your daily routine for Bible reading, just as you would for mealtimes. Once a habit is incorporated into a routine, it is not likely to be neglected. Early morning is a good time for Bible reading: the mind is at its clearest, and memory retention at its best. Reading before bed is also beneficial, as it can calm the mind and aid sleep. One can also read at other times, but consistency is key to making progress and ensuring the process is edifying.

3. Read the Bible with Spiritual Companions

Following a Bible-reading schedule can be difficult to carry on as a solo endeavor. Reading with others and sharing insights afterward not only increases our resolve and motivation but can make reading enjoyable. The best Bible-reading companion is often one's spouse; through sharing, both can grow spiritually and strengthen their relationship. Ideally, a local church can set up a Bible-reading schedule for its members to follow, with announcements to remind and encourage them to read the Bible together. If sermon topics are also planned to coincide with relevant Bible chapters, then the undertaking becomes more meaningful, and the entire church grows together.

4. Read a Physical Bible to Yield the Best Results

The advent of smartphones and devices has made it much more convenient to read the Bible wherever we are. However, if these devices are connected to the internet, they are gateways to a whole host of distractions. Notifications may interrupt our reading and tempt us to multitask, making it difficult to concentrate and meditate deeply on the word.

Moreover, research has shown that reading on paper is better suited to the way the human brain processes and retains information, thereby enhancing focus and memory.[1] Because excessive screen time is associated with physical and mental health issues, reading a physical Bible can contribute to our overall well-being.[2]

The remaining three principles for building the family altar on God's word will be covered in an upcoming issue.

---

[1] Georgia Gowing, "Reading on screens instead of paper is a less effective way to absorb and retain information, suggests research," *Phys.org*, February 6, 2024, https://phys.org/news/2024-02-screens-paper-effective-absorb-retain.html.

[2] Khumukcham A Devi and Sudhakar K Singh, "The hazards of excessive screen time: Impacts on physical health, mental health, and overall well-being," *Journal of Education and Health Promotion*, 12 (2023): 413, https://doi.org/10.4103/jehp.jehp_447_23.

HE WILL TAKE FROM MINE AND DISCLOSE IT TO YOU

KC Tsai—Toronto, Canada

The Book of Acts records the coming of the promised Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The disciples were gathered in prayer in an upper room in Jerusalem (Acts 1:12–14):

And suddenly a noise like a violent rushing wind came from heaven, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ...And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with different tongues, as the Spirit was giving them the ability to speak out. *(Acts 2:2, 4)*

Many Jews from various countries, who had made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, were amazed when they heard the disciples speaking their native languages. Peter stood and testified about the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, declaring, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). Hearing this, the people were cut to the heart and asked the apostles what they should do (Acts 2:37).

Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself." *(Acts 2:38–39)*

THE COMPLETE PROCLAMATION OF SALVATION AT PENTECOST

This unprecedented declaration fully explains the way of salvation: all have sinned and must repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; then they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This promise of salvation was not only for the Jews of that time, and their descendants, but also for "all who are far away," whom God calls to Himself. Many of the Jews had traveled from far-off places for Pentecost, but "all who are far away" did not refer to them, because they were right in front of the disciples. Rather, it referred to the Gentiles who would believe later, including those who enter into salvation in the true church today. After all, the Gentiles were also called by the Lord (Acts 9:15; 13:46–47).

Peter's declaration was not his own, but was spoken through him by the Holy Spirit. Before His ascension, Jesus instructed the disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19). With what authority could Peter change this to "be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38)? Was he not changing Jesus' instructions? Besides, at that very moment, Peter did not realize that "all who are far away" included the Gentiles. Later, the Holy Spirit sent him to the house of Cornelius:

And he said to them, "You yourselves know that it is forbidden for a Jewish man to associate with or visit a foreigner; and yet God has shown me that I am not to call any person unholy or unclean. That is why I came without even raising any objection when I was sent for. So I ask, for what reason did you send for me?" *(Acts 10:28–29)*

It is clear that Peter did not know that he had been sent to preach the gospel to Cornelius. He did not go with that purpose because Gentiles were considered outsiders:

[R]emember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the people of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. *(Eph 2:12)*

At the time of his declaration on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38–39), Peter did not consider Gentiles to be part of the promise. But including the Gentiles was the Holy Spirit's intention all along.

During the Passover, fifty days before his proclamation, Peter had denied the Lord Jesus three times under desperate circumstances. And by the time Jesus had risen from the dead and appeared to the disciples for the third time, Peter was no longer certain about following Jesus (Jn 21:14). Despite being called by Jesus to be a "fisher of people," he returned to fishing.

However, after receiving the Holy Spirit, Peter was completely transformed. He boldly testified before the Sanhedrin, who perceived him to be an uneducated fisherman from a small town in Galilee (Acts 4:13).



