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The Scent of an Apple: Reflections of a Vietnamese Orphan

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An illustration of seven children of various ethnicities playing around a large, stylized orange apple. The apple has a single green leaf and a brown stem. The children are in various poses of play, some jumping, some running, and some standing. The background is a light, textured surface.

The Scent of an Apple: Reflections of a Vietnamese Orphan

by Matthew Do

So much food was on my plate—and it was all just for me! A bowl of soup, meat, rice, vegetables, and a special item too—an apple! It was so pretty and smelled so good. Saliva leaked from the corners of my mouth, and I had to wipe it away with my hand.

At Home

The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines an “orphan” as a child deprived by death of one or both parents, or one deprived of some protection or advantage. This definition describes the situations

of the orphans who came to take refuge in Cam Ranh City Christian Orphanage during the Vietnam War. I am one of them.

When I was about 7 years old and my youngest brother was only a month old, my dad was captured and killed by the communists, leaving my mother with four children. In 1969, when I was about 11 years old, we moved from Quang Ngai province to Cam Ranh City, Khanh Hoa province, through the government's refugee relocation program. My mom's workday started at 5 AM and ended at 9 PM every day. She would go to the local open markets to buy fresh fish, live chickens, pork, beef, vegetables, firewood, etc. She put her merchandise in two baskets and hung them on each end of a 4-foot yoke. Balancing the yoke on her shoulder, she jogged slowly to other markets about 8 miles away to sell her goods. Mom borrowed money with a daily high interest rate from our neighbors, and with the profit she made, she paid interest, and bought food for us. Often the fish or meat she brought home already had an odor, but we'd wash it well and cook it. Sometimes, she lost money, and in such a case, she would wait until midnight to come home, to avoid being verbally abused by the lenders. But Mom faithfully paid

them back, so they continued to loan her their money.

Because of Mom's work schedule, we went to bed early every night. Sometimes during the day my brother and I would dig up sweet potatoes from our neighbors' fields for food. If we were caught, we were beaten up. We attempted to go to school but were sent home because we didn't have money to pay for school fees and uniforms. Without completing elementary grades, we had no hope of attending high school.

My mom was the only one who had two changes of clothes; the rest of us had one pair of shorts and a t-shirt or a shirt. At a distance, my mom's clothes looked decent among the street vendors, but at a closer look, one could see patches on them. When the clothes no longer could be patched, she would buy second-hand clothes from the open markets and alter them to fit her. She made our clothes from the jute sacks that bagged the wheat given as aid to Vietnam. On them was the phrase: "Gift from America." At first, the clothes caused a lot of itchiness, but after a few washes, they were fine.

Our house was small, about 700 square feet, with a thin metal roof, dirt floor, and walls made of wood

plastered with carbon paper salvaged from the dump of the nearby American base. The roof leaked badly, and on rainy days, we had to cover ourselves with pieces of plastic to sleep. It was very hot in summer and cold during some seasons. The smoke from embers of firewood left burning at night and the spiders nearby did a good job keeping the mosquitoes off of us.

In spite of being dirt poor, my mom would not let my younger brother and me become livestock caretakers. We could have earned a few dollars per month and received food, but Mother wanted to protect us from the mistreatment of livestock owners. She told us, "We are not going to be servants of anyone. We must raise ourselves up, regardless of our situation." Mom was always nostalgic about the past. She told us that we had come from a respected family, one that was educated and owned acres of farmland and livestock. But things had changed when the communists took over our land and we had to move to different places. Now, we were penniless. Mom's words, when she recounted her past, always stayed in my head.

Leaving Home

One day something unexpected happened. It was like it dropped

from the sky—really, like it was from heaven! The pastor from Ba Ngoi Christian Missionary Alliance church came to pray for our family. Later, I learned that Mom had become a Christian while we were in Quang Ngai province. So, word had reached the pastor in Cam Ranh, and he came to pay a visit and to talk about sending me and my younger brother to the orphanage. From what I've learned of my family history, my mother was the first person to become a Christian in my father's extended family.

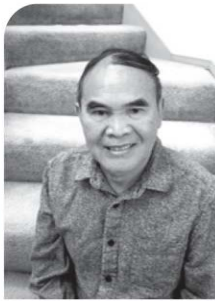
A few days later, Mr. Ha Xuan Nguyen, the founder of the orphanage, and Pastor Walter Routh, Jr., a Southern Baptist missionary, came to my house in a van. They talked with Mom and then stepped outside. With tears rolling down my mother's wrinkled cheeks, she told us, "Both of you are going to the orphanage. There you will have clothes to wear, food to eat, a decent place to sleep, and an opportunity to complete high school. Stay with me, and we will face a dark future. I don't know if there is a future for us, but I will have a better chance to raise your sister and youngest brother..." With that, she embraced us tightly and Mr. Routh prayed for us. As the van drove us away, I peered through the window and saw my mom with her arms up covering her face, hiding her crying.

