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## *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: An Adoption Story*

/ In the Shadow of "Middle-aged Death"

/ Mindy's Story of Redemption

/ MARITAL HARMONY:

Advice for Christian Women

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# *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made: An Adoption Story*

by Cindy Lewis Dake

I'll always cherish six words from someone I had only met a few minutes before: "Would you like to hold him?"

The words were spoken by a gentle-voiced, bright-eyed, 17-year-old girl, and she was holding the tiniest baby I'd ever seen in real life. While my

mind and heart swirled with a million thoughts and emotions, nothing was louder than the quiet question she asked: *Would you like to hold him?*

“Oh, yes,” I said tentatively. “Can I?”

Certainly my answer won’t go down in the annals of history as a very poetic response, but they were genuine. Nothing in the world mattered except what was happening between me, that baby, and his mom. If that ten seconds in my life were to be translated into a movie segment, we’d open with a soft-focus image of a young woman, switch to a not-so-young woman (that would be me), then zoom in for an extra close-up of a tiny human wrapped in soft, Winnie the Pooh blankets.

It was a moment that was unscripted, unrehearsed, and raw with emotion. But in the scope of time and eternity, it was all very planned by the Father.

## The Grey Zone of Waiting

A few months before, my husband and I had marked our ninth wedding anniversary, as well as our ninth Christmas where there were no little “stockings hung by the chimney with care.”

For five years, we had been stuck in the gray zone of infertility. We pursued some fertility measures for a few years before moving on to adoption. We had always been

interested in adoption, although we thought it would be a matter of “birth a few children and then adopt one or two.” Young and in control of our destiny (or so we thought), we imagined our parenting timeline would happen exactly how and when we wanted it to occur. Suffice it to say, it didn’t. Now, five years later, adoption was our only option.

For about a year, we investigated international adoption. We thought that was the best plan because there would be no contact with birth parents. The parents’ rights would have been terminated and the children would be wards of the state. At that point in our journey, it seemed like one less thing to worry about. A baby with no strings attached.

We would have stayed on track for an international adoption except God nudged us toward domestic adoption. Nudged? More like “lovingly shoved.” The first nudge came when the country we were interested in adopting from began to put adoptions on hold. A complex process that usually took a few years could now take twice that long. I was already in my mid-30s and didn’t want to be 40 before I became a first-time mom!

Another nudge was my husband’s new job moved us back to our home state of Texas where we were closer to family and old friends. One of those old friends had started an adoption agency to minister to young

women who found themselves with an unplanned pregnancy. As we attended a seminar for prospective adoptive parents, we learned a few things about the importance of birth parents in an adopted child's life.

A counselor explained that when a child grows up with no idea of his or her birth family, sometimes it can cause the child to struggle with their own identity. The child might fantasize that their birth family was famous or rich or even royalty. But sometimes, the child will wonder if they were not wanted, questioning why their birth family gave them away.

The counselor explained that even though building a relationship with a child's birth family might not be what we had originally envisioned, it could be the very best thing for a child's stability, growth, and emotional development. Secure in the love of his adoptive parents, he would know some basics of his birth story so it would never be "the great unknown" to him.

As my husband and I compared notes, we realized we knew of no one who was adopted and had known their birth parents. When we were growing up, it just wasn't done that way. Birth records of adopted children were sealed, and it took legal action to open them up. Part of our uneasiness was simply because we had no examples of what a

birth family and adoptive family relationship could look like. But that was about to change.

In early March 1998, a phone call brought the nudge we had been praying for: "A birth mom has chosen you."

## Finding Common Ground

A few days later, I was face to face with a stranger who was considering giving her most precious possession, her baby, to our forever care. This teenage mom probably didn't realize I was twice her age. (I sincerely hoped she didn't.) It wasn't lost on me that when I was a senior in high school, she was an infant in her mother's arms. When I was graduating from college, she was probably playing in a sandbox somewhere. How could two women in such separate stages of life ever find common ground?

That common ground became apparent: the welfare of her child. She loved him immensely but recognized that she could not provide him with the medical care and stability he needed. Her motivation was never to cast off her firstborn because of a lack of maternal commitment, but quite the opposite, she wanted to find the arms to place him in where she knew he would be loved, cared for, safe, and secure. Her maternal love called her to sacrifice her bond for his good.



To be on the receiving end of that sacrifice is a gift that defies explanation. When she placed him in my arms, I felt an immediate connection with her baby boy. Though he wasn't born from me physically, he was, in that moment, born in my heart.

