re:new

MAGAZINE

KNOWING JESUS

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Editor's Note

Phoebe Ng

Jesus! Where have you been? "Everyone is looking for you!"

As I continued to read over the disciples' words to Jesus upon finding Him praying in a solitary place (Mark 1:36), I realized that their words betrayed a kind of intensity, a longing, and a kind of desperation that I had been seeking for quite some time.

After all, when was the last time anyone cared if you went off by yourself? Would whole crowds have gone off in search for you? Would they have tried to prevent you from leaving and going off into neighboring villages? (Luke 4:42) Would you have gone out to search for Jesus? Why? Why did the disciples go? Why did the crowds go?

Could it be that they were just so crazy about Jesus that they couldn't stand not knowing where He was? That they were so zealous for a savior that took the time to call out to them and reveal Himself to them that they wanted to be around Him all the time? Wanted to hear His every word? See His every miracle? Be like Him?

What if we were that desperate for Jesus? Desperate enough that we wanted to know every side of Him. All of His attributes, all of His character, every one of His stories. To become like Him. What if we were that desperate for Jesus? As desperate as He is for us.

That desperation is what gave birth to this magazine, and I hope that with the turn of every page you will be encouraged to pick up His book again, to start praying again, and most of all to discover a hunger inside of you that you've long forgotten or perhaps have never experienced before.

How badly do you want to know Jesus?

Editor-in-Chief
Phoebe Ng

President and Founder
Agnes Ip

Editors
Alexandra Sam, Annie Wong, Claire Hellar, Joanna Wu, Martin Luther Chan

Writers
Alexandra Sam, Christopher Lui, Claire Hellar, Joanna Wu, Joyce Huang, Katy Lee, Kevin Wu, Lawrence Chen, Millie Liao, Philemon Ng, Vicky Ng

Illustrators
Christine Hwang, Katherine Yao, Phoebe Shen, Tammi Yu

Designers
Ian Howard Li, Jeff Yeh

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The One Who Says "I Do"

By Claire Hellar

Illustration: Phoebe Shen

God as a Father has always resonated with me. When God first moved in my heart, I was a teenager and my aunt started singing the hymn "I am His and He is Mine" in the kitchen. As I sang it with her I just started thinking how amazing it would be to have a Father you were actually that close with —someone who would always take care of you and to whom you could tell everything. That was the beginning of my relationship with God, and over the course of the next year God moved in me to commit my life to Him, and since then I've always approached Him as a Father.

It's taken me a long time to understand how He can also be other things though—specifically Christ as a Bridegroom, someone who loves me in the way that a man loves his wife. There's something specific and intense about that that I had never understood because honestly, I'd never had more than a crush on someone, so I just couldn't even picture that kind of love. That aspect of God's love for me was just vague and gray in my mind.

And then I fell for someone—fell hard. For the first time in my life, I've felt all those feelings they tell you about in movies and which I hadn't believed really existed—real, mad, magical, sparks-flying, can't-think-of-anyone-but-him emotions. Let's call him Will.

Will both makes me more completely myself and makes me lose my identity in him. He appreciates so many small things about me

that other people don't notice. He brings out all the little quirks and creative parts of me that I don't really let other people see and which don't usually come out. In a way that I can't explain, I feel more like a woman—in only good ways—when I'm talking to him, and for the first time I see what it might feel like to be treasured and pursued.

He shares almost all my interests, so when I'm talking to him, everything that makes me—me—leaps into focus and becomes more vivid. I come more fully alive. But at the same time, when I'm not talking to him, I feel like a huge part of me is missing, as if he's ripped it out and taken it off with him to parts unknown. When I'm not connected to him, I no longer always feel like a whole person.

The thing is, this is a picture—incomplete, but still a picture—of how it is, or how it should be, with God. This is the reality, and both of the ways in which I feel toward Will are ways that God meant for me (and us) to feel about Him. God loves every single small part of me and not only does He love those things about me, He loved them enough to create them in me and make me who I am. He saw me before the world began, chose me to be His child, saved me by His grace, lives in me through the Holy Spirit, and sees me as a daughter, a friend, and a bride. Most importantly, Christ Himself has promised to take me as a bride—that's how deeply He loves me as a part of the Church. The Song of Solomon is just a picture of Christ's deep love for His people. God's love must obviously be ten thousand times more personal, intimate, and passionate than anything Will could ever give me. Christ knows me completely and loves me completely.

But the ache I feel, the loss, when I am not in contact with or around Will, is also reflective of the way our relationship with God should be—it's the downside, or rather the natural counterpart, to being in, not just a deep, fulfilling relationship, but the relationship we're meant to be in. The one with Christ. In John 15, Jesus says, "Abide in me, and I will abide in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers." I'm a branch, meant to be attached to God at all times. If I am not—if I stray from Him, if I avoid or don't seek out His Word and His presence, it hurts and ultimately has negative effects on me.

We're also called to be in a completely intimate, personal relationship with God—***"How precious are your thoughts toward me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you"*** (Ps. 139:17-18). This is how I long to feel and what I am striving for—to be so intimately connected to God that it actually aches when I'm not. So that if I don't read my Bible or pray for days, weeks, or months on end, I miss Jesus. Miss the warmth of His presence, the sense of His love, the guidance He gives for life, and in the end, miss Him, for who He is. When I miss a human being's presence, it reflects the truth that I love that person and feel like I need them. But I don't actually need them in any literal way. If and when I feel that way about God though—and I should—that's my emotions reflecting what's actually the truth—that my life loses its meaning and purpose without God.

I am complete—or as complete as I can ever be in this fallen world—only in Him. I'm serving my purpose and fulfilling my identity of being a child of God and a follower of God, only when I'm attached to Him. When I'm with Him, when I'm pursuing that relationship with Him, God promises all the same emotions that I feel with Will, only more so—love, an inner joy that lights up my days, peace of mind and heart.

These emotions don't come from any external circumstances like getting straight A's or being popular or winning a volleyball or basketball game. They come from knowing and being in a relationship with someone—in this case, God. And in the past two years I have started to taste what that feels like. Long before I ever started connecting with Will, I started, through the Holy Spirit working in me, to ***"taste and see that the Lord is good"*** (Ps. 34:8). All of His promises of hope, joy, peace etc. actually are real and actually do work, you just have to reach a point where the Spirit has worked in you enough, and you've been willing enough to be open to God, that He can start to make that happen for you. When I'm stressed out about work, or really sad over a friend, or struggling with my parents, Bible verses that fit perfectly come up in my mind, and speak to me as powerfully, and sometimes more powerfully, than any friend or loved one could do. And I become calm, and happier.

I'm not saying pursue God so that you feel better—I'm saying that God is so worth it, that any good emotion you that you feel now or in the future is just a shadow of the good emotions God promises even now, here on this earth, to you, as well as in heaven later. Dating and romance are some of the best things we as humans know, or they can be—that's why most of us spend our lives chasing them, not realizing that the amazingness and the magic of it came straight from God. He created it, and it reflects both who He is and what He promises to us if we obey Him and seek Him. A lasting love. A full love. A love that endures. He will love you every day with the same steady, compassionate, passionate, targeted love that a boyfriend, girlfriend, spouse, or even parent, can only give you on the very best of days. And He will love you completely.

So fall in love. And know God's love.

By Christopher Lui

John 3:16 – ***"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.***

Growing up in the church, I've heard and understood that verse all of my life. I knew that we humans are sinners and are separated from God, and that only through Jesus' innocent death in our stead and His resurrection can we have a chance to join God in Heaven. I've also seen many skits and movies that play during Easter depicting this historic event. But I've had a nagging thought in my head; we humans have committed such horrible atrocities throughout history: genocides, greed, deceit, oppression…the list goes on. I pondered about how a few trickles of blood and being nailed to a cross for only 6 hours could possibly atone for such depravity. That is, until my natural affinity for history guided me to research and discover the true process of a Roman crucifixion.

