



I AM THE WORK OF YOUR HAND



*A Testimony of What
God Can Do in a Life
That is Committed to Him*

*“But now, O Yahweh, You are our Father,
We are the clay, and You our potter; And all
of us are the work of Your hand.” (Isaiah 64:8)*

JAMES C.C. HO

I AM THE WORK OF YOUR HAND

GOD IS THE POTTER, I am the clay. This book is an account of how God molded my life. As insignificant as a lump of clay, my life has been made a miracle in the Potter's hands. There were times when God's carving and chiseling was unbearable. I struggled in deep pain and hurts. But in the end, the Master's work of shaping my life refined me into a vessel of honor that reflects God's glory. I hope that my testimony may encourage you to submit to God's molding. Your life will never be the same again, for you will experience God's remarkable power and reality. May all Glory, Honor and Praise be to the Only Wise and True God.



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I am the Work of Your Hand:

A Testimony of What God Can Do in a Life That is Committed to Him

By James C. C. Ho

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Foreword

Is there a God in this world? Does God exist? Many people ask these questions in their hearts. Many search for God, yet few know for sure that God really exists.

Jesus is the only begotten Son of God through whom God manifests His power, lovingkindness, and divine nature. The proof of God's love is found in Christ, whose life "explains" God.

Jesus is the firstborn of the new creation, and we Christians are the new creation who follow in his pattern and footsteps. Our new life must likewise show forth God's reality and divine nature.

The Lord Jesus says, "You are the light of the world," yet Paul says, "You are a letter of Christ!" These statements present a great challenge to every Christian. Looking back at Christianity from past to present, there have been few such Christians. We are hard pressed to find extraordinary Christians because in order to be this kind of Christian, one needs to submit to God's molding. Only then can one's life be transformed as to display God's love and holiness. But how many are willing to yield to God's molding?

Pastor James Ho, the author of this book, had been brought up in the Roman Catholic tradition from childhood, and was antagonistic towards Protestants. But after a series of miracles and after gaining a better understanding of the Bible and Christianity, he was rebaptized as a Christian. He has since experienced God's deliverance in helpless, even life-threatening situations. This made

him humble before God in acknowledging His reality and power. Eventually Pastor James committed his life to Yahweh, the only true God and the Most High. He was willing to forsake everything, submit to God's rule, and be molded by God.

This book, *I Am The Work of Your Hand*, is his account of how he had come to know God, starting with his childhood as a Roman Catholic opposed to Protestants, going on to his university days when he was an atheist, and finally to his commitment to God after experiencing His deliverance. The book recounts the life challenges that he faced after his commitment to God, from his decision to join the full-time ministry to his experiences while serving in the ministry. In the spiritual battles, he submitted to God's will and allowed Him to mold and refine him.

The book is written in a simple and readable style. As the story unfolds, the reader's heart will be lifted and filled with memories that refresh the spirit. While reading the book, my spirit was lifted, for I felt as if I were experiencing God myself. This testimony will likewise lead you into God's presence and attest to His reality.

I thank God for the blessing of knowing Pastor James and his wife Kathleen, of coworking with them in building up the church of God. Our time together had not been long, yet I see God's leading in their lives. I can testify that God's holiness, lovingkindness and mercy have been imprinted in them. God's sacrificial love which is manifested in their lives has "explained" God's reality.

Enoch Zhao

August, 2014

Preface

While I was serving in Sydney, Australia, I was leading a series of Bible studies about knowing God. Towards the end of the series, I shared about how I had come to know God. The sharing was recorded on tape. Years later, we were approached by Noa, a newly-baptized sister in the Lord. She had a desire to serve God, and wondered in what area she could contribute. I thought that it might be good for her to transcribe my recorded testimony into text. She was thrilled with the idea, and her transcription project began to take off with the assistance of another sister in the Lord, Lillian. I here offer my heartfelt thanks to Noa and Lillian for their work.

In 2003, Kathleen's nephew Wang Yi came from Shanghai to study here, and he was staying with us. He excelled in writing. The transcription had already been done, but because my original sharing was in Cantonese, the sentence structure had a very colloquial Hong Kong style. So I asked him to proofread and refine the sentence structure in the transcription. At the same time, we were planning to leave Sydney the following year to launch out into another exciting ministry.

In Sydney I was involved with the prison ministry. In my last visit to the prison before we left Sydney, I printed my testimony as booklets which I gave to the inmates as my parting gift. I also

made print copies for our church members and friends. My readers have given me positive feedback on the book, and some asked whether I will continue to share my testimony in my full-time ministry. I kept that in mind.

I would like to thank our nephew Wang Yi who, while pursuing his postgraduate studies, laboriously spent his precious spare time in proofreading and refining the transcribed material. Eventually he designed and produced my testimony (in Chinese) into a booklet.

Every now and then, as we visit church families in various places, we would meet brothers and sisters who have read my testimony. They would raise the same question as to whether I will continue to write about my experiences in serving God. Recently, as I meditated before God on all these years of serving Him, a flame was stirred in my heart, creating a yearning to testify of His wondrous work in our lives. I cried out to Yahweh my God to mold me, shape me and make my life a miracle. Eventually, I chose the title of this book, *“I Am The Work of Your Hand,”* which is based on Isaiah 64:8:

Isaiah 64:8 But now, O LORD, You are our Father, We are the clay, and You our potter; And all of us are the work of Your hand.

I hope that I—and all believers—can testify of God’s miraculous work in our lives. May He continue to mold us so that we may be a channel of blessings to others, bringing glory, honor and praise to His Name.

The English version of my testimony was first proofread by Lee Sen, our dear sister in the Lord. I express my deep thanks and appreciation to my dear coworker Enoch for writing the Foreword; and to my dear sister Elizabeth and my beloved niece Stacy who, despite their heavy workload, sacrificially helped in proofreading this sharing. Finally, I owe it to my dear friend and coworker, Pastor Bentley, who volunteered to be the final editor of this book.

Most of all, I thank my beloved wife and soulmate, Kathleen, who stood side by side with me, relentlessly fighting the fight of faith, constantly offering her support in riding through life's every trial. In dealing with her own life-threatening health issues, she remained undeterred in spirit, endured the pain, and clung on to God for deliverance. Her own testimony of faith touched many hearts and was a true inspiration to me too. I particularly give thanks to Yahweh my God for providing me such a helper for accomplishing His ministry. I will to God that I can be as much a helper to my dearest wife Kathleen as she has been to me.

James Ho

August, 2014

From Childhood to Knowing God

Reason for my sharing

Who is God? How did I come to know God? There are so many religions in the world, so why did I choose Christianity and believe in the Christian God? If some of you have faced the same questions and have found the answers, I would encourage you to share your thoughts so as to help those who are still searching for the truth.

Since becoming a Christian, I have encountered many trials and challenges to my faith. I would like to take this opportunity to testify that there is only one God, and that He is both faithful and true. It is my fervent hope that this sharing will help those seeking God to understand His reality, to strengthen their faith, and to pursue the living God with undivided attention.

My childhood experience with religion

My experience with God goes back to early childhood. I recall that at the age of five, my mother wanted me to be baptized as a Catholic so that I may be eligible to study at an English school run by a Roman Catholic school board. My mother arranged for me to go through all the required religious ceremonies, and after a couple of years, I received Confirmation and accordingly professed to be a Roman Catholic (Roman Catholics consider Baptism and Confirmation as two of the sacraments).

Although I had come to know God when I was a child, and believed that I was fulfilling my religious duties by attending the weekly Sunday Mass, I really didn't experience God on a personal level. At church I was easily distracted. I couldn't sit still, and I would often turn around to see what the others were doing. I remember one incident vividly. I was with my two elder brothers attending Sunday Mass. We started talking softly about girls, and got so carried away that we raised our voices as our discussion got heated. Unfortunately for us, we were standing close to the confessional, and the priest in the confessional dashed out towards us. While I was still yapping away, my two elder brothers quickly bowed their heads in a solemn "worshipful" manner. I felt someone tapping my shoulder, and as I turned around, lo and behold, the priest was standing there and then he slapped my face. It was such a humiliating experience. In fact, after the incident, I had to line up for confession to the same priest who had slapped me. (Confession is a Roman Catholic sacrament, a means of confess-

ing our sins to God, with the priest acting as the mediator between God and us.)

Migrating to Canada

In 1970, I immigrated with my parents to Vancouver, Canada. When I first arrived there, I would still go to church, but only occasionally and not every Sunday. Gradually my desire to go to church faded and I stopped attending church.

Before I left Hong Kong, I was in my second year at Lingnan College. But in Vancouver, I failed the English language test for university entrance and was demoted to grade 11. That meant losing three years of education. How could I take the humiliation? Fortunately, I had an elder brother who was studying at a university in Montreal. He strongly suggested that I try my luck there. I applied to Sir George Williams University (now Concordia University) and surprisingly, I was accepted into first year Electrical Engineering. Not only that, I received exemption for some of the courses I had completed at Lingnan College in Hong Kong. However, I still needed to enroll in Beginner's English. After discussing the matter with my family members in Vancouver, and getting their approval, soon I was Montreal bound.

Becoming an atheist

Before I left Vancouver, my sister gave me a clean and short haircut. Dressed in my best suit, I looked like a nerd! My elder brother and his friends welcomed me in Montreal. We were completely astonished by each other's appearance. They all wore long hair and faded jeans. It was an absolute contrast: my nerdy look versus their hippy style. It was hilarious indeed.

I had just landed in Montreal and was already falling in love with the city. On the drive from the airport, my elder brother said to me, "Do you know that I don't believe in God anymore?" I was shocked to hear that, and my response was, "Is that so?" He replied in the affirmative, "Yes, I don't believe in God anymore! So if you want to go to church, go by yourself. I won't go with you." Sensing the determination in his reply, I immediately concurred, "In that case, I won't go either."

My brother is two years my senior and I had always looked up to him. While he was in Hong Kong, he was extremely popular. He had a band of followers and I was one of his diehard fans! So if he concludes that there is no God, it was not a big deal for me to adopt his views. It was beyond me to raise objections to his views, so I turned my back on religion and became an atheist.

My university life

During my three years in university, I completely forsook God. I had a very strong background in mathematics, and when I attended the math class, it was too elementary for me. I ended up

lying on the bench, snoring my time away. Looking back, I would describe my university life as undisciplined, rowdy and rebellious. Our band of friends were all like that—doing nothing and hanging around in pubs, billiard halls and Chinatown. My elder brother was the president of the university's Chinese Student Association. Together we organized lots of parties and other social events. I was also involved in all kinds of gambling, including poker and mahjong. I spent most of my time enjoying pop music with my friends, playing snooker and billiards. I picked up smoking and occasionally smoked hash and grass.

One time I was playing mahjong with my friends, one of whom was a professed Christian. He said, "When I get to heaven, I cannot play mahjong with you anymore. What a tragedy for all of you who don't believe in God. If you believe in God, you will have eternal life. If you don't believe in God, you will end up in hell." I immediately jeered at him, saying, "What kind of nonsense is that? If you were in heaven, I would rather avoid going there at all cost!" This so-called Christian often played mahjong with us, gambled with us, and had a mouth full of expletives. He was just as bad as we. So why should I believe what his religion taught?

At that time, I had so much fun with my buddies, so who needs a girlfriend? In fact a girlfriend might be a hindrance to my social life. But thanks be to God, I met Kathleen a year later, and she eventually became my wife. Her elder sister had just become a Christian, and she didn't want Kathleen to go out with me. This elder sister was a volunteer worker at the social welfare services in Chinatown, and she found out that I was always hanging around

with the gangs in Chinatown. She was certain that I would be a bad influence on her sister, but she soon found out that it would be futile to try persuading Kathleen to stop going out with me. So she used another tactic: share the gospel with me. Every time she met me, she would talk about Jesus. I utterly rejected her efforts to influence me, being particularly upset with Christianity on account of my mahjong-playing Christian friend.

A strange encounter in my search for a job

After graduation, I started job hunting. The job market was saturated and I had a hard time getting a job in Montreal. My elder sister in Vancouver suggested that I try my luck there. So I left Montreal and went back to Vancouver. But I couldn't find a job there either, and it was already four months since I had graduated. Then all of a sudden I received a call from my elder brother in Montreal telling me that a company was calling me for an interview. I immediately flew back to Montreal. Unfortunately, I was a day late. A classmate of mine had gone for the interview the day before, and got the job.

I was devastated about missing the interview. That job could have been mine. I was getting sick and tired of looking for a job. Then Kathleen's elder sister comforted me and encouraged me to pray to God, but I didn't take her advice because I didn't believe in God, much less that He answers prayers.

