

How I Know GOD Answers Prayer

The Personal Testimony of One Life-Time

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Chapter Three -

"GO FORWARD ON YOUR KNEES" 1887-1894

"I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron" (Isaiah 45:2).

IN ATTEMPTING to record what prayer meant in our early pioneer days, other than purely personal testimonies must be given; for we were, as a little band of missionaries, bound together in our common needs and dangers by a very close bond.

In October, 1887, my husband was appointed by the Canadian Presbyterian Church to open a new field, in the northern section of the Province of Honan, China. We left Canada the following January, reaching China in March, 1888. Not till then did we realize the tremendous difficulties of the task before us.

Dr. Hudson Taylor, of the China Inland Mission, writing to us at this time, said: "We understand North Honan is to be your field; we, as a mission, have tried for ten years to enter that province from the south, and have only just succeeded. It is one of the most anti-foreign provinces in China . . . Brother, if you would enter that province, *you must go forward on your knees.*"

These words gave the key-note to our early pioneer years. Would that a faithful record had been kept of GOD's faithfulness in answering prayer! Our strength as a mission and as individuals, during those years so fraught with dangers and difficulties, lay in the fact that we did realize the hopelessness of our task apart from divine aid.

The following incident occurred while we were still outside Honan, studying the language at a sister mission. It illustrates the importance of prayer from the home base for those on the field.

My husband was finding great difficulty in acquiring the language; he studied faithfully many hours daily, but made painfully slow progress. He and his colleague went regularly together to the street chapel, to practise preaching in Chinese to the people; but, though Mr. Goforth had come to China almost a year before the other missionary, the people would ask the latter to speak instead of Mr. Goforth, saying they understood him better.

One day, just before starting as usual for the chapel, my husband said: "If the Lord does not give me very special help in this language I fear I shall be a failure as a missionary."

Some hours later he returned, his face beaming with joy. He told me that he realized most

unusual help when his turn came to speak; sentences came to his mind as never before; and not only had he made himself understood, but some had appeared much moved, coming up afterward to have further conversation with him. So delighted and encouraged was he with this experience that he made a careful note of it in his diary.

Some two months and a half later a letter came from a student in Knox College, saying that on a certain evening a number of students had met specially to pray for Mr. Goforth. The power of prayer was such, and the presence of GOD so manifestly felt, that they decided to write and ask Mr. Goforth if any special help had come to him at that time. Looking in his diary, he found that the time of their meeting corresponded with that time of special help in the language.

"I cannot tell why there should come to me
A thought of some one miles and years away,
In swift insistence on the memory,
Unless there is a need that I should pray.

We are too busy to spare thought
For days together of some friends away;
Perhaps GOD does it for us - and we ought
To read his signal as a sign to pray.

Perhaps just then my friend has fiercer fight,
A more appalling weakness, a decay
Of courage, darkness, some lost sense of right;
And so, in case he needs my prayers - I pray."

At last the joyful news reached us women, waiting outside of Honan, that our brethren had secured property in two centers. It would be difficult for those in the homeland to understand what the years of waiting had meant to some of us. The danger to those dear to us, touring in Honan, was very great. For years they never left us to go on a tour without our being filled with dread lest they should never return; yet the Lord, in His mercy, heard our prayers for them; and though often in grave danger, none received serious injury. This is not a history of the mission, but I cannot forbear giving here one incident illustrating how they were kept during those early days.

Two of our brethren, after renting property at a town just within the boundary of Honan, and near the Wei River, moved in, intending to spend the winter there; but a sudden and bitter persecution arose, just as they had become settled. The mission premises were attacked by a mob, and everything was looted. The two men were roughly handled, one being dragged about the courtyard. They found themselves at last left alone, their lives spared, but everything gone. Their position was serious in the extreme - several days' journey away from friends, with no money, no bedding, and no clothes but those upon them, and the cold winter begun.

In their extremity, they knelt down and committed themselves to the Lord. And according to His promise He delivered them out of their distresses; for even while they prayed a brother missionary from a distant station was at hand. He arrived unexpectedly, without knowing what had occurred, a few hours after the looting had taken place. His coming at such an opportune moment filled the hearts of their heathen enemies with fear. Money and goods were returned,

and from that time the violent opposition of the people ceased.

A few months after the above incident several families moved into Honan, and a permanent occupation was effected; but the hearts of the people seemed as adamant against us. They hated and distrusted us as if we were their worst enemies. The district in which we settled was known for its turbulent and anti-foreign spirit, and as a band of missionaries we were frequently in the gravest danger.

Many times we realized that we, as well as our fellow-workers at the other stations, were kept from serious harm only by the over-ruling, protecting power of GOD in answer to the many prayers which were going up for us all at this critical juncture in the history of our mission. The following are concrete examples of how GOD heard our prayers at this time.

We had for our station doctor a man of splendid gifts. He was a gold medallist, with years of special training and hospital experience, and was looked upon as one of the rising physicians in the city from which he came. Imagine his disappointment, therefore, when month after month passed and scarcely a good case came to the hospital. The people did not know what he could do, and moreover they were afraid to trust themselves into his hands. We, as a little band of missionaries, began to pray definitely that the Lord would send cases to the hospital which would open the hearts of the people toward us and our message.

It was not long before we saw this prayer answered beyond all expectation. Several very important cases came almost together, one so serious that the doctor hesitated for days before operating. When at last the operation did take place the doctor's hands were strengthened by our prayers, the patient came through safely, and a few days later was going around a living wonder to the people.