Crucifixion was mainly practiced by the Romans, and is arguably the most brutal, slow, and painful method of execution ever

concocted by mankind. Before we even get to that, the Scriptures tell us that Jesus was scourged and beaten before the cross. I found out that the Romans used a whip called a flagrum, from which we derive the English word, flagellum. A Roman flagrum had glass, nails or jagged sheep bone embedded in lead tips, and unlike a Cat-o-Nine-Tails, which were mainly used as punishment, flagrums were intended for torture. Roman Lictors (specialized soldiers) would lash at specific parts of the victim's backside, avoiding accidentally severing a major vein/artery or causing disembowelment. Numerous historians describe the victims with horrific detail, often citing lacerations so deep that the rib bones, fat tissue, and internal organs would be visible. When Jesus said He would pour out His blood for us, I now think of it literally as well as figuratively. For those of you who have seen Mel Gibson's The Passion of the Christ, the scourging depicted is quite historically accurate.

After the scourging, only then was the victim taken to be crucified. It is important to note that crucifixion was reserved for slaves and the worst kinds of criminals, and as such, the victims would be stripped of their clothes to be publicly displayed in a disgraceful manner. Once hung on the cross, the awkward position of the arms combined with one's own weight, would cause hyper-expansion of the lungs and difficulty in exhaling. In order to breathe properly, the victim would have to elevate his body up by his legs or his arms (assuming they weren't dislocated). Just the action of pulling oneself up would rub the now-exposed muscle tissue against the abrasive wood, causing additional pain even when trying to breathe. Records show that, depending on the health of the victim and environmental circumstances, he could hang from a few hours to several days. This often prompted the soldiers to break the legs of the victims to hasten their deaths. Once the victim could no longer draw himself up to breathe, he would finally succumb to suffocation.

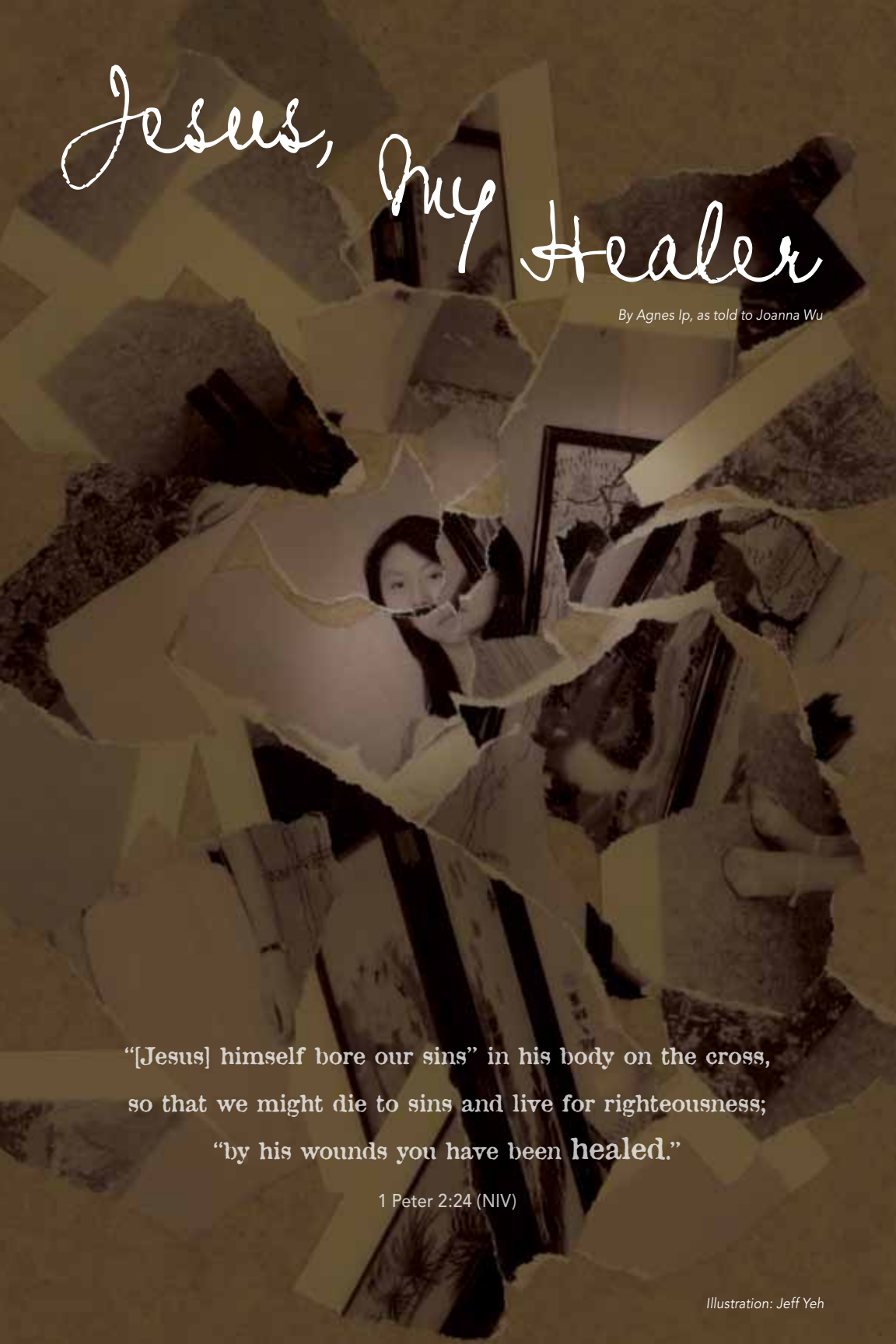
Once I understood the true nature of Jesus' suffering prior to and during His time on the cross, His Passion and the blood that He gave for us became that much more meaningful to me. He wasn't some weak, helpless, pitiful man who was murdered by a bunch of bullies. Jesus, as God incarnate, had options that no other scourged or crucified man has ever had! At any time during or before the scourging, Jesus could have called more than twelve legions of angels to escape (Matt. 26:53), and yet He willingly and obediently chose to lay down His life for us, so that we might have a chance at redemption (John 10:18). All of us have experienced physical pain in our lives, and if we were in Jesus' place at the whipping post, how many lashes, how many flayed chunks of flesh, how much blood loss could we bear before we gave in and summoned our 72,000 angels?

No matter how much pain, whether physical or emotional, we experience, we need not despair, for we have a Savior who experienced and conquered an even greater pain (2 Cor. 1:8-9, Heb. 12:2-3). For those that don't know Jesus, I would like you to reason for a moment: if Jesus was a religious con man, would He have willingly submitted to an excruciating death for something He knew was a lie? If He was delusional, would He have been able to win debates against highly educated Jewish lawyers and teachers, been invited to parties and weddings, or be admired by many for His wisdom? The last possibility is that Jesus is who He claimed to be, the Son of God.

Christopher Lui works for Liferay, a software company based in Diamond Bar, located in close proximity to his church, First Chinese Baptist Church of Walnut. He likes to play video games and pretend to be characters from said video games.

Jesus, My Healer

By Agnes Ip, as told to Joanna Wu



"[Jesus] himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross,
so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness;
"by his wounds you have been **healed**."

1 Peter 2:24 (NIV)

Illustration: Jeff Yeh

I grew up in a difficult home, with a high-stress family and suffered a lot of family pain. At school, I felt like an outcast. In 7th or 8th grade, a guy had asked me out and I said no. I didn't realize my refusal would result in utter rejection. Another guy started spreading a rumor that I said no because I had a sexual disease. People believed the rumor and soon, I was a social outcast, rejected by all of my classmates. No one wanted to sit by me or be near me. I was stuck with another girl, who happened to have terrible body odor. Years later when I was in high school, guys chased after me because I resembled a popular celebrity at the time. However, I still could not forget my middle school experience, and these scars would stay with me until I was married.

When I was growing up, my Mom was controlling and sometimes abusive. She loved us and worked hard to provide for us because money was important, but we struggled financially. We were in such a poor state that my Mom wanted to kill herself, along with me and my siblings. My Mom was a Buddhist and worshipped idols devotedly; when we didn't position the idols appropriately, my Mom would hit us. One time, she hit me so hard that I bled. She often yelled at us and blamed us for many things and never felt like her life was good enough.

As the firstborn in the family, I was responsible for taking care of my younger siblings, especially since my mom was so busy with her business. After my Dad immigrated to Hong Kong from China, he struggled and lost hope when he became a blue collar worker. He had dreams of being an editor because he was a great writer but when he came to Hong Kong, his academic degree wasn't recognized.

