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A Tragic Killing, A Mother's Faith and Forgiveness



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A Tragic Killing, A Mother's Faith and Forgiveness

by Cindy Yang

When Sister Liu walked into our church one Sunday morning, it was almost impossible to associate her with the mother who had suffered the painful loss of her son in a tragic killing three years earlier. Greeting each of us with a warm smile, her countenance reflected complete peace and rest in the love of our Heavenly Father. My heart was stirred by Sister Liu's love and compassion for others, even after enduring immense

pain. When I looked into her eyes and held her hand again, I felt as if I was the one who needed comfort. My cautious greeting and the many unspoken questions I had in my heart must have been written all over my face. But this strong mother's eyes were focused on a place far beyond, where the deepest wounds can be soothed, where every grievance can be comforted, and where every sin can be forgiven.

Her Son, in Life and in Death

The news of the killing had already spread across the internet when the brothers and sisters in our church learned of Sister Liu's tragic loss of her beloved son. It was heartbreaking—the first time I had experienced such a tragedy happening to someone so close, who often attended worship with me. Through many chats with Sister Liu, I had learned that her son was studying at the University of Washington, and that she had confidence he had a bright future. Once, at our church, her son had given his testimony. A group of young people had returned from a mission trip to rural Taiwan and shared that many people, both young and old, had come to faith in the Lord. His face was full of youthful vigor and pride, and beautiful hopes for the future. I never imagined that this face, which evoked such care and tenderness, would later appear as the victim in a shocking front-page news story across the U.S.

Jiang Kaiwen (Kevin) grew up in Chicago and pursued excellence in both his education and life. After graduating from the University of Washington, he continued his studies at Yale University's School of Environment. While in college, to help ease his mother's financial burden, he worked part-time as a real estate agent and fitness coach. Besides excelling academically, Kevin had a rich extracurricular life

and diverse interests. He played the piano skillfully and was passionate about hiking and fishing. He was also a U.S. Army veteran.

The life of this outstanding young man ended abruptly on the night on February 6, 2021. Twenty-six-year-old Kevin had driven his fiancée, Perry, to a local supermarket to buy some daily necessities before returning her back to her apartment near East Rock in New Haven, Connecticut. Shortly after leaving the apartment, he was shot at close range. Although emergency personnel arrived quickly, they were unable to save his life.

The Other Son

Based on a series of clues, the police issued a warrant for *John Doe* (in respect for the family, the real name was withheld), a student at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. After three months on the run, John was arrested in May 2021 during a nationwide manhunt in Alabama. In 2009, John had represented a high school in Maryland, winning a silver medal for the U.S. team in the International Mathematical Olympiad. He was also an outstanding pianist, having performed solo in MIT campus concerts, where he was recognized by both students and faculty as an excellent pianist. During his time as a graduate student at MIT, John's papers were frequently published in prestigious journals. This computer science and artificial intelligence

doctoral student also won a special award from MIT for his remarkable research achievements. Like Kevin, this brilliant scholar also enjoyed hiking, skiing, and other outdoor activities.

A Decision to Destroy

Why did these two exceptional young men, who had never met, become the victim and suspect in a major shooting incident? What led their fates to intersect? The only person who could link Kevin and John was Kevin's girlfriend, Perry. She was an undergraduate at MIT and, though connected with John on social media, they were merely acquaintances. According to Perry's statement to the police, John had repeatedly expressed a desire to contact her by phone, but she declined, since they were just casual friends. However, Perry noted that it was obvious John

was interested in her.

It seems that the turning point that led to John's internal turmoil and eventual loss of control occurred when Kevin and Perry shared on their respective social media accounts the news of their engagement. Learning that the beautiful girl he once desired was about to marry another outstanding young man, and watching them embark on a promising life together, John, who had always excelled in everything, could not accept this emotional defeat. Having never experienced failure, he felt utterly rejected and destroyed. He impulsively chose the worst possible action—to destroy, not to bless.

After the gunshot, there were no winners. The heavy price for John's jealousy and narrow-mindedness was borne by two families that could have otherwise been happy and fulfilled.



