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Death with Hope, a Christian View

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Death with Hope, a Christian View

by Margaret Gayle

(A summary of the book, *The View from a Hearse: A Christian View of Death*, by Joe Bayly)



Birth and death enclose man in a sort of parenthesis of the present. The brackets are impenetrable. Death confronts us with its blank wall, always there waiting for us. Death always waits. The door of the hearse is never closed.

—Joe Bayly

Why the Book

Joe Bayly dedicates his book *The View from a Hearse* to the memory of his three sons, Danny, John, and Joe, whom he says “introduced us to death—its tragedy, its glory.” Writing the book as a meditation on death and grieving, Bayly says he wanted to

show that God has not promised His children an easy death or deathbed visions of glory. What God has promised is an open door beyond.

The book has a special message for those facing death of a loved one, those still in the throes of grief, and for those preparing to die. From a Christian point of view, peace with death doesn't come from understanding everything that happens to us, but in knowing the God who is in control of everything.

Throughout his book, Bayly weaves a fabric of hope, with the reasons for that hope. He tells of sitting next to a little boy's mother in the waiting room of Philadelphia Children's Hospital the day after they had buried their almost-five-year-old, who had died of leukemia. He was there to thank the doctor for the wonderful care he had given their son during the nine months from diagnosis to death. Learning that the little boy had the same type of illness as his son—and wanting to offer hope to the mother—he chose his words carefully: "It's good to know, isn't it, that even though the medical outlook is hopeless, we can have hope for our children in such a situation. We can be sure that after our child dies, he'll be completely removed from sickness and suffering and everything like that and be completely well and happy."

The mother's reply reflected her complete lack of hope and the hopeless plight of many people.

"If I could only believe that! But I don't. When he dies, I'll just have to cover him up with dirt and forget I ever had him."

Three of Joe Bayly's seven children died at young ages. Those deaths explain his decision to write this book. He was intimately acquainted with the pain of death and was all too familiar with what he once called this enemy's grim violence. But he was even more intimately acquainted with the One who conquered that enemy forever.

Facing Death

The certainty of death, Bayly observed, is often the focus of man's insecurity and fear. Philosophers have pondered the subject since the beginning of time. Socrates held that the essence of philosophy is preparation for death, that confronting death is the key to life. Bayly believed that accepting death frees a person to live.

The Psalmist expressed the same thought in his prayer, *"Lord, let me know my end, and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is. So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom"* (Psalms 39:4).

Death overtakes life in a multitude of ways: disease, accidental death, mass killing, genocide, suicide. But God reserves to Himself the power over when we die. Bayly tells of being present when several medical doctors were discussing the termination of life. One doctor expressed his opinion: "I am convinced that God decides the issues of life and death. One patient dies, another recovers, from what seem to be very similar situations. A doctor once administered a several-times-lethal dose of morphine to a severely damaged infant and the infant did not die. I think God did not want the child to die."

The assurance that God controls the issues of life and death gave Bayly and his wife confidence during the crisis period with their sick child. He tells that shortly after their five-year-old died of leukemia, someone asked him how he'd feel if a cure for leukemia were then discovered. His answer was that he'd be thankful, but it would be irrelevant to the death of his son. God determined to take him to His home at the age of five; the means was incidental.

What Dying is Like

It was Voltaire who said, "We begin to die as soon as we are born." Death is one certainty of life, permanent, irreversible. Bayly reminds the reader that death is a terrible enemy, even for one with faith in God. Death, the

enemy, has not yet been destroyed.

In our present cultural moment, death has often been banished from our homes to the hospital, where doctors and nurses replace the family. Thankfully, the growing hospice movement is making it more possible to arrange for members of our family to die at home. Hospice focuses on easing the pain, emotional and physical, and professionals help the patient and family view death as a natural process of life.

Bayly shares the intimate details surrounding his son's death.

"Our little boy died at home. He began to bleed at six o'clock in the morning. The doctor came a little later and said, 'I could put him in the hospital, and he could have a massive transfusion. Maybe he'd live a few days longer, maybe not.'

"We chose to have him stay at home, in the familiar bedroom, with his father and mother, to comfort him and love him and talk to him about Jesus' love and heaven.

"In the previous months, when we knew that he had leukemia—and even before—we had talked naturally about these things, and he had responded with the simple faith of a child in what his parents tell him.

"Now he didn't want to go to heaven. He wanted to stay with us

in the familiar home. (What little boy wants to leave his mother and daddy, his brothers and his sister?)

“At two thirty in the afternoon, he died.

“Died?