I was so desperate to get a job that I tried every trick in the book to prepare myself. I even had mock interviews with my

brother to polish my interview skills. But nothing worked. Time was slipping away, and soon six months had passed since my graduation. I remained unemployed.

One day I saw a newspaper ad for a design engineer, and immediately submitted my application. Kathleen's sister heard about my application and offered to pray for me. This time, out of sheer desperation, I went along with it. When I went for the interview, the personnel manager told me that they were actually looking for a *mechanical* design engineer. I was so upset that I confronted him, saying, "The ad in the newspaper only indicated that the job was for a design engineer and now you change the requirement to a mechanical design engineer. What's going on?" I shifted the blame to them. In actual fact, my outburst only exposed my lack of knowledge and understanding of the job description. Any experienced electrical engineer would have known that the job was for a mechanical design engineer. However, since the personnel manager wasn't a technical person, he was very apologetic and offered to call the electrical department to see if there were vacant positions.

God's way surpasses all understanding, and leaves no ground for man's pride

The head of the electrical department responded to the personnel manager: "Someone just resigned and the position is vacant. We haven't put an ad in the newspapers yet, so you can ask him to come back for an interview tomorrow." I was perplexed and

relieved at the same time. When I went to visit Kathleen, her elder sister immediately asked me how the interview had gone. I said, “Your prayer led me to the wrong job! However, it just so happened that there is a vacant position in the electrical department, and the manager asked me to go for an interview tomorrow.” She replied excitedly, “Surely that is God’s plan!”

The next morning, I borrowed my brother’s briefcase and went for the interview. While waiting for the manager, I played around with the combination lock of the briefcase. By the time the manager arrived and asked me for my resume, I tried to unlock the case. But to my horror, I was unable to. The manager asked me what happened. I gave a blank helpless look, and said I couldn’t open my briefcase. He asked if I had left a resume with the personnel manager the day before, and I immediately responded, “Yes!” He called the personnel department and the resume was sent over immediately. Actually, there wasn’t much to show in my resume because I was a fresh graduate with absolutely no related work experience.

After glancing through my resume and asking me a few quick questions, he asked me whether I was interested in the job, and if so, when I could start. I immediately told him that I can start any time. Then he offered me the job and asked me to wait for the official letter of employment in the mail.

The next few days I waited nervously for the letter of employment. After a couple of days, the letter arrived, and indeed I was offered the job! I was dumbfounded by what had happened: First, I applied for the wrong job. Then right in front of the manager, I

was unable to open my briefcase. Yet despite all the fumbling, I got the job. If you were in my position, would you not also agree that there was divine intervention? So I asked myself, “Now I believe that there is a God in this universe, but who is He? Could this be the same God that my gambling Christian friend believes in?” But I had my reservations.

An incredible experience: God knows the heart of man

During the year 1976, Kathleen’s elder sister would take Kathleen to a Christian fellowship on Saturday evenings. I would accompany Kathleen to the place of the fellowship, and then leave to do my own thing. I refused to attend the Christian fellowship. Then one Friday evening, I was alone by myself when I started to ponder about my relationship with Kathleen. She and I had gone out for four years already, and were both thinking of getting married. But she insisted on a church wedding. Though I had started to accept the existence of God, I wasn’t convinced that God was necessarily the Christian God. Even if I were to agree to a church wedding, I would have opted for a Catholic wedding because of my Roman Catholic background.

These thoughts led me to wrestle with questions about God: If God is real, what kind of God is He? And where can I go to find Him? At that time, I considered Roman Catholicism and Christianity to be two separate religions from among all the mainstream religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Taoism, and so on.

I was inclined to choose between Roman Catholicism and Christianity, so I wondered, “Is God the Roman Catholic God or the Christian God?” A voice within me was crying silently, “God, if You exist, show me which religion is true so that I can believe in You.”

The next day I visited Kathleen, and her elder sister told me that there was a special fellowship that evening and invited me to attend. I rejected her invitation straightaway. But she persisted and said, “This time it’ll be different. They have invited a pastor from England and he is very knowledgeable. He can answer all your questions.” She also promised, “If this Pastor cannot answer your questions, I will never ask you to go to the fellowship again!” It was an offer (or challenge) I couldn’t refuse. So I accepted her invitation and went along to the fellowship.

The place was small but packed with 60 to 70 people. Since we were late, we had to sit at the back. After the singing, the chairperson handed the floor to the guest speaker, and the pastor went forward and started to preach. In front of me was a pillar that blocked my view of the speaker. I was a bit annoyed and agitated that I could only hear his voice. Then something amazing started to unfold. This pastor seemed to be able to *read my mind!* The message lasted about 45 minutes, but throughout the message, every time a question came to my mind, he would immediately repeat my question and give a very convincing answer. It was simply unbelievable! How could he have known exactly what I had in mind? There were around 60 to 70 people at the meeting; how come he answered only my questions? Could it be that Kathleen’s

sister had briefed him about my queries? But even if she had done that, how could he have known the exact flow of my questions and address them in the exact sequence and at the precise moment a question came into my mind? I was completely bewildered. He did answer all my questions convincingly.

Before he ended his preaching, he shared with us about his ministry in his church and said, “I would certainly welcome anyone who is interested to come for a visit.” Then suddenly I heard a distinct voice coming from nowhere saying to me, “This is the church you should attend.” The pastor was Rev. Eric Chang, and he didn’t know me then. He would later become my teacher in the Full-time Ministry Training.

From that time on, I began to go to church again. The next day was Sunday and we planned to visit Rev. Chang’s church. It would be my first time to go to church after years of absence. It was a rainy day, and I hesitated to go because of the heavy rain. I was about to call Kathleen to say I would not go, when suddenly a voice came from nowhere and cautioned me, “This is a temptation from Satan.” That sort of enlightened me and I immediately determined to go.

Since that incident, I have been confronted by Satan’s temptations many times. Unpleasant memories of how I used to find liturgy and preaching boring when I attended church in the past came flooding in: a few minutes of listening to the preaching would knock me off to sleep. Therefore I was very reluctant to go to church. But this time, having distinctly heard the voice of God, I was ready to go to church again.

When we arrived at Rev. Chang's church that Sunday, I was surprised to hear him preaching in Mandarin with a person standing at his side translating the message sentence for sentence into Cantonese (he preached in English just the day before, at the fellowship). The translation doubled the length of the message to two hours, yet to my surprise I didn't fall asleep. On the contrary, despite being non-Mandarin speaking, I was so alert that I could even understand seventy per cent of his Mandarin. I was fully convinced that God was leading me to a big leap of faith.

A car accident: From bane to blessing

I once borrowed my brother's car to drive Kathleen, along with her younger sister and her boyfriend, to the McGill University library. This was during the 1976 Olympics in Montreal. Some of the Olympics events were held at the McGill University facilities. The traffic was chaotic and lots of people were walking on the streets to the Olympics. I was driving uphill, and couldn't find a parking space, and ended up parking the car just at the entrance of the side gate. Together with Kathleen's sister's boyfriend, we carried the books and dashed off to the library. Kathleen and her sister stayed behind in the car. Minutes later, we were back at the side gate but to our astonishment, the car was gone. We were wondering where it had gone when—lo and behold!—we saw Kathleen and her younger sister about fifty meters downhill from us. They were waving to get our attention. Behind them was our car “parked” perpendicular to the other parked cars. How could

that have happened? We ran to them. When I looked at the way the car was “parked,” I knew it was a miracle. There was a gap between two parked cars that was not long enough to squeeze even a small car in between. But it was the perfect fit for my car—parked perpendicularly, that is. Kathleen told us what had happened. She was sitting in front next to the driver’s seat, with the automatic gearbox in between. As she turned around to talk to her sister, she somehow fiddled with the shift stick of the automatic gearbox, and the car started to roll downhill. It was a steep and narrow road. The car started to gain momentum as it rolled backwards. In a panic, and not knowing how to stop the car, she immediately leaned sideways and tried in vain to turn the steering wheel. But the steering wheel locked itself after a few turns. The driverless car ended up rolling downhill in an S-shaped fashion. It went past at least ten parked cars before coming to a halt in the gap between two parked cars, hitting the concrete walls of McGill property and blocking the pedestrian pathway.

As a result, the back of the car sustained substantial damage and I had to pay for the damage done to McGill University’s concrete wall. But it could have been a disaster. It was during the Olympics and the traffic was extremely chaotic. It could have hit the row of parked cars, or the cars driving uphill, or the pedestrians on the crowded pedestrian pathway. I was convinced that disaster was averted only through divine intervention. Once again, it made me think seriously about God’s reality and His deliverance. As a result of this incident, Kathleen firmly believed in God’s

safekeeping. It just so happened that Thanksgiving Sunday was approaching, and she committed her life to God through baptism.

Finally, I know Whom I have believed

My elder brother is an expert in philosophy, and was like a teacher to me. Every time I discussed life with him, I would somehow be enlightened. After my encounter with God, I told him that God is real. He immediately challenged my statement and bombarded me with questions. Since I wasn't familiar with the Bible, I couldn't handle most of his questions. Gradually, every time we discussed our beliefs, we would end up in a bitter argument.

One evening I was talking to my brother over the phone. Again it ended in a shouting match. After the phone call I was deep in thought over his challenging questions. Later that evening, I was watching a TV program about some cult members who had murdered a famous Hollywood actress and her friends. The cult leader was a self-proclaimed messiah. He had long hair and a mustache, and looked like the Jesus of popular culture (I was brought up to believe that Jesus had long hair and a mustache). I was puzzled. Who is Jesus anyway? He said that he was the Messiah and that he will come back again. But this cult leader also claimed to be the messiah. How many messiahs are there? I was so confused.

At that time, I was sharing an apartment with a student. We had two single beds separated by a night table with a lamp on it. That night, I went to bed with lots of unresolved questions. Then I had a dream...

I entered a museum, right in the middle of which was a big book. It caught my attention and I walked over to take a closer look. To my horror, on it was written, “*God is dead!*” At the bottom of the page was a footnote that said, “If you want to find out more, turn to the next page.” Stunned by what I had just read and wondering whether I should turn to the next page, there was a sudden BANG! Immediately I woke up from my dream. The lamp on the night table had somehow mysteriously fallen, hitting my head and waking me up. It was in the middle of the night and I was startled by the sudden awakening. I sensed that the atmosphere was a bit eerie, so I immediately covered myself from head to toe with my blanket and trembled under the cover. Suddenly I felt the presence of a spirit, and then there was something like a video playing out my past. It was like an instant replay of all the things I had done wrong. Incidents that only I knew about were being brought into the light. I was frightened to death and shaking like a leaf, understanding for the first time how fearful is a sinner’s situation when he is in front of the Holy God! I tearfully pleaded with Him, “O God! I know I have sinned. I am indebted to You. Please forgive all my sins.” This was a cry from my heart, pleading for God’s mercy and forgiveness. Amazingly, right after my prayer, I experienced instant relief, and felt a surge of indescribable inner peace that ushered me into quiet serenity. I fell sound asleep.

The next morning I got up and went to work. I was still mystified by what had happened the previous night. The falling lamp interrupted my dream right at the point where I was pondering

whether to flip the page. I was terrified but the instant I prayed to God for forgiveness, I felt a deep inner peace. It just boggled my mind. It was simply inexplicable.

When I came home from work and was having dinner with my roommate, I shared with him what had happened. I reasoned that there must have been something that caused the lamp to fall on my head. I somehow insinuated that he might have caused that to happen. He was bemused but immediately denied having anything to do with it. We ended up having an argument. Finally he ran into the bedroom and jumped onto his bed. He tried to prove to me that even his very deliberate, forceful motion could not affect the lamp. I also joined him, jumping up and down on my bed but the lamp didn't move an inch. We moved our beds and the night table away from the walls so that nothing touched each other. We reassured one another that nothing like that would happen again.

In the middle of the night, while I was sleeping like a log, *the lamp hit me again!* I woke up only to discover that the lamp was on my head. An inexplicable fear caused me to shiver from inside out. Again I covered myself from head to toe with my blanket but that didn't stop my whole body from trembling. Finally I cried out in my heart again, "O God! I truly believe in You. From now on, I will never doubt You. Whatever You want me to do, I will follow unreservedly." After the plea, peace and tranquility suddenly returned and I once again fell sound asleep.