At Home, at the Orphanage

At the orphanage I was given four sets of clothes, two of which were school uniforms, a pair of tennis shoes for school, and a pair of sandals. For the first time in my life, I took a shower with water spraying down on my head. At eleven years old, I had to be trained to use an in-house toilet. A bed was assigned to me with a pillow and pillowcase, a blanket, a mosquito net, and a sheet for the mattress. The room was bigger than my mom's house and had wooden walls with windows. There were two rows of army beds with mattresses and a few of them were already taken. A kid helped me to settle in. Lying on my comfortable bed, feeling happy and safe, I fell asleep until someone woke me for dinner.

I couldn't believe that there was so much food to eat. An apple was a luxury item because it was an imported fruit that only rich people could afford. The piece of beef was fresh and juicy and big enough to feed all my family. Our meals at home consisted of rice mixed with sweet potatoes or cassava, fish sauce or salt, and vegetables—but rarely meat or fish. Now, I was enjoying a rich Vietnamese family meal. I almost cried. As I was about to begin eating, Mr. Ha gently tapped on my shoulder and instructed, "Wait for us to pray together before we eat." After the prayer, I devoured my meal, but I saved the apple—to enjoy the scent and taste later.

Family devotions were a must at the orphanage. Mrs. Ha usually led it. She was a gentle mother to us. A Bible and a hymn book were given to me. We sat around a rectangular table,

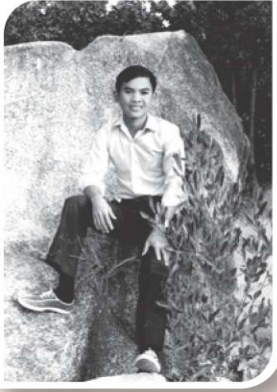


Matthew Do

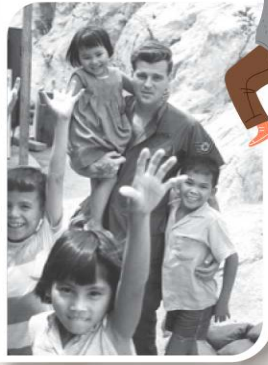


Family vacation





Matthew as a high school student in Vietnam



Matthew standing next to a GI



sang hymns, and took turns reading the Bible. Praying before meals and family devotions were all new rituals to me. The kid next to me helped me find the hymns and the book, chapter, and verses in the Bible. My reading skill was not up to my age level, and my pronunciation was bad because I had been born in Central Vietnam. Mrs. Ha's family came from North Vietnam, so her pronunciation was perfect. Besides, she was a teacher. So, I got a professional reading tutor for free every evening. Mrs. Ha always repeated this prayer for us, "Oh Lord! Help the children grow in their love for You daily...and help them to grow up strong and wise."

The Cam Ranh Christian Orphanage had been started by the men of the

Protestant Chapel on the American base, and every Saturday or Sunday servicemen and servicewomen from the base came to work at the orphanage. They built and repaired houses, built fences, cleared land, and brought with them household items such as utensils, building materials, second-hand clothes, and food—pork, chicken, beef, eggs, cheese, butter, and canned food of all kinds. They'd usually come around one o'clock. At noon, we were ready for them. We boys used the tall rocks near the front gate as watchout posts. When we saw an army jeep leading two army trucks full of GIs, we'd roar with joy and run to open the gate. They brought with them treats for us—soft drinks, ice cream, oranges, apples, and cookies.

In the summer the servicemen would take us to the base for picnics. We swam in the cold ocean water and ate hamburgers and hot dogs for lunch. At Christmas, they would take us to the base for a Christmas worship service. The orphans had learned Christian carols, so we sang for those in attendance. We were always given gifts of new clothes and candy.

During my years at the orphanage, I grew in my knowledge of God and in my love for Christ. After lunch we usually had an hour of rest time. When I couldn't sleep, I would read my Bible. The Bible stories fascinated me, and I read and reread them. On Sundays the entire orphanage attended the church that Missionary Routh pastored. After receiving instruction in the gospel, when I was 12, I professed faith in Christ and was baptized by Pastor Routh.

Under the fostering of Mr. and Mrs. Ha, my education improved notably. The words my mom had told me came back to me, and they motivated me to work and study diligently. I ranked 103 out of more than 2,500 participants in the entrance exam to enter Cam Ranh High School. As a result, I was one of the top 500 students who were accepted by the school. It is the same motivation that helped me raise myself up to be an educated, middle-class American today.

