



How I Have
Come to Know
The Living
GOD

*Testifying to God's
Reality and Goodness*



ERIC H.H. CHANG

**“The encounter with God was so deep that
I knew that a miracle had happened”**

This book offers hope and inspiration to those who want to know whether God is real or not. In plain and matter-of-fact language, Pastor Eric H.H. Chang shares about his deep and miraculous experiences of God. The tone is reflective rather than sensationalist, humble rather than self-promoting. The goal of this book is to show the reader that he or she can likewise experience God in a real way, and be rooted in the knowledge of God and His Son Jesus Christ.

Eric H.H. Chang was born in Shanghai, and came to know God in post-liberation China through a series of miracles. He graduated from the Bible Training Institute (Glasgow), London Bible College, and the University of London (Arts and Divinity, King’s College and SOAS).

He has done pastoral work in England, Canada, and Hong Kong. His publications include *The Only True God: A Study of Biblical Monotheism* and *The Only Perfect Man: The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ*.

For more resources, visit
www.christiandc.org

Christian
Disciples
Church

Publishers



HOW I HAVE
COME TO KNOW
THE LIVING
GOD



*Testifying to God's
Reality and Goodness*

ERIC H.H. CHANG

Large Print Edition

This large print edition is suitable for reading on a tablet or a laptop computer, and has a print book layout. Its text is identical to that of the paperback (ISBN 978-1534995772) and the Kindle e-book (ASIN B0756Y1ZD8), both available from Amazon.com.

PDF Edition of “How I Have Come to Know the Living God”

This book is released to the public as a free PDF e-book. Though free, it remains under copyright and is not in the public domain. You may redistribute the file if no fee is charged for it and no alteration is made to it, as issued by Christian Disciples Church. For the latest version of the file, please visit www.christiandc.org.

Permission is needed for translating this book. To write us about translating it, please use the email address below.

This e-book is released to the world free of charge and with the same goal that the author, Eric Chang, had always had for it: the glory of God and the edification of God’s people in Jesus Christ.

Christian Disciples Church
biblicalmonotheism@gmail.com
August 29, 2020

How I Have Come to Know the Living God:
Testifying to God's Reality and Goodness

Eric H.H. Chang

Copyright © 2000, 2007, 2017, 2020

Eric H.H. Chang, Bentley C.F. Chan

Paperback edition: ISBN 978-1534995772

Kindle e-book edition: ASIN B0756Y1ZD8

These ISBN and ASIN numbers do not apply to this PDF edition

Paperback edition printed in the United States of America
by Kindle Direct Publishing, an Amazon.com company

Cover and interior design: Bentley C.F. Chan

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system—without permission from the copyright holders.

Image credits: Helen Chang, Joe Liang, Tung Lau, Bentley Chan
Smileus/Shutterstock, 4045/Shutterstock

© Can Stock Photo / photocreo, © Can Stock Photo / dndavis

© Can Stock Photo / sborisov, © Can Stock Photo / showface

© Can Stock Photo / Sandralise

Scripture quotations marked ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are from New American Standard Bible, © copyright The Lockman Foundation 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1988, 1995. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. All rights reserved.

HOW I HAVE
COME TO KNOW
THE LIVING
GOD

*Testifying to God's
Reality and Goodness*

ERIC H.H. CHANG

CDC
Publishers

Christian Disciples Church
www.christiandc.org





Dedicated to all the saints in China
who have remained faithful and
steadfast in the face of every
challenge and circumstance, and
whose lives and testimonies remain
an enduring inspiration to me.

Eric H.H. Chang

Contents

Foreword to the 2017 Edition	xiii
Preface to the 2000 Edition	xv
Acknowledgements	xvii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Dreams of My Youth	11
Chapter 2 My Encounter with God	21
Chapter 3 Walking with God	35
Chapter 4 London Days	53
Chapter 5 Christ Lives in Me	87
Chapter 6 Freedom in Christ	129

Foreword to the 2017 Edition

The six chapters in this book correspond to six public sharings given by Eric H.H. Chang on his experiences of the living God. The first three sharings were given in Melbourne in 1985, and edited in 1992 by me for publication in the *Oasis* newsletter. The latter three were given in Kuala Lumpur on separate occasions between 1998 and 2001. In 2000, Raymond Suen edited and published the first four of the sharings; in 2007, he published a larger volume of six chapters.

This 2017 edition includes photographs, and was further edited by me for uniformity in writing style across the chapters. In all the editing that has been done for the book over the years, no content of substance has been added or deleted except by Rev. Chang himself, who added a few supplementary comments to the original sharings.

In this 2017 edition, when we quote from the Hebrew Bible (or what is commonly known as the “Old Testament”), we preserve God’s personal name Yahweh where it is found in the Hebrew text; this is for the sake of biblical and linguistic accuracy.

Personal note: On Nov 13, 2012, I spoke with Pastor Eric by phone two months before he departed to be with the Lord, and asked him if I could republish his testimony. He

said I can do whatever I want with it. He paused for a few seconds, and in a soft voice remarked that the testimony hardly tells the whole story of all the things that God had done in his life. After a brief silence, we went on to other things.

Bentley Chan

Montreal, Canada

April 27, 2017

biblicalmonotheism@gmail.com

Preface to the 2000 Edition

Life in the 21st century often finds us chasing after much triviality in the fast lane. Seldom can one afford the time and leisure to slow down to ponder upon life: where are we going and where should we go? Though it is true for many people that “man’s limitation is the beginning of God’s working in one’s life,” yet I hope that none of us will procrastinate before it is too late to know and experience God first hand.

It is my privilege to introduce the author and his biography to you. I have known him since my student days. In the past twenty-some years, Reverend Eric Chang has been my spiritual guide and mentor. It is a joy to see the working of the Lord through His faithful servant over all these years.

How I Have Come to Know God consists of six chapters. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 were transcribed from Reverend Chang’s testimony given in Melbourne, Australia, in 1985. The testimonies in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 were given in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, at different times between 1998 and 2001. As we read about God’s doing in a person’s life, we ought to pray to God, pleading with Him to move likewise in our lives. The Oasis Literature Ministry counts it a privilege to be a channel of God’s blessings.

May the name of God be praised!

Raymond Suen
Hong Kong, 2000

Acknowledgements

I wish to put on record my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to Pastor Raymond Suen for his work in preparing this testimony for publication, and to his dear wife Rosablanca for transcribing a major part of the original tapes. Thanks also to the others who transcribed the earlier recordings, but whose names are not known to me though they are certainly known to God. All their labors have made the publication of this testimony possible, and certainly its only purpose is that through it all men may come to “know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 5:20).

Eric H.H. Chang (2000)

It is my honor and privilege to say thank-you to Helen Chang, Auntie Tung Lau, Pastor Joe and Olive, Albert and Grace, and Winston, for your help in this new publication and for your participation in Pastor Eric’s hope that this book may draw people to a knowledge of God and His Son Jesus Christ.

Bentley C.F. Chan (2017)



Introduction

While you are listening to my testimony, I hope that your attention will be fixed on what Yahweh God has done. In giving a testimony, my fear is that the attention may be focused on the person giving the testimony and not on God Himself. And if you are merely fascinated with God's miracles in themselves, that would be to miss the point. But if what God has done in my life moves you to say to yourself, "If God can do that for him, He can do it for me," then you are listening to my testimony in the right way.

Many people, after reading of Paul's experiences in the Bible, say to themselves, "Only great men like the apostle Paul can experience God so abundantly. God would never

do for me what He did for Paul.” If that were so, it would be pointless to read the Bible because none of it would apply to us directly. The Bible would be nothing more than a compilation of historical accounts of great men like Paul and Elijah. But James says that “Elijah was a man with a nature like ours” (James 5:17). Yet this same Elijah was one of the greatest of the prophets. God answered his prayer on Mount Carmel by sending down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice (1 Kings 18:38). Has it ever occurred to you that God may want you to do the same? After all, Elijah was a man with a nature like ours.

Long before that incident on Mount Carmel, Elijah had already declared that there was to be no rain in Israel for a few years (1 Kings 17:1). This was an act of judgment against Israel for rebelling against God. Sure enough God held back the rain for three and a half years until that memorable day on Mount Carmel when Elijah prayed for rain to come down (18:1,45). God used one man—a man who shared our nature and even our weaknesses—to bring Israel back to Himself. If you pray as Elijah did, God can use you just as powerfully. In this generation, we desperately need people who know how to walk with God and through whom God can do mighty things.

A testimony, not an autobiography

Before going to my testimony, I need to point out that it is not meant to be an autobiography. An autobiography is the

life story of a person, and that person is the center of the story which is filled with personal details such as his place of birth, his family background, his education, his achievements, and his life events. But a testimony is fundamentally different: it testifies to God and what He has done. It is God and not the speaker who is the center of all that is said. Hence a testimony and a biography are different in character: the former has God as its center, the latter has man. It is possible to make an autobiography more God-centered, but then it would be a combination of testimony and autobiography.

In saying all this, my point is that in giving a testimony, my goal is for me to serve only as a mirror so that when you look at the mirror you will see the glory of God and not the mirror itself.

When you look at the gospel records, you will notice that they are not a biography in the usual sense of the word but a testimony to what God was doing in Christ to reconcile the world to Himself. In fact it is not even possible to write a biography of Christ because not even his date of birth is mentioned in the gospels. There is also no record of his childhood after infancy or any detail of his life before the age of about 30, with the exception of a spiritually important incident when he was 12 years old. The gospels are focused on the final three years of his earthly ministry, particularly the events of the final week which led up to his death and resurrection.

In all of this, God was mightily at work in Christ to accomplish His plan for our eternal salvation. From the Bible we see that God brought humankind's redemption into being through Christ in the final six days of Jesus' earthly ministry. Six days before the Passover, Jesus was anointed at Bethany by Mary in preparation for his burial (John 12:1-3,7). Paul says that "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1Corinthians 5:7).

No exaggeration

There is another thing I wish to make clear: It is my aim that in giving my testimony, there will be no exaggeration. This is a principle by which I live. If I cannot recall something accurately, I would rather not talk about it because I might misrepresent or even exaggerate it. Some people who hear testimonies might say, "Wow, these things are amazing; perhaps they were exaggerated." I assure you, and as the Lord is my witness, I exaggerated nothing, because an exaggeration is, in an important sense, a lie. It is false. You have made the event bigger than what it really was, and that is a falsification. You see the same principle in the gospels: there is no exaggeration. In fact, an important event is often recorded in the Bible just as though in passing:

As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he

said, “Don’t cry.” Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. (Luke 7:12-15, NIV).

The amazing act of raising a person from the dead is reported in four short verses! You cannot report such an amazing event in a shorter and less dramatic way than that. Would a modern news reporter write like that? Anybody familiar with writing would say, “You have to polish up the story, pad it with details, and make it more interesting and sensational.” Many preachers in fact do that very thing to this story; they might not be exaggerating (it is hard to make a resurrection any more significant than it is!); they just want to make a nicer story out of the short gospel account. But the point to notice is that the gospels themselves don’t do that, and I will try to follow the gospels in this respect, though I may not always be entirely successful because we all tend to get carried away by our remembrance of remarkable events. But we must under no circumstances add in anything that was not originally there. Any kind of falsehood is displeasing to our holy God.

We are all called to be witnesses

In giving my testimony, I am simply witnessing. Witnessing is something that every Christian can do and should do. You may or may not be able to preach. That doesn’t matter. You can witness, and you must witness. Don’t say to yourself,

“Oh, he is the one who does all the witnessing.” No, I am just setting an example for you to follow because, to stress the point again, every Christian can witness and must witness.

What is a witness? A witness is somebody who has seen something or experienced something, and then tells you what he or she has seen or experienced. If you are a true Christian, you must have experienced God in some way or other. How did you become a Christian if God hadn't changed your life? If He had changed your life, you would have experienced something important: the miracle of being changed. And if you have been changed, that is what you can witness to. You can say, “I was like this before, and now the Lord has made me into a new person. I didn't change suddenly for no reason; God did something in my life, and this is what I want to tell you about.”

A witness has first-hand experience

A witness is someone who has first-hand experience. That is why witnesses are called when a legal case is tried in a court of law. A witness is someone who has first-hand knowledge of that particular case. In the same way, anyone who has had a first-hand experience of God can be a witness. If all you have is second-hand faith, that is, a faith built on someone else's faith, you are not a true witness. The most you can say is, “My friend believes, so I believe; he got baptized, so I got baptized.” That is second-hand faith. When people don't

have a first-hand experience of God, they will have nothing to witness about Him.

This point is crucial. If every Christian were witnessing for Him, the church would be growing. I have often said that you ought to make it your minimum goal to witness to one person a year—bring one person to church per year. How many Sundays are there in a year? Depending on the year, 52 or 53. If in 52 Sundays you can't bring one person to church, what is the problem with your faith? But if every member in the church brings one person to church, what will happen to the church in one year? It will have 100% growth. The church will double in one year. Has your church doubled in size this year? Probably not. Then somebody is not witnessing, or perhaps most people in the church are not witnessing. Maybe you tried to witness but nobody listened to you; perhaps your witness carried no punch, no quality, no weight. Nobody listened to it. Well, you had better take a good look at your Christian life and ask, "Is there something wrong with me?"

In the Bible, Christians are called "saints". Few believers today would dare to think of themselves as saints or holy people. Yet Revelation 14:12 says that the saints are the witnesses for Jesus. In other words, if you are a true Christian, you are a witness for Jesus. Are you a witness for Jesus or not? I don't want to give you my testimony just so that you can say, "This guy has lots of unusual experiences." That is not important. What is important is whether I motivate you to do what I am doing. Now, you may not have known the

Lord for quite as long as I. You may not have many experiences to recount. But does it matter? If you have one experience to tell others, keep sharing it until you have two experiences. And when you have two experiences, you keep on telling others about the two experiences until you get three. Then your story gets longer and longer, and you will have more to testify to God about and bring Him glory.

To be a witness we must live a victorious life in Christ

Most Christians do not live victoriously. Do you know that testifying for Jesus is a way to live victoriously? Do you realize that? This comes out in Revelation 12:11, “They overcame him (the devil, v.9) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.” How did they overcome the evil one? Through two things: the blood of Jesus and their testimony for Jesus. Many people know about the blood of Jesus, but that is not enough. That is only one aspect; the other is witnessing for Jesus. They overcome the evil one by telling everyone of their experience of Jesus and the way he has changed their lives. Go and tell people about it. Go out there and keep witnessing to the Lord, and you will experience victory. That may explain why the church is full of defeated Christians and doesn't grow: people don't witness for Jesus, so they are defeated and wallow in their defeat.

The importance of witnessing compared to preaching

Is preaching easy or difficult? Preaching and teaching is relatively easy if it is just a matter of repeating knowledge that you have learned. In this connection, there is something



Eric Chang at a conference in
Hong Kong, December 2006

available in North America which I find astonishing: I received literature from a publisher that says that if I pay a monthly fee, they will provide me with a message to preach every Sunday. It is amazing that something like this could exist in the church. I then realized that thousands of pastors must have been receiving this kind of literature and are preaching messages which they did not prepare, but are simply repeating material written by others and sent by post! There is nothing difficult about that.

There is, of course, nothing wrong with repeating a good message if it meets the needs of a particular church at a particular time. But if preaching or teaching is nothing more than the repeating of knowledge, then it is only of the head not of

the heart. When I preach, I preach from the heart. That is why preaching burns me out; I pour out my life through it. I don't preach from the head only. If anyone thinks that what I preach are intellectual messages, then they don't understand my preaching. I preach from the heart or I don't preach at all. Preaching like this will drain your strength. If you can preach five messages and don't feel tired, you've got a problem: You must be preaching from the wrong place, and certainly not from the heart.

Preaching can be just a matter of repeating knowledge or theory, but witnessing is something that comes from life—something you have truly experienced. If you haven't experienced something, you can't witness to it; yet you can preach on the things you have never experienced. You can talk about dying and rising with Christ until your mouth gets dry, yet without having experienced it yourself. In other words, you don't have to experience these things to preach them, but you have to experience them if you are going to be a true witness. So I encourage you to witness. If you don't know how to preach, don't worry about it, but witness in order to be victorious in Christ.



Chapter 1

Dreams of My Youth

Some of you have asked me about my experience in the Lord, so I'll take this opportunity to share with you my testimony. This is somewhat unusual because at the pulpit I would usually expound the word of God. Today I will talk about two aspects of my Christian life: how I became a Christian and how I have come to serve God. As I will explain shortly, these two aspects of my Christian life are inseparable.

My family background

I begin with my family. My grandfather on my father's side lived in Fujian. Though he came from a poor family, he managed to put himself through university (which was a great achievement in China in those days). He could have lived in prosperity, but he forsook everything to preach the gospel and became the minister of a Presbyterian church. Because ministers were paid meagerly in those days, his three sons and one daughter grew up in relative poverty.

His three sons were all brilliant academically, but the most outstanding was my father, Chang Tien-Tze, the eldest son. Although my father was brought up in a Christian home, he grew up as a non-Christian with no obvious interest in spiritual things. He got tired of living in poverty and decided to pursue a better life. He was admitted to Peking University without examination because his average mark was around 97%. When he graduated from Peking University, he broke the university record for the highest average. Then he was sent to Harvard University in the United States to do his Master's degree, which he completed in nine months. He felt that Harvard was not as good as some of the European schools, so he went to Europe to do his doctorate.

He had a phenomenal memory and an amazing gift in languages. He learned languages for the sheer fun of it. He studied French for only three months but spoke French so fluently that many thought he had studied at a university in France (he did, but only for a short time, at the Sorbonne in

Paris). He decided to learn German as well, so he studied at Heidelberg University for three months. At the end of the three months, he spoke good German. He became increasingly proud and confident of his abilities. Wherever he studied, whether at Harvard or in Europe, he received one scholarship after another. In fact he had received so much scholarship money that he could even support his two younger brothers through university and still have enough money to travel first-class to America. He acquired a taste for the good and comfortable life.

That was my family background. My father's intellectual brilliance fostered an intellectual atmosphere for me, his only child, to grow up in. He was a man who loved an intellectual challenge, but he was also a man who loved his country very much. His dream was to pull China out of the Middle Ages and make it a glorious, modern nation—a new China! He studied economics because he felt that the reconstruction of China must first start with the economy and only afterwards with the military. He believed that a strong economic infrastructure was needed for building a powerful and scientifically advanced nation.

My father made me patriotic as well. He would often talk to me about China's glorious past. He was the one who sowed the seeds of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism in my heart. He was incensed that foreign nations had taken advantage of China's weakness to plunder her, to trample on her, and to humiliate her with unequal treaties. So I grew up feeling very hostile towards Westerners. My anti-Western

sentiments were intensified by the fact that I grew up in Shanghai, a city partitioned into various foreign settlements: the French concession, the British concession, the Japanese concession, and so on. You have probably seen a photograph of a sign that says, “No dogs or Chinese allowed” at the entrance to a park. There were foreign soldiers everywhere. I once saw a British soldier kicking and punching a Chinese tailor. I said in my heart, “You guys just wait. I’ll teach you a lesson one of these days!”

My ambition

I shared my father’s love for the country but my ambition was different from his. He emphasized building a strong economy but I emphasized building a strong military. I spent all my pocket money on books on military science. I studied a lot and was fascinated with Zhu Geliang in *The Tales of The Three Kingdoms*.

I learned martial arts because I felt that it was important to build a strong body. I became very muscular through intensive training in judo and boxing. I took up all kinds of sports to train my body. To acquire leadership skills, I single-handedly organized and trained up a baseball (softball) team. Knowing little about baseball, I got hold of a book on baseball and taught myself the techniques of the sport. Then I trained up some guys who also knew nothing about baseball. Within two years we were playing in the “A” division

and challenging the best teams in Shanghai. What was our secret? Dedication and team spirit.

I trained myself not only physically and mentally, but also in spiritual things. I noticed that Zhu Geliang and other ancient Chinese heroes were well versed in astronomy and astrology. They could study the stars and come up with amazing predictions. So I decided to study the stars. I once picked up a book on astrology which predicted that the United States will be involved in a major war at the end of 1941. Then I looked at the year of publication—1935! I was so impressed with its accuracy that I studied the book and learned a lot about astrology to the extent that I could look at a person's face and tell him in which month he was born. People were quite amazed at my ability to tell things about people and events. I know first-hand that astrology works to some extent. Certainly there are charlatans who defraud people with their phony skills in astrology, but there are others who really know something about it. Of course I dropped the whole business when I became a Christian because the Bible warns us not to dabble with spiritism and related things.

I felt I was sleeping too much, so I cut down on my sleep in order to spend more time on military science. You can see what kind of person I was: determined and disciplined. With my intellectual training, physical training, and knowledge of astrology, I was preparing myself to fulfill my ambition.

My anti-Christian sentiments

I was becoming more and more anti-Christian partly because of what my father had told me about foreigners residing in China. He told me that many of the missionaries in China were in fact spies dispatched to various parts of China under the guise of missionary work in order to feed information back to their home countries about China's military and economic situation.

I harbored anti-Christian feelings even in my primary school days. My parents put me in a Catholic primary school not because they were religious but because the Catholic schools in Shanghai had a high academic standard. Sadly, in school I was totally put off by the Catholics. Most of the priests behaved repulsively. I saw nothing Christian about them. They were cold, unloving, and not the least interested in the welfare of the students. Life in the Catholic boarding school was like staying in a prison. It had high walls and there were thick bars across every window. Twice I escaped from the school. Everything was under authoritarian control. We had to line up and march together all the time, whether it was to class, the dining hall, or our sleeping quarters. My anti-Christian feelings made it hard for me to believe in God. I became more and more anti-Christian, and it went on like this until the Communists came.

The war years

During the war, my father was a high-ranking government official with many administrative duties in Nanjing. His administrative center in Nanjing was a kingdom in its own right. It was guarded by its own soldiers, and had city walls and power generators. My father had several armies under him, with two generals in command of the armies. (One of them, the famous Sun Li Ren, later became the chief-of-staff in Taiwan.) I was brought up in a setting in which I enjoyed almost unlimited power under the Nationalists. I was just a teenager, yet the guards would salute me whenever I walked by, and government officials would greet me. If I wanted to travel from Shanghai to Nanjing, high-ranking officials would come to our home in Shanghai and take me to the train station in the official limousine. Upon my arrival at Nanjing, another group of officials would escort me to my father's office. The privilege and power that I enjoyed became a bad influence on a young person like me.

