

How I Know GOD Answers Prayer

The Personal Testimony of One Life-Time

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Chapter Four -

A GOD-GIVEN FIELD (1894-1900)

"LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee" (II Chronicles 14:11).

THE story of the opening of Changte is so connected by a chain of prayer that to give isolated instances of prayer would be to break the chain.

A few months after our arrival in China an old, experienced missionary kindly volunteered to conduct Mr. Goforth and his colleague, who had just arrived, through North Honan, that they might see the field for themselves.

Traveling southward by cart, they crossed the border into Honan early one morning. As my husband walked beside the carts that morning, he felt led to pray that the Lord would give that section of Honan to him as his field. The assurance came that his prayer was granted. Opening his daily textbook, he found the passage for that morning was from Isaiah 55:8-13. Like a precious promise of future blessing for that field came the words: **"As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void."**

For six years, however, our faith was sorely tested.

Of all places, Changte seemed most determined to keep out the missionary. And there were other difficulties in the way. A presbytery had been formed as others joined us, and all matters had to be decided by that body. Two stations that had been opened, where a foothold could first be gained, required all, and more than all, the force we then had. So for six years the door to Changte remained fast closed. But during all those years Mr. Goforth never once lost sight of God's promise to him, nor failed to believe it.

Again and again, when Mr. Goforth and his colleague visited the city, they were mobbed and threatened, the people showing the utmost hostility. But the day came, at last, when the long-prayed-for permission from the presbytery to open Changte was granted. The very next morning found Mr. Goforth en route for Changte, to secure property for a mission site. Often has he told how, all the way over that day to Changte, he prayed the Lord to open the hearts of the people,

and make them willing to give him the property most suitable for the work. Within three days of his reaching Changte he had thirty-five offers of property, and was able to secure the very piece of land he had earlier chosen as most ideal for the mission.

Thus the Lord did break in pieces the gates of brass which had kept us so long from our promised land.

A year later I joined my husband there, with our three little children. It was arranged that our colleague should take charge of the outside evangelism, while we opened work at the main station.

To understand what it meant for us to have our need supplied, there should be some knowledge of what that need was.

We decided, from the first, that no one should be turned from our doors. Mr. Goforth received the men in the front guestroom, while the women and children came to our private quarters. During those first weeks and months hundreds, nay thousands, crowded to see us. Day by day we were literally besieged. Even at meal-time our windows were banked with faces.

The questions ever before us those days were - how to make the most of this wonderful opportunity, which would never come again after the period of curiosity was past; how to win the friendship of this people, who showed in a hundred ways their hatred and distrust of us; how to reach their hearts with our wonderful message of a Saviour's love?

All that was in our power was to do, day by day, what we could with the strength that was given us. From early morning till dark, sometimes nine or ten hours a day, the strain of receiving and preaching to these crowds was kept up. My husband had numbers of workmen to oversee, material for building to purchase, and to see to all the hundred and one things so necessary in building up a new station. Besides all this he had to receive, and preach to, the crowds that came. He had no evangelist, Mr. Wang being then loaned to Mr. MacG--. I had my three little children, and no nurse or Bible-woman. When too exhausted to speak longer to the courtyard of women, I would send for my husband, who though tired out would speak in my stead. Then we would rest ourselves, and entertain the crowd, by singing a hymn.

So the days passed. But we soon realized that help must come, or we would both break down.

One day Mr. Goforth came to me with his Bible open at the promise, "**My God shall supply all your need,**" and asked: "Do we believe this? If we do, then GOD can and will supply us with some one to help preach to these crowds, if we ask in faith."

He prayed very definitely for a man to preach. With my doubt-blinded heart, I thought it was as if he were asking for rain from a clear sky. Yet, even while he prayed, GOD was moving one to come to us. A day or two later there appeared at the mission the converted opium fiend, Wang Fu-Lin, whose conversion has been already recorded.

No one could have looked less like the answer to our prayers than he did. Fearfully emaciated from long years of excessive opium smoking, racked with a cough which three years later ended

his life, dressed in such filthy rags as only a beggar would wear, he presented a pitiable sight. Yet the Lord seeth not as man seeth.

After consulting together Mr. Goforth decided to try him for a few days, believing that he could at least testify to the power of GOD to save a man from his opium. Soon he was reclothed in some of my husband's Chinese garments; and within an hour or two of his entering the mission gate, practically a beggar, he was seated in charge of the men's chapel, so changed one could scarcely have recognized him.