When I was 12, I felt disappointed about life and wanted to die. I was truly depressed. When I thought about life, I saw nothing to look forward to. I thought about how my parents yelled at me and how they constantly fought with each other. I thought, why would I want a life or future like that?

Thoughts of suicide were triggered after I found out my Mom had an affair with her boss. My Dad found out after he followed her, and he nearly fainted when he shared the news with me. As the kids, we were caught in the middle of this conflict. Of course I was angry with my Mom because she showed no sense of loyalty, but my Dad would be angry with us for not siding with him. Sometimes the other man would call when my Mom wasn't home, and my Dad would instruct us not let our Mom know. He wanted us to act like her parent and tell her that what she was doing was wrong.

I felt like it was my duty was to make sure my parents were okay. At one point, I put a knife to my throat, threatening that I would kill myself if they didn't stop fighting. Again, I thought about ending my life. Night after night, I couldn't sleep. Almost every time when I stood in my bathroom where there was a window ledge, I thought about jumping. I thought about killing myself a lot until I was 14, which was when I met Jesus for the first time.

At the time I attended a Christian school and one of the Christian teachers shared about who Jesus was and would consistently invite me to fellowship meetings. A philosopher visited our school and taught us about God, sin and spiritual power. It was then that I finally understood that there was a God who loved and forgave me of my sins. I had never really thought about my own sinful nature. When I heard that Jesus offered everlasting love, I really wanted it. I learned that Jesus was just, and I wanted justice. I wanted a kind of love that I couldn't see in my parents. I saw this kind of love in Jesus, who was willing to die for my sins.

I realized I was really prideful. In fact, I thought I was better than my parents. I wasn't innocent - I had sinful thoughts, including thoughts of

A picture of Agnes in 10th or 11th grade that was sent to a television station when they were recruiting actresses.

wanting my Mom to die. I even stole money from her because she gave us so little, barely enough for food to eat. Because I had little time to study, I cheated in school. I realized I was a sinner, too.

I didn't admit this at school in front of everyone, but when I went home that day, I prayed to God: "God, you are merciful and just. Please forgive me of my sins. I know I'm no better than my parents. Show me how to forgive them. I want to accept you as my Savior and follow you for the rest of my life." After I prayed, I felt a great power and sense of calm surround me. That night, I finally slept peacefully.

However, all the struggles I had with my parents didn't disappear after that prayer. In fact, my Mom was more abusive after this point. But I was changed. I started to read the Bible voraciously. The bathroom toilet became my sanctuary because that's where I spent time reading the Bible and doing my devotionals. I knew that when I gave my life to Christ, I became a slave to Christ. When I entered seminary, I went on a missions trip, and that's where I met my first boyfriend, now husband. He has helped me see and experience God's love and healing work in my life.

I still remember the day my husband Benny first told me he loved me. I cried so much when I heard him say those words. I cried because I remembered all the terrible things my parents had done to me – how my Dad angrily slammed a bicycle on the floor when he lost his temper, or how my Mom threw plates on the ground during tense arguments. These memories haunted me. I told Benny, "If you love me, promise me you'll never hit me." Of course he never has, but when you come from an unstable, abusive family, it's hard to believe that someone could really love you without hurting you. I know that God used Benny to heal me from my family scars. He demonstrated God's love to me, and reminded me that I no longer need to feel ashamed or rejected.

When I look back on my childhood, I know that my parents loved me, but they didn't know how to show love God's way. I've since rebuilt my relationship with my parents, but without these painful experiences and tasting God's love, I wouldn't be a therapist today and helping others to see God's mercy, redemption and power to heal.

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; ***he will never leave you nor forsake you.***" – Deuteronomy 31:6

Agnes is the founder and president of Presence Quotient, a non-profit organization that provides families professional and practical training integrated with the Christian faith. She started Presence in 2003 because she was deeply concerned about society's cultural impact on faith and family. In 2011, Presence launched RE:NEW, a community movement on the web and the streets targeting middle school and high school youth. Agnes has been married to her husband Benny for 22 years and has two children, Karen and Benson.

Who's This Jesus Dude?

A. Lord Most High.

B. The Son of God.

C. A miracle worker.

D. All of the above.

By Millie Liao

After accepting Jesus into my life at the age of 14, I found it relatively easy to relate to God the Father—the Father who loves me unconditionally. Whenever I mess up, Father God has grace for me. He is the One who provides for all my needs. Naturally, I felt connected to my Father—mind, heart, and soul.

Meanwhile, there is Jesus. Jesus is the dude who died on the cross for my sins. He is the crazy guy who healed the sick and walked on water. He is the Truth, the Way, the Life. Sure. Makes sense in my mind, but, that is not enough. I want to know Jesus deep down in my heart and in my soul: What does it mean to have a personal relationship with my Lord and Savior? Who is Jesus to me?

For the past couple of years, the Holy Spirit has revealed Jesus to me as my Teacher. Jesus not only taught verbally, but He also taught through His life by setting the ultimate example. And, of all the things Jesus taught, the Holy Spirit has been emphasizing to me the importance of being secure in my identity in Christ, just as Jesus was secure in His identity as the Son of God.

As described in all the Gospels, when Jesus was baptized, heaven was opened, and the Father spoke, ***"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*** If I were in Jesus' place when that happened, I would have thought, "Uhh… God… Are you sure you're talking to the right person? You love me, and you are pleased with me?" But instead, Jesus received and held onto the truth of love and pleasure the Father had declared. Likewise, because of Jesus, I am now adopted into Christ's family (Eph. 1:5). I am a beloved daughter of the Lord Most High – I believe it, and I want to know how to live in this identity as Jesus did.

For example, during a school field trip, I have no choice but to sit next to someone who is, in my arrogant perspective, "not cool" or "super weird." I think to myself, "What will the others think of me? I don't want to be associated with this person!" On the other hand, when I think about Jesus, I believe He would not only not mind sitting next to the uncool, but He would also voluntarily choose to sit with them and hang out with them. When Jesus hung out with the tax collectors and the social outcasts, He didn't care about what the Pharisees were thinking about Him or if they wanted to kill Him. Jesus cared only about what the Father thought about Him. Jesus was secure in the Father's love for Him and He knew that the Father was well pleased with Him.

On the other hand, when I am around a cute guy I like, why do I act differently from how I normally do? When I hang out with the "cool" kids, why do I feel so pressured to say the "cool" thing or have the "cool" things? Why am I so concerned about fitting in with the crowd? Jesus wasn't concerned about pleasing His crowds. Even if the people wanted more healing and didn't want Jesus to leave (Luke 4:42), Jesus knew what the Father had called Him to do. Jesus was only concerned about obeying his Father, regardless if that left the crowds disappointed.

What about a less obvious situation? When my pastor asked me if I wanted to serve as a leader, why did I feel so pressured to say yes? Was I afraid my pastor would think differently of me if I said no? Did I just want to please my pastor? Jesus didn't feel pressured to start His ministry as soon as possible. There's a time for everything. I believe the first 30 years of Jesus' life (although there wasn't much recorded) was preparation for later ministry work that was to come in proper timing. In many ministry settings, there's lots of pressure to serve, but it's ok to say no, not yet. We might be pressured to serve to please others or even to make us feel better about ourselves, but service should always be done out of an authentic love for Jesus and His people. Moreover, God calls all of us to serve a variety of people and in a variety of places. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that my pastor's judgement was not accurate and that I should not hold his opinion in high esteem and that I shouldn't serve in church, but what I am saying is: don't feel pressured to jump into service unless you know it God's timing for you and don't allow others to limit you to a certain ministry area when God's plan might be to grow you through another ministry. Father God declared his love over Jesus before He even started His ministry. All the things Jesus said, did, and taught in his ministry wasn't to "earn" God's love but was rather from living in the overflow of the Father's love.

Of all my teachers and mentors, Jesus has been my best example of how to live my life and how to minister to others out of the abundance of the Father's love. Is He your Teacher? Who else is Jesus to you? I don't think anyone can fully know Jesus here on earth. But as I have sought to know more of Jesus with all my mind, all my heart, and all my soul, it has been a tremendous joy to receive each piece of Spirit-breathed revelation of who Jesus is. It's like being given a golden nugget to add to my treasure chest. I am excited, for there is much more that is coming! Think about it: to know Jesus as a friend! Ask and seek for such treasures in your life. Who is Jesus to you?