Kevin and his girlfriend



Kevin at Yale University



A Mother's Response

When this tragic news of her son's death reached Sister Liu, she was in shock, struck as if by lightning. She was unable to believe that her loving son—so cheerful, helpful, and ambitious—could have been suddenly gunned down. What kind of deep-seated hatred could drive someone to kill her son?

After the incident, our church established a special prayer group on WeChat for Sister Liu. A brother from the church visited her at her apartment near Yale University. We knew that no words could ease the excruciating pain of a loving mother losing her only son, and no amount of support could replace the immense joy and companionship that her beloved son brought her. Our only reliance was that our omniscient

and omnipotent God would wipe away Sister Liu's tears and heal the deepest wounds in her heart. We prayed too that God's justice would be manifested in this case.

During the first two weeks, Sister Liu was so overwhelmed by grief that she lost her appetite and spoke little. Three weeks later, Sister Liu shared with the WeChat group a revelation she felt was from God. The Book of Revelation describes the crystal-clear, pure, and beautiful blue sea of glass before God's throne. As she read these verses, Sister Liu felt God was assuring her that her son was in that paradise, on that blue sea of glass, in a place of indescribable beauty. She felt God was saying to her, "Do not let your heart be sorrowful." From that point on, she never wavered in her belief in God's goodness and she cast all her cares on Him.



Sister Liu in Bible study group



Sister Liu with the youth

God's Faithfulness.

Sister Liu later moved to Florida and sent back photos of herself standing with other sisters. From the pictures, we could see that despite months of suffering and grief, her smile remained as warm and kind as ever. She had found a new ministry in God's family—leading a group of young people in Bible study and prayer, sowing the seeds of God's kingdom through her tears. She had changed her original English name, Linda, to Joy, because she said that no matter the circumstances, she could always feel God's love and mercy. She wanted to be joyful, content, and grateful! It was God's great love, she testified, that enabled her to recover from her grief, let go of resentment and doubt, forgive the murderer from her heart, and pray for the comfort and salvation of John's parents.

In the end, God upheld justice for Sister Liu and Kevin. The news reports focused solely on the final verdict of the case, providing no answers to the most crucial questions that the world should be concerned with: How can souls be saved from being corrupted by selfishness, jealousy, and pride—demons that ultimately destroy bright futures and innocent lives? And how can those who suffer grievances and disappointment find comfort?

Sister Liu, through her own experience, has given us the best answers: Trust in God's goodness and put yourself

into His hands. In the face of great injustice and misfortune, she did not allow herself to be overwhelmed by resentment, confusion, or despair, nor did she succumb to self-pity and depression that could have broken her body and spirit. Instead, she turned her eyes and thoughts to our Heavenly Father and placed her complete trust in Him. He was her rock and refuge! She also gave witness to how God's glory and miraculous power are manifested in those whom He loves and who love Him.

A Mother's Vow

"Kevin cherished life and had a deep faith in God," Sister Liu says of her son. "He wanted to spread the love of God everywhere. I will always remember his desire to love God and others, and I will fulfill it for him." Sister Liu says of herself: "Whenever I feel helpless, I remember God's words in Psalm 23:4: *'Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.'*" ■

Cindy Yang is a preschool teacher and freelance Christian writer. She is also a member of the news broadcasting ministry in Bread of Life Church in Seattle, Washington. Before coming to the U.S. in 2010, Cindy was a middle school teacher in China for nine years. She likes reading, writing, cooking, and playing the piano.



Journey

to Japan

by Lilian Chen

I've waited for many things in my life.

I've waited for my sister to be born, I've waited to get my first laptop, I've waited for my church's youth retreat to roll around every year. I've waited for college application results, for my scholarship application results, and to finally finish nursing school.

All these things eventually came to fruition, sometimes with a happy result and other times with disappointing results.

But the longest thing I have ever waited for was to go to Japan.