At Home in a New Land

Now, as I sit in my lovely home in a middle-class neighborhood in Federal Way, Washington, I reflect on the six years of my life in the Cam Ranh City Christian Orphanage. The story of Commander Naaman in the Bible (2 Kings 5) makes me think of my own life. He was a powerful, rich, strong man, and a warrior. On the other hand, I was more like the young Jewish girl in the story—fatherless, poor, captured in poverty, and oppressed by society. However, we both sought for God to heal our physical needs. He sought to be healed from the disease of leprosy; I sought to be healed from the disease of poverty and illiteracy. We both got healed—and more. God revealed Himself to us, redeemed us, and took us as His children to inherit His Kingdom. The Prophet Elisha acted as the hands of God in Commander Naaman's life, but the hands of God in my life and the lives of the orphans at Cam Ranh Christian Orphanage were many Christian soldiers.

The family of Mr. and Mrs. Ha had a big influence on our daily lives. The missionaries Walter and Pauline Routh and later Mr. and Mrs. Jim Gayle not only taught us the gospel but endeavored to meet the physical needs of the suffering Vietnamese people. Pastor Gayle, after learning that my mom's house had burned

down, visited her and gave her an amount of money to rebuild. These servants of God were front-line foot soldiers. And there were servicemen like John Cope who, after his tour in Vietnam, came back to live and work at the orphanage for two years. Jim Warner, another GI, fostered a few orphans, including me, after the orphanage relocated to America as refugees in 1975. And churches in America donated money and supplies to people they had never seen or met. All these Christian soldiers carried out the Lord's commandment to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 12:31).

We, the orphans from the Cam Ranh City Christian Orphanage, owe a great debt of gratitude to many people for their lovingkindness. Their labor has not been in vain, at least in my mom's family. In 2005, I sponsored my mom and my younger brother's family to immigrate to the United States. In August 2009, I sat with Mom to plan her funeral service. She was afraid to die, but after I explained that for believers dying was stepping more fully into the Kingdom of God, she smiled and said, "I believe, and I am ready to meet Christ Jesus, the Lord." She passed away in 2011. Today there are at least 30 Christians in my mom's family, and the same is true for other orphans' families.

During the Vietnam War, there were thousands of families like my mom's,

and there were thousands of kids who had similar situations as ours. But why did God choose to care so richly for the orphans at Cam Ranh City Christian Orphanage? This is the mystery no one has the answer to; only God knows. He is sovereign and His purposes are sure. For me, I want to live my life serving others like the people who contributed so much to mine. With God's help, I'm committed to doing that. ■



Matthew (Đỗ Khắc Mẫn) has a BS degree in electrical engineering from the University of Arizona. He has

worked for 35 years as a software engineer—first for the Department of the Navy and currently for the City of Seattle, Washington. In 2010 he earned a Master of Divinity degree from Fuller Seminary. Matthew writes a weekly column for the Viet Seattle Times and uses his bilingual skills in translation work. His wife, AnhDu is a social worker for Korean Women's Association, Tacoma, Washington. Their daughter Lily is a CPA, and son Jonathan works as a software/hardware engineer. Matthew and his wife attend Eastridge Baptist Church in Kent, Washington.

SIX SHOTS: A LIFE TRANSFORMED



by Zhao Ai-guo*

After I came to the States, my life became a total failure: the company I started closed down; the restaurant I opened was destroyed; I was robbed working as a deliveryman; I had nowhere to go and only a spring mattress to sleep on every night; I suffered from a disease that was hard to cure and could be fatal; I did odd jobs for a restaurant to make a living (and who would've

thought!) got shot by my colleague, an old Vietnamese veteran. My life hung in the balance; my wife left me; my family was no more. Could there be a worse tragedy in life than this?

Who would think that back in China, I had been a kind of "success story"? At the mere age of 35, I had become a lieutenant colonel, and in the 90s, that was really something. A man

of status, people waited on me and followed me. But then, what the world called the “American dream” proved to be an absolute nightmare for me.

Shot Six Times and Calling Out to God

Ever since I was young, my motto had been that I was the only person who could bring good fortune to the human race. My “success” in China proved this motto true for me. Notions like “relying on God” or “believing in Jesus” were but jokes to me.

In 1991, my ex-wife went to the States as a visiting scholar. A woman of vision, she thought we would have a better future there than in China. I also had dreams of my own, and her words were like a guiding light, shedding light on my path ahead. Without a care in the world, I resigned my position, despite the many who persuaded me to stay, and flew to Pennsylvania to build a new home and life.

A saying goes: “Dreamy be your dreams, reality remains realistic.”

Starting a new life was exciting and joyful, but we still had to confront the realities of how to make a living. With her wages, my ex-wife was shouldering the costs of rent, food, and commute. As a man, I could not rely on my wife to make a living for me. But how could I provide for my family? I could not speak English and did not have any special life skill. Physical labor was the only thing I could offer. So, I went to work as a deliveryman for a Chinese restaurant.