The Joy of My Life

By Kevin Wu

My name is Kevin Wu and I am 18 years old. I grew up in an average Asian American home with a family of seven. I came to know Jesus and embrace Him as my lord and savior at the age of 15, and this is my story:

My life was filled with cravings for intimacy and romance. I always longed for intimacy and a perfect relationship, whether it be from my parents or from a future girlfriend. However, when I heard that Jesus Christ had died for my sins out of raw love and passion to be reconciled with me, I knew I had found the joy of my life. Instantly, I tasted the fellowship I had with God, and pursued it from that day on.

Throughout my daily life, I would constantly enjoy praying to God. I would enjoy the fact that at any given time in my day, I could look up into the sky and thank Jesus for dying on the cross for me. At times when I would fail in everyday activities, I would be reminded that God loved me anyways and that was enough. God would constantly remind me how much He loved me. At times, when I would sin against Him, by the end of the day, I still knew God was pursuing me. For God is a God of love, and who could be better at romancing a runaway child like myself back into His arms?

In my heart, Jesus had become my highest joy and passion. However, one thing that I believe my mentors in life had left out when telling me about the love of Christ was this: I am a criminal against God! The reason that mankind needed a savior as great and almighty as Jesus, was because we, as sinners, were so terribly sinful and had fallen short of the glory of God. Even after I had fallen in love with Jesus, I never knew how heavy my sin was. I still continued to be a horrible wretch without even knowing that I had grieved God continuously. I had picked up sins in my life that I had no desire to turn away from. Yet at the same time, I only went to God on my weekends and whenever else I felt like.

My relationship with Jesus grew cold and distant and I always wondered why. I had desperately needed a savior for my current situation, and by the grace of God working in my close brothers in Christ, I was convicted by the Holy Spirit. I was convicted of the fact that I was a criminal who deserved nothing more than judgement and punishment! I had continually sinned against a holy God and had taken His atonement on the cross for granted. The next thing I was convicted of was the most eye-opening thing I had found. It was that He loved me so much and was opening His arms out to me - and that He was the most precious thing to behold! If I wanted more of God, I needed to fight my sin. The ultimate gain of Christ on the cross was that now I was brought to a relationship with God! Above all things - like health, family, and even eternal life - I get God to be with. That was what I wanted. And I knew that the only way to get more of God in my life was to pursue Him with everything and let go of my sin. I was awakened to the beauty of the gospel - that He came so that I may have life, and life in abundance (John 10:10). Now, I pray that everyone I meet may be pointed towards Jesus Christ. I pray this for the sake of their joy and God's glory. This is how Jesus has impacted my life, and I hope that my story will impact yours.

Kevin Wu is a recent graduate of Walnut High School who has a passion for the love of Jesus Christ to impact surrounding students. He currently has a dream of one day attending and graduating from seminary to pursue his passion of pastoring teenagers.

KNOWING JESUS

By Vicky Ng

Illustration: Katherine Yao

Would you like to know more about Jesus, our personal Savior, and the Son of the Living God?

Knowing someone is hard. It's like studying a subject - the only way you can really learn is by being interested, paying attention, and coming at it from many different angles. There are even more ways to get to know a person than to study a subject. We can spend a lot of time with someone to get to know them better. We could also observe their way of living, listen to what others say about them, or if they are famous, we can even read books about them. Best of all, if the other party is willing to interact and respond to us, our knowledge of them deepens and continues to grow. Thus, the key to knowing a person does not lie in the method but in our willingness to initiate and respond with sincerity.

Most of us are busy and preoccupied with many academic activities and other obligations. There is so much going on that we can hardly find time to fulfill all the demands placed on us, and so, we may have put off knowing Jesus and saved it for Sunday morning or some other time. However, it should be our top priority to get to know Jesus - to develop an intimate personal relationship with Him. The truth is: knowing Jesus is not mutually exclusive with all our day to day activities and responsibilities, rather, it is foundational for our success! Just think. Have you ever wanted a study partner? Jesus is a great companion. Have you ever needed a good reminder, someone to cheer you up when you are down, someone to guide you when you are confused and lost? Jesus knows our strengths and weaknesses and never gives up on us. He knows our exact purpose in life and will lead us to that purpose if we humbly ask for His opinion. After all, He created the universe. Who could be better to consult than the origin of wisdom itself?

But how do we get to know Him? Isn't He up in heaven? How do we get to know someone when you can't see His face and feel His physical existence? First, we need to hold onto the truth that He desires to live in our heart and is closer to us than we think. We need to secure that truth by choosing to live in Him and obeying His commandments. Jesus said that ***"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him...If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him"*** (John 14:21, 23).

Jesus said if we choose to remain in Him, He will remain in us and we will bear much fruit (display a godly character) and this is to His Father's glory that we bear much fruit, showing ourselves to be His disciples (John 15:5, 8). A good portion of Jesus' prayer during His last hours on earth was devoted to His followers and the world. He prayed that they might know Him as the one sent from God (John 16:27, 28; 17:3, 7, 8, 21, 23, 25). In fact, Jesus said, ***"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent"*** (John 17:3). Therefore, knowing Jesus is what eternal life is all about. Knowing Him is the inward effort of keeping Him alive in you, to keep drinking the water that Jesus offers so that it will become in us a spring of water welling up to eternal life (John 4:14).

That brings us to the second point of knowing Jesus: how do we remain in Him or keep Him alive in us? We do so by spending time at His feet so that we know His commands and by including Him in all our activities so that we learn to follow His commands. It takes determination and creativity to spend time with Jesus. It doesn't have to be lengthy. The key is to spend quality time alone with God in which you give Him your undivided attention. Look at it as a conversation with Him. Read a short passage from the Bible and end with prayer. Write down some key words from the passage or some key thoughts that the Holy Spirit lays on your heart, and then bring the paper around with you for the entire day. Keep these words in your heart and review them whenever you have time: waiting in the cafeteria, going to the restroom, sitting on the bus, in between classes, brushing your teeth, etc. These words will gradually take root in your heart and integrate with your values, beliefs, deep thoughts and other knowledge. Whenever you need to make decisions, consult Him in prayer. Meditate on the words you have studied. Put Him first. Before long, you will have the power to make the right choice and do the right thing.

But don't forget that a friendship goes both ways! We cannot expect a friend to give and never take. Just like many other relationships, we need to stand up for Jesus and make sacrifices for Him. The Apostle Paul was a very intelligent man. He held a high place in his society and he knew all the laws (just like a lawyer or professor in our modern day). But after having met Jesus (you can read the story in Acts 9:1-19), he said, ***"But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ."*** He continues to say, ***"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death"*** (Phil. 3:7-8, 10).

That is the kind of relationship we are seeking: a willingness to sacrifice everything and a desire to participate in suffering for the sake of our friend, Jesus—so that we might know Him and gain fellowship with Him. Paul was determined to follow Jesus and because of his perseverance and faithfulness, Paul knew Jesus well and wrote thirteen books that were included in the Bible! However, that knowledge was hard earned. Not only was he imprisoned multiple times, Paul was scorned and rejected by both Christians and non-Christians alike and he was even beaten to the point of death! However, in the end he still concluded that all of it was worth the cost and he passionately invites us to join him and follow his example.

One night a man had a dream. He was walking through a brook in the dark, and a voice said to him, "Pick up the stones at your feet." He questioned the voice, but the voice said to him, "Don't ask why, just do it. You will understand later." So the man bent over and groped in the dark for the stones. After picking up a few and storing them in his front pocket, he decided that the weight was too much, and he had gathered enough. In the morning when the man woke up, he took the stones out of his pockets. To his surprise, they were all rare and precious gems that he had never come across in his life. How he wished he had taken more!

Jesus is that precious gem! Although you might not realize it initially, once you get close to Jesus, His unsurpassing beauty will be without question and suddenly you will discover a willingness deep inside of you to trade everything that you have for Him (Matt. 13:44-46). But this life is short, and the time that we have to know Jesus intimately is already passing away. Will you choose to make knowing Jesus a priority? Don't wait any longer, begin the journey of knowing Him today!