"He's so beautiful," I managed to say. I couldn't take my eyes off him. He had been born three months premature, and at our first meeting, he was four months old, weighing just over five pounds, less than what a full-term baby usually weighs at birth. Oh, he came with strings attached—two monitors and an oxygen tank with yards of tubing attached to a nasal canula. But he was perfect. And we were so willing to be his adoptive parents.

## You've Got Mail

If time seemed slow in those first minutes when our son was placed in my arms, then the days, months, and years that followed have been marked by how quickly they have passed. Like all parents, I've wished time would slow down every now and then. We've built our lives as a family of three (plus two dogs), and we've cherished the innumerable blessings of loving this boy we named Ryan.

From his earliest days, we told Ryan about his birth mom. Like you would do with any child, you tell them what is age-appropriate for them to know. He has grown up with the awareness that he is adopted and that he is doubly loved by two families.





As Ryan grew, so did our connection with his birth mom. At first, we kept in touch with handwritten letters, cramming envelopes full of pictures to show how he was growing. In return, she mailed us letters and pictures.

Letters transitioned to emails when “you’ve got mail” was a welcome announcement from your computer. We eventually figured out how to attach photos to our emails. Then, smartphones came along and we started texting each other more frequently than we ever wrote.

Even though we are separated by three states and 850 miles, the sense of sharing daily life is more real than ever before. In a cyber second, we can send updates, prayer requests, and photos.

His birth mom married and has a family of her own—a husband, two sons, and now a grandson, too. As “boy moms,” we text and share the ups and downs of raising boys. “He’s playing video games too much!” “He’s growing so fast I can’t keep him in blue jeans!” “Pray for him today; he’s got a test in math.” We now have more in common than ever before.

## Two Families Meet

After Ryan graduated from high school, we planned a vacation, and we made sure to coordinate a time to see his birth mom and her family. We were all excited—and just a bit nervous—about our first in-person meeting in 18 years.

Just like that day back in March 1998,

my view looked a little soft-focus around the edges as I watched our son walk up to his birth mom and embrace her, wrapping his arms around her, and watching her return the embrace with a depth of feeling only a birth mom can know.

Our families ate lunch together, walked around a park on a beautiful, sunny day, took lots of pictures, and ended the day at an ice cream parlor. Even though his birth mom was the only one we had ever met before, there was a comfortableness in our visit that seemed like we'd all known each other for longer. I like to think it's because God has woven these two families together for the past 23 years, and even though we've been geographically distant, we have a shared history, a cherished history.

## No Missing Pieces

Back in the routines of our daily lives, his birth mom and I keep in touch, and often our texts turn to expressions of deep gratitude—mutual gratitude—for the role that each of us has played in the other person's life. There's still a wonder in it for me – that we could be the recipients of such sacrifice and blessing. I can never thank her enough for entrusting him to our care, so I intentionally thank her frequently. I always want her to know that we don't take for granted what she gave us.

In return, she has blessed me: "Thank

you again for loving Ryan. I can't imagine him anywhere else. He was the missing piece to your life."

She is right, of course. He was the missing piece that made our family complete. He made us parents, and we are ever thankful. But God knew that she and her family were the other pieces that we needed to make our lives complete. And so our loving Father wove our stories together, knit them together as only He can, into an adoption story that is fearfully and wonderfully made.

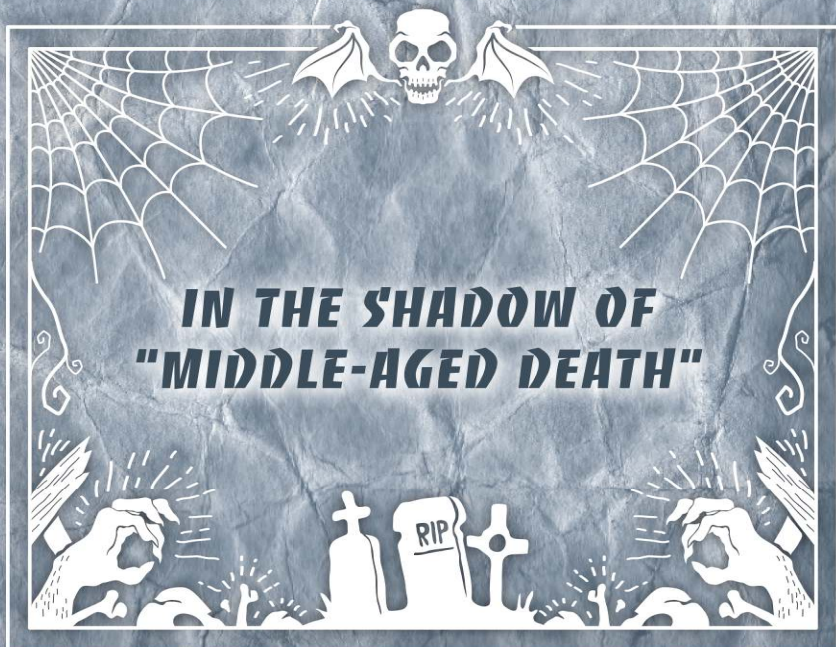
*"For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb... I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made... All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be" (Psalm 139:13–14a, 16b). ■*



