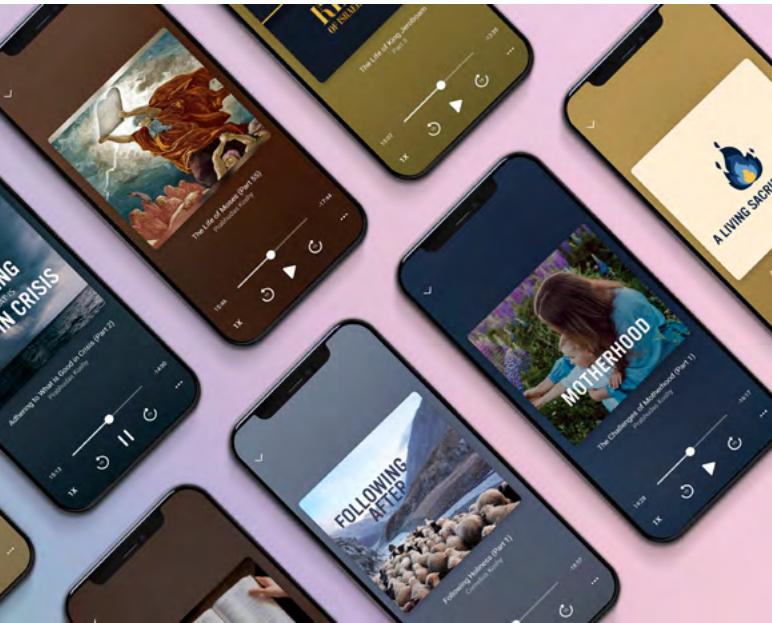


Bible Witness

MDDI (P) 037/04/2025 | ISSN: 0219-5364 | VOLUME 25 ISSUE 6 (NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2025)

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—Hebrews 10:24–25a



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Editor Prabhudas Koshy **Assistant Editor** Ho Kee How **Publishing & Circulation Co-ordinator** Lok Kwok Wah
Technical Editors Jenny Lok, Lok Kwok Wah, Lok Qian Yi **Layout** Matthew Peh **Children's Story Illustration** Andronicus Koshy **Publisher** Bible Witness Media Ministry of Gethsemane Bible-Presbyterian Church, Singapore
Printer Ee Tai Press Pte Ltd **Mailing Address** Bible Witness Media Ministry, 33 Ubi Crescent, Singapore 408584
Telephone (65) 6741 1910 **E-mail** bwmm.gbpc@gmail.com **Website** www.biblewitness.com

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). This magazine is distributed free from 2006 onwards. Postage and handling charges still apply. 2 years (12 issues): **S\$10.00** Singapore/Malaysia surface mail delivery, **S\$14.00** international surface mail delivery; **S\$26.00** Asia air mail, **S\$34.00** for air mail to all other countries.

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BE A FLOURISHING CHURCH

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All articles in this issue were written by the Rev. Dr Prabhudas Koshy, Pastor of Gethsemane B-P Church, Singapore, and Editor of the Bible Witness Magazine.

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WHY SOME CHURCH MEMBERS DON'T Grow Spiritually

Jesus said in John 15:4–5, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” Jesus’ words here emphasise the crucial dependence of our spiritual growth on a personal relationship with Christ. Just as a branch depends on the vine for sustenance, believers must stay connected to Christ to grow spiritually and bear fruit. Spiritual growth is not merely about gaining knowledge or engaging in religious activities, but abiding in Christ, being transformed by His Spirit, and living in obedience to His Word.

There is a real need for all of us to examine ourselves to see whether we abide in Christ continually. The apostle Paul urged the Christians in Corinth to examine their faith, rather than to place undue emphasis on their allegiance to different preachers, leading to divisions within the church. He exhorted them, saying, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be

reprobates?” (2 Corinthians 13:5). This is a call for self-examination to ensure genuine faith and authentic spiritual growth in every Christian’s life.

So, let every church member (including leaders) humbly and sincerely examine himself in the following areas recommended in the Scriptures, to see the cause for one’s experience of spiritual dullness and fruitlessness, and then seek to eradicate those spiritual maladies.

EXAMINE YOUR FAITH IN CHRIST

“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith ...” (2 Corinthians 13:5a). If you truly trust in Jesus alone for salvation and believe that “Jesus Christ is in you” (2 Corinthians 13:5b), your life must be lived according to “the faith”, the divine standard revealed in His Word. Does your life demonstrate confidence in and submission to God’s truth? Or are you placing your trust in emotions, experiences, relationships, wealth, careers, rather than in His grace? A life rooted in faith continually seeks His truth through persistent prayer. As 2 Peter 3:18 urges, “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be

glory both now and for ever. Amen.” Remember: Spiritual growth leads to a life that radiates God’s glory through His grace and truth.

EXAMINE YOUR OBEDIENCE TO GOD’S WORD

Jesus left no room for lip service when He confronted His hearers: “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). He expected His followers to prove their genuineness through obedience. In John 15, Jesus insisted repeatedly that spiritual vitality and fruitfulness come to those who abide in His Word through obedience. “If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love” (v. 10). Earlier He had said, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (v. 7). Reflect: Are there areas in your life where you consistently resist God’s will?

EXAMINE YOUR REPENTANCE AND SEPARATION FROM SIN

The Lord had warned the Christians in the church of Ephesus: “Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth” (Revelation 2:16; cf. 2:5). He had also earlier exhorted them, “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent” (Revelation 2:5).

