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The Year of the Earthquake:

Beauty for Ashes



/ "Anything But …" — Confessions of a Pastor's Daughter
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The Year of the Earthquake:

Beauty for Ashes

by Cindy Yang





A happy family of four

A Glimmer in the Dark

On May 12, 2008, during an ordinary afternoon, young dance teacher Liao Zhi was enjoying a rare day off. Watching her toddler daughter stumbling around in her baby walker, Liao Zhi's eyes filled with tender affection, aware of the deep happiness she felt in her heart. Suddenly, the television before her began shaking violently. Before she could steady it, the entire four-story building collapsed around her.

In that life-and-death moment, Liao Zhi instinctively shielded her daughter and mother-in-law with her body. Trapped in the dark rubble, she called out desperately for her loved ones, only to be met with suffocating silence. The relentless falling slabs of concrete had mercilessly taken away everything she cherished most—her beloved family!

The excruciating pain from the steel bar piercing her right leg paled in comparison to the heart-wrenching realization that her family was gone. Her precious child who brought her so much happiness was dead! When rescuers' shouts and her father's anxious calls penetrated through the debris, Liao Zhi chose silence. With both her legs missing, and her family gone, despair extinguished her will to live. She would rather remain buried there forever than face a shattered future.

However, her father's hoarse yet determined cries struck at her heart again and again. "Liao Zhi! Liao Zhi!"

The calls pierced through the haze of death, awakening her conscience. She suddenly realized how her cowardly wish to abandon life would devastate her aging parents. At that critical moment between life and death, filial duty overcame the impulse to escape. "Dad, I'm here!" she responded with her last ounce of strength. This faint cry was not just a promise to live, but also a daughter's deepest expression of love for her parents. Beneath the ruins, Liao Zhi chose spiritual rebirth over despair.

After being urgently transported to the hospital by rescuers, Liao Zhi faced not just the emotional trauma of losing her family but also having to live with a disabled body. Doctors told her both legs had to be amputated immediately, or the septic blood would cause organ failure and death. When the anesthesia wore off, Liao Zhi stared blankly at her heavily bandaged legs—confused and wondering what meaning a life like this held.

During many sleepless nights, thoughts of enduring strange looks, facing life's hardships, and never dancing freely again made silent tears stream down Liao Zhi's face. Friends and fellow patients brought many inspirational books, hoping to help her find direction, but words seemed powerless to fill the void in her heart. So, deciding to combat despair with action, over time she began participating in charity work, keeping herself busy, hoping to find new purpose through giving.

An Encounter Beneath the Cross

During months of rehabilitation, Liao Zhi returned to the stage to perform an inspirational drum dance. Sitting atop the drum, she moved her arms with all her remaining strength, her posture still graceful and resilient. When the hometown folks saw her dancing with such brilliance despite having no legs, they were deeply moved. Many traveled specially from Deyang to her Chongqing hospital



Inspiring drum dance



On her hospital bed

just to tell her: "Teacher Liao, you must come home and perform for us again! We need your inspiration!" Facing their hopeful expectations, Liao Zhi nodded solemnly in promise.

Soon after returning to devastated Deyang, fate (or Someone) arranged an unexpected encounter. She met a group of strangers who would bring the most important turning point in her life. Canadian volunteers had crossed mountains and oceans to participate in disaster relief at Deyang. Meeting wheelchair-bound Liao Zhi, they showed neither pity nor strange looks. They knelt naturally to speak with her at eye level. This long-lost respect and sincerity, like warm sunlight, quietly melted the frozen knots in Liao Zhi's heart.

During conversations with this group, Liao Zhi suddenly remembered a line from her study in elementary school: "*Love is patient, love is kind*." She recalled that it came from the Bible. Noticing the crosses around their necks, a thought flashed through her mind: Perhaps these are angels sent by God to help me!