“In Jesus’ words, he was ‘carried by the angels’ to heaven.” (Luke 16:22)

Managing Grief

Bayly describes death as a wound to the living, stating that the wound is most painful, the grief most unrelenting, when the bell tolls for one who is part of your own family. A natural response to death is proper and healthy, but what is a natural response?

For sure, a natural response to death would include grief, tears, an overwhelming sense of loss, desire to be alone, or to have social contacts limited. For some—even for Christians—it may be to question God’s wisdom, or His love. Bayly asserts that honesty with God does not turn God away from us but brings Him near. It may even hasten the healing process.

Guilt is another natural response to death’s wound. All of us hurt the person we love at times, and in life we have a chance to straighten things out with “I’m sorry, please forgive me.” But death closes the door on making amends. Bayly urges a person who feels guilty to find forgiveness. He should certainly cry to God for forgiveness, but if after months of acute grief, someone does not experience forgiveness, he should seek help from a pastor or religious counselor.

Other natural responses to death may include idealizing the one who died, feeling bound to the one who has died, or fearing your own death. In admitting that death wounds, Bayly also states that wounds are meant to heal, and given time, they will.

He suggests that emotional investment in other people could be a part of the healing needed for death’s wound. Acknowledging that the death of their three children was devastating to their mother, Bayly attributes his wife’s stability to the fact that a succession of needy, hurting people stayed in their home for periods of time after their children’s deaths. In ministering to the healing of others, his wife—and he—found healing.

At the end of his chapter on managing grief, Bayly states that when the wounds of death begin to heal, most people find that they are freed from the memory of sickbed and casket and recall the person as he really was: laughing, frowning, encouraging, working, playing, life-size!

How to Comfort

If we want to help the sorrowing person to move forward in living, Bayly stresses that we should encourage him to grasp reality quite firmly. This is not denying the reality of death's separation; it is strengthening reality in his mind. Honest expressions of feelings and tears are valid. The viewing of the body in its casket—no longer condemned as barbaric—often helps the survivor accept the finality of death's separation.

Sensitivity in the presence of grief should usually make us more silent, more listening, says Bayly. An arm about the shoulder, a firm grip of the hand, a kiss. These are the proofs grief needs, not logical reasoning. Immediate help is often needed, but

in the first few days, it may be better to let the surviving person make some decisions, face some of the implications and problems, than to do everything for them. The aim is to balance immediate with continuing acts of thoughtfulness and love.

Another piece of advice Bayly gives is to occasionally mention the one who died, recalling an incident or happy occasion from the past. This will usually bring healing rather than pain to the person who is still grieving. Our silence sometimes will raise the question, "Do we really miss the one who died?" Mentioning the one who has died assures the survivor that he is not alone in his sorrow.

Our efforts to comfort should be simple and matched to the need. An invitation to a meal, an offer to prune a tree, inclusion of a child who has lost a father on a fishing trip—these are areas of encouraging a healthy, forward direction in a life that would otherwise be desolate and impoverished. Bayly gives a powerful statement at the end of the chapter on comfort, *Time heals grief: love prevents scar tissue from forming.*

Prayer and Terminal Illness

The Christian person who learns that he has a limited life expectancy is usually open to praying for healing or submitting to the praying of others. Bayly deals mostly with the issue of the effects of prayer for healing on a terminally ill person. He explains that tranquility usually follows and adds that in prayer we are trusting God to do what medical science is powerless to do. An element of tranquility is a sense of peace. If close relatives of the ill person share his Christian convictions, a sense of God's control—His love and oversight—permeates family relationships.

Bayly is clear to point out that prayer for prolonged life is not wrong. But such praying should not obscure the reality of heaven and its joyful prospect for the person who is ill. Death for the Christian should not be a confused misunderstanding of the will of God to heal; it should be a shout of triumph, through sorrow and tears, bringing glory to God. Death, not healing, is the great deliverance from all pain and suffering.

Prayer for healing should never determine our surrender to God's will. Bayly shares this personal story: "The summer after our 18-year-old son died, our 16-year-old daughter was at a Christian camp. A visiting minister told this grieving girl, 'Your brother need not have died, if your

parents had only had faith for his healing.' When our daughter told us this in a letter, I thought about the One who died in His early thirties, the One who loved children enough not to hurt them."

On Death Celebrations

From a Christian standpoint, the funeral of one who—in life—trusted Jesus Christ is a great affirmation of hope. Sorrow and its expression are appropriate, but that sorrow is hope-filled; it is our own loss that we feel most keenly. We have no sorrow over the condition of the one who died. "More alive than now" is what we celebrate in a Christian funeral.