Likewise, if you do not repent of the sins that entangle you, God Himself will stand against you, and this will

certainly rob you of spiritual joy and victory. Have you confessed and turned away from the sins in your life? (cf. 1 John 1:9). Do you grieve over sin and desire holiness? Or do you excuse and justify sinful habits? Every believer must regularly examine himself for unconfessed sin (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:28). True repentance not only acknowledges sin, but also turns away from it, seeking to live as a vessel of honour for the Lord’s service (cf. 2 Timothy 2:21). Take heed: Repent, walk in holiness, and experience the fullness of joy and victory in Christ.

EXAMINE YOUR LOVE FOR GOD AND OTHERS

Do you love God above all else (cf. Matthew 22:37–38)? Do you love fellow believers and even your enemies (cf. 1 John 4:20; Matthew 5:44)? Are you growing in kindness, patience, and forgiveness? Notice Paul’s comment on the brotherly love exhibited by the Thessalonian Christians as evidence of their spiritual increase: “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more” (1 Thessalonians 4:9–10).

Spiritual coldness can stem from various factors. Some become distracted by worldly pursuits, allowing materialistic concerns, personal ambitions, or entertainment to take precedence over their relationship with God. Others may struggle with hidden sin, guilt, or unresolved doubts, which create a barrier between them and the Lord. Still, others might grow

weary due to trials, disappointments, or unanswered prayers, leading to spiritual discouragement and apathy.

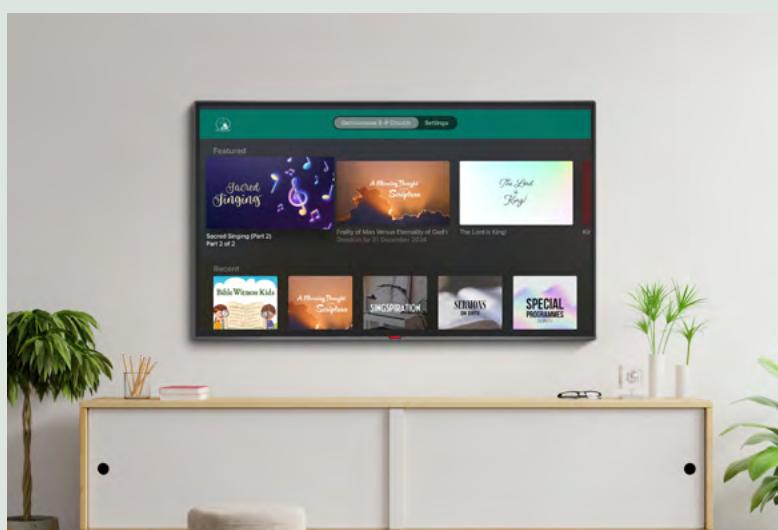
Without an intentional pursuit of God—through prayer, studying His Word, and genuine fellowship with other believers—spiritual stagnation can set in. The fervency of faith diminishes, and what was once a vibrant walk with God turns into a mere religious routine. This is why Scripture urges believers to guard their hearts, remain steadfast in the faith, and actively cultivate their relationship with God.

CONCLUSION

Admittedly, some church members think that things will improve if they go to another church. Changing churches or listening to new preachers might bring a temporary sense of renewal, but if the underlying cause is personal rather than external, the problem will likely persist.

A new church or preacher can inspire, but lasting transformation comes from a heart fully surrendered to Christ. Some people switch churches to avoid accountability and commitment, which will only lead to more spiritual apathy. Changing churches is necessary only when a church teaches false doctrine, is unfaithful to Scripture, compromises on biblical truths, or fails to promote holy living. Then, seeking a biblically sound church is needed.

Be that as it may, the Bible repeatedly emphasises that true spiritual maturity comes from an intimate, lively, ongoing relationship with the Lord. The apostle Paul insists, “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving” (Colossians 2:6–7). Spiritual growth happens when we are firmly rooted in Christ, walking in faith, and continually being built up in Him. ■



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Let Us Not Be Divisive!

Hostility, quarrelling, acrimony, threats, slander, and other hurtful behaviour have wrecked many a church; several such stories in our contemporary church scene have saddened us deeply. If we do not guard ourselves against sin and our self-promoting ways, our congregation will be wrecked with dissension.

Disharmony and disunity have existed in the church since New Testament times. (The church in Corinth was one such disreputable example.) Let us therefore take heed to Scripture's counsel on guarding ourselves against disunity and division. May we be vigilant to intercede for our local church, that "there be no divisions among [us]; but that [we] be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10).

WHY DO PEOPLE QUARREL?

"From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" (James 4:1). Quarrels have long been part of human society. The source of all fightings is man's sinful heart. Man's depraved, egoistic nature is the root of all discord and dispute. "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matthew 15:19).



Man is predisposed to his personal desires and whims. Unless believers "put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication" (Colossians 3:8), they would also be tempted to live for self-interest and self-glory, resulting in bitterness and acrimonious conduct. When two or more people are determined to pursue their own personal agendas, they will soon begin to fight.

CHURCH AND QUARRELS

Sadly, uncharitable contentions do occur in the church. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church: "For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it" (1 Corinthians 11:18; cf. 1:11). Note the reason being pointed out: "ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?"

(1 Corinthians 3:3). Here, Paul is not saying that believers were in a totally carnal state, but that the Corinthians had been behaving in a carnal or fleshly manner. When believers do not walk in the Spirit, they succumb to the impulses of the flesh. This is why believers are reminded: “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Galatians 5:16–17).

It is totally out of character for Christians to engage in quarrels and divisions within the church. They undermine the church’s testimony and effectiveness in the world. They give an occasion for the devil and the world to scorn the church. They grieve the Lord; they discourage and demoralise His people. Beware: “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another” (Galatians 5:15). Quarrels fracture fellowship, rob Christians of their joy, weaken their effectiveness, and dishonour the Lord. What a high price to pay for an ego trip!

