

How I Know GOD Answers Prayer

The Personal Testimony of One Life-Time

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Chapter Seven -

THE STORY OF ONE FURLOUGH (1908-1910)

"Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me" (Psalm 50:15).

IN THE summer of 1908 I was obliged to return to Canada with five of our children, leaving Mr. Goforth in China for the revival work.

Reaching Toronto, I learned that my eldest son was at death's door from repeated attacks of rheumatic fever. He was then almost a day's journey away. On my way there, as I recalled the times in which he had been given back to us from the very gates of death, my faith was strengthened to believe for his recovery again. But, as I prayed, it became very clear that the answer to my petition depended on myself; in other words, that I must yield myself and my will to God.

I had been planning to take no meetings during that furlough, but to devote myself wholly to my children. I confessed the sin of planning my own life, and definitely covenanted with the Lord that if He would raise my son for His service I would take meetings, or do anything, as He opened the way for the care of the children.

There were six difficult doors, however, that would have to be opened - not one, but all - before I could possibly go out and speak for CHRIST and China, as GOD seemed to be asking.

- First, the Lord would need to restore my son to complete health, as I could never feel justified in leaving a sick child.
- Second, He would need to restore my own health, for I had been ordered to the hospital for an operation.
- Third, He would need to keep all the other children well.
- Fourth, a servant must be sent to take care of the house - though my income was so small that a servant seemed out of the question, and only the strictest economy was making both ends meet.
- Fifth, a Christian lady would need to be willing to take care of the children, and act as my housekeeper in my absence from home.
- Sixth, sufficient money would need to be sent to meet the extra expenses incurred by my leaving home.

Yet, as I laid these difficulties before the Lord, I received the definite assurance that He would open the way.

My son was brought back to Toronto on a stretcher, the doctor not allowing him to raise his head; but on arrival he would not obey orders, declaring that he was so well he could not and would not remain still. Fearing the consequences of his disobeying orders, I telephoned for the doctor to come at once. On his arrival he gave the lad a thorough examination, and then said: "Well, I cannot make him out; all I can say is, let him do as he pleases."

Within a month the boy was going back to his high school, apparently quite well. Some months later he applied for a position as forester under the government. He had to pass through the hands of the official doctor. My son told him of his recent illness, and of what the doctor had said concerning his heart; but this physician replied: "In spite of all you have told me I can discover nothing whatever the matter with you, and will therefore give you a clear bill of health."

As for myself, I did not go to the hospital; for all the symptoms that had seemed to require it left me, and I became perfectly well. A servant was sent to me who did her work sympathetically, as helping me to do the Lord's work. A married niece, living near, offered to stay in the home whenever I needed to be absent.

And so there remained but one condition unfulfilled - the money. But I believed this would come as I went forward; and it did. Each month that followed, as I made up my accounts, I found that my receipts exceeded my expenditures sufficiently to enable me to spend money for work in China, and to purchase things which I needed for China, including an organ. All these accounts were laid before our beloved Mission Board secretary, who approved them.

Under these circumstances I dared not refuse invitations to speak. Yet, so weak was my faith, for months I never left home for a few days without dreading lest something should happen to the children during my absence. I even accepted meetings with the proviso that if the children needed me I must fail to keep my appointment. But as the days and weeks and months passed, and all went well, I learned to trust.

"Be still; be strong to-day.'
But, Lord, to-morrow?
What of to-morrow, Lord?
Shall there be rest from toil,
Be truce from sorrow?
'Did I not die for thee?
Do I not live for thee?
Leave me to-morrow.'"

In giving the following I wish to make clear that, had I been living a life of ease or self-indulgence, I could not have been justified in expecting GOD to undertake for me in such matters as are here recorded. It must be remembered that I had stepped out into a life which meant trusting for everything.

Before leaving China for Canada my husband had said to me: "Do not stint the children with apples; give them all they want." But when I began housekeeping I found this was not very easy to do. Apples were expensive, and the appetites of my six children for them seemed insatiable. However, I began by buying a few small baskets; and then I did not need to buy more, for apples

came in a most wonderful way. First in baskets; then, as the season advanced, in barrels. These came from many different sources; and in some cases long distances, express paid to the door. On one occasion a barrel of large, hard "Greenings" came just as we had finished the last barrel. The children complained that they were too hard to eat, and begged me to buy them some "Snows" - very expensive, but delicious apples for eating. I had only purchased one small basket of "Snows" when a large supply, almost a barrelful, came from a distant friend.

I feel that the Lord saw that I had given up all for Him, so just showed how He could provide, thus evidencing His love and care for my dear children. We had set up housekeeping at the end of the fruit season, and so I had not been able to do canning for winter use. That winter, again and again, gifts of canned fruit came, sometimes from unknown sources. Altogether, seventy jars of the finest fruit were sent to us. I will give the details of just one of these gifts.

