

How I Know GOD Answers Prayer

The Personal Testimony of One Life-Time

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Chapter Six -

PROVING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS (1902-1908)

"The safest place. . . is the path of duty."

ONE of the results of our gracious and merciful deliverance from the hands of the Boxers was an increased desire to make our lives tell in the service of GOD - to spend and be spent for Him. Our Heavenly Father saw this and just took us at our word, and led us out into the path which meant absolute surrender as I had never known it before.

It is so true that "God will be no man's debtor." When He asks for and receives our all, He gives in return that which is above price - His own presence. The price is not great when compared with what He gives in return; it is our blindness and our unwillingness to yield that make it seem great.

The following story has been asked for many times. Believing that it has a lesson for others, I give it, though to do so means lifting the veil from a very sacred part of my life.

After the Boxer experience, my husband returned to China in 1901; and, with my children, I left for China in the summer of 1902, leaving the two eldest children at the Chefoo schools, en route to Honan. Mr. Goforth met me at Tientsin, and together we traveled by riverboat inland a journey of about twenty-four days. During those long, quiet days on the river-boat my husband unfolded to me a carefully thought out plan for future mission work.

He reminded me that six missionaries, from a mission-station which had been destroyed by the Boxers, were now permanently stationed at Changte; and that the main station, now fully equipped, no longer needed us as before. He felt that the time had come when we should give ourselves to the evangelization of the great regions north and northeast of Changte - regions which up to that time had been scarcely touched by the Gospel, because of lack of workers. His plan was that we - husband and wife, with our children - should go and live and work among the people.

To make this possible a native compound would be rented in the center, where we would stay a month for our first visit, leaving behind an evangelist to carry on the work; and we would revisit this and other places so opened as many times as possible in the year.

What this proposition meant to me can scarcely be understood by those unfamiliar with China and Chinese life.

Smallpox, diphtheria, scarlet fever, and other contagious diseases are chronic epidemics; and China, outside the parts ruled by foreigners, is absolutely devoid of sanitation.

Four of our children had died. To take the three little ones, then with me, into such conditions and danger seemed literally like stepping with them over a precipice in the dark and expecting to be kept. But, on the other hand, I had the language and experience for just such work, the need was truly appalling, and there was no other woman to do it. In my innermost soul I knew the call had come from GOD, but I would not pay the price. My one plea in refusing to enter that life was the risk to the children.

Again and again my husband urged that "the safest place" for myself and the children "was the path of duty"; that I could not keep them in our comfortable home at Changte, but "GOD could keep them anywhere." Still I refused. Just before reaching our station he begged me to reconsider my decision. When I gave a final refusal, his only answer was: "I fear for the children."

The very day after reaching home our dear Wallace was taken ill. For weeks we fought for his life; at last the crisis passed and he began to recover. Then my husband started off alone on his first trip! He had been gone only a day or two when our precious baby Constance, a year old, was taken down with the same disease that Wallace had. From the first there seemed little or no hope. The doctors, a nurse, and all the little mission circle joined in the fight for her life. Her father was sent for, but arrived just as she was losing consciousness. A few hours later, when we were kneeling round her bedside waiting for the end, my eyes seemed suddenly opened to what I had been doing - I had dared to fight against Almighty GOD.

In the moments that followed GOD revealed Himself to me in such love and majesty and glory that I gave myself up to Him with unspeakable joy. Then I knew that I had been making an awful mistake, and that I could indeed safely trust my children to Him wherever He might lead one thing only seemed plain, that I must follow where GOD should lead. I saw at last that GOD must come first. Before the precious body was laid away preparations for our first trip were begun.

Was GOD faithful to the vision He had given me? Or did He allow the children to suffer in the years that followed, when months each year were spent with them right out among the people? As I write this, eighteen years have passed since we started on that first trip, and none of our children have died. Never had we as little sickness as during that life. Never had we so much evidence of GOD's favor and blessing in a hundred ways - as may be gathered from the definite testimonies which follow.

Without one exception, every place in which we stayed for a month, and opened as my husband had planned, became in time a growing church.

And I found, to my surprise, that I was able to give more time to the children, that I was able to guard them better when on those trips than when in the Changte Station. For the mission compound was large, and often the children were out of my sight for hours at a time; whereas the outside native compounds we lived in were so small the children were always within sight and reach. Even when groups of women were listening to the Gospel, I was able to direct the children's lessons. As I look back on that time, my heart is filled with overflowing gratitude to GOD for the wonderful grace and strength He gave for that life.