The war intensified. The Nationalists were losing one battle after another to the Communists who were advancing south. My father had to decide whether to fight or to withdraw. Meanwhile he had become very disgusted with the widespread corruption among the Nationalists. Many Nationalist armies were semi-independent and not subject to the control of the central government. This opened the way to great abuses. My father was fed up with the corruption that was rampant in China; his stand against corruption got him into disputes with many of his fellow government

officials. When his mentor Wang Yun Wu, then the acting Prime Minister, resigned, my father took the chance to resign *en bloc* with several other officials. He retired from government just shortly before the Communists reached Shanghai.

The Nationalists fled Shanghai when the Communists came, but my father refused to leave. His friends were warning him that even minor officials such as mayors of small cities were being executed, but my father said, "My record is blameless. I have done nothing against my country. I have nothing to be ashamed of. I have fought the Japanese. I have served my country. Let the Communists shoot me if they want to, but they will have to tell me what is their charge against me." Sure enough, when the Communists came into Shanghai, they never bothered us. People were being executed every day but we were left in peace because the Communist headquarters had received a good report of my father from their spies. They found his record clean; he had done nothing that could be construed as hostile to his own country or even to the Communists.

They later tried to get my father to serve in the Communist government, but he refused to work with them, saying, "Loyalty is our Chinese principle. After serving one government I cannot serve another." He said this partly as an excuse. Later they invited him to teach at Peking University but again he declined. He decided, however, to stay in China in order to see with his own eyes how the Communists will build this new China. So the whole family remained in

China. In 1952, my mother left China due to serious health problems (tuberculosis). When my father had finally decided to leave China, they did not allow him to do so. In 1953, he made use of an opportunity to leave China. So I was left in China by myself with no money or possessions. What had happened to my dream of building a new and powerful China?

Facing dialectical materialism

I had to decide what I was going to do. The communists had gained control of China. What was I going to do with the rest of my life? One possibility was to side with the communists and go all out with them. I could join the army and rise through the communist ranks (which would not be too difficult because, as a senior middle school student, I could start as an officer in the army straightaway). That would allow me to accomplish something through the communist army.

But I refused to pretend. Without true belief in communism, one cannot be a true communist. I felt, however, that I should at least give communism a chance to convince me. So I started to read communist books on dialectical materialism as well as books on the history of the Communist Party. Having had some knowledge of military science, I found the history of the Communist Party very fascinating because it describes some of Chairman Mao's brilliant military stratagems.

But reading communist literature did not make me a communist. On the contrary, I came to the conclusion that dialectical materialism is an illogical doctrine. Instead of making me more pro-communist, dialectical materialism made me more anti-communist. (Looking back, I would say that dialectical materialism had probably helped me to become a Christian later on.)

I could tell from the classroom debates that even some of the Communist Youth League members did not agree with it. Somebody once asked a party member about the origin of life, and the reply was, “Oh, that’s easy, life comes from non-life!” Even the pro-communist students felt uncomfortable with that answer because the chances of that happening are so remote. It actually takes more faith to believe that life came from non-life than to believe that life was created. But I wasn’t too concerned with these issues. I was only concerned with what to do next.



Chapter 2

My Encounter with God

A daring and foolhardy act

A few of us began to hold secret meetings to discuss ways of getting out of China. We decided that two persons (I being one of them) would travel south to find a way out of China, and then inform the others of the escape route.

My partner and I did something daring and foolhardy. We boarded a train to Guangzhou, and there we tried to look for a guide who, for money, would show us a path to cross the border. But we could not find one. In fact many guides were caught by communist soldiers disguised as refugees, and were executed as a public warning. So we decided to go on to Shenzhen without a guide and to cross the border during the night, knowing well that we were risking our lives.

Though we were not religious, I had a strange feeling on the night before we left for Shenzhen: my sixth sense told me that we were heading for trouble. My partner felt it too. We were not sure how seriously we were to take this premonition. I was aware from ancient Chinese records that spiritual perception is important in warfare because man has a spirit with the potential to sense spiritual things. (The Bible also says that man has a spirit.) But we didn't understand this principle very well and dismissed the whole matter as a funny feeling.

The next day we set out for Shenzhen. When the train arrived, we knew that our fate was sealed. That part of Shenzhen was everywhere surrounded by barbed wires and guarded by soldiers. The passengers disembarked and started taking out their passes. We tried to follow the crowd that was heading for Hong Kong. Most of them had passes for Hong Kong, but we did not. We walked away from the crowd and took a path towards a village. We had gone only a short distance when we saw, in front of us, a man and a

young boy surrounded by three or four soldiers checking their papers. We tried to slip past the soldiers while they were busy, but one of them saw us and called us back. When we could not produce our passes, they started frisking us. Unfortunately for me, I was carrying a hunting knife in case I needed it for self-defense. He held the menacing-looking stainless steel knife to my face and asked me what it was for. I told him it was for cutting watermelons! Obviously he didn't believe my story. We were arrested and marched off to prison together with the man and the little boy.

The jail was a small house surrounded by one heavy barricade after another. As we were approaching the prison, I was studying every detail of the surroundings in order to plan an escape. From afar I could already see the faces of people peeking out from behind the thick bars. Soldiers were positioned everywhere. From the way they moved and handled their guns, I could tell that they were trained veterans. We were locked inside the prison compound, and there we waited and waited for the officer-in-command to decide what to do with us. The hours dragged on like eternity. Some prisoners were whispering among themselves, saying that we were likely to be shot.

My encounter with God

When a person is confronted with death, it makes him wise and sensitive to spiritual things. I sat there saying to myself, "I'm still young, yet this looks like the end of the road for

me. All my dreams, my ambitions, and my hopes are finished. My parents won't even know what has happened to me." I thought to myself, "What is life all about? What are we living for?" I was getting a bit desperate. Then I told myself, "Well, I'm not going to sit idle! If I'm going to die, I'll die fighting! I'll take out a few soldiers before they shoot me dead!" So I began to study the movements of one soldier to see how I could snatch the gun from him.

Suddenly a bird flew over my head. I looked up into the blue sky and wondered if there was a God up there. Does God exist? Many believe in God for emotional reasons, but what if there really is a God? If so, then I had made the biggest miscalculation of my life. How can I know if God exists or not? Well, here is my chance to see if He can save me.

I knew I had no claim on God; I wasn't even a Christian. I used to think that Christians are weak and foolish. A church elder once talked to me about Christianity, and I had a delightful time demolishing his arguments. His inability to defend his case was, to me, a confirmation of my view that Christians are emotionally and intellectually weak. It also proved to me that God doesn't exist. But I was mistaken. The elder's failure to defend his case doesn't mean that there is no case to defend. I realized that it was I, not the elder, who was the fool after all. In the end, what had my pride and self-confidence accomplished for me? Here I was sitting on this stone, waiting for my life to come to a humiliating end.

I looked up and wondered how one could come to know God. But I felt that God wouldn't want to talk to me because of the way I had mocked Christians. Perhaps I shouldn't even try to pray. But I also came to the conclusion that the only way to know someone is to talk with him. This principle of life applies to man; surely it applies equally to God. When you talk to God and God talks to you, you have come to know Him. So I said to myself, "I've got to start somewhere. If God exists, presumably He will answer me when I talk to Him."

I was knocking on heaven's door. I didn't even know how to pray. But knowing that I had to be honest with God, I prayed, "O God, if You are there, if You are the living God, if You are real, if You truly exist, I come now before You asking You to take me out of prison. If You don't save me, I may be dead by tomorrow. Yes, I'm ashamed that I have to call on You while I'm in this mess. I also know that I can't be saved on my own terms. Therefore, if You will take me out of prison and save my life, I will know that You are the living God, and I will serve You and live for You all the days of my life."

I felt that if God did exist, it must be wonderful to know Him and serve Him. Now you can see why I said at the beginning of my testimony that my becoming a Christian is inseparable from my serving God. At the very moment I came to God, I had already pledged to serve Him for the rest of my life.

After that prayer, I sat down not knowing what to expect. Then something happened. I sensed heaven opening. I was standing in the presence of God! Though I was not seeking experiences, I knew God was there all around me. In Zechariah 2:5, Yahweh God says, “I will be a wall of fire around her, and I will be the glory in her midst.” That was exactly my experience even though I didn’t know of this verse at the time. There was such joy in my heart that I thought I was going crazy. I was so ecstatic that I wanted to jump up and down. I had never felt anything like this; it was like getting drunk.

I can understand the feeling at Pentecost. The apostles were filled with so much joy that others thought they were drunk. My face must have been beaming with radiant joy because my partner who was arrested with me asked me why I was smiling. Shall I tell him I had just met with God? Not knowing what to say, I simply told him that everything will be all right. He retorted, “What do you mean all right?! We’re going to be shot!” But the more I told him that everything will be all right, the angrier he became. He was shouting louder and louder until one of the soldiers said, “Quiet! You’re not allowed to talk!”

That encounter with God was so deep that I knew a miracle had happened. I started to ask myself what this experience could mean. It could mean only one thing: God was telling me He had answered my prayer and will take me out of prison! As I was pondering on this, Commander Li came back with the man who was arrested with the little boy.

He had just finished interrogating him. A soldier opened the prison door, pushed the man in, and slammed the door. This man, perhaps in his forties, had committed no crime as serious as mine; he was not carrying a weapon; he was even accompanied by a young boy. Was I too bold to think that God would release me from prison?

Interrogation

I was called in for interrogation. The officer led me to a room that was empty except for a stool at one corner (where I was told to sit), and a desk and a chair at the other corner (where the officer sat). I wanted to sit closer to him, even face-to-face, and so I picked up the stool and walked towards him. He pulled out his gun and ordered me to return to my corner.

He asked me many questions: What was I doing? Did I belong to any secret organization? Why was I trying to enter Hong Kong?

I replied, “Who in his right mind would enter Hong Kong? I only wanted to earn a living in Shenzhen because life had been hard for me.” He said, “Let me ask you point blank: If I give you a chance to go to Hong Kong, would you go?” I said, “If that’s the way you ask the question, yes, I would accept your offer. But what’s your point?”

He took down several pages of notes. When he had finished, he ordered me to put my fingerprint on the papers. I told him I will not do it unless I am allowed to read my

own confession. But he refused to let me read it. So I said, "I'm signing my own death warrant, right?" He said, "It's up to you. Do you want to put your fingerprint or not?"

I was in a no-win situation; either way I was going to be shot. So I put my fingerprint on it, and was taken out of the room. Then he called in my friend and said to him, "Your friend has confessed to everything. Here's the confession. Read it!" After my friend had read it, he turned pale. He said, "What? You confessed to all this?" Our doom was sealed. To this day I still do not know exactly what I had "confessed" to. That is why I am wary when I hear of a so-called "confession" allegedly made by a church leader in China.

I do know a few general things about my confession. My friend told me that I had confessed to membership in a secret organization, and that I had done this and that. What I was alleged to have committed was enough to shoot me three times over! We could do nothing except to wait for them to shoot us. I had already ratified the confession with my fingerprint. I started to wonder how God was going to answer my prayer and take me out of prison.

Night came and still we hadn't been given any food. At one point the officer came by, and I thought my hour had come. But he only wanted to lock us in a small room for the night. The next morning he took us back into the prison yard, and again we sat there on that same stone, waiting and waiting. In the afternoon, the officer called me in and said to me, "Listen. I'm not going to lock you up or shoot you. I

will take you to the railway station and put you on a train. Get out of here. Go back to Guangzhou and don't ever come back here without a permit." I asked myself, "Did something happen during the night? Why would he release me after going through the trouble of getting a confession out of me? Is this a trick?"

He marched me off to the railway station and put me on a train. When I arrived in Guangzhou, there were no soldiers waiting for me. I said to myself, "Hey! This is for real! I'm free! What happened?" To this day, I still don't know what had happened. I have lived under the communist New China for seven years and I know that they are not given to mercy or kindness. God must have done something to this commanding officer during that night.

More than that, he didn't even record this incident in my police book. When you travel in China, you have to carry a little book with you that keeps track of your movements. If you travel from Shanghai to Guangzhou, for example, you have to inform the police of your trip after your arrival. My little police book should have recorded that I was carrying a dangerous weapon, that I had entered a restricted zone in Shenzhen without a permit, that I was arrested, that I had confessed to crimes punishable by death or, at least, hard labor. The absence of any such statement was all the more amazing because the officer must have kept a record of the incident in his own files in Shenzhen; yet he recorded nothing in my police book. If he had, I wouldn't be standing here before you today. I wouldn't be able to get out of China

because I would have been blacklisted as an anti-revolutionary. This was my first experience of a miracle.

Down to the gutter

After returning to Shanghai, I ran into a problem: I had to keep my promise to serve God all the days of my life. I was really stuck. Had I promised too much? Maybe I should have promised something less—like attending church every Sunday for the rest of my life! Maybe the whole incident was just a coincidence. Maybe there was a human explanation for my release from prison. Even so, it wouldn't have been any less a miracle.

Life in Shanghai was getting harder and harder for me. It was getting very cold. I had no idea where my parents were. I was running out of money. My friends deserted me because they were afraid that I might borrow from them. In no time at all, I had lost all my friends except the son of a floor sweeper. In my former days of prosperity, I accepted him as my friend because he was a nice guy. But my father was embarrassed that I was associating with this son of an uneducated working-class fellow. In the end, it was he who proved to be my only faithful friend. He allowed me to stay in a storage room so that I wouldn't have to sleep outside. I was getting poorer and poorer. I sold my watch and all my possessions to get some food. This helped me to survive another month or two.

God was dealing with me. He had brought me from the heights of position and privilege right down to the gutter—

literally the gutter because I had to wash up at the outdoor tap where people washed their cars. I could not wash my clothes because I had no change of clothes. My white shirt was turning yellow. I was experiencing the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

My next encounter with God

When my worldly friends forsook me, I began to wonder what Christians were like. I took a long walk to a church without the faintest idea of what I might encounter there. God, in His amazing timing, had arranged for my arrival to coincide with a church meeting. I knocked on the door, and who opens the door but the church elder I used to ridicule! He recognized me and said, “Eric! Please come in!” He was so warm and kind that I sensed something different about these Christians. I could not understand why they harbored no bitterness against me for the way I used to mock them. At first I enjoyed their kindness but soon I was getting suspicious. Were they trying to convert me with ulterior motives? But I soon realized that even if they did convert me, what could they get from a man who had no money or possessions?

As Christmas was approaching, a woman in the church said to me, “If you have nothing to do on Christmas day, please come to my place for tea with the church family.”

Her invitation made me suspicious. But being a man familiar with hunger, I found her invitation almost irresistible. When Christmas day came, I was struggling for the

whole afternoon trying to decide whether to go or not. It was not until it was getting dark that I had decided to go. I arrived so late that all the guests were leaving. I felt embarrassed and said, "Sorry for being late. I'll leave right now." But this woman entreated me to come in. Everyone else had left except a brother named Henry Choi.

Henry was a Cantonese who had lived in Shanghai for a long time. He was a brilliant research chemist who had formulated many things, including special ink and photographic chemicals which China could not produce at the time. As soon as I started talking with Henry, I sensed something different about him; there was a certain spiritual quality about him. He began to talk about God and how God was real to him. But thinking that his motive was to convert me, I gradually switched off and stopped listening. He was talking and I was daydreaming. Suddenly a powerful conviction struck my heart as I had never experienced before. In one flash, the Spirit of God was convicting me of my pride. More than that, God reminded me of the promise I had made to Him in the prison yard. So strong was the conviction that I realized it was a question of the truth. Once again I had met with God.

While Henry was talking, I said, "Stop!" That took him by surprise and he asked me if he had said something wrong. I said, "No, I want to accept God right now! What must I do?"

He said, “Kneel together with me. God is the King of kings and Lord of lords, so you must come to Him in humility.”

When we knelt, I asked him what to do next. He said, “We’ll pray together. Pray from your heart.” I asked him how to pray. He said, “Simply tell God what’s in your heart. Confess your sins and thank Him for His mercy and saving love.” When I started to pray, I felt the whole place shaking. Everything in the room was becoming bright as if someone had switched on the floodlights. I am basically an unemotional person, so I was puzzled that everything was shaking all over the place. There I committed my life to God. Something profound had happened to me; my whole life was changed; God had come into my life. That was the beginning of my long walk with Him.



Chapter 3

Walking with God

The beginning of my walk with God

From that point on, I began to experience God through one miracle after another. My faith was being confirmed by these amazing miracles even in the ways in which God supplied my needs. I once had a can of dried turnips that simply refused to go empty. No matter how much turnip I ate, the supply would not be

exhausted. It was not until later when I had gotten so sick of turnips that God finally stopped the supply. Later on I read a similar account in 1 Kings 17:15-16: “Her household ate for many days. The bowl of flour was not exhausted nor did the jar of oil become empty, according to the word of Yahweh which He spoke through Elijah.” This was just one of many miracles I had experienced. I also met some mighty men of God through whom God performed great miracles. (But that is a long story in itself, and I will skip it for lack of time.) When people ask me how I know that God is real, I would tell them, “After having experienced so many miracles, how can I not know?”

After two and a half years, one day I asked God, “What would You like me to do? If You want me to stay in China, I would be glad to stay, but please tell me what to do.”

In fact I could not do much. Every job in China was controlled by the government; you couldn't even sell newspapers without government permission. Twice I applied to leave China but they would not give me a visa.

My health was getting weaker and weaker because of malnutrition. One day I felt a cold sweat, and I knew it could be a sign of tuberculosis, the disease that had struck my mother so severely that one of her lungs had to be removed. I went for a free X-ray and was told that I had a spot in one of my lungs. But I had no money to buy food, never mind medication. To get a second opinion, I went to another hospital for another X-ray, but the results were the same. There they issued me a card with a picture of two

lungs, on which was a mark that indicated the location of my spot. This card gave me the freedom to travel throughout China with very little government restriction. I could even visit my uncle in Beijing. Why? Because every time I was questioned, I would produce this card and they would let me go. Nobody wanted to come close to me because everyone thought I had tuberculosis. This little card was probably one reason I was eventually allowed to leave China.

God spoke to me in an audible voice

One day I was praying in my room when I heard a voice say to me, “I will take you out of China.” So clear and distinct was the voice that I turned around to see who was speaking to me. I saw nobody in the room. This was the first time—and not the last time—God spoke to me in an audible voice. (Later on I came upon this statement in Isaiah 30:21, “And you will hear a voice behind you saying, ‘This is the way. Walk in it.’”) Immediately after receiving this message from God, I started to pack my bags. Some brothers and sisters thought I had received an exit visa, but I told them, “No, I haven’t received anything yet, but God Himself told me that He will take me out of China!”

The Bible gives many similar accounts of the Lord speaking to His people. In the book of Acts, the Lord spoke to Paul on several occasions. But the standard of Christianity today has become so mediocre that these experiences are now considered unusual or even strange. The problem lies

precisely in the area of commitment: Today we have multitudes of lukewarm, half-committed churchgoers, but few totally committed Christians. The church in the Western world has become wishy-washy. It costs nothing to become a Christian. The statement, “Take up your cross and follow me,” has become meaningless to Christians in the West. This cheap diluted salvation will never help you to experience God or to know firsthand that God is real. But when you are totally committed to Him, you will experience His miraculous power, especially when you find yourself in a difficult or critical situation. That is why the Christians in China experience miracles all the time. Being a Christian in China takes total commitment because it will cost you your life. For me to become a Christian in China required my total commitment.

How God took me out of China

Through one miracle after another, God opened the way for me to get out of China. But when the visa was finally granted, I had no money to buy a ticket to leave the country. And how God provided! Out of the blue, my uncle sent me a sum of money even though he had never sent me money before. He didn't even know I was leaving the country. He had received the money from my father which he didn't want to accept, so he sent it to me just when I was about to leave the country. God's timing is perfect!

But I soon ran into another problem. Though I had a visa to leave China, I could not enter Hong Kong. Because Hong Kong had too many refugees, the British authorities would not grant me entry unless I could prove I was going to another country. The problem dragged on for a long time, and my exit visa was about to expire. The Swiss consul phoned the British consul to request a visa on my behalf, but that too was refused.

I went before God and told Him that according to the Bible, any door that He opens, no one can close. The next day I went to the British consulate. The person at the counter asked me what I wanted, and I told him I wanted a visa to enter Hong Kong. He took my passport and asked me to wait. Then he came back with my papers and asked me how long I was planning to stay in Hong Kong. I asked for one month. Surprisingly, a visa was granted immediately.

When I crossed the bridge from Shenzhen to Hong Kong, the British border officer asked me, “Do you speak English?” I said, “Yes”.

He said, “Your visa is very unusual.”

I asked him what was unusual about a one-month visa.

He said, “No, you’ve got more than a month! They gave you unlimited stay in Hong Kong! I myself have never seen this kind of visa!”

I asked him what I was supposed to do, and he said, “Well, you can stay in Hong Kong as long as you like!”

I ended up staying in Hong Kong for nine months, and even got a Hong Kong CI (Certificate of Identity). If this was not of God's arrangement, how would you explain this?

My search for employment

In Hong Kong I asked God, "Now that I'm here, what would You like me to do?" He gave me clear indication that I was to go to Europe. But how could I get the money to go to Europe without a job?

In the 1950s, Hong Kong had tens or hundreds of thousands of refugees. How could I compete with them for a job? But God's ways are amazing. One day I came across a job opening for someone to translate from English to Chinese, and from Chinese to English. I immediately applied for this high-paying government job. On the day of the interview, I saw that many other applicants were competing for the job. I took the oral and written examinations, and later received a letter offering me the job.

Then God put me to the next test. It turned out that it was a permanent job whereas I only wanted to work temporarily and then leave for Europe. I was struggling within myself deciding whether to tell the employment officer of my situation. I knew I would lose my job if I did. When I finally decided to be honest, I said to the Lord, "You have done so many miracles. If it is Your will for me to keep this job, I will certainly have it regardless of the conditions of employment."

I wrote a letter thanking the employment officer for accepting me. But I also told him that as a Christian I had to be honest about my situation: I only intended to work one or two years before setting out for Europe. He wrote in reply, “Thank you for your honesty but we are looking for a permanent staff member. Unless you reconsider and are prepared to work longer than one or two years, we regret that the job will be offered to someone else.” I had no choice but to tell him to give the job to someone else.