CHURCH AND UNITY

Paul therefore admonished the feuding Corinthians (in 1 Corinthians 1:10)—“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” The first need of the Corinthian church was harmony among her people. It is also the need of many churches today.

Note that this unity comes with proper judgment, being of “the same mind and ... the same judgment”. Anything less is not true spiritual unity. Hypocritical unity that tolerates doctrinal errors and unholy living is not what is taught here. We are not simply to be in unity indiscriminately and avoid all conflicts while people pursue ungodly doctrines and unscriptural living. When congregants differ in doctrine or strongly disagree with the church leadership and policies, they cannot contribute to the spiritual unity of the church nor serve effectively. Of course, believers are not “carbon copies” of each other. They differ in disposition, temperament, skill and giftedness, but they should be of “the same mind” in Christian doctrine and living.

If any kind of difference or dispute occurs, it must be resolved according to the Scriptures. Church leaders, who are men of knowledge and spiritual maturity, must make it a point to prayerfully attend to those issues, and advise the church what “seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to [them]” (Acts 15:28). No arbitrary ruling should be made, but the Board of Elders must make their decision unanimously, and in accordance with God’s Word under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Their godly counsel must then be humbly sought and obeyed, for Scripture commands believers to “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:17). Faithful believers then must be in complete harmony with their leaders to obey God’s will. When elders are one in the Spirit, the

congregation should submit to the directions given to them by the elders.

Such unity would require much effort and prayer. But it is God's way for His church to enjoy the sweet blessings of unity, as Paul said to the Philippians: "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (Philippians 2:2). Let us remember the psalmist's praise of brotherly unity—"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1).

CHURCH THAT IS "WITHOUT MURMURINGS AND DISPUTINGS"

Philippians 2:14 exhorts, "Do all things without murmurings and disputings". We are dissuaded from engaging in two evils, namely murmuring and disputing. Interestingly, Paul is concerned that some may engage in spiritual activities with murmuring and disputing. In other words, they practise religion without sincerity and joy. When God-given duties are done with murmuring and a disgruntled spirit, such service will be unacceptable. So, all Christians must guard themselves against such evil conduct. Both of those sins must be abhorred and avoided if our services are to be effective and helpful.

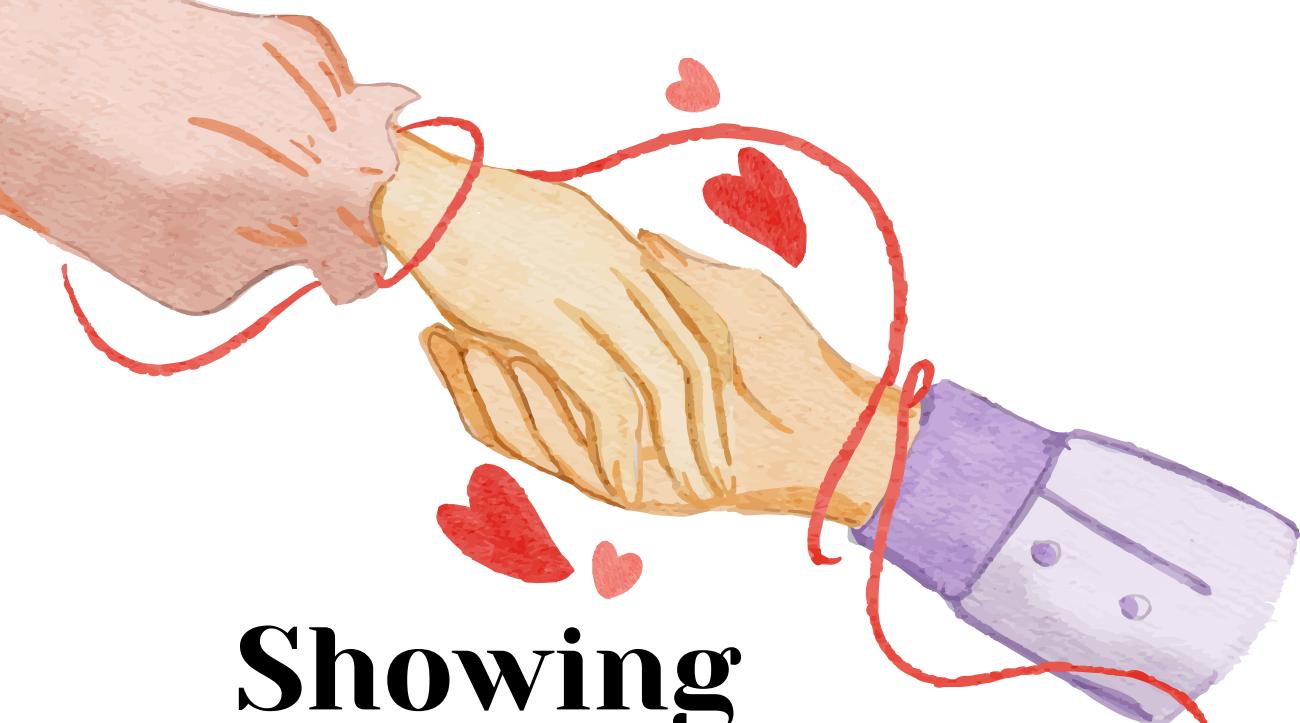
Some murmur against God and His servants, like the Israelites in the wilderness when experiencing a time of scarcity (cf. Numbers 11:4–6; Exodus 15:24; 16:7–9). Others murmur because they are discontented with and envious of the godly men and women whom God uses (cf. Numbers 14:1–4; 16:41; Mark 14:5). There are also some others who murmur because of their unbelief

and their bigoted desire to spread their sedition (cf. Luke 15:2; Jude 16).