At parting, the volunteers not only left Bibles and contact information, but made a heartfelt promise to return to China in a year to take her to Canada for specialized prosthetics. Liao Zhi thought to herself that they surely were too busy with relief work to remember her later. Yet, a year later, they found her through the Disabled Persons' Federation and brought her from her hometown to Canada for prosthetic legs. During her stay, Liao Zhi lived with the volunteers who cared for her tenderly and brought her to Sunday church services. Though she had heard of the Bible and God as a child, she knew little about Christianity. Living with them, she discovered how deeply she longed for the love, peace, and joy they had. When she asked how to become a Christian, they said: "The Bible tells us that God loved us so much that He sent His only Son Jesus Christ to die for our sin, and when we believe in Him, He becomes our Savior and gives us eternal life—a life that is filled with joy and peace. Liao Zhi replied joyfully, "Yes, I believe!"

The trip to Canada gave Liao Zhi not just functional prosthetics, but a new identity. She was a child of God! Looking back, she feels no despair about her experiences, only overflowing gratitude. She increasingly realizes, as the Bible says, that though she "walked through the valley of the shadow of death," God's love never left her. Though her trials were great, God's grace was greater! His plan for her life far exceeded her wildest dreams.

After losing her family, Liao Zhi relied on God's grace to emerge



Smiling at life



Meeting in love

from darkness step by step—from adapting to prosthetics to mastering walking and dancing again. Through TV appearances, people came to know Liao Zhi as a talented dancer and were inspired by her courage. While comforted by others, Liao Zhi still privately grieved the loss of her family and not having a life partner by her side, especially when she saw couples smiling at each other after her performances. When she confessed her loneliness to Christian friends, they surrounded her like clouds of witnesses, comforting her and teaching her about prayer's power. They even prayed specifically for God to prepare a tall, handsome, strong, well-educated, Christian partner who could help adjust her prosthetics! Liao Zhi laughed at such a perfectly impossible request, but her friend said seriously: "Liao Zhi, your faith is too small. If I care for you this much, how much more does our Heavenly Father love you?" This revelation struck Liao Zhi deeply. In her loneliness, she had relied on her own strength, forgetting God's constant care. From then on, she determined to wait patiently for God's perfect timing.

A Tailor-Made Miracle

With renewed faith, Liao Zhi was up to facing a new challenge: a dance competition! Before the finals, staff suggested getting dance-friendly prosthetics. Remembering a Christian friend's recommendation, she visited a prosthetic company's Shanghai branch where she met Charles, a handsome and kind technician, newly arrived from America. Their shared faith made collaboration smooth. Later, she noteiced him quietly attending her speeches. Though briefly wondering if he liked her, she dismissed the thought. Months later over dinner, Charles confessed that he had been moved by her warmth and resilience since their first meeting. What seemed amazing

was that this Taiwanese American man had chosen prosthetics as his career in 2008—the year of the earthquake—and came to Shanghai in 2013, the exact time of Liao Zhi's dance competition. He perfectly matched every detail of her friends' prayers! They marveled at God's perfect timing—how God had been preparing them separately before their paths crossed. A year later, Liao Zhi and Charles were married in a simple church ceremony, holding hands with tears of joy.

Soon, two babies filled their home with laughter. God not only blessed their family but began using their story to bless others. Seeing many disabled people struggling with poor prosthetics, they launched charity projects. One three-year-old boy refused prosthetics until—with patient training and prayers—he not only wore them but began playing soccer and riding bikes, restoring his smile to the joy of his family!

Reflecting on her journey, Liao Zhi overflows with gratitude—from the ruins of Deyang to national dancing competition stages, from losing her beloved daughter to building a family of four, Liao Zhi's life journey echoes the profound truth in the Book of Job: true redemption lies not in avoiding suffering, but in encountering God through it. Her story poses the ultimate question to us all: When fate strips away everything we depend on, can we still believe that life can recover—much like nerve endings regenerate after an amputation to rediscover sensation in seemingly impossible places? This inspiring lady, who dances the dance of life on prosthetic legs, has answered with a resounding YES!—proving that, in the providence of God, there are no winters that cannot be overcome, and no springs that will fail to arrive. In God's hands, a broken life can become a vessel of God's love—transforming suffering into blessing! ■



Liao Zhi and the children





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"Anything But ..."