For many Christians, there is a conflict in considering members of their families who died without giving any evidence of faith. We cannot change the condition of a person in the afterlife, but neither can we know absolutely that one who died did not exercise faith in the closing, private moments of his life. Bayly recounts once observing a deathbed conversion of a New Englander shipyard worker who had lived more than 70 years without faith in Christ. Sudden alarming symptoms sent him to the hospital where his life hung in the balance. Time was short, and his son—a Christian—knew it. Quoting the verse "*I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved,*" the son said, "Dad, that's the Lord Jesus' promise." The dad replied,

"Son, I'm coming in." And he came! During the two weeks before his death, he was often heard repeating the words "everlasting life" and "I'm not afraid."

Bayly makes it clear that though deathbed conversion is possible today, yet death is a watershed. Jesus Christ is the one way to eternity with God. The alternative is eternal separation from God. In life we decide our destiny at death.

In answering the question that arises why a kind God allows suffering, Bayly says our peace is not in understanding everything that happens, but in knowing that God is in control of sickness, health, and death itself. We accept life's mysteries and sufferings unexplained because they are known to God, and we know Him. This world is in rebellion against the kind God, and we live in a world of evil and sin and pain—where, as Jesus explained—God's enemy is at work. In this world of evil, God's primary work is not to shield us from suffering, but to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ. A Christian's response to suffering is a powerful testimony to the reality of Christian faith.

Two Kinds of Death

The Bible uses the same word for death to describe the event of dying, as we know it, and also to describe man's spiritual condition. Death is

a state of sin and darkness in which all men are alienated from God, the fountain of life and light. Jesus described His mission on earth this way: *"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly"* (John 10:10). And He made a great claim for Himself, related to death: *"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live"* (John 11:25).

Bayly acknowledges that death is a mystery, and the Bible does not answer all our questions. But what it does tell us is that by the death of Jesus Christ on a cross, death itself has been conquered, its bitter sting has been removed, and—in a day yet to be—it will be destroyed.

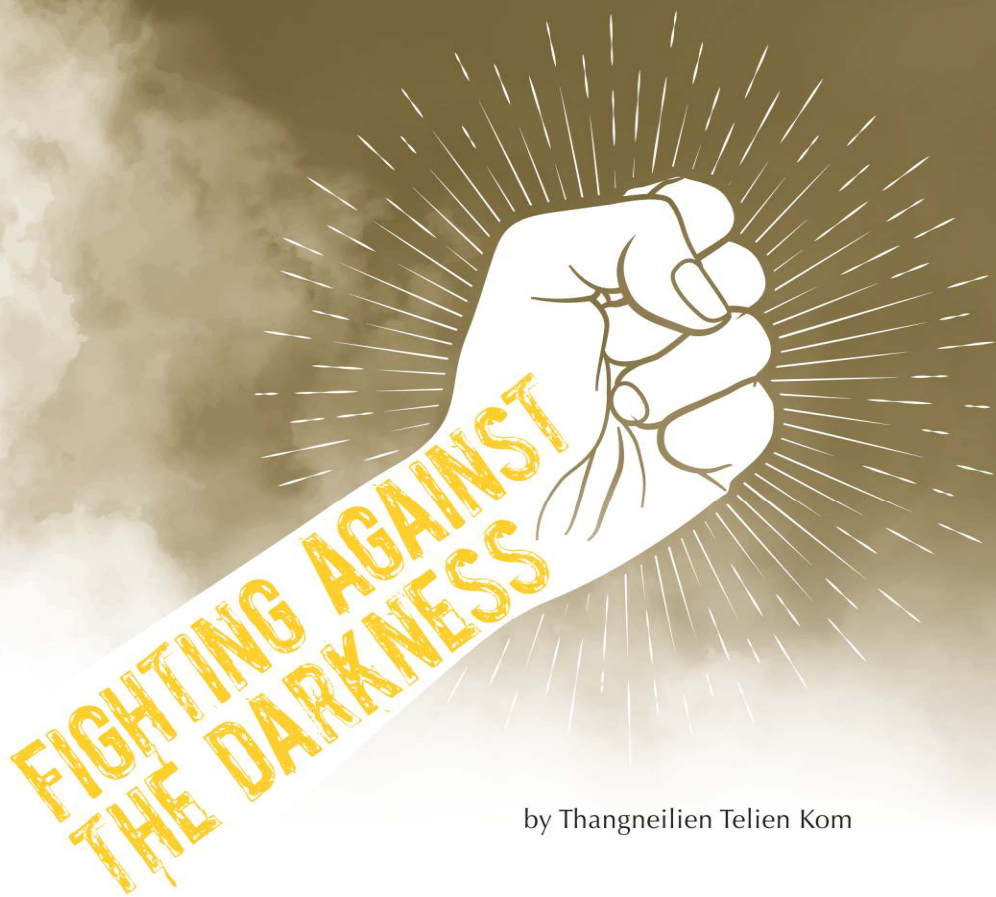
"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). ■



Margaret Gayle served with her late husband, Jim, in overseas missions for nearly 25 years. As assistant editor for

Challenger since 2005, she considers it one of her great blessings to work with the wonderful people who share their life stories with Challenger.