With the Holy Spirit upon him, Peter received power from above (Acts 1:8) and was filled with wisdom—able to quote and expound the prophecies of Joel and David, convict the people of their sins, and preach forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God.

THE LORD JESUS CONTINUES TO SPEAK THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

The task of revealing the truth about salvation was left to the Holy Spirit by Jesus. Before departing from the world, Jesus said to the disciples:

"I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them at the present time. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth....He will glorify Me, for He will take from Mine and will disclose it to you." *(Jn 16:12–14)*

Jesus had many more truths to impart, but withheld them until the disciples received the Holy Spirit, who continued to reveal these truths after Jesus departed. In other words, the truth of salvation is not attained by human wisdom or Bible study alone but is given from above. It is a top-down blessing.

As mentioned earlier, before ascending to heaven, Jesus instructed the disciples to baptize in the singular name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19). Yet, after receiving the Holy Spirit, Peter proclaimed baptism in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38). Peter did not contradict Jesus but clarified through the Holy Spirit that the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is Jesus; baptism in His name alone grants forgiveness of sins.

Similarly, some question how the True Jesus Church can claim to be the sole church of salvation without first visiting every denomination and independent church. Salvation truth, however, is divinely revealed, not found through human effort alone. As the Bible says:

For who among people knows the thoughts of a person except the spirit of the person that is in him? So also the thoughts of God no one knows, except the Spirit of God. Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God. We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. *(1 Cor 2:11–13)*



Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus establishes His church on earth and leads the church into all truth.

THE HOLY SPIRIT ESTABLISHES AND GUIDES THE TRUE CHURCH

In the Bible, rain symbolizes God's grace: the autumn rain, or early rain, softens the soil for sowing, and the spring rain, or latter rain, matures the crops before harvest (Joel 2:23, 28). They work hand in hand to bring forth grain, wine, and oil (Deut 11:14), precious produce given through the providence and grace of God. Following the same pattern, the latter rain of the Holy Spirit will descend as the early rain did.

The faith was "once for all time handed down to the saints" (Jude 3). Therefore, it was divinely given, not obtained through human research or effort, and it was delivered once for all time, without any need for supplement or revision. Both Peter's sermon (Acts 2:38–39) and the Jerusalem Council's decision that Gentile believers did not need to be circumcised (Acts 15:28–29) were divinely guided and revealed, constituting the faith delivered once for all time.

Jesus prayed, "I have given them Your word. …Sanctify them in Your truth. Your word is truth" (Jn 17:14–17). So the truth of salvation is the word of God, which comes from Jesus, not human endeavor. It was given to His chosen disciples and passed to the true church.

Likewise, all who are to receive spiritual blessings and eternal life were chosen by God in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4–5). In his letter to Timothy, Paul said:

[God] saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was granted to us in Christ Jesus from all eternity. *(2 Tim 1:9)*

So it is all because of God's own purpose and grace that the church of salvation was established, and we were chosen to enter into this church.

The True Jesus Church has received the latter rain revelation and proclaims the baptism of forgiveness in Jesus' name, which includes full immersion in living water. The requirements of baptism were uniquely revealed by the Holy Spirit, especially the bowing of the head. Further study of the Bible affirms that baptism means being united in the likeness of Jesus' death:

[J]ust as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection. *(Rom 6:4b–5)*

The Bible declares that at the moment of His death, Jesus uttered, "It is finished," and bowed His head (Jn 19:30). This shows that further study of the Bible confirms the instructions given by the Holy Spirit to the True Jesus Church. The formalization of other doctrines, such as footwashing, was also guided by the Holy Spirit and is unique among Christian churches. Workers sent by the church—sent by the Lord Jesus (Jn 13:20)—wash the feet of newly baptized believers so they have a part with Jesus (Jn 13:8, NKJV). These teachings were all revealed by the Holy Spirit and are essential for salvation.

The five doctrines of the True Jesus Church have been preached since the church's establishment, but were officially adopted during the first World Delegates Conference (WDC) in 1967. These five doctrines were then expanded into the Ten Articles of Faith, which were adopted and codified during the second WDC in 1975.

Just as Peter's declaration of salvation (Acts 2) and the Council of Jerusalem's four prohibitions (Acts 15) constitute the true faith delivered once for all to the saints, the doctrines that consistute the Ten Articles of Faith were also given to the True Jesus Church once for all by the Holy Spirit. The True Jesus Church's beliefs thus remain unaltered and consistent with the apostolic teachings. The Holy Spirit continues to enlighten the true church with a deeper understanding of the truth—not to revise or redefine what was originally revealed, but to further affirm it with biblical evidence. He continues to expound the truth given from above and discloses it to His church.