Who Is This Man?

By Lawrence Chen

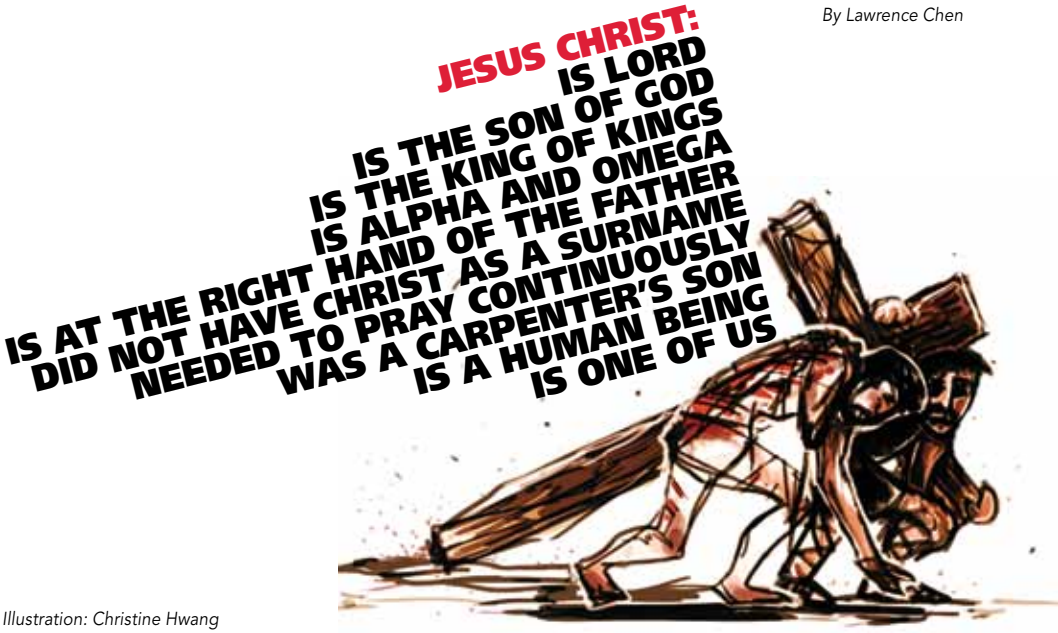


Illustration: Christine Hwang

As I was driving back from a worship service one day, I realized that during the sermon, almost every single one of the pastor's descriptions of Christ demonstrated something about His divine status. He was portrayed as either "the Messiah," "the Son of God," "the Holy One," or some other elaboration on the same theme. So, I began to think back. When was the last time I saw "Jesus Christ is human!" on a church billboard, or heard a sermon where Jesus' humanity was emphasized more than His divinity? It seemed as if the only time I remember learning about Jesus as human was in my Theology and Christian Doctrine classes at Westmont College. Tell me if I am crazy, but I think there may be something wrong here. Shouldn't we emphasize the humanity of Christ just enthusiastically as we do His divinity? Doesn't our hope lie in the fact that Christ is both human and God?

In Philippians 2:1-18, Paul urges the people in the church of Philippi to be humble and to love others more than themselves. He gives the supreme example of Christ ***"who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage; rather, He made***

Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:6-8). Although Paul's intended message was to convict the prideful, I for one am glad that what Paul stated about Jesus' humanity is true. So why is this so important for us? To find an answer, we need to look briefly into the two natures of humanity and of God's love.

Let's first tackle the nature of humanity. I believe that the nature of humanity is inherently good. During the first five days of the creation story, God created everything except for humanity and He called it good. On the sixth day, God created mankind in His image and called all that He had made very good. At our inception, humanity was seen as the object of God's adoration. Everything that was made was given and entrusted to us. We can also see that God had a close relationship with His creation because He could be found walking in His beautiful garden regularly (Gen. 1:8). Nothing about humanity's inherent nature was evil. However after the fall, humanity became corrupted and now lacks the will to choose God freely. But just as we cannot call a slice of moldy bread inherently bad, we cannot call humanity inherently evil. Further evidence can be found in the person of Christ Himself. We understand that Christ is fully human and fully God. If humanity was inherently evil, then Christ Himself would also be subjected to that evil nature. That is obviously not true. Because of this, we must adopt a higher view of humanity and physical creation than we currently have. If we see humanity in such a negative light, we will downplay Christ's humanity and also turn a blind eye to God's true view of His creation (not to mention fall into gnosticism—the belief that the soul/spirit is exclusively good and the body is wholly evil).

God's loving nature does not need to be reworded another time here. However, I will reassert that God's love for humanity is the reason that He personally decided to come down to the fallen world in order to save us from our depravity.

Although I am sure that theologically we all understand that Jesus was both completely God and completely human, what happens when we start to exclude language which suggests that Jesus Christ is just as human as He is God? We can easily fall into any one of the heresies of the person of Christ (I suggest reading Heresies and How to Avoid Them by Quash and Ward if you are curious). But why is it so important that Jesus is human as well as God? Perhaps the most important reason is that humanity could not be saved by any other means. Paul addresses this in Romans 5:12, 18-19, ***"just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned...Consequently, just as one trespass resulted in condemnation for all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of one man the many will be made righteous."*** Jesus was under God's Law just like the rest of humanity. By completely fulfilling the Law, He was able to be the scapegoat for our sins. However, if Jesus was not human, this would not be possible. First, He would not be like us. Jesus would not have been able to take the sins of those who He could not relate to. Second, His pain and suffering would have been fake because the divine God cannot feel the same pain that we do. Lastly, if God came down as an avatar instead of an actual physical human it would show that God does not actually care about His creation to the point of understanding our daily burdens and temptations.

My hope lies in the fact that the almighty God, came down to earth to become a lowly human

servant. What does this all mean? He was subjected to temptation, anxiety, suffering, and death. He was hungry, thirsty, poor, in physical pain, and emotionally broken. If He did not experience these things as a human, God would not be able to truly relate to the human condition, and we could not say that God understands our struggles. Lastly, our ultimate hope resides in the fact that Jesus Christ is physically risen from the dead! Our hope is that we too will be risen from the dead one day, and if Jesus was not fully human, we would not have the same hope in our resurrection because His resurrection would have been God being resurrected and not humanity. But, as the fully human firstborn from the dead, Christ is the tangible embodiment of our hope in the new Kingdom.

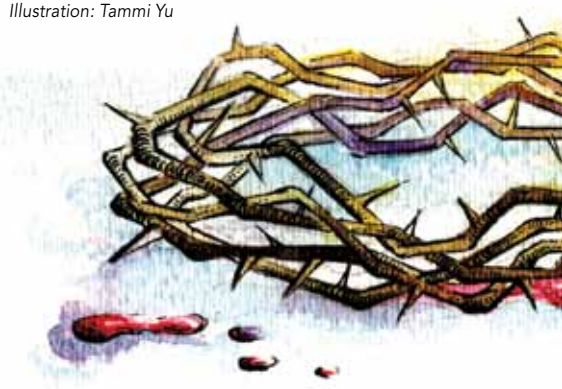
So, do me a favor! Next time you speak about Christ, start off by saying "Jesus Christ is human! Amen?" When someone asks you why you said that, you can begin to share with them the hope you have in the risen Christ!

Lawrence Chen is a dynamic, young Christian leader who seeks to bring change to this generation's youth. Growing up in Walnut, CA, Lawrence found his calling for youth ministry at an early age. He became the president of the Walnut High School Simple Faith Christian club and founded Impact East LA (now called Impact Youth Foundation) during his Senior year of high school. Impact's goal is to teach youth how to become influential leaders and to empower youth with holistic Christian values so that they in turn can be the hands and feet of God wherever they are called—whether it be in the workforce or in full-time ministry. Lawrence recently graduated with a B.A. in Religious Studies and Communication Studies and Minor in Music from Westmont College, a Christian liberal arts college in Santa Barbara, He enjoys singing, playing guitar and drums, and mixing live sound. His latest endeavor was playing electric guitar on the live album recording of "As it is in Heaven" with the Westmont Chapel Band. Lawrence currently lives in Santa Barbara where he is a Pastoral Intern at Santa Barbara Community Church and an IT Technician at Anchor Point IT Solutions.