After making that decision, I got a scolding from the Christians who were staying at the Lutheran Home where I was staying: “That’s foolish! Don’t you know how many refugees are struggling in Hong Kong?” One of those who scolded me had been an elder of our Shanghai church many years earlier. He said, “Young people don’t know the realities of life. You get a good job and you turn it down. Look at me, I’m over fifty. I’ve been working at the same gas company for over thirty years, and what do I get? Just a bit more than what you were offered. Imagine, a young man gets this kind of money! You’re out of your mind for turning it down!” So I got a good scolding from them. I didn’t say anything to defend myself but simply committed the matter to God.

I was back to square one, still without a job and still uncertain as to how I would get the money to go to Europe. A missionary school offered me a job as an English teacher but the pay was so low that even if I worked there for the rest

of my life, I wouldn't be able to save enough to go to Europe. Eventually that job didn't materialize either.

Hong Kong had many ships, so I approached some ship captains to ask if they needed a deck hand or someone to clean the cabins. The captains were nice to me but they could not hire me because they had sufficient crew. But God had a plan for me; He was only testing my faith.

God's miraculous provision

Meanwhile, across the Pacific, on the west coast of the United States, in the state of Oregon, a woman was kneeling in prayer. God said to her, "Go to Hong Kong because I have a job for you to do there." She was around fifty-five years old and belonged to a wealthy family. She had never been outside the United States. For her to go to Hong Kong was like going to the moon.

She said to her husband, "When I was praying today, the Lord told me to go to Hong Kong." Her husband, also a fine Christian, said to her, "If the Lord wants you to go to Hong Kong, go!"

She then went before God and asked what she was to do in Hong Kong. The Lord simply said, "Go to Hong Kong and there I will tell you what to do." (One of the principles of the Christian life is that God leads us one step at a time.) So she journeyed to Hong Kong and stayed at the Lutheran Home where I was staying. Every day for several weeks, she kept on asking the Lord what He wanted her to do.

During my quiet time one day, there was a knock on the door. I opened the door and there was this woman standing before me. She said, “The Lord has been speaking to me, and has instructed me to buy you a ticket to Europe.” I expressed my appreciation, but I asked her to pray more about the matter. She quickly answered, “No! The Lord has made it very clear to me!”



Eric Chang in Hong Kong, 1956

A few days later she returned and asked me if I had booked the ticket. When I said no, she said, “Book the ticket. I am now very definite as to why God had sent me here. He has given me a job to do, and it is to send you to Europe. Book the ticket without delay!”

It was a Friday. From my daily reading of the newspapers, I knew the routes, fares, and schedules for all the ships leaving

Hong Kong for Europe. I also knew that the lowest fare to Europe was for a particular ship that was to leave the following Tuesday. After the woman had kindly given me a cheque for the right sum, I went straightaway to the shipping agent to book a place on the ship. But when I got there,

I was told that the fare had increased 20% due to the fighting at the Suez Canal (1956). The canal had been shut down because of the war, and no one knew whether it would be navigable in a month's time when the ship was expected to arrive in the region. If not, it would have to take the much longer route around South Africa and the Cape of Good Hope. I asked the agent if the extra 20% would be refunded if the ship was eventually able to go through the canal. He was unsure but said that a refund was unlikely because of the higher cost of insurance for a ship going through the Suez immediately after the war (because of the danger from sunken ships and floating mines). A clause was attached to the ticket stating: "In view of the situation at the Suez, the shipping company retains the right to keep all or part of the additional 20%, and any decision on this would be made solely at the company's discretion." It was already Friday, and the ship was going to leave on Tuesday. How was I going to get the extra money?

When I returned to the Lutheran Home, the American woman asked me if I had bought the ticket. When I told her about the 20% increase, she exclaimed, "Praise the Lord! Everything's fine! While you were away, I got a cable from my husband informing me that he had just sent more money. He didn't know why, but God had instructed him to send you this extra money. He felt that you were going to need it. Here's the money. Go and get your ticket!"

Praise God for His people who know how to walk with Him! I came all the way from China, and God sent someone

all the way from the United States to meet me in Hong Kong to send me to Europe! How do we understand this? Is it a mere coincidence? God is so real and amazing. His timing is impeccable. I left Hong Kong on Tuesday, and the woman returned to the United States on Wednesday.

My voyage to Europe

The ship was a freighter that carried only twelve passengers. I shared a cabin with a man from Hong Kong who was traveling to Singapore. As the ship was getting closer and closer to his destination, and as the Singapore skyline was looming larger and larger, he knelt down with me and committed his life to the Lord!

For the rest of my journey to Europe, I had the whole cabin to myself, so I was able to get some badly-needed rest and to recuperate from my weakness. On the freighter we all travelled first class. With the good, nutritious food that I ate on the ship, and with the peaceful rest that I enjoyed, God was restoring my health.

A labor strike in Burma kept the ship stranded there for a month, waiting for the cargo that it was to transport to Europe. As a result, I spent two whole months on the ship for the price of a regular journey. My health was restored by the time I had reached Europe. The Lord really knows our needs.

During the voyage, the passengers were discussing among themselves whether the shipping company would refund the

20% of the ticket we had paid for. They asked for my opinion, and I told them I was absolutely sure I would be refunded the money. They were puzzled by my answer and asked me how I knew. I could not explain it to them, but I knew from the Lord that I would get back the 20%.

When we arrived in Europe, we got off the ship and went straightaway to the shipping company's office. The agent promptly gave me a cheque for the 20%. The next person was expecting a cheque as well, but the agent refused to give him anything because, as stated in the clause, the refund was entirely at the discretion of the company. My ten fellow passengers spent a whole day at the office trying to get back their 20%, in vain.

Something was curious about my 20% refund. I paid the fare in Hong Kong in U.S. dollars, and received the refund in Yugoslavia. But my refund was neither in Hong Kong dollars, nor in American dollars, nor in Yugoslav dinars, but in British pounds! All this was planned by God, as I would later find out.

My arrival in Europe

After arriving in Europe, I immediately visited my mother in Switzerland; she had just had a near-fatal operation. I waited on the Lord to see what I should do in Europe. One day I went to Zurich to visit the president of the Bank of Switzerland, the gentleman whose signature was found on the back of every Swiss bank note. (Somebody in Hong

Kong had given me his name and address.) It turned out that he was a very fine Christian; his whole family were fine and humble people.

When I was boarding a train to leave Zurich, his wife handed me a magazine so that I would have something to read on the journey. I accepted the magazine and thanked her. On the back cover was an advertisement of a Bible college. I said to myself, maybe I should apply to this Bible college.

I didn't know what God wanted me to do. At first I wanted to study engineering, but the more I thought about it, the more I felt it would be better to study at a Bible college before considering anything else. I cut out the ad and applied to this Bible college in Scotland. It was not until I was accepted by the college that I knew why my refund cheque was in British pounds. God had already foreseen that I would be going to this Bible college in the United Kingdom. When I paid the school fees with the cheque, it was exactly enough to cover my first term. God had worked out everything in advance.

God provided for all my needs

God continued to work in my life in amazing ways. When I arrived in England, I knew no one. Because I was not allowed to work, I had to look to God to supply my needs for every school term. God tests our faith from time to time. Towards my final term in the Bible college, I had no more

money to pay the school fees. I counted the money in my pocket, and realized that I would be in debt if I stayed another two or three days. What was I to do? The Bible says we must owe no man anything except love (Romans 13:8). I didn't want to owe anything to anyone, and that included the Bible college.

I told the registrar that I was quitting college because I could not pay the fees. He put his arm around my shoulder and said, "Eric, we don't consider you to be in debt—at least not until the last day of the term."

Then I said, "Mr. Williamson, if God doesn't provide for me at the start of the term, how would I know that He will provide for me at the end of the term? I would be in debt by then, and that would be against the Biblical principle." He pleaded with me to stay, but I told him I had to go. The diploma was unimportant to me.

I returned to my room upstairs and thanked the Lord for giving me a chance to study at the Bible college. If it was His will for me to go, I would gladly accept His will. I opened my writing pad to write some farewell letters, and what did I see inside? A bundle of brand new one-pound notes! I thought I was daydreaming. I counted the bank notes, and sure enough it was exactly enough to cover the expenses for the final term! I had never experienced anything like this before.

I went back downstairs to Mr. Williamson who must have been expecting a farewell handshake from me. You can imagine his surprise when I handed him the bank notes

instead. After I explained everything to him, he said to me, “Eric, in this Bible college we have seen some truly amazing things happening in your life.”

Recent events

I will skip over the many years that had elapsed since my student days, and the many, many things God had done during that period. I wish to mention one last incident that took place only recently. This will demonstrate how the living God guides His people when they walk with Him.

Before going to that example, I could perhaps mention something that happened recently (in 1985). As I was driving to town one day, I stopped at an intersection near my home in Canada. In Canada, when a car reaches a stop sign at a 4-way stop, it must come to a complete halt. Whoever stops first has the right to cross first. After coming to a complete stop, I was about to accelerate when God’s voice clearly spoke to me, “Don’t move!” So I stopped. Sure enough, a bus streaked across the intersection in clear violation of the law. The driver not only ignored the stop sign, he also failed to stop at the bus stop located just before the stop sign. Had I accelerated, the bus would have smashed right into my car. This was not the only time the Lord saved my life.

I come to the final example. For one reason or another, in recent months, several brothers and sisters in our churches have been in a situation in which a parent had either died or had been hospitalized in a critical condition. One of them

was a full-time sister coworker in our Toronto church. Her father had diabetes, which led to further complications with his kidneys, forcing him to undergo regular dialysis. One day this sister gave me an urgent phone call: "I just received a long-distance call telling me that my father's condition is worsening. But nobody, not even the doctors, knows if the situation is life-threatening. Should I go home?" I told her to look to the Lord herself. After waiting before the Lord, I received an indication from Him that her father was about to die. I said to her, "Return to Malaysia as soon as possible so that you can witness to your father before he passes away." She immediately took the warning and caught the first available flight to Malaysia. When she arrived, her father seemed to be in relatively good physical condition. She had a chance to witness to him for two or three days. Being a nurse herself, she knew something about his medical problems. Seeing that his condition was good, she went out to visit some brothers and sisters who had returned to Kuala Lumpur from Montreal. But while she was out, her father died. His death was so sudden that she was caught by surprise. But God had already granted me to know that her father would not survive for long; that was why I told her to go home immediately.

A similar type of incident occurred shortly afterwards. A brother in Canada received an urgent call from Hong Kong informing him that his father was dying from a heart attack. This brother quickly called me to ask me what he should do. God immediately gave me a message: his father will not die.

I conveyed the Lord's message to this brother but he gave further explanation, saying that the doctors regarded his father's condition as extremely critical. But I said to him, "The Lord said your father will not die!" True to God's words, the father is still alive to this day, many years later.

When you walk with the Lord, He will reveal His secrets to you (e.g., Amos 3:7; Daniel 2:19,22,28,30). In both these cases, the message that I received from God was open to examination. Its outcome would immediately verify whether I was a false prophet or not. Unlike so many fortune tellers, I did not resort to ambiguous predictions that can be fulfilled irrespective of the outcome. On the contrary, God's words spoken to me and through me were so clear and unambiguous that they could be tested and verified.

Conclusion

God's greatness is amazing. I have shared only a small fraction of His amazing deeds, but even these few examples can hardly be accounted for by any human explanation. I could have given many more examples but our time has run out.

Now you can see that my becoming a Christian is inseparable from my serving God. I had no choice but to serve Him because of what I had promised Him. To be honest, there were times when I tried to run away, but God would always remind me of my promise to Him. Through all these

years, He has kept me on the right track so that I have been able to serve Him by His grace.

Some of you may ask, “Why is God so real to you? Why don’t we experience the same things?” The secret is nothing more than this: If you are totally committed to Him and are willing to take up your cross and follow Him, you will experience remarkable things from God as I have.



Chapter 4

London Days

 In today's sharing, I would like to do what Scripture calls "declare" or "witness". I will declare His glory, declare His mercy, declare His goodness, declare His wisdom, declare His character. I will declare His eternal name Yahweh.

Knowing God

Becoming a Christian is not a matter of joining some religion. I have never been interested in religion as such, and to this day I am not interested in religion. Becoming a Christian is a matter of knowing God, indeed knowing Him as a living Person. It is in this process of knowing God that we understand what it is to be a Christian and to grow in the Christian life. Being a Christian is not about how much you have learned or studied. I have nothing against learning; I myself have spent enough time in studies. You are not a Christian by what you know about Christianity in terms of its doctrines, its history, and its structural organization. None of this makes you a Christian, not even if you believe the creeds. Fundamentally, being a Christian is to know God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son of God. John 17:3 says that eternal life is to know God and His Son Jesus Christ. So everything depends on knowing God and His Son. What I want to declare today is what God has taught me about Himself.

God reveals himself differently to different people

I also want to make it clear that everyone's experiences are bound to be different. Therefore your experience of God is not something you have to measure against mine, because God reveals Himself differently to different people. I stress this point because sometimes an experience may sound

dramatic, so you say to yourself, “I haven’t had such dramatic experiences.” It doesn’t matter. You can experience Him in less dramatic ways but nonetheless in very real ways.

It is not for us to make an experience dramatic or not. For example, when the Lord Jesus revealed himself to Paul, Paul was not yet an apostle and was still called Saul. But on the Damascus Road, a brilliant light from heaven caused him to be blind for several days. Very dramatic stuff. So you say, “I never have experiences like that.” It doesn’t matter. Your experience of God is no less real just because you didn’t fall off your horse or weren’t blinded for three days.

Be prepared for sufferings

One thing I do want to say is this: If an experience is particularly outstanding or dramatic, you might need to be prepared for the possibility that God will ask you to do something very tough. For example, Paul had a dramatic experience, and the consequence of that experience was that God had arranged some very difficult things for him to go through. In other words, if you are interested in gaining some outstanding experiences, you had better be prepared to endure some very outstanding sufferings, which was what Paul was called to (Acts 9:16). If you aren’t keen on extraordinary sufferings, you had better forget about extraordinary experiences. Just listen to somebody else talk about their own experiences, and let them go through the sufferings.

When I share about these things, I won't talk much about the sufferings I have experienced. By God's mercies, I think I could say that I have had a fair share of suffering. Whenever attacks and sufferings come to me, I would simply remember that this is what the Lord has called me to, and that a major part of His calling is to confirm to me His relationship with me in a living way through these experiences.

The word "declare" in the Bible occurs repeatedly in the Psalms:

- "Declare His deeds among His people" (Psalm 9:11)
- "Come and hear all you who fear God and I will declare what He has done for my soul" (Psalm 66:16)
- "That I may declare all Your works" (Psalm 73:28)

This goes on and on through the Psalms: declare His works and His glory to the nations, the people of the world. This is basically what I am doing now. I declare Your mighty deeds, Your mighty works, Your greatness (Psalm 145:6).

Many have said to me, "It is not fair that God gives you dramatic experiences but doesn't give me any." Well, I hope you'll bear in mind what I have just said. You can have the same experiences, even greater ones, provided you are ready to suffer for His sake. If not, don't even think about it. That means to say, every revelation of God brings along with it a certain price tag. If you are unprepared for it, don't even seek these experiences.

As for me, I delight in the privilege of knowing God and His Son Jesus Christ, and more and more in the sufferings attached to it. I can say with the apostle Paul, “That I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death.” (Philippians 3:10) That was how Paul was going to know Jesus. How much do you really want to know the Lord?

London years

Let me get on with this fourth part of my testimony. I will relate only a few incidents because in this one hour I cannot cover even a small fraction of my testimony from any particular period of my life, in this case my days in London. My previous sharings dealt somewhat with my background in China and my time in Scotland. I now concentrate on the years during which I was in London. In those years, I had experienced so many things from God; but, as I said, I can only give you certain highlights here and there.

Our needs: an opportunity to experience God

It is through various difficulties—suffering in particular—that God reveals Himself. If there were no problems, we would have no opportunity to experience what God can do. If you have no financial or material needs, and have never been in financial difficulty as a servant of the Lord or as a child of God, where is your opportunity to experience His

miraculous provision? You don't have a need, so there is no opportunity for God to intervene. I feel sorry for those who have no needs because they will also have no opportunity to experience God's provision.

If you have no physical problems, you would not experience God along that line. Every day I have to depend on God physically. I have arrived at a stage where I cannot get through a day without His daily sustenance. I used to be as fit as anyone here and maybe even fitter, very fit and physically strong. But today I have severe back problems, and even standing for 10 or 15 minutes can give me intense pain. So what do you do? You learn to depend on God. My need becomes His opportunity.

Andrew McBeath, a man of God

In Scotland, I spent two years at the Bible Training Institute which was one of the oldest and best known Bible institutes in the United Kingdom. It was in fact set up through D.L. Moody. Many Christians in the western world would know of the great preacher D.L. Moody. Moody Bible Institute in Chicago also came into being as a result of his ministry. Ira D. Sankey was his music minister. Wherever Moody went, Sankey would follow and carry out his music ministry. As you know, many famous English songs and hymns were written by Sankey. They had an evangelistic campaign in the United Kingdom, and many turned to God. As a result,

many people wanted to be trained in the Lord's work. That was how the Bible Institute was set up.

In my time, the principal of the Institute was Andrew McBeath, a scholarly man, but more importantly, a fine servant of God. As I look through my life, I try to count how many true servants of God I have met—people who stand out in my mind as men of God. “Man of God” is not a title that can be thrown around lightly. Few people qualify for that title. I think there is no higher title in all of the Bible than “man of God”. There are very few men of God around. In my whole life, I can count perhaps fewer than there are fingers on one hand. I would list Andrew McBeath as one of these men. If you meet him and get a chance to know him, you would know that you have met a man of God.

First, his outstanding humility struck me. I arrived one month late because I could not get a visa. I was having all kinds of visa problems and finally got to Glasgow one month after the school term had started. And Mr. McBeath himself welcomed me. Why should a principal welcome a new student? He could have sent someone else to welcome me. There were many other students around, but he welcomed me personally. Not only that, he took me to his own living quarters which was in the same building as the Bible Institute. He took me to his own apartment and introduced me to his family. I had never heard of a principal who takes the trouble to introduce a student to his family. He introduced me to his wife who was sick at that time. So she greeted me sitting up in bed.

Those of you who are married would know that when a woman is sick in bed and doesn't have her hair combed properly, she wouldn't want to see visitors. But no problem. Andrew McBeath introduced me to his wife and she graciously welcomed me as well. That was my first taste of his graciousness and humility.

One day as I was walking down a corridor, Mr. McBeath saw me. He said to me, "Come here." I wondered what was going on. He called me aside and handed me an envelope. I looked at it and asked, "What is it?" He said, "The Lord has spoken to me and I would like to give you my tithe." I was deeply touched. There were so many students in the Bible Institute and here was the principal personally giving me not just any gift but his own tithe. I was speechless, stunned, and deeply moved. This is just to give you an idea of the quality of this man. I was still a first-year student.

You can see how his whole life radiated Christ. It was truly beautiful. What I took away from the Bible Institute was not a lot of knowledge but above all, an impression of what a man of God is like. There is nothing more precious than to develop a friendship with such a man.

Many years later, when Mr. McBeath was quite old, I phoned him from Liverpool where I was pastoring. I asked him what he thought of the laying on of hands, a topic which I had been studying in the Bible. All along I had steadfastly refused ordination. I didn't want to be ordained because I didn't like to be addressed as Reverend so and so or Pastor so and so. I didn't want to have any title. In fact, I

wanted to serve God without pay, which in fact was what I had done for all my time in Liverpool. I had received no salary during those five years. I declined to receive pay. That didn't make life easy, but I wanted to show the church that I wasn't preaching the gospel for money. I didn't want any income from serving.

In fact I never said anything about it. When I left Liverpool five years later, only then did some people find out that in all those five years, I had never received a salary. They were quite shocked. They asked, "Where did all the money we put into the offering box go to?" I said, "It has gone into the Lord's work. Just because it didn't come to me, doesn't mean it didn't go to the Lord's work." And they said, "How come you never said so?" I said, "I said so in the beginning but you hadn't yet joined the church." The church had grown from a small handful of people to a larger congregation, and most of them didn't have any idea about the matter.

But I did want to know more about the laying on of hands which I had seen mentioned in Scripture several times. So one day I phoned Mr. McBeath and said, "Reverend McBeath, what do you think about the laying on of hands?" He said, "It is very important." I said, "All right, what else can you tell me about it?" He said, "I will be going to Liverpool." I said, "Is your exposition so lengthy that you have to come to Liverpool to explain it to me?"

Notice this godly man. He travelled all the way from Scotland to Liverpool. That's a long way. I thought he was

coming down to Liverpool to explain to me the laying on of hands. It was just before Easter. When he got to Liverpool, I said, "I am wondering why you have come all the way down to Liverpool to tell me about the laying on of hands." He said, "I didn't come here to tell you about the laying on of hands; I came here to do it!" I was speechless. I said, "What?" He said, "When you know that something is in the Bible, you don't just talk about it, you do it."

The amazing thing was that he came down on a weekday just before Easter. Three days later, on Easter Sunday, I received the laying on of hands and was ordained. The church wasn't even notified of it the previous Sunday because I myself didn't know I was going to be ordained.

That shows you another secret of a man of God. He doesn't just talk about something, he does it. If something is Scriptural, you do it even if you don't understand everything about it. He never expounded it to me. He never explained the laying on of hands to me. He simply proceeded with the laying on of hands. Looking back, I consider it a high privilege that I was ordained by an exceptional servant of God, a man of outstanding quality. I truly regard this as the apostolic succession through men of God.

I am spending some time on this because I would like to say that there are very few men of God. And in God's wisdom and kindness, He had granted me the privilege of meeting a few of them.

Andrew McBeath wrote a number of books. Before I left Glasgow, I said goodbye to him in his office at the college.

Always in his kind and gentle way, he said goodbye to me and said, “My book has just been published and I would like to give you a copy.” So he autographed the book and gave it to me. Significantly, it was a book about the book of Job. Being immature at the time, I didn’t catch its full significance. Only later did I realize that he wrote his commentary on Job because of his long experience of suffering for the Lord. Yet he never talked about his sufferings. Only later I gathered from here and there how much he had suffered. You don’t become a man of God without a lot of suffering. His commentary on Job was of great value because there are lots of commentaries and books written by scholars sitting in their armchairs, but Andrew McBeath was a man rich in both scholarship and experience. He experienced many things for the Lord in preaching the gospel in many places in the world.