Ever since that time, I know whom I have believed. In my later encounters with my brother, no matter how challenging a quest-

ion he posed to me, it could no longer shake my faith in God. If you think that all these things are coincidences, then the odds of believing that all my experiences were coincidental are even more astronomical than believing something supernatural had taken place. Take for instance the incident with Rev. Chang. He didn't know me at all, yet he read my mind like a book and answered all my questions in the order of my thoughts. Bear in mind that I was sitting way at the back at an obscure place, and that a pillar stood between me and Rev. Chang that blocked our view of each other. He didn't even know I was present. Another example is the car accident: the car simply rolled downhill without a driver. There was nothing anyone could have done to control how the car rolled and swerved. But miraculously, nobody was hurt and none of the cars along the road was hit. As a result, I reckoned that God is real and in control of everything. I started to have a keen interest in the Bible, and as my life began to be transformed, I started to rid myself of my bad habits.

Test of faith

Kathleen and I were married shortly after the renewal of my faith in God. At that time, the province of Quebec was going through political upheaval. The separatists had won the provincial elections and were trying to separate Quebec from the rest of Canada. The day after the elections, French became the main language of communication amongst my colleagues. Since I had only an elementary standard of French, I was at a disadvantage when

communicating at business meetings. Soon the fear of separation from Canada took its toll on the economy in Quebec. Many companies underwent streamlining and moved their headquarters out of Quebec. My company was affected too and started to lay off employees. Those who did not speak French bore the brunt and I was amongst the earliest batch given notice to go.

I was hurt and frustrated. I had just come to know God and had been married for only a couple of months. Now I faced the prospect of joblessness. What had happened to my bright future? My wife was a nurse, but how could I expect her to support me? Certainly not! Out of desperation, I turned to God for deliverance. I prayed that through this time of testing I would experience Him more deeply. After the political crisis, French became compulsory for all job seekers in Montreal. I failed every job interview because I couldn't communicate fluently in French. It was a hopeless case.

One day I went to a Christian bookstore and saw a plaque with a Bible verse written on it:

John 15:7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you.

I was much encouraged by this verse, so I bought the plaque. I prayed silently, "Lord, despite the fact that I am facing the prospect of being laid off, I long for Your presence and want to experience the reality of Your words. You called us to seek first Your kingdom and Your righteousness, and everything will be added to us. Is that true? I am seeking You, not because I want You to grant me a job, but because I know You will meet my

needs.” Instantly I heard a sweet gentle voice that replied, “You will not face even one day without a job.” I knew my prayer was answered and so I believed.

Week after week, I went looking for a job, expecting something to happen. But there was still no job. I prayed to God, “If You give me a job, I will accept it no matter where it is located.” It was about two more weeks before I was to be laid off, and there was still no news. I was in despair. Suddenly there was an interview for me in Toronto. Toronto is about five hundred kilometers from Montreal. Kathleen’s two older sisters lived there. I went for the interview on a Friday. Normally the result would be known the following Monday. I earnestly clung to the Lord for His providence.

Apparent fulfillment of the promise

But there was no news the following Monday. I left the office with a heavy heart. Tuesday afternoon, I unexpectedly received a phone call from the manager who had interviewed me in Toronto. He said, “I am offering you the job.” Wow! I was speechless and happy. Coincidentally, that day was February 14th, Valentine’s Day. It was also the second day of the Chinese New Year according to the lunar calendar. I found that God has a sense of humor, full of grace and lovingkindness. *He provided a job for me right on Valentine’s Day, a day that commemorated love.* The manager told me that the personnel manager would be working out the details, and get back to me soon. He asked me to be ready to move to

Toronto anytime. I immediately called my wife to give her the good news and asked her to resign from her job to pave the way for our relocation to Toronto.

Half an hour after I have gotten the job offer from Toronto, I received a second phone call. It was from a sister company in Montreal, and it called me for a job interview. I was so tempted to accept the interview because I would have dearly loved to stay in Montreal. But I had already promised God that wherever He leads me, I would obey. Since I had already accepted the job offer in Toronto, it would have been wrong of me to go for the interview in Montreal. So I reluctantly told the caller, “Thanks for arranging the interview, but I just got a job offer in Toronto. If you had called half an hour earlier, I would have loved to come for the interview, but sorry, I cannot come.”

Further test of faith

After a couple of days, I called Toronto to find out when I should start my job there. The manager who hired me was away on a course and my call was transferred to the personnel manager. He said, “Sorry, we haven’t decided to offer you the job yet.” I immediately replied, “That’s not right. Your manager called me and offered me the job a couple of days ago, on Tuesday.” But he explained, “I am really sorry. The manager has no authority to offer you the job. He can only recommend you. It is our responsibility to finalize the hiring. Right now, there are two other candidates to be interviewed for the job and so you have only one-third of a

chance.” I protested, “I have already asked my wife to resign from her job.” He coldly concluded, “Well, that is your problem. You shouldn’t have asked your wife to resign so quickly without hearing from us first.” I didn’t know what to do. I was completely shaken by the sudden turn of events. It was a bitter pill to swallow. I almost yelled out, “O my God! Are You kidding me? How can this be?” Out of desperation, I immediately called the sister company in Montreal to see if the job there was still available. But it was too late, for they had already hired someone else.

Friday evening, after attending the church Bible study, I shared my ordeal with my Bible study leader. I asked him why this happened to me and what was God’s real intention. He comforted me by saying, “Perhaps it is a further test of faith. God wants to refine you through this testing.” I replied, “Is that so?” Outwardly I accepted his answer but deep in my heart, I was unsettled. It was easy for him to say what he said, but I was the one who had to go through the trial, and by next Friday I will be laid off. However, I still clung to the Lord with a faith as small as a mustard seed.

When I went to work on Monday, my department manager approached me and asked if I had received the job offer from Toronto (in fact, the company in Toronto was a sister company). I had no good news to tell him. My heart was in turmoil and I was thinking of calling the personnel manager in Toronto to ask whether I got the job or not. But I abandoned the idea because I thought that human intervention would be useless. I might as well hold on to God, and if He opens the door, the job would be mine.

If He closes the door, no matter how many times I call, I still won't get the job.

Days passed by, and I still hadn't called the personnel manager for an answer. Finally, Friday came and that was my last day at work. My colleagues took me out for a farewell lunch. After that, I went back to my office to pack my stuff and bid farewell to my colleagues. It was around 3:00pm. I was making my way around the office with a heavy heart to shake hands with my colleagues. The department manager was about to post the reason for my departure on the bulletin board. He actually had two versions of the letter. One was a letter of congratulations that said I was being transferred to the sister company in Toronto. The other said that unfortunately I was laid off due to the company's reduction of staff.

My phone rang as I was leaving my desk. I picked up the phone thinking it was from one of my colleagues bidding me farewell. But it wasn't. It was from the personnel manager in Toronto. He said, "We are offering you a job and you will come on board effective March the first." That was the following Wednesday. I was speechless. He was waiting for my answer when I faintly replied, "Thanks, I will be there!" I almost burst into tears of joy over God's deliverance in the nick of time. I immediately went over to the department manager and told him the good news. He stared at me and said, "Are you sure?" Then, without waiting for my answer, he went back to his office and called Toronto. Minutes later, he came out all smiles and shook my hand warmly. He confirmed that I had been accepted. Since it was a sister company,

he told me that he will extend my pay until I start my work in Toronto. He quickly took out the second version of the letter and posted it on the bulletin board. All my colleagues flocked over and embraced me with joy and laughter. Only minutes ago, I would have been taking the walk of shame, but now I can walk out of the office with some dignity. I made my last call at the office to Kathleen and told her the good news and God's answer to our prayers. I was overwhelmed by the Lord's lovingkindness. He had kept His word that I won't be laid off even for one day. It was the fulfillment of His promise to me. I got the job on the last day of work and I was paid until I began my new job. That was a perfect demonstration of God's power and how He is always in control.

That night when we went to the Bible Study, we told Rev. Chang about our leaving for Toronto. He took us aside and prayed for us. Three days later on Monday, we left Montreal and moved to Toronto.

Life in Toronto: God's blessings abound

Provision of a new home

The new company offered us accommodation for the first month. During that month we had to start looking for our own home. We found out that the rent in Toronto was higher than in Montreal, yet I received basically the same salary as I did in Montreal. Another of Kathleen's siblings suggested that we purchase a unit instead. But how could I come up such a big sum of money? In

fact, I couldn't even afford to rent a unit. I worked out that the most I could afford was \$400 a month. After surveying the rental units, we found out that most of them were over \$400 a month. I had a friend who was a real estate agent and I asked him for help. At that time, I had worked for over three years. The government encouraged potential new homebuyers to contribute to a housing plan as a means of tax deduction. Each year I would contribute \$1000, and thus far I had put \$3000 in the housing plan. After reviewing my financial situation, my real estate friend did his homework and started to search for a place for me.

The end of the month drew near and we were still desperately hunting for a place to settle in. Then one day my real estate friend called us about an apartment. We were very pleased with the unit but were afraid that we couldn't afford it. My friend worked out the finances and told me, "If the owner is willing to reduce the price by \$3,000, coupled with your \$3,000 in the housing plan, the total amount, including mortgage and all management and maintenance fees, would come up to \$396 a month." When I heard that the amount was under my budget of \$400 a month, I immediately asked my friend to buy the apartment. Of course the chances of a \$3,000 reduction from the sale price were minimal, but it was certainly worth trying. We also committed this matter into the Lord's hand. Surprisingly, the owner accepted our offer and we were elated with the answer to our prayers. Again it is a testimony that nothing is impossible with God. We were able to move into this place just at the expiry of our company's one-month accommodation benefit. Isn't that amazing?

Provision for my wife’s job

Meanwhile, my wife didn’t have a job in Toronto. She was a fresh graduate in nursing. When we were living in Montreal, she had to work long hours and odd shifts. After we got married, we had to adjust to a “Hello” and “Goodbye” lifestyle because of her shifts. One day she would work from 7:00 pm in the evening to 7:00 am the next morning. Another day she would be working from morning to night. I had envisaged the married life as one in which my wife would at least serve me breakfast, but it ended up with me serving her and cooking for her.

Not long after we had moved to Toronto, Kathleen enrolled in the Nursing Association of Ontario in order to be eligible to work as a nurse in Ontario. When she started to look for a job, I prayed to God, “It would be best if Kathleen could work close to my workplace. Also, please give her a 9-to-5 job so that she won’t have to work odd shifts.” See what a dreamer I was?

One day, as Kathleen was out looking for a job, she was attracted to an elegant-looking building and went in to explore it. To her surprise, it was a Jewish hospital. She looked at the building’s directory and discovered that there was a doctor with a Chinese name under the Family Practice Unit. She went straight to the Family Practice Unit and was greeted by a Chinese nurse. Kathleen told her that she was looking for a nursing job. The Chinese nurse asked her to wait, and went away to call the head nurse. When the head nurse saw Kathleen, she welcomed her warmly and talked with her. She was very pleased with Kathleen. When she knew that Kathleen could read, write, and speak Chin-

ese, she beamed with joy and excitement. Then she told Kathleen that due to the influx of Chinese refugees from Vietnam and other Asian countries, they were setting up a weekend clinic to reach out to the Asian refugees. In fact it was about to open the coming weekend. They desperately needed a Chinese nurse who could read and write Chinese for the outreach project. The Chinese nurse who worked there was Canadian born and couldn't read or write Chinese. The Chinese doctor who spearheaded the weekend clinic was a Malaysian Chinese who also couldn't read or write Chinese.

She was wondering if Kathleen could help. In fact, just when Kathleen walked into the office, the unit was having a hard time trying to translate some of the medical terms from English to Chinese.

Kathleen immediately volunteered to do the translation. Soon she lost track of time as she threw herself into the work. It was already past 5:00 pm and I was waiting for her call to go home. I received her call at around 5:15 pm only to discover that she was helping out at the Jewish hospital located in the block right next to my office!

The head nurse offered Kathleen a part-time job, working on Friday and Saturday mornings on the Chinese outreach project. It was a good start and a partial answer to my prayer because her workplace was very close to mine.

The head nurse really liked Kathleen because Kathleen was also conversant in other Chinese dialects. Not long after Kathleen had started her part-time job, the other Chinese nurse gave a one-

month notice of her resignation because she was about to be married to her fiancé who was working in the United States. According to union regulations, the job would be posted for internal competition before it is advertised to outsiders. Since this was a 9-to-5 job, it would certainly draw lots of applicants. But the head nurse had other ideas in mind. She wanted to offer the job to Kathleen, so she literally tailored the entire job description to Kathleen's experience and language ability, including fluency in Cantonese, Mandarin, and Shanghainese. Strangely, the personnel department made a mistake in the educational requirements for the post. They advertised for a Master's degree instead of a Bachelor's degree in nursing. As a result, not one applicant qualified for the job. In the end it was through the head nurse's recommendation that Kathleen was offered the 9-to-5 job close to my office. Isn't it amazing? God answered the prayer of a dreamer!

