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### **Chapter Nineteen: A “Successful” Missionary, 1980–1987**

From 1980 to 1988, with one year in America on furlough, I served on the faculty of China Evangelical Seminary. In this chapter, I would like to tell you **what** we did as missionaries, as well as **why** and **how** we did it.

#### **WHAT**

First of all, what did we actually do? At the cost of some repetition, let me review the outlines of our work as missionaries.

My chief duty was to teach at the seminary. I offered courses in elementary Greek, Greek reading, and advanced Greek exegesis. I also taught New Testament Survey, Bible Study Methods, Johannine Theology, and – in my last year – Ethics. The seminary had an extensive evening program for church leaders and Sunday school teachers, and I taught several of those courses, too. Over the course of seven years, I directed the honors thesis studies of three outstanding students.

Every year the student body was divided into small advisory groups, each led by a faculty member. These groups met weekly for fellowship and prayer. My group also ate together in the dining hall on Fridays at noon. Dori and I developed some of our richest relationships with the students in my group and with their wives. In fact, I performed several weddings for people whom I had gotten to know in this fashion.

Once a week, I also taught a class for the Campus Evangelical Fellowship staff workers.

Each missionary with OMF was required to attend and serve in a local church. As you know, we were privileged to go to the Chinese section of Friendship Presbyterian Church. In addition to teaching adult Sunday school, I served as advisor (*fudau*) to the Young Adults’ Fellowship. We attended their weekly meetings and hosted a small group in our home twice a month. As my Chinese improved, I spoke more often to the group. I regularly spent time with the chairman to encourage him.

My major goal always was to train men who could train others, as Paul instructed Timothy.<sup>1</sup> For the last three years of our time in Taiwan, I met almost weekly with a small group of young men. Each one had a responsible job in the world. All were trying to live as Christians in an unfriendly environment. We honestly shared our struggles as men seeking to follow Christ, and we supported each other in prayer. I still meet with them on my visits to Taiwan.

Once or twice a month, I received an invitation to speak to a Chinese church, Sunday school, or fellowship group. I always enjoyed these opportunities to see other groups at work.

Perhaps our most important ministry, however, was to the pastor and his lovely wife. A senior OMF missionary had told us at a Field Conference that missionaries should seek to befriend the

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 2:2

pastors of our churches, for they are often very lonely. Our pastor came over every week or so for tea and some of Dori's home-made bread. He and I shared our concerns, and I listened to him talk about his hopes and dreams for the church. Dori met with his gracious wife, also. They taught us more than any missionary school could have, for they exemplified Chinese Christianity at its best. Courteous, intelligent, hardworking, and utterly devoted to Christ and his church, they set an example we have found hard to follow. We have become lifelong friends.

Although Dori's primary focus was our home, she made important contributions as a missionary as well. She was the "mother" of our seminary advisory group, often counseling women with their special needs. She befriended a few faculty wives and single women of the faculty and staff. She opened her home to our Young Adults' Fellowship small group. Perhaps her major impact was with young mothers in our church, however. Before leaving for home assignment in 1984, she had broached the idea of starting a small Bible study group for young mothers with another OMF missionary wife. When we returned in 1985, she found that a group had been formed, so she immediately took part.

In Taiwan, most educated women work outside the home even after they have children. Under the influence of Mrs. Han, Dr. Han's wife, some of the young mothers in our church decided to buck the tide and stay home with their children. Dori shared their joys and sorrows as they sought to glorify God in the home in a society which had turned its back on the priority of motherhood as a calling.<sup>2</sup> She also received great encouragement from them.

Increasingly, I found myself engaged in literary work. From 1981 to 1986 I worked on the translation of Gingrich and Danker's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* into Chinese. After that book came out, I wrote a series of articles on how to use it and other references works, which resulted in another small book, entitled (in Chinese) *New Testament Reference Works*. I also wrote articles for various Christian publications, about once a month on average.

As the work on the lexicon came to a close, I thought I had finished with scholarly and academic projects. I preferred to write popular articles for the general Christian public. That all changed, however, when the editor of the seminary press told me that Dr. Carl Henry's massive *God, Revelation, & Authority* was not selling well. The first four volumes had been translated into Chinese and published by the seminary, but people were saying that they were too hard to understand. I myself had been under the same impression, as you remember.

"Perhaps someone needs to make an abridgment," I replied.

"Would you do it?" he countered.

Having just finished a five-year project, I was not eager to launch another major effort. I agreed to pray about it, however. The next day, as I walked to an OMF prayer meeting, a sense of God's presence came over me. More than that, a heavy burden fell upon me, and I knew I just had to undertake this assignment. I called the editor that afternoon and began reading the first volume

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<sup>2</sup> For the biblical teaching on the value of being a homemaker, see *More Precious than Rubies: The Worth of a Godly Woman*, available from China Institute.

the next day. That was in 1986, I believe. It took years of intermittent but steady labor before I was able to hand the abridgment of the sixth volume to the publisher in 1998.

I thank God for the privilege of spending so much time with one of the great minds in Christian history. In the opinion of many, Dr. Henry was the greatest evangelical theologian of the twentieth century. I believe he ranks with Athanasius, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Owen, and John Edwards, to mention only relatively “Evangelical” writers, and also with Aquinas and Barth, who are not as biblically-based in their thinking. Indeed, he is the only Evangelical who has adequately replied to Karl Barth (with the exception of his mentor, Gordon Clark). Not only does he present the case for the truth of the Christian faith, he also answers critics of the Bible from all schools of thought. To make his work even more valuable, his writing is always powerful and sometimes really beautiful.

Even though my ministry focused on Christians, I had a strong burden for the millions in Taiwan who had never heard of Christ. Before we bought a car, we often took taxis, and I shared the gospel with each driver. I also gave tracts to the people who ran the little stalls and shops in our neighborhood.

As I told you earlier, a faculty colleague had gotten me interested in the plight of people living in “small” towns where there was little or no Christian witness. There were dozens of these towns in Taiwan, most of them with populations of forty thousand or more. I was invited to join the board of the Village Gospel Mission, an organization that placed evangelists and church planters in these municipalities. I knew that a foreign missionary could do little effective work among such people, so I tried to mobilize our church to join in this work. After several years, I was happy to participate in a team which our church sent to a town in southern Taiwan for a week-long evangelistic outreach to the Hakka people. They had told us we would be considered successful if only five people indicated an interest, but by the end of the week, fifty-two residents of that town had said they wanted to know more about Christ. I will tell more about this mission in a later chapter.

Dori and I were members of OMF. As part of that fellowship, we not only benefited from the support of other missionaries, but also began to play a leadership role. Once a month, I led the team in Taipei in a study of Donald MacGavran’s classic work, *Understanding Church Growth*. Each quarter, I met with four others on the OMF Field Council to advise our director as he made decisions about policy and personnel. Twice, when funds were low, I was asked to give the Bible messages for our annual Field Conference.

Dori took an active part in the women’s Bible study. She also helped with the music for the Taiwan Missionary Fellowship Women’s Retreats, as well as with the music at our Field Conference.

As you can see, we were busy people! I count those years of service among the most productive of my life, and thank God for the chance to be of some service in the cause of his kingdom among the Chinese.

## WHY

So far, I have not really explained the rationale for cross-cultural missionary work. You will remember that the Great Commission impressed itself upon me when I was leading a study group on missions as chairman of the missions committee for our church in Chapel Hill.

No fewer than five times, the New Testament records Christ's final command that the gospel be taken to the entire world.<sup>3</sup> As if this were not enough, we see the history of the early church, recorded in Acts, as one of bold evangelism. The career of Paul furnishes abundant evidence for his conviction that every group of people on earth must hear the good news of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. He explicitly teaches the necessity of preaching, especially in his own "missionary" letter to the church in Rome, which he hoped would send him on to Spain.<sup>4</sup>

Some would say, "But there is no need for foreign missionaries anymore. The gospel has been preached everywhere." That is wrong on at least two counts: First, two billion people have never heard the good news about Christ and live beyond the reach of Christian neighbors who could tell them; second, even in places like Taiwan, where the church has existed for more than a hundred years, there are not enough believers to bear witness to Christ in such a way that their nation or people can hear.

In Taiwan, for example, less than 2 percent of the population are active Christians. With twenty million inhabitants on that island, there is no way that the tiny church will be able to reach the entire population without help from outside.

Furthermore, even a mature church like the one in Taiwan still needs specialized assistance. In my own case, I was able to share what I had learned of Greek and the Bible, both in the classroom and in writing.

More than that, even the most "Christianized" nation on earth, the United States, can benefit from the fresh testimony of believers from other cultures, who can see things differently and sometimes express them more effectively. Likewise, in Taiwan, the seminary students asked that I teach the ethics course precisely because, as a foreigner, I would approach problems differently from a Chinese person. The most obvious instance dealt with ancestor worship, which I treated from the perspective of the early church in ancestor-worshipping Rome. That came as a surprise to the Chinese, who consider their situation unique.

American Christians, despite our many faults and failings, inherit a wealth of knowledge, experience, and skills that we can pass on to others. We excel in communication, organization, and participatory decision-making; we have published the greatest array of Christian literature in the history of the church; and we are used to dealing with people who are different from ourselves. In all these ways, we are able to make a contribution to other cultures.

