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# Challenger

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## *Digging My Own Grave Chasing after Wealth*

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# Digging My Own Grave Chasing after Wealth



by Aquila\*

*The Hakka ethnic group of Chinese, known to be diligent and perseverant, have a complicated culture. Historically, they have moved southwards, time and again, to flee from war and famine. Basically believing in anything—the sky, the land, the mountains, the sun, the moon, the stars, animals, plants and, in particular, their ancestors—they find faith in everything and everywhere. This is the culture I grew*

*up in, so it was really difficult for me to believe in a One True God.*

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## Hearing About God in Secondary School

In 1991 when I was in secondary school, due to poor lodging conditions at the school, a few of my friends and I rented an apartment

together. Our landlord was a devout Christian. He told me about Jesus and how Jesus helped him quit his smoking habit of a few decades. I was shocked, for it was the first time I had heard of Jesus, so I did not understand. But the landlord was warmhearted and invited a pastor over to visit. The pastor's sincerity, kind face, and smile deeply touched me. He started telling me how mysterious, amazing, and great our universe was. This appealed to me, as I was very interested in scientific knowledge about nature. He told me the story of the gospel of Christ—from our orderly universe, to the wise, transcendent Designer behind it all—the Creator God. On Sundays, I went to the pastor's church to listen to sermons. This was how God sowed the seeds of the gospel in my heart. However, it could be said that I only heard of God back then.

## All I Wanted Was Wealth

After graduation, my father found me a good job through his connections. At that time, my father rented a tiled mud house for our family. My mother asked me once, "Son, when will our family be able to live in a flat?" I answered without thinking, "Soon, and we won't only have a flat to live in, we will have more than one!" Thus, I promised myself that I would work hard to make money. I had no interest in going to church and gradually strayed far from God.

At work, I met a hairstylist, who later became my girlfriend. We came up with a business plan to make money: to open a salon. In less than two years, we made enough money to invest in a bigger beauty and hair salon. I was ecstatic, feeling like I was edging close to success. In 1997, I invited my cousin to invest together in a top-tier luxury beauty and hair salon. The business really took off! I was carried away—and not even thinking of God, I placed a Guanyin statue on the counter in the entrance of the hair salon as my cousin did. However, the good times did not last.

## In Deep Trouble and Pain

Around half a year after the opening of the salon, there was an incident. The shop manager that my cousin hired was a member of the Triad Society. Since business was good, the manager prompted my cousin to continue with the business on his own, and not to partner with me. My girlfriend learned of this and got into an argument with the manager, who called a gang of Triad members over to the salon. A knife fight ensued, and someone was hurt. As a result of this altercation, my family and my cousin's family had to enter into negotiations, amid verbal abuse. We had to auction off our hair salon at a low price. I sold the salon that I had invested hundreds of thousands in for only tens of thousands, which left me deeply in debt. Then I lost my

job as well. “When it rains, it pours!” Being in this difficult place, I started to doubt every aspect of life. My heart was exceedingly heavy and my spirit adrift.

Having lost the business, my girlfriend was always worried. She had violent tendencies, and she would hurt anyone who got into a fight with her, including me. My parents and my relatives advised me to break up with her. Not only did she refuse to break up, she planned to kill me and then commit suicide. She tried to stab the back of my head with a fruit knife, slash my throat with a razor, burn my house down with gasoline, and poison me with rat poison. But God protected me and none of her attempts succeeded. In the end, she tried several times to end her own life by jumping off a building, slashing her wrist, breathing toxic gas, and shocking herself with electricity. Time and again I saved her life, but I was in great pain and

on the verge of a breakdown. The final straw happened when one of our former female colleagues at the salon called me for help in finding another job. Being a suspicious person, my girlfriend thought I was having an affair with this female colleague. Using a sharp blade, she slashed it across the face of the female colleague, almost cutting off her nose and ruining her face. I had to compensate the colleague, so I took out another loan, putting me even more in debt. In the end, my girlfriend was arrested and sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment. We lost contact, and I never saw her again. Through all of this, I was deeply in pain. On one rainy night, I looked into the darkness and cried, *Where is God? Why am I suffering like this?*

## My Life in Chaos

Obstinately, I refused to accept reality and was still trying to make a comeback to pay my debts. Disregarding consequences, I discussed drug deals with my friend.