TRUE LOVE

By Alexandra Sam

Illustration: Tammi Yu

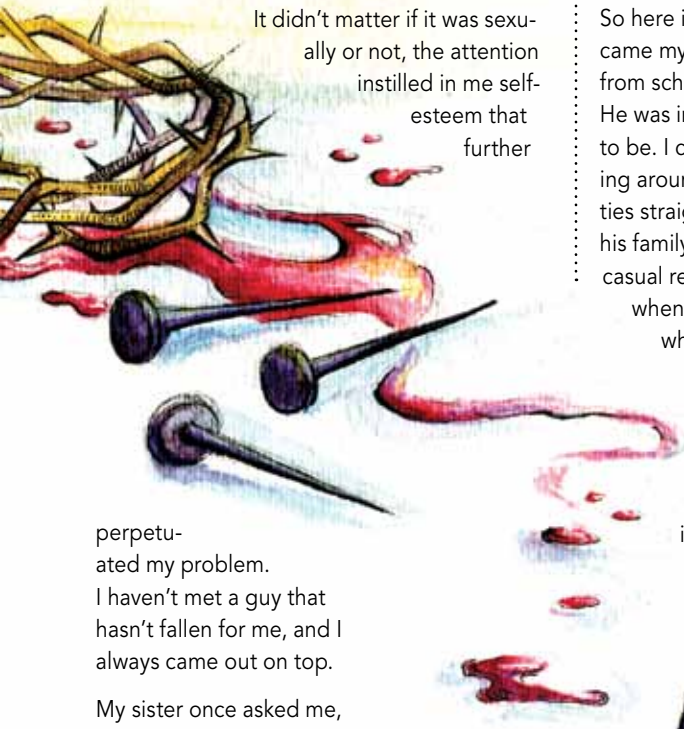


It's been a really long time since I wrote something and meant it or since I thought of myself as a writer. My sister, Erika, once said to me, "That's how you know you're in a bad place when your creativity is being stifled." I guess that was true to an extent. I never thought that I would be here - writing, and sharing the things in my life that have brought me to this place. I could never conceive of myself being this person. I used to do a lot of bad things. Those that know me know I wasn't a pothead by the conventional definition of the term, but I did blow a lot of money and time on being stoned when there were more productive things I could have been doing. I would love to be able to blame it on something that could possibly substantiate an excuse, but in actuality I was just bored.

Stupid and bored.

I was seduced by the allure of the drug culture. ***YEAH MAN GET HIGH AND HAVE FUN***. Everything was better with weed. Getting drunk? Smoke. Watching a movie? Smoke. Going to the beach? Smoke. Studying for finals? Smoke. Like I said, stupid and bored.

And even so, I wish I could apply the stupid and bored excuse to my promiscuity, but no. I don't even have that to rely on. I wanted to be a sexual being. I liked knowing that I had the power to bend someone to my will because of my sexuality. I gained a certain measure of satisfaction from watching my number go up. I liked knowing that I was wanted. It didn't matter if it was sexually or not, the attention instilled in me self-esteem that further perpetuated my problem. I haven't met a guy that hasn't fallen for me, and I always came out on top.



My sister once asked me, "How does it feel being the one that got away for more than one person?" It felt extremely empowering, to be frank. I believed that no man would ever conquer me, until one did. Through a completely bizarre confluence of events involving a near-death experience on the 210 freeway I ended up at church with a guy from school that I was interested in, and that was the beginning of my walk with the Lord.

I speak so candidly because I've learned the hard way that transparency builds trust, and I want to be someone that my readership can trust. I honestly never in my life thought that I would be the person that I am now, that I would have this outlook on life, that I would be humbled and ashamed by my previous behavior and poor decisions. But here I sit, utterly humbled and completely ashamed. Testimony is a very important part of my walk with the Lord, and If I can touch one person, if I can reaffirm one person's faith in the Lord, if I can bring one person to God, I will rejoice with Him in having told this story.

So here is the story of how Jesus Christ became my redeemer. I fell in love with the guy from school, but he wasn't in love with me. He was in love with the person he wanted me to be. I changed for him. I stopped messing around and started getting my priorities straight. I went to church with him and his family every Sunday. I had always had a casual relationship with God. I talked to Him whenever I needed to and made deals when I saw fit. I was raised Catholic, but just barely, so my understanding of salvation was a little cloudy. My relationship with the guy from school began to worsen. He exposed every one of my sins and then hated me for it, he tortured my spirit, and put my sanity in jeopardy. I kept thinking to myself: Is this what it means to be a Christian? Is judgement all I have to look forward to?

The answer came to me when a mutual friend suggested that I attend a different church for a while so that I could come to know Jesus Christ on my own. That was when my eyes were opened to the singularly most beautiful thing I have ever encountered: ***mercy.***

Mercy is an interesting thing. You always want mercy for yourself and justice for others, but Jesus Christ does not discriminate. He became my redeemer and because of Him I know what true love is. Everything is done within Him and mercy is what He will always offer.

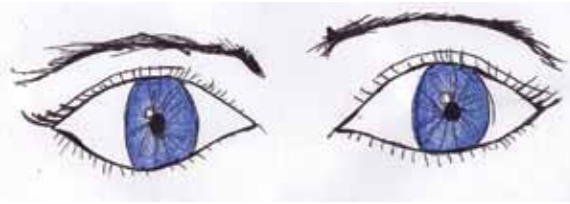


Illustration: Phoebe Shen

I don't have to fear any kind of rejection from the Lord because all of my sins have been taken care of in Him. The love that I had been looking for in my previous relationship, unconditional and steadfast, I realized I always had it with Jesus Christ. His love for me encourages me to not falter in my quest to establish a real and intimate relationship with Him. I have no fear in laying out my sins before Him and crying out to Him because I know I am a child of God.

Now I live a different life. Previously, I would have never foreseen a life of such fulfilment and anticipation. Sometimes it is a struggle to overcome the influence that my past has on me, but when I turn to Jesus Christ for help I am encouraged and emboldened to live with Him and not in the world. There is a far greater sense of freedom and security in the Lord that I feel now and meditating on my relationship with God, growing in Him and spending time with Him is absolutely exciting! I have a whole new world ahead of me now. Even though I know things won't be easy one hundred percent of the time. I am also blessed with the knowledge that I will have God with me every step of the way.

Interview

Jesus as Helper

By Vicky Ly

What is your testimony? How did you come to know Jesus personally?

I have always been surrounded by Christian friends who never pushed me to believe in Christ. One day a friend from San Jose needed a ride to church. So I offered to take her there. Then she invited me to come along. Since I wasn't doing anything in particular that day, I agreed to tag along. The next thing you know, I continued to go to that same church from then on. That was six years ago, and now here I am, serving as a small group leader.

It's amazing how God uses people in our lives. So now, who do you see Jesus as?

I see Jesus as my daily helper. He is someone I go to daily. I need Him! Before going to work, I always pray. You know, I almost got into a few car accidents, and prayer really helped me avoid them. When I worry about work or serving at church as a small group leader, I always pray and ask Jesus to help me. For example, there was a girl in my small group that I was apprehensive to talk to. For some odd reason, I was scared to talk to her. Her personality was not very approachable, but I had to talk to her on a weekly basis. After asking God for help, I was able to overcome my fear. Now I always talk to her and our friendship has really deepened.

It's really precious that He was able to bring you two together. Can you tell me one story that illustrates how Jesus is your helper?

I work in a big public company. Like many big companies, there are politics and sometimes people would say things behind your back to the boss or sabotage you. A specific incident was able to confirm for me how Jesus is my helper. A co-worker relocated from Canada and I helped her settle down. She had 2 grown kids, and didn't really need to take that job offer, since her husband was working as well. She struggled a lot with living alone, and was even depressed. I tried to be friendly to her and would be one of the few people who would talk to her. One day after coming back from vacation, my boss called me in and asked me severely, "Did you say something that makes her (the lady) want to quit her job?" It completely caught me by surprise. Apparently, the co-worker thought I told her to quit during one of our conversations. She was having a hard time struggling with loneliness, and I genuinely suggested that if she didn't want to be there, then she should think about going back home to where her family was. I didn't know that she took it the wrong way and told my boss. This got escalated to HR, and they gave me a "point" on my record for misdemeanor behavior. I struggled a lot with this. I asked myself, "Where is justice?" After praying asking Jesus to be my helper, I was able to not harbor bitterness towards her. After a few months, she decided to quit, but this time she told people that it wasn't my fault that she quit, rather, it was her own issues. Then God convicted me to not hold a grudge against the lady. If the Lord is willing, one day, when we see each other on the street again, I wouldn't mind talking to her and ask how she's doing.