The spirit of murmuring is perilous. God's Word cautions us: "Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer" (1 Corinthians 10:10). Murmuring is often the result of envy, discontentment, bitterness, pride and unbelief. It results in many evil deeds, such as gossip, backbiting, slander, usurping of authority, defiance, sedition, dissension and schism. Murmuring is not just a dispute with man, but also with God! So, serve the Lord without any murmur or dispute.

CONCLUSION

Dear Christians, let us always endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:1–6). For the local church to be flourishing, it is pertinent that we make Paul's prayer for the Roman church as ours: "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Romans 15:5–7). Amen. ■



Showing Compassion

FOR THE AFFLICTED

A flourishing church is a church that is not short on works of mercy. She does not merely pay lip service when confronted by sufferings and hardships endured by afflicted brethren. She not only responds through communicating material gifts towards needy saints, but also is moved with compassion and touched with the feeling of others' infirmities.

This is not difficult to fathom if we realise that the church of Jesus Christ is not merely a gathering of individuals, but the family of God, redeemed by the blood of Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In this holy fellowship, believers are called to walk together in love, to edify one another in the faith, and to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2). Among the vital expressions of our

unity in truth and love for Christ, the compassion and support we extend to afflicted brethren must be manifested. Scripture commands it, Christ exemplifies it, and the Spirit enables it.

THE COMMAND OF SCRIPTURE

The apostle Paul exhorts the Colossian believers, "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering" (Colossians 3:12). Compassion is mentioned here as a necessary garment, not as optional, for the Christian life. Likewise, Romans 12:15 instructs us: "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." This means identifying ourselves with our brethren in their sorrows and trials, sharing their pain, and reflecting the tender mercies of our Saviour.

James reminds us that words of good will without deeds are empty: “If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?” (James 2:15–16). True faith produces works of mercy. Thus, the command of Scripture is clear: to show compassion in both word and deed to those afflicted among us.

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST

Our Lord Jesus Christ is the perfect pattern of compassion. Again and again, the Gospel accounts describe Him as being “moved with compassion” (Matthew 9:36; cf. 14:14; 20:34). He touched lepers, healed the sick, fed the hungry, and wept with those who mourned. His ministry to the afflicted was not formal or mechanical; it was tender, personal, and full of grace.

Above all, His compassion moved Him to bear the greatest affliction of His people: the guilt of sin. By His suffering and death upon the cross, He secured eternal deliverance for all who trust in Him. If He, the sinless Son of God, stooped so low for our salvation, how can we refuse to stoop in love to aid our suffering brethren?

THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH

The church, as the body of Christ, is called to reflect Christ’s compassion in a corporate and practical way. Acts 2:44 records how the early church shared their possessions, so that “all that believed were together, and had all things common”. The apostolic

church understood that spiritual unity must be matched with tangible support of the needy.

For us today, in our homes and church, this means cultivating a culture of genuine care. When a brother is sick, the church prays, visits, and provides. When a sister is overwhelmed by trials, the church comforts, counsels, and encourages her in the Word. When families face financial burdens, the church rallies to supply what is lacking. Such ministry is not social work, but a manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit and the outworking of Christ’s love.

However, no one in the church should become poor and needy because of his unbiblical conduct. Brethren must walk honestly, providing for their own (1 Thessalonians 4:12; 1 Timothy 5:8). The church must remember: “if any would not work, neither should he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Poverty that springs from sloth or waste, and suffering reaped through careless conduct, bring reproach upon Christ. Believers are called to diligence, wisdom, and godly stewardship, that their lives may honour the Lord and edify His church. True faith labours diligently, faithfully manages God’s blessings, and lives with godly contentment, lest one burden the body of Christ.

THE WITNESS TO THE WORLD

When the church demonstrates compassion to her afflicted members and co-labourers, and fellow believers around the world, she adorns the Gospel before a watching world. Jesus declared, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have

love one to another" (John 13:35). A congregation that stand shoulder to shoulder in trials with their afflicted brethren testify that the love of Christ is real, comforting and restoring.

Afflictions will not cease until Christ returns, but until then, the Lord calls His people to be channels of His mercy to one another. We must resist selfishness and indifference, remembering that "whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26a).

Let us, therefore, take to heart the words of Hebrews 13:3: "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with

them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body." It goes without saying that to remember is not merely to think, but to act, to pray, to comfort, and to support.

CONCLUSION

As we faithfully show compassion and support to our afflicted brethren, we reflect the heart of Christ, fulfil the law of love, strengthen the church's unity, and bear witness to the power of the Gospel. Truly, to God alone be the glory as we yield ourselves to be a compassionate congregation, which is a genuine mark of a flourishing church. ■

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WHEN THE CHURCH Gives, THE CHURCH Grows!

Over the past thirty-eight years of this writer's church ministry, God has blessed us to witness significant growth in both our local and foreign Gospel work. This, to a large extent, has been advanced through the generous and sacrificial giving of our members and friends.

Time and again, when God opened doors for us to proclaim Christ, whether through church planting, missionary support, evangelism, or strengthening of our home ministries, it has been the Spirit-led giving of God's people that made those efforts possible. Brethren, who are being moved by a desire to see the church advance in her endeavours for the expansion of the Gospel, have consistently responded with open hearts and open hands—giving not only out of abundance, but oftentimes through personal sacrifice as well.

This bountiful spirit is a clear mark of God's hand upon our church, working mightily through us as we walk in faith and obedience, with hearts set on seeking first the kingdom of God. Such generosity not only strengthens the ministry, but also fosters unity, faith and joy within the body.

THE PRACTICE OF CHURCH GIVING

Giving in the church encompasses more than finances. While tithes and offerings are important, the New Testament calls the church to a wide-ranging generosity.

Giving of Substance

Paul exhorted the Corinthian church to be intentional and cheerful in their giving: "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him

give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). Our giving should not be under compulsion, but flow from a grateful heart.