Margaret lives in Hurst, Texas, near her three sons, and is active in First Baptist Hurst.



by Thangneilien Telien Kom

Even before I was born, I had already been to church. My mother was a faithful Christian and always saw to it that I was in church. Though I grew up in a Christian family and learned about Jesus Christ from the Bible, I never believed in Jesus or had peace and joy in my life. I did not realize that Christ's coming into the world—and His death—was for me. All that I read from the Bible about Him was just like reading and knowing stories of Mahatma Gandhi. It did not lead to my spiritual growth.

Family Heritage

I was born on October 3, 1977, the second son in the family of Shonkholer Telien and Khamnu Telien of Hmongkotjiang, Manipur, India. When I was five years old, our family moved to the village of Phunchongiang, Churachanpur District, Manipur. My grandfather, the late Shonjathang Telien, was one of the first converts to Christianity in our area. After receiving Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord, he started

facing negative pressure from his own relatives and society. He was eventually chased out of his village. However, through him, his own father and other relatives believed in Jesus. Later, my grandfather resigned his government service and, until his death, served the Lord as a voluntary evangelist. Since he no longer had a secure income, he didn't have the resources needed to send his son, my father, to school. As a result, my father was illiterate, and as such, had no option but to join the Indian Army.

Once when returning home for the holidays, my father was involved in a bus accident and injured. As a result of that incident, he was partially handicapped, his right leg being shorter than his left leg. No longer fit to serve in the army, he started serving the Lord as a church helper. His work involved maintaining the key to the church, keeping the church and its premises clean, and ringing the church bell.



Family picture

I was told that from the time of my birth my grandfather had dedicated me for Christian service. My parents often reminded me that I was going to be a pastor, instructing me that I must not fight with friends at school, tell lies, steal, or miss attending Sunday school. Even as a young adult, my friends used to discourage me by saying that if I became an evangelist or missionary, I was not going to get a beautiful and good wife. In India, many of the evangelists and mission workers are poor, so most women are not willing to marry a man of this calling. As a result of my poor family situation, I was not able to earn a higher education. I only completed up to 12 standards (pre-university course).

Moving into Destiny

During my youth, I served in various youth fellowships in my church and as chairman of Moirang Area Youth Organization. I loved to stand in the midst of people and proclaim the Word of God. But instead of serving for His glory, I was looking for man's applause, which did not bring joy or peace to my heart. I could boast of reading the Bible from cover to cover, but what I learned, instead of utilizing it to rectify my sinful heart, I applied to others. Looking back, I see how much I did not fear God! Without truly knowing the Lord, I wasted many years of my life.

In 2002, a crusade was held in my

village. During the crusade, Rev. Thangjang gave a sermon about the goodness of reading and knowing the Bible. On hearing that sermon, I decided what I needed was to go to Bible School, thinking that knowing theology would bring me salvation, and I'd find peace and joy in my heart. Naively, I also thought that only people who feared God would be in Bible College—that it would be like paradise! But Bible College was not like what I thought. Before entering Bible College, I had given up chewing tobacco, but there were some people who indulged in chewing tobacco, taking pills, and even injecting drugs while claiming to be believers. I saw things I had not seen at home, which was shocking to me.

Thereafter, amidst the confusion of Bible College, I did not find peace and joy in my heart. The following year on Friday, January 24, 2003, I was in my room reading when God opened my eyes to believe. I was reading Timothy Tow's book *"My Homiletic Swimming Pool"* and Rev. John Sung's sermon, "Heaven and Hell" (the story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19–31). That sermon pierced my heart like an arrow! The existence of Heaven and Hell became real to me! I truly believed that Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace and the Way to eternal life. I knew that Christ came into this world to redeem me!

Getting up, I went to one corner of the Bible College campus, and

kneeling down, cried and asked for forgiveness for all my sin. In that moment, I was born again. God forgave my sin, and I was saved! Joy and peace flooded my heart! *"If you confess with thy mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved"* (Romans 10:9).

Now that I had received salvation, it was my humble desire to take up the cross of Jesus and serve Him till my last breath.