Taking After My Parents

I've always known that I am a product

of my parents. They immigrated from rural China in their 20s in hopes of creating a better future for themselves by chasing the "American Dream." Due to their persistence and endurance, my brother and I were given lives of plenty and blessing. We were never hungry, we were never cold, and we were able to receive an education. We lived out the American Dream that our parents had dreamed of.

Part of this American Dream was going to church. My parents knew this was a part of American culture, so they joined a Chinese church; and I have had the blessing of growing up in a Christian home, with a loving church family, and with the opportunity to learn about God. With a complete family, a church community, and an



Family photo

excellent education, I should have had everything I needed to be happy.

Questioning My Parents' Love

By middle school, however, it was clear that this life of plenty and blessing wasn't enough for me. I felt pressure from my parents to succeed academically, and when I wasn't good enough, I questioned if I would ever be good enough for them. *Get A's in middle school, get A's in high school, get into a good college, become a doctor.* I would argue frequently with my parents about my academic performance. Was my existence simply to make my parents' sacrifices worth it? I wanted my parents to be proud of me, and I wanted my classmates to be impressed by me, but when I couldn't meet their expectations, I felt hopeless.

In middle school, I really wanted a MacBook Air laptop, and thought that if my parents really loved me, they

would buy me what I wanted. This was how I defined love—giving another person whatever they wanted. Though I wanted money, possessions, and good grades, what I wanted most was to be loved by my parents.

In the 7th grade, I went to my first youth retreat, and I was so excited to spend a weekend away from my parents and with my friends. I was happy with my church friends, worshiping, praying, and studying the Bible together. But on the third day, my parents showed up to visit. I was so upset and embarrassed that they came. "Go home!" I told them. I didn't want my parents at the retreat! Later that night, during the prayer portion of the service, I was sitting by myself, longing to encounter God in my life, when I felt two hands on my shoulders—and heard Chinese. I looked up and saw my parents there, praying for me. Before I knew it, tears started falling uncontrollably down my face. In that moment, God revealed to me that I was a sinner. I had grown so much bitterness and hate in my heart towards my parents and said so many horrible things to them, yet here they were visiting me, forgiving me, and praying for me. I had sinned against my parents, and I had sinned against God. A verse I had memorized as a child came alive for me: *"But God shows his love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). What I truly needed was God's perfect love. He paid the ultimate

price so that I could be reunited with Him. This was the most important purpose for my life—to know God, and to love Him.

New International Friends

From that youth retreat, God lit a fire in my heart, and I spent my high school years learning more about Him and acting in faith to share His love with others. When it was time for college, I wanted to do the same—somehow succeed in my career and also be able to give the glory to God. I was the product of my parents, so since my mom is a nurse and my dad is a businessman, I pursued a dual degree in nursing and business at the University of Pennsylvania. Surely this was God’s plan for me, to one day become a hospital CEO and impact many lives that way. The plan definitely was one my parents would choose for me.

In college, I saw that a life of plenty

and blessing wasn’t enough for me or the people around me. I encountered more wealth, greater idols, and fewer people who were happy. During a particularly difficult semester, my nursing and business classes began to lose their meaning. I had gotten into my top program. I was creating a future for myself. But why did this future feel so empty? Why was I not happy?

But then, during the difficult semester of my sophomore year, the Lord brought me the greatest blessing. I began learning Japanese as a passion project and met my three language partners—Ami, Momo, and Erika. I spent every day hanging out with them, learning about their country, language, and traditions. I would bring them to church with me and to fellowship events and translate the Bible studies for them. Through this friendship, I experienced so much joy and love and delight! God was telling me, “*Lilian, the world is so*



Leading worship at church with kids from Lilian's youth group



Parents praying with Lilian at her youth retreat in 2012

much bigger than Philadelphia, than California, than America. Dream bigger!"

Right before my friends had to return to Japan, one of them shared with me, "I want to believe in Jesus and become a Christian." I was shocked! I had not had a direct gospel conversation with any of them; I simply shared my life, and in the process, God touched her heart and touched my heart as well. I began to see the brokenness in Japan and how it was similar to my own story—Japan is a country of plenty and blessing, with a sound economy, kind culture, and safe environment, yet it has the highest rates of suicide and depression. Once again, I could see that plenty and blessing are not enough.