*Cindy Lewis Dake writes from Arlington, Texas, where she is a picky editor, a mediocre gardener, and a newbie*

*cheesemaker. She and her husband, Edward, recently celebrated Ryan's graduation from college. Cindy loves leading women to dive into God's Word through Read & Reflect Bible Studies, available for free download at [cindydake.com](http://cindydake.com). Follow her on [Instagram@cindydake](https://www.instagram.com/cindydake).*





by Abraham Zhang

In the summer of 1983, my hometown in the Hubei province of China was flooded by the Yangtze River. After almost drowning in the much-polluted flood waters and being resuscitated by my father, I fell ill with a lingering diarrhea. Later, I was diagnosed with chronic hepatitis B, a dreadful disease caused by the hepatitis B virus attacking the liver. In acute hepatitis B cases, an infected person quickly recovers and develops immunity. But in my case, the illness lingered beyond six months, and my immune system could no longer defend against the virus. I had all the common symptoms, including

fatigue, weight loss, loss of appetite, yellow skin, and liver malfunction, which meant my liver was constantly being damaged.

Chronic hepatitis B was not uncommon in my hometown in those years. Knowledge of its three developmental stages circulated widely: chronic hepatitis B, cirrhosis, and liver cancer. As a child, I heard several sad stories of lives lost to hepatitis B. In fact, one of my uncles, my father's only sister's husband, died at age 30+ due to liver cancer caused by chronic hepatitis B. I still remember the heartbreaking cries of my aunt



and three young cousins at my uncle's funeral. Consequently, the shadow of "middle-aged liver cancer" was constantly in the back of my mind.

## The Book of Fortune

In the summer of 1984, a year after the flood, two fortune tellers from the Jiangxi province visited my village. Concerned about my state of health, my parents paid them a good amount of money in hopes of knowing my future. The fortune tellers took information about the exact time of my birth and left. Several months later, they returned with a book for me called "Liu Nian," which means in English "passing years." It was basically a year-by-year prediction of my future life. Each year covered two pages, divided into 12 small boxes, one for each month in the year. Each day of the month had a brief prediction for the day, with such words or short phrases as *danger*, *bloody*, *happy*, and *fortunate*.

Somehow, such "Liu Nian" books were quite accurate in their predictions. One of my neighbors paid for the same kind of book for his young adult son. One day, his son went out to do farming and was killed when his agricultural vehicle overturned. After the accident, the father opened his son's "Liu Nian" book and found the word for that day was "foot long fish in inch-deep water," a figure of speech commonly used for a

dangerous state that requires being absolutely still from activities in order to survive. My neighbor deeply regretted that he had not consulted the book earlier in order to protect his son from the accident. Learning from this, my parents were very vigilant to consult the book in advance and take action before any of my "dangerous" days. For example, once, the "Liu Nian" stated a certain day as bloody, so my parents spread eel's blood on my face, thinking to manipulate its fulfillment. They ordered me not to go out of the house but to stay on a large bamboo bed. Somehow, a loose stick of bamboo from the bed scratched one of my legs and my skin bled. Experiences like this caused my family to believe that a person's fate was predetermined, but through knowledge of it, one could manipulate its realization in terms of how it would exactly play out.

Due to the astonishing accuracy of its predictions about my life, the "Liu Nian" was the only book that I brought with me when I left my hometown for university study in Beijing. From time to time, I would read it to learn what was going to happen. Especially on the days which were marked as *unfortunate* or *dangerous*, I would make a conscious effort to avoid misfortune. The book was helpful to me in this aspect, but its accuracy and a prediction concerning the year 2020 (when I would turn 42) constantly

frightened me. Although I couldn't figure out what exactly would happen by the rather vague predictions for that year, it was obvious the year would be life threatening, or almost certainly that I wouldn't survive it—there were strange figures of “horses” being upside down and many other bad predictions. Because of having hepatitis B virus in my body, I believed the predictions meant that liver cancer would end my life that year.