A Vision Fulfilled

In 2007, right after completing a master's degree from the seminary, I served the Lord as an evangelist among people of other faiths in Imphal, India. On February 8, 2011, God answered my nine-year prayer for a good wife. I married a beautiful, God-fearing, and well-educated lady, the only daughter of T. Siekam, a faithful mission worker. My wife, T. Neishoning, completed her Ph.D. from North-Eastern Hill University, NEHU, and today is my right hand in ministry.

Soon after we were married, my wife and I felt impressed and called by God to fight against the darkness in India. We felt the need for producing Christlike leaders to reach the millions of lost souls by establishing Bible-believing churches in India and beyond. Truly, India is a country of great spiritual darkness!



*Graduation Program of
MIB SABCT&M*



MIB SABCT&M Students

- * *India is a country of 1.4 billion souls.*
- * *The population of India is greater than the population of all Europe.*
- * *The population of India is greater than the population of North and South America combined.*
- * *The population of India is greater than the entire African continent.*
- * *According to a projection by the United Nations (UN), India will be the most populous country in the world by 2028.*
- * *Over 80% are Hindus, who believe in many gods and goddesses.*
- * *Another 13% are Muslims.*
- * *Less than 5% of the population is Christian.*
- * *"India is one country with many languages and cultures. More than 19,500 mother tongues are spoken in India." ("The Indian Express," published July 1, 2018)*
- * *India is one of the least evangelized countries of the world, yet only*

1.25% of the world's missions giving is directed to the country of India.

- * *Two-thirds of the people in India live in poverty.*

God's goodness and faithfulness in the past was the basis for our vision for the future. His unfailing love became our stronghold during the ups and downs of our journey. We held onto two Bible promises: "With God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26), and "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28).

A Vision Realized

From a humble beginning of just INR15,000 (US\$230) in hand, my wife and I started Mission India & Beyond (MIB). The initial startup began operating the ministry out of a rented building, with three faculty

and twelve students. After a few months of running the ministry, the local government officials tightened their rules and regulations for our locality. MIB was restricted from putting up ministry signboards and was warned by the local village defence force to discontinue conducting ministry in the building. Thus, MIB was not able to operate the ministry peacefully. But our God was so good and faithful to us. We were able to move to Guwahati in March 2015, and since then, MIB has continued to grow and function peacefully in a rented facility.

We rejoice that from our humble beginning until now (2023), God has been faithful in leading us, and we confidently move forward towards a global vision of reaching unreached India and neighboring countries with the gospel. Besides training Christlike leaders to establish Bible-believing churches, our mission is also to help in nation-building through transformational community development programs. We share the love of Christ with poor and needy children by giving them free tuition, school accessories, and nourishment so they don't drop out of school and will have a better future.

In 2020, God showed favor on MIB. Mission India & Beyond was registered by the government of Assam, India, as a leadership and community development initiative to transform communities with the

gospel of Jesus, one life at a time.

My wife and I have been blessed to have a small part in taking the gospel to our needy, beloved, homeland of India. All Christians are called to be willing to lay down their lives for Christ, to seek His Kingdom first, and to serve Him above all else. As we hold on the faithfulness of our God, all of us together can do great things to fulfill the Great Commission of our Lord.

"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few..." (Luke 10:2, KJV).

"And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14, KJV). ■



Rev. T. T. Kom graduated from South India Baptist Bible College & Seminary and completed his postgraduate degree from Trulock Theological Seminary. He is the director of Mission India & Beyond's ministry-training and church-planting center, South Asia Baptist College of Theology & Missions (SABCT&M) in Guwahati. He has a great burden for the unreached people of India. In his free time, he enjoys gardening. His favorite Bible verse is Romans 8:28, "All things work together for good to them that love God."

I AM MADE NEW



by Woo Yi-bo*

Hearing a hymn shook me to my core and tears began to fall. That was when I realized I had so many tears in me.

Family Background

The impression I have of my early childhood was that I was always home alone. Like most traditional Taiwanese families, my parents were always busy. My father ran a jade jewelry business, and in the 1980s, our family was rather wealthy, owning three to four houses in prime locations in Kaohsiung. Our

refrigerator was always filled with plenty of food.

But when I was in Primary Five, my family faced a huge change. My father accepted an invitation to start a diamond mine in the Republic of Sierra Leone in Africa. Investing all his assets, he planned to make a successful business of it. However, things didn't turn out that way. Not only did my father not earn a single dime from this investment, but he lost his properties and cars as well. As a result, he became an alcoholic and often abused my mother and me

when he was drunk. Eventually, my mother had enough and divorced my father. She then started anew with me and my sister.

No Real Home

We stayed with a friend of my mother's for a few months before moving to a school dormitory. I learned that it was the dormitory of the Holy Light Theological Seminary, where my mother was studying. Whenever someone asked me about my family, I felt inferior as I didn't even have a home. Back then, in my head, I would blame my mother for giving up on our home just to follow Jesus. At Primary Five, I was starting to develop my own thinking and values, and I wondered what was so good about following Jesus anyway.