*Aquila and Family*



*Author Aquila*



He went abroad to find a supplier, while I looked for local buyers. We bought 50 grams of heroin in a drug deal and were caught redhanded by a plain clothes officer. During this time, China was cracking down on drugs, and any drug deal involving more than 50 grams was punishable by death. My friend and I were scared to the core, not knowing what to do. As it turned out, the buyer I had found was an undercover police operative who had made thorough plans to capture us. It was our first drug deal, and we had failed miserably! I never expected that my friend would be escorted by the officer into a police vehicle and sentenced to be executed, while I was brought to another vehicle and released after investigation. It was deemed that I could not be convicted. I jumped out of the vehicle and kept running, gasping for air with my heart pounding when I reached home.

I dared not tell my parents and pretended that nothing had happened. But my friend's family started looking for me. Suspecting that I had conspired to murder their son with the undercover officer, they kidnapped me. I explained everything to them and begged them repeatedly to let me go. Finally, they agreed on the condition that I bring them to my parents, disclosing my address and the identity of my parents. I agreed and brought them to my home. After they left, my parents sensed that something had happened, so I

told them the truth. My mother was so scared that she broke down and cried. My father was calmer and told me not to stay at home but to stay with our relatives abroad.

At that time, I dared not think about becoming rich, as I had almost lost my life chasing after wealth. I knew my future was bleak. Helpless and powerless, my life was a chaotic mess, and I had no idea what to do.

### Forgiven by God's Mercy

In the end, I made the biggest and best decision of my life—to return to church after all those years. Minister Dorcas and the brothers and sisters of the church enthusiastically cared for me and helped me. They prayed for me with fervor and encouraged me to rely on God for renewal. After prayer, I felt a kind of peace and joy that I had never experienced before, which chased away my fear. I flipped open the Bible that had collected dust for a long time and read the verse, *"The Lord is my light and my salvation"* (Psalms 27:1). I dropped to the ground with a loud thud and bowed to God a few dozen times. My head was swollen, but my tears were flowing, and my heart remorseful. I admitted my ignorance and shamelessness and the many mistakes and sins I had committed. My shame was beyond measure!

I asked God for mercy and forgiveness. Only then did I realize how much

God loved me. He had not forsaken me but protected me in secret and waited for me to turn back to Him. Today, I know that God has forgiven me, because the Bible says: *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"* (1 John 1:9). God is merciful and loving, and I thank Him for choosing me, a lowly and unworthy sinner, so that I may be made new in Christ. On April 12, 1998, I was baptized, and I wouldn't dare leave God and His church ever again! I insist on attending church fellowship, actively participating in different ministries at church, and longing to understand the truth of the Bible. I study the Bible, pray, look to God each day, and receive the strength to walk in the right path. My life is being renewed and changed by the Holy Spirit, bit by bit.

### All Glory to God

God graciously gave me a wonderful wife. We were married in 1999, and later God blessed us with a son and a daughter, who were both so clever and full of life. I am most grateful that my wife did not turn her back on me because of my past. We both worked, and she helped me pay off my debts. In 2003, with the encouragement and help from Minister Dorcas, I borrowed \$20,000 and started my own business again. We started a company with only two people. By then, I had learned to rely on God instead of people, as the Bible says:

*"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight"* (Proverbs 3:5–6).

*"Humility is the fear of the Lord; its wages are riches and honor and life"* (Proverbs 22:4).

By God's protection and mercy, my company is now 19 years old and during these years we have seen the blessing and grace of God. Although we experienced fierce competition in the field, financial crisis, and global pandemic, our company still stands. At its peak, it was a company of around 100 people. We have set up a place of service in the company, so that we may worship God in our workplace. May all glory be to God.

In the past, I was full of pride and greed. Now, I dare not rely on my own thinking but on God in all things, as I fully understand my shortcomings and limitations. Money does not have a hold on me now. I know that money—and everything in this world—belongs to God. Even our lives are given by God. The Bible tells us that our lives are more important than money. Jesus says:

*"What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"* (Matthew 16:26).

*“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (1 Timothy 6:6–10).*

Money is certainly the most useful thing in this world. It is also the biggest temptation to Christians. It is well said that “men cannot bring money into the grave; but money can bring men to their grave.”

I have promised before God that at a certain time I will set aside 51% of company profits as an offering to God, as having 51% means the controlling stake and decision-making power. God created and granted us our lives, our breath, our bodies, our souls, our intelligence, our abilities, our skills, and our years on earth. All that we have belongs to Him and offering back to Him is a test of our faith. The wisest king of Israel said: *“But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand”* (1 Chronicles 29:14). God does not

actually need anything from us; He simply wants to live in our hearts. When our hearts are consumed by money, money has become our idol, and we stop treating our Lord as God, and we stop glorifying Him. *“What shall I return to the Lord for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord”* (Psalms 116:12–13).