After a few years, we saved up some money and started our own restaurant. But making money was not as easy as we imagined. When a fire occurred in the restaurant, we were forced to close it down. During this time, people from the church would invite us to go to services. I did go—not to worship God—just to meet with my countrymen, eat Chinese food, and learn English. I had no time for what I deemed superstitions, and there was no way I would “believe in Jesus.”

Under the stress of making a living, I became disillusioned. I had given up a life that was envied by everyday folk in China to come to the States.



I worked hard every day, never slacking off. I had gone from living the life of the upper class in China, to this almost refugee-like state of having nothing at all. Why did “relying on myself” work in China but not in the States? Would I be a loser for life? I did not want to accept it, but what could I do? Argument became the language between my ex-wife and me. We both thought ourselves exceptional, and we both felt let down. Eventually, our marriage broke apart.

In 1996, I found a job at a large-scale restaurant. Many colleagues were from Southeast Asia. One of them was a Vietnamese veteran that fought in the Sino-Vietnamese War. After he learned that I was once a Chinese soldier, he hated me and picked on me all the time. He never found it in himself to treat me with kindness. Then one day, this Vietnamese deliberately made fun of me again, and I had had enough. I rebutted him, never thinking that he would pull out a gun and shoot me. There was a kitchen cabinet between us. He shot me six times in my abdomen, leaving 11 holes in my body. One bullet did not go through and was stuck inside me. My intestines were shattered, blood gushed everywhere, and nothing could stop the bleeding. By the time the ambulance arrived and rushed me to the hospital, I was feeling cold. With my life hanging in the balance, I thought of the God that the pastor and the brothers and sisters

from church had told me about. In my desperation, I knew He was my only salvation. I prayed, “God, if you do exist, please save me!” More than 10 hours later, I came to my senses. How amazing! A life as hopeless as mine was saved! I immediately felt it in me: “God is real!” I had not been wanting God, but God answered my call. *“I call on the Lord in my distress, and he answers me”* (Psalm 120:1). I became a believer in the Bible then: *“My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me”* (Psalm 31:15).

In Poverty and Dejection Comes the Salvation of Jesus

After being resuscitated in the hospital, I returned to China for recovery. A Chinese saying goes: “One is bound for good fortune after surviving a great disaster.” After the disaster, I had no difficulty in believing in the existence of God. Yet, I still knew next to nothing about this God that saved my life. During my almost seven years in the States, many Americans and Chinese had told me the gospel. They said that we were all sinners in need of salvation and believing in Jesus Christ would give me eternal life. In China, I had heard nothing about salvation and eternal life during the education I previously received. However, in America, both American and Chinese Christians left me with the same lasting impression: their love for others. The people who

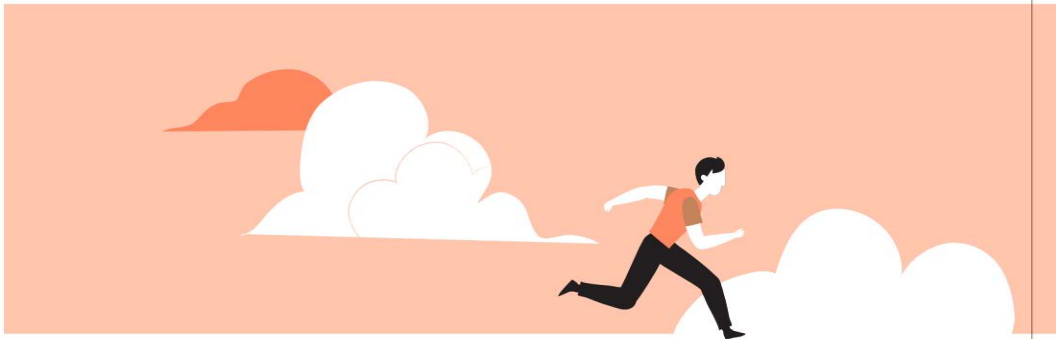
came to talk to me at church were all very kind. The grannies would talk to me with a kind smile, without a hint of arrogance. They looked like they lived in peace and joy. They willingly helped me whenever I needed it, never asking for anything in return. Their Christ-like character and way of navigating the world were something I had never experienced before.

Although the life of these Christians led me to see that believing in Christ was a good thing and would fill people with love and kindness, I never believed in the existence of heaven and hell. Ever since I was young, I had received an atheistic education, so it was totally unacceptable for me to admit that I was a sinner, or that I would go to hell if I did not believe in Jesus. Yet, when I was shot and almost dying, I thought not of any ideal or belief but of the gospel that the Christians told me about: "When you face adversity in life, and no one is coming to your rescue, no one is going to help you, only God can save you. God not only can save your body, but your soul as well." When my life was endangered, I called out to God, and my life was saved. This is an undeniable fact, something that I firmly believed was true.