Making a Firm Decision

The next two years were not easy. They were filled with disappointments and

frustrations, such as receiving an internship offer in Japan but COVID happening, or trying to chase the path of healthcare consulting but God slamming the door shut with rejection after rejection. During my senior year, though, time was up, and I had to decide. What did I want to do with my life?

I weighed the four options in front of me: nursing, business, Japan, and ministry. I had come to college for nursing and business, but now I felt cynical towards nursing and business. I realized that physical healing does not lead to eternal salvation, and that the quest for wealth in business will never end. I was, however, spending 15 hours each week learning Japanese for fun, and I spent another 20 hours on college ministry because these two things mattered so much to me. I wanted a career where I could loudly share the gospel and praise Jesus Christ to the people around



Playing for worship with young adults and youth group kids at Lilian's church



Serving at Aomori Christian Center in Aomori, Japan, during the summer of 2022 (Lilian playing the guitar)



Teaching kids at a Taiwanese elementary school in 2023



Teaching about Japan to kids at Vacation Bible School (VBS) during summer 2023



me. I wanted to use all my efforts and talents for what truly mattered and what would last forever. One day in October 2021, I humbled my heart and prayed, “God, I don’t know if you want me to do missions or be a nurse, or what, but whatever you want me to do, I will do it. I surrender my life to you.”

After that prayer, I gave up the expectations of the world to seek material blessings and the path that my parents wanted me to follow. I chose the path that brought me the most joy and happiness—Japan and ministry. I would meet Japanese students in my college fellowship and share the gospel with them. I had the strong conviction that, if there was anything I was meant to do, it was this. The following few months were not easy. I feared that I would disappoint my parents and the people around me with my decision. The first time I told my mom the news that I wanted to go to Japan as a missionary,

she hung up on me, and I burst into tears. But I continued to pray, and when I came home for winter break, the Lord had transformed my mom’s heart. We were at a dinner party, and mom introduced me, “This is Lilian, and she wants to be a missionary in Japan.” I had not convinced her; I had not reasoned with her; I had not presented to her a business plan—but the Lord had transformed her heart!

Once, at a retreat for missionary candidates, I scanned the room and saw that I was a minority—the only Asian American candidate, and thus no one would understand my parental struggles. In my 10-minute testimony, I focused on the relationship I had with my parents and how that has been a struggle in my decision to volunteer for missions. I was not prepared for how many people directly related to my testimony, even if they were not of Asian descent. I learned that most parents don’t want their children to go to foreign countries for four years

at a time—or even longer. Later in the week, I met a staff member who was also a second-generation Chinese American and had been a medical doctor before going into missions. He said that his parents were still not supportive. Hearing his testimony affirmed in my mind that I could not live for my parents' approval. But I did want to honor and respect them.

My next step of action was to pursue my seminary education. I planned to enroll in Westminster Theological Seminary's Master of Arts in Theological Studies program, but I didn't have any money. My home church suddenly said that they were encouraged that I wanted to go to the mission field, and they paid for my entire tuition! While I had worried about money and income if I chose this path, God showed me that He would provide and make a way.

The relationship with my parents is still rocky, and I must be constantly in prayer about it. Even though my decision to go as a missionary has disappointed them, my story of leaving the path the world set out for me and instead trusting in God's plan for me has been an encouragement to my friends and other parents in the Asian American community. One parent asked me, "How did you grow to have such a strong conviction in the Lord?" I answered, "I saw my parents love God as I grew up, so I did the same. Through God's grace and love I am here today, full of

joy and wanting to share the grace of God, the source of true joy, with everyone in the world."

October 2024 Update

I am now officially in Japan, serving with Mustard Seed Network, part of a church-planting team for the 1-million non-Christians in the city of Sendai. It's amazing to see lives changed by the gospel, but it is also overwhelming to stand on a packed subway and realize that I am probably the only Christian on the train. But God is a good Father, and I am grateful to be in Japan. There is nothing more beautiful than seeing the glory of God reach the darkest, most hopeless corners of this world.