My great regret is that I did not keep a record of answers to prayer. I find it most difficult to record just what "asking and getting things from GOD" meant at that time, but it now seems to me to have been the very foundation of the whole life. The instances of answers to prayer, here recorded, are simply the ones connected with that life which stand out most clearly in my memory of those years.

The first answer came the morning after our dear Constance died, and was the one that had the greatest, most far-reaching effect on the new life and its work.

As I thought of facing the crowds of heathen women day by day, and what it would mean to carry on aggressive evangelism outside, there was one need I felt must be met - that of a Bible-woman. As I prayed for direction, a Mrs. Wang Hsieh-sheng came to mind as the one I should ask.

But when I laid my request before her, that she come with me, she burst into tears, saying: "I dare not. I have only one child left, and it would risk her life too much."

Seeing how she felt, I did not urge her, but told her to go and pray about it for a day, and bring me her answer after the funeral that night. When she came that evening her face was shining through tears, as she said: "O my Shepherd Mother, I will go. If you are willing to risk your children for the sake of my sisters, how much more should I!"

Eighteen years have passed since that day. I would need to write a volume to record all that Mrs. Wang meant to me in those years; yes, and to the work. As the years passed she became my beloved companion, sharing in all the responsibilities and hardships of that life, and also in its joys. I realized more and more that she was indeed a God-given co-worker. Though circumstances have led me away from that life, she still remains and works for her sisters in the Changte Church.

One of the hardest words a missionary can get from his Home Board is the word "re-trench."

My husband and I were on one of our evangelistic tours north of Changte. Every door seemed wide open before us, and the time ripe for a specially aggressive campaign of evangelism for the heathen. But, just as we were planning for this, word reached us from our station treasurer of a message received from the Home Board that funds were low, and retrenchment must be carried out along all lines.

To us this meant dismissing helpers, and a general curtailing of our work. We faced the question squarely. Our own tithe had been long overdrawn. How then could we support the men we had, and go on with the work which was opening so gloriously before us after years of hard pioneer preparation?

But we decided to go on as we had planned, and to trust GOD for the necessary funds; believing that, though for the time being the home church had disappointed us, GOD would not fail us.

The following Friday a home mail reached us, in which was a letter from a lady in New Zealand. The writer said she had read a letter of ours in *The Life of Faith*, and wished to support an

evangelist under us. This relieved us of the support of one man, but there were many other needs as yet unmet.

The following Monday, when our next mail was forwarded to us, a letter came from a lady in Australia, enclosing a draft ample to meet every special need in the work for a year to come. She stated very plainly that she did not wish the money put into the general funds of the mission, but to be used by ourselves in any way we thought best. Indeed, had she known the special circumstances in which the letter would find us, she could scarcely have written more exactly to fit our case.

Again, a year after this experience of GOD's faithfulness to meet all our needs, we began to feel the need of special funds for the work. My husband, as usual, seemed quite sure that we should keep on as we had been doing, and that the money needed would be sent. In spite of all the blessed lessons of the past, my faith seemed to fail me; and I spoke decidedly against using our salary, when we needed it all for ourselves and our children's education.

We were traveling homeward by cart at the time and the matter was dropped; though I felt my husband was hurt by my lack of faith.

When we reached home, that evening, a letter from a lady in Canada was awaiting my husband. He read it first; and I cannot forget the look on his face as he handed it to me, with the words "I told you so."

As near as I can recall it the letter said: "My mother and I are strangers to you, never having seen or heard either you or your wife. But my mother, who is an invalid, has for some time been restless because of a conviction that has come over her that she should send you some money. So to quiet my mother I am sending you fifty dollars."

As I read the letter, I certainly did feel ashamed of my lack of faith. In writing our acknowledgment, I told how wonderfully opportune the gift had been. A couple of months or so later came a reply, telling us that the invalid mother passed away soon after my letter reached them; and that the story of how GOD had used her in this matter greatly strengthened her faith, blessing and helping her during the closing days of her life.

On one occasion, when we were traveling from Wuanhsien to Pengcheng, we reached the town of Hotsun late in the afternoon, expecting to stay over night. But on our arrival we found that the Christian whom we had sent to arrange for our accommodation had failed to get us a place, everyone absolutely refusing to take us in. While the animals were feeding, and we were trying to eat our dinner of Chinese dough-strings in the midst of a curious crowd, my husband told the Christian to go out again and look for a place while we prayed.

We dared not close our eyes, lest the superstitious heathen crowd crushing against us on all sides would take fright, thinking we were mesmerizing them. So we just lifted up our hearts silently to our Father; and before many minutes had passed, indeed before we had finished our meal, the Christian returned greatly rejoiced, saying: "A wealthy man has offered you a fine empty place which has just been fixed over. And you can have it as long as you like, free of rent."