—— Confessions of a Pastor's Daughter

by Samantha Chao





Playing the piano



Samantha and her father

There's a look people get on their faces when they're trying to figure out how they know you—the little crease in their forehead, the way their eyes narrow ever so slightly as the wheels turn in their brain trying to figure out who you are. Growing up, that was a weekly occurrence for me at church. And even now, in my 30s, I still get that look in the most unexpected places, most recently when I was at the dentist's office. It's something I'm used to and often joke that it's just one of the occupational hazards of being the senior pastor's daughter, in a reasonably large Chinese heritage church.

When I was 10, my dad started his second stint pastoring at the Chinese heritage church where I grew up. It was his first time as a senior pastor. As the eldest of three children, I was constantly watched by all the adults. If I did something wrong, I could be sure my dad would hear about it. People would call me "Pastor Lim's daughter," like it was my name. And, over time, I resented it! I didn't want my identity to be "Pastor Lim's daughter" and be held to a higher standard than all my peers. I just wanted to be Samantha, a normal kid.

At age 16, I accepted Christ as my Savior and told God that I would gladly give Him my whole life. However, there was a catch. I told Him, "You can ask me to do anything, and I'll do it. I'll do anything but ministry." This seemed like a relatively safe thing to tell God at the time. After all, there aren't many

women in vocational ministry in Chinese heritage churches. My plans were to attend pharmacy school—or at least pursue something equally ambitious. I also considered a music-related career, one which would allow me to follow in my mother's footsteps as a piano teacher. I had been leading worship in my youth group and coordinating ministry teams, so I figured I could continue doing something similar, regardless of the career I ultimately pursued. But I was to find that out that God's plans are often ironic—even like He has a sense of humor!

I entered undergrad intending to study pharmacy but emerged with a diploma in psychology and child development instead. I had chosen that major with the initial desire to study biblical counseling, which I figured was more psychology than ministry and didn't involve serving in a vocational role in the church. Just before graduating, I started a seasonal role serving as the children's ministry assistant at the church my dad no longer pastored. (He was now pastoring a different Chinese heritage church in the area.) I was making copies and decorating bulletin boards, but that, I told myself, wasn't the same thing as vocational ministry. My future career would surely be something else. Anything but ministry.

After graduating I began applying to various psychology master's and doctoral programs, but my heart wasn't in it. So, it was no surprise that I was rejected. During this time while I was trying to discern where God was leading me, I took a job working at a daycare center to save up money for whatever might be in the future for me. (To this day, that was the most energy-draining, mental health-destroying job I have ever had! God bless those who are called to do this work!) I was angry with God about my situation, which I had put myself in, and I had an intense faith crisis. However, everything changed at Urbana 2015.

Urbana 2015 was my dad's idea. (Pastors tend to know about these types of things!) I had never actually considered going, but he encouraged me to make time for the conference. At Urbana, two completely unexpected things happened. One, I found the booth of my younger brother's undergraduate school and learned that they offered a master's degree in worship. Two, when we were praying for the persecuted church during the main session of the conference, different people took turns singing worship songs. I began singing "In Christ Alone" very quietly, but

out loud. Halfway through the song, I realized that a significant portion of the 16,000 people in the stadium were singing along too. In that moment, for the first time, I became open to worship ministry as a potential vocational calling for me. But would my musical skills be sufficient for such a role? I recalled some feedback given to me during my college years—not unkind, but still painful. I was told that my vocal skills were lacking. I also recalled that I had told God five years before that I was willing to do anything but ministry. So, for a whole year, I delayed applying to the master's program in worship. However, when I finally applied and was accepted, I had reached the point of no return. My "anything but" had turned into "Yes, Lord."