My mother often brought my sister and me to different churches where she worked as an intern. We found this situation hard to adjust to. Having a lot of schoolwork and feeling socially inferior, I became reluctant to go to church. Just when I started making friends at one church, my mother would have to leave because of her internship. I detested this lifestyle. For this reason, I hated the church, and by Grade Nine, I stopped attending.

The Beginning of Down

During the last few months of Grade Nine, as I did quite well in my exams,

I didn't have to study as hard for the second test as my classmates did. So, wanting to share the household financial burden and gain some work experience, I found part-time jobs. I deliberately got restaurant jobs to avoid going to church, as I would have to work over the weekends. For the next six years, I didn't go to church once.

After graduating from junior high, I did not continue my studies at a regular senior high. I had always liked playing computer games and was interested in computers, so I enrolled in an information technology course at an industrial high school. Continuing to work my restaurant jobs, I attended class during the day and studied at night. But by the end of the first academic year, I realized that studying was not a piece of cake. My grades were terrible, and I had to transfer to another vocational school. During my time there, I would fall asleep in class, exhausted from working the night shift at the restaurant. I started smoking, and when caught by a disciplinary teacher for smoking both outside and inside the campus, I was expelled for my bad conduct and failing grades.

Way Down

Through my part-time work I made some "acquaintances" and eventually joined the gang. We raced, got into fights, and did illegal work with our

gang bosses. From my “brothers,” I seemed to have found the sense of belonging and recognition that I craved. I felt these brothers were more important to me than my family. I moved out to live with them in a rental, living a muddled life—sleeping during the day, going out at night. During that time, I had countless penalty tickets and was followed by many police officers. I was involved in at least three cases and had to face legal proceedings. Seeing that I had a clear criminal record and was “remorseful,” the prosecutor asked the judge not to impose a custodial sentence, but simply to fine me.

After that, I still arrogantly thought I could easily pay off this fine of NT\$ 130,000 by running some errands or doing some jobs for my boss. However, it was not as easy as I thought. According to the court sentence, I had to be detained if I could not pay the whole fine within a

specified period. For each NT\$ 1,000 of fine, I had to be detained for one day. So, I would have to be detained in the Taiwan High Prosecutor’s Office for 130 days.

Crying in a Foreign Place

By this time, my mother had remarried and had married a preacher. They were worried that if I was detained in the Taiwan High Prosecutor’s Office, I would meet even more gang bosses and would find it even harder to lead a life free of gangster influences. So, one week before the deadline for paying the fine, they managed to locate me and proposed that they would pay the fine for me—if I volunteered at an orphanage in Myanmar.

When I heard that I had to go to Myanmar, I was very reluctant at first. I didn’t even know where Myanmar was, and now I had to stay there for half a year? In face of legal consequences, none of my “brothers” was willing to share even a dime with me. Having been abandoned by those I cherished and valued, I was steep in hatred and loneliness. As the deadline approached, I had to make a decision, and I made the call to go to Myanmar. It was precisely this decision that changed the course of my life.

On November 19, 2013, I went to Yangon, Myanmar. The Dean of the Yangon Evangelical Seminary,



Being prayed for

Guo Bao-cai, came to pick me up personally. The first night, overwhelmed by the loneliness of being a foreigner in the mugginess of Yangon, I could not sleep at all. When the morning came, the students started doing morning devotions. I heard a hymn that I knew: "Every day, Your grace is sufficient / Even in adversity, I will not run away / There is nothing to fear, when You are with me..." Since leaving the church I had been void of feelings and purpose. But this hymn shook me to my core and tears began to fall. That was when I heard a voice in my head clearly saying, "My child, you are home!" I started crying when they sang the hymns, and I was still crying when their morning prayer session was over. Pastor Guo invited me to join in the 9 a.m. staff prayer meeting. I cried once again when I heard the hymns. That was when I realized I had so many tears in me.

Repenting, Returning to God

Pastor Guo treated me as his own. I was so touched by the preachers, pastors, and students of the seminary who received a visitor like me without reservations. I truly experienced the love of Christ through them.

Around two weeks after I arrived in Myanmar, Pastor Guo started encouraging me to teach Chinese classes at the orphanage. I asked him: "Can I really do it?" He simply answered: "If you are willing, you

will see God work." So, I said yes and started teaching in the orphanage. That was when I saw the extent of Pastor Guo's ministry: seminary, missionary center, orphanage, and the Chinese church ministry. He also led mission trips to different parts of Myanmar. I was not allowed to join them since I had just arrived, and Myanmar was politically unstable back then. But I envied those who got to go and promised myself that one day I would go on a mission trip with them.