For three days we preached in that place - morning, noon, and night - to great crowds; and a

work was begun which has gone on ever since.

There were times when my faith was severely tested, and I fear too often I did not stand the test; but oh, how patient GOD is with us in our human weakness. "**Like as a father pitieth, . . . so the LORD pitieth.**" The Chinese have often said to me, "Your children seem made for this life." But I know it was GOD's great goodness. He knew how hard the life was, and how difficult it would have been for me to continue that work had the children been peevish or hard to manage. Time and time again we had to get the little ones up before daybreak to start on a cart journey, but I do not remember that they ever even cried. They would just wake up enough to get dressed and ask sleepily, "Are we going again, Mama?" and then go off to sleep as soon as we were settled in our carts.

On one occasion, arriving at a certain town, we found the place in which we were to stay unfit for the children.

It was simply horrible. On either side of us, almost reaching to our door, were two great pigstys - Chinese pigstys! In front of the door were eight or ten great vessels, filled with fermenting stuff which had been there all summer, and which added to the other varied and oppressive odors. I greatly feared for the children, and wanted to leave at once, but my husband seemed calmly certain of the Lord's power to keep them from all harm.

On the second evening the youngest child became very feverish. Mr. Goforth was holding a meeting with the men. I was almost overwhelmed with fear lest the child had diphtheria. Kneeling down beside him, I cried to the Lord as only a mother under like circumstances could pray. At last, tired out, I fell asleep on my knees. Awakened by the entrance of my husband, I felt the child's head again and it seemed cooler, and the child quieter. The following day he was quite well. *Is it much wonder I can say I know GOD answers prayer?*

Returning from our summer holiday the first of September, 1912, we hoped to find a place rented at a certain large center where we had planned to begin work; but to our disappointment learned that the evangelists had secured premises in a small market village, where there was just one Christian. There was nothing to do but to go there, though it seemed almost useless, for it was the busiest season for those farming people.

On our way to this place we prayed much that the Lord would prepare the people, and open their hearts to the Gospel. We had not been there many days when we became convinced that we had been led there, and that the Lord was opening the hearts of the people in a most unusual way. Crowds of men and women heard the preaching every day. Our evening Gospel meetings, with organ and hymn scroll, were crowded out on to the street.

Everywhere we met with the utmost friendliness, and before our month's visit was ended we had the joy of seeing some of the leading people in the village and district come out boldly for CHRIST. One was the chief doctor; another was the head man in the market. In the store, through which we women had to pass to get to the evening meeting, there were three men and a young lad of fifteen; all of these were brought to CHRIST. The men were opium users, gamblers, men of evil lives. Two of them are now preachers of the Gospel, and one is the leading man in the little growing church there.

Had I time and space I could go on multiplying cases where the same results have followed when the cross of Christ has been the pivot of all Christian teaching, and prayer has been the source of power.

On one of the early visits to the city of Linchang, a woman came with a little child whose foot was terribly burned. The whole foot was badly swollen, the inflammation reaching some distance up the leg. The child was feverish, and seemed in a serious condition. It happened that on that trip I had forgotten to bring the simple remedies which I was accustomed to take out with me, so the woman was told nothing could be done.

But she begged so piteously that I could not turn away; and lifting up my heart in prayer I asked the Lord to guide me, if there was anything I could do.

Even while I prayed the thought of a bread poultice came to mind. This remedy seemed almost absurd. I had never heard of such a thing being used before under like circumstances, but I resolved to try it. Twice a day the foot was cleansed and put in the poultice, and it was really wonderful to see how it healed. We were there ten days, and when we left the foot was almost completely well. The mother, father, the child herself, and indeed the whole family, became Christians.

On a later visit I examined the foot, and found not even the sign of a scar remaining.

I told this incident not long ago to a medical doctor, and he said: "Why, there is no miracle in that! It was just up-to-date hygiene - giving nature a chance by cleanliness!"

I replied: "Doctor, to me the miracle lay, not in the poultice, but in GOD's telling me what to use; and now it is to me all the more a miracle of prayer, since you say it was up-to-date hygienic treatment."

At the same place, some years later, we were conducting special tent meetings for Christians in the day time, and for the heathen at night. Just after our meetings began the weather turned bitterly cold, with wind and sleety rain. The tent was like a drafty ice-house. My husband caught a severe cold, which became worse each day. He had fever and severe pains in head and chest, but would not give up his meetings. One noon he came from the meeting looking very ill, and lay down to rest till the afternoon meeting.