After half a year of recuperation in China, I returned to the States without a penny. In my sorry state, I could only afford to stay in a most stripped-down basement, living from day to day. I forgot when it

started, but someone next door was singing loudly every day. The voice was loud and sounded merry. It annoyed me to death. One day, I couldn't help myself and knocked on the door and shouted, "What's your problem? Stop singing every day; it's really annoying!" As blunt as I was, the person did not get mad but told me gleefully: "I am singing songs of praise to the Lord." When he mentioned the Lord, my heart was touched. It turned out the man was a pastor from Taiwan who had come to the States to pursue a doctor of psychology degree. This pastor was immensely wise, and step by step he led me to learn more about the Bible and prayer, and brought me to church. He was truly the angel sent from God to guide me in learning about the Creator of the world, the Lord of salvation. At that time, I dedicated my whole being to reading the Bible, praying, attending church services, and learning more about this God who gave me a second chance at life.

The Bible says: *"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* (Romans 3:23). God's standard of glory is unattainable. As sinners, we fall short of the glory of God. Gradually, the Holy Spirit guided me to see my true self as a sinner. Although to the world, I had attained success at a young age, I had also lied, was proud, did things against my conscience, was always criticizing, had a bad temper with



my wife, and was arrogant and strict with people. These were all true of me. I confessed, “Lord, I truly am a sinner. I need the blood of Jesus Christ to wash me clean.”

A lot of Chinese people respect heroes for being highborn and dying with glory—not trembling in the face of death. But death is not the end. *“Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment”* (Hebrews 9:27). The true meaning of life lies not in a belief system, but in having a living relationship with Jehovah our God, the Creator of mankind. When we lead our lives according to the way He shows us, then we are following Jesus Christ. When we leave this world, we will enter into the glory of God for eternity. The life of a Christian is filled with hope and meaning.

Following Jesus Christ, Blessed by God Beyond Measure

When I was recovering from my wounds in China, I met my wife, a virtuous and capable woman. We both found faith after we came to the

States. When we were looking for a suitable church, my wife happened across a sermon of Pastor Zhang Boli online and really enjoyed it. For a year, we attended the Sunday service of Pastor Zhang Boli’s church, even though it was a journey of almost five hours there and back. As I matured as a Christian, God called me to preach, so I went to seminary to equip myself. Today, I enjoy a loving relationship with my wife, have a beautiful family, and am well-respected in the local Chinese community. My three children are all Christians—graduates from business school and medical school—who go on overseas missionary trips with me.

When I relied on myself, I lost it all. When I rely on Jesus, my blessings overflow—for this life and for all eternity. ■



**This article was written from an interview by Man Man and translated into English by Kiara Ngai.*

A PHYSICIST'S PATH TO TRUTH THROUGH SCIENCE

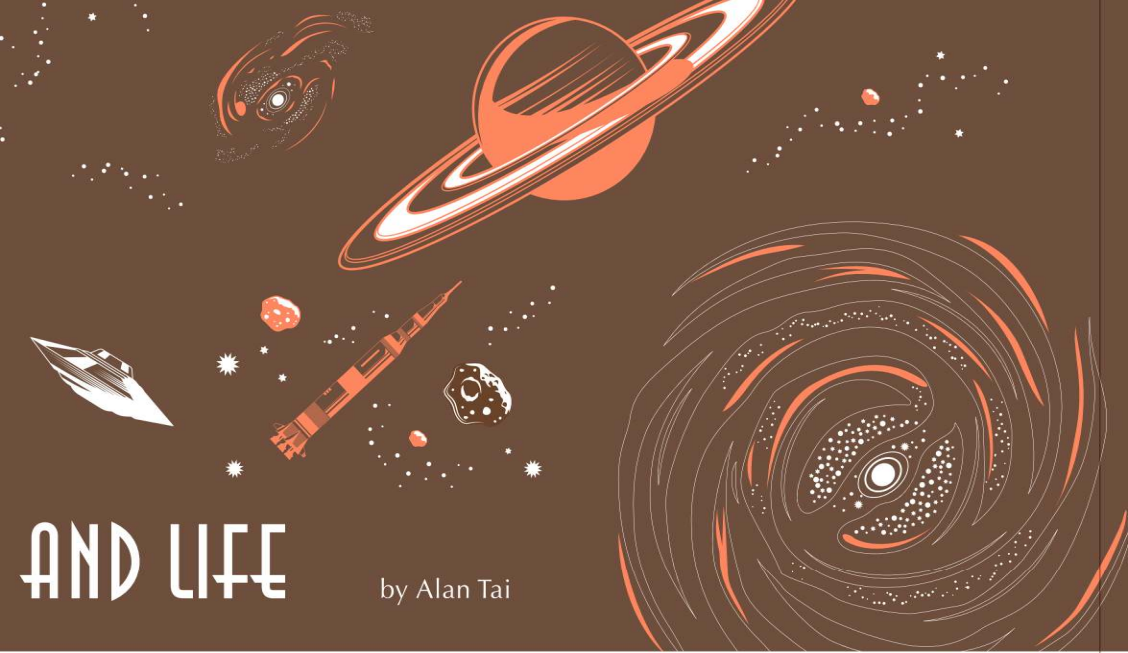
Studying in three different schools in Hong Kong left me confused about religion. The stories of Abraham were taught in my Koran classes, and they were also taught in my Catholic Bible class in elementary school. How could I know which religion was the right choice? I did not see a need for any of them. Science seemed to be the only truth worth pursuing.