From the first day of his ministry at Changte there was no doubt in the minds of any who heard him that he had indeed been sent to us by our gracious GOD, for he had in a remarkable degree the unction and power of the HOLY GHOST. His gifts as a speaker were all consecrated to one object - the winning of souls to JESUS CHRIST. He seemed conscious that his days were few, and always spoke as a dying man to dying men. Little wonder is it, therefore, that from the very beginning of his ministry in our chapel men were won to CHRIST. GOD spared him to us for the foundation laying of the church at Changte, then called him higher.

Mr. Goforth's need was relieved by the coming of Wang Fu-Lin, but not mine. The remarkable way GOD had sent him, however, gave me courage and faith to trust GOD to give me a Bible-woman. Those who know anything of mission work in China will agree with me that it is far more difficult to find women than men who are able to preach the Gospel; or if able, who are free for the work. But I was beginning to learn that GOD is limited only from the human side; and that He is always willing to give beyond our asking, if the human conditions He has so plainly laid down in His Word are fulfilled.

A short time after I had begun to ask my Heavenly Father definitely for a Biblewoman, Mr. MacG-- came in from a tour, and his first words were:

"Well, Mrs. Goforth, I believe we have a ready-made Bible-woman for you!"

Then he told me how he had come across a widow and her son in a mountain village, who had heard the Gospel from a recent convert out of one of the other stations. This man had been a member of the same religious sect as the widow and her son. When he found CHRIST he at once thought of his friends, and went over the mountain to tell them. Mrs. Chang received the Gospel gladly. She had been a preacher in that heathen sect, and had gained the fluency in speaking, and power in holding audiences, so necessary in the preaching of the Gospel.

The way was soon opened for her to come to me, and she became my constant companion and valuable assistant in the women's work during those early years. She witnessed a good confession in 1900 - being strung up by her thumbs when refusing to deny her Lord. Faithfully she served the Lord as a Bible-woman, until the time of her death in 1903.

During the first two or three years at Chang Te Fu we lived in unhealthy Chinese houses, which were low and damp. It was therefore thought best that we should have a good semi-foreign house built for us. The work at this time was so encouraging - converts being added weekly, and sometimes almost daily - that we feared lest the new house would hinder the work, and become a separating barrier between ourselves and the people. We therefore prayed that GOD would make the new house a means of reaching the people - a blessing, and not a hindrance. The answer to

this prayer, as is often the case, depended largely upon ourselves. We had to be made willing to pay the price that the answer demanded.

In other words, we came to see that in order that our prayer could be answered we would have to keep open house every day and all day, which was by no means easy. Some assured us it was wrong, because it would make us cheap in the eyes of the Chinese; others said it was wrong because of the danger of infection to the children. But time proved these objections to be unfounded. The very highest as well as the lowest were received, and their friendship won by this means. And, so far as I can remember, our children never met any contagion because of this way of receiving the people into our house.

The climax in numbers was reached in the spring of 1899, when eighteen hundred and thirty-five men and several hundred women were received by us in one day. These were first preached to in large bands, and then led through the house. We have seen evidences of the good of this plan in all parts of our field. It opened the hearts of the people toward us, and helped us to live down suspicion and distrust as nothing else could have done.

In May of 1898 we started down to Tientsin by houseboat, with our children, for a much-needed rest and change. Cold, wet weather soon set in. Twelve days later, as we came in sight of Tientsin, with a bitter north wind blowing, our eldest child went on deck without his overcoat, in disobedience to my orders. Shortly after the child came in with a violent chill. That afternoon, when we arrived in Tientsin, the doctors pronounced the verdict - pneumonia.

The following day, shortly after noon, a second doctor, who had been called in consultation, met a friend on his way from our boy's bedside and told her he did not think the child could live till morning. I had taken his temperature, and found it to be 106. He was extremely restless, tossing in the burning fever. Sitting down beside him, with a cry to the Lord to help me, I said distinctly: "P-, you disobeyed me, and have thus brought this illness upon yourself. I forgive you; ask JESUS to forgive you, and give yourself to him."

The child looked at me for a moment steadily, then closed his eyes. I saw his lips move for a moment; then quietly he sank into a sound sleep. When he awoke, about dusk, I took his temperature, and found it 101. By the time the doctor returned it was normal, and did not rise again. Although he had been having hemorrhage from the lungs, this ceased.

Is not JESUS CHRIST the same yesterday, today, and forever? Why should we wonder, therefore, at His healing touch in this age? "**According to your faith be it unto you.**"

During those early pioneer years, when laying the foundation of the Changte Church, my own weak faith was often rebuked when I saw the results of the simple, child-like faith of our Chinese Christians. Some of those answers to prayer were of such an extraordinary character that, when told in the homeland, even ministers expressed doubts as to their genuineness. But, praise GOD, I know they are true.