THE ONLY CHURCH OF SALVATION

The Bible identifies one true church of salvation: the Bride of the Lamb descending from heaven. She will "[come] down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev 21:2b). "From God" indicates she has been with God since He chose her, and those within her, before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4). She is with God in the Spirit and will manifest herself—"coming down out of heaven."

This one and only Bride of the Lamb is the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:9–10). She comprises the ancient saints, like Enoch, Noah, and Abraham, who were justified through their faith in God's promises (Heb 11:5–16); the saints who believed during the apostolic time; and faithful believers who enter the true church of the end time. The Holy Spirit brings all those who have the true faith into the church of salvation.

Indeed, the True Jesus Church is the sole church of salvation in the end time. If we are in this church and submit to the Holy Spirit's direction, He will continue to expound and explain the truth to us. He will continue to take from what is Jesus' and disclose it to us.

REFLECTING ON GOD'S WILL THROUGH VIRAL CHOREOGRAPY (PART 2)

BECOMING A WISE TIME-USER

Meditating in the Field—Singapore

Editor's note: Now that the COVID-19 pandemic has receded, we no longer live under the virus's shadow—on the surface, at least. As memory of the pandemic fades, we are left with the echoes of tragedy and trauma, but also the lessons that strengthened our faith and drew us closer to God. This article concludes the writer's reflections on "dancing with the virus," the first part of which was published in Manna *94.*

When we danced with the virus, we were made to count time. Viral incubation period, lengths of quarantine and self-isolation, intervals between vaccinations, and unexpected departures of loved ones were constant reminders that time was not on our side.

Through the parables of the wise and foolish virgins (Mt 25:1–12) and the fig tree (Mk 13:28), and the signs of the end time (Mk 13:4), Jesus cautions that time is fleeting. It returns for no one. We, therefore, must be vigilant and prayerful in preparation (Mk 14:37–38).

The apostles also remind us to make the best use of time. Paul exhorts us to redeem the time by pursuing wisdom and understanding of God's will (Eph 5:15–17, NKJV),[1] and being wise in our interactions with outsiders (Col 4:5). Peter describes a day as being a thousand years, and a thousand years being a day, to God. If we ever feel we have plenty of time to kill, it does not mean God is slow or has forgotten His promise. It means He is extending His grace period (2 Pet 3:8–9). Similarly, James likens human life to vapor that appears only for a while and then disappears. Therefore, we can only say: if the Lord is willing, we shall live to do this and do that (Jas 4:14–15). Time is life. Life is the total sum of the seconds, minutes, hours, days, and years that we have under the sun.

[1] Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

TO REFLECT, TRAIN, AND IMPROVE

Time crawled at a snail's pace during the lockdowns, also known as circuit breakers in Singapore. What should we do with our time when in similar conditions of confinement?

Around 1900 BCE, Joseph was seventeen years old (Gen 37:2). Today, he would be in high school and about to enter college or university. Yet, instead of studying overseas, Joseph was human trafficked across the border. His "undergraduate and graduate studies" in the following decade or so were completed at Potiphar's house, with no pay and no contract end date (Gen 39:1–6). He then did his "post-graduate study" in prison (Gen 39:19–23). At the age of thirty, Joseph attended his first job interview before Pharaoh (Gen 41:14–41). He was subsequently given the monumental task of overseeing the survival of millions in the region and sustaining the national economy for the

next two decades.

In the thirteen years since Joseph left home, he had been in chains most of the time, legally if not physically. However, during this time he mastered at least one foreign language, accounting, diplomacy, agricultural sciences, human resource management, public relations, policy making, and strategic planning, amongst others. He was so rigorously trained that he named his sons Manasseh ("For God has made me forget all my toil and my father's house") and Ephraim ("For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction") to commemorate the hardships he had encountered (Gen 41:51–52).

Similarly, when Paul was in confinement, he wasted no time. He turned his internment into a writing sabbatical. He completed epistles that were read by churches of his time and went on to shape the future development of Christianity. When God confines us, it is time to reflect, train, and improve.

TO LIVE AND CHERISH

The pandemic took away the lives and health of billions globally. It caused not only excessive deaths—both directly and indirectly linked to COVID-19—but also profound grief, unemployment, famines, familial separation, social unrest, political instability, and economic downturn. This reminds us that everything we took for granted before the pandemic was given by God. Because they are given, they can also be taken away.

As the pandemic receded and life gradually returned to normalcy, restrictions on group gatherings were lifted, mask wearing became optional, and safety distancing and TraceTogether became distant memories of the past. People returned to traveling, dining out, and engaging in life, just as in pre-pandemic times. Yet, I wonder how God wants us to make use of time after we have regained what was lost.