During the following six years, working in vocational ministry was never a question in my mind. I completed a worship internship at a megachurch, served as the permanent children's ministry assistant, and graduated from my master's program. During this time, I applied for worship-leading positions at churches, but there were no offers. At my advisor's urging, I applied to a doctoral program in leadership. Toward the beginning of the doctoral program, as part of one of my classes, I was asked to develop a spiritual formation plan for a particular age group. I chose college students and had fun with the assignment, thinking I would probably never get to use it. However, just a few months later, I found myself accepting the role of college director at my home church.

Serving in a vocational role at my home church was my dream job. In that role, I was able to put my education to good use: developing leaders, creating systems to help care for students, and leading students to Christ and to grow in their faith. The joy I got from doing ministry was unique and life-giving. Each day I drove to work with the biggest smile on my face, unable to believe how blessed I was to serve there. The only downside I felt was that the title of my role was college director—not student minister.

Nearing the end of my doctoral studies, my role shifted toward administration and equipping, two new passions that had developed during my time in school. I looked forward to continuing to work at my home church when I finished my studies. Also, by this time, I had gotten married, and my husband and I were planning to start our family once I completed my studies. Then unexpectedly, the dream came

crashing down. I was informed that my employment would not be renewed. With what I believe were their best intentions, I was advised by the church leadership that I should pursue academia instead of continuing to work in ministry. At this point, I realized that my attitude toward the ministry had changed. It was no longer, "God, I'll do anything but ministry." It had become, "I don't want to do anything but ministry!"

For the next year, I was not involved in any vocational ministry role. The hurt I experienced when it was implied that I was not called to ministry caused a confusing time in my faith journey, during which I relied on the Lord more than ever. I was unsure if I would ever take a ministry position again. All I could do was trust that God was leading.

Not long after I stopped working, I became pregnant, but that didn't stop me from applying for academic and ministry positions alike. I even secured a promising interview for an executive pastor position, only to be turned away because I didn't have enough experience. The job prospects on the academic front weren't much better, apart from miraculously finding an adjunct position to read dissertations. I questioned why I had invested in getting a PhD at all, why I'd gotten a master's in worship, and whether the call to ministry—which I thought was so clear before, despite my desire to do anything but ministry—was real or if I had made it all up in my head.

The answer came in an unexpected way at an even more unexpected time: 10 days after I had given birth to my daughter—two and a half weeks before her due date. I don't know why I did it, but I decided to check job-related emails in my maiden name email's inbox. One



Samantha's Pastor Dad officiating her wedding



Father and the bride

worship leader position immediately jumped out at me, especially when I discovered that it was for a Korean heritage church. I applied, had an interview, visited the church, and unmistakably understood that I was called there. After I had accepted the position, I was brought to tears when the leadership informed me that they were giving me the title of minister. It felt as if the internal call I had to ministry all these years, despite my initial desire to do anything else, was resonating perfectly with my new church's external call to meet their needs. Although it meant moving to a church with a different culture, requiring twice the travel time, and leaving the church where my husband and I had met and where my dad still pastors, it was my joy to respond to the call by saying, "Yes, Lord!"

Looking back, ministry wasn't something I sought or pursued, but it has somehow always managed to find its way to me in the least expected ways. The only explanation is that God has been at work this whole time, directing each step of the way, and all I had to do was trust His timing and leading so that when the right time came, I could obey. Now my identity isn't in making a name for myself, nor is it in being known as Pastor Lim's daughter, or being in ministry, or holding the title of minister. It is in being a child of God, who so happens to be called into ministry just like her earthly father, for the glory of her Heavenly Father. What I thought would bring the least joy (ministry) has become my greatest joy. The thing I hated most when I was growing up (being a pastor's kid) has become one of the things I'm the most grateful for. So now, when people ask what I do, I joyfully tell them that I'm a worship minister, a beautiful combination of both my parents' legacies. And when I do get asked if I'm Pastor Lim's daughter, I tell whoever is asking, "Yes!" with a smile on my face—even when I'm about to have a needle stuck into my gums for dental fillings! ■



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First We Have BREAKFAST

by Lee Ferguson

"Jesus said to them, 'Come and eat breakfast'" (John 21:12, NKJV).