Today, there are still a lot of people who do not know God, who still live under the darkness and power of Satan. They live a life of hardship, indulgence, deep pain, and meaninglessness. They need the gospel of Jesus Christ and the salvation and grace of the Lord. I know in my heart that the gospel saves, and our mighty Lord will save all those who believe. I also know in my heart that it is the responsibility of all Christians, including myself, to spread the gospel. Thanks to the guidance of the Lord, besides managing my business, I am also receiving theological training from Global Enrichment Theological Seminary through online classes, in hopes of being a better vessel for God’s use. May God be glorified until the end of days! Hallelujah! ■

\* This story was first published in *Chinese Today*, Issue No. 70 (April 2022) and was translated into English by Kiara Ngai.



# From Greek Orthodox to Baptist

— beyond culture  
to rich heritage  
in Christ

by Harriet Walker



*The look of panic on my uncle's face as he directed our family to run towards shelter in the caves is forever engraved in my mind. "The Germans are coming!" I was just four years old, so I didn't know what that meant, but I knew we were in grave danger!*

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I grew up in the picturesque village of Avgeniki on the Island of Crete. The Varverakis family dates back at least five generations, based on the stories handed down to me by my Yiayia and Papou. We were a small, close-knit village that filled our days working our olive groves and grape vineyards. My father, mother, two brothers, two sisters, and I lived under

a roof filled with love, which was the strong foundation that helped us get through the occupation of the Nazis during WWII.

For about three years, my early childhood story played out during the occupation of Nazis, and the life we knew drastically changed. We experienced tremendous loss as our loved ones were killed before our eyes. Many villagers disappeared and later we would learn they were tortured and killed. We experienced hunger as our fields and food supplies were confiscated for the German army. I remember so many nights trying to sleep, but my hunger pains kept me awake for hours. We routinely went to the village dump and picked out the leftover table scraps the Nazis trashed. My mom would clean the potato peelings and other scraps to make us a dinner that barely filled the empty void in our stomachs. Once a kind Nazi soldier gave my mom a chocolate candy bar, which she used to make us a pot of hot chocolate. He also provided us with blankets and medicine when my baby brother became ill. As the months became years, I started school and our village attempted some sort of normalcy during this occupation.

When the Nazis left in 1944, they destroyed most of our crops, including our olive trees and grape vineyards. Not only that, but they planted land mines—one actually

exploded when my Uncle Manuel stepped on it. Thankfully, he lived, and many years later my children were fascinated with his wooden leg! Saying we experienced difficult times is an understatement. Greece spent decades rebuilding our beautiful country after the devastation of WWII. Looking back, God used this incredible hardship to prompt my father to seek refuge in America, the land of opportunity!

It took my father almost ten years to get the appropriate paperwork in order and money to bring my mother, my younger brother, and me to America. By that time, my three older siblings were married and building their lives in Greece. My Uncle George owned a restaurant in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and was instrumental in helping us build a new life. So, when I was 18 years old, we boarded the Queen Frederica steamliner and crossed the Atlantic in 13 days—most of which we spent incredibly seasick. My first thoughts as we approached New York were of wonder and awe. I had never seen a skyline before! We spent days going through the process of entering the States, and I was both nervous and excited, as everything was so foreign to me.

Once we arrived in Pittsburgh, my Aunt Bea took me shopping for new clothes—new, pretty clothes, not the hand-me-downs I was accustomed to. A new coat, a new hat, gloves,

and shoes. I was so stylish! Within a few days, my Uncle George had me working behind the counter at his restaurant. My first English words were “ketchup” and “mustard”! It was quite entertaining trying to take orders. My first paycheck was \$15 dollars for a week, and I felt like a millionaire!

We settled into a three-room apartment, and for the first time, I had my own bed. I couldn’t believe how lucky I was to be in America. I went to night school to learn English and continued to work at Uncle George’s Chicken Delight for three more years. Restless and wondering what I was supposed to do with the rest of my life, I considered going back to Greece. Then my cousin, Irene, who was married to an American GI, invited me to stay with her for a change of scenery. So, I took a bus to Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri. Little did I know I was about to meet my future husband!