Kathleen worked 9 to 5 Monday to Friday. She relinquished her part-time post to somebody else. But the more experienced nurses at the clinic felt unhappy about her appointment. Kathleen didn't want any disharmony with her workmates so she offered to work the afternoon shift (1:00 pm to 9:00 pm) twice a week, which was still a much better shift than what she had in Montreal. That settled the unhappiness among her colleagues and they all worked harmoniously together.

We may have different experiences to share, but I believe that we are all given the same grace that God bestows in abundant measure to meet our needs. Since we have received so many blessings from God, I have learned that so long as we hold on to

our faith, and humble ourselves before God, and are willing to follow Him regardless of the outcome, we will all experience His wonderful grace and unfailing love.

From Montreal to Toronto: God's divine purpose

Why did I eventually decide to serve the Lord? It was because I had come to know the reality of God through various life experiences. Before I left Montreal, I told Rev. Chang, "It is so hard to find a good church. I really don't want to leave." But he comforted me by saying, "If you remain faithful, God will certainly lead and guide you all the way. He will fulfill His divine purpose in you." Indeed, God had already begun to unfold His plan for us. Shortly after we had left Montreal, four other couples from our Montreal church were also transferred to Toronto one after another because of their work. So we began to meet together every Friday evening for Bible study. This carried on for five years and eventually a sister church in Toronto was born, fulfilling what Rev. Chang had said, that God had His divine purpose in our relocation to Toronto.

The attractiveness of the world: Rethinking my commitment to the Lord

After moving to Toronto, we started to establish our careers, and our bank accounts began to grow. At the same time, our hearts were starting to get dull in spiritual things. As I broadened my

knowledge and life experience, making more friends and widening my social circle, I was very much drawn by the prosperity of the world, chasing after brand names and living more and more luxuriously. I discovered that although I had changed a lot and had rid myself of most of my bad habits, in my heart I couldn't help being lured by the lust of the world.

In 1983, I realized that I had to face a question point blank, namely, the question of my regeneration. I may have returned to God in some sense, or have at one time professed to be Roman Catholic, having been baptized at the age of five, yet I discovered that I still lacked the power of the Spirit. I tried to solve the problem of why I was powerless to overcome the desires of the flesh. I was still so prone to sinning and so weak against temptation. I finally realized that even the most beautiful baptism ritual would not guarantee the bestowment of the Holy Spirit in one's life. A baptized person can still be empty inside. The sacrament of baptism doesn't guarantee the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

From re-baptism to regeneration

After a long and fierce struggle within my heart, I finally came to the light. In 1983, at our church summer camp, I was re-baptized. I remember vividly that as I stepped into the St. Lawrence River for my baptism, the water suddenly became turbulent and the currents were strong. That almost threw me off balance. As I struggled and finally managed to stand before Rev. Chang, he held my hand firmly and calmly said, "Don't worry! I sense the power

of the Holy Spirit surrounding us.” Right after the baptism, the water quieted down and I sensed a deep peace in my heart. My wife and some of her family members witnessed the baptism. God has showered me with many precious experiences. He has done mighty works in my life and answered my prayers. I truly believe that He is the Almighty God on whom I should always focus!

Chapter 2

Step by Step to Regeneration

*Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul,
Thank you, Lord, for making me whole;
Thank you, Lord, for giving to me
Thy great salvation so rich and free.*

— From the hymn, *Thank You, Lord*

*The Lord Jesus said,
“Ask, and it shall be given to you;
Seek, and you shall find;
Knock, and it shall be opened to you.”*

— Matthew 7:7

Count God’s blessings

God provides abundant blessings; and through trials and testing, I am continually refined. Every time I face testing, no matter how tough the going or how helpless the situation,

God's grace is always sufficient to triumph over obstacles. Even now, as a servant of God, I am constantly being refined and molded by God according to His likeness. I would like to share with you my many experiences of God, and I hope that they will encourage you to pursue after Him.

In the last chapter, I described the agony of facing unemployment shortly after my marriage. The next sharing is from a different chapter in my life, and highlights some of God's work in me during my stay in Toronto.

I must say that during the first few months in Toronto, we had received so many blessings from the Lord that we simply took them for granted. Our wishful thinking and our biggest dreams became a reality right before our eyes. For example, it was expensive to rent an apartment, and we worried about finding a place within our budget. But God heard us and gave us a nice apartment. He also heard my prayers on other matters.

My wife was a fresh nursing graduate, and it was difficult for her to find a suitable job in Ontario. There were no hospitals near where we lived. If she finds a job, she would most likely do shift work and travel a long way to work. It would be laborious to say the least. I wished that she could find a regular 9-to-5 job next to my office so that we could start our days together. We submitted our dream to God and miraculously it came true! It was like what God promised:

Isaiah 65:24 It will come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear.

Be honest and faithful, and flee from greed

When the job offer in Toronto was confirmed, we had to terminate our apartment lease in Montreal. However, the lease had not yet expired. According to the rental agreement, there is a penalty of three months' rent for terminating the lease prematurely. The company in Toronto agreed to pay the penalty. However, just before our move, a friend called me and wanted to take over the lease. But I had already accepted from my new employer the money to cover the penalty. So I came up with a shrewd idea: The company's payment would be given to the real estate agent and my friend would pay me rent for the three months. It sounded like a good deal to me, and it was a temptation I succumbed to.

The cost of living was higher in Toronto than in Montreal, but my salary remained the same. The deal with my friend was too tempting to refuse. It meant an extra thousand dollars for us and we were tight on money. Furthermore, since nothing was on paper, the company wouldn't find out. However, my conscience was gnawing at me. Would a righteous God be pleased with my greed and dishonesty?

Soon after I had arrived in Toronto, I confessed the situation to the personnel manager. He appreciated my honesty but required full restitution of the money. He suggested deducting \$100/month from my salary until the money was repaid. I didn't feel good about having to repay the company. For my honesty, a thousand dollars just vanished in the thin air. However I accepted the arrangement and trusted in the Lord for my financial needs.

We were still tight on cash. My wife didn't have a job yet. Our new apartment needed basic furniture and appliances. After three months of paying back the company, I couldn't afford the payment for the following month. So I approached the personnel manager again, this time to explain my dilemma and asked for a one-month deferment of payment. I stood there totally overwhelmed by surprise and disbelief when he replied, "Don't worry about it. We'll write off your debt and you don't need to pay the balance to the company." He then smiled and waved goodbye to me. I thanked him and walked out of his office full of thanksgiving and praise to God.

Do not retract: Let your "Yes" be "Yes"

Though we had already settled in Toronto, our hearts still longed for Montreal. We had yet to find a church in Toronto that could satisfy our spiritual hunger for the word of God. More importantly, when I was still in Montreal, I had promised Rev. Chang that I would make a translation system for the Montreal church because it would be more time-efficient for them to have simultaneous translation. Although I graduated in electrical engineering, I knew nothing about designing and assembling a translation system. The embarrassment prevented me from telling Rev. Chang the truth. So I decided to do the research and build it myself. With all the technical difficulties resolved, I was about to build the system when I suddenly had to leave for Toronto. But whether I was in Montreal or not, I thought that it would be right to keep my

promise. Therefore, in 1978, we drove back to Montreal for the Easter holiday. During that short stay, with the help of my former workmate, the translation system was completed and given to the church on Easter Sunday. Since I didn't go back on my word, Rev. Chang got the translation system as promised.

Driving in the midst of a snowstorm: God's safekeeping

Beyond presenting the translation system to the church on Easter Sunday, we longed for fellowship with the church brethren. They were very warm and persuaded us to stay for an early dinner before heading back to Toronto. We knew it would be a long drive home, but we really wanted to have more fellowship over dinner. Little did we know that we were in the wake of a very heavy snowstorm.

At 7:30 pm we left Montreal with two other friends. The distance between Montreal and Toronto is about 550 kms. Normal driving would take about 6 hours for the trip. However it began to snow when we started out. I had to reduce the speed to barely 50 kms/hr. If I maintained that speed, it would take over 10 hours to get home! After a couple of hours on the road, it was already dark and it was snowing heavily with zero visibility. I was losing patience. Then a big sedan sped past us. I stepped on the gas, determined to keep up with the sedan. I figured that I could use its taillights for navigation. But the sedan was pulling away farther

and farther, and my car began to hydroplane on the snowy road. My heart was beating faster and faster...

In a split second, I saw the taillights of the sedan swerving left and then right, and then disappearing into the darkness. To make matters worse, we were entering a curve at a furious speed.

Maneuvering the steering was of no use and the car went out of control. I desperately pumped the brakes but it was too late. Like an unleashed stallion, the car skidded into the highway divide and we were facing oncoming traffic. I instinctively turned the steering wheel to avoid collision, and that sent us spinning violently. Right at that critical moment, I heard Kathleen say, "*James, be calm.*" I instantly felt in her voice an instruction from God about what to do. So I gripped the steering wheel tightly with both hands and slammed on the brakes. I let the car run its course, and in my heart, I just committed everything to God.

Bang! My car veered back in the right direction and ploughed into a snow bank. That woke up our two passengers (they had fallen asleep and didn't even know what had happened). I told them that we just had an accident. The impact was so hard that the front hood was buried in the snow. It was still snowing heavily but thank God the snow was soft. I got out of the car to assess the damage. Amazingly, there was none. So together we managed to get the car back on the highway and continued our journey home. All along the way, we saw that many vehicles had skidded into the divides and soft shoulders. I suspect that the big sedan which I was following was one of them.

It took us over 10 hours to reach Toronto, maintaining a snail's pace of 50 kms/hr, and eventually arriving at 6:00am. But near our destination, we were running out of gas. So every time we went downhill, I would put the car in neutral and let it roll down to save fuel. It would be another difficult hurdle to overcome if our tank was empty before reaching home. Most gas stations weren't opened in the early hours of the morning. Once again, we committed the matter to the Lord.

Soon we were running out of gasoline. I put on a brave face for the sake of the passengers, but in my heart, I was anxious. I prayed silently, crying out to God for help. Suddenly, I saw a bright "24" sign board just ahead of us. It was a 24-hour gas station! I was jubilant. We made it to our much-needed refuel. After that, we dropped off our two friends at their respective homes. When we got back home, we unloaded our luggage. I brushed my teeth and washed my face, yet got up early to work promptly at 9:00 am. Surprisingly, I felt fresh after 11 hours of driving in the most treacherous snowstorm I had ever encountered. All praise to God for His safekeeping.

You may ask, "Since you did God a service in making the translation system for the church, shouldn't God have led you home smoothly? Why did it take double the time to travel, not to mention an accident in the snowstorm?" I didn't blame God at all for the frightening and tiring journey, but thanked Him for being with me and leading me through the shadow of the valley of death. In times of crisis, I would become more sensitive to His presence, and appreciate His wonderful grace and deliverance more deeply.

God does not promise us a rose garden, but He assures us of His companionship in times of testing and crisis.

Life belongs to God: a Christmas visit to my elder sister

I was involved in another near fatal incident on the highway not long after the previous one. Christmas was approaching and we were preparing for a four-hour journey to visit my elder sister in Ottawa. According to the weather forecast, the skies were supposed to be clear. Before leaving, I looked up at the sky and sensed that there could be a change in the weather with the possibility of snow. Double-checking with my sister in Ottawa, she assured me that the weather on her side was fine. So without further delay we set out that afternoon.

A storm was brewing as we entered a two-way road. The snow fell more and more heavily and eventually developed into a major storm. The wind and snow were blowing in all directions and soon overtook us on our way to Ottawa. The temperature fell, and the snow had turned into black ice overnight, all hidden under the fresh snow from the storm.

Traffic became heavy. We initially wanted to use an alternative route to bypass the jam. Then we heard on the radio that this sudden storm had caught everybody by surprise. There was a chain of car accidents that led to a major pileup, and brought traffic to a complete halt. We quietly gave thanks to God that we didn't take that route. We just had to patiently crawl our way to Ottawa.

Being careful to keep a distance from oncoming traffic, I drove closer to the curb. Suddenly I hit something hard and the car swung towards oncoming vehicles. Black ice! Right in front of me were the headlights of a sports car, and we were heading for a direct collision. It happened so fast that I thought we were going to die. Just at that instant, Kathleen called out, “*James, be calm!*” She said exactly the same thing as in our previous traffic incident. But this time, the car skidded so fast that before I knew it, I had completely lost control. However, just in the nick of time, my car suddenly went back to our own lane and the sports car sped past us. It was as if an angel had pushed our car to avoid imminent disaster. The car ended up on the soft shoulder, with its back facing Ottawa. When the car came to a complete halt, our hearts were pounding and we were both shaking uncontrollably. Then we prayed to God thanking Him for His rescue.