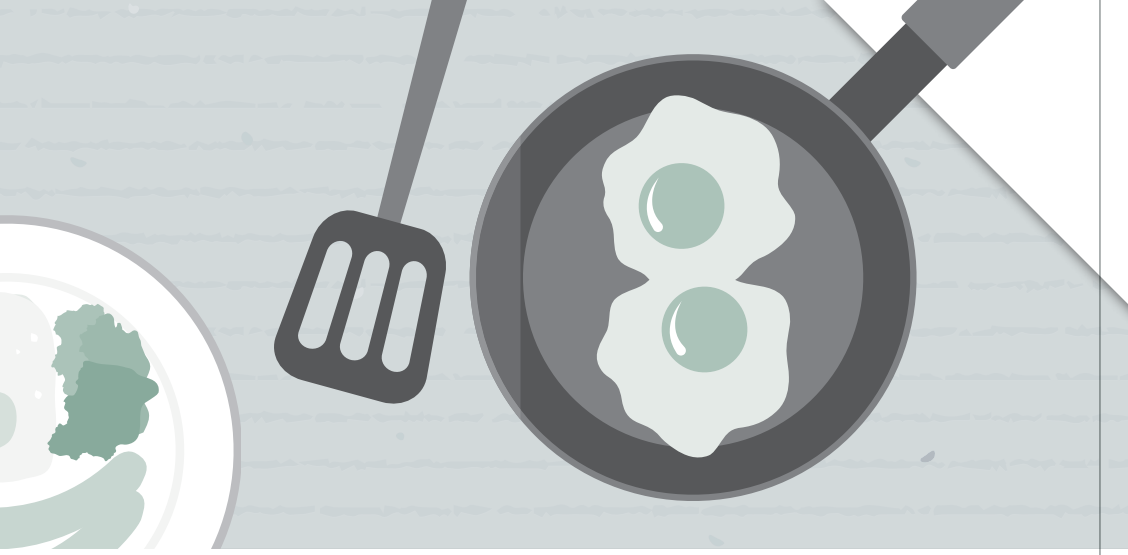
Mother's Example

My mother, Willie Ferguson, was known for her hospitality and culinary skills. In November 1976, she hosted her first Thanksgiving breakfast for the 29 members of the Ferguson family. (Most lived within an hour away.) The percolator filled with steaming hot coffee served as an eye opener for the early bird arrivals. Biscuits were cooked at intervals—so everyone would have them hot—and served along with cream gravy and homemade peach preserves. There were also fresh donuts—made from scratch and cooked in an iron skillet—and waffles and hot cakes, so everyone could have what they wanted. Her breakfast was an instant hit and became a Ferguson family tradition until Thanksgiving, 2019, when COVID hit.

Besides being a good cook, Mother was also a woman of faith and prayer, which was evident in her daily life. While providing healthy meals for our family, she always had enough to share with homebound friends in our church. There were six of us kids; I was the second oldest and the youngest were triplets. We children often saw our mother studying her Bible, preparing to teach Sunday school, and she always managed to get all six of us properly dressed and in church.

Called to Serve

In 1976, I was ordained as a deacon by my church, First Baptist Church, Hurst, Texas, to assist the pastors in meeting the practical and material needs of the congregation—and I felt the weight of the responsibility. For



many years, my wife Pat and I had been teaching preschoolers in our Sunday school, and it was a great privilege to help little children get to know the Lord. Now, as a deacon, I was given the responsibility to serve the needs of our church in tangible ways.

For several years, I had been sensing that God had something else for me to do with my life. I was 40 years old, married, with two daughters who were in high school. Pat was in transition at her work, and I was about to begin a full-time job that required me to be at work at 7:00 a.m. With the responsibility that came with being a deacon, I realized that I needed to spend more time in prayer. I knew that prayer had to be the foundation of all true Christian service, so I began to ask God to show me how I might lead the men in our church to pray. The idea of starting a Men's Prayer Breakfast came to my mind. (I, like my mother, have a love for good breakfasts.) I shared the idea with my dear friend, Doc Glenn Baker, and he gave his full support, suggesting that we meet on Thursday mornings. So, in September 1977, the Men's Prayer Breakfast was born.