That is a very inspiring story. What are some of your fears and how have you overcome them?

Some of my fears are how people see me, asking myself, "Does this person like me?", and being a people pleaser. I really love this book: When People are Big and God is Small: Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency, and the Fear of Man by Edward Welch. This book reminds me that when I fear people, I make Jesus small. When I fear a person, I am replacing God with that person because I am focusing on the wrong thing. But God will take away this fear. Jesus has already overcome the world for you.

Do you have any advice for the younger generation?

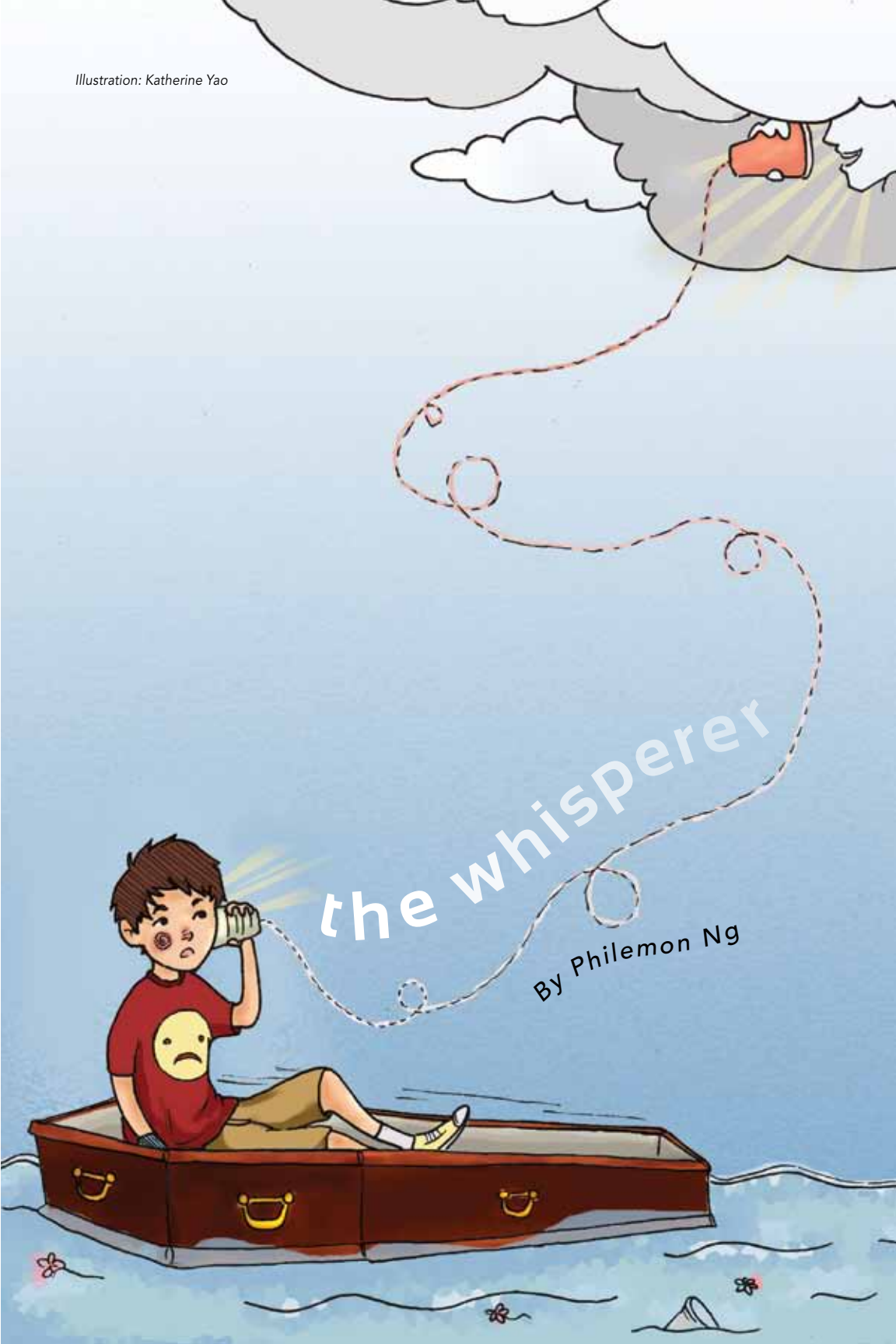
Try to take Bible classes. God's word helps a lot and His word is so powerful. When we are not turning to God's word, we are turning to the secular world. I attend Bible Study Fellowship on Tuesday nights and learn a lot about the Bible there. I would also order materials and study these with a sister.

I once heard on the radio that Jesus always gets invited to dinners, and that's how He parties. Be sure to be plugged into a support group or small group. This is where you can grow.

Don't take life seriously. Why are people going around and being so serious all the time? Take it easy, leave everything to God. You still need to do your part, because God doesn't want us to be lazy and just sit there; but we are to trust in Him, and not worry, because He is the greatest provider that anyone can ever ask for!

Vicky Ly is Chinese by ethnicity but moved to the United States from Vietnam in 1982. She came to know six years ago by the grace of God and is now serving as a small group leader at First Evangelical Church of Arcadia. Today, her fervent prayer is that she will be able to continue to support others, walk with others and learn more about our Savior everyday.

Illustration: Katherine Yao



the whisperer

By Philemon Ng

Many people don't think that God speaks to people any more. They think He is some kind of being that only exists in the Bible or in fairy tales, but He is not. God speaks. God, Jesus, Spirit—whichever third you want to refer to Him by—really speaks to people in this day in age. And God speaking to people is not some sudden thing where you are walking on the street and you bump into God and he starts talking to you. God has been speaking to you for ages. All of creation is God's love letter to you. From the ocean to the sky and everything in between; even that door knob that you neglect to notice every morning was wrought with God's loving hand with you in mind. God uses anything and everything to try and get your attention: from the birds chirping at dawn, to that out of place line on the radio, in the smile of your friend on the street, and always in the whisper to your inmost being. God is speaking to you. Sometimes warning you. Sometimes instructing you. Most of the time simply telling you: my child, I love you.

There was one time I especially remember his whisper. One moment I was yelling at my parents, the next I was running out of the house. It is not easy being a son, even more so a son of Chinese parents; and even more so a Chinese pastor's son. It was not that life was hard or that my parents' expectations were too high. I simply ran out because I was tired of it all: the nagging, the trying in school and being outshone still, the devil's whisper that I am all alone and no one loves me, but most of all the spiritual death that created a "hole in my soul". I was dead inside to a lot of people; my parents, my friends, myself, but more so to God. My continual sin of anger, pornography, lust, mental cutting, fits of rage, and all the pointless things that leave you emptier inside left me with nothing but the thought of escape. So I ran to a nearby park and decided to commit suicide. But I really did not want to die. I never did. I wanted to not feel empty inside; I wanted to not feel alone. So with one last desperate plea, I prayed a prayer which slowly filled that hole in my soul. I cried out to Jesus, and He whispered. The whisper was but a fleeting feeling, but can be described as, "Don't die. I love you, as you are. If you are willing to lose your life, give your life to me."

And in that moment I knew that wherever I go, I will see, I will hear, and I will feel the hand of the Creator reaching out to me. He knows everything about me, the good and the bad. I do not have to tell him, but He wants me to know about him. He is not a rude or brash God. He waits patiently at the corner of my eye for me to notice him. God works through each and every one of His creations: He hides in the expression of the beggar, the voice of children, the shaking of the broken hearted, in the humblest of places He is found. Waiting for us to hear his whisper. So the next time you think God has abandoned you, think again. Just listen for that still small voice and know the voice of the whisperer.

The Lord is my shepherd,
I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down
in green pastures,
he leads me beside
quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along
the right paths
for his name's sake.