## Living the Nightmare of Fear

At the university, I did reasonably well, but my hope of a romantic relationship for marriage was destroyed. My relationship with a girl ended shortly after her father scolded her, “Do you want to become a widow at age 30?” It was so painful to feel rejected due to the hepatitis B virus in my body.

Not being able to get over the fear of “middle-aged death,” I sought counseling services offered by the university's mental health support office. A long conversation with a psychologist, unfortunately, did not help deliver me from the fear. I still felt no hope of living beyond age 42. I started to self-study western philosophies, trying to find out why I was in this world and what meaning life had. Philosophers, however, didn't provide a satisfying answer to these questions. Later, I realized that philosophers were often the most depressed of people, with

some of them becoming insane or killing themselves in their search for answers to the same questions I had. The traditional Chinese philosophers I studied were far less concerned about these questions. They cared more about how to live this life, which didn't appear to be relevant to my inner struggle and fear. I didn't want to die at 42, but I believed that was my fate because of my hepatitis B condition and the accurate “Liu Nian” book.

At the end of my undergraduate study, I started to feel abnormally tired. A blood test showed that the hepatitis B virus had become active again. During 40 days of hospitalization, my big brother came to Beijing to look after me in my illness, for which I am still very grateful. After medical treatments, the liver function became normal again, and I was discharged from the hospital. Since there is no cure for chronic hepatitis B and it was still active in my liver, a doctor advised me to begin using anti-hepatitis B drugs. I tried everything available on the market, but none was effective in suppressing the virus. One drug, which I endured for half a year, caused severe side effects, including insomnia, hair loss, extreme fatigue, appetite loss, and weight loss. It was a nightmare! I couldn't sleep well and often cried quietly to myself in a dormitory shared with several roommates, finding my pillow soaked with tears the next morning. “Why is this my

fate?" I asked in desperation, but nobody could give me an answer. Fortunately, after struggling for a year, I became "clinically cured," which meant the virus was no longer active in my body although still present in the liver.

## Providence or What?

As I considered future job opportunities, I knew that after health screening, hepatitis B carriers were often rejected by employers. Some graduating classmates would get someone else to take a blood sample on their behalf, but I didn't want to do that. Because of this discrimination, I decided to go overseas to a more developed country that had better protection for the employment rights of hepatitis B carriers.

After tough months of studying for the GRE and TOFEL exams, I got a scholarship offer from Singapore for its dual master's program between the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) in the U.S. I flew to Singapore in July 2002 and started my first semester at NUS. Immediately, I was drawn to a Chinese Bible study group on campus due to my interest in philosophies. I had absolutely no interest in becoming religious but thought it was necessary to learn about foreign cultures and belief systems. As the semester progressed, I continued to attend the Bible study, eventually

becoming the only non-Christian left in the weekly Bible study meetings. At the end of the semester, the group leader connected me with another Chinese Christian fellowship group at Georgia Tech, where I would be going soon. So, after landing in the U.S., I continued weekly Bible studies on campus. I had lots of debates with the new Bible study leader, and I often challenged the teachings in the Bible. The Bible study leader and other Christians were very kind to listen to me and never made me feel awkward for my different opinions. Therefore, I continued to attend the weekly Bible study meetings until I left the U.S. to return to Singapore.

Immediately after returning to the NUS campus, I bumped into an older friend who had been in the same Bible study group I was in a year earlier. He had become a Christian and seemed quite different from the person he used to be—very joyful and enthusiastic about sharing his newly-found faith in Jesus Christ. Though his enthusiasm felt socially awkward, I secretly longed for the kind of joy he displayed in his life. At that time, I was still a very heavy-hearted person and seldom had joy in daily living.

For about three months, I followed this brother to another Bible study group and attended Sunday worship services in his church. After more debates on Christian faith, I thought it was time to make a decision. I already



knew enough about Christianity. Since nobody could prove God to me, I decided I shouldn't believe in the Bible and in Christianity, although they had many moral and emotional benefits for life. I should only believe in what could be proven truthful. Therefore, I decided to say "no" and "goodbye" to Christianity. I wrote an email to all my Christian friends to thank them for their friendship and told them that I would stop Bible study and church activities because nobody could prove God is true. The email was sent out on the 12<sup>th</sup> August, 2003. On the 24<sup>th</sup> August, 2003, however, I had a totally unexpected personal encounter with God alone in my bedroom before the dawn. I had to acknowledge God's existence and submit my life to him. For a detailed account of my conversion, please refer to my other story entitled "A Glimpse of Hell" at <http://ccmusa.org/read/read.aspx?id=chg20140104>.