In two near-death situations, my wife cried out, “*James, be calm!*” It wasn’t a coincidence. She couldn’t have been that calm at those critical moments. I knew that it was God who saved us, and our lives were in God’s hands. Silently, I made my pledge to God, “My life belongs to You. Sooner or later, I will serve You full time.”

Chasing after Mammon (prosperity and wealth): Being ungrateful for God's blessings

I remember saying to Kathleen before we got married, “If Rev. Chang conducts a third Full Time Ministry Training, we will apply.” She agreed to that. However, once we moved to Toronto, we soon forgot about the pledge for Full Time Ministry Training.

We were living in increasing comfort and financial security. My career was on the right track and slowly taking off. Kathleen had a very good job. Unfortunately, ever since we moved to Toronto, we weren't getting much spiritual nourishment at the church we were attending. Our zeal for the Lord slowly fizzled. We were like the Israelites who became prosperous after entering the Promised Land, and forsook God. We were drawn by the lusts of the world. When we became materially abundant, our hearts subtly became dull, losing our appetite for spiritual things.

In 1980, my in-laws immigrated to Canada and we helped them look for a house. The property market was very volatile. Within a month, the same property could increase by \$10K in value. Kathleen said, “At this rate, if we don't buy a house now, we will never be able to afford one!”

So while scouting around for our family, we decided to buy a house for ourselves. I couldn't believe my eyes when we went to the real estate office—people were literally lining up to buy, adding to an already tense atmosphere. In fact, nobody could physically inspect the houses as they weren't even built yet! All we had were a few floor plans and we were supposed to choose from them.

When it came to our turn to select a house, we were somewhat hesitant. The real estate agent became impatient with us and pressured us into a decision. To him, we were holding up the queue. In the end, we just picked the cheapest one available and paid the deposit. As we left the real estate office, I couldn't even recall how many bedrooms we had or what facilities were included! Days later, we drove to the location where our house was supposed to be built; there was nothing but a piece of bare land.

It took one year for the house to be completed. That gave us some breathing space to save up for the down payment. But that year there was a worldwide recession and the financial markets collapsed. The mortgage rate soared to a record high of 21% per annum. What about our deal? The real estate agent called and informed us that the government, for some reason, didn't approve of the building site. He gave us two proposals: One was a refund of our deposit in full; the other was to choose a similar house already approved by the government. God gave me a choice to back off from our deal but I didn't. Since Kathleen and I had a good and stable income, the mortgage was not a burden to us. We figured we wouldn't have any problems paying off our mortgage even if the rates were to rise sharply. We decided to look at the houses available for purchase, and in the end the real estate agent approved one that was better than our original choice. We thought we were making the right decision and even gave thanks to God for leading us to a better deal. Our family members likewise thought that it was a very good deal.

The conviction of the Holy Spirit: The Word of God is like a two-edged sword

Inner peace did not come with my decision. Perhaps it was the conviction of the Holy Spirit. I experienced what I might call a “temperamental crisis,” that is, one in which I became easily agitated and every little thing got on my nerves. Even when unprovoked, I was impatient and bad-tempered.

Ever since our move to Toronto, a steady stream of brothers and sisters from the Montreal church began to join us, relocating to Toronto for work reasons. We met regularly every Friday evening for Bible study. I remember a sister asking me, “Shouldn’t you be re-baptized?” I was rather upset by her question because I strongly resisted the idea of rebaptism. But the Lord slowly revealed to me that even though I had some dramatic spiritual encounters, it didn’t mean that I had the power from within to resist and overcome temptation. Although I had kicked bad habits such as smoking, drinking and gambling, that was really nothing because I wasn’t addicted to any of these. I did notice, however, that my hot temper hadn’t changed. It was in my blood. I tried to suppress it but it felt like a balloon that was blown to maximum capacity, ready to explode any time.

Romans 7:19 For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish.

This verse describes my condition then. I was getting very frustrated with this kind of life. After we had moved into our new mansion, Rev. Chang sent a couple to lead our Bible study for 10

weeks. They would drive six hours from Montreal to Toronto to share the word of God with us. During that time, the word of God pierced my heart like a two-edged sword. After every Bible study, I couldn't sleep. The inner struggle almost tore me apart. Finally, I felt that I had to make a clear choice: either deal with my life or give up my belief. I didn't want to be a hypocrite. Friends and relatives challenged my faith because they said they couldn't see God's work in my life. Outwardly, because of the Bible studies, to some extent I did change for the better. But I still had my "temperamental crisis" and was full of pride. I knew that God was real, so I told them that although I am not a good exemplary of a true believer of God, they should not rule out His reality.

I have sinned: Through repentance, draw near to God and resist temptation

During one of her visits to Toronto, my elder sister asked me, "Do you really love God?" She questioned my motive for believing in God. Did I believe in Him because He lavished me with a posh mansion? I immediately defended myself, saying, "Certainly not! If this house causes me to be unfaithful to God in any way, I will sell it immediately." She replied, "Mark your words!" In fact, before we moved into our new house, I said to my wife, "We should not spend money for the house at the expense of our offering for the Lord's work. I'd rather give up the house instead." Kathleen agreed.

In the first year of our new house, we overspent in upgrading it and had reduced our offering for the Lord's work. When I realized what I had done, my heart was in agony because I had grieved the Lord and was ungrateful for God's abundant blessings. During the Bible studies, the word of God constantly brought deep conviction to my heart and forced me to face the ultimate question I had been trying to evade: the question of my regeneration. If I were serious in dealing with my regeneration problem, the first step I needed to take was to sell the house.

But right at that time, the property market collapsed and the value of our house plummeted to rock bottom. We shared with Kathleen's family the reason for wanting to sell the house. Her family was strongly opposed to the idea of selling at that stage. Out of good intentions, they said, "Don't be such a fool. Don't sell the house yet. A repentant heart is all you need." Influenced and persuaded by them, I temporarily put the idea on hold. Still, I didn't have peace in my heart. I pleaded to God for more time and to grant me the courage to withstand family pressure and influence.

God's unexpected way of deliverance

One day, we went to Kathleen's younger sister's home for a gathering and ended up staying there overnight. We didn't go home until the next evening. When we entered our house, we found it ransacked. Our bedroom drawers and wardrobes were opened and our clothes were strewn all over the floor and bed. The house

had been broken into! My brand new sound system was stolen. Personal items of sentimental value were also taken, including a Hamilton watch given to me by my father and a press camera from my elder brother.

Before that incident, I was arguing with my home insurance company over an extra annual charge of \$27 for a new policy called replacement insurance. The argument went back and forth for a month before I reluctantly forked out the money. About two weeks later, our house was burgled. Because of the additional replacement insurance, I got a brand new sound system. Furthermore, the insurance company paid \$3K as compensation for my father's watch and my brother's camera. I was deeply grateful to God for all this, but I was unaware that He had a better plan to pave the way for me to sell the house.

Things felt different after being burgled. Every time we got home, we would enter cautiously, always checking to make sure that no one was inside. Every bump in the night kept us awake. The house had three stories, including the basement. There was just the two of us with four big rooms upstairs and lots of space downstairs. Feeling insecure after the intrusion, Kathleen agreed with me that it was time to sell the house.

We approached our next-door neighbor, a real estate agent, about selling the house. She warned us, "Do you know that house prices have plummeted so much that if you sell, you won't get your money back?" We knew that we would suffer a substantial loss, as newly constructed houses with better facilities were cheaper than what we had paid for our house. We reassured her that

money wasn't an issue and asked her to go ahead with the sale. She told us that even if we were willing to suffer a loss, we would face very stiff competition from the many new houses on the market which were better value for money. She suggested therefore that we hold off for a while. However we insisted on selling because we knew it was God's will. At the same time, we told our Bible study group to remember us in prayer because we were putting up our house for sale.

When you honor God, God will honor you

God started to do amazing things. Within a week of our decision, and without a "For Sale" sign on our lawn, a young Jewish couple came knocking on our door. They inspected the house and liked it. Our area was predominantly Jewish which suited them nicely. They were planning to get married soon and wanted to buy a house. As we were one of the few Chinese in a Jewish community, they approached us to see if we were selling. We took them to see our neighbor, the real estate agent. The next thing we knew, an offer was on the table. But it was ridiculously low and we didn't know what to do. On the one hand, we knew that God wanted us to sell the house. It was beyond our expectations that an offer would come so fast. Could it be from God? On the other hand, the offer was so low that I almost couldn't be bothered with it. The couple had to increase their offer by at least \$5000 before it can even be called reasonable. We committed this matter with fear and trembling to the Almighty God.

The next day, not knowing if our counter offer had been accepted, we were surprised when our real estate neighbor rushed out to greet us as we drove into our driveway. We waited for the verdict with nervous anticipation. As we got out of the car, she shook my hand and said, “It’s sold!”

I felt a dull pain in my heart for losing around \$20K in this deal (in the 80s, it was a substantial sum), but the inner joy and peace I experienced far outweighed any monetary loss. Suddenly we felt all our burdens lifted, and we knew that it was again the Lord at work. Most importantly, we felt accepted by our loving God again. He embraced us with His inexplicable joy and peace that the world cannot give.

When we told our Bible study group that our house had been sold, they were astounded. However, when it all sank in, we praised our God who, within a week, amid stiff competition, amazingly supplied a buyer out of nowhere.

After we sold the house, I made a pledge to the Lord to never buy another house for more than \$100K. Once again, we asked our next-door neighbor for help. She took us to a prestigious area. The house was as big as our previous one, in a better location, and it looked gorgeous. She said the owner was desperate to make a deal. She was confident that if we made an offer of \$105K, we would get it. It was a great deal, as good as the one we gave to the young Jewish couple. That meant, relatively speaking, we didn’t lose out. It was very tempting to make an offer but somehow, I remembered my pledge to the Lord to never buy another house for more than \$100K. Again we were facing a bit of turmoil within

our hearts: turning it down seemed like we were missing out on a good opportunity. God then reminded me:

Matthew 6:21 Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

God asked me, “Where is your heart?” I knew the answer and didn’t make an offer to buy the house.

After that, I asked my good real-estate friend to go on the hunt again. We had our hearts set on finding a house near my in-laws. Then the Lord miraculously provided a 4-bedroom house for us. The landlord had to leave for England urgently, and my friend made an offer which he immediately accepted. The timing was perfect: the day we moved out of the big mansion was also the day we moved into our new home. If it weren’t for God, things wouldn’t have turned out so perfectly. We learned that when we honor God, He will honor us.

It all makes sense: Determined to be re-baptized

After all the house selling and buying, I was even more determined to deal with my regeneration problem. Towards the end of 1982 or early 1983, Rev. Chang sent Rev. Hung to Toronto to lead us in Bible study. Rev. Hung asked our Bible study group, “Do you want to set up a church in Toronto?”

When I heard this, what Rev. Chang had earlier said in response to my sharing about my reluctance to leave Montreal and the Montreal church, came to mind: “Be faithful to the Lord

always. When you do so, God will have a plan for you.” In 1983, five years after I had left Montreal, the church in Toronto was born.

That same year, I applied for re-baptism at our church’s summer camp. The reason I was so determined to apply for rebaptism was my conversation with Rev. Hung. When I approached him about the matter of baptism, he suggested that I evaluate my childhood baptism as a Roman Catholic in the light of whether I knew then what commitment to God was all about.

He used the analogy of marriage, with two scenarios. First, my situation could be like an arranged marriage where the parents choose a wife for their son. Although the son has never met his future wife and has no say in the marriage, he knows that marriage is a life-long commitment and that he needs to honor that commitment to his wife. The second scenario is that of a marriage predetermined before birth. Both sets of parents agreed that their respective children would be husband and wife once they reached maturity. The parents made a covenant of marriage! In that case, the son would not know what commitment to marriage was all about.

When I looked at my baptism in the light of the marriage analogy, I suddenly realized that it fell into the category of a predetermined marriage rather than that of an arranged marriage. I certainly didn’t know what my commitment to God was all about. I was only 5 years old when I was baptized and 7 years old when I received my confirmation of faith. I didn’t really grasp the meaning of baptism in terms of a life-long loving relationship with

God. Just as in a marriage, the relationship with God demands total faithfulness and loyalty.