Giving of Time and Service

The church must also give of her time and spiritual gifts in service. The apostle Peter exhorts: "As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10). Every believer has been uniquely gifted by the Holy Spirit—not for self-exaltation, but for the edification of the body and the advancement of the Gospel. When the members of Christ's church offer their time and talents willingly and joyfully, the whole body thrives.

Whether one has the gift of teaching, serving, encouraging, leading, praying, showing mercy, or organising ministries, each has a role to play in building up the church. A giving church is a working, serving church.

When the members of Christ's church offer their time and talents willingly and joyfully, the whole body thrives.

And a serving church is a growing church. Spiritual gifts left unused are like lamps hidden under a bushel. But when offered to the Lord, they become instruments of divine grace, pointing others to Christ and strengthening the household of faith.

Likewise, time is also a sacred gift from God, woven with divine purpose. Each moment carries opportunities ordained by His providence—to serve, to grow, to bless, and to glorify Him. To value time rightly is to recognise that every hour holds a doorway to obey the will and purposes of the One who orders our steps. The stewardship of both God-given time and spiritual gifts is not optional; it is a sacred trust.

Giving of Love and Forgiveness

Perhaps the most powerful gift a church can offer is genuine love and forgiveness. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35). The early church's growth was fuelled by their passionate love and hospitality. They broke bread together with gladness and singleness of heart, bearing one another's burdens, meeting one another's needs, and welcoming strangers as family. Whether Jew or Gentile, rich or poor, male or female—all found equal footing at the foot of the cross. This Christlike love was the fragrance of the early church, drawing multitudes who longed for truth and hope. When the early church practised this kind of generosity, the results were astonishing: "And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common" (Acts 4:32). Their giving

created unity, eradicated need, and built mutual trust in the community.

In a world of selfishness and bitter quarrels, genuine love is rarely found. Even in churches and so-called Christian families, many people cease to express genuine love and forgiveness. But the church that yields to the Holy Spirit, whom the Lord has abundantly supplied to His people, can produce the spiritual fruit of love (cf. Galatians 5:22–23).

THE PROMISE OF CHURCH GROWTH

Scripture consistently connects generosity with an increase in the church's spiritual vitality and outreach effectiveness. 2 Corinthians 9:6–8 directly links generous giving to both spiritual abundance and fruitfulness in ministry. "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work". Those who give cheerfully are promised sufficiency and grace to abound in good works, including outreach and service.

A giving church attracts people, not by marketing or manipulation, but by the compelling testimony of God's love in action. Acts 2 presents this model: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship... And sold their possessions and goods, and

parted them to all men, as every man had need... And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:42, 45, 47). Note the connection: They taught. They fellowshiped. They gave. And the Lord added. Gospel growth is God's work, but He also uses the faithful generosity of His people as His instrument.

HINDRANCES TO GIVING AND GROWTH

When a church fails to give, her growth is severely curtailed. The Laodicean church in Revelation claimed to be rich, but Christ rebuked them: "Because thou sayest, I am rich... and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor..." (Revelation 3:17). They had ceased to give from the heart. Their spiritual stagnation came from misplaced trust in material wealth. A stingy spirit leads to spiritual starvation.

Hoarding, fear, distrust and selfishness will choke the life out of a church. But the spiritual increase promised will be enjoyed when biblical giving is maintained—freely, cheerfully, and faithfully.

CONCLUSION

The church of Jesus Christ is called to be a giving body because she represents the giving Saviour. The more she pours out in love, generosity, time and service, the more she will be blessed by God with spiritual vitality and numerical increase which God has promised. For as we give, we grow in grace, Gospel missions, and eternal fruit for the glory of God. Unquestionably, when the church gives, the church grows! ■



Vessels of Honour

IN A GREAT HOUSE

The Holy Spirit often uses vivid images in Scripture to reveal spiritual truths. In 2 Timothy 2:19–21, Paul describes the church as a “great house” filled with vessels of gold, silver, wood, and earth (clay). These vessels represent believers—some useful and honourable, others not. Through this imagery, Paul calls us to purify ourselves, that we might become vessels fit for the Master’s service and, in turn, be a flourishing church.

CHURCH, A GREAT HOUSE WITH AN UNSHAKEABLE DIVINE FOUNDATION

“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (v. 19).

In the previous verses (vv. 16–18), Paul had warned Timothy about false teachers whose heresies were capable of overthrowing the faith of some within the church. Yet, despite the spread of error and ungodliness, Paul declares with confidence: “Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure...” Amidst the chaos, the true church rests on an unchanging foundation laid by God Himself.

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul had already affirmed that “the house of God, which is the church of the living God”, is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). The church stands immovably upon the truths that God has revealed in His Word. No matter how fiercely falsehood rages, God secures His people upon the solid ground of His truth. It is no surprise,

then, that the church is pictured here as “a great house” (v. 20a).

Paul further emphasises this security by noting that the foundation of God has a “seal” (which is a mark of ownership and divine purpose)—“The Lord knoweth them that are his” (v. 19a). Like a stone engraving on a grand building, God’s mark assures us that He knows and loves each true believer, and none will ever be lost. As Jesus has prayed to the Father: “Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none” (John 18:9; cf. 17:12).

The seal also declares God’s purpose for His people: “Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (v. 19b). God’s ownership is never passive; it leads to active sanctification. True believers will not abandon God to embrace sin—rather, they will continually depart from sin, as visible proof that they belong to Him.

CHURCH, A GREAT HOUSE WITH HONOURABLE AND DISHONOURABLE VESSELS

“But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour” (v. 20).