Furthering my studies in London

When I was set to leave Scotland, one of the last things Mr. McBeath said to me was, “Eric, you have to go on to higher levels of training because God has given you the gift. You have what it takes to go much higher. So go down to London and continue further studies.”

To tell you the truth, I wasn’t interested in further studies. A fire was burning in my heart and I wanted to go out to preach the gospel. I didn’t want to waste more time sitting in classrooms studying things that bore me to death. I

never liked school all that much. I loved the sports field but not so much the school.

Here was Mr. McBeath telling me to go for higher studies and I thought, “Oh no.” Yet you have to listen attentively when a servant of God speaks to you. So I said, “All right, I will go down to London, and if God opens a way for me, I will go and study, but if not, then great, I will go and preach the gospel.”

I don't know if Mr. McBeath was praying for me, but everywhere I went, the door was open to me. I thought it was amazing. The fact of the matter was that I had no time to do my university entrance studies (the GCE) in the usual way of taking two or three years to complete them. I wasn't even interested in this. But because of Mr. McBeath's counsel, I took up a bit of studies. But studying part-time here and there would not get me far. After all, London University is not the easiest university in England to get into. But behold, this man of God must have been praying for me because every college I went to, I was immediately accepted on the spot. I thought that this was quite amazing. Many people have tried but never got accepted. I would just walk in and the professor would say, “I accept you.

I was pondering what to study. Some of you are probably wrestling with the same question, “What to study?” I thought to myself, “I want to study something that will be useful for the Lord's work. So Lord, what would You like me to study? I am waiting for Your answer.” I thought that because my heart's desire was to bring the gospel to China, I

had better get more deeply acquainted with China. But what can I study that has something to do with China?



Eric Chang at his study table at home in London circa 1956

I should mention that I dreaded studies that have to do with literature, philosophy or history, because in all the studies I had done in school, I was good in science subjects and hopeless in the arts. I didn't know how to write a proper essay. In science subjects, things were straightforward. Two and two equals four. I could cope with that. But I didn't know how to write an essay. My arts subjects were terrible. If

I could scrape a pass, I would be very grateful. With science subjects, I did reasonably well. My best subject was always mathematics. It was a nice game I could play with, so it was great fun. I have never understood why some people are terrified of mathematics. Yet I was terrified of the arts.

I felt that I wasn't going to study science subjects because I didn't know what I could do with them in God's work. There is certainly use for them but I am just talking about my own situation at the time. For other people, science might be useful in one way or another, such as opening a door to a job in China or somewhere. But for myself, I was thinking of deepening my understanding of culture and language. So I went into Oriental philosophy and other subjects like literature and history which took me very deep into the arts. I was doing the very thing I was not good in doing.

Initially I was thinking of doing Greek. I could specialize in Greek in order to understand the New Testament better. I walked into the Greek department of University College, and said to the professor, "I would like to study Greek." And I was accepted. He asked me, "Have you applied to Oxford or Cambridge?" I said, "No, I have not. My church is in London, so I don't want to go to Oxford or Cambridge." He said, "If you apply to those schools, I am not going to accept you, but if you are applying to London only, I will accept you." I thought, "Well, that was fast." He was not beating around the bush.

Afterwards I found out that what I was going to learn was not New Testament Greek but classical Greek. They are not exactly the same though they are related. I wasn't prepared to spend three years learning classical Greek as it might be of limited use later on.

I went to the School of Oriental Studies, University of London, and the same thing happened. I walked in and said, "I would like to apply for study here." The professor asked me, "Why do you want to study this subject?" I said, "Because I want to preach the gospel. I am going to be a missionary." I could not have been more straightforward than that. If he was anti-religion, he might have thrown me out right there and then. They are not there to train missionaries. Most of those who study at that college are trained to be diplomats. They would study philosophy, foreign languages and foreign culture, and many eventually become diplomats. In fact, the former Governor of Hong Kong, David Wilson, studied at the same college for his post-graduate research. One day I heard in the news of his appointment as Governor of Hong Kong, and I mentioned this to my wife Helen. He was the second to last Governor before the handover in 1997.

Serving in the Chinese church

I went down to London and a brother there asked me, "Which church are you going to attend?"

"I just arrived in London. I haven't got a church."

“Come to our church.”

“Which church?”

“A Chinese church we just started.”

“May I ask which church?”

And he told me.

“You mean the one where I had met a certain Mr. H. before?” (I had a rather negative impression of this person.)

“Yes, but he has already left.”

“No, I think I will look for another church if you don’t mind.”

“Please, we are short of people, why not come to our church?”

“I am not keen.”

The fact is that you are affected by what you hear, even negatively. No matter how good a thing is, if somebody says something negative about it, an impression stays in your mind which thereafter is hard to get rid of.

Anyway, this brother had learned something from the parable of persistence, to knock on the door until it is opened. He never gave up. He kept asking me week after week, and said to me, “I know that you don’t like that particular church very much, so how about coming to the Bible study?”

I said, “What difference does it make?”

“What I mean is that you lead the Bible studies.”

“I don’t even know the people.”

“No problem, you just lead the Bible studies. There is nobody to lead it. Aren’t you going to help out?”

In the end that was how I was persuaded into going to that church, through leading the Bible studies there.

When he referred to the Chinese “church,” it sounded grand. In fact it had only about five people, and they called themselves a church. It should have remained a Bible study. They met in the YMCA chapel, and that was perhaps why they considered themselves a church. Five persons in the chapel, and they called it a church.

The next thing I knew, I was the only person leading this church. And ironically, I didn’t know where this brother who had invited me had gone to. He suddenly disappeared to do something else, and I was left taking care of this five-person church. It was a one-man show because I had to do everything from announcing the hymns to playing the organ. I had never played an organ in my life. I knew how to play the piano a little, just enough to get by for hymns. Can you imagine what it is like to sing a five-stanza hymn with five people who can hardly sing a hymn? I thought, “Maybe I had better learn the organ.” I didn’t even know which buttons on the organ I was supposed to press.

But God has a great sense of humor. I would be up there making announcements and then dash to the back of the chapel to play the organ. No one was on the platform while I was playing the organ. When the hymn was finished, I would jog back to the front.

Gradually the chapel became packed as God continued His work of drawing people in. Within a few months, the chapel was packed full to about fifty people, and we had to set up chairs in the foyer. Even that was getting filled, so some had to stand in the corridor.

I was beginning to see the power of God's Word. God was pleased to use somebody totally green, totally inexperienced, and unfit for the work, and He was gracious in blessing the work. We had to move to a much larger place in the YMCA building a few weeks later.

So far I haven't told you anything dramatic about this church, have I? So far I have only told you how you can experience God in all these seemingly day to day things, and experience His power even in the matter of drawing people to Himself and His church.

A year or two later, the church was continuing to grow, not under my care, but under the care of a pastor who was from China. When I first came, he was already the pastor of that new work, except that he was in the United States raising funds to purchase a building for the church. Having been away for three to four months, he was surprised to see the chapel packed out.

Pentecostal experience at Chislehurst

The church continued to grow. One day we had a camp at Chislehurst in Kent, southeast of London. It was an ordinary Easter camp where we did the kind of things that people

usually do at camps. About sixty people joined the camp. In the camp, you could already see that God was working in the hearts of the people.

Then came Easter Sunday which was also the last day of the camp. On that day we had a treasure hunt for an Easter egg. To hunt for the egg, you would look for clues for getting from one point to another. If you don't get the clues right, you will end up at the wrong places. From clue to clue, you are supposed to do some Sherlock Holmes detective work to find the egg.

If you know me, you would know that I am a fun-loving person. I was joining in the fun with everyone looking for the clues. In the end, what happened? I won the egg. It may sound great to win it, but I felt like a clown coming into the Easter morning thanksgiving service with this big golden egg in my hand. I thought to myself, "Lord, why did I have to win this egg?" This looked ridiculous. I tried to hide it under a chair, and soon the meeting began.

I specifically mention the Easter egg hunt because many Christians try to work up a spiritual atmosphere with music or by working on people's emotions in order to get spiritual results. But at our camp, there was no attempt to build up any kind of emotional atmosphere. There was no emotional preparation for what was coming.

The meeting started. The chairman stood up and began to speak. Everyone had just settled in, laughing and joking. There was a moment of quietness and the chairman said, "Let us pray." This was the last I heard from him that day,

for he disappeared from the scene. He tried to mumble something in prayer, and suddenly the Spirit of God came down. That's why I told you about the Easter egg hunt. There was no psychological preparation whatsoever. It was totally unexpected. One moment, the people were laughing and giggling. The next moment, total silence. And right after that, an overpowering sense of God's presence. Unless you have gone through an experience like that, there is no way for me to explain to you what it is like.

I can now understand what happened at Pentecost when the Spirit came down. When the Spirit of God came down in Chislehurst, He took control of our meeting. The chairman vanished into his seat and we never heard from him again for the rest of the meeting. In other words, he never chaired the meeting! The Lord took control of it.

There was sobbing in one corner. Then more sobs. Suddenly there was the sound of crying all through the room in which sixty people had gathered. There were tears. People were confessing their sins and repenting of them. God's awesome holiness is not something you can define on a piece of paper. What is holiness? You can look it up in a dictionary and it will say that holiness is this and that. But in the end, you still don't know what holiness is.

If you have met with God, nobody has to tell you what holiness is, for you have experienced it. Suddenly there was an awesome sense of His presence. God was in the room convicting people of sins. The man standing next to me was a big tall fellow who wouldn't want to be seen crying. I

turned around and saw that he was crying uncontrollably with tears running down his face. This was going on all through the room. Everywhere God's power could be felt. People stood up asking for God's forgiveness, confessing their sins one by one. It was amazing. The Spirit of God worked through the room, a truly unforgettable experience.

We lost all sense of time. The meeting was supposed to last 1.5 hours but it went on hour after hour. Everybody had forgotten about the camp program and nobody turned up for lunch. The camp staff were waiting to serve lunch but nobody turned up. Everyone remained in the room, and the Spirit of God was working. If you want to talk about dramatic experiences, there God's awesome power was being manifested. It was dramatic, I tell you. It was a first-hand experience of Pentecost. Now I know what Pentecost was like. We experienced an awesome overpowering presence of God. I use the word "awesome" because I don't know how else to describe it. Every person's spirit was broken in His presence.

After many hours, we ended the meeting. I am not even sure how it was concluded. We all came out of the room dazed and stunned. I mention the length of time to stress that it was not something that lasted two or three seconds, flashing by and vanishing, but something that went on for hour after hour with God's presence. It was not a fleeting, imaginary, ephemeral, evanescent, temporary experience. It went on and on such that you could fully savor it. You could taste God's presence to the full. He didn't just come by and

vanish, or else you might say, “Did a ghost just pass by?” No, for God was there. Nobody can be the same after that kind of experience. It is etched in my spirit more deeply than I can ever understand. The power of that meeting with God was amazing. I don’t think anyone who was there would know how to describe that experience.

But having experienced God many times, I also knew that as soon as God does a remarkable work, the enemy will strike. What soon happened was that the number of people in the church simply exploded. The news that sixty of us had met with God in Chislehurst spread like wildfire. Everyone wanted to visit our church to see what happened.

How do you catch this fire? The truth is that there is no technique of catching the fire. What are we going to tell you? It is not like step one, step two, step three. We were totally unprepared for it. You have no way of preparing for it. God comes as He chooses. It was not that we were any better than anyone else, or more saintly, or sang better, or clapped louder, or danced better. We were not good at any of these. There was no human reason for what had happened. God had simply chosen to come.

Fierce attack upon the church

Then came the fierce attack upon the church. As the church exploded and expanded, we jumped to 120, then 150, then moving towards 200 people in a short time. Brothers and sisters, this is a bad sign. You may ask why? I tell you why:

Most of the newcomers were not serious with God. They were only interested in spiritual things in a temporary and carnal way. Crowds and numbers are not necessarily a good thing. It is what is deep that abides. What is shallow will disappear. Many were curious because they had heard that we had an outpouring of the Holy Spirit at our church camp. So they crowded in, hoping to catch a bit of this leftover blessing, to feel some of its bright rays, the leftover warmth, the leftover crumbs under the table. The result was that we suddenly expanded in number, but the people in the church didn't know each other well. The level of the sweetness of fellowship began to drop. Everything began to weaken. The distance between people became greater because we didn't know each other. It takes time to know one another. The sense of family disappeared. Suddenly we had a large number of unfamiliar people.

Those of you who have been to our joint camps in Hong Kong would know what I mean. Suddenly you have a thousand gathered there. It is nice to have the great numbers around you, but you don't know who is who. Every time you meet somebody, you have to look at his or her name card: "Your name is this, and you are from so and so church"; this is like what was happening to our church in England. When a thousand people attend a Hong Kong joint camp, it is impossible to know one another in any meaningful sense in the limited time available, especially because you come from different churches. Some churches have over a hundred people, and they already have a hard

time knowing one another meaningfully. This is one of the negative aspects of a large church. Unless you have wise spiritual leadership, what is meant to be a blessing can become something undesirable.

Church scandal

The larger the church, the larger is its financial capacity. The higher the level of devotion in the church, the larger is its income. Do you know what that does? It attracts people who join the church for the church funds. Soon a certain man became a church treasurer with the aim of siphoning some of the funds into his own pockets, which he did with considerable success until he was discovered. This man from East Malaysia worked himself up into the position of one of two treasurers of the church. By means of subtle slander, he got the other treasurer removed from office. He then arranged that no one will be appointed to replace the treasurer who was dismissed. So he became the sole treasurer of the church. (By the way, the treasurer who was removed was also from Malaysia, a very good man. It was absolutely tragic that the people believed the slanders brought against this dear brother.) And this wicked man began to siphon off the funds by “fixing” the books.

I am taking you from the heights of spiritual experience to the negative side that often accompanies it. We are engaged in an intense spiritual war. This is the nature of the spiritual life. When we advance triumphantly, there will be

counterattacks. And this happened quickly. This man eventually stole funds amounting to thousands of pounds sterling. We couldn't find out exactly how much he had stolen because he had destroyed the accounting books. We brought in outside accountants to assess the damage, and the losses were enormous.

As you can see, one has to be alert and vigilant. When this scandal was exposed, the treasurer promptly vanished. But before he vanished, he married one of the richest girls in the church and returned to East Malaysia. It was a shameful scandal to happen to a church. Our pastor was distressed by the fact that our church, despite having experienced an extraordinary outpouring of the Spirit, now had an enormous scandal in its hands. The treasurer had run away with a huge sum of money. The pastor didn't know what to do about it and wanted to keep it hush-hush.

As one of the church leaders, I said to him, "Pastor, you can't do that. We must answer to the brothers and sisters in the church. It is their money which they offered to the Lord. We have no right to keep this thing hidden."

He said, "But it's bad for the reputation of the church."

I said, "We will have to leave that in God's hands. We must do the right thing. What people think of us is secondary." But he disagreed.

So I said, "Pastor, if you don't wish to expose it, then I cannot be part of a cover-up, so if you will pardon me, I will leave the church."

He was very distressed and said, “No, please don’t do that.”

I said, “I have no choice. I’m not going to be part of a cover-up.”

He said, “What do you suggest?”

I said, “This man has stolen the Lord’s money, and nobody who steals money from the living God gets away with it. At Chislehurst we experienced how real God is. Deliver this man into the hands of God because it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb.10:31). And after God has dealt with this evildoer, you won’t have to worry about your reputation because the fear of the Lord will be upon everyone. They will know that God is the living God. No one can steal His money and get away with it. So let Him deal with it.”

He said, “I still don’t have the confidence to do that.”

I said, “Well then, goodbye Pastor. Here is where we must part.” And I left the church.

The aftermath was terrible because the more he tried to hide it, the more the church people got to know about it. I didn’t say anything about it because I had already left the church. But the news spread by word of mouth, and people began to leave the church. Some wanted to leave the church with me: “We will go with you. We will set up a new church and you lead us.”

I said, ‘No, you don’t understand. I’m not going to do that.’”

They said, “You have been giving us Bible studies in the past two years. You are our teacher and we will follow you out.”

I said, “No. This is the church where I have served. This pastor is the pastor of the church, and God forbid that I do anything to split it. God forbid that it be laid to my charge that I raised my hand against the Lord’s anointed, for whether he is right or wrong, he is the pastor. God anointed him pastor and I won’t raise my hand to do anything against him.”

They continued to press me, so I decided to disappear. I vanished without telling them where I had gone. They could not find me anymore. I pulled up my tent pegs and disappeared, not telling anyone where I went. Later that was used against me to say that I must have something to hide. But never mind. Let them say what they will. I won’t let it be said that I split the church, for I had not. In any case, many others also left the church.

Nobody runs away from the living God

I am telling you all this because I want you to know what God did to the man who stole the money. Nobody but nobody runs away from the living God. Scripture says, “Be sure your sins will find you out” (Numbers 32:23). Because he destroyed most of the accounting books, we could not press charges against him. It would be a difficult thing to do. Humanly speaking, there was not much we could do. More

than that, he had already left England. To pursue him, we would have to get him extradited back to England to face trial. And with much of the evidence destroyed, that would be very hard to do.

But we don't have to worry because our God will take care of everything. He is to be feared in His righteousness and holiness, but also to be loved in His mercy and goodness, for these are not separate. To show kindness to His church, He has to be severe with evildoers, but evildoers will soon destroy themselves.

This man went back to Malaysia with his new wife, but their marriage was falling apart. What more can you expect from somebody like him? He was so insecure about the marriage that he confiscated his wife's passport to make sure she won't run away. Can you imagine that? One day his wife managed to get her passport back (whether it was the old one or a new one, I don't know), and she went off to the United States. He became so furious that he followed her to the States. There he found her and murdered her. Believing that she was in a relationship with someone else, he murdered her in a fit of rage and jealousy. Then he fled back to East Malaysia.

The United States, through an extradition treaty with Malaysia, had him extradited to face charges in the United States. He was extradited, sentenced to death, and executed. So what had all the stolen money accomplished for him? Nobody runs away from the justice of God. God has a way of dealing with sin.

Sweet presence of God

In sharing all these things with you, I don't know where to end. Therefore I will close with one last sharing, an experience of God that remains deeply imprinted in my mind.

I was staying north of London in a place called Foreign Missions Club. I stayed there because it was one of the cheapest places for accommodation, and it gave special rates to students.

I had been living by faith all this time. I had always had to look to God for His provision. I would often start a college term with no idea if I could pay the fees for that term. At University of London, you had to pay on registration day at the start of the term. But I often didn't have the money even the day before, so I had to leave the matter into God's hands. It didn't worry me at all. I would say, "Lord, if You want me to continue with my studies, could You please provide the funds? But if You don't want me to continue my studies, I thank You nonetheless because a degree means nothing to me. I will continue if You want me to, or stop if You don't want me to." Of course God had complete control of the matter because He controlled the money. It was not up to me to decide whether to carry on or not.

God is remarkable in His ways. Sometimes on the very day of registration, I would receive an anonymous envelope containing sufficient funds for the school fees.

Staying in North London, I would cycle down on my bicycle in order to save on the bus fares. I would look like a panda by the time I arrived at college because of the

pollution. I would wear goggles to protect my eyes from the dust and the bus diesel fumes. When I got to the college and took off my goggles, there would be two round circles. You can imagine my face with black and white rings around the eyes. It looked cute. People would smile as I walked by. At first I didn't know why they were smiling at me, but when I looked in the mirror, I knew why.

That shows you how poor I was, for I had to get around in a big city like London on a bicycle. There was scarcely another cyclist in sight, so it was a bit of an oddity to have a cyclist charging around the cars and buses.

A few months later, a brother whom I knew at the Bible Institute and was going to Japan as a missionary sold me his old motorcycle at a low price. But I still had to wear the goggles when riding the motorcycle, so that panda effect remained!

One weekend at the Foreign Missions Club, because I didn't have to rush off on my bike for college, I had an extended time of quietness before God in prayer. As I entered into prayer, I was suddenly transported somewhere. I didn't know what was happening. I didn't know if I was being transported up to heaven or if heaven came down to earth. Suddenly I was in a different world. I was still aware of what was going on around me, and I was not in a state of trance, if by "trance" we mean losing awareness of the environment. I was not ecstatic in the sense of being beside oneself and not knowing what was happening. I suddenly felt that I was in some kind of heavenly realm even while on

earth. It was truly mysterious. I don't know how to describe it. All my faculties were clear and alert, being fully aware of what was going on. It was not like the powerful and overwhelming presence of God that we experienced at Chislehurst but a gentle pervasive beautiful sense of being in heaven. I don't know how to describe it. It was as if everything was full of light, and I was walking in the light. All darkness was driven back and I was surrounded by God's light. As far as I looked, everything was light.

There, in my room at Foreign Missions Club, I was transported to a sweet fellowship with God, as if He wanted to say, "At Chislehurst, you experienced Me in My awesome, overwhelming and frightening power; today I want you to experience Me in My love, gentleness, sweetness, and kindness." There was this warm, sweet presence of God that was not in any way terrifying or intimidating.

Again it came totally unexpected. I didn't work my mind up for it; there was no psychological buildup. Absolutely nothing. I wasn't singing any song.

In those days I would usually pray on my knees, but I soon found that I could not stay long on my knees because the hard floor would make my knees ache. The pain distracted me and affected my concentration. I learned to sit down so that I could stay longer with the Lord. And there was His presence for something like two hours in a state of being lifted up into His sweetness, into the joy of communion with Him. Yet I was totally aware of everything going on.

I looked at my watch and was reminded of a lunch appointment, so I had to get going after these two hours. I knew it would take me about 40 minutes to walk there. I don't remember why I didn't go by bike. That detail escapes me. I don't recall why I decided to walk. Perhaps I thought I could continue in God's presence if I didn't have to pay attention to the traffic. I don't remember if that was the reason.

I thank God for this sweet and amazing experience. I started walking on the streets, and do you think that His presence had vanished? Not at all. It was amazing. As I walked on the streets, His presence was there with me. I was still in heaven because where God is, as the song goes, heaven is there. As I was walking along, I thought, "Am I still on earth?" How come I still see everything clearly, yet I don't seem to be here? I had a sense of being here and not being here at the same time. Does this sound strange to you? Unless you have experienced it, you wouldn't know what I mean. As I was walking, God's presence was with me. I was thanking Him, praising Him, fellowshiping with Him right up to my arrival at the house where the meeting was.