In the Book of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon contemplates the futility of life. Through his contemplation, he reasons that to live is to cherish and enjoy the lot God has given us. This includes the food and drink we consume for nourishment (Eccl 2:24; 3:13; 5:18, 19), our loved ones (Eccl 9:9), and our labor (Eccl 9:7, 10). Let us be content with the lot that God has granted us in life, and count our blessings, both great and small.

TO SING

For those who remain, the post-pandemic is a new beginning to appreciate life. Through that appreciation we sing praises to the Lord. As King David describes:

The dead do not praise the Lord,
Nor do any who go down into silence;
But as for us, we will bless the Lord
From this time and forever.
Praise the Lord! *(Ps 115:17–18)*

X-ray images of calcified lungs and the lingering coughs of long COVID remind us that to live and breathe is a miracle. Singing is a privilege for the living. During online choir rehearsals over Zoom, we had to mute our individual microphones while singing to avoid sound interference, feedback, and internet lags. Even when the congregation returned to physical worship, for a period of time we could only sing quietly without projecting our voices, to minimize the spread of the virus. We were singing together, but subdued. Now that we are able to open our mouths and vocalize collectively, our praises are a testimony that we are survivors of the pandemic. Those who have passed on have passed on; those who remain must continue to praise God.

TO LABOR

At the height of the pandemic, scientists across the world worked around the clock to ensure vaccines kept up with the speed of viral mutation. That speed parallels the urgency we should have toward the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord can be understood in two ways: as Christ's second coming, or as our own eventual death. Certainly, no one knows when that hour will be except God. However, as Paul reminds, "[F]or now salvation is nearer to us than when we first believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is near" (Rom 13:11b–12a). Jesus repeats throughout the Gospels: the harvest is plenty but workers are few (Mt 9:36–37; Lk 10:2; Jn 4:35). There is much to be done before Christ comes again, especially in the post-pandemic era. There are many going through mental distress and physical unrest, needing consolation, healing, and salvation. The harvest is indeed plenty.

WALTZING WITH THE VIRUS

The global pandemic taught humanity many lessons. For those in Christ, I offer these reflections for our mutual consolation and encouragement. The first reflection explored how through the constant role-switching between being Job and his friends, we learn to be better comforters. We are here to keep company rather than to pass judgement. This second reflection is a meditation on how time is not on our side. The pandemic forced us to count our days. When we next find ourselves in confinement, let us use it as an opportunity to reflect, train, and improve. When out of confinement, let us take it as a new beginning in which we cherish, praise, and respond to God's calling.



True Jesus Church

IA MEDIA MINISTRY: RESOURCES

SOCIAL MEDIA

FACEBOOK

tjc100

INSTAGRAM

@tjc.ia

YOUTUBE

@tjcia

PODCASTS

Meet Jesus

MOBILE APP

iOS

TJC-IA
(iOS)

ANDROID

TJC-IA
(Android)

iOS

eRhema
(iOS)

ANDROID

eRhema
(Android)

MEDIA MINISTRY RESOURCES VIDEO

YOUTUBE

Website

YOUTUBE

Bible Learning

YOUTUBE

Social Media

YOUTUBE

Bible &
Hymnal App

BIBLE & HYMNAL APP

WEB APP

bible.tjc.org
(eRhema)

WEB APP

hymnal.tjc.org

BIBLE LEARNING

WEBSITE

learn.tjc.org
(eLearning)

WEBSITE

bsg.tjc.org
(Bible Study Guides)

IA WEBSITE

WEBSITE

tjc.org

WEBSITE

tjc.org/welcome
(For new visitors)



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 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 #101: The Last Days
Articles due: October 1, 2026

And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" *(Mt 24:3)*

Answering their question, Jesus warns His disciples of what will come in the last days before His second coming. There will be confusion, wars, political conflict, and natural disasters. Indeed, many of the events prophesied by Jesus have not only come to pass, but are increasing in magnitude and frequency, signaling that we are experiencing the birth pains of the end time.

More pertinent to True Jesus Church believers—members of the true church of the end time—are the tribulation and persecution that are to come, and have already begun. What spiritual challenges will we face, and how should we prepare to overcome them?

How can we defend the truth against the creeping distortion and confusion sowed by false prophets and false christs, especially in the age of information and misinformation overload?

How can we prevent hatred and lawlessness from taking root in the hearts of believers, to stem the tide of individualism, immorality, and irreverence that typifies the current generation?

As we sojourn in this faithless landscape, how can we keep our faith from growing lukewarm, and our love for God and man from turning cold?

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 NASB 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.

Issue 99 Vol. 50 No. 1
Publication date: July 2026
Mend Our Nets

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!

True Jesus Church, 21217 Bloomfield Ave, Lakewood, CA 90715 USA

Phone: +1-714-533-8889 | Fax: + 1-562-402-3190 | Email: info@tjc.org | Website: www.tjc.org