Once I became a Christian, I found that the "Liu Nian" book suddenly lost accuracy in its predications. Still consulting the book every few weeks, I shared my puzzled heart with my pastor. He told me to throw the book away, pointing out that God forbids fortunetelling in the scriptures and consulting them is believing in Satan, who is behind them. The "Liu Nian" book can be accurate in predictions because Satan, who is evil, can control our lives and will ultimately lead us to destruction. My pastor

told me that because I had received salvation through Jesus Christ, my life was now in God's hands, no longer in Satan's hands—the default place of every person due to original sin. I rejoiced to learn that my name was now in God's Book of Life! So I threw away the "Liu Nian" book as rubbish and felt greatly relieved.

As a new believer, I had an immense hunger for the Bible. I started the habit of reading the Bible and praying every morning. The Lord was close to me, often giving me directions and wisdom that I needed for the day ahead. But deep in my heart, I still feared about my future because of the "middle-aged death" complex that had developed over the years. I prayed earnestly for God's healing to clear the hepatitis B virus from my liver. I attended healing services offered by some famous preachers/pastors. I was often the first one to respond to the altar call for divine healing. But my blood tests again and again showed no change—I was still a hepatitis B carrier. However, God completely removed my fear before removing the virus from my body. One day in my devotional time, I read: *"Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation"* (Psalm 91:14–16).



It was as if these three verses jumped out of the Bible and spoke to me, becoming God's personal promise to me. On that day, I determined to love the Lord wholeheartedly so that I could claim this precious, personal promise of long life. Since then, the fear that troubled me for many years was completely dismissed. No amount of so-called positive thinking—which I had tried hard in the past—was able to give me relief from the fear. Counseling by an experienced psychologist had not changed my negative mentality. But the power of the holy scripture in the Bible and the Holy Spirit completely set me free when I put my trust in the Almighty Lord.

## He Makes Everything New

In July 2005, I came to know a godly and beautiful girl who later became my wife. I fell in love with her, but I was so afraid that after learning I was a hepatitis B carrier, she would reject me. As we saw each other more and more often, I struggled desperately within myself. "How can I be less honest after becoming a Christian?" I asked myself. So, I decided before continuing the relationship to tell her my hidden health issue. After a long telephone conversation, I shut myself in my bedroom and knelt before the Lord in prayer. I opened my Bible and read the verses from my devotional that morning: *"At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship*

*and said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised'"* (Job 1:20-21).

I just couldn't hold back my tears, "Yes, Lord. I surrender to you whatever the outcome will be." In my heart, I accepted the possible outcome that I would remain single for life because of the health problem.

Thankfully, this young lady whom I loved was a woman of faith and prayer. The Lord gave her peace to start a relationship with me. Before we got married, she got a hepatitis B vaccine, and today, we have four healthy boys. As the Lord said to the apostle Paul, *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"* (2 Corinthians 12:9). Praise be to the Lord Jesus, who lives forever and whose power has no limit.

In 2013, I did a blood test in Singapore as part of the New Zealand immigration requirements. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw the test report—the hepatitis B virus was clear from my body and I had antibodies! I shared the unbelievable report with my big brother who is a medical doctor. He asked me to repeat the same blood test after a month. The result was the same, and the antibodies had become even stronger! My brother said this was a miracle, as the chance of such a

change is very low. Part of the credit goes to my wife for her emphasis on healthy lifestyle choices for our family, but it's ultimately God's healing in response to our prayers. The Lord was never too late to deliver me from the virus, although I waited for 30 years!

In this 2021 Easter weekend, I am writing this testimony to give praise to my Lord Jesus Christ. I passed the "intimidating year of age 42" last year. I declare that He is the Lord of my life and my future is secure in Him. Jesus is alive! He is more than a good teacher or a prophet. He is the son of the living God, who died on the cross for the atonement of my sins. He rose from the dead and now sits at the right hand of the Father interceding for me. His deliverance didn't come as quickly as I wished, but He was not too late to accomplish His purposes for my life. In fact, He used both trials and waiting to prepare my heart to be ready for knowing Him. He brings forth goodness out of our sufferings according to Romans 8:28, *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*

Once I asked the Lord in a prayer: "Lord, where were you when I was undergoing tremendous suffering?" The image of Jesus hanging on the cross immediately came into my

mind. I became speechless and didn't need any more answer. The crucifixion of Jesus transcends time and space—it was for me and relevant to my sufferings. We live in a fallen world where pain and suffering is inevitable, and Jesus can empathize with us because He suffered more than all our suffering. Chronic hepatitis B was an awful life experience, but God used it for good in my life. The difficult years made me think more lightly of the fleeting pleasures of the flesh and ambitions in this temporary world. The pain drove me to seek for truth and for what really matters in eternity. I found that Jesus is *"the way, the truth, and the life"* (John 14:6), and I now have the greatest blessing one can ever have—knowing the Lord, the creator of the universe, the giver of life, and having a personal relationship with Him through His Son Jesus Christ.