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15 (I accept the last verses of Mark as genuine); Luke 24:47; John 20:21; and Acts 1:8

<sup>4</sup> See especially Romans 10:14 and 15:15–24.

My own career amply demonstrates the dangers of personal sin and of national and cultural pride and ignorance, as the next chapter will further prove. I do not minimize the difficulty of cross-cultural missionary work, the imperative that we send only those who are equipped to make a real difference, or even the vast needs for evangelism in our own country. I am only making the point that, contrary to a great deal of current teaching, American and other missionaries still have a vital role to play in worldwide evangelization.<sup>5</sup>

## HOW

Finally, let me briefly say how I tried to serve in Taiwan. Other American, European, and Asian missionaries were more effective than I, and I only hope they will tell their own stories. Meanwhile, I wish to give glory to God for his mercy in using me to convey some of his blessings to my beloved Chinese friends.

Before I summarize the principles and practices of our own missionary work, let me begin with the most important point: Only God's grace and power could make any missionary at all effective, and that applies especially to us! If Dori and I were able to accomplish anything worthwhile, God must receive all the glory and praise. You have already seen how miserably I failed in my first term in Taiwan. The next chapter will document another serious defeat. The title of this book, *Mercy All the Way*, comes from my conviction that God has not only protected and provided for me all my life, but he has made up for my deficiencies and overruled my sins so that others might, despite me, be blessed.

You have seen that I engaged in personal evangelism; public teaching through preaching, classroom instruction, and writing; and personal work with a few men. My primary goal was to train men who could train others. To do that, I tried to do my part as a witness of Christ at home and in the world, to equip Chinese Christians to be witnesses, and to train teachers.

Let me say more about my teaching. In the seminary, I tried to show students how to understand a passage and then how to communicate it to others. I stressed the role of context and of grammatical structure in determining the main point of each section of the Bible. In addition, I aimed to show how to find the major applications of the Bible to daily life. In other public teaching and preaching, I attempted to set an example of careful exegesis of the Bible and a conviction that God's Word speaks to all aspects of our life, including marriage and work.

Since nothing can be done apart from Christ,<sup>6</sup> I joined in prayer with other believers. OMF, the church, and the seminary all had weekly prayer meetings which I attended. I believe that the major reason why God was pleased to grant some success to my missionary labors lay elsewhere, however: From the beginning of our first term in Taiwan, I followed the practice of writing monthly prayer letters to our friends back home. OMF encouraged this, mailing the letters for us

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<sup>5</sup> Some groups, like Christian Aid Mission, proclaim "a new day in missions" and promote the concept of sending money to "indigenous" missionaries in other nations so that they can finish the job. First of all, an "indigenous" or "native" missionary is a contradiction in terms! Moreover, CAM itself supports cross-cultural workers, people who cross huge cultural and linguistic barriers to reach other groups. Further, financial help is fraught with a multitude of risks, as history abundantly proves. Finally, for any church to ignore and disobey the Great Commission is sheer disobedience.

<sup>6</sup> John 15:5

free of charge and maintaining the address list for us. Month after month, we saw God at work through the faithful intercessions of believers in America. If there is any “secret” to fruitfulness in ministry, at home or overseas, it is reliance on the regular prayers of other Christians.

Since it is my desire that this narrative prove helpful to others who are or might become missionaries, I should share other reasons why I think some of my efforts bore fruit. I do this at the risk of sounding prideful, but hoping that you will give glory to God alone, without whose constant help I would have been able to do nothing. He has laid down certain principles of effective service in the Bible, and it should encourage you to know that by following some of these, I was able to enjoy a certain degree of “success” as a missionary. Any credit belongs not to me but to the God who instructs and empowers his servants.

For those who would seek to serve God well, then, here are a few lessons from those years in Taiwan:<sup>7</sup>

I started each day with a long quiet time, continuing the practice begun the day after my conversion in 1965. Bible reading, meditation, and prayer kept me alert to God’s leading and strengthened me when I was discouraged or tempted.

I supplemented reading and meditation with memorization of certain passages of the Chinese Bible. Since my own ability in Chinese would never match that of a native speaker, I sought to increase my limited fluency by memorizing most of Ephesians as well as other passages. I would quote these when I preached in Chinese. I also quoted other words from the Chinese Bible, which I would copy down in my sermon notes. God was thus allowed to speak through me, despite me!

Like all other OMF workers, I served with and under Chinese Christian leaders. In the seminary and the church, our role was supportive, not dominant. We followed their agenda, doing what they told us. Some church-planting missionaries don’t have that luxury, but we were glad that OMF required us to be servants within the Chinese church.

We also worked under and with other missionaries. We were not on our own, doing our own thing. We were glad to have experienced and dedicated leaders in OMF, both in Taiwan and in Singapore. They prevented us from making even more mistakes than we did and provided us with ample guidance and support all the way.

Following the advice and example of OMF leaders and missionaries, we worked hard. We took time to relax, especially on Sundays, but kept up a steady pace of activity. I remembered the words of a veteran missionary who spoke to the First Termers’ Conference in 1976 when he told us that the price of effective missionary service was “hard work and suffering.” We didn’t suffer much, but we did work hard.

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<sup>7</sup> A longer list of lessons which I think God has been trying to teach me appears as the Conclusion of this book.

OMF urged us to learn the language and provided us with two full years of full-time language school, followed by two years of half-time learning. We had the best teachers and the finest textbooks, and we were given one-on-one classroom instruction. As a result, OMFers were known for their ability to speak Chinese.

We were also told to keep studying Chinese culture. I read books on Chinese history and Taiwanese church history. I benefited greatly from biographies of the giants who went before us, like Hudson Taylor and Jonathan Goforth, as well as some of the less well-known missionaries who had served faithfully in Taiwan. Works on mission history and theory kept me thinking about how to do things better. In fact, I would have to say that one of the greatest joys of missionary life is the thrill of lifelong learning of a variety of fascinating subjects!

I'll close this chapter by reminding you that any "success" from my labors resulted from God's mercy and grace. Without him, I would have wasted everyone's time and money while merely living in Taiwan. His love and his Spirit enabled me to reflect some of his glory among the Chinese. To him be the praise.



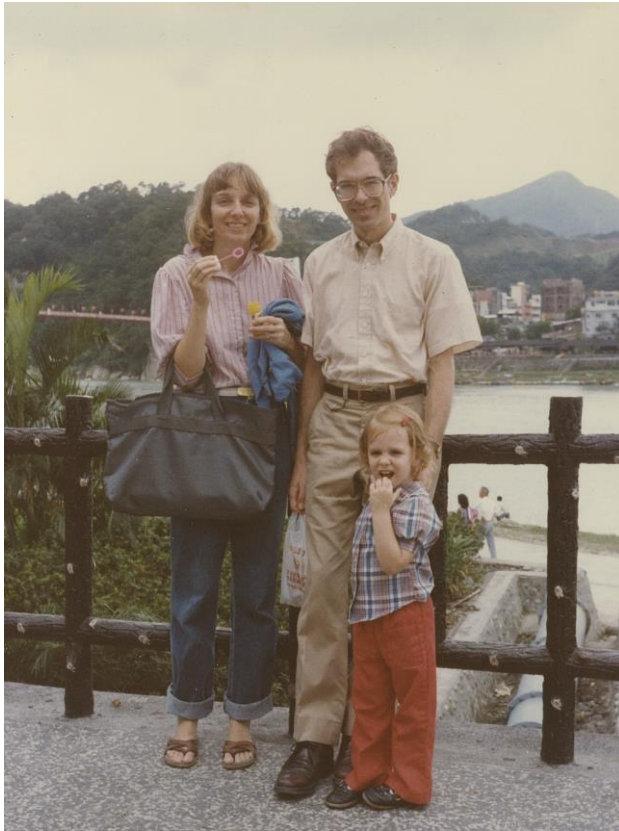


Dori made a different cake for each birthday, 1985

David Adeney came to visit us in Taipei, 1985



The church's mothers' group, 1986



**Above:** With my mother in Hawaii, 1986

**Left:** At Bitan, Taipei, 1986

**Below:** At the Taiwan Missionary Fellowship conference, 1987





## **Chapter Twenty: From “Success” to Failure, 1987–1988**

As the academic year of 1987–1988 opened, I seemed to be a “successful” missionary, and to some degree I was, as we have seen. But a storm had been brewing which would burst upon me with greater fury than I had ever experienced. The origin of this storm lay with my own folly and sin. It’s not a pretty story, but it must be told, so that others might learn from my self-inflicted trouble.

You will remember that I wrote a book called *New Testament References Works*, which the seminary published. Actually, I did so in flat disobedience to God. After I published the article on how to use the Greek-Chinese lexicon, the editor of the seminary press asked me to put together an entire book on the use of all the reference tools available to the Chinese for the study of the New Testament. When I prayed for guidance about this project, I had a definite sense that I should not accept it. Nevertheless, I ignored that inner “voice” and proceeded, anyway.