Several weeks into our visit, I answered the knock at their front door and there stood this tall, handsome soldier. I wasn’t sure what to make of him, but somehow found myself agreeing to a date—my very first date! We went to a drive-in movie, ate a footlong hotdog, and had a soda! Jim was a big flirt, and I was very naïve. We had a whirlwind courtship—met in October of 1959 and had a Big Fat Greek Orthodox Wedding on December 26—the

same year! I was the only sibling in my family to marry an American, so you can imagine how funny our wedding was, as we merged my Greek family with Jim’s Kentucky/Ohio family! Looking back, it seems so crazy, but God had a future for me and our family.

Jim loved to tell our friends we had the perfect marriage until I learned to speak good English! We certainly had to have a sense of humor as we navigated our first years of marriage combining our cultural backgrounds. Our first baby came soon afterwards, Michael Glenn Walker—named after both grandfathers. That same year in 1961, I became a proud American citizen, something I treasure to this very day. Our daughter, Janet Marie, was born the next year, followed by Gladys Rae a few years later, and finally Victoria Lynn in 1967. Our Air Force assignments took us on many adventures from the East Coast to the West Coast and several overseas assignments. Jim did several remote tours to Korea. Those were challenging years, as I was back in the States with four small children. I was anxiously awaiting the time to return to my beloved Greece and was overjoyed when, in 1970, Jim was assigned to Hellenikon Air Force Base in Athens, Greece.

Greece was a dream come true for our family. I was in my element—the culture, the food, the people, the language, and the Greek

Orthodox Church. It felt so familiar and comforting to be back after 14 years. Little did I know that God would transform Jim's life and in turn change the course of our family. One of Jim's work peers, Louis Delgado, gave him a Bible and began sharing Jesus. At the same time, we were introduced to some missionaries, Bob and Maria Hill, who served in Athens. God used our friendship to lead us to His saving grace and a personal relationship with His Son, Jesus. You can imagine the irony of me—a born and bred Greek, raised in the Greek Orthodox Church—making the decision to follow Jesus and be baptized. We attended a mission church—Trinity Baptist. For the first time in my life, I began to read and study the living Word of God. My Greek Bible came alive for me as I grew in my relationship with

God and learned what it meant to daily serve Him.

In 1973, we returned to the States. I'm embarrassed to admit that I cried most of the trip through the state of Oklahoma. I'll never forget my first impressions of the flat, dry land and awful smell of the stockyards as we entered Altus. I couldn't for the life of me understand why God would send us here to this awful place after three glorious years in Greece. As new believers, it was important for us to find a church. Emmanuel Baptist Church was where we spent the next two years and formed some of the sweetest friendships that I cherish to this day. Our pastor's wife, Gladys, took me under her wing, as well as did Effie Cook, one of the sweetest ladies you would ever meet. These ladies were important spiritual mentors that God provided as encouragers and friends who sharpened me.

One day, Jim walked into our base house and told me it was time for



*Wedding Picture*



*Harriet and Jim*



him to retire or he would have to do another remote tour away from our family. So, he retired after 23 years in the military, and we headed to the big state of Texas for Jim to attend Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. At that time, I had the opportunity to work at Life Outreach International, a Christian organization dedicated to sharing Jesus Christ with hurting people worldwide. During the 23 years I worked for them, this ministry had a huge impact on my life. When Jim died in 2015, the organization's founder, James Robison, called to pray and encourage me. And my church family, First Baptist Hurst, were the hands and feet of Jesus. If I needed anything, they were there giving me rides to church, helping me run errands, and fixing things around the house that Jim used to handle. I still chuckle over my pastor, Jeff Burnett, asking, "Hey, Greekie, how are you doing?" Through loving relationships in my church, God provided a family for me.

Oh, how I fell in love with Texas! It has been my home now for over 40 years! When I think of where I started, in a small village on the other side of the world, I am truly convinced that God was with me every single step of the way.