If one understands that commitment to God means a life-long relationship with Him in faithfulness and obedience, and if he determines to commit to God, then God will grant him the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a pledge or guarantee of the established covenant. The person would then be considered born again as a child of God

Ephesians 1:13-14: In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.

Commitment is generally made at baptism. Suddenly it dawned on me: All along I wasn’t really a child of God. In other words, I wasn’t born again because I had never had a genuine or total commitment to God. After I realized my own condition, it was clear to me that I had to commit my life to God in faithfulness and total obedience through re-baptism.

In 1983, at the church summer camp, I was re-baptized. It was the turning point in my life. I remember that my vow to the Lord was a pledge to never to live a life of compromise again. From that day on, my life truly belonged to God. He continues to mold and refine me. Through His refining, my faith is strengthened and firmly rooted in Him.

Preparing to Go Into the Full-Time Ministry Training

God is the Potter: He molds us into vessels fit for His use

In the early years after my re-baptism, Satan constantly tempted me in many ways. Among the greatest of the challenges I faced was in the area of love, testing whether I loved God or my family more.

Matthew 10:37 He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

To me this Bible passage posed the greatest challenge. It is also something that every believer of God has to face.

After my re-baptism, I had a yearning for the word of God, and read the Bible daily. There was also an ongoing eagerness to go to church. Though I still had lots of weaknesses, God was slowly molding me and renewing my mind.

One day, Kathleen's younger sister and her two children came to stay with us. In the middle of the night, my 4-year-old niece suddenly started to cough, and woke everybody up. I couldn't go back to sleep, and I really felt for the little girl because she was crying and in obvious pain. So I prayed to God, "Lord, please have mercy on her. She is coughing so badly. Please let her stop coughing and get back to sleep." After I prayed, she immediately stopped coughing, and the night returned to a complete calm. The instantaneous answering of prayer was an awesome experience. I quietly gave thanks to God in utter adoration.

But half an hour later, the one-year-old baby started to cough too. It was getting worse and worse, and he was crying and coughing at the same time, just like his sister. I was hesitant as to whether I should pray to God again. There was a struggle within me. Was it pure coincidence that my prayer was answered? Somehow I felt an inner compulsion to pray for the baby boy because he was in great agony. So I prayed again, "Lord, please have mercy on the baby too. Otherwise, he will wake his sister and she will start coughing again. Then things would be worse than before." Once again, immediately, the baby stopped coughing and peace descended upon us. My doubts were swept away and my faith was strengthened. It was definitely not a coincidence!

The call to respond to answered prayer

I was deeply touched by God’s grace and mercy. I felt totally unworthy that God would listen and respond to my prayers at such lightning speed. As I lay on my bed, I once again gave thanks to God, and I felt His warm presence surrounding me. Entering into a deep communion with the Almighty God, I whispered, “Lord, I love You!” He responded, “Do you really love Me? If you do, I want you to give up three things.” I replied, “Lord, I am wholly Yours. Is there anything that I will withhold from You?”

(1) Pleasing my father-in-law versus making better use of time

God said, “Good! The first thing I want you to give up is bridge. You are never to play bridge again.” I mumbled, “What? What do You mean by that?” At our weekend family gatherings, I would entertain my father-in-law by playing bridge with him. I was in a dilemma. How was I going to tell my family, especially my father-in-law, that I couldn’t play bridge ever again? Moreover, I liked playing bridge.

I soon realized that God’s intention wasn’t to give me a hard time. It was a test of whether I love Him more or my family more. At the same time, He was reminding me to make good use of my time with the family. Instead of entertaining them with bridge, I should be using that time to share the gospel with them. After a bit of struggle, I pledged never to play bridge again.

(2) Pleasing my mom in doing the things she liked versus being concerned for her soul

The second thing that God wanted me to give up was mahjong. I really loved that game. My standing record among our family in Vancouver was a winning streak of 10 weeks. In Toronto, I seldom played mahjong but whenever I visited my mom in Vancouver, she would make time to have a game with me. God was again challenging me on whether I loved Him more or my family more. Last time it was my father-in-law, but this time it was my mom. Naturally it was much harder to face my mom because I loved her more.

I was wrestling with God and trying to evade the issue. The inner turmoil was so great that I just couldn't sleep. Slowly, God revealed to me that I should be a witness to my family. I was born anew and shouldn't indulge in this kind of game anymore (although we treated it as a game, mahjong is commonly associated with gambling). He showed me that I should love my Mum with God's love, and not just please her by doing whatever she liked. I should be concerned for her salvation and be a good witness to my family. In the end, I gave up struggling and made my pledge to never to play mahjong again.

(3) Being a lover of self versus being a living sacrifice

The third thing I had to give up was billiards. God is certainly All-Knowing! He knows the heart of man, and knows exactly how much I loved those games. In fact, among the three, I loved billiards the most. I even had a cue specially brought all the way from Hong Kong when I immigrated to Canada. So how could I give it up without a fight especially when it is going to be a lifelong ban?

I vividly remember tossing and turning in bed as I pleaded to the Lord not to ban this game for life. Tears flowed but to no avail. I was restless and couldn't sleep. All of a sudden, God showed me two visions: the first was of Abraham offering his only son, Isaac. The second was of the Lord Jesus nailed on the cross. Then God said, "How can you claim to be totally committed to Me when you can't even give up such trivia? These are only games. It's not as if I have asked you to shed your blood for Me or suffer any bodily harm on My account." At that moment, I realized how shallow my love for God was, and wept bitterly in self-disgust. I cried out to God for forgiveness, and made my pledge never to play billiards again.

Once I made the pledge, I felt immediate relief as the weight of my burdens was lifted from me. I fell asleep instantly.

My pledges to God: genuine or just lip-service?

Then came the weekend, and as usual, we had a gathering with Kathleen's family. I told them, "I will never play bridge or mahjong anymore." They wondered why. I replied, "Because I made a pledge to God." They were even more puzzled, "Do you mean that Christians can't play bridge or mahjong even if they are not gambling?" I tried to explain that I was an exception to the rule. It doesn't mean that other Christians can't play. I shared with them about that night's experience. They were skeptical. I knew it would not be easy for them to accept what I had told them, especially when most of them were Christians. My refusal to play indirectly posed a challenge to their spiritual lives. That was certainly not my intention. I was only fulfilling my vow to my God.

Amazingly, my father-in-law wasn't angry with me. On the contrary, it stirred his interest and he started to ask me about my religious beliefs. Soon after that, we started a Bible study at home with the family on the weekend. That was exactly what God had intended for us to do, so that salvation may be proclaimed to our family.

I passed the first test in dealing with my father-in-law, but the second test would be much harder because I had to face my mom. Coincidentally, we were scheduled to visit my mom in Vancouver that year and I knew I had to face the challenge of honoring my pledge to God. As soon as we landed in Vancouver, Mom was so happy to see us that she immediately booked me for a game of mahjong. It took so much courage just to blurt out faintly that I didn't want to play mahjong anymore. But she simply ignored me

and started to call her mahjong friends. Kathleen was by my side and gave me a nudge. She whispered, “Why don’t you speak louder to your mom? If you can be so assertive in speaking to my dad, you can also be firm to your mom!” So I repeated to my mom, “I really don’t want to play.” Again, it fell on deaf ears as she continued to call her mahjong friends. I was desperately praying to God for help because I had no more strength to refuse my mom again. Suddenly, I overheard my mom saying that one of her friends could not make it and so the game was cancelled! Oh, what a relief! It was clearly divine intervention. On the one hand, God allowed me to go through the test. On the other hand, He had a rescue plan for me. I had to struggle with the test. Though I was weak, God mercifully delivered me out of trouble. I passed the test with God’s help. Since then I have never played mahjong.

The deceitfulness of Satan: An enemy from within one’s own ranks

In 1989, we went back to Hong Kong for our theological training. We had an occasion to attend a retreat for all Hong Kong coworkers. We discovered that there were a few pool tables in the recreation room. I used to play on standard size billiard tables, and I wouldn’t even cast my eyes on these small pool tables. However some of my coworkers asked me, “Didn’t you know how to play pool? We don’t know how to play but you can teach us!” They didn’t know that I had made my pledge to God. But I also

thought that it wouldn't be a breach of the pledge if I just taught them how to play.

So I picked up the cue and showed them how to play the game. It became obvious that they were struggling even to hold the cue properly, let alone shoot the balls into the pockets. As I watched them play, I sighed at the easy misses, and unsuspectingly I was lured into playing the game. Then one of the coworkers handed me the cue and suggested, "This is a hard shot. I can't play that. Can you play it for me?" I tried to convince myself that I wasn't violating my pledge to God, because in the past, I loved playing on large billiard tables, and not on these small pool tables. So I presumed that playing on the small table wasn't included as part of the pledge.

As soon as the cue was in my hand, I didn't want to let it go. I continued to play to my heart's content. That night I just couldn't sleep. God rebuked me for playing the game. I made an excuse, saying that the small table wasn't part of the pledge. But He said that whether the table was large or small, I should never play the game again. I suddenly realized that though I claimed to have quit the game, I still had strong cravings for it regardless of the size of the pool table. It was almost like an addiction to the game. God wanted me to be rid of my heart's desire. Finally I confessed my sins before God and pledged never to play the game in any shape or form. I didn't realize how deceitful Satan was. He used my own coworkers to lure me into sin. Certainly, my coworkers couldn't be blamed, for they didn't know about my pledge. It was only after

this incident that I shared my failure with my coworkers and everyone was in awe at the deceitfulness of the evil one.

Rooted out the cravings of the heart

One time I went to visit an inmate in prison. I shared with him about my pledge to God and my failure in playing the game of pool. He said, “Do you know that you can play billiards using “Chinese pool” (康樂棋, the word-for-word translation is “recreational chess,” and was once a popular game in Hong Kong)?” It aroused my interest and I thought playing that Chinese pool should be alright because it was really a different kind of game. So he taught me how to align the pieces into snooker formation, and I found it fascinating indeed. Suddenly I heard a voice sternly rebuking me, “Are you still craving the game? Your heart has never turned away from the game.” I knew it was God’s warning and immediately I begged for His forgiveness. I prayed to God to rid this game from my heart. From then on, I had no more craving for it. Though I would occasionally watch billiard games on TV, my attitude was very different. I would enjoy the game as a spectator without indulging myself in it.

God rekindled my heart to serve Him full time

God had been transforming me in my temperament and also in my relationship with people. Through His reshaping and molding, I got rid of bad habits, and He rekindled my desire to serve Him.

Actually, I had the heart to serve God all along. Back in 1983 when the third training team started their theological training, God reminded me, “Did you not say that if Rev. Chang started the third training, you would apply?” I responded that I wasn’t ready.

Two years quickly went by, and Rev. Chang announced that the fourth training was open for application. I really wanted to join and I even had a meeting with Rev. Chang to discuss this. But Kathleen wasn’t willing. So I withheld my application and told her, “I will surely apply for the fifth team. So let us make use of the next two years to prepare ourselves for the Full Time Ministry Training.”

I had already been working for the same company for over six years. Since it was a crown corporation, then according to government policy, if I worked for 9 years, my pension would be locked in until the retirement age of 65. The government would double my retirement pension plus interest, but I would not be able to access the money until then. Since I was already determined to join full time training, I certainly didn’t want any of my money to be frozen, so I was making plans to leave the company before my pension got locked in.

Meanwhile, the church’s Bible study group at the University of Toronto needed help. I was working at the west end of Toronto whereas the Bible study group was in the city center very close to where Kathleen worked. I was thinking that if I could find a job in the city center, I could pick her up and we could attend that Bible study together. At that time, her spiritual life was declining and I

felt really sad. I had been thinking of ways to encourage her to renew her faith in God.

It just so happened that my company's fortune took a downturn. They issued a notice to encourage employees to opt for voluntary separation. They would assess the applications on a case-by-case basis and compensate the successful applicant with a voluntary separation package. In fact, that was exactly what I was looking for because I could then leave the company without my pension being locked in. So I immediately submitted my application and at the same time started looking for a job. I prayed to God to lead me to a job located downtown so that I could help out with the Bible study group and at the same time invite my wife to attend too.