Psalm 23:1-3

He Is Desperate For Me

By Katy Lee

Illustration: Tammi Yu

I had just finished my freshman year in high school, was just getting used to the campus, had started joining clubs and making new friends, when my father told us . . . we were moving.

Couldn't we move to another house in the same area? Couldn't we move after I finish high school? I cried and begged not to have to change schools, but I had no vote when it came to family decisions. We moved across town, and I started 10th grade with fear and trepidation as I stepped into a school where I did not know a single soul.

I was barely a Christian at the time. Less than a year prior, I prayed the sinner's prayer when someone shared the Four Spiritual Laws with me. I didn't comprehend the gravity of that decision, but God did. He took that very small mustard seed of faith and began to orchestrate my life towards Him. It began in that new high school that I didn't want to go to.

I wasn't looking for Christian friends, but God brought them to me. My first friends at the new school were students who attended the Christian club. They made my transition to the school less painful. In fact, looking back, I am more than grateful for that move. I know now that God used the move to remove bad influences that my old friends could have had on me and instead gave me Christian sisters who helped me in my spiritual growth. Since I didn't have any strong convictions, God knew I was prone to peer pressure, so He intervened to save me from myself. I didn't know it at the time, I wasn't looking for God, but He was looking for me, and looking out for me.

When circumstances do not work out the way we want, it's unhappy for a season, but only for a season. If you belong to God, you can be sure that He is working behind the scenes, bringing a better life, the abundant life that He promised in John 10. That life is always better than what we could have planned for ourselves.

When I graduated from high school, I had absolutely no regrets of leaving my old school. I know now God can be trusted. He is good!

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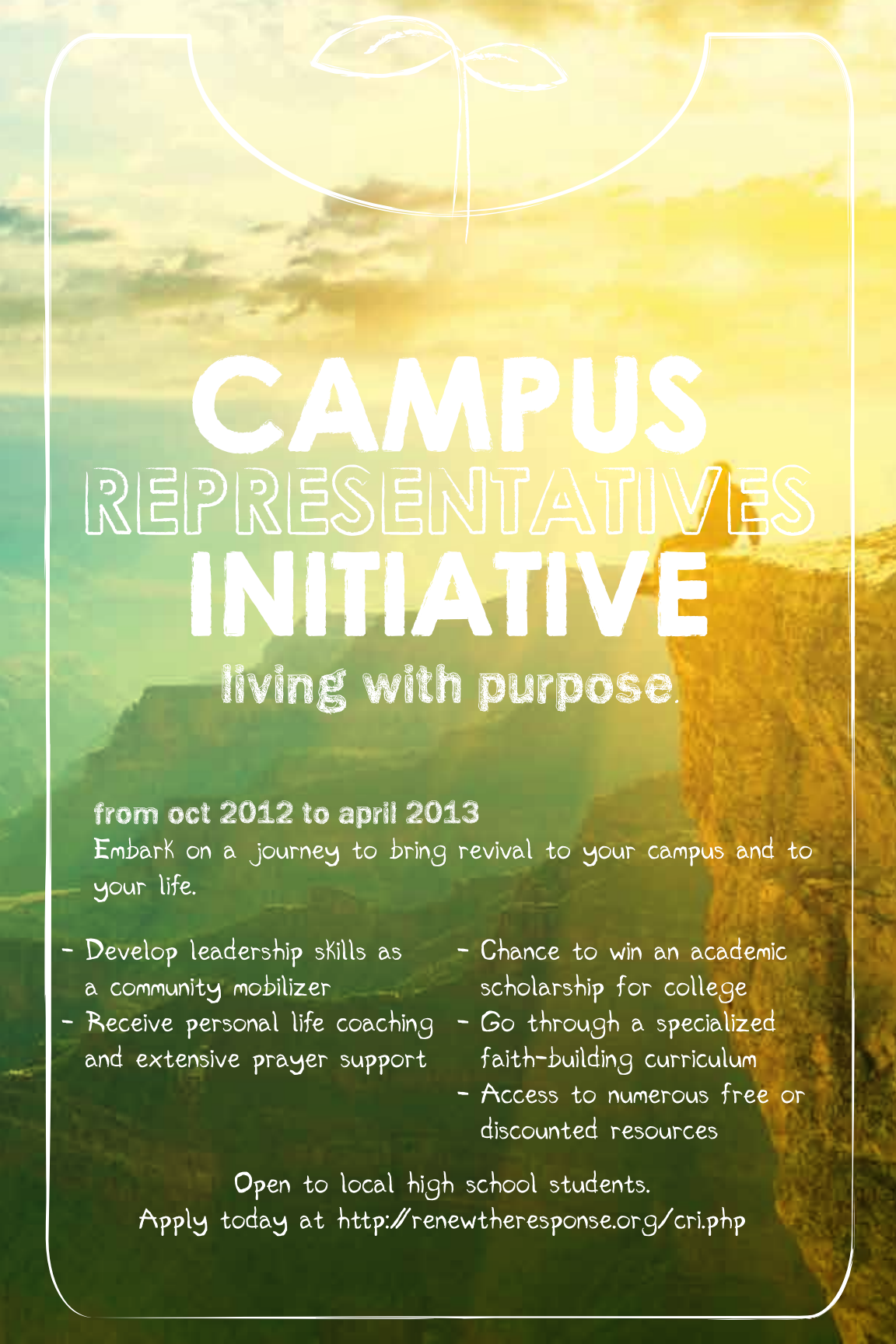
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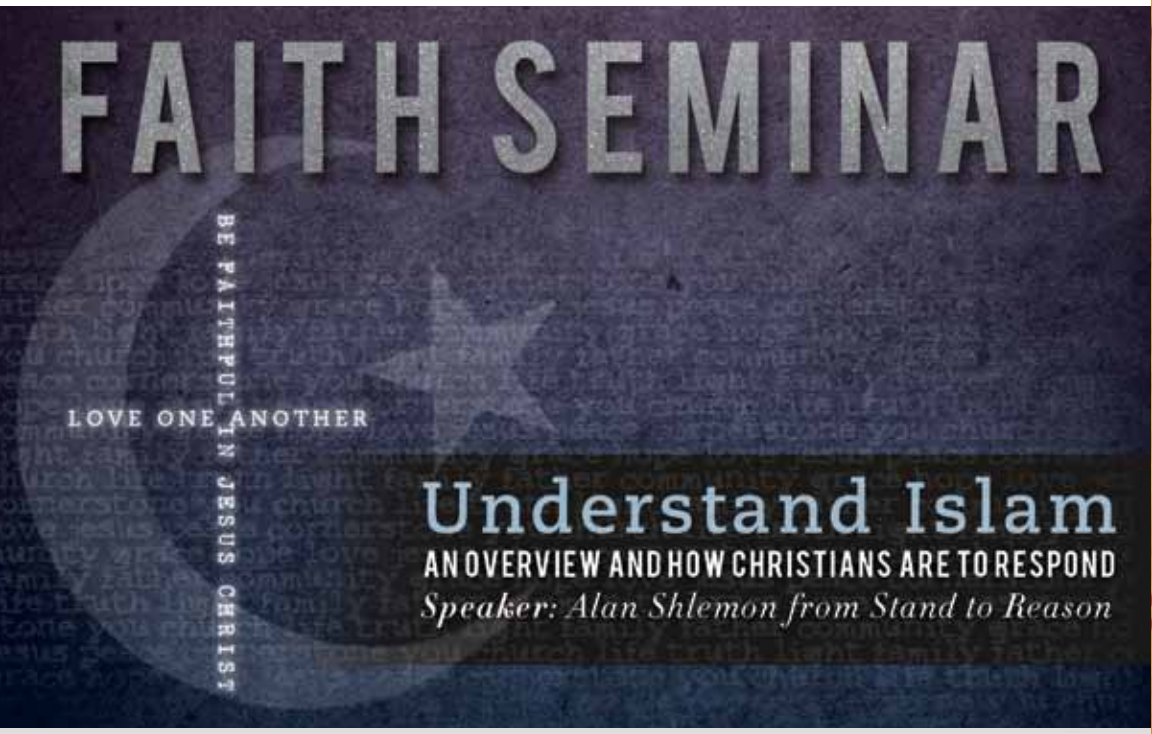

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