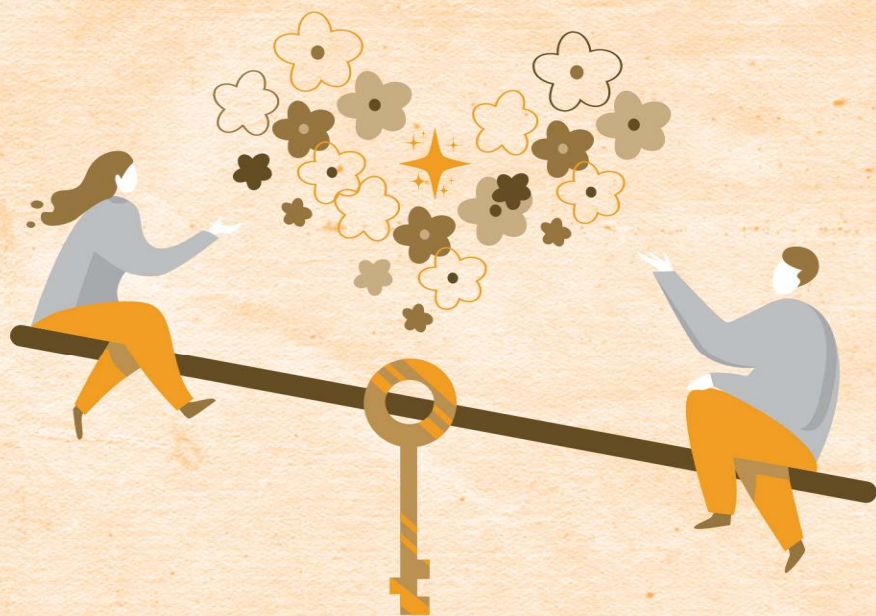
In April 2022, I had the privilege of celebrating my 85 years on this earth by returning to my beloved Greece

with my daughters, Janet and Gladys, and their husbands, Mike and Tim. We spent two amazing weeks exploring the beauty of my birthplace, visiting the Acropolis, Corinth, and Santorini, and most importantly, reconnecting with my family. My sister Irene is my only living sibling, and my reunion with her was precious. I walked with my daughters through the streets of my village, sharing my memories and stories, and thanking God again for His provision through the hardest days of my life so many years ago. God has been faithful, He is good, and I am truly blessed!

*"Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him."* (Psalm 34:8) ■



*Harriet Walker loves studying the Bible with women in her church, using her well-worn Greek Bible. A woman of many talents, she shares loaves of her freshly baked bread with families at the Ronald McDonald House. As a volunteer at Harris Methodist Hospital for 21 years, she has received the Helping Hands award three times. Each year she knits hundreds of caps for babies in the nursery. Harriet takes great delight in her family, including nine grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.*



# The Ultimate Lover

by Kaili C. Zhang

**E**ven before her personal encounter with Jesus, Annie learned the hard way that having a husband was not a magic key to happiness. Two years into her marriage, Annie's husband decided that he wanted to move from their home in New Zealand to Australia—to live life “to the fullest.” He quit his job and left, leaving Annie behind with no support. With no place to turn and feeling the pain of rejection, Annie ended her marriage by divorce.

Annie soon met a young man who showed great interest in her. With no family or friends to support her, Annie accepted this man's expressions of compassion. He seemed to understand the pain she had gone through in her marriage and promised that he would protect her for the rest of her life. To Annie, this sounded wonderful. She thought she had found her “Mr. Right”—the man who would genuinely love and care for her and who would never

leave her, as her ex-husband had done. Believing that they truly loved each other, Annie moved in with him, anticipating that this time would bring them even closer together.

But her dream of a blissful relationship with a man was quickly dashed. Mr. Right was like many of the “free-thinkers” of today. He claimed to be a Catholic, yet he believed that the homosexual lifestyle was acceptable. His mother was a lesbian, and he even admitted that he wouldn’t mind living a bisexual lifestyle. Though Annie didn’t consider herself a saint, these values were so different from how she had been brought up. She was Asian, from a traditional Chinese home, and her parents were very conservative!

### Enter: a Biblical Perspective!

When a girl at work invited Annie to attend a Bible study at her church, she was curious. A group of international students about her age met regularly to study the Bible and look for answers to life. Annie shared with the group that though she could resonate with many of Jesus’ teachings, she only believed in him 50%. She still believed 50% in Buddhism. The group accepted her graciously, but someone explained to her that she couldn’t stay halfway. It would be like wanting to stay halfway in a flooded area and be halfway rescued by a helicopter. Shocked by

this friend’s statement, Annie began to read the Bible on her own. As she read, her heart was stirred by how much God loved her. Eventually, she responded to God’s love and placed her complete trust in Him.

As a new creation in Christ, Annie found joy in her salvation welling up in her heart every day. She wanted to share this newfound joy with her boyfriend, but when she tried to talk to him, he became abusive. He even admitted to having had an affair with another woman. Deeply hurt, Annie packed up her belongings and moved out. She knew in her heart that God was not pleased with the relationship she had with Mr. Right. Leaving him was the right thing to do. And she wanted nothing to do with another relationship with a man—ever!

