

**Graceland**  
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*"But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of ... is a land of the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are continually on it..."*

**Words from the Editor:**

*(Deuteronomy 11:11-12)*

The new COVID variant Omicron has come fiercely. In the face of the continuous spread of the pandemic, we may be in another wave of panic, anxiety, and even helplessness, as if we are still tied up. I hope that through Pastor Lam's New Year's message and the sharing of other brothers, we can fix our eyes on our God. May we be willing to be humble and obedient to let Him release all the bondages that make our lives stuck and set us free. Let's trust God to live a transformed life!

## **Renew & Transform**

**By Pastor Albert Lam**



Since the first outbreak of the coronavirus in 2019, two years have passed in the blink of an eye. In the beginning, everyone thought that although the virus was menacing, we would easily maintain control over this battle with our advanced technology and medicine. We thought it would disappear in months. However, the speed, scope, and strength of the virus went above and beyond our expectations. Many doctors, microbiologists, and epidemiologists were taken aback and felt helpless. As of now, the death toll from COVID is in the millions, and the number of infections is in the tens of millions. Those who were infected and recovered remain worried about the unknown long-term impact the virus had on their bodies. At the end of 2019, the vaccine was finally available, and many people rejoiced, yet quite a few had various reasons for not getting vaccinated and delayed the ideal herd immunity.

Because of the pandemic, everything from visiting friends and family to vacationing had to be put on hold. Even people living in the same neighborhood or going to the same church couldn't meet. All of these circumstances were like being stuck in a cocoon, with our freedom and motion limited. But these lim-



itations were only the external bindings. We have more from within: we fear the pandemic and fear being infected, so we dare not do anything, go anywhere, or visit anyone. Although we were bound by COVID-19, we are further limited by our fear.

In fact, 99% of what we fear does not happen. But because of fear, we miss so many opportunities for goodness. What a shame! We ought to be cautious but being anxious and overly worried paralyzes our daily lives and pauses God's good plans for us.



During the pandemic, we were all acclimating to worshipping and attending fellowships virtually. There was a learning curve in the beginning, but soon we became familiar and even enjoyed it. First, there was no need to drive; second, no need to change (and even if we needed to, the top was enough); third, it saved time and was safe. Once Zoom became the new norm, many brothers and sisters were bound by it. They lost the motivation to dress up, prepare their hearts, and have fellowship. The author of Hebrews says, "do not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing." (Hebrews 10:25) Today, we need to ask ourselves this: Have I been bound by the habit of "giving up meeting together?"



Virtual meeting, virtual learning, online entertainment, online shopping, and online communication: these have become part of our lives in the past two years. We all became people who can't live without our phones. We turn on our phone to check for any messages first thing in the morning. We check our emails during the day. We then go watch YouTube

at night. Besides the necessary work-related screen time, we might spend six or seven hours on our phone. We are addicted. Many of us have subconsciously been bound by the (Inter)net. I Corinthians 6:12 says, "I have the right to do anything, but not everything is beneficial. I have the right to do anything, but I will not be mastered by anything." In our life, there are many unhealthy habits not from God that have bound us, leaving us unable to focus on what we should. We should be determined to break that binding and walk freely in love, leaning on God's strength.



Damaged relationships are another binding that prevent us from moving forward. Very often, we find ourselves on bad terms with others – although they're not deep grudges and more often caused by some offensive language or a misunderstanding, we carve it into our hearts. These grudges are toxic to our spirit, harming our spiritual health and hindering us and our growth in love.



Another cocoon we must emerge from is our limited knowledge of the Lord. You might ask, "I have committed myself to Jesus for quite a while and have known our Lord quite well. What else do I need to do to break through?" Many Christians' knowledge about Jesus remains basic, although they might have been a Christian for many years, or even decades. Their foundation of Christian values remains at an elementary level. Bound by these viewpoints, they are prevented from renewed understanding of Christianity, prayer, and faith. I ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see the abundance and wisdom of our Lord, and to not be tied by the past or other people's rigid view of God.