Shortly before leaving home for ten days, the servant informed me that the canned fruit was finished. Accordingly, I went down and ordered enough dried fruit to last till I should return. On reaching home I was greeted at the door by a rush from the children, all trying at once to tell me that a lovely valentine had just arrived. Leading me back to the kitchen, they showed me the table covered with twenty jars of the most delicious looking fruit, and a large can of maple syrup. On a card accompanying the gift was written: "A valentine for our dear substitute in China,' from her sisters in Renfrew."

Early in the winter it became evident that a telephone was a necessity, with my numerous calls and engagements. I hesitated about going into this expense, not being quite sure that it was right to use in that way the money given me. At last, I prayed that the Lord would show me His will in the matter by sending me half the amount needed for the telephone within a certain time, if it was right for me to get it. Before the time expired the money had come; so I got the telephone.

As the weather became cold I began to suffer on the long drives in the country to appointments, and was soon longing for a fur coat. I consulted our mission secretary as to whether, if sufficient money were given me, I could put it into a fur coat. The answer was a decided "Yes." There was no doubt that the coat was a necessity in the Lord's work. So I began to pray the Lord to send the money quickly, for the cold was severe. In less than two weeks I received the money needed, and of course got the coat.

The ladies of the Winnipeg Presbyterial had arranged a series of meetings for me in Winnipeg, Brandon, and other places in that vicinity, about ten in all. The collections from the meetings were to defray my traveling expenses, which would amount to over one hundred dollars. On my way by train from Toronto to Winnipeg I caught a severe cold, which settled in my throat and chest. I did not want the women to be disappointed, and also put to all the expense, if I failed them. Just before reaching Winnipeg I was enabled to commit myself definitely into the Lord's hands, for strength and voice for the meetings. The days that followed can never be forgotten, for the bodily weakness, fever, and throat trouble were removed only while I was giving my addresses. In each case, though so hoarse before and after speaking as to be scarcely able to make myself heard above a whisper, my voice cleared for the address.

For example: while at Dr. and Mrs. C. W. Gordon's home the Sunday I was to speak in Winnipeg, I was advertised to speak that night in Dr. Gordon's church. At the supper table I asked Dr. Gordon if he would be ready to speak should I fail. Just before my time came to speak

I slipped up on to the platform behind Dr. Gordon, who was praying; and oh, how I cried to the Lord for help and courage! For the church was packed, and even the Sunday-school room partitions were opened to accommodate the crowd. My throat was as if in a vise, and I felt weak and ill. But, as Dr. Gordon introduced me, I stepped forward possessed by a feeling of wonderful calm and absolute confidence.

It seemed I could just feel One like unto the Son of man beside me, and never had I felt so completely and only a channel. For more than an hour I spoke so that everyone heard distinctly; but when I sat down my throat tightened as before. Dr. Gordon told me later that he had a man sit in the most difficult place in which to hear, and that he had heard every word.

So it was till the end of my appointments. On the homeward journey I asked the Lord either to heal my throat, or to provide a way for me to get a needed rest from speaking, for I had many appointments awaiting me in Ontario. A few days after reaching home four of my children were taken down with measles. During the weeks I was in quarantine with them my throat received the rest it needed, and became quite restored.

One day the following early summer, in looking over the children's clothes, I found there was so much to be done I was fairly overwhelmed. I saw it was quite impossible to do the necessary sewing and keep my appointments too. The question that weighed heavily was, "Should I cancel the meetings for which I had given my word?" My husband urged me to buy ready-made clothes, but I knew how expensive they would be, and could not bring myself to do so. I went alone and laid my burden before the Lord, praying that, if he wanted me to speak further for China, he would show his will by sending me some gift that would enable me to get ready-made clothes for the children.

A few days later I was speaking at a Presbyterial gathering in western Ontario. At the close of the evening meeting an old gentleman put into my hands some money. I asked him what he wished me to use it for, and he replied, "For your children. Use it in a way that will help you to be free for GOD's work." My heart rose in thanksgiving, and I decided to accept it as the token I had asked of the Lord.

On my return to Toronto I spent this gift in buying ready-made clothes for the children, to save my time and strength for the Lord's work.

When busy in my home one day, the thought of two dear friends of the China Inland Mission kept coming constantly to mind, and I began to wonder if I should not send them some money. Looking into my purse, I found I had only fifty cents on hand. I put the matter out of my mind, with the thought that if the Lord wanted me to send them anything he would provide a way. That afternoon's mail brought a letter from a distant place in Ontario where, a year before, I had visited and spoken for a friend. The letter was from the treasurer of the Christian Endeavor Society for which I had spoken. He enclosed five dollars, and said the money was to have been given me at the time I spoke for them, but had been overlooked.