Almost immediately, I began to regret that decision. I found that to introduce the books useful for Bible study took far more time than I had imagined. I had to look at dozens of commentaries, dictionaries, concordances, translations, and other volumes in order to give an adequate treatment. I did my best, and the resulting volume, though short, has been used as a seminary text; but it would have been better if I had waited longer. I also tired myself out by rushing to finish it.

Even worse, I committed an inexcusable error as I wrote. The president of the seminary had certain unusual opinions about certain passages and themes in the New Testament, and he expressed these with great conviction on many different occasions, even writing up his views in the seminary newsletter. I considered his ideas to be mistaken and even somewhat harmful. Rather than going to him directly, however, I expressed myself indirectly. I used this book as a platform for stating opinions contrary to his. By choosing examples carefully, I could illustrate how to employ various reference works in Bible study while I refuted the president’s interpretations. I thus not only violated basic principles of courtesy, but also set myself up for a disastrous fall, as you will see.

In the summer of 1987, I sensed that God wanted me to resign my seminary position. There were three reasons for this conviction:

First, as I have already related, I had a growing burden for the un-evangelized people living in “country towns” all over Taiwan. I wanted to join the Village Gospel Mission and take the gospel to these lost souls.

Second, I had come to the conclusion that academic seminary theological education not only did not prepare men well for ministry, but also actually violated certain biblical principles of leadership training. Even before going to Singapore, I had come to believe that Jesus’ methods of training the Apostles should be applied to modern church life. That is why I was glad to teach for a while at the Discipleship Training Centre in Singapore; I thought it might substantiate a more biblical, and thus more effective, way of cultivating preachers, teachers, and evangelists for the church.

What is wrong with modern seminary education? In my opinion, it suffers from bondage to the academic model. For hundreds of years, pastors and preachers had been educated the way other tradesmen had learned their own skills: through apprenticeship. A young man would attach himself to a godly and mature pastor and, while reading a few good books, observe how the older man went about his ministry. In university he would have learned Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. His theological education came through his own study, coupled with conversations with his mentor and participation in Christian work.

Our modern seminary system (which only appeared in the nineteenth century), isolates young men and women for three years, virtually locking them in a stifling classroom, while it fills their heads with vast amounts of knowledge which they promptly forget. In the rush to graduate, they have little or no time to ponder the precious truths of God. Academic pressure tempts them to neglect their families and to work for grades rather than real theological knowledge. As a result, they usually don't learn the material very well.

Our own seminary faculty confirmed that last statement when they turned down my proposal that we administer a final, comprehensive examination in all subjects before a student could graduate. Their reason: There is no way anyone could pass such a test! What does that say about the professors' confidence in either their own teaching effectiveness or in the capacity of their students to absorb what had been "taught"?

Some people say that seminary education is the only way most men will gain a knowledge of Hebrew and Greek. Sadly, most seminaries don't require Hebrew. Those that require Greek allow students to take the minimum number of courses in that vital subject, after which they forget almost all they have learned. Various surveys have shown that 95 percent of all preachers do not use the original languages in sermon preparation!

Good seminaries, like the one where I taught, require their students to engage in field work, usually in a church, during their three years at school. This is an attempt to overcome the academic focus of theological education, but it mostly fails for several reasons. For one, their church work interferes with academic study, or vice versa. Since the two are not integrated, students do not have the chance to apply what they are learning in class. Furthermore, most pastors do not take the time or do not have the ability to mentor the trainees; they simply use them as cheap labor.

I could add further reasons why I became convinced that seminary education works against the goal of preparing men for ministry, but my point is simply that I was not fully at peace with what I was doing. During faculty meetings, I had also expressed disagreement with the president and the majority on a few important issues and was therefore becoming a bit of a gadfly or divisive presence. To preserve unity and personal peace of mind, I should have left. Instead, I began working on a paper called, "Jesus' Seminary and Ours," which was to contribute to my downfall.

The third reason why I thought I should resign was perhaps the most sinful. I violated my own conscience and clear sense of God's leading. Here's how it happened: During the summer of 1987, when my doubts about seminary education had become a conviction, another realization

came to me. You will remember that I hold “traditional” views on the role of women in the church, and that I had discussed these with the president, who believed that women could preach and serve as pastors. As time went on, he became more and more alarmed at the shortage of pastors and preachers for the churches in Taiwan and grew in his belief that the seminary should seek to fill the void by training more women to fill the pulpit. He also began to state his view of this aspect of the seminary’s mission more often and more forcefully.

On the other hand, my “conservative” position became more and more a part of my personal and ministry convictions. I believed that the Bible clearly teaches that women should not lead or teach men.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, I saw the shortage of men in the churches as a fundamental problem, one that had approached crisis proportions. Not only were there not enough pastors and teachers; there were not enough men to serve as elders, deacons, and Sunday school teachers. Worse, countless Christian women could find no suitable husbands because there were so few men in the church. It almost broke my heart to listen to them ask me what to do when their non-Christian parents put pressure on them to marry a Buddhist. In my opinion, female preachers and leaders attracted other women, but not men, to believe in Christ and come to church. It seemed like a vicious cycle to me, which confirmed my belief that the biblical prohibition against women teaching or leading men (as I understood it) expressed the wisdom of God.

When it became clear to me that the seminary would continue to encourage women to serve as pastors, I realized I would be participating in an action I considered unbiblical because I was training them to teach and have authority over men.<sup>9</sup> Previously, I had assumed that my female students would serve in support roles in the church and para-church organizations, so I was happy to teach them also. Now I saw that I would be preparing them to do something I thought they should not do!

I spoke of this to the OMF Taiwan director. Though he disagreed with my theological position, he agreed that a man must follow his conscience. He knew from Scripture that “whatever is not from faith is sin,”<sup>10</sup> and he did not want me to sin by violating what I thought was right in God’s eyes. There was another, more personal reason for my thinking I should resign from the seminary, which he also honored: In several different ways, my role as a faculty member was tempting me to various mental sins. The director, who himself had a sensitive conscience, gave me permission to write a letter to the dean saying that I would not teach after the current spring semester.

Much relieved, I went back to my office and composed that letter. Then, for some reason which I still do not understand, I failed to deliver the letter to the dean, who was just down the hall from me. Perhaps I was afraid to confront him. Maybe I feared Dori’s reaction, for she loved the shape of my ministry with its regular teaching and frequent speaking opportunities; she considered it just right for me.

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<sup>8</sup> See the short book, *Women and Church Leadership*, available from China Institute, for the reasons for this position.

<sup>9</sup> See 1 Timothy 2:11–14

<sup>10</sup> Romans 14:23

Anyway, weeks passed, and I still had not sent the letter. One day, the dean called me into his office to discuss the next year's teaching assignments. He surprised me with two requests: that I teach the ethics course for seniors, and that I offer a course on 1 Corinthians. I objected to the first on the grounds that I was a foreigner. As I have already said, however, he told me that the students wanted a different perspective. I questioned the course on Corinthians because, as the dean already knew, my views on the role of women in the church diverged so much from those of the president. When we came to chapters 11–14, I would inevitably say things contradictory to the president's position.

"No matter," he replied, "as long as you state your views as one point of view and present other points of view."

"I can agree to that easily," I said, for that was always what I attempted to do – to give my understanding as one of several, one which I preferred but would not insist was the only allowable Christian understanding of that particular point. We agreed, and I left his office, thinking perhaps God had granted me two new chances to grow in my own knowledge as well as to serve the students. I filed away my letter of resignation and began preparing for the next year's courses.

In doing so, I transgressed a fundamental principle of Christian life and ministry: Never violate the promptings of your conscience. Keeping what Paul called "a good conscience" is essential for happy Christian living and effective service.<sup>11</sup> To paraphrase the passage from Romans: If you aren't convinced an action is God's will, don't do it!

An article I read some time ago riveted my attention. Researchers have apparently discovered that when we tell a lie, something changes in our brain. The more lies you tell, the more the brain is altered. There comes a point where you are not really conscious that you are not telling the truth; your brain has been permanently damaged.

Perhaps something similar happens when you go against the dictates of your conscience. I am convinced that by doing what you think is wrong, or failing to do what you believe is right, you introduce an "alien" element into your mind that produces strange and destructive behavior.

In my case, after silencing my sense of God's leading and remaining at the seminary, I began to do things that, in retrospect, just don't make sense. Here is one example:

Ever since the founding of the seminary, faculty and staff had met at 8:00 A.M. on Mondays for an hour of prayer. More than an administrative meeting, this was a time of real fellowship in Christ and for sincere petitions to him for guidance, provision, and strength for the work of training workers for the Chinese church. The president required everyone to attend, believing that this hour was an essential aspect of our ministry.

Beginning in the fall of 1987, however, I started missing more and more of these prayer meetings. Although Dori would remind me and even ask whether I planned to go, I would often

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<sup>11</sup> See Acts 23:1 and 24:16; 1 Corinthians 8:7–12 and 10:29; 1 Timothy 1:5, 1:19, and 3:9; and 2 Timothy 1:3.

make some excuse for not leaving home in time to get there when the meeting began. My absence became increasingly obvious and awkward. Strictly speaking, the president could not command my presence since I was not employed by the seminary and was finally under the authority of OMF. However, as a teacher assigned to China Evangelical Seminary, I really should have obeyed all the directives of the president, just as I tried to follow all the other rules. Furthermore, the Bible clearly teaches that “slaves” should obey their “masters.”<sup>12</sup> I had no reason for not showing up on Monday morning, and I was most foolish to provoke the president.