A church growth movement scholar once said, "The method that led you to success in the past will not guarantee you to do better tomorrow." What he meant is that many church leaders used a previously successful strategy and thought it was a universal solution, regardless of who the audience was and the time they worked in. Unfortunately, that is not the reality. Often, we are bound by past successes and methods, and as a result, we refuse to reflect or try new methods, new leaders, and new tools. This halts our church ministry. I pray that God will help us see our past with honest and humble eyes, see our reality, and not be bound by past success. Let us seek God's will for what He will use in this new era to expand his Kingdom, respond to need, and win people over. ♦





# A New Creation and A New Image

By Larry Mi, Central Campus



Before I became a believer, I would instinctively try to overcome hardship by simply pushing myself harder. For instance, when I assumed the role of “the master of the house” after I got married and started a family, I took many of those responsibilities and challenges in stride, but I found myself on a pedestal, playing God. As a result, I was often stressed. After I became a believer, I learned to cast all my anxieties onto the Lord through my prayers. The stress inside of me disappeared and was replaced by peace and joy from the Holy Spirit. Knowing that I’m one of God’s children, I have great faith in His grace and mercy. His sovereign power to forgive all sins has set me free from the bondage of guilt, and I learned to reconcile with myself.

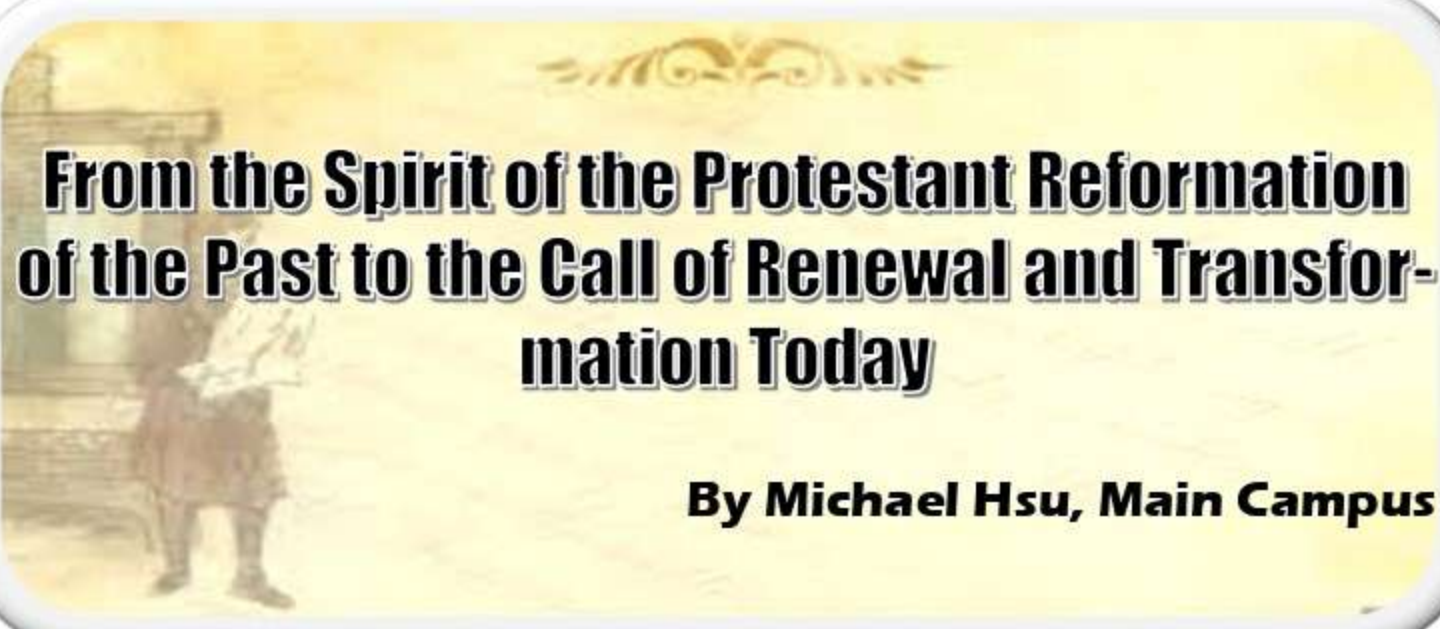
I also found my relationships with others improved. Before I became a believer, I would conceitedly attribute success to myself yet quickly blame failure on others. After I became a believer, the Holy Spirit would often remind me to be humble. When everything goes smoothly, I should give glory to God and be grateful for others’ assistance. When the opposite happens, I should not only search inwards and examine myself, but also place myself in others’ shoes. I learned to forgive, which is the most rewarding thing for me. Jesus sacrificed His life for us to save us from our sins, so why can’t I forgive others? In fact, when I forgive others, I am also blessed by no longer being constrained in a prison of bitterness.