"Jesus said, 'Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life'" (Mark 10:29–30, ESV). ■



Lilian Chen is from San Jose, California. Since 2024, she has been serving as a missionary in Sendai, Japan, with Mustard Seed Network.



PARENTS: Worthy of Respect

by Wendy Click

In China, women who come from Southern China are known for their intelligence and beauty, and my mother is typical of this kind of woman. From pictures of her, I can see that she was beautiful, competent, and full of youthful spirit. One time she told me that when she was young, she could give presentations on revolutionary policy without any preparation or drafts. Mother was gifted in carving, Chinese calligraphy, printing, and accounting. Her schoolmates at higher primary school had even given her the nickname of “Little Yiman Zhao” (a famous female Chinese communist). Though my mother was beautiful and bright, she was born at a time when she had little opportunity to develop her talent.

Mother’s father had died when she was little, so she—along with two older

brothers and two older sisters—were raised by my grandmother alone. As she grew older, her only request was to go to school. But my grandmother thought the most important things for a girl were to be able to do needlework well and be married off to a decent family. When mother was 12, my grandmother consented and sent her to a higher primary school, where she developed her handwriting and Chinese calligraphy skills.

After gaining a higher primary school education, my mother was able to join the Chinese Communist Party. Following the belief of “for the happiness of the next generation,” she accepted the marriage arrangement of the Chinese Communist Party to my father, a cadre of the Party. Shortly after getting married, they moved to a mountainous region in southern Zhejiang Province to contribute to

the building of a new China. Mother worked as a clerk in a government office.

Memories from my childhood are that my parents' marriage was full of sadness and bitterness. There was a difference in their educational level and social status, and they lived on a tight family budget which created worry over the future of their children. Both were also strong-willed.

As a child, I never understood why my father lost his title, job, and income during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Mother left her job and stayed with my father, and they went back to my mother's hometown with nothing — living under the eyes of people who discriminated against them. But mother kept the integrity of our family for the sake of her children and never considered divorcing my father. After the Cultural Revolution, Father's name was cleared, and he started to work as a national cadre again.

My father was born into a poor family in Shandong Province. He joined the army of resistance against the Japanese when he was 14 years old. Later, he left his hometown for Southern China and was appointed director of the Agrarian Reform Team in Zhejiang Province. He experienced every facet of the Revolution and dedicated his life to the struggle for Communism. In my memory, he was most faithful to his belief, being loyal and devoted to his country and people. He always said that their bloodshed and sacrifice was for the happiness of the Chinese people and for a rich, strong, and prosperous country. He endured much humiliation for his beliefs, but the bullet scar on his body clearly gave evidence that he had a glorious history of fighting for China. When I was in middle school, Dad was reinstated to his former position, and after 10 years he was honorably retired.

Soon after father retired, I started to believe in Jesus. Through radio



Wendy Click



Wendy with her parents

broadcasts, I heard about Jesus, that He loved people enough to die for their sin—and the seed of belief was planted in my heart, which later developed into full faith.

After Dad retired, we returned to our hometown where I got a job working in the post office. My father, mother, a nephew of mine, and I lived together in an old room of 30 square meters, without a toilet. We had to cook outside in the public passageway. Other retired cadres were furnished an apartment, but my father didn't get one. He was told that his working unit couldn't afford one since the city where we lived was so poor. Father had devoted all his life to the cause of the Revolution and ended up with not even a room of his own. There was no space for him to grow flowers, which was his beautiful dream.

Over time, Dad's beliefs began to change. After I bought a new apartment and invited my parents to live with me, his dream of having a room to grow his flowers came true. I told Dad that many sisters in my church had been praying with me about the apartment. When Dad saw the decorated new apartment, with a spacious living room and balcony that looked out into the bright outdoors, he exclaimed, "I never expected this! Thank God!"