When I got to the door, I knew that this experience ended at that point. The sweet glow was there but God's presence was not with me in the same way anymore. It ended right at the door. Yet as I was walking along the streets amidst the traffic, God's presence was there. When I arrived at the door, it was as if God was saying, "I am going to leave you now. This communion with Me ends here."

I walked through the door in a slight daze, but in a sweet way. I walked into the room and saw the last unoccupied seat; all the other seats were taken. The people were seated in a circle; most of them were people from our church. I walked to the vacant seat and sat down. I had never met the man who was next to me. Yet he turned to me and asked, “How did you come to know God?” Now, why would someone open a conversation by asking, “How did you come to know God?” As I was pondering how to answer his question, he said, “I am asking because I want to know God.” And I didn’t even know his name!

Could it be that God’s presence in us is like the fire of the Spirit (Acts 2:3) which, though invisible, draws people to Himself? You sit down and then somebody asks, “How did you come to know God?” Interestingly, some of the people who have asked me this question before were strangers to me.

I began to talk with this young man. Then God worked so powerfully in him that on the same day, about an hour later at noontime, he knelt down with me. He was anxious about committing his life to God. It was not I who asked him but he who asked me about committing his life to the Lord. I said, “All right, we’ll kneel and you commit your life to Him.” I have seen God do this many times. His power drives people to their knees and they want to commit to Him. It is amazing. Sometimes I try to slow them down but they want to keep going. How can I stand in God’s way? So this young man committed his life to the Lord. He was

about to enter medical studies in London. God's power had so worked in his life that he decided not to study medicine but to be trained to serve the Lord. He paid a high price for that because his father disowned him and was not reconciled to him until recently. He and I are still in touch.

From this please understand that God often grants us an experience not for our personal enjoyment. Perhaps one reason He gave me a special communion with Him that day was to help this man turn to Him. I think that this experience was given not just for me but also for him. He was prepared to be rejected by his family. His father, a medical doctor, wanted his son to be a doctor too. His father, a Buddhist, was absolutely furious, and didn't talk to his son after he had decided to be a preacher. I asked this brother some years ago when he was in Hong Kong, "Are you reconciled with your father?" He said, "My father still doesn't talk to me." Thirty years later, his father still didn't talk to him. That was how bitter his father was.

Declare His works to all

I pray that God will bless you through this sharing. I was simply fulfilling what Scripture says, that we declare His glory and His mighty deeds. This is what I was hoping to do today. To hear of His glory puts a certain responsibility on you. Nobody can hear God's Word and go away without responding to God in some way. May God help you to respond to Him in the right way.



Chapter 5

Christ Lives in Me

God works miracles



In this section of my testimony, I will describe additional things that God had done during the ten years or so of my time in London. Ten years is a long time, so I can only select a few events and even then I will have to leave out many details. I looked to the Lord and asked Him, “What do You want me to say about Your deeds?” Whatever God does is inherently unique in character, and we call it the miraculous. Everything God does is miraculous to us because it is not

natural; and what is supernatural astonishes us. I aim to share those incidents for which there is no human explanation, that is, for which you can't come up with a plausible psychological or human explanation to account for them.

Learning to let Christ live in me

We mentioned earlier that the whole Christian life, if it is genuine, is miraculous. If it isn't miraculous, then it isn't God who is working. Whenever God works, the miraculous happens. The Christian life begins with dying and ends with life, the reverse of what happens in the physical world. We begin by being crucified with Christ (Gal.2.20) and through this God raises us up into newness of life (Rom.6.4).

To drive home the point about dying, what I will do today is to describe the matter in reverse order. It means that I will first talk about my life in Christ or Christ living in me, as the song says, "Christ lives in me". I don't live anymore, but Christ lives in me.

It is vital to understand that we experience God's miracles working in us and through us only if Christ lives in us. What worries me about many Christians is that they hardly ever experience anything of God's work that can be properly called miraculous or supernatural. It worries me because I wonder if Christ is truly living in them. Is Christ living in you? When Christ lives in you, God will do things in and through you, and what He does will appear to us as miraculous. He doesn't do amazing things just to impress us

or other people. But when we live the life of Christ, walking along his path, living to serve him, miracles are bound to happen regularly.

A motorcycle that taught me to trust in God

Earlier in my testimony, I said that I had finally acquired a motorcycle. This motorcycle (for those of you who know something about motorcycles) was a BSA, which is no longer in production. It was a 150cc British motorcycle, which was fairly powerful and heavier than most motorcycles we see on the streets of Malaysia, many of which are around 80cc. For a poor student like me who owned next to nothing, a motorcycle was a valuable possession. The friend from whom I bought the bike had been a classmate of mine at the Bible Institute; he was also a graduate of Cambridge and was soon going to Japan as a missionary. So he sold me his motorcycle for £50. For a poor student, that is a lot of money. I couldn't pay the whole amount in one go, so he kindly allowed me to pay it in installments, whenever the money became available.

Someone stole my motorcycle

Not long after I had bought the motorcycle, something happened. At the time I was staying in an apartment shared with two Malaysians. The one from Ipoh was studying architecture; the one from Kuala Lumpur, a brilliant scholarship student, was studying electrical engineering. One day an

American-born Chinese brother visited us and stayed in my room with me. We had some time of fellowship, and finally said good night and went to bed. A few minutes later, I heard a distinctive click coming from outside our window. I knew it was the sound of my motorcycle stand being pushed up. I knew that somebody was messing around with my motorcycle three floors down. I jumped out of bed, rushed to the window, looked down, and saw two guys sitting on my motorcycle. The one in front was kick-starting it. I ran down the stairs full speed and was about to grab the guy at the back when the engine started and the motorcycle sped off. It was gone.

But what I want to stress is this: There was total peace in my heart over the loss of the motorcycle. I experienced the heavenly supernatural peace which Paul speaks of in Philippians 4:7, “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (see also v.6). You can rightly say I had lost my only possession which had substantial monetary value. Moreover, it affected my transportation because I would usually take it to college or church. Now I had to take the underground trains and pay what to me were expensive fares. The motorcycle may be gone, yet the beauty about Christ living in you is that the world means nothing. It doesn’t matter; I didn’t let it bother me. I went upstairs, committed the matter to God, went to bed, and promptly fell asleep.

My American friend couldn’t believe what he saw. He said to me the next day, “I don’t understand you.” I asked,

“Did I do something wrong?” He said, “No, your motorcycle just got stolen, and you go back to bed and drop off to sleep!” I said, “What’s the problem?” He looked at me in disbelief. We were talking two different languages. He shrugged his shoulders and walked away apparently thinking, “This guy is hard to understand.”

I think he expected me to react like a “normal” human being and be upset that I had lost my most valuable possession, my motorcycle. He could not understand how it didn’t bother me at all. He knew that I didn’t have so much money that I could go out and buy another motorcycle. I couldn’t, but it didn’t bother me in the least. This peace is not “normal”. Is there any human explanation for such perfect peace? Or is this not a case of how we can experience for ourselves the peace which Paul speaks of in Philippians 4:7? It is a peace beyond human understanding, a peace that guarded my heart and mind in Christ so that I remained undisturbed in the confidence that everything remained under the Lord’s control.

How would you feel if things in the world don’t go your way? Do you sit there and say, “Lord, I am living for You and have given you my life, yet You allow my motorcycle to be stolen! What kind of God are You? You could have protected my motorcycle.” Isn’t this how the human mind reasons? What do you believe in God for if He can’t do anything for you? He can’t even protect your bike!

Yet I was not the least bothered because I knew that God had a good reason for this, though I didn’t know what it

was. It was good enough for me that since He had given it to me, He can take it away: “Yahweh gave and Yahweh has taken away. Blessed be the name of Yahweh.” (Job 1:21) He gave me the motorcycle; He took it away. Let His name be praised.

Do we have this kind of thinking? Has it been transformed? Not in the case of many Christians, which is why we have nothing to witness to. We have no impact on people. But when God changes our lives, we become different; we have perfect peace in those circumstances in which normally there would be no peace. That is why my American friend looked at me in disbelief. You don’t even have to say anything; your life will witness to God’s peace and power. Someone who met my American friend many years later told me that he still mentioned this incident. Later on, he himself became a servant of the Lord. He went back to the United States, completed his studies, and went for training in pastoral ministry. I did not know of this until many years later.

Witnessing is not a matter of talk. We can talk our mouths dry but what counts is the kind of life we live, a life that moves people to say, “This guy is extraordinary. What is the secret of his life?”

What is more, because my motorcycle was stolen, it set off a chain of events that I will explain in a moment. Meanwhile, as required by law, the next day I visited the police station to report the theft. They told me that the chances of finding a motorcycle in a city like London are close to zero.

London is a big city with too many motorcycles. I told them, “That’s okay. I am just letting you know that it was stolen.” A few days later, I got a call from the police, “We’ve found your bike; come to the station to collect it.” So I went there and got it back. Whoever was rough-riding the motorcycle did some damage to it. The rear brake was damaged, and there seemed to be a leak somewhere in the engine which I could not locate. But do I allow these things to become a cause for complaining?

You see, I was about to go on a mission to Ireland when the motorcycle was stolen. I was about to go there to serve God with another brother who had a similar motorcycle. His motorcycle was in perfect condition but mine was now defective. Anyone who rides a motorcycle would know that defective brakes can be deadly. In this case, relying on the front brakes alone can be dangerous because the bike would be unable to stop fast enough at high speeds and could skid if the road is wet, which is a common condition in England. When a motorcycle skids, it is not like being in a car that has four wheels; you can fly off the bike and be killed.

Westward to Wales

Defective brakes and impending rain

Much of my testimony regarding my London years is about witnessing. It was my constant joy to witness for the Lord, and I did this with great determination. For the school term break, I had arranged with my friend to go to Ireland to evangelize together. But my motorcycle was now damaged. If I had used the little money I had to repair the brakes, I wouldn't have money to go on the mission. But if I go on the mission, I wouldn't have money to repair the brakes. So what was I to do? I asked God, "What do You want me to do?" And He gave me clear confidence: "Just go, and I will be with you."

It doesn't mean that we can be careless. When we were setting out, we listened carefully to the weather forecast. I usually don't pay attention to the weather forecast, but when you are going on a motorcycle trip, it is wise to pay attention. The forecast said that on the day we were to leave, it was going to rain. I asked God, "Do You want us to go on the mission on that day or not? Rain is expected, so should we delay our departure?" Rain was forecast for several more days. After waiting further before the Lord, I received the confidence to pray, "Lord, I know that the enemy wants to stop us from witnessing for You, but we are ready to go

forward, so we entrust the whole situation into Your hands.”
God granted us His peace and so we went forth.



The two of us set out for Ireland on two motorcycles. To go from London to Ireland, you would travel west through England and Wales. I still remember that the road was the A40 which runs through Oxford, and from there we went on to Wales.

We looked at the sky and saw something I had never seen before. Looking west in the direction we were heading, the sky was all clear. The sky was blue in front of us but black

behind us. Have you ever seen anything like it? A north-south line stretched right across the sky: blue in front, black behind! I looked up and said, "My God is going to do some interesting things today."

My friend and I prayed together, and rode off towards Oxford, then through Oxford westward. Whenever we looked up, the line was following us! Where our motorcycles were, right above us was always the line, black behind and blue in front. We left London in the morning and by mid-afternoon we were about halfway to our destination in Wales for that first day; all day we were following the sun going west.

As we were approaching Wales, I suddenly remembered someone from a nearby Catholic monastery whom I had wanted to witness to. So I said to my friend, "Let's pause our journey and witness to a monk in the monastery." He said, "What? Witness? Look at the black clouds, we've got to keep ahead of the clouds." I said, "Let us do God's work and leave the weather to Him." My friend thought I was being reckless. I said, "No. We put God's work first and He will take care of the weather." This brother was from a conventional church and had no miraculous experience of God, so he thought that the whole idea was unreasonable. Anyway, I spent some time with the monk, witnessing to him, and then we continued westward. Looking up, remarkably the cloud was still right above our heads, and as we went on, that line kept moving west. It got darker and darker until we couldn't see much of what was above us anymore, but we rode on.

Stranded in the darkness of the night

During the travelling, we would take turns riding in front with the other following behind. This was especially helpful in the dark because riding in front in the dark and relying only on your headlight requires greater alertness and is tiring. The one behind just follows the taillight of the one in front, so he can get a little rest on a long ride. On one stretch, when I was riding in front and my friend was riding behind, suddenly my engine faltered and stopped, and my lights went out. Everything went black. My electrical system was powered not by a battery but by a dynamo that generated electricity for the lights. It means that while the engine is running there is light; but when the engine stops, the light goes out.

My friend asked, “What happened?” It turned out that I had run out of gas. There was a small leak in the engine because of the damage done by the thieves, and we didn’t know that the gas was draining faster than usual. My friend, who rode a similar motorcycle, needed no additional gas at this time. In fact he didn’t need any more for the rest of the day. What were we going to do? We were in the countryside in the middle of nowhere, in pitch darkness. We prayed and committed this whole matter to the Lord. Then my friend rode off, and I watched him as his lights disappeared over the hill. Now I was standing in the darkness by myself, just looking to the Lord.

A few minutes later, I saw a light coming back. My friend was holding a can of gas. He said, “It’s amazing! When I

went over the top of that hill, I found a gas station right there. The man was just about to close the garage; I got there just as he was about to lock up, and he gave me this can of petrol.” Do we see the timing of God’s work? Neither of us knew there was a gas station there. God knew, and He did not allow the engine to die until we got close to the station.

The Lord tests our faith all the time, to test whether we trust in Him. What is faith? Faith involves trust. Do we trust in Him? I also realized that through this whole thing, God was speaking to my friend. The Lord was transforming his life by giving him a chance to witness remarkable things all along the journey. In this particular incident, my friend realized that God’s timing is amazing. He arrived at the garage just as the owner was locking up. Can you imagine what our situation would have been if my friend had arrived five minutes later and the man at the garage had left?

I filled the tank, and we rode on to Wales, to the small town of Caerphilly where we were to stop for the night. When we got to the house in Caerphilly, do you know what happened? When we removed our things from the motorcycles and stepped inside the door, at that very instant the rain came pouring down. If the rain had poured while we were still riding our motorcycles, we would have been blinded by the rain, utterly soaked, and in great danger because Wales is a hilly place. The road goes up and down, left and right, and if your brakes don’t function properly, you could be in real danger. In fact God controlled the weather not only for that night, but for the entire three weeks or

so of our journey. Do you know what? It never rained in the daytime during those three weeks! Walking with God is a privilege!

When we stepped in through the door in Caerphilly, it was as if we stepped on some device on the floor that activated the sudden downpour. I looked at my friend and saw his mouth drop open as he stared at the rain. The timing was so astonishing, indeed awesome. Can you think of a human explanation for all this? Shall we call it a coincidence? When you walk with God, there will be one “coincidence” after another until there is no more coincidence to talk about, for if a coincidence happens every time, it is by definition no longer a coincidence.

A message from God

On our way to Wales, we stopped for a drink at a small town and I said to my friend, “You know, God has given me a message to speak to the brothers and sisters in Caerphilly”. Surprised by that statement, he asked, “Do they even know you are coming?” I said, “No, I don’t think so.” “Then how can they know you are going to preach this Sunday?” I said, “I don’t know. All I know is that God gave me a message to give them this Sunday.” He looked puzzled.

One day after we had arrived at the town (I think it was a Friday night), the people of the church said, “Oh, we didn’t know you were coming, otherwise we would have invited you to preach.” I said, “That’s all right.” After they left, my

friend looked at me and said, "What happened to the message that God gave you for this Sunday? They've already got a preacher from a Bible college." I said, "That is all right. I mean, it is God's message. If He wants me to give it, I will give it. If He doesn't want me to give it, I won't give it. Either way is fine with me." But he probably thought that I had heard the Lord incorrectly.

Early Sunday morning there was a knock on the door. My friend opened the door, and there was a young man standing there. Neither of us knew him. He couldn't talk properly. His throat was hoarse and he whispered, "I am the man who is supposed to preach this Sunday, but I lost my voice during the night. Would you be so kind as to preach in my place?" I said, "No problem, I would be happy to." My friend looked at me, "Your God is real. Oh my, He is real!" Mind you, although he was a Christian, he had never experienced the Lord in this way, and that is true of many Christians today. My friend found all this truly awesome. I told him in advance that God had given me a message for the church in Caerphilly, but he found it hard to believe. And when we were told after our arrival that they had already arranged a preacher for Sunday, it seemed clear to him that I had been quite wrong. But now he was amazed.

In recounting this incident, I want to stress that it doesn't mean that I was any better than this brother from a Bible college who had lost his voice. Not at all. God would sometimes give a message through one person and at another time through someone else. He is the Lord, so He chooses

whom He speaks through on any particular occasion. So I am not implying in any way that I am better than this brother from the Bible college, whom I didn't even know personally. I am simply relating the events as they happened.

What about my friend who traveled with me on this three-week mission trip? His whole life was transformed, not because I preached to him but because he saw what God had done and was stunned. He said he had never seen such things before. And do you know what? He became a servant of God too. After he completed his engineering program at University of London, he went to a theological college and then into the ministry. But that is another story.

Sharing Christ's life in Cambridge

During my time in London, I was driven by a desire to witness for the Lord. If you haven't tried witnessing, you won't experience God's working. One of the ways of experiencing God is to witness, and then you will see what He can do in people's lives. I can give you account after account of how people turned to the Lord, and it was not because of any eloquence in my witnessing. In fact, I oftentimes didn't even have to start a conversation, yet the Lord drew the person to Himself. An example is a Vietnamese student in Cambridge who later became a good friend of mine.

I would often go to Cambridge even though I studied in London because London is a big and bustling city. I was busy in the church, so it was often hard to find the quiet that

I needed for study. I loved the quietness of Cambridge. Whenever I was in Cambridge, I would have a strong urge to witness, and would go around looking for people to witness to about God. I stayed at a place in Cambridge called Tyndale House for Biblical Research. Though it was designated a house for Biblical research, many graduate students living there were not doing Biblical studies but their doctoral studies in engineering or some other major. They were allowed to live there if rooms were available, provided they were graduates and were believers.

That was where I stayed in Cambridge. The woman in charge of the day-to-day management of the place was a very fine Christian who worked hard to witness especially to the Asian students in Cambridge. One day she told me that in one of the colleges, there was a Vietnamese student whom she would like me to meet. She asked me, "Would you like to witness to him?" I said, "Fine, just give me his name and tell me where he is staying, and I will go look for him." He was a brilliant scholarship student studying electrical engineering.

I visited him in his room. When God works, you don't even have to think of a way to start a conversation with questions like, "Are you by any chance going to church? Do you know Christians?" It is amazing that when God works, He speaks to the other person at a deeper level. I would often just keep quiet.

After briefly introducing ourselves to each other, the Vietnamese student immediately said, "I am a Buddhist, are

you a Christian?” I said yes, and he went straight to the point: “Tell me about Christianity.” Right from the start he wanted to talk about Christianity! I had just walked in through the door, and he didn’t even know me, yet he said, “Tell me about Christianity.” He explained, “I am not satisfied with Buddhism. I have looked into Buddhism (Vietnamese people are traditionally Buddhist), but I am not satisfied with it, so tell me about Christianity.” That evening, little more than an hour later, he knelt down with me and yielded his life to the Lord. We became good friends. He also began to experience God in amazing ways. But that is another story.

Let me tell you about a student from Taiwan whom the woman at Tyndale House had invited for tea. She would often invite people for tea in Tyndale House, and then run to my room, knock on the door, and ask me to come downstairs, saying, “I’ve invited someone for tea, come and talk to him.” I ended up talking to a good number of people in this way. So there was this Taiwanese research student who was invited for tea. After some conversation, he yielded his life to the Lord there and then, that very afternoon.

I like to tell his story because some time later I saw him and he was full of joy. He said, “You know, God is wonderful.” I asked, “What did you experience?” He said, “I have to tell you something. The other day I was walking on one of the streets in Cambridge (the narrow road from Tyndale House to the city center). As I was walking on the road, I wanted to pray. I said to God, ‘I am going to pray now. I am

going to close my eyes, and please see to it that I don't bump into the wall or into the trees while I am praying.”

This is a brilliant research student doing his degree in mathematical economics, whatever that is. My father studied economics, but I don't know what mathematical economics is, though we know that economics is becoming more and more connected to mathematics. Here he was, like a child; he wanted to pray, so he closed his eyes. He said, “You know, I walked the entire road praying with my eyes closed and I never hit the wall or the trees!” I know the road he was talking about, the one with a narrow sidewalk. You couldn't even walk on it with your arms stretched out, that was how narrow it was. On one side were trees and on the other side was a long wall, so the chances of hitting a tree or the wall are quite good. He walked down the entire road without hitting a tree or the wall. He said, “God is so amazing. I just pray to Him.” I smiled at him and said, “That is wonderful but let me tell you something that is also wonderful.” He said, “What is that?” I said, “You can also pray with your eyes open.” “You can?” he said in astonishment. So lovely and childlike!

There was a student from Hong Kong whom I got to know just by knocking on his door. The nice thing about witnessing in Cambridge is that you can just knock on someone's door. When he opened the door, he looked at me and invited me in. “Where do you stay?” he asked. I told him I was staying at Tyndale House for Biblical Research.

“Oh,” he said, “you are a Christian?” “Yes,” I replied. Right away he said, “Well, tell me how you became a Christian.”

As fast as that! What is it that draws people? Do you find it hard to witness? You try to witness but the other person never raises the subject and you say, “Hmm, by the way, have you ever read the Bible?” “No.” “Do you have Christian friends?” “No.” You don’t know where to go from there; it’s so awkward. But here within two minutes he was asking me to tell him how I had become a Christian. That is how fast things go when God works.

As if he was afraid that he had just opened a door he won’t be able to close, he said, “Don’t try to convert me. Just tell me how you became a Christian.” I said, “Sure. That’s fine.” I could give him that assurance because I am not the one doing the converting. It is God who converts a person. True conversion is something that only God can do; only He can transform the human heart. With that assurance, I knew that I was not the one to convert him. I was only a witness.