Traversing through Religious Schools in Hong Kong

My first grade was spent in an elementary school associated with Buddhism. My impression of Buddhism at that young age was related to the statues of the Buddha. He always appeared to be smiling and in deep thought. Next, I entered St. Antonio Catholic Elementary School, where I studied from the

second grade to the sixth grade. In this school, I first heard the stories of the Bible. Statues of Mary, Jesus, and the apostles were in different locations around the school. They appeared to be more friendly than those I saw inside the “Heavenly Queen” temple. Passing the worship hall of the school gave me a sense of solemnness and unspeakable “love.” I especially enjoyed the Christmas parties at this school when all the students could watch movies and received gifts and candies.

A lovely female teacher had converted to be a Catholic nun. Her enthusiasm in teaching and her faith in her religion expressed a certain genuineness in caring for people. The feeling of a holy environment and prayer during the mandatory Mass—the Catholic worship service—also



AND LIFE

by Alan Tai

changed my attitude toward “western religion.” Even though my family tradition of the “Eastern God” did not endorse any involvement of the “Western God,” I started to pray to St. Mary by memorizing her prayer.

One story taught by the nun related to the special power of St. Mary. During the final judgment, all the work done during the lifetime of a person was put on a scale to be determined if he or she was good enough to enter heaven. The handkerchief of St. Mary would be put on the other side of the scale. This would change his or her status from bad to good, because the tears of St. Mary somehow made the difference. I did not understand what really happened after people died, but I was drawn by the religion’s charm and virtues. However, I did not have a relationship with God

through Jesus Christ. My so-called “faith” at that time was on shaky ground that would not stand when trial and difficulty came.

One school year, my results in academic examinations were not good so I needed to see the headmistress, a Catholic nun. She asked me to promise her that I would not watch television till my academic performance improved. I had no choice but to say “yes.” For a while I did try to not watch TV—I studied behind the TV! But I could hear the TV sound, and the temptation was too strong for me. I gave in and went around to the front of the TV and enjoyed the programs.

My academic performance for entering middle school did not meet the minimum requirement of the

Hong Kong education department. Without the subsidized tuition from the government, I needed to find a middle school on my own. I prayed to St. Mary quite often and wondered why she or God didn't answer my prayer. When I look back, I see that my faith was based on favorable things happening at that specific time, rather than on God's providence in directing my life.

Unless a private school accepted me, I would miss the chance to further my education. A new middle school and high school up the hill from where I lived was an "Islamic College." I was so desperate to be accepted in a school, I did not really care what kind of school it was or what religion it was associated with. I managed to pass the Islamic College entrance test and started my student journey in a "new religion" school.

I discovered the related religion did not belong to Westerner or Easterner. It belonged to Middle Easterners,

as far as I could understand. All the students were required to attend a religion class about the Koran once a week. The religion education leader, Mr. Pao, a Muslim scholar educated in the Middle East, would pray in the Arabic language during student assemblies. His prayer included some songs with melodies I knew, but I did not understand the meaning of the prayers. From my observation, Mr. Pao sincerely prayed to communicate some messages to God (Allah), the essential points of which he also tried to share in our religion class. Most of what I learned in the Koran class was related to Muslim law, teaching people not to do wrong and evil things, and telling people about Allah.

Even though I wished there were a God who created all things, I pondered how I would know and communicate with Him. The religions I encountered guided people to do good. And if people did not follow the religious teachings about doing



Alan Tai and his wife



Alan Tai in Hong Kong

good, they would be punished for doing evil things. Nevertheless, it was not in my heart to seek religion to find God. My impression of religions at the time was mainly based on my observation of people who regularly attended a church or temple. It seemed that true believers needed to give money and time to be considered religious. I asked myself, "Why would I invest my time and money in some uncertain endeavor, especially when my dream of seeking wisdom in science was my highest priority?" I reasoned that if I were a good enough person, I might not need religion. Considering myself an atheist, I believed nothing but science to be the final Truth of life.