### New beginnings

It was then that God began to show Annie the kind of husband He could be to her: Provider, Protector, Comforter, and Friend. Isaiah 54:5–6 says: *“For your Maker is your husband—the LORD Almighty is his name... The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit—a wife who married young, only to be rejected, says your God.”*

Understanding the many ways God wanted to husband her, Annie realized she didn’t need to keep

looking for a man to care for her. God was all she needed, and she would look to Him to be her husband. He was the only One in this life who had truly said, *“I will never leave you”* (Hebrews 13:5, NKJV). She understood that God would be with her both now and forever, and, as God’s beloved, she deserved to be treated with kindness by men. She accepted that God might not necessarily give her a godly husband in this life, but she had joy, because God had filled the hole in her heart with a sense of fulfilment found only in Jesus Christ.

Verses from the Bible became more personal and precious than she could imagine. Psalms 139:14: *“I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”* And Ephesians 2:10: *“We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

Annie also began to realize that her past did not surprise God. She had tended to love people who loved her and harshly judge those who didn’t—including the men in her past relationships. But Jesus taught that even sinners do that. She realized that she was lumped in with all sinners: *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23).

Today, the covenant relationship Annie has with God—and is remaking

every day—is more eternal than any marriage covenant she might someday have with a husband. God, the Maker of her soul, is her eternal lover. An earthly husband could not be God in her life. He could never meet all of her needs. Only God as her “Husband” could love her in a way that would complete her and never disappoint. She now rests and lives in the joy that she is loved with an everlasting love, *“and underneath are the everlasting arms”* (Deuteronomy 33:27). She knows that in this life there will always be challenges and disappointments, but by believing the reality of who she is in Christ and trusting God in all circumstances, she has peace. One day, all believers will meet our truest Groom face-to-face. And, in this life, regardless of our marital status, we groan for the culmination of all things: the coming of Christ—our Groom—and our eternity together. ■



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# I Found Gold in Africa

by Zubao Zhong\*

## Poverty in the Village

In 1965, the year before the Cultural Revolution began in China, I was born in a remote village in Jiangsu Province. At that time, China was plagued by famine and other natural disasters, and many families endured severe hardships.

My father suffered from bronchial asthma, made worse because he worked in manual labor to provide for our large family. I was the youngest of seven siblings, and twenty days after I was born, my parents decided to sell me for 14 RMB to raise money for my dad's medical treatment. The plan was to stay in contact with the buyer, and from time to time be able to visit.

On the day when the exchange was to take place, my mother was so heartbroken she could not bear to witness the moment of separation. She went to the fields, pretending to work, but was actually running from the pain. When the buyer came for me, he paid my father 14 RMB and said he had changed his mind. He did not plan to stay in contact, and my parents would not hear from him again! Stunned at this imminent split with his child, my father did not know what else to do but accept. However, my older sister, who was standing by listening, took me from the arms of the buyer and, holding me tightly, strongly objected. In desperation, my father slapped my sister. Hearing my sister crying, my mother came back from the fields, saw my sister



squatting in the corner holding me, and understood what had happened. In tears, my older sister begged my parents, insisting they must keep me even if it meant everyone had to eat less. So, I was not sold, and when I was four, my father passed away, because we were too poor to afford medical treatment for his bronchial asthma.

Poverty made my childhood very difficult. Being fatherless, I was an outcast in my village, with no friends to play with and mocked by my peers all the time. At my primary graduation, I promised myself that I would leave my village and never return. After my secondary graduation, I could not pursue higher education because we were

poor, and my academic performance was unsatisfactory. I wanted nothing more than to leave my village!

### Relocating Abroad

In 1985, I happened to find out that Beijing Foreign Studies Academy was providing a three-year broadcast correspondence English course. Students who completed the three-year course and passed the exam would be eligible for a scholarship of \$1,500 and further studies at the campus for one year. At that time, the amount of the scholarship was an astronomical sum to me, and it was a huge drawing factor. So, I applied for the course and started learning about foreign languages. After three years, only a thousand candidates could sit

for the secondary examination of the first round of national recruitment at the academy. After the secondary examination, only 23 were given scholarships to undertake further studies for a year, and I was one of the chosen ones.

In the beginning of 1989, I was elected class monitor of the course in the academy. When I first stood on the stage in front of classmates from all over the world, I was so nervous I could not utter a single word. This was the first time I had met Europeans and Africans. I was one of the few that came from a village. The scholarship took care of the problem of tuition for me, but I had yet to settle my living expenses. In a metropolis, I didn't even have a pair of shoes that fit or any suitable clothing. Looking back, it was a really difficult time.