So I witnessed to him. But my principle is this: When you start witnessing, don’t keep on talking and talking. You are going to wear everyone out and they will be tired of your talking. So I witnessed for a few minutes and stopped. He said, “I am still listening.” I normally continue on when the other person is eager to hear more. This is an important principle of witnessing: Don’t talk to a person until he is sick of hearing you. I shared for a bit longer and stopped again. Every time I stopped, he asked me to carry on. Finally I said, “I think I have shared enough for today, it’s time for me to

go.” So he said, “Okay. We will talk again.” Indeed, we met together several times after this.

He was studying medicine in Cambridge. Most medical students in Cambridge, after completing their first three years, have to go to London to complete the rest of their medical training in one of the well-known teaching hospitals in London. And when he moved to London, where did he stay? Oh, God always knows what to do. The student ended up staying in the same district where Helen and I were living! When we found out where he was staying, we invited him over for supper. Do you know what happened? He walked in through the door and said, “By the way, where did we finish last time? You were telling me how you came to the Lord. Please continue. But don’t try to convert me, all right?” You can see his great spiritual hunger, yet he didn’t want anyone to pressure him. He was hungry to know God, so I shared more with him. Later on we had to leave London because I was taking up a ministry in Liverpool. The work there was very busy, and I eventually lost contact with Arthur, this medical student.

Many years had passed, and one day I said to myself, “Whatever happened to Arthur?” Then later, some years ago, we went to serve the Lord in Hong Kong. Somehow God brought Arthur Lee back to my memory. I looked him up in the telephone directory. Do you know how many Lee’s there are in Hong Kong? The directory has many pages for this common surname. “Arthur” too is a common name in Hong Kong. There was no way for me to find him like this.

A year or so later, I was watching the news on television and someone was about to be interviewed. Then his name was displayed on the screen: Professor Arthur Lee! I seldom watch that particular local news program, but I happened to be watching it that evening. Arthur had become the head of the medical department of Chinese University and also Professor of Surgery, teaching at the well-known Prince of Wales Hospital. We had finally located him after all these years. That student in Cambridge was now a professor in Hong Kong. I picked up the phone and called him, and even after more than twenty years, he remembered me right away and said, “How about lunch together?” He invited us to meet him at an exclusive club in Hong Kong. Being ignorant of these clubs, I didn’t even know it was some high-class place until I got there. After lunch, I tried to pay but he smiled and said, “You can’t pay. You’ve got to be a club member.” Anyway, the main thing I wanted to know about him was his relationship with the Lord. He replied, “Yes, I am a Christian.” Amazing, isn’t it? Somewhere along the way, he had come to the Lord.

It is through witnessing that we have the privilege of seeing lives being transformed by God’s love and power. Is there any greater joy or miracle than this? By the way, I saw Arthur on television again a few months ago. He is now Vice Chancellor of the university. But now that he already knows the Lord, I didn’t see the need to contact him, at least not unless God leads me to. What God does is truly amazing.

The joy of witnessing: seeing God change lives

Many of the things I am sharing with you today I have already shared in various messages over the years as illustrations of experiencing God. When we were in Kuala Lumpur a few days ago, I said to Helen, “To find out how I have been witnessing for the Lord through the years, all you need to do is to listen to all my messages, take the stories out, arrange them in sequence, and there you’ve got my witness. Then I don’t have to share anything here.” She said, “Yes, but the problem is that you’ve preached several hundred messages. It would take a long time to dig out all the stories from these messages.” I guess that is why I have to give the accounts here.

I stress again: It is a tremendous joy to witness for God and to see His power working in people’s lives. I have seen so many changed lives. Preaching God’s word can also change people’s lives but I always put in my own witnessing as much as possible in my preaching.

One of the great joys of preaching the gospel in London or Liverpool was seeing people’s lives being changed in front of my eyes. As I witnessed to them and preached God’s word to them in those years, it was amazing to see people being transformed. Witnessing is something that is and should be close to every Christian’s heart.

Another time I experienced God deeply in connection to witnessing was when I was staying at the Foreign Missions Club in North London. One evening as I was studying, the Lord spoke to me very clearly and distinctly: “Eric, get up

and go down to the YMCA in central London.” Nowadays, people think it strange that God would speak to us, but why such doubts? The Bible is full of such examples. Have we not read in the Bible that Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the other prophets would often proclaim a message from Yahweh God with the words, “Thus says the Lord” (literally, “Thus says Yahweh”)? Do you think the prophets dared to invent those words? Would they dare to say that Yahweh had said something when He hadn’t? Certainly not. God would speak something to the prophets in a way that they could hear it. And having heard what He had said, they declared it with the prefatory words, “This is what Yahweh says”. Count how many times “Thus says the Lord” occurs in the Old Testament and you will be amazed (over 400 times!). Even today, God speaks to His servants all the time, to those in whom Christ lives.

God said to me, “Get up and go to the YMCA.” So off I went to the YMCA, but not without some mumbling over the fact that I had a lot of homework to do. I was wondering how I was going to complete my work if I had to go to the YMCA. I was also wondering what I was supposed to do there. Anyway, I got on my motorcycle and went on a long ride to the city center. The YMCA was in the city center near Oxford Circus (for those of you who know London). I arrived at the YMCA and said, “Lord, what do You want me to do here? I haven’t got a clue.” As I stood inside the YMCA wondering what to do, the Lord directed my attention to the revolving door where people were coming in

and going out. The Lord said, "Look towards the door." I looked, and I saw a tall Chinese gentleman coming in. Then the Lord instructed me, "Talk to him." As I went towards him, I asked God, "What am I supposed to say to him?" I had never met him before, and had no idea what I was to say. The Lord said, "Ask him if he needs help." Would you normally stop a stranger in public and ask, "Do you need help"? Well, I asked him, "Do you need help?" I was surprised when he said yes. I no longer remember what kind of help he needed, but what mattered was that we got into a conversation, and soon we were talking about spiritual things. He was older than I, being perhaps in his forties. I, being much younger, felt it was not appropriate for me to be the one helping him on the spiritual level. So I arranged for him to meet the pastor of our church the next day. There and then, he came to the Lord!

When this gentleman later told me his side of the story, I realized just how amazing God's leading is. One cannot think of any human explanation to account for the course of events. The day I met him, he had just arrived from Taiwan where he was a high ranking government official. He was on his way to Geneva as a representative for some trade talks. I didn't ask him for the details. He had just arrived in London, and didn't know the city. That was why when I asked him whether he needed help, he said yes. Moreover, he was leaving the day after the next, which meant he had only two days in London, only one of which was a complete day. Either he comes to the Lord now, or will never. After the

conference in Geneva, he was to go back to Taiwan; so he had only those two days in London.

Later it struck me that this is like what happened when Philip went to meet the Ethiopian eunuch in the desert (Acts 8:27-39). The eunuch was a government official who was on his travels when Philip met him; so Philip's timing had to be perfect or he would have missed him. When Philip met the eunuch in the desert, he found him reading a Bible passage in Isaiah. Philip asked him, "Do you understand what you are reading?" That is to say, "Do you need any help?" The eunuch needed someone to help him understand its meaning, and Philip was there to explain it to him. Then and there the eunuch yielded his life to God.

This was what happened in the case of the government official from Taiwan when he committed his life to the Lord. The timing was marvelous. Had I not listened to God or obeyed Him, the blood of this man would have been on my hands. He wouldn't have come to the Lord. He said to me afterwards before setting off for the conference in Geneva: "It is amazing. I was looking for God. I didn't think that I would find God, or God would find me here in London." This had to happen exactly within that short window of time. Is there a human explanation for this? Our God is amazing. I am filled with wonder but also with fear and trembling that had I not listened, what would have happened to this man? Will someone pass away without knowing God because you weren't listening to the Lord?

Deep and direct communication

For the sake of clarification, something else needs to be said. You may have noticed that all the experiences I have shared happened when I was young—young not only in terms of physical age (I was in my mid-twenties) but also in the sense of being spiritually young. When I was still young in both senses, God spoke to me audibly on a few occasions. But when I became spiritually more mature, God would communicate with me in a non-audible way. He now lets me know His will directly (without words) and with clarity (I know clearly that it is from God and not something fabricated by my own mind). He impresses upon my heart, “This is My will,” in such a way that I have no doubt what He wants me to do. God has not spoken to me audibly for a long time; He doesn’t need to, because as I learn to walk closer to Him through the years, He communicates His will to me heart to heart, straight to my heart. As I wait and listen, He lets me know what He wants me to know or do. I don’t need to hear it audibly anymore. I think that when I was much younger spiritually and physically, I was not walking with God close enough to receive a message directly from Him into my heart. I needed to hear it with my ear, as it were. But He knows our needs and is very gracious. He will meet with you according to your maturity or lack of it. If you are young in the Lord, He will talk to you at your level. It is like the difference between talking to a child and talking to an adult; you don’t talk to a child the way you talk to an adult. So

when I was spiritually immature, God talked to me in such a way that I could clearly understand Him.

Nowadays He often makes His will known to me as though I see a flash of light, clear as day, at a time of His choosing. I know it is from God because what He reveals is beyond human knowledge. For example, we don't know the future, yet the practical reality is that we need to know what God wants us to do or where He wants us to go, whether it is today or tomorrow. But how can we be "led by the Spirit" as every child of God ought to be led (Romans 8:14) unless He reveals His will to us? If He wants me to help someone, He will reveal that to me. If necessary, He may even reveal if a particular seriously ill person will die or not. Of course He doesn't reveal things to satisfy my curiosity, but only if there is a definite need for me to know.

For example, there were two separate cases of a doctor saying that a patient would die, but God revealed to me that the two patients would not die. In both cases, when I informed the relatives and friends of the seriously ill person that the person will not die, they responded, as one might expect, with the words, "But the doctors said he will die." So they had to choose between believing the doctors or believing what God had told me. In the end, of course, the doctors were wrong and what the Lord said to me came true. We don't blame the doctors for being mistaken because they spoke according to the best of their medical knowledge. But God's power works beyond the limits of man's knowledge. That is the wonder of walking with the living God.

Dead to sin, alive in Christ!

So far I have been talking about Christ living in us. Now I draw your attention to a verse that is very short, yet is one of the most important Bible verses for practical Christian living: “He who has died is freed from sin” (Romans 6:7). He who has died is free, that is, free from the most fearful thing in this world: *sin*. When sin reigns in your life, the devil has a grip on you. You don’t believe in the devil? It makes no difference. The devil doesn’t want you to believe in him. He doesn’t need you to believe in him, because he is very real whether you believe in him or not.

The same is true of God: If you don’t believe in God, it doesn’t change the facts. Will God disappear just because you don’t believe in Him? God is there. Whether you believe in Him or not doesn’t change that. But it does make a difference to you.

If a doctor tells you that you have malignant cancer, and you say, “I don’t believe it,” will your cancer disappear just because you don’t believe him? The cancer will kill you whether you believe the doctor or not. What matters is how you respond to it: “Oh, I have cancer. Now I need to know what to do.” But if you don’t believe it and take no precautions, you will die. If you respond wisely, you may live. If you respond foolishly, you will die. God is real. Not believing in Him doesn’t change the fact of His existence. He doesn’t cease to exist just because you don’t believe in Him. Your belief or disbelief affects you yourself, and how you respond to Him is a matter of life and death.

The same is true of the devil. If you don't believe the devil is real, he won't disappear. But your disbelief does affect you because you will let your guard down. On the other hand, the devil cannot touch you if you are not controlled by sin. He needs to have sin in your life before he gains a handle on it and shakes you around. Is there sin in your life? If so, the devil has a grip on you. The world will also have a grip on you, for the world is the devil's instrument to work on you. He is the "god of this world (or age)" (2Cor.4:4), and the world is his instrument. When you harbor sin, you are spiritually dead, my friend. And the way to get out of it is to die to sin, and therefore die to the death caused by sin. The path to true freedom—freedom from sin—comes from dying to sin. Have you experienced the joy of that freedom? Or are you a slave whom Satan pushes around? Few Christians experience complete freedom; that is because few Christians have experienced death—death with Christ (Romans 6:3-7).

This death with Christ—which goes together with our union with Christ—is not an end in itself, but a door to life. Have you ever seen a Christian die physically? Some people have come to God just by watching a Christian die physically, having seen his peace and quiet joy. For such Christians, death is simply a door to eternal life. The early church was a powerful witness to the world, for the non-Christians were afraid of death. The devil controls people through the fear of death. Are you afraid to die? You don't know where you will end up apart from being buried six feet

into the ground. But the one who lives with Christ in this world knows where he is going. He is free from the dominion of sin and therefore free from fear. Sin brings fear, so when one is free of sin, one is free of fear. The freedom that comes from being dead to sin is simply wonderful.

My mother

Finally, I would like to share some incidents involving my family. Although these things are deeply personal and I prefer not to talk about them, I don't know any other way to witness to you about my dying with Christ and its effect on my relationship with my mother and what God had done in her life. I have already shared a little about my family, mainly about my father but almost nothing about my mother.

You see, my mother was someone I hardly knew when I was a child; that was because when I was a child from infancy, I was cared for by a succession of nannies. I was five years old when World War II broke out. My father, a fervent patriot, joined the war effort by serving in the wartime government. He slipped out of Shanghai just before the Japanese army took the city. So my mother and I were stranded in enemy territory for the duration of the war. She found a job to earn some money, and again she hired a nanny to do the housework and look after me. When I was ready to attend primary school, my mother felt it would be best to send me to a boarding school on the other side of Shanghai for the first two years. I would come home on

occasional weekends, which meant I seldom saw her. Even when I went home, she was often not home. She was young and beautiful, and understandably wanted to enjoy some social life. All this meant that I grew up hardly knowing my mother and not experiencing motherly love.

I didn't experience motherly love except in surrogate, that is, in a substitute form. My "amah" (nanny) was a mother to me. She brought me up and was very devoted to me. She loved me so much that, in a way, I had never lost anything. Although I didn't have the care from my natural mother, I had another mother who loved me as her own child. She probably loved me more than most of you have experienced love from your own mothers. In this sense, God had already graciously provided for me, giving me an amah who was more like a mother than an amah. Even so, no amah, no matter how good, is actually your own mother. But I didn't know how to relate to my own mother.

My pet chicken

To make things worse, my mother did things that hurt me deeply. Amah once got me a grown chicken from her home in the countryside. She had gone home for a visit, and when she came back she said, "I have a present for you." Children, of course, love presents. I asked, "What is it?" She opened her large basket and to my delight, out came a chicken! It had beautiful feathers and was clever too! How clever? Whenever my nanny called for it, it would immediately

come to her. We were living in an apartment on the third floor, with two main entrances on every floor. This provided a way of testing the chicken's intelligence because when my nanny called for it from the third floor window, how would it know which of the two doors to enter? And which floor to go up? And which is the right door on the right floor? Yet my chicken would know exactly how to get home.

My amah would put the chicken out in the garden, which was not a private garden but a public garden that was open to the street. Yet this chicken would never walk out to the street but would stay in the safety of the garden. Who had taught it to stay in the garden? It was not brought up as a chick in the garden, but was full grown when it came. Yet it would stay in the garden and feed there. And when my amah called for the chicken from the window, it would run up the stairs through the right door, to the right floor, and right into our door! Isn't that a super chicken? It became very precious to me.

One day I came home from school, and where was my chicken? It was in the cooking pot. I demanded an explanation from my amah, "What do you mean by cooking my chicken?" "I didn't want to cook it, but your mother told me to," she said sadly, because the chicken was dear to her too. "Why did she do that?" The explanation given was that my mother had some guests and she wanted to put more food on the table. So that's what happened to the chicken. I was just a child and this chicken was precious to me. To you a chicken may not mean much, especially if it isn't your pet.

I didn't know how to forgive my mother for that (though I don't recall that she had ever asked for forgiveness). It was a cruel thing to do to my pet. I thought to myself: I didn't get anything from my mother and now she has taken from me what was dear to me.

My Pekingese terrier

One of the greatest friends you can have is a dog. I had a small white Pekingese terrier with long hair that covered its the eyes so that you can hardly see them. It had a cute round face, and looked like a teddy bear. It was very dear to me because when I would come home from school during the weekends, my dog would welcome me excitedly and jump all over me. You cannot get a warmer welcome than from a dog. I didn't receive such warm welcomes from human beings. In many households, the husband comes home from the office only to find his wife busy cooking, washing the clothes, and looking after the baby. Often the husband is too tired or busy to give his wife much attention. Often neither husband nor wife has the time or energy to greet each other when the husband comes home. But dogs would always give you a warm welcome, licking and jumping all over you.

One day I came home and there was no dog. No warm welcome, not pet, no nothing. "What happened to my dog?" "Oh, your mother forgot to close the door. The dog went out and never came back." My chicken was gone, and so was my dog. I lost the thing that had given me the greatest joy. It

was too much to take. Not receiving much by way of motherly love is one thing, but losing something dear to me is another.

No resentment

If you grow up harboring anger, resentment, and bitterness, what kind of person will you become? If God had not worked in my heart, I would have remained bitter. Why do I feel no bitterness or resentment or hatred against my mother? Because I have since died with Christ, and in that dying I lost the old person in me that was offended, hurt, and neglected. I entered into a new life with no bitterness or anger or hatred because Eric Chang, who grew up without his mother's love and lacked even the minimal attention from his mother, had died with Christ. I didn't suffer any psychological damage, none whatsoever. I could even love my mother. And before she died, we became very close friends. That is the evidence of God's saving and transforming power.

Now you can see why I have not previously talked about my mother. It is because I didn't want to say these things about her. The reason I can finally say something about her is that in doing so, I am testifying about this important aspect of the Lord's work in my life and later also in hers. Unless you know the seriousness and painfulness of the situation I grew up in, with its potential for deep inner damage, you will not be able to appreciate the greatness of

God's work in transforming me into a new person. By drawing me into a new life in Him, God changed my attitude and my relationship towards my mother, and this resulted in her being changed too.

Nowadays there is a section of the Christian church that preaches something called "inner healing". They claim that this "inner healing" ought to be used on everyone, in particular those who, like me, were hurt inwardly. It is true that when I search my memory, not one example of my mother's love comes to mind. If you ask me to name just one such incident from my childhood years, I wouldn't be able to think of one. It doesn't mean that she didn't love me. I only mean to say that no expression of motherly love has ever been impressed on my mind. Such a deprived childhood is thought to leave emotional and psychological scars on one's mind, but I don't find any scars. There is also nothing to be healed of. I don't need to go see a psychiatrist or psychologist and analyze the effects of the psychological hurt. Why? Because Jesus came into my life; I have died with him at baptism and rose with him into a new life. In dying with him, my old self with its old memories and attitudes all passed away. The old "me" had to die so that a new "me" could come into being.

The "inner healing" practice of "healing" the old self is what Jesus would describe as patching an old garment with a new piece of cloth, which over time will worsen the tear. In saving us, God does not patch up the old person, He makes a new person out of us, in Christ. This is the New

Testament teaching (2Cor.5:17, etc). After God saved me, I began to love my mother, and I didn't even know why! But I was able to do that only after Jesus had come into my life. He lives in me and is a friend of sinners. He forgives sinners like me, and put his love into my heart. This love was the most powerful thing that turned my mother around, such is the wonder of what the Lord had done in me.

When I was studying in London, I would visit my mother during the summer break. I wouldn't call her place my home because I wasn't really welcomed there. Again, I could have felt hurt or harbored hatred, but I won't let that get to me. "He who has died is freed from sin" (Romans 6:7), and hatred is sin.

But my presence at her home was interfering with her private life and was inconvenient to her. So I would stay only for a short time. But during the stay, I would wash the dishes and do the things I was not expected to do. I said to myself: I am not going to preach to her but will witness to her with my life. If my life doesn't speak to her, nothing will.

One day she asked me, "How do you pay for your studies? Who provides financially for your studies in London?"

"My God provides."

"Yes, but He doesn't drop money out of heaven."

"Perhaps sometimes He does! One way or another, He has His ways of doing it."

"I don't understand."

Because she didn't know the living God, she couldn't possibly understand that He looks after His children and provides for their needs when they look to Him to take care of them. A few years later, after I had graduated, she said to me, "I don't understand how God provides for you, but I see that He is real."

The matter of inheritance

My father died a few years later when I was still in London. My parents had been separated. I find it difficult to talk about these family matters, but again I see no other way of sharing what God had done in my life without making some reference to these things. Officially my parents were divorced, but my father had written in his will that my mother is the one to whom he bequeathed all his possessions. He loved my mother, and still hoped to reunite with her, but she didn't want to. After he had died, the executor of his will looked at it, and saw that my father had instructed that his possessions be given to "my wife," namely, my mother. But the court blocked the execution of my father's will according to that instruction until my mother could prove she was still his wife. She couldn't, of course, because they were divorced. So the court decided that since my mother could not claim the inheritance, it will be given to me.

My mother wanted to contest, or at least appeal against, the court's decision. Would we not be inclined to think, "Isn't this going too far? You don't want to be his wife, you

don't want to be a mother, yet you want the inheritance!?" But let us remember that she was not a Christian. What should I do in such a situation? Well, this is what I did: I said to my mother, "I will give you the whole inheritance." I hired a lawyer at my own expense, and instructed him to write a statement on my behalf whereby I relinquish the inheritance which the court in the United States (my father died in USA) had declared to be mine. So I signed away my inheritance. I said, "Give it all to my mother. I don't want it. I am a servant of the Lord." I had no money myself; and I couldn't pay the lawyer's fees immediately. The lawyer, who was a good Christian, was touched by what I had done, and he said to me, "I don't want you to pay me. In the future, whenever you need legal help, you come to me and I will help you free of charge." That was how the inheritance went to my mother.

A new person in Christ

Slowly and over time, God worked in my mother's heart such that her hardness and selfishness began to melt away. One of the profoundest moments in my life came on the day she said to me, "Eric, how can I come to know the God whom you trust and serve? Tell me." I asked her, "Mum, do you really want to know?" She said, "Yes, how do I get to know Him?" I said, "Well, are you prepared to kneel down with me and open your heart to God, break with the past, yield your life totally to God, and let Him make a new per-

son out of you? Are you willing to do that?” She said, “Yes.” I asked, “Shall we kneel down together?” She said, “Yes,” and so she knelt down with me and yielded her life to the Lord. Tears of repentance poured down. She wept abundantly. It was amazing.