I was guilty of other omissions, too, such as not eating lunch with the students in the seminary dining room. That made me feel further from them and not as much a part of the community, now that we were living in an apartment about a mile away.

### **“Show Me My Sin”**

As 1988 began, I opened the year with a prayer to God to show me my sin. I knew I lacked a deep enough sense of his grace and mercy, and that a sharper vision of my need for forgiveness would open the way to a clearer view of his love for me in Christ. Little did I know how he would answer that prayer!

One reason I prayed this way was that, lacking funds to bring in a speaker from Singapore, OMF in Taiwan had asked me to address the OMF Field Conference a second time. I trembled before this heavy responsibility, knowing that I could not adequately preach the Word of God to others unless the Lord had first spoken to me.

### **Storm Clouds Gather**

The course on 1 Corinthians began well enough at the start of the new winter term. I learned much that was new for me as I tried to interpret the letter strictly according to its context. For one thing, I came to see that some of our traditional categories may not be right. What does “word of knowledge” in 1 Corinthians 12:8 mean, for example? Charismatics usually take it to refer to the phenomenon of someone – usually a preacher or “healer” – knowing about the illness of someone in the audience. Actually, “word of knowledge” almost certainly must mean a word of Scriptural knowledge. When a person identifies the specific illness of someone, that should probably be called prophecy.

Anyway, I was having a great time teaching, though I knew that the later chapters would lead me into controversial territory. At the same time, I taught the Greek reading course on 1 Peter. It soon dawned on me that Peter’s orders to wives to submit in chapter 3 would touch on principles applicable also to Paul’s instructions to women in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14.

True to my promise to the dean, I had assigned two textbooks for these courses which contained material consistent with the president’s view of the role of women in the church. I required the students to read these books so that they would know the other position and because both the books gave excellent instructions on how to interpret and teach the Bible.

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<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 6:10, Colossians 3:22, 1 Peter 2:18, etc.

One of the texts was Walter Kaiser's *Toward an Exegetical Theology*. He strongly advocates expository preaching, saying that a preacher should give a topical sermon no more often than once every five years, and even then he should immediately repent! As we progressed through his examples, however, I noticed that his model outlines of the Greek text did not follow the grammatical structure as closely as they could have. Since Dr. Kaiser's specialty was Old Testament Hebrew, I attributed his mistakes to a lack of expertise in New Testament Greek.

Notice now how I committed an unpardonable offense out of pride and folly. The president, who was a strong admirer of both Kaiser's Hebrew scholarship and his view on the role of women in the church, had received his PhD in Hebrew. He knew Greek, of course, but that was not his specialty, either.

When we encountered an example of what I considered to be a mistake in Greek exegesis by Kaiser, I would say, "I am sure his *Hebrew* is very good." On the surface, there was nothing wrong with this observation; I felt that it was a way avoiding direct criticism of the author of our textbook. The Chinese are masters of indirect and subtle communication, however, and my students began to see what I was really saying: Like Dr. Kaiser, our president knew Hebrew very well, but not Greek; thus, his interpretation of the New Testament passages on the role of women – like Kaiser's interpretation – lacked a sufficient basis in knowledge of the original language. In effect, I was undermining the authority of the president in an attempt to prepare the students to accept my exegesis of the key New Testament texts on women in the church.

Although I still believe that my understanding of this subject is correct, I am ashamed of myself for employing such an underhanded method to achieve my goal of persuasion. Not only was it foolish; it was unnecessary, as events were to demonstrate.

### **The Storm Breaks**

When we came to 1 Peter 3 in the Greek reading class, I prepared notes which referred to other passages on the submission of women. These notes prompted a discussion in class, which led me to express some of my views on the role of women in the church. I referred my students to the two textbooks which presented another view and then told them why I differed with those authors.

Then the unexpected happened. Several women in my class were convinced of my arguments. They discussed the matter among themselves, prayed over it, and decided that they would not seek to serve as pastors when they graduated from seminary. Since they knew the president's opinion on this subject, they went to tell him of their new convictions.

You will remember that he had given me permission years previously to state my views, believing I was so obviously wrong that no one would ever be persuaded by me. When he heard that these women had changed their minds, he was shocked. His shock turned to anger when he realized that the Chinese church would be deprived of their services in the pulpit. He now feared I would persuade more women to neglect the great needs of the church in Taiwan. In his eyes, the mission of the seminary was being thwarted by my erroneous doctrine.



You should know that my teaching assistant, who translated my English notes into Chinese, also served as the president's secretary and teaching assistant. Since the president knew I was teaching courses on 1 Peter and 1 Corinthians, he asked to see the notes which I had given her to translate. These materials confirmed his impression that I was not only wrong, but also dangerous.

Events moved quickly after that. He called me into his office and, with the dean present, ordered me not to mention my perspective on the role of women in the church to any seminary students or faculty again. I thought this violated my rights as a professor and resigned on the spot. He said, "I fired you before you resigned!" while the dean bowed his head in sorrowful prayer.

Since the president had done and said other things to me and to others which I considered unfair, I was deeply hurt. I went home very sad. For the next week or two, Dori and a few friends tried to comfort me, but my heart was filled with self-pity and resentment towards him. Mercifully, God dealt with both of these sinful emotions.

First, he ministered to my grief and sadness. One night, when I was lying on the sofa in the living room, depressed over the loss of my teaching position and what I considered to be the wrongs committed against me, I put on a recording by John Michael Talbot. When he sang his version of Psalm 23, God's Spirit spoke directly to my wounded heart. I knew the Lord was with me and loved me. The balm of his tender care assuaged my grief and healed my soul. I wept for a long time and arose with a profound peace and joy in the presence of the Good Shepherd, whose goodness and mercy would never leave me.

Then, God began to answer my prayer from the start of the year to show me my sins. As I reviewed my actions over the previous months, I saw my folly, arrogance, and rebellion against the authority of the president. I knew my behavior had injured our relationship. I had caused him to lose face in the eyes of the students and had worked against his understanding of God's commission for the seminary.

More than that, I had refused to forgive him. In my self-righteous anger, I justified my resentment until one of the students in my advisory group came to visit me one evening. When he told me that he and the others were praying for me, I was greatly encouraged. He went on, however, to say that he was praying particularly that I would forgive the president. I realized the students knew I was harboring ill feelings towards him! I was ashamed of setting such a terrible example and asked God both to forgive me and to change my heart.

Our gracious God answered that prayer in a way that I would never have believed was possible.

But first, some background. The general director of OMF had come to Taiwan on a visit and asked me to meet with him. He was the founder of the seminary, so he deeply cared about what took place there. I was one of his missionaries, which doubled his concern. He first listened to my side of the story. I told him that I thought I had a right to teach what I thought was right. I told him also that if I left the seminary, which I was willing to do, I wanted to work with the Village Gospel Mission and take the word of God to un-evangelized people living in country towns around the island.

The general director surprised me by his response. First, he said that Chinese culture would not allow me to propagate a contrary opinion at the seminary. Then, he gave me a choice: Either I return to the seminary with a promise not to mention the role of women in the church again, or I leave Taiwan. Chinese culture, again, would not tolerate my presence on the island after such a confrontation with the president of the seminary.

At first I thought he was speaking this way because he agreed with the president's view of the role of women in the church (which he did). Later, however, I asked my pastor what he thought, and he confirmed the general director's decision.

At this point, I should remind you that there is no such thing as a "loyal opposition" in Chinese history. If you oppose the emperor, you are not "loyal." In fact, you are dangerous and must be removed.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the Chinese view of authority requires that leaders must be considered right all, or at least most, of the time. They exercise their authority on the basis of intellectual and moral superiority, and they cannot admit mistakes or lose face, lest they also lose power. Even in Christian circles, except under unusual circumstances, there is a strong tendency to seek to save face, both for yourself and for others.

For me to remain in Taiwan after such an open break with the president would mean that OMF in some way sided with me against him. People would know I had refused to return to my teaching post because I insisted upon academic freedom. All of this would cause the president to lose face. The general director, who was famous for his ability in Chinese and his understanding of Chinese culture, was right.

For reasons which I shall explain later, I decided on a compromise: I would return for the third and final term of the academic year; I would not speak of my understanding of the Bible's teaching on the role of women in the church; and I would leave Taiwan in the fall.

Then came God's work in my heart. When the new term began, I resumed attendance at faculty meetings (from which I had been banned for a while). At the first of these, I sat on the other side of a long table from the president and thus could see him clearly. I had been begging God to give me a heart of love for him. Then it happened. He began to speak about a certain subject. I could see his wisdom and maturity, and I admired his skill as a leader. More than that, I was suddenly filled with love and affection for him as a person. My heart was healed of the bitterness I had borne towards him for weeks. Considering how deeply I thought he had hurt me, I believe this was a major miracle.