Very much depended upon the outcome of this and other serious operations. Had the patients died under the doctor's hands, it would have been quite sufficient to have caused the destruction of the mission premises and the life of every missionary. Three years later the hospital records showed that there had been twenty-eight thousand treatments in one year.

Again, we kept praying that the Lord would give us converts from the very beginning. We had heard of missionaries in India, China, and elsewhere, who had worked for many years without gaining converts; but we did not believe that this was GOD's will for us. We believed that it was His pleasure and purpose to save men and women through His human channels, and why not from the beginning? So we kept praying and working and expecting converts, and GOD gave them to us. The experience of thirty years has confirmed this belief.

Space permits the mention of but two of these earliest converts.

The first was Wang Feng-ao, who came with us into Honan as Mr. Goforth's personal teacher. He was a man of high degree, equal to the Western M.A., and was one of the proudest and most overbearing of Confucian scholars. He despised the missionaries and their teaching, and so great was his opposition that he would beat his wife every time she came to see us or listen to our message. But Mr. Goforth kept praying for this man, and using all his influence to win him for Christ.

Before many months passed a great change had come over Mr. Wang; his proud, overbearing manner had changed, and he became a humble, devout follower of the lowly Nazarene. GOD used a dream to awaken this man's conscience - as is not uncommon in China. One night he dreamed he was struggling in a deep, miry pit; but try as he would he could find no way of escape. When about to give up in despair, he looked up and saw Mr. Goforth and another missionary on the bank above him, with their hands stretched out to save him. Again he sought for some other way of escape; but finding none, he allowed them to draw him up.

This man, later on, became Mr. Goforth's most valued evangelist. For many years his splendid gifts were used to the glory of his Master in the work among the scholar class in the Changtefu district. He has long since passed to his reward, dying as he had lived, trusting only in the merit of JESUS CHRIST for salvation.

Another of the bright glints, in the darkness of those earliest days in Honan, was the remarkable conversion of Wang Fu-Lin. For many years his business had been that of a public story-teller; but when Mr. Goforth came across him he was reduced to an utter wreck through opium smoking. He accepted the Gospel, but for a long time seemed too weak to break off the opium habit. Again and again he tried to do so, but failed hopelessly each time.

The poor fellow seemed almost past hope, when one day Mr. Goforth brought him to the mission in his cart. The ten days that followed can never be forgotten by those who watched Wang Fu-Lin struggle for physical and spiritual life. I verily believe nothing but prayer could have brought him through. At the end of the ten days the power of opium was broken, and Wang Fu-Lin came out of the struggle a new man in CHRIST JESUS.

I shall have occasion to speak of this man again.

In all the cases of divine healing cited in this record it will be noted that GOD healed in answer to prayer either when the doctors had done all in their power and hope had been abandoned, or when we were out of reach of medical aid.

Soon after coming to China brother Hunter Corbett, one of the most devoted and saintly of GOD's missionaries, gave a testimony which later was used of GOD to save the writer from giving up service in China and returning home to Canada.

Dr. Corbett said that for fifteen years he had been laid aside every year with that terrible scourge of the East - dysentery; and the doctors at last gave a definite decision that he must return at once to the homeland and forsake China. But, said the grand old man: "I knew GOD had called me to China, and I also knew that GOD did not change. So what could I do? I dared not go back on my call; so I determined that if I could not live in China I could die there; and from that time the disease lost its hold on me."

This testimony was given over twenty-five years ago, when he had been almost thirty years in China! In January, 1920, when well-nigh ninety years of age, this beloved and honored saint of GOD passed to higher service.

For several years I had been affected just as Dr. Corbett had been, and each year the terrible disease seemed to be getting a firmer hold upon me. At last, one day my husband brought me the

decision of the doctors, that I should return home. And as I lay there ill and weak, the temptation came to yield. But, as I remembered Dr. Corbett's testimony, and my own clear call, I felt that to go back would be to go against my own conscience. I therefore determined to do as Dr. Corbett had done - leave myself in the Lord's hands - whether for life or for death. This happened more than twenty years ago, and since then I have had very little trouble from that dread disease.

Yes, the deeper the need, and the more bitter the extremity, the greater the opportunity for GOD to show forth His mighty power in our lives, if we but give Him a chance by unswerving obedience at any cost. **"In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul"** (Psalms 138:3).

During our fourth year in China, when we were spending the hot season at the coast, our little son, eighteen months old, was taken very ill with dysentery. After several days' fight for the child's life came the realization, one evening, that the angel of death was at hand.

My whole soul rebelled; I actually seemed to hate GOD; I could see nothing but cruel injustice in it all; and the child seemed to be fast going. My husband and I knelt down beside the little one's bedside, and he pleaded earnestly with me to yield my will and my child to GOD. After a long and bitter struggle GOD gained the victory, and I told my husband I would give my child to the Lord. Then my husband prayed, committing the precious soul into the Lord's keeping.

While he was praying I noticed that the rapid, hard breathing of the child had ceased. Thinking my darling was gone, I hastened for a light, for it was dark; but on examining the child's face I found that he had sunk into a deep, sound, natural sleep, which lasted most of the night. The following day he was practically well of the dysentery.

To me it has always seemed that the Lord tested me to almost the last moment; then, when I yielded my dearest treasure to Him and put my Lord first, He gave back the child.

While writing the above I came across an extract from the *Christian* of March 12, 1914, in which the editor said:

"Speaking at the annual meeting of the Huntingdon County Hospital, Lord Sandwich referred to the power of spiritual healing, and premising that the finite mind cannot measure the power of the infinite, said he looked forward to the day when the spiritual doctrine of healing and the physical discoveries of science will blend in harmonious combination, to the glory of GOD and the benefit of humanity."

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