In the past, when I talked about Jesus and shared testimonies from brothers

and sisters in my church, Dad would become angry. He always insisted that the Communist theory was right, and we should trust the Communist Party and authorities. Then, during a serious illness when he was near death, seven sisters from the church came to our home to pray for him. He was deeply moved, and to everyone's surprise, the next morning he got up and said that Jesus had healed him! He did get better, and from that time on, he began to introduce Jesus to his friends.

Being the only daughter of my parents, getting a husband for me was always a great concern. I was determined to only marry a Christian—and Christian Chinese men were few. When I met a Christian man from America, my dad's heart was full of happiness. On our wedding day, he said it was the most joyful day of his life. My mother had always hoped that I would have a happy marriage. At my wedding, Mother—nearly 80 years old, in good health, and optimistic about life—told people that her daughter's marriage was arranged by God. She never worried about me moving to America with my husband. Chinese parents have hopes and dreams for their children which they have not realized for themselves. My happy life in America has fully realized my parents' expectation for their daughter.

As Dad's health began to wane, Mom took care of him as best she could, day and night without complaining,

even though she was in her 70s. My father left this world with gratitude in his heart for my mother, for all the care she had given him. In the past, I thought that there was no love between my parents. But I came to realize that I could not really understand the feelings two people have for each other. In later life, after both my parents became Christians, they showed a definite love and gentleness toward each other. My mother's joy was like the joy of mothers who are surrounded by love.

For the hundreds of millions of families in China, my prayer is that they will come to know Jesus and let His indwelling presence bring peace and happiness instead of hatred and suffering. My desire is to honor my parents and give respect to my homeland—China. ■



Born the first year of the Cultural Revolution, Wendy Click grew up in a Communist family. Through blood and

tears, she became a Christian in her youth, serving the underground church, and facing persecution for her faith. Now, as a missionary sent by God, she is dedicated to giving back her love to America.

“Mommy, Would

On August 26, 2021, as I was putting our daughter to bed and finishing a children's Bible story, she looked at me and asked me to please read the complete Bible with her. I gently kissed her goodnight and told her that I had never read the complete Bible before, but I would do my best for her.

I went to my office and cried to the Lord—how could I do this for her if I had never read the Bible myself? I texted my sister (a strong Christian, married to a pastor) and she assured me I could do it. Knowing my sister, she prayed earnestly for me that night. With strength—definitely not my own—I searched for over two hours, reading reviews on Amazon for Bibles for teens. That night before going to bed I ordered eight books. Thanks to Prime, the books arrived the next day, and I began to

You Please...”



by Monica Gomez

scan them for the best ones. I also downloaded the audio Bible app and began listening to and reading the first chapters of Genesis.

A few nights passed, and I was ready to sit with Ariela at bedtime and read and listen to Scripture with her. She would ask questions and often my answers were, “Let me look into that for you,” or “Let me ask my sister for clarification.” Then I would go to my office and read some more, so I could get ahead of her questions.

A hunger for Scripture began to grow, and I listened as I cooked, walked on the treadmill, showered, and cleaned the house. My questions about life were being answered: *Why was I chosen to be born? What was my purpose in this world?* and most importantly, *Why did Christ die for all my sins?* I realized that the big sins

and little ones, my bad choices and faults, and all my mistakes were sins before God. I knew that because of my sins I deserved God’s judgment.

The Bible showed me that since the beginning of time, God’s love, guidance, compassion, and patience have always been evident. He has always instructed His people how to live and trust Him. Through Christ’s perfect life and death on the cross, He shows us that He loves us more than we could ever love Him. Through faith in Christ, our sins are forgiven, and we receive eternal life.

I was learning how to handle every situation life might throw at me in my marriage, my parenting, my family, and my career. Within two months of reading the Bible, the Lord had worked on my heart, chipping away the old me and revealing the new

Monica, with Christ leading the way. One morning I called my sister to tell her that the world seemed so bright, and Scripture was no longer a foreign language to me but had become my own.