Making breakfast

The question I had was whether men would be willing to get up an hour earlier than usual to gather at the church to pray. I knew God would have to bring them, so I left the outcome to the Lord. Word of the prayer breakfast was shared man to man and publicized in our church newsletter. One of the men who attended from the start was Bill Green. He told the men that a piece of paper is only a piece of paper until you put a date on it—then it becomes a document. With his urging, all the men put the date on their calendar. We knew that a 5:45 a.m. prayer meeting would require commitment on the part of the men.

Our first prayer breakfast got off to a good start, with about a dozen men attending. Among the group were some young men who liked to get up early and some retirees who needed the fellowship with other men. A couple of former members of our church drove quite a distance to attend. At first, donuts and cinnamon rolls, orange juice, and coffee were the fare at the breakfasts. But after our family purchased a new cookstove, and Pat was regularly making biscuits for our family, I asked if she might make enough biscuits for 20–30 men. She was very willing and that became her ministry for the next 47 years.



Lee and Pat

The biscuits and gravy menu soon expanded to sausage, eggs, juice, coffee, Blackburn jelly, and honey. Men would often comment that it was the best breakfast they had all week. It didn't take long for Pat and me to hone our skills and get a smooth-running routine. On Wednesdays, we'd make a run to the grocery store to get the items we needed and then stop by the church to put things in the refrigerator and get the coffee ready to brew first thing the next morning. Pat would mix the biscuits on Wednesday nights at home, except for the buttermilk which she added the next morning before rolling them out. I carried the uncooked biscuits to the church in a cart, and using the code to the back door of the church kitchen, entered, and began the routine I knew so well: coffee pot turned on, oven set at 450 degrees, sausage in the oven, eggs cracked and in the bowl. The gravy was made last minute from the sausage drippings.

I would try to arrive at the church at 4:45. For me, that first hour working alone in the kitchen was a time of

worship. Usually, words from hymns would run through my mind—my favorite was "I Must Tell Jesus." And I would recall favorite scripture verses, like 1 Peter 5:7 (RGT), "Cast all your cares on Him, for He cares for you." Men would arrive at various times—some to help with the preparation, and at 5:45 it was time to begin eating. Breakfast was always a time for fun, laughter, and catching up with each other before we prayed.

Men of Prayer

The prayer time was led by one of the men, with everyone sharing prayer needs with the group. Each person would write the requests on 3x5 cards, then—with a partner or in small groups—pray for the requests. The cards were meant to be carried home as reminders to continue to pray. We followed the biblical injunction that *"supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people"* (1 Timothy 2:1, ESV). We prayed for our government, our president, and world leaders. Mainly our prayers centered around the needs of our church, the outreach to the community, and mission projects. We prayed for our pastors and their families, church staff, and personal needs of family and friends.

Through the years, we prayed people through crises in their families, illness and grief over the loss of a loved one, financial difficulties, wayward children, and broken marriages. One man went through a dark place in his life, and he credits the prayers and support of his breakfast friends as God's way of bringing him out of depression. Over the years, many men came to believe in the power of prayer and called themselves "Men of Prayer."

The faithful men who throughout the decades came to the prayer breakfasts believed that God was hearing and answering our prayers. Though we never knew nor could see the full extent of how God was answering, we knew God was honored when we turned to Him with our needs. In the model prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, we are to pray, even for our daily bread. The Men of Prayer trusted that God was ready to help us with our needs—sometimes before we realized we needed His help. We accepted His promise in Jeremiah 33:3 (ESV), "Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known."