Come April the following year, a mission team from Taiwan came to Myanmar. Pastor Guo's team was working together with them, and I was involved in the design of screen projection. On the last night of the revival conference, the pastor of the mission team invited the congregation: "If you are willing to surrender your life to Jesus now, please raise your hand and let me pray for you!" So, I raised my hand, officially admitting that I was a sinner and willing to repent and return to Jesus Christ.

Street-sweeping Days

Half a year passed by quickly. My stepfather, Pastor Ye Ji-fa, came to Myanmar by invitation to teach and delivered a piece of bad news: my case had been retried. As I did not pay the fine before the deadline, and I did not behave within bounds before coming to Myanmar, the

prosecutor thought that I was not remorseful. He decided to revoke the decision to impose a fine in place of imprisonment and sentenced me to 130 days of imprisonment. And I had to appear in court to clarify the matter! So, after half a year in Myanmar, I returned to Taiwan with my stepfather to take responsibility for myself.

When the court was in session, God worked in amazing ways. The judge who considered my case only had my case for the day, whereas the other courts had four to five cases that morning. I had never been in court before, and I answered the questions poorly. But thanks be to God, the judge was patient and willing to teach me how to answer the questions. He analyzed my case in detail. Together with my parents' petition for me and my experience of volunteering in Myanmar the previous six months, the judge sentenced me to 730 hours of community service to make up for the fine I should have paid. That's how I started half a year of street-sweeping. During that period, I continued attending church services, persisted in reading the Bible, and contemplated the Christian faith. I kept experiencing God as I lived a life of repentance.

Studying Theology

During my street-sweeping days, I did not forget my aspiration to return to Myanmar. Towards the end of 2014,

after the conclusion of my case, I returned to Yangon. This time, my father encouraged me to undertake theology studies there. After praying about the matter, I officially enrolled in the seminary.

Being a child with little confidence, when I was asked by a teacher to go onstage, I would get very nervous and would even have a stomachache and dizziness. Thus, speaking publically was a huge challenge for me. After I started studying in the seminary, I prayed to God for courage to share onstage. God granted me my wish, and I started sharing and singing hymns publically. I even started practicing preaching. Through serving God, I continued to experience the grace of God: from knowing nothing about music to becoming a member of the worship team and serving God with music; from knowing nothing about sound controls to being the chief sound controller in church; from knowing nothing about electronic appliances to designing the sound wiring for the entire church. Time and again, I experienced the presence of God so fully that I completely believed in the encouragement from Pastor Guo and my father: "If you are willing, God will use you."

After the Epidemic

When I was studying theology, I first thought God had called me to serve Him while working. Therefore,



I applied for leave of absence two years after I started my bachelor studies at the Yangon Evangelical Seminary (2015-2017). I joined a medical team established by a group of Christian shareholders. The headquarters was in Yangon, and I worked as an assistant to help them with medical missions and projects to combat poverty.

In 2021, Myanmar was affected by the COVID epidemic that plagued the globe. More than 10,000 died from COVID in July alone. Government crematoriums were overcrowded, and society was filled with fear and dread. The church could not hold services as usual. All of my work was suspended. I returned to help Pastor Guo with the orphanage ministry and taught some classes. One night at dinner, Pastor Guo asked me to survey the land behind the orphanage with him, as he was making plans for a future campus, including a basketball court. During that period of time, I was often touched by how Pastor Guo surrendered his life to serve God and others. I made a promise to myself that I would do my best to assist Pastor Guo—to live up to Jesus' calling to me. However, just when I had this thought, something major happened!

In July 2021, half of the preschool students became sick with COVID. Pastor Guo was no exception. Just as everyone started to get better, Pastor Guo did not, but got worse. His



Woo Yi-bo preaching

blood oxygen level started to drop. Everyone from our church was in search of a hospital for Pastor Guo. Yet, medical resources were scarce in Myanmar, a lot of doctors were sick with COVID, and hospitals were not equipped with medical ventilators. Having no other option, we could only send Pastor Guo to a nursing home in a barracks. However, after battling the virus for seven days, on August 1, 2021, Pastor Guo left us, to be with our Lord.