During this time, my husband was in the dark about what Ariela and I were doing. I had kept it from him for two months, afraid he wouldn't understand since he was not a religious person. I started to write down my feelings so I could sit with him and confess. I held on to that paper for what seemed like forever, praying that the Lord would help my words come out—not saying too much and not saying too little. I prayed that Christ would open my husband's ears and heart to the same love that I had for Christ. Finally, one night the Lord pushed me to have a pillow talk with Ari. I sat on our bed and read my index cards to him. I asked him to let me finish and not interrupt me. I was so scared to look up, but when I did, he had the most beautiful smile on his face! His grin went from ear to ear, and it may sound silly, but his face was shining. He then assured me that he was happy for me, and that he had seen a positive change in me but didn't know the reason. I told him that Ariela had said the same thing—that I had become a better mommy in her eyes. "It is Christ in me," I tried to explain. "I now want to honor God before myself."

Then I told him how it all began, how Ariela had asked me to read the Bible with her two months earlier, and how I had felt so lost to help her. Ari said, "But Honey, we are not that bad; we don't murder or steal." Trying to explain further, I told him that all sins, both big and small, are equal—that my lukewarm faith had been just as bad as ice cold, and that I needed a Savior who through His Spirit would teach me how to truly respect him as my husband, be a better mother, honor my parents, and love my neighbors as I loved myself. I told him that every good gift was from God, not earned by our works, and that my salvation was not earned according to how good or bad I was—it was given to me as a gift of faith that leads to good fruit in my life. I told him that one day I would stand before God and give an account of my life, whether I had used my gifts for His glory.

That night Ari asked me to read Scripture to him, and we started reading it together every night. One chapter a night became five, and soon afterwards I started catching him reading on his own. I could see the fruit of true faith and salvation. As Christ began to reside in my husband's heart, leading his thoughts and words, our conversations grew, and Christ was at the center of them.

Before long, Ariela asked if we could find a church that matched

the Scripture we were reading. As before, I told her I would do some research. And once again, I asked my sister to guide me. I loved the way my brother-in-law preached in Minnesota, but that was too cold and far away. I wanted a preacher who would always show the true way of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. After listening to a few online sermons from area churches, I knew that Community Bible Church was where my family needed to be. I told Ari that I would never force him to go to church, but that I needed to continue our spiritual growth. So, for a while, Ariela and I attended alone. What caught my heart about the church was the verse-by-verse teaching of God's Word. What I was discovering in my personal Bible study at home was identical to what Pastor John taught in his sermons. The fellowship of brothers and sisters in Christ was

exactly what my heart needed. Soon Ari started to join us for the Sunday morning service, and not long after came Equipping Hour, Wednesday night Bible study, lunch dates with our church family, retreats, and plans for a trip to Israel—Lord willing.

The Lord knows me: He knows my past fears, my thoughts, and most of all my heart. He knew that I had always yearned to know Him but didn't know how to start. He knew I wanted to understand His Word, the Bible. He knew me so much that He used Ariela as His vessel. He knew that as a mom I would move mountains for her. He saved me using my weakness!

I am forever grateful for the gift of salvation that God brought to our family. My faith is grounded in Christ alone. Now, I strive to be anxious about nothing but trust in Him fully.



Family photo



Monica , Ariela, and Ari



Monica and Ariela

I pray that the good works produced through faith will bring honor to Him. I pray that I will praise and glorify Him not only at my church but with every step I take outside of those walls. I am especially thankful for Diane and Dave Stinson who were the first smiling faces to welcome me to CBC, and for my dear sister, Michelle, who always prays for me, trusts the Lord for me, and shows me how to be a godly woman. And I'm so very grateful for our young daughter who asked me to read the complete Bible with her.

In 2023, my husband and I were baptized, and in 2024, our daughter followed. Our baptism was an act of obedience, symbolizing our repentance and faith in Jesus Christ who died on the cross that we might have new life in Him.

Luke 18:16—

*“But Jesus called the children to him and said, ‘**Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.**’”* ■



Monica Gomez and her family are members of Community Bible Church in St. Augustine, Florida,

where they enjoy verse-by-verse teaching of God's Word.