The Lord must have changed his heart, too, for he resumed his courteous treatment of me. In typical Chinese fashion, he never apologized. He did show, however, that we were reconciled. A day or two before we were to leave for America, he invited Dori and me to dinner, along with all the department heads of the seminary. We sat at a round table – a symbol of harmony – and spoke of pleasant topics throughout the meal. To confirm my rehabilitation, he concluded the event by cordially inviting me to return to the seminary and teach after our year at home.

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<sup>13</sup> John King Fairbank's *China: A New History* examines this central fact of China's long political history and concludes that it forms a major impediment to progress. See especially the Epilogue, pages 427–32.

## **“You Killed the King”**

This story has an epilogue – or perhaps I should say it has a prologue since it sheds light on why I had unintentionally provoked a conflict with the president of the seminary.

After the farewell dinner of which I just spoke, we traveled back to the United States. We landed in San Francisco, where a Chinese couple whom we had met at church in Taipei met us. They took us to their home for the night. That evening we watched the movie “The King and I” on television. You never know how God might speak to you. As Carl Henry says, God’s voice usually comes unbidden:

Divine revelation palpitates with human surprise. [It is] like a fiery bolt of lightning that unexpectedly zooms toward us and scores a direct hit, like an earthquake that suddenly shakes and engulfs us.<sup>14</sup>

At the end of the movie, as the King of Siam (Thailand) lies dying on his royal bed, his prime minister takes the news to Anna, the teacher from England. Despite her growing love for the king, she had often treated him with such disrespect that he lost face in front of his people. The last straw came when she shamed him into withholding punishment from one of his subjects; he fell ill soon afterwards.

After telling Anna the awful news, the prime minister looked at her sternly and spoke words that pierced her heart: “You killed the king!” He meant, of course, that her rebellious confrontations with the monarch had brought him so much shame that he could no longer wield absolute authority. Her lack of understanding of Eastern culture, combined with her ethno-centric conviction of Western cultural superiority, had blinded her eyes to the benefits of absolute monarchy. Since the king based his worth upon his position as sole ruler of Siam, he had no more reason to live. He was dying of a broken heart.

As soon as I heard the words, “You killed the king!” I had to flee the living room. I closed the door in our bedroom and broke down, sobbing. God’s Spirit had convicted me of the same sin towards the seminary president. Not always – for sometimes I truly served him as if he were the Lord Christ<sup>15</sup> – but in my heart, I had often “killed” him by denying him the respect he deserved. I had become more and more unhappy with his way of running the school and looked forward to his retirement and the appointment of a new president. I had judged him by the standards of American leadership, which is much more democratic.

Since that time, I have seen that American democracy contained within it the seeds of sinful rebellion from the beginning. Furthermore, I now agree with those who believe that China will not be able to turn to democracy – or even a truly representative form of government – in the near future. The US Constitution was possible only as an outgrowth of the British Constitution, which required centuries of struggle and the powerful influence of the gospel, to receive even the imperfect form against which Americans revolted in 1776. How can we expect China, with such

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<sup>14</sup> *God, Revelation, & Authority*, Volume II, page 17

<sup>15</sup> Colossians 3:24

little Christian influence among its intelligentsia, to understand, much less adopt, the limited government described in the US Constitution? It will take years of steady teaching and Christian experience.

We Americans have learned some lessons about leadership and organization which conform to some important biblical principles. We should teach these to believers in other lands for their own benefit. But if we do not exercise great patience, trusting God to work his will in his own time, we shall greatly offend our hosts and cause unnecessary disruption in their society.

Thus, God showed me that I nursed a spirit of rebellion, which is just as evil as witchcraft.<sup>16</sup> As tears of repentance flowed, I asked God for his mercy. Then the Spirit revealed to me that my rebellion against the president really stemmed from my resentment towards my father. In fact, the two looked alike in some ways, especially when they smiled. As I had with our pastor in Chapel Hill, so also with the president, I had responded to each like a child who resents his father's authority.

In their brilliant study of adult behavior and how to change, John and Paula Sandford show how failure to obey the command, "Honor your father and your mother," will inevitably produce failure, conflict, and sorrow in adult life.<sup>17</sup> My sinful response to men in authority showed that I had not yet repented of my lack of respect for my father.

The Sandfords point out that, though we do not have to approve of or agree with all that our parents do, we must still respect them. We may feel outrage for their abusive actions (or our perception of their behavior), but we must not allow resentment or disdain to settle into our hearts. Otherwise, the Lord will surely bring some other person or persons into our lives who remind us of our parents to give us another chance to see our sin and repent of it.

In his mercy, God used my conflict with the president of the seminary to expose a deeper sin from which he intended to liberate me. Since then, I think I have responded to authority with greater submission and respect.

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<sup>16</sup> 1 Samuel 15:25

<sup>17</sup> John and Paula Sandford, *The Transformation of the Inner Man*, Tulsa, Oklahoma: Victory House, Inc., 1982



**Above:** With Campus Evangelical Fellowship staff workers, 1987

**Below:** We invited our neighbor over after a church evangelistic service, 1987



Thanksgiving with American students in Taiwan, 1987

Our seminary small group in our home, 1988







**Above:** Sarah and the daughter of fellow OMers in our “yard”

**Left:** The swing I made for Sarah, Taipei, 1987

**Below:** At a church picnic, 1988



### **Chapter Twenty-One: To Another Field, 1988**

God soon led us to another field of labor. He took us out of Taiwan, allowing us, with his usual gentleness and kindness, to leave with many happy memories and a clear sense of direction.

#### **Hearing the Shepherd's Voice**

I told you I would explain how and why we decided to go home in the fall of 1988 after spending little more than three years in Taiwan, rather than the usual four years for a full missionary term.

The OMF general director had said that I must either accede to the president's demand that I not mention the role of women in the church or leave the faculty. I could accept that for the final term of the current academic year, but could I keep silent forever?

The idea of returning to the United States one year early was hard for me to accept. There was so much I wanted to do! In particular, our church had finally agreed to send a team to the South for a week-long evangelistic campaign with the Village Gospel Mission. I was hoping to follow up that trip with more trips of my own, perhaps even mobilizing more teams from our church. The desperate need for trained men in the church made me also want to spend more time with potential leaders to equip them for ministry.

On the other hand, concern for our mothers was growing in our minds. Dori's mother lived near one of her sisters, but that sister needed some help in caring for her. My mother lived alone in Pensacola, though one brother and sister lived in the same town. She had occasionally expressed a longing to see me more. Since she was already eighty-four years old, I did not know how much longer she would live. Would we see her again?

One day, as I wrestled with these conflicting desires, I drove the car across Taipei to Yuan Shan, a small mountain behind the Grand Hotel. I had often wanted to climb it because as a boy I had descended it with some friends after a long hike down Yang Ming Shan (Grass Mountain) one lovely Saturday. With my Bible and a notebook, I began climbing the ancient stone stairway, hoping to find a quiet place where I could be alone with God and wait upon his voice.

Not far up the hill, I suddenly saw an older man in white clothing step onto the path above me. He greeted me warmly and invited me into a compound which lay behind a tall fence. Other people had already come and gone, so the place was deserted. I told him I was a missionary. This was a spot used for meditation by church people, and he was an elder in a local congregation.

After some time in prayer, I asked him to pray for me. I told him about my desire to remain and serve in Taiwan, then about our concern for our mothers. He immediately gave his opinion.

"You should go home to your mother," he said, authoritatively. "She needs to see you. Your wife's mother also needs you. The church here can do without you."

His words took me by surprise. Although Chinese Christians follow their culture in upholding the virtue of filial piety, they also highly regard missionary work and the Christian ministry, and

often expect people to follow God's leading into "full-time Christian service" even if their parents don't approve.

Thus, when he so quickly and unequivocally exhorted me to leave Taiwan and take care of our mothers, I took it as God's voice to me. He was, after all, an elder, and someone whom I should thus highly respect. Indeed, he had appeared so suddenly and clothed in white, I almost thought he was an angel! He was in some sense, for he bore God's message to me.

I returned home at once and told Dori what had happened. Only then – I say this to my shame – did I recall God's clear guidance in 1985 as Dori finished packing and I played with Sarah, when he said, "Only three years." Now I knew what he had meant. I was so stubborn and so filled with my own ideas of what I should do, that I had neglected to obey his voice. The Lord had to use the president's demand for silence, the general director's insistence that I comply or leave the island, and, finally, this "angel" in white, to recall his earlier command to come home after three years.

Many years later, I asked an experienced Chinese pastor what the Lord had been teaching him. His answer found a ready response in my heart:

"I have learned that my ambitions are not always God's will," he said slowly and in a soft voice.

How true that is, even – and perhaps especially – in the Christian ministry, where we so easily equate our plans with God's purpose!

Have you ever wondered why the Book of Exodus records how God instructed Moses to prepare the Tabernacle and all its furnishings for worship, and it then repeats most of that information by describing how the people of Israel completed the work just as God had told Moses?<sup>18</sup> Why such repetition? Was it to emphasize the importance – even the necessity – of serving God exactly and only as he specifically commands, and not according to our own notions of what should be done?

### **A New Vision**

Up to now, I have not told you another reason why I decided we should go home earlier than we had planned. For several years, God had been speaking to me in my quiet times, telling me he wanted me to have a ministry among the Mainland Chinese. I always wondered what he meant, however, because we could not travel freely from Taiwan to China in those days. How was I going to serve among those from Communist China?