My first thought was to return it, as it would be dishonoring my friend to accept money for such a service; and then I remembered my friends for whom I wanted money, and I decided to send the five dollars to them. My husband, returning the following morning, handed me another five to put with it, and the ten dollars was sent off.

In due course a reply came from my friends, saying that the very morning my letter arrived they both had been given assurance that a certain sum would come, for which they had been praying. This was to meet a need which they did not wish to bring before their Board. My letter brought the ten dollars; and another letter in the afternoon's mail contained a sum which, with mine, exactly made the amount they had been asking the Lord for.

"Say not my soul, 'Can GOD relieve my care?'
Remember that Omnipotence hath servants everywhere!"

On one occasion, when about to leave home on a ten days' trip to Montreal and other places, word came that the children's Sunday school treat was to take place during my absence.

Little Mary had no "best" dress for the occasion. I had planned to make her a white woolen dress, but now there was no time; and I knew I could not make it while away, with so many meetings ahead. But, that very day, a lady from our church called and said she had wanted for a long time to help me, and asked if she could do any sewing for me. With dim eyes and a grateful heart I accepted her offer. On my return, Mary told me of her wearing a pretty white cloth dress for the Sunday-school treat.

Once more we planned to leave Canada for China, and a serious problem faced me. Our eldest son could be left to face the world alone, but not our daughter of sixteen. It was necessary that a suitable guardian be found for her. I called on three different ones whom I thought would feel some responsibility toward the missionary's daughter, but all three declined to accept the responsibility. I then saw that it was not for me to try to open doors, but for this also I must look to the Lord. I prayed that, if He wished me to return to China, He would send me one to whom I could commit her.

A short time passed; then a lady called, whose life had been devoted to the training of young women. Her beautiful Christian character made her the one above all others in whose care I could gladly leave my daughter. This lady told me that in her early years she had hoped to give her life for service in China, but the way had been closed. She now felt that the Lord had laid it upon her heart to offer to take charge of my child. Years have passed since then, and she has fulfilled my highest expectations of her. Rarely has a more definite answer come from a loving Father, nor one that brought greater relief and help; for this offer, coming as it did in answer to my prayers, seemed to be unmistakable proof that the Lord would keep my child as I gave her up.

The time had almost arrived for beginning the last preparations for the long journey to China, when one day Ruth came in from her play with her heavy coat almost in shreds, she having in some way torn it on a barbed wire fence. The coat was the only heavy one she had, and I had planned to make it do for the ocean voyage, intending to get a new one in England. I tried to find a new one in the stores, but the season was past and I could not; and I had no time to make another.

I just took the need to the Lord and left it there, believing that in some way he would provide. A few days later a friend telephoned me that her mother had recently returned from a visit to Chicago, and wished me to come over to see a parcel she had brought for me. Oh, the relief that

came when I found that the parcel contained, among other things, a handsome red cloth ulster, which fitted Ruth perfectly. This fresh evidence of the Lord's overshadowing care touched me deeply. Those who have never known such tokens of the Lord's loving care in the little things of life can scarcely understand the blessedness that such experiences bring.

"Whether it be so heavy that others cannot bear
To know the heavy burden they cannot come and share;
Whether it be so tiny that others cannot see
Why it should be a burden, and seem so real to me,
Either and both I lay them down at the Master's feet
And find them alone with JESUS mysteriously sweet."

As I attempt to recall the answers to prayer on this furlough, so many come to mind it is impossible to record them all - help in keeping my appointments, courage and power for public speaking, physical strength, and guidance in facing many difficult problems.

It was at this time I formed a habit of getting a message for a meeting on my knees. It often seemed to me very wonderful how, as in a flash, sometimes, an outline for a talk on China would come. Never having kept notes, nor even outlines of addresses, I have frequently been placed in circumstances when I have felt utterly cast on the Lord. And I can testify that He never failed to give the needed help, and the realized divine power. Yet sad, sad is it that often at just such times, no sooner would the address be ended than the Satan-whispered thought would come, "I have done well to-day."

Oh, is not the goodness and forbearance of our GOD wonderful; wonderful that He ever again would deign to give help when asked for it?

A short time since I asked a dear friend whose writings have reached and inspired multitudes throughout the Christian world: "How did you do it?"

Softly, with deep reverence in look and tone, she replied: "It has been done all in and through prayer!"

With deepest gratitude and praise to our ever faithful GOD, I too can testify that any little service I have been able to do has been done by His grace in answer to prayer.

"I stood amazed and whispered, 'Can it be
That He hath granted all the boon I sought,
How wonderful that He for me hath wrought!"

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Oh, faithless heart (He said that He would hear,
And proved His promise, wherefore didst thou fear?
How wonderful if He should fail to bless
Expectant prayer with good success!"

~ end of chapter 7 ~