Paul continues his household imagery of the church, describing it as a “great house” filled with different kinds of vessels. Some are crafted from precious metals like gold and silver; others are made from common materials like wood and clay. In any grand home, vessels of honour are displayed proudly, while vessels of dishonour—used for refuse or waste—are hidden away.

In the same way, within God’s great house, the church, there are faithful servants who bring honour to His name, and others who bring shame through unfaithfulness, laziness, cowardice, or discontent. We are called not merely to be part of the house, but to be vessels of honour—clean, useful, and ready for the Master’s service.

No institution on earth is greater in God’s sight than His church. Serving Him within the church is both a high privilege and a sacred duty. To be a vessel of honour in the great house of God is not something to be taken lightly. It is a calling that demands our best, and rewards us with eternal significance.

BE HONOURABLE VESSELS FIT FOR MASTER OF THE GREAT HOUSE

Paul further exhorts, “If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (v. 21).

Every believer, especially those called to leadership (like Timothy), must cleanse himself from false doctrines and ungodly practices, which Paul had warned of earlier (vv. 16–18). Only by separating from sin and error can one become a vessel of honour, set apart and ready for the Master’s use.

The Lord uses only clean vessels. Talent, intelligence, or capability alone does not make one useful to God. The Lord requires purity of life. If we flee sin and live for Him, we will become instruments that bring Him glory. Are you purging your life of sinful attitudes, worldly habits, and ungodly influences?

If so, God will prepare you for every good work which He has ordained for you to fulfil (cf. Ephesians 2:10).

In the subsequent few verses, Paul then gives three crucial instructions to maintain ourselves as honourable vessels:

1. Flee youthful lusts: "Flee also youthful lusts" (v. 22a). Youthful lusts include more than sexual sins; they also include pride, impatience, quarrelsomeness, ambition, and all kinds of selfish desires. God's servant must actively flee these things.
2. Follow righteousness, faith, love and peace: "follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (v. 22b). It's not enough to flee from sin. We must also pursue godly virtues alongside others who "call on the Lord out of a pure heart". Running from sin must be matched by running towards righteousness with all the people of God.
3. Avoid foolish arguments and cultivate gentleness: "But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will" (vv. 23–26). The servant of the Lord must not be argumentative and quarrelsome, but be "gentle ...

patient, in meekness instructing...". Our goal is not to win debates, but to restore souls. With patience and prayer, we labour, trusting that God may grant repentance to those ensnared by the devil and rescue them. In your teaching and interactions, ask yourself: "Am I striving to win arguments, or working to restore hearts?" "Is my conduct and message drawing others towards Christ, or pushing them further away?"

To be a vessel of honour in God's great house, we must flee that which corrupts, pursue that which is godly, and serve with gentleness and meekness. Only then can we reflect Christ, and be a flourishing church—to the glory of God. ■

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BIBLE TRIVIA—JOSHUA 11–12

SARAH YONG

I. Read the Bible passage from Joshua 11:1-23. Then rearrange the statements below in the correct chronological order by numbering them (from 1 to 12) in the right-most column.

(From 1 to 12, in the right-most column.)

No.	
A.	But the LORD assured Joshua, "Be not afraid, for I will deliver them up all slain before Israel."
B.	This army was as numerous as the sand upon the seashore, and equipped with very many horses and chariots.
C.	All these kings met and pitched together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel.
D.	When the king of Hazor heard about Israel's victories, he gathered the kings on the north of the mountains to join forces with him.
E.	So Joshua and all the people of war with him, came suddenly, and fell upon their enemies, and smote them.
F.	And Joshua smote the king and people of Hazor with the sword, and utterly destroyed the city with fire.
G.	The LORD delivered those enemies into the hand of Israel, and Joshua did unto them as the LORD commanded.
H.	The children of Israel also took all the spoil of the other cities, and the cattle, for a prey unto themselves.
I.	When Joshua finally took the whole land, this conquered land would be given for an inheritance unto Israel according to their tribes.
J.	However, the inhabitants of all the cities were killed by Joshua with the edge of the sword.
K.	Joshua then went on to battle and took all the south country, and all the land of Goshen.
L.	Only one city made peace with the children of Israel, namely the Hivites, who were the inhabitants of Gibeon.

Answers to Bible Trivia—Joshua 10 (Vol. 25, Iss. 5, p. 17)

Part A: A, D, E, G, I, L, O, R, S
Part B: "I LORD GOD of ISRAEL"

II. Read the Bible passage from Joshua 12:1–24, and then answer the following questions by filling in the blanks.

1. Which 3 tribes of the children of Israel were given possession of the land that was conquered under Moses' leadership?

Answer: The tribes of _____, _____, and _____.

2. How many kings did Joshua defeat in his conquest of the Promised Land?

Answer: _____



Wang Ming Dao

(1900-1991) - Part X

Retold by Jenny Lok
Layout & Art by Andronicus Koshy

In the winter of 1942, Wang Ming-Dao met a Japanese Investigating Officer, Mr Takeda.



Wang then went on to explain further his firm belief in the truths of God's Word.

Mr Takeda then repeatedly asked him to reconsider his decision.

Not wanting to waste time over the matter, Wang rose from his seat



Before Wang left, Mr Takeda gave him a warm handshake. Wang knew that it was the Lord who had protected him from being arrested that day!

*previously known as the 'North China Christian Federation.'

Sometime later in 1943, it came to Wang's knowledge that Mr Takeda was not at all offended by his refusal to join the Association.