As we thought about returning to the United States, we realized that our new mission field might be in America, among scholars from China. We had heard that the Chinese Bible study in Chapel Hill now had many students and researchers from the People's Republic of China (PRC) attending; indeed, they outnumbered those from Taiwan. Furthermore, we had begun to think of moving to Charlottesville, Virginia, so we could be closer to Dori's mother, who lived in Richmond, only an hour away. We somehow learned that the Chinese woman who had helped

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<sup>18</sup> Exodus 25–28, 36–39



me proofread the Greek-Chinese lexicon had moved to Charlottesville and was working with PRC scholars connected with the University of Virginia.

The pieces of the puzzle were coming together to make a clear picture: God wanted us home, not only to help care for our mothers, but to take the gospel to the Mainland Chinese. Most of these highly-educated people had never had a chance to hear about Jesus. They were like the residents of country towns in Taiwan.

### **Following Paul**

Meanwhile, I was preparing the messages for the OMF Field Conference. I had been teaching Romans in the extension division of the seminary and had come to see that Paul's letter aimed to mobilize the Roman Christians to send him on to Spain as a missionary.<sup>19</sup> I reminded my colleagues that the church must always be pressing onward to new areas and people groups until all nations had heard the gospel.

Thus, we should remember the un-evangelized in Taiwan, like those in country towns with no Christian witness. After Taiwan had been thoroughly evangelized, perhaps we could think of going to China (the ardent hope of many missionaries in Taiwan). At the same time, however, I sensed that God was moving Dori and me out of Taiwan and into a harvest field.

Afterwards, Dori said she had never heard me speak with such passion. Others responded similarly. I knew God had answered all our prayers for the Spirit to overrule my limitations and speak through me despite my many faults and failings. Perhaps the deeper sense of my own sins for which I had prayed in January enabled me to speak with less pride and more power.

### **First Things First**

Before leaving Taiwan, however, I had to heed my own words and try to give people outside the major cities an opportunity to hear about God's love to us in Jesus Christ.

After the Field Conference, we returned to Taipei, where the team from our church prepared for a week-long visit to a town in southern Taiwan that had only one tiny church. We attended training sessions each week. Staff members from the Village Gospel Mission taught us beliefs of the millions of Chinese people: What is called "Buddhism" among the Chinese is really a smorgasbord of religious beliefs and practices. Scholars label it "traditional Chinese religion." The influence of Buddhism is pervasive, but other "gods" share the throne with Buddha (who himself did not believe in any god, but who has been worshiped as one for two millennia).

As a conversation-starter, we were told to ask, "Which god do you worship?" and then, "Why do you worship this god? What benefit does it bring you?" Instead of beginning with Christ, our trainers advised us to tell our hearers about God the Creator first. I saw the wisdom of this approach at once. After all, God himself had followed the same order in the Bible!

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<sup>19</sup> Romans 15:23–24

Anticipation filled our hearts as we drove out of Taipei. We knew we were going to a “resistant” people, the Hakka, and had been warned not to expect more than five positive responses in the coming week. We joyfully lived together in two houses (men and women), took meals in the church hall, and fanned out by twos and threes during the day. We knocked on hundreds of doors, asked our opening questions, and reeled with surprise at the reaction.

Instead of five expressions of interest, we counted fifty-two by the end of the week. Several factors seemed to have been at work. The two Village Gospel Mission workers had prepared the neighborhood for our visit; they, we, and our church had prayed for months; and we had received excellent training.

Something else may also have helped our efforts. A long drought in the southern part of the island had caused the farmers considerable worry, and the day before we began visiting homes, the president of the Republic of China, Lee Teng-hui, came to the South to inspect the drought conditions. A professing Christian, he had prayed publicly for rain in church on Sunday. The clouds burst the next day, bringing great joy to farmers and opening their minds to the idea that a Chinese person could be a Christian (their president was both!) and that the Christian God possessed awesome and beneficent power.

I shall never forget the profound thrill of telling people who had never heard the gospel of God’s love for sinners. We saw no immediate conversions – indeed, we looked for none, knowing that it would take time for seeds to bear fruit – but we rejoiced to see so many open, hungry hearts among a people others had concluded were “resistant” to Christianity.

A few months afterwards, just before we left Taiwan, Dori, Sarah, and Dori’s nephew Thomas joined me for a visit to the South. We stopped by the village where the team had spent a week and visited two of the families with whom I had spoken. Their daughter “Mary” still expressed interest in Christ. In fact, she touched our hearts deeply when she took off a precious necklace and offered it to Sarah as a token of her gratitude to me. We could not accept this gift, but we thanked her profusely and left praising God for his work in that town.

### **China at Last!**

Ever since I had sensed God’s leading to work among people from Mainland China, I had echoed Paul’s words to the Romans:

For God is my witness ... that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.<sup>20</sup>

Finally in October, Dori, Sarah, Thomas, and I set off for China by way of Hong Kong. We had arranged our trip to China through a travel agency in Hong Kong, which I had not visited since I went with my parents in 1958. I had fallen in love with the bustling city at once and decided to return.

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<sup>20</sup> Romans 1:9–10

From Hong Kong, we took a plane to Shanghai, where we stayed in a good hotel in the former French Quarter. I spotted a long line standing outside a store beneath our window one morning and went to look. Imagine my surprise when I saw customers walking away with hot fresh loaves of French bread under their arms! I joined them and carried my trophies back to the hotel room.

Shanghai in 1988 was just beginning to embark on the remarkable development that would transform it into a modern, world-class city. As we walked along the Bund (the area near the river), we were surrounded by crowds of curious Chinese people. They had never seen anything like Dori's and Sarah's blonde hair, it seemed. We discovered later that they were probably from the country and had come into Shanghai to look for work.

At the other end of the cultural spectrum, Sarah and I had a remarkable conversation with an unusual man in a posh hotel while Dori went shopping. We had gone into the lobby, as was our custom, to enjoy the luxury without paying for it. Then we noticed lovely sounds coming down from the mezzanine. Looking up, we spied a string quartet playing classical music. We climbed the stairway and found a table, where we sat listening to these accomplished performers.

There was a young man sitting at the table next to us. He spoke as we passed by on the way out, inviting us to join him. This we did, and we enjoyed a long and stimulating conversation with him. He was quite open to Christianity and asked me many questions. We exchanged addresses and parted. I thought I would never see him again, but he called me from New England when he eventually came to the States. Years later, I met with his father in another luxury hotel in Shanghai for an evening, but that is another story.

On Sunday, I asked the concierge whether there was a church we could attend. She said, "Yes, the International Church. My mother goes there." I tried to follow up on that opening, but others were around and she became silent. We got directions and took a cab to the church, an old European-style building from missionary days. An elderly lady showed us to the balcony, where other foreigners also sat. Down below us, hundreds of Chinese people filled every available seat until the aisles and stairways were also occupied.

The liturgy reminded us of a traditional Protestant service. The preacher spoke on the need to forgive those who have wronged us. Considering all the suffering of the past decades, especially during the Cultural Revolution of 1966–76, I could see why people were giving him their closest attention. Then something happened which I had never seen before: The pastor announced that they were about to hold the Lord's Supper, before which all those who had not yet been baptized must leave the building. We watched in wonder as hundreds of worshippers, mostly young, filed quietly out the doors.

We wanted very much to talk with the Chinese believers but were afraid to compromise anyone's security. We were pleased, therefore, when a family approached us outside the door at the end of the service. Most people had already left, but they stayed behind. They showed us their family Bible and asked whether we had any Christian literature to give them. I was happily conversing with them, but Dori grew anxious as she noticed the pastor and two other stern-

looking men observing us carefully. She motioned to me that we should move on, which we did. I wonder whether that family paid a price to talk with foreigners.

We took our French bread with us to the railway station, where we waited for the train to Hangzhou. Once again, a crowd surrounded us. This time, however, they engaged us in conversation. When they discovered that we had learned Mandarin in Taiwan, one asked, "How do Taiwan and China compare?"

I knew better than to say that Taiwan enjoys greater freedom and prosperity, so I replied, "I am a guest in your country."

One man, emboldened, I suppose, by our presence, declared in a loud voice, "I know that things are better in Taiwan. We don't have any freedom here!"

We were glad when another man closed that dangerous topic by shooing people away from us. "Let the foreigners eat their lunch in peace," he ordered. When everyone else had moved away, he drew closer and said, "Tell me more about Taiwan."

I had been following the news in China a bit, so I knew that freedom was in the air. Deng Xiao Ping had inaugurated the Four Modernizations, and the nation was beginning to benefit from the breezes that blew in from the outside world. What I did not know was the extent of unrest, discontent, and even bitterness among the people, especially the educated, who had suffered so much during the Cultural Revolution. Nor were we aware of the rising anger over inflation and the pandemic corruption in the government. We were sitting on a crate of dynamite in front of the railway station and were only vaguely aware of the turmoil beneath the smiles of citizens on the streets. Who could have predicted the events of May and June 1989 which embroiled the entire country only a few months after our visit?