Called to Faithfulness

For 47 years, the Men's Prayer Breakfast met, rain or shine, except for a few times when the streets were icy and a three-month pause during the COVID pandemic. Once when our church kitchen was under repair, we met outside, cooking breakfast on grills. If for any reason Pat and I had to be out of town, Doc Baker

and his wife would fill in for us. God granted us the strength we needed to be faithful to the job He had called us to do. Cooking breakfast for the men was not always easy, but it was never burdensome. The joy of the Lord was our strength. Everything we needed was provided, with the men generously covering the costs of the breakfasts.

Pat and I are grateful for the 47 years God gave us to serve men breakfast first—before they prayed. And I cherish many pleasant memories of fellowship and prayer with men around breakfast tables. On the anniversary of our 45th year of cooking for the Men's Prayer Breakfast, our church gave Pat and me a plaque of appreciation. Then the Lord graciously gave us two more years to serve! When I turned 87, we decided it was time to retire. Our last prayer breakfast was on November 21, 2024, with 25 men and women attending, including our pastor emeritus, church staff, and several faithful men who had been with us from the beginning. The Quilters for Christ ladies from the church presented us with a quilt of gratitude, and Doc Baker's wife, Lene, read the words to the song "Find Us Faithful," which was the prayer of us all:

Oh, may all who come behind us find us faithful

May the fire of our devotion light their way

May the footprints that we leave lead them to believe

And the lives we live inspire them to obey

Oh, may all who come behind us find us faithful.

Luke 16:10 (ESV)*, "The one who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much."* ■



plaque



Lee Ferguson worked for 27 years with the Hurst-Euless-Bedford (HEB) School District in Tarrant County, Texas. In retirement, he and his wife Pat enjoy participating in the senior adult ministry at their church and getting acquainted with their first great-granddaughter, Nora. Married for 67 years, Lee and Pat live in the house where they have lived for 60 years and practice being good neighbors to other residents in their community. Lee's hobby is birdwatching in his backyard.

(Continued from back cover)

At Epic, I was in a community of people about my own age who genuinely wanted to get to know me. Their love for Jesus compelled them to be intentional in building relationships. They rejoiced with those who rejoiced and mourned with those who mourned. Several students soon became my best friends and mourned alongside me when I totaled my car a semester later. They also celebrated with me over every personal and academic goal I achieved. From my first time at Epic, I felt seen and known.

One day, after a large group meeting, a senior student named Thomas approached me and asked if I'd be willing to start meeting with him every week to learn about what it means to follow Jesus. I honestly didn't know what to expect. What was Thomas inviting me to? But I was excited to be able to learn, and I didn't know my Bible very well, so I said yes to Thomas' invitation. And I am so glad I did! It became one of the most formative relationships the Lord has ever gifted me.

Thomas was the first person to really explain the Gospel to me. He sat with me one day and told me the greatest news ever:

There is a God who created the world and the first two people. All was very good. God created man and woman in His own image, as His representatives to tend to His creation. These first parents of mankind had a relationship with God; they were stewards over the world God made for them to enjoy.

But, in time, these two people chose to rebel against God. Wanting to be their own god and rule over their own lives, they brought death upon themselves. As a result, God's good world was filled with all kinds of evil, suffering, and pride. The human heart became inherently bent on evil, incapable of any good outside of God's divine grace.

God would have been just to let all of us die in a world completely removed from His goodness. But God loves His creation and desires to dwell with us for eternity. He loved us to the point that He took on flesh in Jesus Christ and lived the perfect life—the life we were initially designed to live. He died on the cross and took on the full weight of our sin—past, present, and future. Three days later He rose in victory over all sin, death, and evil. And He gives His free gift of forgiveness and eternal life to everyone who trusts in the work accomplished by Jesus Christ. One day, God will make all things new. There will be no more evil, mourning, crying, sorrow, or pain.



Thomas finished by saying to me, "Only Jesus fully satisfies—and He can make you a new creation." Then it clicked for me. This wasn't just good news. It was the best news ever! God had graciously revealed Himself and His amazing love to me! What was this great love?—Christ died for *me* on the cross and rose to defeat *my* sin and evil—a love that calls me out of my past life of selfishness into a life of following Jesus. I dropped to my knees before my Savior and, as a new creation, I started my new life in discipleship to Jesus Christ.