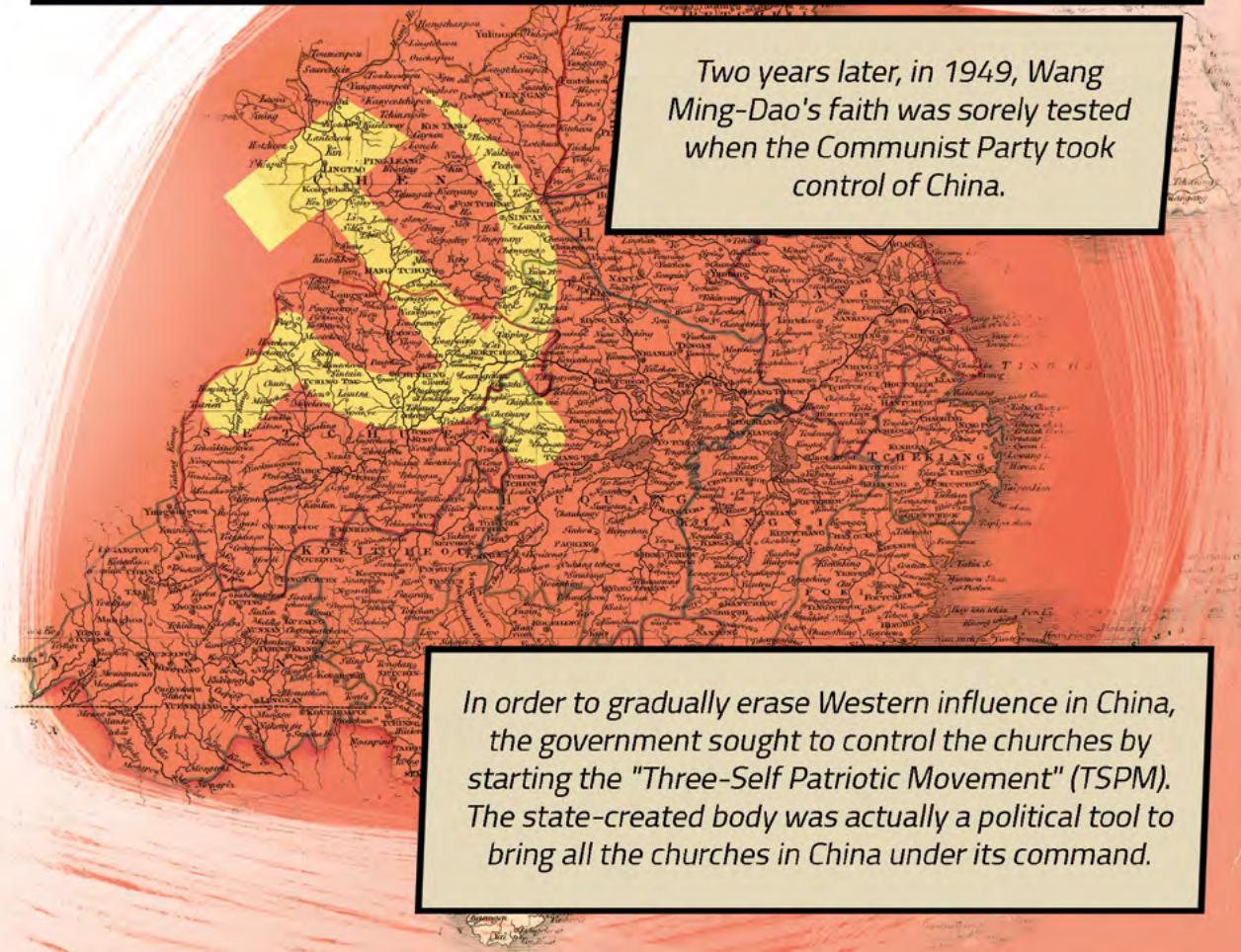
Pastor Wang has plenty of reasons not to join us. I can see he is a very determined man and we cannot compel him to obey our instruction.

However, no other church is allowed to behave likewise!



Doubtless, it was the Lord's doing that Wang's life and ministry were preserved.

Nonetheless, Wang Ming-Dao was to face more trials in the years ahead, especially in 1946 and 1947, when he lost his sister and mother respectively to illness.



Two years later, in 1949, Wang Ming-Dao's faith was sorely tested when the Communist Party took control of China.

In order to gradually erase Western influence in China, the government sought to control the churches by starting the "Three-Self Patriotic Movement" (TSPM). The state-created body was actually a political tool to bring all the churches in China under its command.

Wang Ming-Dao refused to bow to any pressure to join the TSPM and thus had to endure accusation meetings, where congregations were incited to strongly criticise their pastors.