May you experience His comfort when you read this testimony. May you hold fast to Him and keep your hope in His unfailing love because: *"He cares for you"* (1 Peter 5:7). ■



*Dr. Abraham Zhang is married to Kaili Chen Zhang. They are both university lecturers in the UK. They are blessed to have four boys—Joseph, Daniel, Jordan and Enoch.*

An illustration in the top right corner featuring a cluster of heart-shaped balloons in various shades of blue and white. The balloons are tied together by strings that converge at a small, light blue gift box with a white bow on top. Several individual heart-shaped balloons are also floating separately around the main cluster. The background is a soft, light blue with a bokeh effect of out-of-focus white hearts.

by Keyi Zhou

# Mindy's Story of Redemption

*The winter night was freezing cold; two friends shared a bed, just like many good friends do on a girls' night. Hiep, a friend from church, had invited Mindy for a sleepover.*

*"I see you are cold. I can hold you," Hiep said, embracing Mindy with her warm arms.*

*A feeling of home rushed over Mindy's body. She felt Hiep's strong heartbeat, the warmth from her chest, the closeness and safeness.*

*"I just kissed her! I couldn't control myself!" Mindy told Carla, her*

*Christian life coach. "I was ashamed and confused. I had so much pain inside me."*

## Her Life as a Child

Mindy grew up in a farmer's family in a small village in Sichuan Province, China, living most of the time with her mother and younger brother. Her father was around very little, for he had to go to the city to earn extra bread. Like thousands of Chinese village families, the pittance from farming would not suffice the family.

Mindy was always a good girl. A

picture of her in her school uniform shows a smiling face like the shiny stars of a summer sky. Shy and obedient, she made fair grades in school while taking care of her younger brother and helping out at home. Her mother, an introverted, hardworking woman, had limited education. With a husband who only came home for the spring festivals and stayed for a month maximum, she did her best to attend to her little family's need for food and shelter—but love remained unexpressed with words or affection. Mindy often felt misunderstood and rejected and learned to keep her emotional needs to herself.

Mindy's story was the story of many other village girls with the same destiny. Growing up under harsh conditions, they had cuts on their fingers from doing chores in the bitterly cold winters. Their future consisted of a middle school degree, getting married, raising kids, and repeating the destiny of many former generations.

## Hearing the Gospel

However, Mindy decided that she wanted something bigger. After graduating from a teacher training school, she entered a college in Chengdu, the biggest city of Sichuan province. She was still shy and quiet most of the time, but life started to unfold itself.

Learning English was an exciting way to tap into the new world and going to English Corner was on all the college kids' to-do-list. At the English Corner, she met Stephanie, a woman from the Philippines, who really listened to her. Feeling understood and connected, she was able to share her thoughts and feelings with Stephanie. For Mindy, it was like a bird, flying up high, not fearing the unknown world or unexpected danger lurking in the corner. She developed a friendship with no strings attached—something she had never known before.

Stephanie was a Christian. She and her friends came to Chinese schools under the identity of students, but their real mission was to share the gospel of Christ. Hearing the name of Christ, but not understanding the faith, Mindy saw a door opening in





front of her and wanted to find out if it was really paradise on the other side of the door. Listening to the radio one day, she stumbled across a radio station—Liangyou (meaning “a good friend”)—which was based in Hong Kong.

“I thought it was a western religion, so I was amazed that somewhere in China there was a radio station telling people about Christ,” she said. Like a thirsty deer lost in the woods, she heard the sound of a flowing stream. She kept on listening and contemplating faith. Crying out for answers, she wrote down her questions and emailed the station. She was eager for a Savior! Finally, she prayed and told Christ that she was willing to follow His footsteps, from this life till forever. Asking around, she found a church (made up mostly of people older than she) and staggered along the road of faith. With no one to teach her how to study the Bible and pray, she remained a spiritual baby for years.

After graduating from college, Mindy moved to Guangzhou, a big city in Southeast China. There she met Christians her age who were enthusiastic about discipleship training. With the closeness of this group, Mindy started to grow in spirit, even preaching the gospel to others.

It was here that Mindy met Hiep, the woman she kissed uncontrollably.