Pursuing the Study of Science

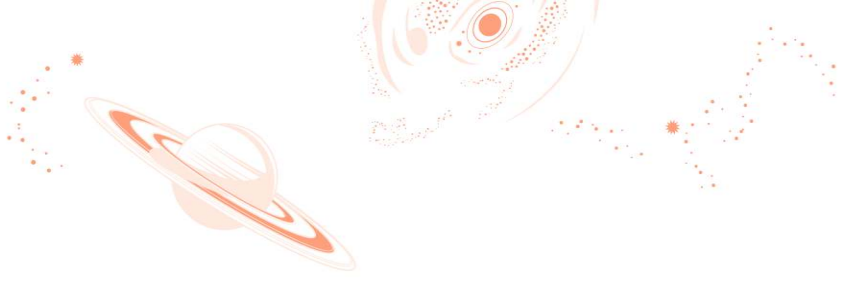
Life after high school was busy as I endeavored to focus more on studies and working. Because I had failed the English language section in the Hong Kong standard test, I could not be accepted at a university. So, I started working a series of low-level jobs. However, I was eager to learn science and technology and studied at night at a technical institute.

My family and relatives were supportive of my desire for a science education. Chinese tradition and Confucian philosophy valued

education most favorably among the virtues. An uncle and other relatives encouraged me to apply to universities abroad. The fact that my family trusted me was very humbling. I deeply appreciated their love, not to mention their financial support of my education.

Coming to the United States to study in 1981 gave me the opportunity to broaden my horizon and discover more about science and life. My major purpose in pursuing higher education was to learn science. I determined that I would not spend time in religious activities but focus completely on studying physics, to seek to discover its universal laws—the thing that fascinated Einstein. I also chose not to watch TV. For the seven years of undergraduate and graduate studies, I basically fulfilled my promise to the Catholic headmistress in my elementary school.

As I pursued my dream of becoming a physicist, I read biographies of scientists whose passion and interest in science motivated and encouraged me. Albert Einstein, Isaac Newton, and Marie Curie drew my attention so vividly that I considered them as my teachers and friends. They were my role models as scientists whose persistence and wisdom



in understanding scientific truth opened the door to classical and modern physics that pushed science and technology forward by at least a few decades.

My love for science and physics led me to desire to gain wisdom in using and applying scientific knowledge. I longed to understand the original cause and source of this world—to uncover the mysteries in this universe. How did the universe come into existence? Did the Big Bang Theory give more evidence about creation than evolution? If God created the wonderful heavens and earth and was the first cause of these mysteries, did He use mathematics as a foundation of creation? Was He both a mathematician and a creator?

Galileo called nature the “Book of Nature” and mathematics the language of this book. The current mathematical formation of nature and science results from the contributions of many wise mathematicians and scientists. The theories of mathematics can be verified and applied to the establishment and advancement of physics. Mathematics itself is not bound by space and time. The same mathematical truth can always

be used and checked in different locations and periods. It is a universal language and can be studied by people without boundaries. Mathematical truths stay the same in the past, present, and future.

Finding the Highest Truth

During one school break, I spent a week visiting my cousin in Toronto, Canada—a week that began a turning point in my journey to a new life. My cousin had changed from the naughty and goofy person he had been into a caring and sincere person. He had become a Christian. He shared with me the Christian gospel and brought me to various church meetings. My heart was opened, and I became willing to read God’s Word. My cousin’s testimony and God’s Word helped me know that Jesus is real. I accepted Him as my Savior and Lord and began a personal relationship with the Creator God. My life was changed forever.

Then one night in 1982 while I was studying the Bible, the Spirit of Truth touched me gently and opened my eyes even further. I understood that through the very mysteries of the universe, God is making Himself

known. *“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork”* (Psalms 19:1, ESV). And God most clearly reveals Himself in His Son, Jesus Christ, *“the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being”* (Hebrews 1:3). Because of God’s love, He provided a way through Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross to remove the barrier that separates man from God, so that by faith in Christ, we may know God and have eternal life. This is the hope I have in Christ, and it is worth spending the rest of my life studying His Word and experiencing His guidance. I had found the Truth that is higher than science. ■



Alan Tai received his PhD in physics from Boston College. He has worked at various medical ultrasound technology

companies as a technology leader and scientist. Alan has been preaching in the Cantonese worship service of his home church in Phoenix for the last decade. He is passionate about sharing how science and nature are in harmony with the creation processes revealed in the Bible. Alan authored the book “A Physicist’s Perspective on God: Roadmaps to Wisdom through Science and Life” and posts topics of science and faith at his website, scienceandlife.org.

Before going to the doctor, I had prayed that the Lord would prepare us for whatever news we heard. My husband and I determined beforehand that we were going to trust the Lord with whatever news we received. Even so, when the devastating news came, we cried out to the Lord for His comfort and peace. In that moment of despair, we had to trust the Lord and His sovereignty. And in the months and years to come, we would learn to trust the Lord in even deeper ways than we did at that time.