I can never look back at this incident without feeling the power of that emotion as I looked at what God had done in my mother’s heart. She had been one who didn’t want to see the inside of a church, who wasn’t interested in the gospel, who didn’t believe in God, and who lived only for herself, yes, herself alone. Yet right before my eyes, God made a whole new person out of her. I am a witness to this wonderful event. We became very close after that. There was a whole new kind of love for one another. It is hard to explain, but it is just amazing.

Since my mother cannot be here to testify to how the Lord saved her and changed her into a new person, I am sure she would be happy that I have done it for her. Moreover, if she were the one to describe her former life, she would probably have described it in harsher terms than I have. That is because after God changes us, we see ourselves and what we were in the past with much greater clarity. On my part, if I had tried to avoid the unpleasantness of mentioning the past events and don’t refer to them at all, you wouldn’t have seen the vast change that God had effected in her life. She became a totally different person from the one I had known before.

Sorrow because of love

A few years after my mother had come to the Lord, she passed away. I felt a deep pain in my heart. In fact it was one of the few times in my life that I was unhappy with God, to be frank and honest. I said to God, "All my life I didn't have my real mother. She has since come to You, she loves You and wants to walk with You. I am now just beginning to know that I have a mother, and yet You have taken her away. I don't understand this. Lord, I am unhappy about this." I confess to you that I grumbled to God. Why did He do this? To this day I don't know. Just when my mother and I had become closer to one another, just when we had a new love and sweetness for one another, she passed away. What seemed to be an ordinary cold developed into a vicious viral pneumonia that no antibiotic could stop. She went into a coma and died within a few days.

I didn't even get to say goodbye to her, not even over the phone. I was away on a mission at that time. Shortly after returning, I received a telegram informing me that my mother had passed away. I knew that being a Christian is not easy, but I frankly admit that it grieved me tremendously that God saw it fit to take her away. But I know there must have been a good reason for that which I will fully understand one day. Until then, I am reminded by the Word of God that:

“My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” declares Yahweh. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

The crucial point I want to stress is that because I had died with Christ, I did not harbor any unhappiness towards my mother. After I had come to know God, there was no problem for me to forgive her. I could no longer think of anything for me to forgive because I—the one who had once been hurt and neglected—had died. That Eric Chang no longer exists. There is a new man in whom Christ lives. My mother encountered God’s saving power in this new man, and it was a power that changed her, a person whose heart was so hardened that, humanly speaking, it was impossible to save her.

I hope that you can see what it means to die with Christ. I never needed any so-called “inner healing”. I didn’t need emotional healing because once you have died, all the hurt and all the bad things have died with you. The old life with its scars and sins has passed away.

Recently a young woman told us that she had gone through a painful experience of being terribly abused, and was left with deep psychological scars. But after she had died with Christ, she no longer needed psychological treatment or healing of any sort. The old had passed, the new had come. She had experienced for herself the truth that the one who has died is free from past sins and hurts, free to live a new life that is enriched and made meaningful by the glory of

God, the joy of God, the liberty of God. The salvation and transformation of a person is the greatest miracle you can ever see. I have experienced and witnessed many miracles, but none greater than that of the transformation of a person. There is simply nothing to compare with that.

I would visit my mother's grave from time to time when I am in that part of the world, and I would say, "O Lord, how marvelous are Your ways!"



Chapter 6

Freedom in Christ

 It is a miracle from the Lord that I can be here to speak to you today because I came down with a flu a few days ago. It seems that the flu has affected many other people. It affected me badly because a flu can create serious complications for someone who has asthma, an ailment which I contracted in England some 30 years ago. So it seemed that the likelihood of my speaking here today was not very high.

I wish to begin by sharing with you how God has graciously made it possible for me to be here today, and what I have learned through this experience.

I arrived in Kuala Lumpur a few days ago after attending a three-day full-time workers' conference. My physical condition was already quite bad on my first night in Kuala Lumpur, and was getting steadily worse. My temperature was rising fast. As the fever rose to 102°, Helen and I prayed about the matter, committing the fever to God. At that time something came to my mind: what the Lord Jesus did in Luke chapter 4. The mother-in-law of Jesus' disciple Simon Peter had contracted a fever; the account says specifically that she was "suffering from a high fever" (v.38). As I pondered about my situation, the words describing what Jesus did came to my mind: "He rebuked the fever" (v.39). The fever was an oppressing power that incapacitated Peter's mother-in-law. Jesus rebuked the fever and it left her, an act which I found remarkable. So I thought, "Well, didn't the Lord instruct us to follow him in what he did?" So I rebuked the fever in the Lord's name (which means to claim his power to do it; see for example Acts 4:7). I had never done this before because I seldom get a fever. After rebuking the fever, Helen and I prayed together. It was early in the morning about 2.30 am, and I soon fell asleep.

Never use God’s power for personal gain

But before I fell asleep, a thought crossed my mind regarding another principle. In following Scriptural teaching, we have to be sure that we have correctly taken into account all the relevant principles which are applicable to a particular situation. I then realized that I have missed something important. And it was this: Should I have rebuked the fever in my case? What do you think? Why is there a problem? The problem lies in this: A servant of God should not use the power which God has entrusted to him in a way that benefits himself personally, that is, he should not seek to profit from it. That is why the Lord Jesus, when he became hungry after 40 days of fasting and was severely tempted in the wilderness, refused to turn stone into bread though he had the authority to do so. The devil’s temptation was designed to make Jesus use his power and authority for his own benefit. This important principle had escaped me and I immediately repented before God and said, “Lord, I am sorry. In my concern to drive out the fever, I had forgotten the other principle. I should not have used Your power for my own benefit.” I asked the Lord’s for forgiveness, and fell asleep.

When I woke up in the morning, my wife, who is a nurse, took my temperature and it was still well over 100°. So nothing had changed. But two hours or so later, I said, “What has happened to my fever?” I asked my wife to take my temperature again. The fever had vanished. It was gone! The sudden disappearance of the fever surprised us. This was checked three more times over the next few hours, and each

time the temperature was normal. The fever had indeed disappeared. As I pondered on this, I thought about how God dealt with this matter according to His wisdom and mercy. He saw that I had repented, asking Him to forgive me for using His power for my own benefit. I had misappropriated His great power, and only afterwards realized my error and repented. God did not drive out the fever at first, for when I woke up the temperature was still over 100°. But after I had learned my lesson, He drove out the fever. In other words, God was saying to me, “You shouldn’t have used My power for your own benefit, but you repented and I have forgiven you. I have driven out the fever not because you claimed My power, but because of My grace and mercy alone. I did it only because of My own mercy.”

We must understand the difference between asking God for something that is according to His will and presumptuously claiming and using His power to gain something we have decided is good for us and for others. Sadly, many Christians cannot distinguish these two totally different things. Some even ignorantly call the presumptuous misappropriation of God’s power “faith”. A faith that is not exercised in total submission to God’s will is not faith as far as God is concerned.

In any case, could God not have given me the strength to preach even without taking away the fever, if that was His will? In fact, some 20 years ago I did preach while having a fever. I was preaching in a city in western Canada at a time of the year when it was cool, yet I was drenched in sweat

because of the fever. I was so focused on preaching the word of God that I didn't even remember to ask God to remove the fever. Does it mean I had less faith at that time as compared to now, or that I was less obedient to His will? By the grace of God, I don't think so.

Jesus, sent by God to set the captives free

I thank God from my heart that in all the years of walking with Him, I have experienced the remarkable ways of the living God. From this most recent experience, the Lord lays it upon my heart to base my testimony today on the same chapter, Luke 4, in which the healing of Peter's mother-in-law is recorded towards the end of the chapter. The driving out of the fever was one of Jesus' earliest miracles. But chapter 4 begins with the remarkable words of the prophet Isaiah, which Jesus cites to announce the commencement of his own ministry. The words sum up Jesus' whole ministry, so he read them aloud to the congregation in the synagogue. This is what he read out to them:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” (Luke 4:18,19)

In these few brief sentences which were read out to the congregation, something is being repeated. This kind of repetition in Scripture signals something that we need to pay attention to, for it is repeated for the sake of emphasis (in this case, repeated with the same meaning though with not the same words). Notice the words, “He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives,” and then, “to let the oppressed go free.” These two statements say the same thing even if the wording is not identical. The idea is to release captives, to set people free, and this is further emphasized by the liberating of the blind from the incapacitating effects of blindness; and further still by the proclamation of “the year of the Lord’s favor,” also known as the year of Jubilee which came every 50 years in Israel, a year in which all debts were forgiven and slaves were released. Hence all the four statements express the same essential truth: Jesus was sent by God to set every kind of captive free.

Living in bondage

One of the most fearful things in life is the bondage or slavery of addiction. We are all familiar with drug addiction but there are many other kinds of addiction. I can say without fear of contradiction that everyone who has not been liberated by God is under some form of addiction. You might not be addicted to cocaine or alcohol, but everyone is under addiction or bondage of some sort. The great tragedy is that we are often blind to our own situation. That is why

in between the two statements on being freed from oppression, you have the statement, “recovery of sight to the blind.” In this context, it does not mean that Jesus was concerned only with healing the physically blind, as though it were the only kind of miracle he was interested in. The reference here is not primarily to the physical but the spiritual. The problem is that we are under bondage without knowing it.

The frightening thing about the bondage of addiction is the capturing of the will. You start out with a little bit of alcohol or whatever you consume, and you gradually become addicted to it. Some people can take wine or alcohol without problem; the French usually drink with their meals, and many drink daily without being addicted to alcohol. But there are others who cannot do that. In other words, some things are addictive to some people but not to others. In part it depends on the reason for using a substance. If people use alcohol to drown out their misery and problems, they could soon develop a dependency that will become an addiction.

Self-centeredness is bondage

There are other kinds of bondage. I can say without fear of contradiction that every human being is in bondage to himself or herself, notably bondage to self-interest, in other words, to selfishness. Everyone is selfish until God does something with him or her. Until that happens, everyone is addicted to selfishness. The ego, the self, is always central.

What that does in a society is not hard to see. When everyone cares only for himself or herself, no one will care for others unless there are overlapping interests. The self-centered principle is that I will care for someone only if his or her interests happen to affect me or intersect with my interests. Then of course I would care for the other person, for his or her welfare is intertwined with mine. That is the root problem of human society. Jesus came to create a new kind of society in which God's command to love the neighbor as oneself is meant to be implemented. But this is impossible in a self-centered society until we are changed and transformed. That is why the gospel is about change and transformation; it can't be achieved until we are liberated—freed from our selfishness and self-centeredness.

The gospel has to do with freedom, true spiritual freedom. Outward freedom doesn't translate into true inward freedom. The one who is under bondage to sin is a slave inwardly, enslaved in heart and mind, irrespective of what his outward circumstances may be. In the Bible and in experience, sin is equal to slavery. To those who live under the bondage of sin, the good news is that Jesus came to release the captives, to set free the oppressed.

Have you been freed?

How many truly free Christians do you know personally? If you belong to a church, you will know how many truly liberated Christians there are in your church. Let us be

honest. How many would you say are free people? The great problem is that we may not even know what true freedom is, so we don't know that we are under an addiction. That is a consequence of spiritual blindness.

This is a pitiful situation. Does a fish in a tank know or even care whether it is free? After all, there are other fish swimming around—colorful and lively fish which don't seem to be living in fear. In fact they look quite content. There are ornaments in the tank that look like coral but are not, though there are real plants that contribute to the beauty of the aquarium. The fish are given nutritious food, and they adapt to life very well in the confined environment of the tank.

If you send these colorful fish back into the ocean, to the real coral reefs of their natural habitat, can they tell the difference? The point is that when people become accustomed to, and are comfortable with, a confined state of life, they won't know or care that they are prisoners. Do you know what true freedom is? Have we become so comfortable in our confining environment that we don't find it oppressive or limiting? The spiritual walls that imprison us have become the home in which we are accustomed to living. We find it hard to imagine life outside these walls and perhaps don't care to know. We have enough to keep us occupied within the confines of our aquarium world. But what are the consequences of this mentality?

Freedom to grow

One time my wife and I were looking at an aquarium. You must have visited pet shops where they have aquariums, and sometimes we would walk in to take a look at the colorful fish. I once saw a small fish that I thought looked like a shark. A shark? In a small aquarium? I have seen a number of sharks in open waters, and my encounters with them can be tense when they are large. I encountered a few sharks (white tips) while snorkeling off the east coast of Malaysia. One or two got a bit too interested in me. When they reach 4 or 5 feet in length, they can take a good bite out of you (though white tips don't have a reputation for attacking people).

But I have also seen baby sharks near beaches. And when I looked at the fish in the aquarium, I said to my wife, "That looks like a shark." Well, it was a shark—the shop confirmed it. But how big was it? Not your five-foot variety, which wouldn't fit in the pet shop's aquarium. The tiny sharks were not longer than 6 inches, some even smaller. Six-inch sharks in a tank! I had never seen anything like that. I was wondering why a shark in an aquarium was not eating up the other fish. Well, for one thing, it is too small to eat the other fish. At 5 or 6 inches, it should be content that it is not eaten by bigger fish!

But how do you get a shark to live its whole life in an aquarium? Wouldn't it grow too big for it? I later read, to my surprise, that if you take a shark out of the ocean and put it in an aquarium when it is still small, it never grows big. It will reach maturity, but it won't get much larger than 6

inches. Well, that was a surprise to me. But if you release the same shark into the ocean while it is young, it could grow to 8 feet. In other words, in the nice yet confined conditions of the aquarium, in which the fish is safe, comfortable, and well fed, the shark is prevented from growing. It adapts its size to the aquarium and stays small like the other fish swimming around. But if it had been released into the open sea, it could have become an 8-foot shark. I was surprised when I learned this. “Live and learn” as they say. Being a certified scuba diver, I thought I had some knowledge of the oceans, but obviously there is still a lot for me to learn.

Freedom to reach our potential

The point is that there are churches full of people who live in an environment that is protected and comfortable. A direct consequence of this is that they never grow spiritually. They don't even know that there is a problem because the environment is so comfortable to live in. But a shark is not meant to be 6 inches at maturity. A white-tip shark in its natural habitat can grow to 8 feet. The great white is much bigger, but we are talking about this particular species. So, too, many Christians spend all their lives in an environment in which they are comfortable but never reach the potential that God wants for them. There are many such Christians.

The open sea is a dangerous place even for sharks, especially baby sharks. There are many creatures that can eat baby sharks. Sharks are a lot harder to eat when they are 8

feet long, though even at that size they can be attacked by orcas, better known as killer whales. In any case, it takes them a long time to reach 8 feet, and many are eaten long before they grow to that length. Baby sharks are eaten by bigger fish, so they dare not venture into open waters.

I saw many baby sharks along the east coast of Malaysia; they stay very close to the shore for safety; they hug the coastline and dare not venture into deeper waters where the bigger fish live. But at least they are in the ocean, not in an aquarium, so they will keep growing in relative safety among the smaller fish near the shore. They will venture out when they get larger.

Many Christians stay in the safety of their fish tanks without ever thinking of venturing out by faith into the wider world outside. They remain captive to their own fears. They want a secure and comfortable life within the social circle of fellow Christians. You can have that comfortable existence (though life in a fish tank is not without its internal problems, but they are different from those in the open sea), but it does mean that you are going to spend the rest of your life as a six-inch Christian.

What does Jesus want us to be? Why are some servants of God so extraordinary while multitudes of Christians go nowhere? The secret lies in the words, "I came to set the captives free." Do you know that you are a captive? Captive to what? Find out the things that keep you in bondage, and call upon God to make you what He intends you to be. I hope, even if nothing else is accomplished through this

message, that at least some of you will say, “Okay, I have had enough of this nice aquarium life. Lord, set me free to attain whatever it is You want me to be.” This has always been my goal and purpose. I don’t want to have anything within myself, or anything around me, that will bind me into some form of bondage, including religious bondage.

Sadly, religion can be a deep bondage, whether in the form of rigid human traditions or narrow-minded legalism which have nothing to do with true spirituality and which even hinder spirituality. We need to understand that being religious is not the same as being spiritual. The religious person is content to stay in his religious fish tank community though he may transfer occasionally to another similar fish tank for one reason or another. But the spiritual man’s life is governed by God, and he goes wherever God wants him to go, yes, even out into the sea. Let God set us free to follow Him wherever He takes us.

We can now understand another aspect of Jesus’ command to “go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation” (Mark 16:15; v.17 says it is through “those who believe” that he will do his work; see the parallel command in Mt.28:19). We often think of this as a command to evangelize, not realizing that it is something fundamentally vital for our spiritual growth. We often think that the command to “go” is for other Christians, not for us. This is the fish tank mentality. We have failed to grasp the Parable of the Fish Tank and the Sea, as we might call it. However, going “into all the world” does not necessarily

mean that we enter into the deepest ocean at the far end of the world just yet. Initially, God may want us to remain close to the shoreline, perhaps in our own city or locality. When we have grown spiritually, we will be ready to go further out.

I sometimes wonder how the Lord Jesus feels about us. He “came to set the captives free,” but when he looks at his people today and sees that most of them are captives like those in Egypt, how would he feel? The Israelites were comfortable in Egypt. Soon after coming out of Egypt, they started grumbling and demanded to return to Egypt. The amazing thing is that they were happy with living in bondage, for bondage can feel secure and comfortable. To them that was much safer than going out into a harsh and dangerous desert for an uncertain future in distant lands. They were not keen to leave Egypt, so God had to take them out. In Egypt they were living under bondage, and yes it was a hard life, but it was relatively safe and came with basic comforts and enjoyments such as their favorite leeks and garlic.

The mindset of the Israelites is not hard to understand. Consider this: You work hard at the office, don't you? It is a hard life. You work many hours a day, sweating it out. Your boss scolds you and you dare not talk back. You talk back in church but not at the office. When you talk back in church, you don't lose your bowl of rice. But if you talk back at the office, you lose your job. So you are well behaved in the office. You accept the bondage under your boss even if he is nasty and makes you work yourself into the ground. You

accept the situation, and might even enjoy the life of bondage. All this illustrates how we have come to be comfortable with bondage. But this type of bondage, which is basically external in nature (though not entirely unrelated to the spiritual type), is not our main concern here; I am only using it to illustrate how we can become accustomed to *spiritual* bondage, which is a much greater cause for concern.

If you are comfortable in bondage even to the extent that you are no longer aware of it, it is time to let God open your eyes to see your true spiritual condition.

God wants to set us free

God wants to set us free from every kind of bondage. The spiritual purpose of the physical healings recorded in the Bible is to tell us that God can set us free from any kind of oppression, physical or spiritual. The main purpose of the healings in the Bible is spiritual, not physical. But the pervasiveness of physical disease helps us to understand the seriousness of the problem. Physical illness is one of the great sources of suffering and oppression that human beings live under. In Canada where we have something like a social medical system, the cost of paying for this system is mind-boggling: a few hundred billion Canadian dollars a year. Sickness is a costly and terrible oppression. People are driven by their suffering to seek relief from disease, injury, pain, and disability. In Canada every time someone sees a doctor it costs the government an average of \$60. This is just for the

doctor to see you, and does not include medication and other things. Sickness is a dreadful bondage, so when Jesus healed the sick, the message being proclaimed is that God has sent Jesus to set you free from every bondage by God's saving power.

Breathless in Liverpool

One of the things that God taught me in England, after I had moved from London to Liverpool, was a new understanding of sickness and health. It was the Lord who led me to Liverpool, but it was not I who wanted to go there. There was a small handful of people in Liverpool who pleaded with me to go help them. After much reluctance, I went there as God led me. But as soon as I arrived in Liverpool, I fell sick. I had hardly set foot in Liverpool and I was already sick. I should mention that I was very fit and hardly knew what the word "sickness" meant. Since about the age of five, I had never been sick, and I don't remember even having had a headache. Medicine is one subject that never crossed my mind to study; I was simply too healthy to be interested in diseases. I didn't think of such things.

But I was amazed that as soon as I stepped into Liverpool, I got sick with serious breathing problems. But as soon as I left Liverpool, the problem would disappear. My wife was working in a hospital in London at the time, so I had access to a bronchial specialist there. He examined me and said, "There is nothing wrong with you." So I asked, "Why then

do I have these problems whenever I go to Liverpool?” He said there was a serious problem of industrial pollution in Liverpool, and I was allergic to it. And sure enough, when I went back to Liverpool I was sick right away.



One night I woke up after having slept only an hour or two because of severe difficulty in breathing. I was struggling for each breath of air, and was wondering, “What’s happening to me? How come I can’t breathe?” I didn’t want to wake up my wife because I felt that she needed her sleep, so I struggled with trying to breathe hour after hour. I had never known that one breath of air could be so precious.

When you are well, you can just relax and breathe without giving it another thought. But when you cannot get that one breath of air, let me tell you, the feeling of desperation is terrible. In the morning when my wife woke up and saw me lying there, I was blue in the face. She was shocked. She looked at me but I couldn't talk. She rushed off to look for a doctor. The doctor came and, of course, having been in Liverpool for many years, he knew right away what the problem was: an acute attack of asthma.

I didn't even know what had struck me, not having any previous experience of asthma. The doctor prescribed me some medication, and in a short time all the symptoms disappeared. He told me that if I didn't want to get chronic asthma, I would have to leave Liverpool as soon as possible. But I had already promised the church I would come here. How was I going to leave then? I had to stay on, which I saw as my obligation.

Later on, after I had lived five years in Liverpool, the church had been built up, and I had trained up someone to take over the work from me. But by then I was stuck with chronic asthma which I would never get rid of. I felt that this was a price I had to pay for serving the Lord, a taste of the fellowship of the Lord's suffering.

Yes, I could have saved my health. In fact my mother pleaded with me with tears in her eyes when she saw me going through an asthmatic attack. She said, "Please, please leave Liverpool." I said, "I can't leave the brothers and sisters, can I? Who is going to look after them?" In fact God



Eric Chang speaking at a conference in Peterborough, Canada, 1975

had made it clear to me that He had sent me to serve Him there for five years. After those five years were over, He sent me to Canada. By then the asthma had become chronic and permanent. I was granted the privilege of having a small share in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.