Seeking a job by faith

The company accepted my application for voluntary separation, so I immediately went to look for a job. I remember that in one of the interviews, the interviewer asked me point blank if I was a Christian. I said "Yes". Then he asked, "If you are a Christian, do you think God will give you this job?" It was a sharp question indeed. I replied, "If it is God's will, I will get the job." But he wanted a more direct answer and asked again, "But what do you think? Do you have faith in getting this job?" He didn't want me to be evasive. So I conceded, "I know that I am qualified for the job, but may God's will be done." When it was my turn to ask him questions, I asked him if he was a Christian, and he admitted that

he was. Then he told me that the job wasn't really suitable for me. He explained that a project was left hanging and they had dismissed one of the team leaders. They were looking for someone to fill in and take full responsibility for the project. However, all signs pointed to the project failing, and in reality they were looking for a scapegoat. He called his colleague and referred me to another position. That manager was also a Christian. The interview went well and they both recommended me for this new position.

A weird dream

I left the interviews with full confidence that I would get the job. That very night, I dreamt that I went for a job interview. While waiting in the meeting room, I was surprised when a clergyman walked in. He greeted me with a smile and I smiled back. Suddenly, his head melted in front of me like wax.

I was so frightened that I woke up from this weird dream. While contemplating what the dream might mean, I figured that it was somehow related to the job. So I prayed to God, "If it is not Your will, then I would rather not have the job." In fact, the salary and the location were very satisfactory. But it was a bit far from the city and if I wanted to go to the downtown Bible study after work, I probably wouldn't make it on time.

Fulfillment of the dream

A few days later, the company called me and the personnel manager said, “Due to the company’s recent budget forecast, there is a freeze on the position that you applied for. But there is another position that is suitable for you in another department. Would you like to come in for an interview?” Seeing that there wasn’t much choice, I agreed to go for yet another interview.

Wow! This position offered even better prospects than the previous one. It was so tempting. First, I would go for an all-expense paid three-month training in South America, living in a luxury hotel facing the ocean... While I was visualizing myself sitting on the patio enjoying the ocean view, we were suddenly interrupted by the manager’s secretary. She whispered a few words to him and immediately he turned pale. He stood up and said apologetically, “I am terribly sorry. I have to stop the interview, and we will have to meet another time. Just a few minutes ago, lightning struck the tree in my backyard and it collapsed. Somehow, the tree fell in such a way as to cause a power outage in my house. My wife recently had an operation and is resting at home. Now she’s panicking and I have to rush home to take care of the whole situation.”

It was funny that a freak accident happened right in the middle of my interview. I had nothing to say except to wish him well. It was raining heavily as I drove home. Suddenly, the vision of the weird dream reappeared and I got the message that if this job is not of God’s will, I won’t get it either. As it turned out, the job was also put on hold because of the company’s poor financial forecast.

Faith shaken: Reverting to my own game

My last day at work was fast approaching and I still didn't have another job. Though I had gone through similar situations before, with God providing me a job at the last minute, my faith was shaken when I faced the reality of not having a job after so many near misses. Finally I resolved to call my former boss and ask whether he had any job prospects. He was very helpful. Shortly after my call, he referred me to a job interview. The interviewers were very pleased with me because of the referral. But when they put the offer on the table, it was \$7000 less than what I was earning at my present job. But I still accepted the offer. The only concern I had was whether it was really from God because it was still too far from the city and again, I might not be able to help out in the downtown Bible study group.

God's thoughts are higher than ours

Wednesday, two days after the interview, was my wife's birthday. To give her a surprise, I took a day off from work and stayed at home to give the walls a fresh coat of paint. Suddenly I received a call from an employment agency. He asked me whether I was still looking for a job. There was a job located downtown. When I heard the address of the company, I knew it was very close to the Bible study group. I told him that I had already got a job offer. He asked if I had the offer in hand. I told him that I was still waiting for the official letter and that it should arrive any day now. He persuaded me to go for a job interview because he said that so long as

there is no legal contract in hand, it isn't binding. He sounded convincing enough and I agreed to go for the interview that afternoon.

As it turned out, the manager really liked me and expressed that he would recommend me for the position. However, I had to confess to him that I had already got another offer and it was against my conscience to reject the previous offer for this one. He tried to persuade me to consider the job but he also couldn't offer me the job immediately as he had to set up another interview with his department manager to finalize the offer. I told him honestly that I would not consider his job offer unless there was a change of condition from the other job offer. He respected my decision and was willing to wait for my reply and put the job on hold.

Thursday, the next day, I received the letter of employment from the other company. But to my surprise, they reduced my salary. I immediately called the personnel manager and asked why the terms of employment were changed. He said that it was according to the standard company salary scale and he had already tried to submit my case to the salary review board but was unsuccessful. I told him frankly that I had another potential job offer, and since there was a change of conditions, I could not confirm my acceptance of his offer. He then asked me which company it was. When I told him, he immediately replied that it was a better company to work for. He was also kind enough to say he would wait for my decision before giving the job to somebody else.

Another challenge of faith: God's will be done

After that, I called the downtown company to say that I could consider the position he had offered. The manager was happy to hear that, and wanted to set up an interview with the department manager for the following Monday. However, I told him that I would be away for my church's summer camp for a week and wouldn't be able to go for the interview until after the camp. He respected my decision and the interview was set for the Monday after the camp.

In fact, it was a real challenge to my faith because the very next day, Friday, would be my last day of work with no definite job offer in sight. But I put God's work as first priority. I refused to go to any interview during the time of the church camp. I told both companies that I had to go to the camp for a week and that I would not make any commitment until after the camp. As it turned out, both companies were willing to wait for my reply.

After the camp, I went downtown for an interview with the department manager. It went smoothly and the next day, they made me an offer. I was overwhelmed by God's intervention and how He led me to the right job. I could then serve in the Bible study group, and my wife could go with me to the group. How perfect was His solution. It reminded me of a Bible passage:

Matthew 6:33 But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.

Vision: A perfect jigsaw puzzle

Time flew by and the application for the fifth training was approaching. I told Kathleen, “I will apply for the fifth training.” She replied, “Good! Go ahead. But let it be clear that I won’t be applying.” Afterwards she would remind me to apply for the training, even bidding me not to procrastinate. Having prayed earnestly to God, I submitted my application for the full-time training. I was haunted by the prospect of choosing between God and my wife. I knew I had to face the toughest challenge of my life. But somehow God revealed to me a vision: it was a jigsaw puzzle. Every piece was perfectly in place and it showed forth a beautiful picture. He comforted me and told me not to worry, but to just cling to Him. He assured me that He would lead me triumphantly through the toughest battle of my life.

A Trip to the States: Confirmation of my future in serving the Lord

In 1988, we went for a wonderful trip in the United States. First we flew to San Francisco, then we rented a car and drove to the Grand Canyon. From the Grand Canyon, we drove back to the southern tip of California. We headed north from San Diego along the Pacific Coast highway and came back to San Francisco. The whole round trip covered over 3000 kms in 16 days. During the trip, God was gracious to us such that we encountered many unusual experiences as well as deliverance from life-threatening

situations. I want to share with you only one such unusual experience.

We passed through lots of cities along the Pacific Coast highway. One particular street name appeared in practically every city we entered. In fact, I lost count of how many times we got lost on streets of that name. Sometimes we thought we were circling around the same city when in fact we were in another town but driving on a street with the same name. Do you know what the name of the street was? It was “Mission Street”. Could it be a coincidence that on the trip from San Diego to San Francisco, somehow and somewhere along the journey, we ended up on Mission Street? I asked Kathleen, “Do you think that God is leading us to see that for the rest of our lives, we will be serving as missionaries?” Kathleen replied, “Perhaps that’s true for you but not for me!”

While flying back to Toronto, we both acknowledged that it was one of the best trips we had had together. Kathleen said, “This will be our last trip together. From now on, you go to serve God and I go my own way.” It was as if a sword had pierced right into my heart. I pleaded with her, “Is there anything that will change your mind?” She replied, “Unless there is a miracle!” I said, “Then I will pray for that miracle to happen.”

Interview for the Fifth Training

A week after our return from the trip, Rev. Chang came from Montreal to interview the fifth Full Time Ministry Training applicants. When it was my turn, I knew that he would ask me about Kathleen. Indeed, during the interview, he asked, “If you are accepted in the fifth training which will be conducted in Hong Kong, what will happen to Kathleen?” I said, “She will stay in Toronto and I will go to Hong Kong.” He asked, “But wouldn’t it be a strain on your marriage?” I said, “I really don’t know.” Actually, I didn’t want to think about it. We discussed this matter for a while, and finally Rev. Chang said, “Alright, I will accept your application for the fifth training.”

Mixed emotions: Entering into the fiercest spiritual battle of my life

On my way back after the interview, I had mixed emotions about my acceptance into the fifth training team. I really didn’t know whether to be happy or sad. To be honest, I was more grieved and heavy-hearted than full of joy and gladness. I wondered what my reaction would have been if Rev. Chang had rejected my application instead. However, my worst nightmare had materialized: I might have to part with Kathleen in choosing to serve God. The real and fierce spiritual battle had begun.

When I got home, neither of us said a word. After dinner, I finally summoned all my courage to tell Kathleen that I was accepted. She abruptly stood up, ran upstairs, slammed the bedroom

door, and turned on the TV. I was deeply hurt. I could only cry out to God for help to overcome this fierce spiritual battle. Then the vision of the jigsaw puzzle reappeared, but it wasn't perfect, because it missed the most vital piece—my wife. So I asked God, "What will happen to my wife now?" Somehow He gently reassured me, "Do not worry. You just go. I will complete the jigsaw puzzle for you."

Satan tried to inflict irreparable damage, but triumph comes through earnest prayer

Following the fifth training interview, there was a joint summer camp held by the Montreal and Toronto churches. The camp theme was based on Luke 18:8, "*...when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*" Satan wouldn't miss such an opportunity to lure my wife away from going to the camp. In previous camps, my mother-in-law would always join us. But this time, something cropped up and she couldn't go. My wife was very much attached to her mom. If my mother-in-law couldn't go, Kathleen would very likely stay with her mom and not join the camp. But thanks to earnest prayer support from the church brothers and sisters, she finally decided to attend. I knew that God was behind her change of mind which paved the way for a miraculous deliverance.

The four-day camp was the miraculous turning point in Kathleen's life. Before we went to the camp, I earnestly prayed to God that He would lead three persons to talk to her voluntarily without

my deliberate invitation. I saw it as human intervention if I were to ask them to talk to Kathleen. I also wanted to live out the camp theme which was focused on faith. I prayed to God to increase my faith in Him, and I waited for His deliverance.

One of the three persons I had in mind was Rev. Chang's wife. One time she just happened to sit next to me. I was so nervous and really wanted to beg her to talk to Kathleen. I couldn't sit still. My heart was struggling over whether I should seize this golden opportunity to seek help from Rev. Chang's wife. I was emotional but I prayed earnestly to God to grant me silence and full trust in Him.

But God worked amazing things. I witnessed the three persons talking to Kathleen on separate occasions without intervention on my part. I marveled at God's doing. On the third night of the camp, while I was with some brothers and sisters, I saw from a distance that Rev. Chang's wife was talking to Kathleen and that Kathleen was crying. I prayed silently that God would continue to melt her hard heart.

Finally on the last day of the camp, I had the opportunity to sit with my wife. I noticed a definite change of attitude. That was encouraging, and I continued to commit her to God in prayer.

Amazing grace: Kathleen changed her mind

On the way out of the camp, we didn't talk much and I didn't know if my prayer had been answered. It seemed that both of us were deep in thought. It was like an invisible cloak of fear that was

oppressing me, preventing me from asking her how she felt about the camp. Any negative response would mean that my prayer of faith was somehow not answered, which was what I feared most. The camp could be the last chance for Kathleen to change her mind.

The next day after work, Kathleen suddenly suggested to go out for dinner instead. While we were having our meal, she asked whether I knew how she felt about the camp. I said “no”. Then she asked if Rev. Chang would still consider accepting her into the fifth training. I was stunned and didn’t know how to reply. She shared that in the camp, she was deeply moved by the love and faithfulness of God and it just melted her hardness of heart. So she confessed to God and pledged to serve Him for the rest of her life. After the camp, she was a renewed person.

After that, we had an opportunity to talk to Rev. Chang regarding Kathleen’s intention to join the fifth training. He said to her, “I don’t know what reason I have to accept you. There are over 40 or 50 applicants and I have rejected almost half of them. Among those who were rejected were lay leaders serving in the church. But you haven’t been actively serving for the past two years and you didn’t even attend Bible studies regularly.” Kathleen replied, “I know I have wasted my last two years. I feel really bad about it. But I have repented and confessed to God. I have made my pledge to God to serve Him faithfully for the rest of my life. I know that I will do my best and never go back on my word.” Seeing her determination, Rev. Chang said, “Right now, I cannot give you a

definite answer. I need to wait upon God for His decision. Meanwhile, please be patient and commit this matter in prayer.”