As my paradigm shifted, so too did my behaviors. My relationships with my children benefited the most. Being the male chauvinist I was, I used to call the shots in the family. After I became a believer, Jesus became the Lord of our household. Whenever there were disagreements among us, we would all pray for God’s guidance and settle the matter peacefully. I no longer needed to stand on ceremony in front of the children just for the sake of saving face, and I could have candid discussions like a friend and apologize sincerely when I was in the wrong. I benefited so much from these experiences.

A few months ago, my daughter told me that she would like to take advantage of the half year gap before college and go to New York to work a part time job and take some classes. I would not have agreed to such an arrangement if I were still



my old self. I would mostly likely have been irritated by the mere mention of it and even waged a verbal fight against my daughter. As a reborn Christian, I not only blessed her idea but also felt at peace with her “calling her own shots,” since I believe that God has a beautiful plan for each and every one of His sons and daughters. I prayed more earnestly for my daughter that God would lead her way. Praise the Lord! She was able to find a church in New York soon after her arrival and has been living her dream there in the past few months. From this event, I’ve also learned to lean on God more than ever, just as Psalms 37:5 says: “Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this.” ♦



## **From the Spirit of the Protestant Reformation of the Past to the Call of Renewal and Transformation Today**

**By Michael Hsu, Main Campus**

Five hundred years ago, the continent of Europe was enveloped in darkness created by the corrupted Catholic Church which had departed from the true teachings of the Holy Spirit and instead came to uphold “traditions” fabricated by men. It was then that a young man named Martin Luther came to the rescue. Legend has it that Martin Luther was caught in a torrential storm one day and was stricken by the thunderous lightning. He called out for God’s help and was filled with the Holy Spirit, and dedicated himself wholeheartedly to God. The Holy Spirit worked in his heart and opened his eyes to a great and holy mission — to lead the reformation of the church and push it out of the darkness with renewed spirit and transformed life, just like a butterfly pushing its way out of the confinement of its cocoon. This revival was the Protestant Reformation.

In addition to Martin Luther, the Holy Spirit continued to inspire many more of God’s servants to further pursue church reformation so that the church would not be out of sync with its time due to the old traditions imposed by men, nor lose out on the opportunity to witness the progress of society. From John Calvin of Switzerland to Pietism of Germany, from Great Awakening in North America to the Jesus Movement started in California in the latter half of the 20th century, we can easily see a clear path laid out by the Holy Spirit throughout church history. It is a path of constant renewal and a path of constant transformation so that a downfall like that of the Church in the Middle Ages can be avoided.



Today, we Christians are faced with an era of rapid changes. The impact of high tech on our lives, the explosion of information on our smart screens, the cry of individualism in each of us, and the rise of pluralism around the world, all combine to make this era an era of great changes similar to the era of budding science and technology that occurred towards the end of the Middle Ages. With that, I wonder if God is already in the process of identifying the next Martin Luther, and if the Holy Spirit is urging and revealing to us His unwavering decree of renewal and transformation.



The answer is a definite yes. There must be reasons that God placed us in this era of rapid change. One of them is because He has chosen us to be part of another church revival!

As we enter into a brand new year, let's think about how to contribute to the church revival and how to renew our spirit and transform our lives; how to steer clear of various outdated traditions and ideas and not let our egos get in the way of the Holy Spirit, but instead, let our humility pave the way for the work of the Holy Spirit; and how to have the right conversations and gospel delivery with non-believers in the context of rapid changes and their varied understanding. What kind of role can we play in support of such church revival?

Above are the questions I would like all of us to think about as we enter the new year. Last but not least, I would like to share what I learned a few days ago: We become truly alive when the Holy Spirit pours on us from above. Nothing in this world can ever satisfy us again. Only the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and His guidance and renewal can make us satisfied. Brothers and Sisters, I hope that our spirits will all be renewed and lives transformed in this new year, just like butterflies set free from their cocoon! ◆



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