## Her Biggest Struggle

After the kiss, Mindy began to cry. Hiep also panicked and felt confused, saying she could help Mindy by praying and reading the Bible with her. This offer of goodwill led them into a deeper trap, and Hiep admitted that she had feelings for females, which started in college. Together, Mindy and Hiep shared the struggle with the group leader and with Stephanie, and they were advised to go to different groups. However, because the pain of separation was too strong, they decided to deal with it in their own way—to stay in the same group, to serve the Lord together, and keep each other close.

However, things did not get better for Mindy. The struggle was so strong that her body weight dropped drastically because she had no desire for food. Her heart broke, the sky turned grey, and tears were her only companion on many dark nights. She lost her joy inside.

“I couldn’t tell others that I led a double life, and I could not forgive myself. I loved Hiep, and I was so scared of losing my relationship with her. I wondered if I was a lesbian, and if I was really saved.”

The pressures from home to rush her into marriage, plus doubting her identity and salvation, gave Mindy the feeling that something which

used to give her life meaning was withering, approaching her with the wand of death. All she ever wanted was to be loved, which she felt deprived of since she was a little girl. But Mindy kept praying, and one day she realized how foolish it was to hope to get the most precious but rare thing—love—from the wrong place!

“In my pride, I believed I was a good person. In spite of my struggles, I believed I was better than many people in the church. They struggled with drugs, depression, and marital problems, and I told myself that these things were much worse than mine. But finally, I saw that I was indeed a wreck—and I needed God!”

### A Change of Heart

Mindy started to look at the world and other people differently, with a kind of compassion she never knew before. It was not her joy but her tears that connected her with the brokenness of others, the sorrow leading her into a deeper love. Hiep also went through many struggles, and both girls saw the mistake of staying close in the same group. They continued to pray that their friendship would be holy.

Over the next few years, Mindy’s life continued to change. She served God with enthusiasm, led Bible studies, and shared the good news with people she met. God had answered her prayer—the light inside her

returned. Then in 2016, she met Paul, an American man whom people said would be a good match for her. He was a nice person, but something inside Mindy pushed him away. The confusion from her relationship with Hiep had not completely dispersed, and the pain returned, telling her that she needed a deeper level of healing.

### Ask, and You Shall be Given

Mindy began taking a course called Conscious Dating, and the Lord brought Carla, a Christian life coach, into her life. With Carla’s help, she was led to the discovery of her vision, her life purpose, and her preferences of people. To her surprise, a tightness in her chest told her that she had not completely recovered from her relationship with Hiep, which at this point seemed healthy and normal. Her heart was telling her she still lusted after the love she had felt for Hiep, with inappropriate subconscious expectations.

When learning that Hiep was going to get married soon, Mindy was able to identify the fear that arose in her heart. She recognized that she had made her relationship with Hiep an idol. Just as the Bible says: *“The sorrows of those who substitute other gods for the Lord will increase. The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply”* (Psalm 16:4). She had made Hiep a god in her life!

With gentle questions and comforting words from Carla, Mindy went inside and explored the darkness. This time, she was not alone and was not intimidated. She knew that only God could heal the wounds and emptiness in her heart. She wanted to know God's true love—and to love others with His love.

## A Future and a Hope

Mindy made the difficult decision to break up with Paul, which led to more pressure to marry from her family and friends. Several of her friends got married that year and neighbors from the village constantly asked Mindy's mother when Mindy would be getting married. When they got the answer, they would give her the "shame look"—picturing a horrible old woman who did not marry in her proper age. With growing anxiety, Mindy's mother kept nagging, and Mindy felt suffocated by the pressure.

"I felt like a failure. I was lonely and hoped that I could find a boyfriend," Mindy admitted. But deep inside, she knew that no person could give her the love she really desired. She kept praying and God worked in her heart—peace descended. She used to believe that God would love her only if she was a "good Christian." Now she knew that no matter what she was like, or how difficult her struggles were, God's love was truly unconditional and everlasting, just as the apostle Paul said: *"But God*

*demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8).

Mindy's testimony to others is: "Don't quit church, no matter how difficult things are. You can always learn from the sermons, and God can use other Christians to speak into your life. Open up to God and others. You will find that many people do care for you."

Having received life-changing encouragement from life coaching, Mindy is now taking courses to prepare herself to become a life coach in the future. With peace inside, she no longer attaches herself to the love of people. She serves people wherever she can, makes friends easily, and laughs more than ever. Her love carries freedom wherever it goes. She is still in hope of having an intimate relationship that God has designed for one man and one woman, but whether she enters into marriage or not, she knows now that she will not become discouraged. ■



Keyi Zhou is a Christian freelancer who lives in Kunming, Yunnan, China.