Here are two concrete examples.

Li-ming, a warm-hearted, earnest evangelist, owned land some miles north of Chang Te Fu. On

one occasion, when visiting the place, he found the neighbors all busy placing around their fields little sticks with tiny flags. They believed this would keep the locusts from eating their grain. All urged Li-ming to do the same, and to worship the locust god, or his grain would be destroyed. Li-ming replied: "I worship the one only true GOD, and I will pray Him to keep my grain, that you may know that He only is GOD."

The locusts came and ate on all sides of Liming's grain, but did not touch his. When Mr. Goforth heard this story he determined to get further proof, so he visited the place for himself, and inquired of Li-ming's heathen neighbors what they knew of the matter. One and all testified that, when the locusts came, their grain was eaten and Li-ming's was not.

The Lord JESUS once said, after a conflict with unbelief and hypocrisy: "**I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.**"

Our little Gracie became ill with a terribly fatal disease, so common in malarious districts - enlarged spleen. The doctors pronounced her condition quite hopeless. One day a Chinese Christian woman came in with her little child, of about the same age as our Gracie, and very ill with the same disease. The poor mother was in great distress, for the doctor had told her also that there was no hope. She thought that if we would plead with the doctor he could save her child. At last Mr. Goforth pointed to our little Gracie, saying: "Surely, if the doctor cannot save our child, neither can he save yours; your only hope and ours is in the Lord Himself."

The mother was a poor, hard-working, ignorant woman, but she had the simple faith of a little child. Some few weeks later she called again, and told me the following story:

"When the pastor told me my only hope was in the Lord, I believed him. When I reached home I called my husband, and together we had committed our child into the Lord's hands. I felt perfectly sure the child would get well, so I did not take more care of him than of a well child. In about two weeks he seemed so perfectly well that I took him to the doctor again, and the doctor said that he could discover nothing the matter with him."

That Chinese child is now a grown-up, healthy man. And our child died. Yet we had prayed for her as few, perhaps, have prayed for any child. Why, then, was she not spared? I do not know. But I do know that there was in my life, at that time, the sin of bitterness toward another, and an unwillingness to forgive a wrong. This was quite sufficient to hinder any prayer, and did hinder for years, until it was set right.

Does this case of unanswered prayer shake my faith in GOD's willingness and power to answer prayer? No, no! My own child might just as reasonably decide never again to come to me with a request because I have, in my superior wisdom, denied a petition. Is it not true, in our human relationships with our children, that we see best to grant at one time what we withhold at another? "**What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.**"

And one of the most precious experiences of GOD's loving mercy came to me in connection with our little Grace's death. We had been warned that the end would probably come in convulsions; two of our dear children had been so taken. Only a mother who has gone through such an

experience can fully understand the horror of the possibility that such might come again at any time.

One evening I was watching beside our little one, Miss P- being with me, when suddenly the child said very decidedly: "Call Papa; I want to see Papa." I hesitated to rouse her father, as it was his time to rest; so I tried to put her off with some excuse; but again she repeated her request, and so I called her father, asking him to walk up and down with her until I returned.

Going into the next room I cried in an agony to the Lord not to let Grace suffer; but, if it was indeed His will to take the child, then to do so without her suffering. As I prayed a wonderful peace came over me, and the promise came so clearly it was as if spoken: "**Before they call I will answer; and while they are yet speaking I will hear.**" Rising, I was met at the door by Miss P- who said: "Gracie is with JESUS."

While I was on my knees our beloved child, after resting a few moments in her father's arms, had looked into his face with one of her loveliest smiles, and then quietly closed her eyes and had ceased to breathe. No struggle, no pain, but a "falling on sleep."

"Like as a father pitieth, . . . so the Lord pitieth."

Ever-darkening clouds gathered about us during the months following Grace's death; and while the storm did not burst in all its fury till the early summer of 1900, yet the preceding winter was full of forebodings and constant alarms.

On one occasion thousands gathered inside and outside our mission, evidently bent on serious mischief. My husband and his colleagues moved in and out all that day among the dense crowd which filled the front courtyards; while we women remained shut within closed houses, not knowing what moment the mob would break loose and destroy us all.

What kept them back that day? What but trustful prayer! And the Lord heard that day, and wonderfully restrained the violence of our enemies.

We did not know then, but those experiences were preparing us for the greater trials and perils awaiting us all.

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