Back then, there was a huge demand

for people who understood English. Knowing English gave people a great edge in finding jobs. After undertaking further studies, I started working in the Beijing office of an international architectural firm. At that time, the biggest project of the company was based in Kenya, Africa. I didn't even know where Kenya was. Hundreds of employees were constructing the Integrated Sports Facility in Kasarani. My duty was to apply for visas, book plane tickets, and make transportation arrangements for company personnel traveling to and from Kenya. Therefore, I frequented many embassies that had business connections with our company. However, after a few months of not getting to use English as much as I thought, the job stopped being challenging.

In 1991, I worked as an interpreter for the Chinese team assigned to



*Graduation Picture*



*Zhong with Bible College President*

the Barbados Stadium project. In 1994, I went to Uganda with the same company responsible for the construction in Kasarani and worked as an interpreter and business manager in their office. In 1996, I left the company, as the company was mismanaged, and decided to start my own company.

### **The Witness of Westerners**

In late 1996, I opened a Chinese restaurant in Uganda where I met a lot of Christian missionaries. They were always friendly to others, very respectful to me and my staff, and grateful for our services. At times, they would talk to me about Jesus. I had no interest in Jesus, even though while I was in Barbados, I had seen a church and got my first Bible, which I never read. I was brainwashed by socialism and thought salvation had nothing to do with Chinese people. Jesus and salvation only concerned Europeans and Americans. I strongly believed that I could rely only upon myself to secure a good future. And to have a good life, I must make money.

The missionaries frequently visited me, giving me different versions of the Bible. I treated them as collectibles and never read them. While busying myself with making a living, expanding my business, and buying and selling land, over time, I grew fond of the missionaries. They never put pressure on me to accept

Jesus Christ. They simply prayed for me and sent me their regards. I did notice that they valued family life and were always spending time with their family.

### **I Lost my Land but was Saved**

By 2008, my life had become even busier as I was planning to relocate to Australia. Reminding myself to follow the missionaries' example and take good care of my family, I planned to bring my family back to Uganda in 2009. My elder daughter would be going into primary school, and we would be there for her.

To make more money, I bought two acres of land near the Nile River Holiday Inn and actively invested in its development. The piece of land was adjacent to the 47-hectare forest of the Ugandan government in the vicinity of a 4-star international hotel. It even overlooked the Nile River. It was truly a beautiful piece of land! Because of this, I got busier and busier with the development, hoping to build a campsite that could be rented to European and American backpackers.

Then one morning as I was getting ready to go to work, a friend called to tell me that over 50 Ugandans were taking down the barbed wire fence around my property. It was November 11, 2008. After I got the call, I made my way at once to the scene with the local secondary

village committee chairman. A government official violently blocked my way and accused me of stealing government land. He called over a soldier, who loaded his gun, put the loaded gun against my head, and detained me illegally. That was how they took my land and left me in a helpless, hopeless situation. All of a sudden, I was under a lot of pressure!

What should I do? My wife asked me to give up; the missionaries asked me to pray. But how would I know how to pray? My best friend in Uganda, a senior official of the Ugandan government, suggested that I bring the case up with the Ugandan Forestry Bureau and take it to court. Facing all of these various suggestions, I had no idea what to do.

Later, I sued the government department in court. Feeling very lonely, I tried to think of ways to reduce my stress. One day, a voice inside my head whispered to me: "You could read the Bible." So, for the first time in my life, I picked up a Chinese Bible and started reading. I read for a long time, with tears running down my face. The words of God shocked and amazed me! How did I take the Bible for granted all these years? 1 Timothy 6:10 says, *"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."* Truly well-said! Wasn't

my sorrow the proof of these words?

The verse, Ephesians 4:29, touched my emotions: *"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."* Had I not been taught the same by my mother since I was young? I immediately called my mother, who is a believer in Jesus, but she did not know which part of the Bible this verse came from. Thus, I became a lover of God's Word. The Holy Spirit showed me that I was a sinner and could not save myself. I repented, accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior, and was baptized on October 27, 2012, by a Baptist pastor, Robert Davis.

After five years of court proceedings, I won the case in early 2013, and the court ruled that the Ugandan government had to compensate my losses.