(Continued from back cover)

An ideal marriage is where BOTH husband and wife are doing their part to adapt and make the marriage work.

### **WHEN IN CRISIS...**

Get above the circumstances of the moment.

Never act or speak in the heat of emotion. When you calm down, the Holy Spirit will speak to you.

Remember that at one time you felt your spouse was the best choice of mate for you.

It takes a lifetime to work out the problems in a marriage. It's not over until life is over.

Every marriage goes through its really hard times. There is no such thing as a perfect marriage.

Each person has areas of weakness, but you can only change yourself—

not the other person. LEAVE THE CHANGING OF YOUR PARTNER TO GOD.

Marriage is a spiritual training program designed by God. It takes His strength and love to live out a lifetime with another fallen human being.

No one can fulfill the deepest needs of your heart—only Jesus can satisfy your soul. Putting that burden on another human being will lead to disappointment.

When there is friction or disagreement between you, say little or no words, but do many loving deeds. Your actions will communicate love, commitment, and forgiveness.

Don't instruct your husband on anything. This makes him think of you as a mother-figure, which by nature he must break away from. It kills romantic feelings toward you.

A man will stay on guard if he thinks you are going to bring up problems. Create a secure emotional climate at home so that your husband will feel it is safe to talk to you about things.

Don't put all your "emotional eggs" in the marriage basket. It puts too much stress on the other person, and you go to pieces if they disappoint you. DON'T MAKE EACH OTHER THE FOCUS. The Lord is your focus.





Let your spouse think independently of you.

Women think things are going well in a relationship when they are talking about it. Men think things are going bad when you have to talk about it.

Keep your marriage relationship “in the Lord,” just as you try to keep a good testimony outside of the home. Stay close to the Lord in the matter of your marriage. Get on your knees or on your face before the Lord and tell Him all about it.

Don’t let Satan’s lies get into your thinking. BE ON GUARD AGAINST NEGATIVE THOUGHTS ABOUT YOUR HUSBAND. Take any such thoughts to the Lord at once and release them.

Love deeper at home than anywhere else.

Give yourself room to be human and make mistakes, just as you do for others. Allow your husband to be human also.

Confess resentment and bitterness as sin. They are in the same list of scripture as drunkenness, adultery, witchcraft, etc. Sins of the emotions may be hidden to others, but they can destroy you from the inside out.

Think before speaking. Never let your tongue run loose.

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Men crave respect. Women crave love. If you want love, give respect.

An unsaved husband and a carnal, saved husband act the same way. Don't envy other people's marriages. You don't know the whole story.

Beware of the counsel of the unsaved. They are generally wrong, even though it may sound logical and right at the time. If acted upon, it can ruin your effectiveness for the Lord.

You don't have to be a doormat. It's okay to tell your husband what's bothering you ONCE, maybe twice, but try not to mention it after that. He knows how you feel, and anything you say after that will seem like nagging.

The enemy isn't your husband but the devil. We don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but against evil spiritual forces.

Be happy in the Lord by yourself.



This is NOT DEPENDENT upon what is going on around you.

No two marriages are the same. What works for one couple may cause strife for another. Battle (if necessary) through the rough times, hold on in the tough times, and be happy during the good times!

**NOTE:** *This advice may not apply if there is pornography, substance abuse, adultery, addictions, mental illness, domestic violence, or mental, emotional, or physical cruelty in a marriage caused by the husband. Husbands are to LOVE THEIR WIVES as Christ loved the Church, and wives are to RESPECT (honor) their husbands. If you are experiencing abuse, you have the right to protect yourself and your children. Tell your parents, pastor, counselor, family, friends—or even the police, if necessary. The women’s shelter in your area also has valuable information and assistance available.*

Marriage (between a man and a woman) is of God. Build your relationship with your husband on the spark of affection that was between you at the beginning. Never forget that! ■



*Dominie Soo Bush is a piano teacher and church musician in St. Augustine, Florida. She and her husband Don attend*

*Community Bible Church. This article was excerpted from her booklet, “Marital Harmony,” at [www.fms-help.com/marriage.htm](http://www.fms-help.com/marriage.htm).*

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## MARITAL HARMONY: *Advice for Christian Women*

by Dominie Soo Bush

*“The aged women...that they may teach  
the young women...to love their  
husbands” (Titus 2:3–4, KJV).*

Over the years, I have received wise counsel from my godly parents (married 54 years) and from Christian friends who practice what they preach. I’ve also gleaned nuggets of truth from sermons on marriage and the home. This advice is for WIVES ONLY and does not address the husband’s role or responsibilities.



(Continued on page 20)

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