I recently read up on crucifixion and learned an aspect of crucifixion I had not known before: When a man is crucified, apart from all the agony of the nails going through the hands and feet, what it does to the whole body, not just the hands and feet, is even more agonizing. This is explained by a medical specialist who had written extensively on crucifixion. He says that as the person hangs on the cross in agony, it creates extreme trauma to the body which can cause fluid to build up in the area of the lungs around the heart. This may explain why both blood and water flowed out when Jesus' side was pierced with a spear (John 19:34). The fluid builds up in the chest such that it becomes hard to breathe because the fluid is pressing against the lungs.

That is an aspect of crucifixion I didn't know about, and as I was reading about it, I saw that this is exactly how you

feel when you are having an asthmatic attack. You just can't breathe; you gasp for air. Then I realized that for the Lord Jesus to say those seven sayings from the cross was in itself a wonder because you can hardly talk when you are out of breath, and it is exhausting to say anything. I realized that the suffering of asthma, of being unable to breathe, was an agony the Lord Jesus experienced on the cross. He bore our sufferings. He knows what they are like, and he did that to set us free.

The compassion of our Redeemer: Four cases of healing

So it was in Liverpool that I began to experience this matter of health and sickness, not only in myself but in at least four cases of healing that I would like to share with you as examples of the Lord's compassion. Why does God set us free? It is out of His compassion. What is compassion? If you have experienced it, you would know what it is. You feel for someone's suffering, someone's pain, someone's agony. Now why would we selfish people care about anyone else's suffering if it doesn't affect us? Compassion is something that God puts into our hearts (Romans 5.5); it is not natural to the human heart.

One Sunday evening, I received a phone call from someone in our church, and he said to me, "Please, can you quickly go to the hospital because my mother is there with a cerebral hemorrhage" (bleeding in the brain, commonly

called a stroke). He pleaded with me, “Will you please go to the hospital to see my mother?” I said, “Yes, I will.”

I arrived at the hospital and there was this middle-aged woman, Mrs. Tung Lau, lying there, paralyzed from the neck down with a stroke. I looked at her and asked, “Would you like me to pray for you?” She blinked her eyes, nodding slightly. She was lying on a trolley (called a *gurney* in North America), a stretcher with wheels, waiting to be put on a hospital bed. But they had already done some tests on her.

The normal procedure is to extract spinal fluid, which used to be a painful procedure (the ultrathin needles used today were not available at that time). A needle would be inserted between the vertebrae and into the spinal column to extract fluid; the presence of blood in the fluid is the evidence of a hemorrhage or stroke.

They confirmed that it was a stroke. The tests had been done, and she was lying on this trolley. That was when I prayed for her. After the prayer, she experienced immediate release.

Imagine being paralyzed by a stroke such that you can't move. Can physical bondage get much worse than that? If someone shackles your hands behind your back, you still can move, at least the rest of your body can. If someone tied your feet, you can still move the rest of your body. But to be paralyzed is to lose all freedom of movement. When I had prayed to God for her in Jesus' name, she had immediate release. In other words, she was healed.

But did the doctor believe it? “It can’t be! We just did a test and confirmed that it was a stroke. In fact she was paralyzed.” Yet she wanted to sit up. Can you imagine the scene at the hospital? The doctor said to her, “Don’t move, just lie there.” So the poor lady had to lie down. After a while she said to me, “I’m hungry. I would like to have some food.” I



This photograph of Mrs. Tung Lau (刘冬) was taken in Liverpool several decades ago at around the time she was healed of a stroke. Recently, in March 2017, four church workers, including a pastor, paid her a visit at her home. Auntie Lau, who by now was in her eighties, showed them this photo and confirmed to them that that the healing recounted by Eric Chang had indeed taken place.

asked the hospital staff, “Can you get her something to eat?” “Sorry, she is not allowed to eat.” So I got back to her, “Sorry, no food. The doctor doesn’t allow it.” So how long will she have to lie there? From Sunday night to Wednesday! Her back got sore from lying there. She was not allowed to move even though she could move.

So what happened on Wednesday? Because this was a big teaching hospital, on Wednesdays the professor would come with his students in tow, and they would go from bed to bed to examine the patients while the professor explains things to them. When they came to her bed,

they looked at her, examined her, and huddled together for a long discussion. They called in the doctor who was in charge and asked, “What is this woman doing here? There is nothing wrong with her.” “But we did all the tests on her; she had a stroke on Sunday.” So they looked at the test results which confirmed what the doctor said. Well, you can imagine that this was a real mystery to them. After further discussion among themselves, the poor woman, who had to endure several days of lying on her back, was finally told to go home.

All this happened a long time ago (over four decades ago as on this date of publication, 2017), and this dear sister in the Lord is still living in Liverpool today, now in her eighties. She had experienced God’s compassion and God’s power to set her free. That was one of my first experiences of healing. It was for me a remarkable example of God’s mercy and kindness.

There is another case where a woman in our church, a restaurant owner, called me and said, “My mother is in agonizing pain with a large tumor in her abdomen in the area of the womb, and she is due for surgery next week. The pain is unbearable and the painkillers don’t help much.” Many of you know that there are certain pains that not even the most powerful painkillers can suppress. Her mother was in terrible agony, so she asked, “Would you please come and pray for my mother?” I went with my coworker and we saw that she was suffering intense pain. She was not a believer at the time, so we explained to her that we would pray for her

but she must put her trust in God, because it is He who heals, not us. We prayed for her.

A few days later she came to our Sunday church service, full of joy. She was still scheduled to return to the hospital because it had been arranged for her to have surgery about two days later. It turned out that after we had prayed for her, she had no more pain. When she returned to the hospital, she was X-rayed and thoroughly examined, but the huge tumor found in her womb had disappeared into thin air, nowhere to be seen. They looked at the previous X-rays, and compared them with her new X-rays, and saw what had happened. How marvelous are the ways of the Lord, how great His mercy.

The third case has to do with a nurse in our church. In her hospital we had a Bible study for nurses, and she was one of the nurses who attended the Bible study regularly. She called me and told me that she had terrible pain in her upper lip, from a tumor that was growing in that area. There was a long list of people waiting for surgery, but because she was a member of the hospital staff, the hospital arranged for her to have an emergency operation the next day. But she told me, "The pain is driving me crazy. I can't wait until tomorrow. And the painkiller is not working." I asked her, "What does God tell you? Have you prayed about this?" She said, "Yes. I looked at the passage in the gospels where a leper said to Jesus, 'If you are willing, you can make me clean,' and Jesus said, 'I am willing,'" so the leper was healed" (Mt.8:2-4; Mk.1:40-42; Lk.5:12-13). I said to her, "If Jesus' word is

speaking to you in your present situation, I will come now and pray.”

I went to the hospital and prayed for her, and the pain disappeared in a flash, gone in an instant. Then the same thing happened as in the previous case: On the next day when she was to undergo surgery, they found that the tumor had vanished! Tumors are unpleasant and potentially dangerous lumps or growths of physical material. Anyone who works in a hospital would know that tumors don't just vanish into thin air. Tumors are not psychological or emotional states that can come one moment and vanish the next. How can tumors disappear instantly except by the power of God?

The next case involved my mother who was prone to migraines, which are extremely painful headaches that can last for days. I was visiting her at the time, and one day she had a migraine attack. When I looked at her, my heart couldn't take what I saw: a large vein on her forehead stood out. Tears were flowing from her eyes, and she sat down in agony. I said to God, “Lord, surely You don't expect me, Your servant, to sit here and watch my mother suffer like this and do nothing? I now call out to You that You in Your great mercy will be pleased to release her from her pain.” I asked her if she would like me to pray for her. She nodded.

At that time my mother hadn't yet known the Lord; she was still an unbeliever who hadn't shown much interest in spiritual things. In fact she seemed to be a hard-core unbeliever with whom it was almost impossible to talk about anything spiritual. But now she needed to be released from

this indescribable pain that was holding her in its agonizing grip. I prayed for her, and the pain went away instantly. It was gone in a flash. I still remember the astonishment on her face. I guess she thought I would pray for her as a formality to express comfort or sympathy to someone who is sick or in pain. What she didn't expect was the instant release by the power and mercy of the Lord. That was evidently the reason for the look of utter surprise on her face. One moment she was in agony, the next moment she was free. I think this was one of the things that had led her to come to God later.

I wish to make it clear that although I have exercised God's power to heal people by His grace, I am not a faith healer. What is the difference? A big difference! A faith healer is someone who makes healing the central element of his ministry. Healing is not the central element of my ministry; it has only a relatively small place in it.

The gospels do not give the impression that Jesus went around looking for people to heal, but that many who were suffering from all kinds of illness came to him for healing. His ministry was to proclaim the gospel and to teach the word of God; but out of compassion he healed those whom he met or who came to him as he was going from place to place in the course of his ministry. These acts of compassion served as signs or messages from God, to announce that His salvation is now made available in Christ to all men. For Jesus, the acts of healing were secondary to the ministry of preaching the message of life. And given human nature, sometimes the working of miracles can even have undesirable

results. When Jesus fed 5,000 hungry people in the wilderness out of compassion, the result was that they wanted to make him a king by force (John 6:15).

Bondage to insecurity?

Let us continue with this matter of being freed from all forms of oppression. Many things oppress us, including fear and insecurity. There is a long list of things that hold us in bondage. Fear, for example, is a very powerful element. Life insurance is a multibillion dollar industry. Without fear in the world, insurance companies would have almost no business. Of course “life” insurance cannot guarantee you protection from death. It only assures you that when you die, your family may get a million dollars or whatever it is you are insured for.

Fear of death can be a powerful presence in people’s hearts, as also the fear of losing the things precious to us. We insure our property; this is even compulsory in many countries. You have to insure your car, though the level of insurance (comprehensive or third party) is up to you; we usually prefer to buy higher insurance for an expensive car. If you drive an old car as I do, there is no point in going for maximum insurance; you take the minimum insurance required by law.

Losing my car

One Sunday evening in Liverpool after the church service, I went to the church center to do something for a few minutes, and parked my car just a few steps from the entrance. Ten minutes later I came out and the car was gone! I have already told you about the theft of my motorcycle but that was in London. By now I had graduated from a motorcycle to a car, and although it was old, it was in good condition. Ten minutes in the church center and the car disappeared! Now, how would you feel? Oh, the anxiety of having lost something! There is the fear that you might lose something, and when you have actually lost it, you feel great turmoil. But what bothered me was not the car but my Bible in the car. You may be puzzled because a Bible doesn't cost very much in a bookstore. Well, my Bible was priceless to me because it contains literally thousands of notes. On any one page, there could be dozens of handwritten notes. All the notes were numbered, linking them to Bible verses. It represented many years of hard work. They can take the car but give me back my Bible!

I still remember my daughter's surprise when she heard me say that. She was a little girl about 4 years old. When the car got stolen, she was shocked. How could anyone steal a car? To her, if somebody stole your teddy bear, it would be a heinous crime, but a car? It was mind-boggling to her. But when I told her, "Daddy is not concerned about the car but about the Bible," she was even more astonished. How much does a book cost in a bookstore? This kind of situation gives

us an opportunity to convey to our children the things that are of value to us. The Bible represented years of hard work. I had written so many notes in it over the years that there was no more space in the margins. So I had to get a separate expandable notebook. This notebook in its protective cover was almost as thick as the Bible itself. Since these external notes were linked to my Bible by numbers, you can see that if I lose the Bible, my notes would lose some of their usefulness. On this occasion my notebook was left at home.



Eric Chang with his wife Helen and their daughter Grace, 1972

I said to my daughter, “Let’s pray that Daddy gets his Bible back, all right?” She saw that in prayer I was more concerned about the Bible than the car. Children’s prayers

are effective; the Lord takes delight in listening to their prayers. They are uncomplicated, and much purer compared to grown-ups. They seem to have a more direct access to the Father. Their angels stand near to God our Father, as Jesus tells us (Matthew 18:10, cf. v.5).

A few days later I received a call from the police who said to me, "We have found your car. Come and collect it." I rushed to the police station looking for my Bible. To my great joy the Bible was there. The car had sustained minor damage but there was nothing serious.

God's Word: The truth that sets us free

I share this with you because the main secret of my ministry is the word of God. I don't worship the Bible, I worship God. But if you worship God, you will listen to His word. And to obey His word you will need to know what it teaches. Many Christians dare not launch out into the world by faith because they don't know God or His word. Jesus said, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (Matthew 22:29). I have spent many years of my life studying the Bible, and I mention this because many Christians, even if they have been in church many years, have a pitiful (and indeed inexcusable) lack of knowledge of God's word; consequently they are ineffective and fruitless in His church.

I recall three important periods in my life when the Lord put me aside to study His word. One was a time in China of

at least two years when I could do nothing but study the Bible. I delighted in the study of the Word. But initially I couldn't understand it. If you are a young Christian, you would know what I mean. You read the Bible and you don't know what it is saying. I was given a King James Version Bible which, because it was translated many years ago in 1611 and uses the English of that time, did not help to make things clearer. Although my English was not that bad, and I understood King James English not too badly, there were certain important points where the meaning did not make much sense to me.

I knelt before God and said, "Lord, I don't understand what Your word is saying, will You please open my understanding?" During those two years, a lot of time was devoted to studying the word of God. One of my joys is that after all these many years, I still have some of the notes I wrote at that time when I was a young Christian; and when I read them much later on, I could only say, "Surely I did not discover all that by myself. Clearly God was already teaching me in those days."

The second period was at the Bible Institute in Scotland where for two years I studied the word of God every day. We had classes in the standard subjects a Bible college would teach, but frankly I did not feel that I had benefited much from most of them. What I found most beneficial was the time I spent in my room studying the word of God for myself. That was another two years.

There was a third period when God put me aside in London to be quiet. This was after my time in a Bible college in London and the university years of academic studies. The Lord granted me three years after all those studies to again focus and meditate on the word of God day after day. During this time I added many more notes to my Bible as God led me deeper into His truth. The importance of the Bible, the word of God, lies in the fact that in it we find God's truth. And Jesus says, "The truth will set you free" (Jn.8:32)—the spiritual freedom which is experienced by those who follow him.

Read the testimonies: God can do the same for you

Let me share with you someone else's testimony which testifies to the same truth. I love to read testimonies because from them I learn about what others have experienced. I find it wonderful and refreshing to see what God is doing in the lives of other people.

I recently read the testimony of a Chinese brother who had gone through a lot of suffering in China for the Lord's sake. I am humbled when I read his story because I have not suffered as much for the Lord as this dear brother has. He had gone through many years of beating, abuse, and starvation. He was in his late twenties when he was first arrested and imprisoned. There was a pattern to this: He had been going from place to place to preach the gospel, and this led

to a cycle of being arrested and released, only to be arrested and released again—and beaten and humiliated.

One day God did something amazing for him: setting him free from prison. He had been locked up many times, but during this particular imprisonment, he had endured so much that I think God had decided it was enough, for he had endured as much as he could bear. Paul says:

God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted (or tested) beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted (or tested), He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. (1Corinthians 10:13)

In this brother's case, God *literally* provided “a way out”. This brother had been put in solitary confinement most of the time; that was because every time they put him in a prison cell with others, many of his cellmates got converted. Do you know what happened one day when he was alone in his cell? The chains suddenly fell off his wrists. God opened the doors, and this brother walked out of prison through seven sets of gates. They all opened up in front of him! So he experienced what the apostle Peter had experienced when the Lord did something similar for him, freeing him from his chains and opening the prison gates so that he walked out to freedom (Acts 12:7-10).

Yes, the Lord came to set the captives free, literally, physically and spiritually. In fact I spoke to this brother on the phone recently when he was visiting our Liverpool Church. The coworkers told me, “He is here in Liverpool.

Would you like to talk to him on the phone?” I said yes. So we had a conversation, and he invited me to visit him.

The liberation of Doctor Satorius

God saves us not only from external or physical bondage but more importantly from inner bondage. There is the case of a Swiss medical doctor whom I had come to know. When I visited him in Switzerland, he said to me, “I would like to tell you my story. I used to be an alcoholic. Even though I was a medical doctor, I started with a little bit of wine. But I turned out to be one of those who could easily get addicted to alcohol.” He became addicted and couldn’t stop drinking. He drank more and more until he was spending most of his income from his medical practice to pay for his addiction. In Switzerland, as in many countries, alcohol is heavily taxed and expensive.

One day he had no money to give his wife for the children’s daily needs. His wife said to him in the morning, “The children have no breakfast. Do you have money somewhere?” He said, “No, I don’t.” She said, “In that case, they will go hungry today.” He became very depressed because he felt that he was a complete failure in life. His three children were growing up, and all they could see was a father who was constantly drunk. He only barely managed to do his medical practice. Half the time he was unable to function properly, so his income was reduced while his expenses increased.

He said, “You know, the last straw came one day when my son came to me with a small cut on his hand. I looked at it and said to him, ‘That’s nothing. Go away. Don’t bother me with trivial things.’” The next day his son came down with a fever, and he realized that his son was suffering from septicemia (blood poisoning). The little cut was not as harmless as he had carelessly supposed. It had become infected, and now the boy was fighting for his life. So Dr. Satorius sank into a deep depression. He looked at his son and he said, “I can’t even look after my son; I can’t provide food for my children; my life is a complete mess; yet this bondage is something I cannot break.”

In his depression, he felt it was better to end it all. In Switzerland, all young and healthy men do military service (as in Singapore). Since he had been an army officer, he had a service pistol in his office. And he decided to use it, being unable to live with himself anymore. He simply could not overcome his addiction. He said, “I tried again and again to make resolutions.” He tried every technique he knew in medicine to break his bondage to alcohol, but he couldn’t. So he said, “The situation is hopeless; the bondage is unbreakable. I will take out my pistol and end it all.”

Dr. Satorius opened the drawer to take out his gun, and he saw a Bible lying on top of the gun. Switzerland has a state church and everyone is expected to be a Christian. If you are not a Christian, you will have nowhere to be buried, so you had better become a Christian, at least on paper, because it’s a serious problem to have no burial place when

you die. As a member of the state church, you would go through a ceremony called Confirmation at which you are given a Bible. So he had a Bible which he hadn't read. It was lying on top of his gun, so he had to remove it before he could get the gun. But since he was now holding the Bible in his hand, he thought, "I might as well read a verse before I pull the trigger." So he opened the Bible. And since he didn't know where to look, he flipped it open at random and took a look. There the words of the Bible hit him right in the eyes: "I am the Lord, your Redeemer" (Isaiah 60.16, "I, Yahweh, am your Savior, your Redeemer"). God was speaking directly to him through these words.

The word "redeemer" doesn't mean much to English-speaking people because it is a rare word in everyday English whether written or spoken, though it is found in most English Bibles. But the German term is very significant. In German, "your Redeemer" means "Your Liberator, the One who sets you free". His mouth dropped open in astonishment as the power of the words, "I, the Lord, am your Liberator," sank in. God was speaking straight to him through the Bible. He exclaimed, "That is exactly what I need: a Liberator."

He fell on his knees and said, "Lord, liberate me. Set me free from my bondage. I am destroying my family and now I am going to destroy myself unless You set me free." It was a cry from the heart. Remember, he was not religious. He didn't know how to pray; he only knew how to cry out from his heart. God spoke to him, "I am your Redeemer," and he

responded, “Lord, redeem me.” That is all a person in bondage has to do, indeed, that is all he can do. God doesn’t need you to make a speech; prayer is a cry from the heart for liberation; and God removes the chains and sets you free.

He said that something happened immediately: he felt the chains falling off. He said, “Suddenly I was free. I didn’t understand what was happening but I was free. I had struggled for months with this bondage and had always failed, yet in that split second I was free.” He doesn’t know how to understand it medically, for addiction requires a long treatment. How is it possible to be free in an instant? That is humanly impossible; yet he was now truly free. He said he stood up on his feet a new person; God had removed his addiction in one stroke!

But he got more than he had expected. He now had no desire for alcohol. In fact he was changed even more than that: God changed his life so fundamentally that he became a preacher. He didn’t quit medicine as far as I know, but wherever he went he testified to God. When I was visiting him, he took me almost daily to various meetings where he testified to what God had done in his life, and preached the gospel.

Some years later, I was in a town in northern Switzerland, and there I saw the name “Pastor Satorius” on the notice board in front of a church. Satorius is a rare name, so I thought, “Is there a connection between this Pastor Satorius and the Dr. Satorius I met many years ago in eastern Switzerland?” As it turned out, this Pastor Satorius was his

son who had blood poisoning. I later heard that he was a well-known pastor in Switzerland. Not only did God set Dr. Satorius free, He also set his family free. The whole family was redeemed. How wonderful are the ways of the Lord!

Dr. Satorius told me that the liberation was so complete that a glass of wine could be put in front of him and it would not tempt him. The desire for alcohol had gone completely. As a medical man, he understood what it meant. As a general rule, even if someone breaks free from addiction, he is still strongly tempted and is in constant danger of falling back into addiction. A drug addict is still drawn by the old addiction even after he had gone through the lengthy process of rehabilitation. He is always in danger of being tempted back to drugs. But the doctor said, “I have no more desire for it whatsoever; it has no attraction for me anymore.” Not only does God liberate us, but the liberation is complete—unless, of course, we choose to go back into bondage even though it has lost its power over us.

Will you let God set you free?

Today I have shared from my heart about this wonderful God who has called me to Himself and given me the privilege of knowing Him, a God of wonders and miracles. God does all these things not to impress anyone but to set us free. Today I hope you will think about the things that hold you in bondage. Bondage is a strange thing. Take our habits, for example. There are many bad habits from which people

need to be released. One could say that a bad habit is a form of addiction. Some people, for example, habitually respond to certain situations with fiery anger; they are easily provoked and they provoke others to tension and conflict. Moodiness can also be habitual, and it can result in constant misery. Negative mental attitudes become habitual, and it is essential that we be freed from these destructive habits—destructive to ourselves and to others.

I go back to the story I began with, of the shark that never grew beyond six inches—the king of the ocean that ended up being a midget in a fish tank. What kind of a person are you? Are you content with the comfortable bondage in which you live? And with your comfortable routines? Are we so comfortable with our self-serving lives that we don't care about the multitudes of people who also need to be set free from bondage and misery? Or will we say, "Lord, I want to know You more. I want to be set free from the habit of doing things my way; I want to attain the maximum of what You have called me to, so that on that day when I see You, I will not be ashamed but will rejoice; and then Your son Jesus would not have died for me in vain."



Eric and Helen Chang with the children of coworkers, Hong Kong, April 2009

— End —