As I waited in labor for the baby to be born that I knew I would never take home, the Lord was with me, giving me strength to endure. When he was born, they wrapped him in a blanket to be taken away and later laid in a casket not a bassinette. Through my tears, I felt the Lord there with me. I looked at my precious baby boy, no longer alive, and saw a peaceful smile on his face, as if he were saying to me, “It’s okay, mommy, I am in the arms of Jesus.”

What comfort that thought brought to my hurting heart—knowing that the first face our son ever saw was the face of Jesus! And, oh, what a glorious face all of us who know Him will see one day. My baby boy was safe in the arms of Jesus—at home, where I long to be. As I chose to trust the faithfulness of the Lord when I didn’t understand why things were as they were, He filled me with a peace that was beyond my understanding.

Through His comfort, I learned that the Lord would always be there to comfort and help me through whatever trial I might face.

Heartache as Parents of an Adult Child

On June 4th, 2017, after a very busy Sunday of ministering in our church, we were home settling down for the evening when around 9:00 our doorbell rang. I went to the door, and seeing two policemen, my heart immediately sank. I knew they had not come to bring good news. We have five children and four of them were in different cities and states working. It could be any of them! We were about to receive the news no parent ever wants to hear!

The policemen told my husband that there had been an accident, and we should call the police in Arizona. The police there informed us that our oldest son had died from extreme heat exhaustion after climbing a mountain in Arizona that day. He had

been hiking alone and was found by another hiker in an unconscious state. By the time medical help arrived, he had already died. In the midst of this heartbreaking news, I felt the strong presence of the Lord being with me once again. He held and comforted us like no other could. We did not understand why—and we never will this side of heaven—yet our hearts were trusting the goodness and sovereignty of God.

Ben had just graduated from Alabama State University with a doctorate in physical therapy. He was in Arizona doing his last clinical before beginning his career as a physical therapist. He had worked so hard and loved people so well. He would have been a great PT! Why the Lord chose to take him before he ever got to do what he had prepared to do, we do not know. But one thing we do know is that God has an eternal plan in all the events of our lives. There are so many questions that we will never have answered, and we have learned to be okay with that. We have learned



Ben with family at Thanksgiving in 2016

to trust in the sovereignty of God as we continue to move forward and to seek to honor Him with our lives. We know that He is faithful in all things and does no wrong. So we trust in the One who gave the promise that He will never leave us or forsake us, and we find peace even in the midst of tragedy. He is the One who carries us through the heartaches of each day and enables us to use our story to point others to Him. Ben is—and always will be—greatly missed! His memory will always be in our hearts! We will honor him by using the story of his life and death to point others to Jesus, the Solid Rock on whom we stand. May the Lord continue to use our brokenness to draw us ever closer to Himself.

God is Forever Faithful!

Losing a loved one is always so hard, the separation so painful, the missing so hurtful. It's hard to carry on without them, wishing they were with us, experiencing life with us. But we must continue to move

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Ben Knight's graduation from PT school

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forward as the days and years go by with our eyes fixed on Jesus. Instead of focusing on the “what might have been,” we must train our hearts to focus on the sweet memories and times we did have with them. We can use the truths the Lord has taught us and the comfort He has given us to comfort others. As we share our stories, we share God’s faithfulness.

Because we live in a fallen world, Christians will go through trials that cause heartache and pain. But we have a Comforter and Helper who goes with us through these trials of life—One who gives us strength to carry on. Jesus won the victory over death when He died on the cross for our sins, and through His resurrection, He gives us eternal life. Thus we have a living hope that one day all things will be made right. There will be no more tears, no more sorrow, no more sickness, no more sin, no more heartache, no more death. Oh, what a glorious day it will be when all things are made new!





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A higher purpose.

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*"I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the LORD, the
Maker of heaven and earth" (Psalm
121:1–2).*

*"For the wages of sin is death, but
the gift of God is eternal life in Christ
Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). ■*



*Toma Knight has
ministered for over
40 years alongside
her husband, Cliff,
in family ministries
through their church.*

*The lives and deaths of two of their
six children—one at birth and one at
age 26—have become part of their
story. They share with others the
faithfulness of God in the midst of
deep heartache and pain, knowing
that suffering is never for nothing but
always has an eternal purpose. For this
truth, Toma says: "To God be the glory
for the great things He has done."*



Comfort through the Heartaches of Life

by Toma Knight

On April 6, 1989, three weeks before the due date of our firstborn son (Cliff Lamar Knight, Jr.), I called my doctor to let him know that I hadn't felt the baby move in a few days. He told me to drink a Coke and see if that would get him to move. Still no movement. He then told me to come into his office so they could do an ultrasound and check to make sure the baby's heart was beating. They moved the monitor around several times before giving us the heartbreaking news. The nurse told us that the baby had no heartbeat and had died. The news was devastating, but we felt the Lord with us in that moment of despair.



(Continued on page 19)

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