For Thomas, the Gospel message was the life breath of everything he did. He loved Jesus and wanted me to know his Savior as he did. Our Thursday morning Bible studies were much more than consumption of information. Thomas was interested in helping me gain knowledge of the Bible, but he was equally interested in my life: where I grew up, my family, my goals, and interests. I found myself looking forward to our discipleship times—not strictly because I would learn more about God, but because I experienced Jesus' love week after week through Thomas. He became like the older brother I never had.

One thing Thomas did was to pay attention to my life patterns. He noticed that I never ate breakfast and was always hungry when I met with him for our Bible studies. Being a fellow college student, he didn't have much to give. But he started bringing me a homemade sandwich so I wouldn't be hungry in Bible study or during class afterward. Of course, this helped me pay a little better attention during our Bible study time.

The month before I graduated, I received an offer to work at my church in College Station, mentoring three boys. In my quiet time with the Lord, I brought this discipleship opportunity up in prayer, asking how I should mentor these students under my care. The Lord reminded me of Jesus washing His disciples' feet (John 13), as well as the memories of my time with Thomas. All of a sudden it clicked. Why did I remember so clearly how Thomas served me?

Because this is the model of love that our Savior showed. I couldn't recall exact details of our theological conversations, but I remembered exactly how Thomas loved and served me.

Jesus makes his appeal known to us through His love—through His radical service for us. Why would Jesus focus specifically on washing His disciples' feet? Because it is in this act of service that we experience and witness the very character of God. We see the heart of the God who loves humanity to a point that He would come down to rescue us from our sin and shame and bring us into His kingdom. And He calls us to follow His example—to wash one another's feet. How did Jesus want me to disciple the three young boys?



Sandwiches during discipleship

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At Thomas' graduation

By bending down and serving them as Thomas had served me. Proper discipleship is only done with deep, abounding love for one another.

Years later, after I finished college, Thomas' act of kindness still sticks in my mind. Our theological conversations were important, but it was Thomas' service to me that I remember most clearly. His sandwiches became an example week after week of his intentional, subtle kindness, as well as his desire for me to walk with Jesus. I came to see how powerful and life-changing the Holy Spirit is in the lives of those who have trusted in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. It wasn't a glamorous sermon that showed me God's character. It was someone bending down to wash my feet.

As His followers, we are called to serve sacrificially because it is through this that the world can see the heart of our Savior. God used something as small as a sandwich to show me the depths of His amazing grace. May we love this hurting world by sacrificially serving one another, for the glory of our risen Savior and King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Oh, for grace to trust him more!

***"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet"* (John 13:14).** ■





Abraham Tsai is from Plano, Texas. By God's grace, he is a current resident at Grace Bible Church in College Station, Texas.

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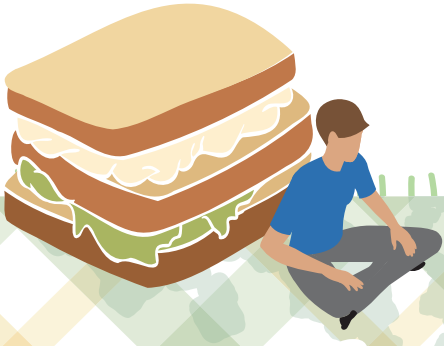
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As Small as a Sandwich

by Abraham Tsai

My 18-year-old self stumbled into the halls of Texas A&M University wanting one thing: to find a community of students who loved Jesus, loved each other, and could help me become a true follower of Jesus. It was here where the Lord met me through a little Asian-American ministry called Epic Movement. While the main focus of Epic is on Asian-American students, anyone is welcomed and encouraged to join in their activities. Established in 2010 as a Christian student organization, Epic's goal is to create a learning and social setting where students can interact in a community of believers who strive to live out the Gospel of Jesus Christ in every aspect of their lives.

(Continued on page 19)

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