We took a modern train to Hangzhou, passing through fields of grain still being worked in ancient ways. At one point, we crossed a branch of the famous Grand Canal, built centuries ago to take produce from the South up to the capital city of Beijing. We checked in to the hotel where a famous Chinese leader had spent his last days and marveled at the poor service. China had only just begun to open up to the outside, and standards had not yet risen to the levels of today.

Early the next morning, we engaged a boat for a tour of the famous West Lake. Marco Polo had called Hangzhou the most beautiful city in the world, and we saw why. Even now, the graceful buildings and lovely willows that line the shores of the lake evoke a glorious past. At lunch we sat next to a family who turned out to be Christians from Wenzhou. We told them we had lived on Wenzhou Street in Taipei, obviously named after someone homesick for his native city. They told us of flourishing churches and multiplying believers in their region, which had the greatest concentration of Christians in all of China.

We wanted to sit by the lake to drink in the quiet beauty of this scene. Not long after we had found a place on the lawn, a man in his early thirties asked in English whether he could join us. I was not there at the time, having gone back to the restaurant to use the rest room. Dori says that

the next sentence this man – whom we shall call “Paul” – uttered was “Have you read *Gone with the Wind*?”

My wife, who is from the North, replied, “No, but I have a Southern mother-in-law.”

At that point, I showed up. To my great delight, “Paul” wanted to talk about almost everything – politics, economics, philosophy, and religion – for the next few hours. His father had become a Christian, but “Paul” was an intellectual and wasn’t sure whether Christianity possessed sufficient grounds for a reasonable man to believe. I assured him of the essential rationality of the Christian faith. In the end, he accepted some Christian literature from me, even as we looked over our shoulders at three men who seemed to be Party members.

I kept up with “Paul” for several months, first by sending him a copy of *Gone with the Wind* in English (he had read it only in Chinese) and then by exchanging letters. After the Tiananmen incident in June 1989, I became more cautious in writing to him, lest our association cause him trouble. His letters finally came less frequently and then stopped.

From Hangzhou, we took a plane to Beijing. Space does not allow me to narrate all we saw and experienced there. I shall only relate one incident which confirmed my sense of leading to share the gospel with PRC intellectuals in the United States. We had all gone to the Forbidden City, but Sarah had become ill. Dori took her back to our hotel while Thomas and I continued our tour. Suddenly, a man came up and began speaking in English. He offered to show us around the vast complex and proceeded to take us down corridors and narrow alleys we would never have discovered on our own.

We conversed about different subjects, including modern philosophy and religion. I could tell he had a keen interest in truth and perhaps also in God. Along the way, he told us that he was a paper cutter and began making my silhouette out of a small piece of white paper. When we saw the finished product, we marveled at his artistic skill. I wanted to give him something, but he refused, saying he had merely wanted to share his art with new friends.

Insisting that I must somehow repay him, I reached into my pocket and drew out a tiny Chinese New Testament, the last one we had. When I presented it to him, he received it graciously, then looked at it closely. All of a sudden his eyes lit up. Holding the little book in both hands, he exclaimed, “I want this. I need this. I will read this! Thank you so much!” Then, without a further word, he left us and was quickly gone.

From these incidents, I am sure you can understand why we returned to Chapel Hill convinced that God had indeed opened up a wide door of ministry to scholars from Mainland China. Later events fully confirmed that conviction. But that is another story.

## Epilogue

After renewing fellowship with people in the Chapel Hill Bible Church in North Carolina, we moved to Charlottesville, Virginia, to serve among Chinese intellectuals studying at the

University of Virginia. In 1989, deciding that we had to remain in this country and be closer to our mothers, we resigned from OMF.

The Chapel Hill Bible Church did not think they could supervise us from a distance and urged me to form our own organization, and that is how China Institute came into being. The name sounds much bigger than it should, for we are very small; but God has richly blessed us. Since 1990, when we began a Chinese Bible study, we have seen two dozen baptisms. Three different fellowships have sprung up, and hundreds of ethnic Chinese people have come into contact with the gospel.

For four years, 1991–1995, I served as missions director of a large church while maintaining the ministry among the Chinese. Seeking to understand and to encourage missionaries and local ministries which our church supported, I traveled to Spain, Morocco, Ivory Coast, Mexico City, and India (where I spent a fascinating three weeks).

I have also returned to China three times as a tourist. On each trip, God has given me incredible opportunities to speak of Christ to hungry souls.

As the airplane flew over the outskirts of Taipei the night we left Taiwan, Dori looked down at the twinkling lights and said, “All our friends are down there.” Well, God has given us many new friends, but we have not forgotten our Chinese and missionary brothers and sisters in Taiwan. I have been back ten times to see how they are doing, thankful always for their love for us and for the Lord. I hope to make many more trips to the Beautiful Island.

God has led me into a ministry of writing in recent years. Almost all the reports I read tell of a church in China that, while growing rapidly, lacks solid biblical teaching or adequate resources for educated Chinese believers and seekers alike. A major goal of China Institute is to provide books and articles which will help to fill this gap. Write us for more information.

Well, dear reader, it is time to say goodbye, at least for now. You have come a long way with me, patiently bearing with my many foibles, faults, and failings. Thank you for staying with me all this time. Someday, perhaps, I can tell you more stories of God’s goodness and power towards us in the years since we came home from Asia.

For now, however, please remember the main point of this book: There is a great God who loves and cares for his people. He orchestrates everything in their lives to draw them closer to himself and to manifest more of his kindness, wisdom, and power to them each day. He wastes nothing in our lives. He overrules our sins and the sins of others. He delights to give us good gifts, including the gift of suffering, in order to glorify himself in and through us in this sad world.

That is why I have called this story *Mercy All The Way*.



**Above:** At West Lake, Hangzhou, 1988

**Below:** All eyes were on the foreign girl,  
Shanghai, 1988



With the workers of the Village  
Gospel Mission, 1988

In the cockpit of a Singapore  
Airlines Boeing 747, 1988



### **Conclusion: Words of Encouragement from a Fellow Pilgrim**

As I ponder the ways of God in my life over the past 61 years, I see that he has been trying to impress certain truths upon me and build certain habits into my life. Allow me to share some of these with you, my fellow pilgrims on the way to the Heavenly City.

Please do not think that I have learned all these lessons. I still struggle to trust and love God. Nevertheless, I would like for you to know what I have been learning. When I have followed the counsel I am about to give you, it has gone well with me, my family, and my ministry. God has apparently ordained certain principles which, if followed, will bring relative peace and prosperity – especially spiritual prosperity – in this life.

#### **Have FAITH in God (Mark 11:22)**

First and foremost, we need to trust God, for he is trustworthy! He will use all your past, including your sins and especially your pain, for your good and his glory. All things **do** work together for the good of those who love God (Romans 8:28).

He will not tempt you beyond your strength to endure. He will provide for all your needs, giving you enough money, strength, wisdom, and resources to serve him in this world.

He will forgive all your sins (Psalm 103:3; 1 John 1:9). He will be with you always and will never leave you nor forsake you (Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5).

Hudson Taylor took Mark 11:22 as his motto and the motto for the China Inland Mission. Through their faith in God, he and his colleagues accomplished great things for God and the Chinese. Today's missionaries must imitate the faith of those who have gone before us if we are to see comparable results from our labors, or if we even hope to have strength to engage in labor!

#### **Nurture Faith with God's Word**

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17). Lay up his word in your heart each day by reading, studying, and meditating upon the Bible. Take time to memorize key passages, including whole chapters and even books.

Read good Christian books by godly men and women, especially solid exposition of the Bible, sound theology, and edifying church history, including biographies.

Go to church regularly. Choose one where God's Word is honored and taught. Pray for the Lord to speak to you during worship, particularly during the sermon.

Participate in small group Bible studies with others who are eager to know more about God.



### **Grow in Grace with Other Believers**

Billy Graham is reported to have said that, apart from personal Bible study, having a spiritual partner is the most important element in the Christian life. I agree. Find one person of the same sex with whom you can share your life and join in prayer. Be open and honest; hold each other accountable. This one practice will do a lot to help you grow into Christian maturity.

As I said above, take part in a small group and go to church regularly. Use your spiritual gifts to serve others. Learn from others. Love them, and experience love from them.

### **Ask Others to Pray for You**

I must say that much of my spiritual growth and any effectiveness or fruit I have known in my ministry have come along with the intercessions of Christians for me. The mighty apostle Paul often asked others to pray for him (see Ephesians 5:19, for only one example). Shall I not do the same?

If you are a missionary, write regular prayer letters. OMF leaders impressed this upon us, and I have found that God works through us to benefit our Chinese friends in direct proportion to the frequency, clarity, and specificity of our prayer letters. For our good and his glory, God will not be pleased with results that stem from our own ability and action. He is jealous of his own reputation, but generous with his help when his people request aid. Don't be shy; don't be lazy! Write that letter or make that phone call now! You will be amazed at the way God does far more abundantly than all that we could ask or think.

### **Place Yourself Under Authority**

Honor your parents, church elders, and leaders in your Christian group or organization. They are not flawless, free from sin, or without error, but God has placed them in your life for your good. Pray for them. Seek their counsel. Ask them to pray for you. Obey them, unless they command you to violate some clear teaching of the Bible.