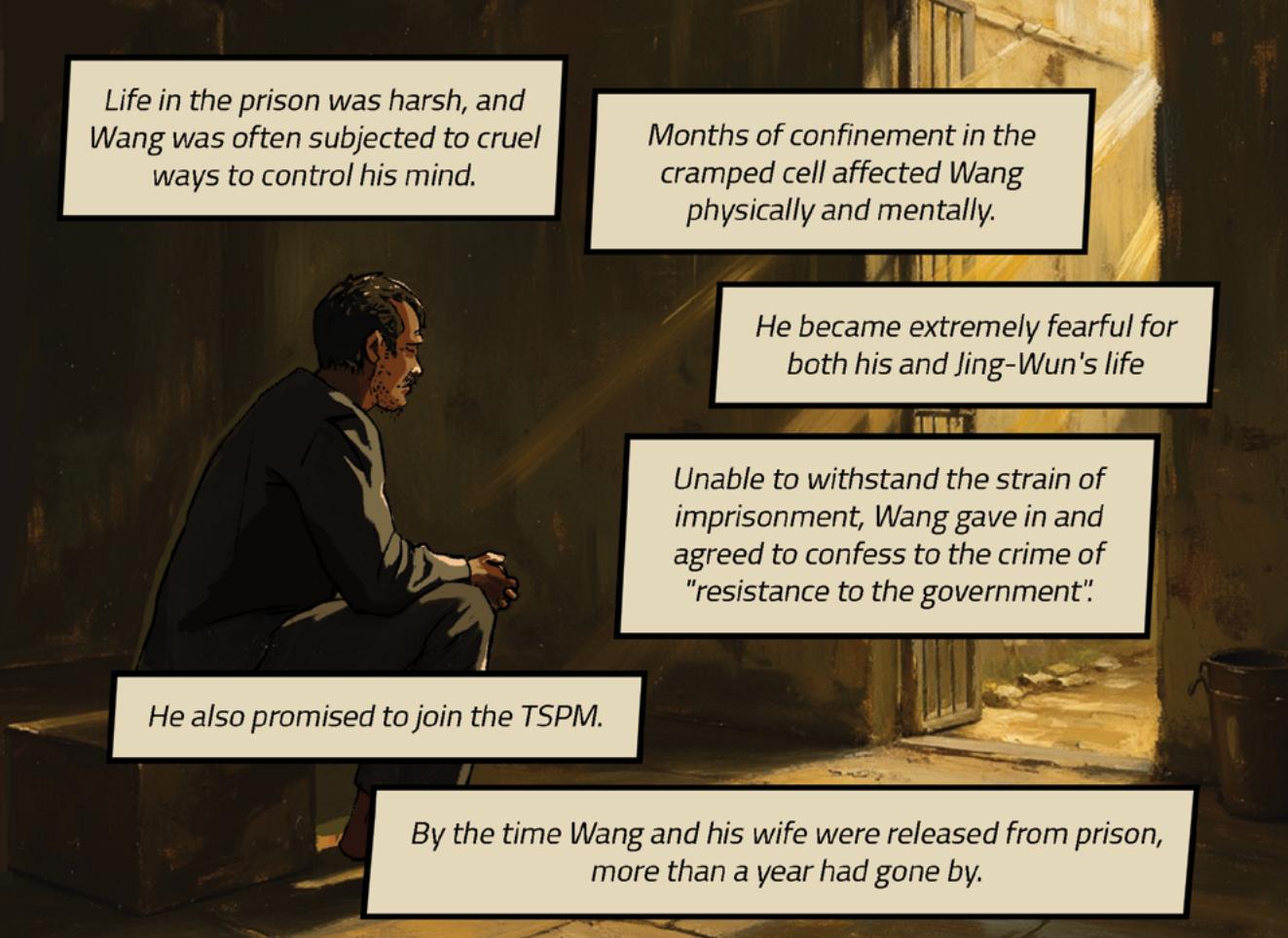
However, his godly life made it difficult for the authorities to find an excuse to arrest him.

All the while, Wang continued to write strongly against the "Three-Self Patriotic Movement". His article, entitled "We Are for the Faith", caused quite a stir among the government officials.

Wang's constant reminder to his church was:

**We are ready to
pay any price to preserve
the Word of God...
Don't give up, don't
compromise!**

The authorities were already hot on his heels and eventually, in the summer of August 1955, Wang, his wife, and a number of church members were arrested by armed personnel after his last sermon at the Tabernacle church. Significantly, the sermon title was: "The Son of Man is Betrayed into the Hands of Sinners".



Life in the prison was harsh, and Wang was often subjected to cruel ways to control his mind.

Months of confinement in the cramped cell affected Wang physically and mentally.

He became extremely fearful for both his and Jing-Wun's life

Unable to withstand the strain of imprisonment, Wang gave in and agreed to confess to the crime of "resistance to the government".

He also promised to join the TSPM.

By the time Wang and his wife were released from prison, more than a year had gone by.

Though Wang had his freedom, yet his heart was laden with guilt and sorrow!



Oh, how can I betray my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who had died on the cross for my sins?

He started to meditate on Micah 7:7-9

Therefore I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the LORD, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness.

At the end of it all, Wang could only cry to the Lord.



Please forgive me!

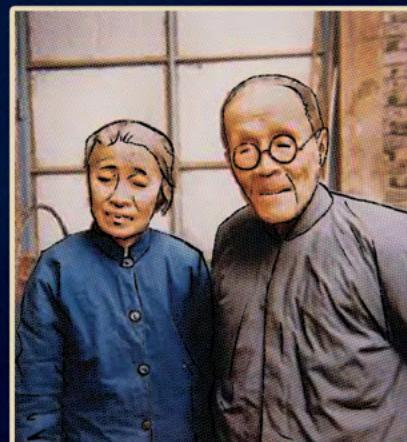
Wang Ming-Dao's fellowship with the Lord was restored immediately; the road to spiritual revival had begun!

Hence, Wang Ming-Dao did not participate in any activity in the Three-Self Church, but boldly declared to the authorities:

I was wrong to confess that I had committed a crime for not joining the TSPM. I now retract my past statement, which was made under great duress!

For boldly standing up for Christ, both Wang Ming-Dao and his wife were rearrested in 1958. They endured years of torture and hardship in both the prison and labour camp.

Eventually in 1980, Wang was released from prison but became partially blind and deaf, while his wife (who obtained her freedom a few years earlier) had lost the sight of one eye.



Their evening years were mainly spent in Shanghai with their son.



Despite his afflictions, Wang continued to minister to the saints through regular meetings until he was taken home to be with the Lord on 28 July 1991.

His wife Jing-Wun followed soon after, on 18 April 1992.

Once an unpolished and unworthy "stone", Wang Ming-Dao had become "a stone made smooth" under the mighty hand of God, who saw fit to use a "foolish and weak, and poor and lowly" man – one who had failed Him at some point (like the apostle Peter) – to accomplish His great work in China.

To God be the glory indeed!

27TH BIBLE WITNESS RETREAT

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Speaker: Pastor Prabhudas Koshy

Dates: 16th–19th March 2026 (Monday–Thursday)

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