Undertaking the Vision

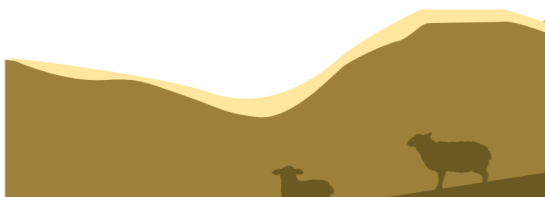
After handling Pastor Guo's funeral matters, I was deeply lost. Looking at the expanse of his ministry, I wondered: how can this ministry go on? And almost at the same time, I saw in my mind the verse Isaiah 6:8, and it was as if it were a calling from

God: “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’”

After praying for three weeks and affirming the call was indeed from God, I decided to once again equip myself to become a full-time preacher. Presently, I am a full-time student of the Master of Divinity course at Logos Theological Seminary. In the future, I hope to further equip myself with a Master of Theology and a Doctor of Missiology degree. I want to give the rest of my life to the ministry in Myanmar—in particular, the orphanage, Chinese school, and the training of preachers at the seminary. I am willing to devote the rest of my life to impact the lives of others. And I know that Jesus Christ our Lord shall always be with me! ■



**This story was first published in Chinese Today, Issue No. 730 (February 2023) and was translated into English by Kiara Ngai.*



In 1968 during a tumultuous time in our nation, I left home to attend nursing school in a city 60 miles from the farm where I grew up. Because I was from a small rural community and had rarely been away from home—much less lived in a city—I felt very insecure. Many of my classmates talked of dating, boyfriends, partying, and making life choices I did not desire to participate in. I was a rule-follower and people pleaser, and now I was confused as to what the rules were and who to please. I felt lost, unsafe, and unsure about making choices and what choices to make. It seemed being good was no longer good enough.

Early in my freshman year, a vivacious classmate asked me to a Bible study in her dorm room. She invited me week after week, from early fall into spring. Always, I had an excuse: I was studying, I had a paper to finish, I was going out with girlfriends, I was going home for break. By midyear, I was irritated by her persistent invitations and would give any excuse.



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In my thinking, even though she was a cheerful, friendly soul whom everyone liked, I didn't need her Bible study. After all, I was a good Christian girl. I just chose to keep my faith to myself. Who was she to think she needed to teach me the Bible?

Near the end of the spring semester, she knew there were no upcoming assignments or tests.

I had run out of excuses. I also thought, well if I just give in and go, then she'll quit hounding me. I decided to attend. "Bring your Bible," my classmate said, "and we'll listen to a cassette recording from my pastor and discuss what we learn." I responded, "Okay, if you say so."

The study that night was on a familiar passage, the 23rd Psalm. As we listened to the pastor, we read along in our Bibles. I had heard this Psalm many times in my church back home but never before had I heard a Psalm taken apart verse by verse and word by word. I learned that the Good Shepherd in this Bible passage was

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a picture of the ministries of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He would care for His sheep as their restorer, healer, leader, protector, guide, and Savior. I learned that He loved me, cared for me, and wanted to rescue me. I was amazed at how clear the message was and how much the Shepherd desired to tend His sheep. When the pastor concluded his lesson, he asked, "Can you say in your heart, and know for certain, the Lord is MY Shepherd?"

I realized I knew of this Shepherd, but I did not know Him personally. I could not say with complete certainty, "The Lord is MY Shepherd." That night I prayed and asked the Lord Jesus into my heart. I sensed an immediate peace and overwhelming assurance that I now belonged to The Shepherd and was rescued from sin and confusion.

The Lord Jesus has been my Shepherd and Savior ever since. While I often fail Him, He has never failed me. Christ set me free, redeemed me, and paid my ransom. He rescued me from sin and death, delivered me to eternal security, and provided for me a life of daily fellowship with Him. He restores my soul, and I have the wonderful assurance that I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.



PSALM 23 (NASB)

*The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not want.
He makes me lie down in green
pastures;
He leads me beside quiet waters.
He restores my soul;
He guides me in the paths of
righteousness
For His name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort
me.
You prepare a table before me in the
presence of my enemies;
You have anointed my head with oil;
My cup overflows.
Surely goodness and lovingkindness
will follow me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the
Lord forever. ■*



Rose Reese is a retired registered nurse who dabbles in creative writing. She also enjoys gardening and studying the

Bible with ladies at her church. She considers her highest calling to be a wife and a mother and today enjoys investing in the lives of her children and grandchildren. Rose lives in Fort Worth, Texas.

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As Good as Any

by Rose Reese

I was as good a Christian as any, I thought. Raised in a morally upright home, I respected and obeyed my parents, studied hard to get good grades and was known in my family as “the good one.” In high school, I was active in 4-H, band, and Student Council.

Although my parents did not attend church themselves, they saw to it that we kids could attend a small-town Methodist church with neighbors. In my teen years, I served as president of the Methodist Youth Fellowship and played the organ during church services. Surely, I could be called a good Christian girl!



(Continued on page 20)

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