I determined to take the Christians into my confidence, and tell them of my anxiety for Mr. Goforth. So, some time before the afternoon meeting I slipped out and called them into the tent, telling them of my husband's condition and asking them to pray for him. Oh, what a wave of earnest, heart-overflow of prayer went up without a moment's pause! The tears came to my eyes as I thought, "Surely GOD will answer such prayers!"

Then, fearing my husband might arrive, I gave out a hymn. A few moments later he walked into the tent in his old brisk way, looking quite well. At the close of the meeting he told me that shortly after he heard me go out the pain in his head and chest ceased, the fever seemed to leave him, and when he started for the tent he felt quite well. The symptoms did not return.

At Tzuchow, the first place we opened together, the people seemed much set against us.

After the first period of curiosity was over, no one came to hear the Gospel. As we had a nice place for the children to play in with their faithful nurse, - the one who saved Ruth's life in 1900, - Mrs. Wang and I determined to go out each afternoon and try to reach the heathen women with the Gospel. Before going out we always prayed the Lord to open a door to us for preaching. And as I now recall that time, never once did we return home without being invited into some home to preach, or at least being asked to sit on a doorstep and tell of a Saviour from sin.

When on a visit to a certain out-station, after being there two whole days, scarcely any women had come to see us. We were so circumstanced that I could not leave the children. The third day I became so burdened in prayer that I could only shut myself up in an empty room and cry to the Lord to send women to us, as He knew I could not leave the children. From that day we always had plenty of visitors to keep us busy, either Christian women studying or heathen women listening to the Gospel.

One of the most outstanding evidences of GOD's favor and blessing was seen, at this time, in the way He provided my husband with native helpers. To carry on the plan of work we had adopted required a good force of trusty evangelists. Time and again we looked to the Lord for men and women to help us, and the answer always came.

As my husband always seemed to have plenty of men to help him, he was frequently asked for evangelists by his fellow-missionaries of both our own and other missions. I was at first opposed to his giving away his best men, but he would answer, "The Lord has been good to me; should I be less generous with my brethren?" And it certainly was remarkable how, whenever he gave us really valuable evangelist, another man, even better, was raised up shortly after.

The secret of his getting men may be seen best through words of his own, taken from a letter to a friend in Canada about the time of which I am now writing:

"We came to this little market town in September of last year. My wife had two women workers. I had Mr. Tung, the old evangelist, and a young high school graduate without experience, and the only Christian man in the district, very ignorant but with this to recommend him, that he was converted or quickened by the HOLY SPIRIT in the Changte revival, and was intensely in earnest. We were here only about twenty days when dozens began to inquire, among whom were robbers, opium sots, and gamblers. The work went on all day and well on till midnight. We were all tiring out. We had not enough workers. It was like a very heavy burden that forced me to my knees. I told the Lord that He was the Lord of the harvest, and that He must send more harvesters. There was a time of intense looking to GOD, almost amounting to agony, and then the burden lifted, and I knew that GOD had answered. I told my wife that I was sure that GOD was going to send me workers.

"Now what is the result? Since then he has sent me two Chinese B.A.'s, both excellent speakers. He moved an excellent elder to give up his business, and he has been appointed an evangelist. At this center a scholar, who was an opium user and gambler, got converted last year. His progress has been most remarkable, and it looks as if he is going to make one of the front-rank preachers. Also two brothers here, who were among the first converts last year, help to preach, their father - also a convert of last year - providing their food."

Another gracious evidence of GOD's overruling providence was seen in the way we, especially the children, were kept from contracting contagious diseases. The Chinese carry their children about everywhere in their arms, even when sick with all sorts of contagious diseases.

I give the following instance to show how impossible it was to know when one would run into danger. Going to a certain village for a day's preaching, I took with me little Mary, then three years of age. We were waited on by a Christian woman who was most kind and attentive, bringing water and food for both Mary and myself. Being much taken up with preaching to the women, it did not occur to me to ask why she kept her baby's face covered, for the child was always in her arms. Just as we were leaving I asked her; then she uncovered the baby's face, and to my horror I found that the child was suffering from smallpox! For weeks I watched Mary's temperature, but nothing developed.

Through repeated instances of this kind I came to see that Mr. Goforth was right when he said, "The safest place for yourself and the children is in the path of duty."

As I recall those years of touring life with our children, words fail me to tell of all the Lord's goodness to them and to me. Though there were many hard, hard places, these were but opportunities for special grace and help. Many times, when discouraged almost to the point of never going out again with the children, there would come evidence that the Lord was using our family life, lived among the people, to win them to CHRIST. Then I would take new courage, and go again. Oh, it is so true that

"We may trust Him fully
All for us to do;
Those who trust Him wholly
Find Him wholly true."

~ end of chapter 6 ~