### **Seek First the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness**

In all your decision making, look first to God's honor and glory. Even when you think that obedience to the Bible will lead to loss, trust the Lord to protect you and provide for you. His ways are best. He will take care of those who make it their aim to trust and obey him.

Beware of seeking fame, wealth, comfort, security, pleasure, or anything else more than you seek God. You will only find disappointment, remorse, and sorrow.

### **Seek to Give, Not to Get**

Not only when you seek a marriage partner, but in all your considerations, make love your aim. It is more blessed to give than to receive, said Jesus. Don't neglect to pray for others. Seek service, not satisfaction. God will give you more than you would have imagined.

Even missionaries, who are supposed to go to another land simply to serve, will find that they must constantly struggle against pride and selfishness. We must ask ourselves, “What is my real motive?” and seek the benefit of those we came to reach.

### **Spend Time with Your Family**

Missionaries and ministers of the gospel sometimes put “the work” ahead of their families. As a result, they leave a poor legacy, alienate their spouses and children, and deprive themselves of lasting joy.

While your parents are alive, try to be with them as much as possible, consistent with your duties and desires. You need to grow independent but not distant from those who gave you birth and brought you up.

If you get married, don’t neglect your spouse. Husbands, if you devote yourself to your work or play more than to your wife, you will miss out on many great blessings. Wives, if you pursue a career at the expense of your family or pour your heart into your children and forget to love your husband, you will reap a harvest of loneliness and remorse. “Rejoice with the wife of your youth” (Ecclesiastes 9:1) – and wives, let your husband rejoice in you!

### **Take a Sabbath**

Without going into controversy about biblical laws concerning sabbaths, let me just urge you to take the Lord’s Day off. Go to church; enjoy fellowship with family and Christian friends; and share the gospel with a non-Christian. Rest, sleep, walk, and read good Christian books. Avoid frivolous entertainment, especially public events, on that day. From my own experience I have discovered that a quiet use of the Lord’s Day makes the rest of the week not only bearable, but more productive.

Those working in another culture as missionaries must especially be careful. The needs press upon your conscience so heavily that you sometimes think you can’t take a rest. Wrong! Precisely because of the millions around us who have never heard the gospel, we must take time to rest and wait upon the Lord, who alone can refresh our souls and bodies.

### **Try to Maintain Good Health**

As one wise man once said, you are not much use to anyone, including God, without good health. The Lord may see fit to afflict you with acute or chronic illness. If he does, pray for healing but accept your illness as his good providence while it lasts.

Ordinarily, however, health depends upon prudent living. That requires eating nutritious meals, getting seven or eight hours of sleep a day, and engaging in vigorous work or exercise about an hour a day.

Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Do not destroy this temple with substance abuse, over-eating, or laziness. God has given you an instrument to be used in his employment. Keep your tools sharp and well-oiled; maintain your car; take care of your body.

My own missionary career was cut prematurely short because I neglected my health during our first term of service. Only good health enabled me to return to Taiwan and work steadily for seven more years.

### **Admit Your Sins and Failings**

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). We deceive only ourselves, however. How much better to admit our wrongs and errors to others, especially those close to us! Above all, we should regularly ask forgiveness from God, who has promised that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us (1 John 1:9).

A missionary who refuses to admit mistakes or confess sins will have little impact upon the people to whom he came to share the good news of a Savior who died for sinners.

### **Learn to Listen to Others**

A careful reading of the Book of Proverbs will show that listening well is just as important as speaking well. Listen to other’s advice (Proverbs 19:20). Listen also to their criticisms. At the very least, you will learn what is on their minds, which is essential information for you to know in relating to them. You might even gain a fresh insight into your own conduct, one which will help you to improve. “Let the righteous strike me” (Psalm 141:5). Listening shows love and care, which will win the affection of those who speak to you.

Cross-cultural missionaries should be especially careful to listen before they speak. There is so much that we don’t know or understand. We must hear what our local friends say before they will give us a hearing.

### **Read All That You Can**

“Wise men store up knowledge” (Proverbs 10:14). In addition to the Bible, which you should read through at least every two or three years, be sure, as I said before, to read theology, church history, and books on Christian living. Avoid novels, especially romances, except for the really great ones.

Read about your own culture; explore the cultures of others. Gather knowledge about politics, the economy, nature, health, business – anything that will be useful in understanding your world, your friends, and yourself. If you are a missionary, compile a list of books about your host culture and study them well. I have never regretted the hours spent with books rather than in front of the television.

## **Set Priorities and Stick to Them**

Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established. (Proverbs 4:26)

The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way. (Proverbs 14:8)

So many paths lie before us, with so many possible alleys leading away from the main road, that we must constantly ask God for clear direction. Set goals periodically; review them often; measure your progress by them; and revise them when necessary.

Take time to plan. When I do, I get more done and feel better about it. When I don't, I may be busy – in fact, I usually am! – but a vague sense of inefficiency and sometimes frustration haunts me.

Imitate God, the great Planner! He has a grand design towards which he is guiding all of history, and according to which he does all things (Ephesians 1:11). We should seek his wisdom about the few “good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

## **Persevere**

Keep on keeping on. Don't give up. “You have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise” (Hebrews 10:36).

Work hard; work smart; work at it until you have finished the job. I have discovered that if I just keep steadily at a project, I shall eventually bring it to conclusion. The lexicon took five years; the abridgment of Carl Henry's *God, Revelation & Authority* took almost twelve years (though I didn't work on it all the time).

Missionaries sometimes despair of acquiring fluency in their new language. Trying to learn Chinese has certainly taxed my patience. Forty years after starting the first language lesson, I still bemoan the poverty of my vocabulary. I admire those missionaries who have applied themselves more diligently to the task of language-learning and wish I had exercised more discipline, studying a bit each day.

When you have worked for years and still see no converts, you can lose heart. Remember to keep on sowing the seed and watering it with prayer. We have waited for as long as ten years for some Chinese people to believe in Christ after first hearing the good news.

Those who sow in tears will reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves [of grain] with him. (Psalm 126:5–6)

### **Follow Your Conscience and Sense of God's Leading**

You have seen how I have gotten into deep trouble by forgetting that “Whatever is not from faith is sin” (Romans 14:23). Learn from my mistakes. Don’t do anything you are not sure is right before God. If you have doubts, don’t do it!

On the other hand, “He who knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin” (James 4:17). Don’t quench the Spirit of God; follow his leading. You will be glad you did.

### **Make Friends with Pain and Suffering**

The veteran missionary who spoke to the OMF First Termers’ Conference in 1976 uttered words that have troubled me ever since: “Missionary effectiveness comes only with hard work and suffering.”

He might also have said, “The Christian life requires hard work and suffering,” for the Bible makes clear the demands of discipleship. Jesus told his followers to take up their crosses and follow him, and he promised, “In this world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33). Paul warned that “We must through many tribulations [troubles] enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

Peter said, “Do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you” (1 Peter 4:12). In fact, he put it even more strongly:

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind. (1 Peter 4:1)

The word rendered “mind” can also be translated as “purpose.” In other words, one of our purposes and goals in life should be to endure suffering with Christ. Not that we seek martyrdom or afflict ourselves, but that we include pain, rather than pleasure, among our priorities. After all, everyone suffers. The question is whether we shall suffer with a purpose to know and glorify our Lord Jesus.

Despite all these passages and many more, I have spent much of my life running from pain and complaining about suffering. Perhaps it was for this reason, and in order to teach me to “count it all joy when [I] fall into various trials” (James 1:3), that God has been pleased, since we left for Asia in 1975, to afflict me with pain in my feet, knees, eyes, hands, back, mouth, head, and stomach. I have known the discomfort of illness and insomnia. I have lost two jobs and suffered much rejection. Nor have I been immune from the usual difficulties that befall everyone, such as pain in relationships, including those with family.

After our return in 1978, one discerning pastor asked, “Have you embraced the sufferings of the Cross”? My answer was “NO!”

When will I learn to give thanks for all things (Ephesians 5:20; 1 Thessalonians 5:18) and to “bless the LORD at all times” (Psalm 34:1)?

On the rare occasions when I have summoned the faith to trust God enough actually to thank him for pain and suffering, he has flooded my heart with joy and peace. I recommend that you acquire this habit early in life, and thus spare yourself much unnecessary fretting and frustration.

### **Seek Satisfaction in God Alone**

Finally – and here we return to the first principle – look to God alone for life. “In Him was life,” John said of Jesus (John 1:4).

You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16:11)

They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light. (Psalm 36:8–9)

Delight yourself in the LORD, and He shall give you also the desires of your heart. (Psalm 37:4)

God wants us to find joy in him and in his gifts to us. In fact, we are commanded to “rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4). If we look elsewhere for happiness, we shall be utterly disappointed. When I set my heart and hopes on God, he fills me with peace; when I wander off to worship idols, he graciously frustrates me so that I am driven to return to him, the only source of true life.

And how do we find satisfaction in God? By trusting in his word, believing his promises, and relying on his grace.

So, the sum of it all is this: Have faith in God!

To him alone be all the glory and honor and praise, through Jesus Christ our Lord, by the Holy Spirit. Amen.