(Continued from back cover)



Alice Hopper Plavier (Debbie's grandmother) and Eleanor Plavier Wilson (Debbie's mother)

She knew what a disciple really meant and faithfully followed the Lord simply because that was her deepest desire. Because of her prayers, there are many today walking with God and exercising a life of prayer themselves. The ministry at church and the missionaries all over the world were always her deepest concern. She always “in honor preferred another” before herself and would extend herself and her physical strength if she could do something that would help someone else. Today her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren pay her tribute. They too know Christ because of the faith that she had and in answer to her prayers. Her own works praise her—and will continue to—until that day when we will all stand reunited in the presence of our Lord. When Job lost all that was dear to him, he bowed his head and worshipped God. We too, must worship and thank Him for allowing our mother to spend many years on this earth and now, in His sovereignty, called her unto Himself.

Two generations later, we can apply these very words to my own mother.

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From my grandmother's generation to my mother's generation, to my generation, and then to my children and grandchildren's generations, we've witnessed the awesome grace of God. And we've praised Him from one generation to the next. In our family, that is five generations of grace and praise!

It is wonderful to have been raised and nurtured in a Christian home. As a young girl I wrote in my Bible a verse that has always been in the corner of my mind: *"One generation will praise Thy name/works to another"* (Psalm 145:4). This verse has remained in the forefront of my thinking as I have raised my children and prayed for them and for future generations. I am thankful for the legacy of faith left by my parents and grandparents.

Mother was always serving in some area at church—teaching teen girls in



Debbie on her wedding day with her beloved grandmother, Alice. Debbie's bridal bouquet was arranged on top of her mother's (Eleanor's) first Bible.



Gramma Plavier with Debbie's first daughter, Jacqueline

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Debbie's two daughters, Jacqueline (left) and Jennifer (right), on a mission trip

Debbie, right, with her mom in the middle and sister on the left

the 1960s and 70s, and later in life, Pioneer Girls, and her dear friends in the Joy Class. She was a student of God's Word, always with a table full of study books to help her prepare the lessons. I never saw her in despair or panicked, and I never heard a harsh word come from her mouth. She just walked her entire life in paths of righteousness to honor her Lord and Savior. As her life neared its end, she was ready to be with the Lord. After a few months of fading life and health, she went to her heavenly home on Sunday evening, November 20, 2016. She arrived in eternity—in the presence of her Savior.

At Mother's funeral, we chose to read the closing paragraph of what she had written and read at her own mother's funeral. It expresses what we were feeling at the passing of our mother:

We say goodbye with sadness for ourselves because of our loss, but with gladness and hope because of



Jacqueline and her daughter, Nina



The 5th generation, Nina, singing praise in church to our Savior

the blessed future we look forward to when we will be together again, where there will be no parting—and united, we will praise Him who so abundantly gave us this blessing of a “Godly Mother.”

Both my grandmother and my mother were Godly mothers who praised the Lord’s name/works from their generation to the next. May we in our generation—and every generation that follows us—praise the Lord and walk in paths of righteousness as they did. ■



Debbie Molnar lives in Saint Augustine, Florida with her husband, Dave, of 50 years. Her daughters, Jacqueline (and three

grandchildren) and Jennifer, live in Saint Augustine as well. Debbie is a church ministry assistant and also plays the piano at her church. She is thankful to the Lord for her family’s legacy and all His blessings.

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Five Generations of Grace and Praise

by Debbie Wilson Molnar

Throughout my mother's long 94½ years on this earth, she walked along paths of righteousness as God led her—not for her own sake, but for the glory of God and to help others. She lived as her mother (my grandmother) had lived before her.

At my grandmother's funeral in 1980, Mother wrote and read these words about her mother:

When our mother was a young girl, she accepted Christ as her Savior and gave her life to Him. From the time of her conversion, she had a deep desire to walk in fellowship with Christ and live a life of obedience to God's Word. She taught her children scripture and tried to mold their lives in a way that would please Him.



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