### Sharing My Utmost Treasure

With a changed attitude towards God, my attitude towards people changed drastically. I now was full of passion for the lost. I realized that many Chinese people who come to Uganda—or even to the entire African continent to make a living—have yet to meet Jesus Christ. I am encouraged by the Bible, and other religious books, that it is not enough

that I have eternal life—I must spread the gospel truth to others. Most of the Chinese will return to China, and if they accept Jesus Christ as their Savior, they could carry the gospel back with them. However, I am aware there are many truths in the Bible that I have yet to fully understand. Thus, Pastor Gong Wenhui from the U.S. encouraged me to pursue theological education to better equip myself for ministry—which is what I did. I am willing to rely on the guidance and help of the Holy Spirit to spread the gospel to the Chinese people in Africa. ■

\* This story was first published in *Chinese Today*, Issue No. 70 (April 2022) and was translated into English by Kiara Ngai.



Zubao Zhong

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(Continued from back cover)

I pulled over, put my hands on the steering wheel, and waited for the police officer to appear to question me and write me a ticket. All the while, I was trying to think up some kind of excuse to give him in hopes of gaining sympathy. My son even suggested that I should turn the radio to a classical music channel, in the chance that it would increase the likelihood that the officer would give me a warning instead of a ticket.

Yet, as I waited for the police officer to slowly walk from his car to mine, I wasn't fretting over my "misfortune." My attention had turned to the police officer. What was he experiencing? His job of hiding in his vehicle with the intention of catching people who drove too fast, to give them a ticket, probably wasn't too rewarding! In his work, he must see a lot of unhappy faces, because no one likes being caught by a cop for speeding.

Glancing at the police officer, I noticed that he looked sluggish and expressionless. I wondered



how many people to whom he had given a ticket ever thanked him or gave him a sincere smile. Realizing this, I became empathetic with this public servant who had to repeat an unwelcomed action day after day. So, I politely accepted my ticket and thanked him.

Following Paul's admonition in his letter to the Philippians, I was able not to just think of my own affairs, but to be interested in the officer. Stepping into the other person's shoes helped me ride out the situation and look at it from a different angle. I still needed to pay my ticket, yet I found a special joy in knowing that I might have brightened someone's day—albeit in a small way. ■



*Carmen Tsui is Challenger's chief editor and also a Master Certified Coach (carmentsui.coach).*

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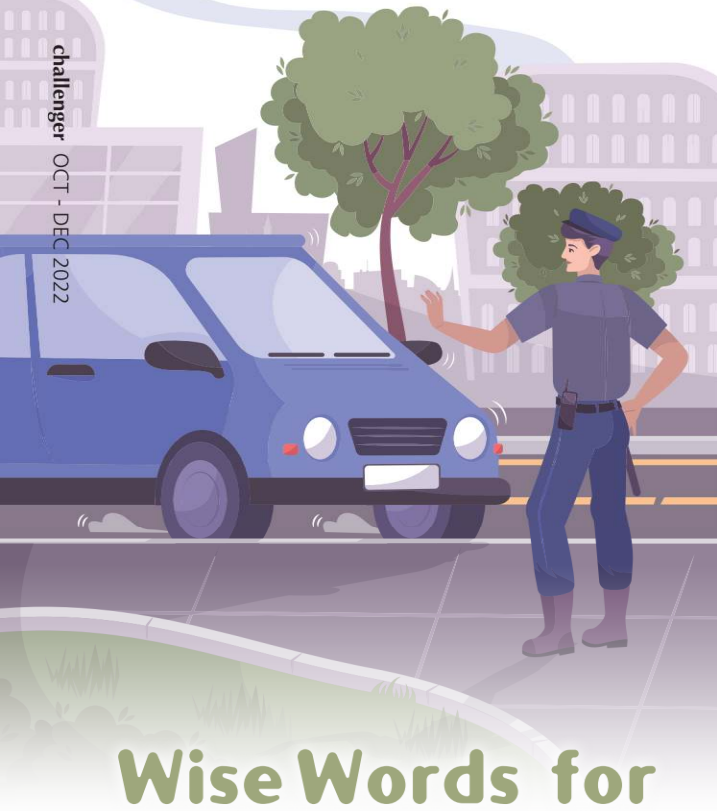
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# Wise Words for Smart Living

by Carmen Tsui

*“Don’t just think about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and in what they are doing” (Philippians 2:4, TLB).*

The police car hidden behind a tree on the side of the road pulled out as I passed. The bright flashing lights behind me told me I was caught. I had been chatting with my son while driving him to his cello lesson and was unconsciously going too fast.



(Continued on page 22)

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