A few months had passed and there was still no news. By that time, Rev. Chang had already gone back to Hong Kong to prepare for the fifth training. Our families knew that I had given up my career and that I would be going back to Hong Kong for the training. They also knew that Kathleen hadn't been accepted yet. They opposed my decision to go for the Full Time Ministry Training and constantly applied pressure on us. I really had to cling to God for strength and to wait for His deliverance.

I had to book my air ticket to Hong Kong by early December 1988 if I were to arrive in time for the training. Unfortunately, the result of Kathleen's application was still uncertain. She said, “If I am not accepted, I will stay in Toronto. But whatever Rev. Chang suggests for me to do, I will follow. So please don't worry. I will continue to pursue the Lord.”

Heartbreaking separation or perfect union?

On Sunday, December 1, the long wait ended. After the service, our pastor approached me and said, “Rev. Chang called me from Hong Kong. He has accepted Kathleen into the training!” Wow! I was completely overwhelmed. The heaviest burden in my heart was suddenly lifted. I was filled with inexpressible joy and thanksgiving to God. Now the vision was clear: God has put the last piece of the jigsaw puzzle in place, and it revealed the most beautiful picture I had ever visualized in my life. I recalled that before the

church summer camp, I was on the verge of facing a heartbreaking separation from my wife. But now, through the grace and mercy of our God, He holds our hands and renews us with a perfect union of heart; together we launched out to a new chapter of our lives to serve Him.

I knew that my wife and I would labor for the Lord with all our heart, our mind and our strength. We would never disappoint God, by His unfathomable grace. So at the end of 1988, we left Canada to go to Hong Kong for theological training.

Heartfelt thanks to God: Walking hand in hand with my wife to serve our living God

I very much desire to be a vessel that brings glory to God and faithfully abides in His will. I will accept His molding into any shape or form under any circumstance if only I could bring Him honor and glory. Whatever severe test awaits me, I plead to God that I may have steadfast faith in Him to overcome all obstacles. I have tasted so much of His goodness that I know His grace is sufficient for me. In fact, there are always challenges to our faithfulness to God when people such as friends, family, and our most beloved stand in the way of our relationship with God. It is written in the book of Samuel:

1 Samuel 2:30 Therefore the God of Israel declares, ‘... for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed’

God has been refining me through trials and testing. He is leading me every step of the way. Through every test, even when my marriage was on the line, God delivered me by His mercy and lovingkindness.

Every Christian will face the challenge of faith through trials and temptations during our pursuit of God. It is only through faith and complete dependence on God that we can remain faithful to Him, and when we do so, God will surely deliver us.

January 1989 to June 1993: Hong Kong

Launch out into the missions field

We left our secular jobs in Canada and went to Hong Kong for our Full Time Ministry Training in January 1989. We knew that God will continue His refining work in our lives through many trials and testing. I would like to convey to you one point though: *Our God is a compassionate and loving God. He can shape our lives to withstand any life challenge.*

Isaiah 46:3-4 ...You who have been borne by Me from birth, and have been carried from the womb; even to your old age, I shall be the same, and even to your graying years I shall bear you! I have done it, and I shall carry you; and I shall bear you, and I shall deliver you.

Walking with God and serving Him is the best thing in our lives. I would like to share with you about our life in serving God. May all honor and glory be given to Yahweh, our Most High Eternal God.

Goodbye Canada

Once we got the confirmation that Kathleen was admitted into the Full Time Ministry Training, we made immediate preparations for our exodus to Hong Kong. Kathleen was very much attached to her close-knit family. When all our family and friends bade us farewell at the airport, the atmosphere was very emotional and touching. No one wanted to say the last goodbye as we lingered on until the final call for boarding. It was like sending soldiers to the front line of the battlefield. Indeed, the song “Onward Christian Soldiers” was in the back of my mind as we slowly made our way to the boarding gate. We knew we would not return home in the foreseeable future. I held Kathleen’s hand firmly as we proceeded to the boarding gate. Words were replaced with tears when we turned back and waved goodbye to our loved ones. On our way to Hong Kong, we would stop over in Vancouver to bid farewell to my side of the family.

I want to note here that although the term “Christians” properly applies to both Catholics and Protestants, in this sharing, I will simply use the term “Christians” for “Protestants” (this is the terminology used by many Chinese). My side of the family is Catholic. I was the first one to leave the Catholic church to join a Christian denomination. In those days, there was still a rift between Catholics and Protestants (Christians). Though my siblings were open minded enough to accept us as Christians, they were puzzled as to why we would go to the extent of forsaking our professions and serving God in the full-time ministry. Out of their love and deep concern, they cautioned us about our decision,

asking whether this is really what we endeavor to do for the rest of our lives. We took this as an opportunity to testify of the work of God in our lives, and reassured them that we would never regret our decision because we deem it as our privilege to serve the Most High.

Roadblocks

Having no knowledge of church history and the Reformation that led to the split of the church, my mother was told that believers who depart from their Catholic faith are “Protestants”. Irrespective of the reasons for the split from the Catholic Church which led to the establishment of different denominations, all “Protestants” are considered bad because they protested against the Catholic Church. My mother was simple-minded, and all she knew was that “Christians” were Protestants who split the church. When I became a Christian, she labeled me a traitor or turncoat from the Catholic Church. When we told her in Vancouver that we were going for the Ministry Training, she was so upset that she disowned me as her son. I was deeply hurt but I knew that my mom still loved me very much. I prayed quietly to God and tried to explain this to my mom one step at a time:

I asked my mom, “Do you want your son to love God wholeheartedly?”

“Certainly!” She affirmed.

“Do you think that among believers, the priests are the ones who are the most devoted to God?” I continued.

“Of course!” She replied.

Then I said, “Now there is a dilemma! I want to love God wholeheartedly and you want your son to love God. But since I am already married, I cannot be a priest because all priests are celibate. Therefore, in order to love and serve God, we have no alternative but to go into the Full Time Ministry and serve in the Christian church!”

She was speechless momentarily, and then uttered, “I don’t want to talk to you about this anymore!” But the tone of her voice indicated that she had softened her stand.

(Actually, we left for Hong Kong at the end of 1988. In July 1992, it was my mom’s 80th birthday. During the interim period of over two and half years, we only occasionally communicated with our family members in Canada by correspondence and long-distance calls. The family held a banquet for my mom and invited us to attend. We took the opportunity to visit Canada for the special occasion. Just before the banquet, my second eldest sister approached me and said, “Mom wants you to give the blessing before the banquet commences. Would you like to do that?” I was so dumbfounded by the privilege to pray and give the blessing, considering that in my last conversation with my mom just before we left for Hong Kong for the Full Time Training, she disowned me as her son. But now she asked me to give the blessing at her 80th birthday banquet. This was unbelievable! With tears of joy, I heartily accepted the invitation to pray before the banquet. We thanked God that He had changed my mom and my family miraculously and mysteriously. Just before we left Vancouver, my

mom's attitude changed dramatically. She gave us her blessing to serve God and told us she will pray for us daily!)

Just a couple of days before we left Vancouver for the training in Hong Kong, we received a phone call from Kathleen's mom who sounded very worried as she told us that Kathleen's stepfather fell ill and was hospitalized. Kathleen comforted her mom and encouraged her to trust in God, and said we would commit Kathleen's stepfather to God in fervent prayer. All along he had been well with no major health issues. But just when we were about to leave for Hong Kong, he suddenly fell very sick. We immediately perceived that it was Satan's tactic to obstruct us from going to Hong Kong. Satan was aware of the close bond within Kathleen's family such that if anything should happen to any of the family members, it would have an emotional impact on her. But the Bible passage in Luke 9:62 ("No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God") vividly reminded us not to pull back. We knew that once Kathleen returns to Toronto, this would be the death-knell to her opportunity to move forward again. By God's grace and comfort, Kathleen suppressed her emotions and pressed on to our exodus to Hong Kong. Shortly after we arrived in Hong Kong, we received the news that her stepfather was released from hospital and was on his way to recovery. That brought great encouragement to us, knowing that our God cares and protects us from the Evil one.

Seeking residency in Hong Kong

Kathleen and I were both born in Hong Kong. I migrated to Canada at the end of 1970, Kathleen in 1972. Both of us had not been back to Hong Kong since we came to Canada. The city changed so much over the years, and when we arrived, it was like settling into a new city. Apart from the main roads on Hong Kong Island which did not change much, it was like a face lift with all the old residential structures replaced by modern high-rise buildings.

We entered Hong Kong with a tourist visa because we had long lost our Hong Kong identity cards. But since we still had our birth certificates, we just needed to go to the Immigration Department to reapply for our HKID cards, which would grant us permanent residency in Hong Kong. We did not expect any problems, so we waited until our tourist visa almost expired before we went to the Immigration Office to change our residence status.

Meanwhile, after settling into our new abode, we started to get ourselves reacquainted with the roads in Hong Kong. I had a brother who was living in Hong Kong. He and his family had moved back to Hong Kong a few years earlier. We had always maintained regular contact with one another. As for Kathleen, her half-mother's family was in Hong Kong. Previously we only got to know one of her half-sisters when she and her husband went to Toronto some years ago. We became good friends. But Kathleen hardly knew the rest of her half-mother's family. The last time she met them (apart from the half-sister whom we befriended in Toronto) was at her father's funeral when she was a child. This

time around, she really made it her goal to know all her half-mother's side of the family. She phoned her half-mother, and a family meeting was finally arranged for a meal at a restaurant. It was a friendly meeting that paved the way for a miracle to happen.

Our tourist visa soon expired. We went to the Mong Kok branch of the Immigration Office to change our status. After queuing for a while, we submitted our application for obtaining our HKID card. An immigration officer reviewed our applications. He had no problem with mine, but there was a problem with Kathleen's because the birth certificate showed her maiden name. When we got married in Canada, she changed her surname to mine. Therefore her surname in the passport did not match that in her birth certificate. The officer asked us to show our marriage certificate as proof that Kathleen's surname had been changed.

But when we left for Hong Kong, we stored everything in boxes in our Toronto home. It never crossed our minds that we might need our marriage certificate in Hong Kong. Even if we asked Kathleen's family for help, it would be a daunting task for them just to search for the marriage certificate from about 80 boxes stacked to the ceiling. By the time they found the marriage certificate and send it to Hong Kong, Kathleen's tourist visa would have long expired. The immigration officer indicated that Kathleen might not be granted visa renewal and she would have to leave Hong Kong. We knew that once she returned to Toronto, it would be another uphill battle for her to return to Hong Kong. Also, the training had already started and she would miss the

training sessions during her absence. Out of desperation, we showed the immigration officer our wedding photo as proof that we were indeed married, but that didn't resolve the issue.

While we felt helpless and didn't know what to do but cry out to God for deliverance, I suddenly saw a person walking by at the end of the corridor. From a glimpse of his profile, he looked like Kathleen's half-brother. I immediately told Kathleen about him. We speedily ran to the end of the corridor and looked around. We saw the men's washroom on one side of the corridor and presumably the half-brother or his look-alike had gone into the restroom. Minutes later, he came out, and indeed he was Kathleen's half-brother. He was surprised to see us too. Actually, he was also an immigration officer at the Mong Kok branch. He wondered why we were there.

When we met Kathleen's half-family in the restaurant, we heard that her half-brothers and sister were working in the Immigration Department. We did not ask which branch they worked in, because it never occurred to us that we would need to seek their help. His presence was like the presence of an angel sent by God. What better proof could there be of Kathleen's identity since she was his half-sister and shared the same surname. Glowing with hope, we told him about our problem and asked him for help. He agreed to testify on our behalf, and asked us to go back to the immigration officer's counter while he visits his colleague in the office to resolve the problem. In the end, as a matter of procedure, we were told to take an affidavit as proof of our marriage and of the change of Kathleen's surname. The matter was resolved

and Kathleen was granted her HKID card. Once again we could see God's outstretched arm, this time removing the obstacle that could have barred Kathleen from staying in Hong Kong for the Full Time Training. Our God is indeed the living God, our Rock and Refuge.

Team life, team love

Our Full Time Training Team consisted of brothers and sisters from different backgrounds and cultures. Some of us came from Canada. Others were from Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and Australia. Some of us had been in the work force for many years, others were fresh university graduates who had the zeal to serve the Lord. At the beginning of the training, our mentor Rev. Chang admonished us to practice what we preach. The main essence of the Bible is to uphold the two great commandments:

1. Love our God with all our heart, all our mind, and all our soul.
2. Love our neighbor as ourselves.

Rev. Chang admonished us to serve God wholeheartedly since we have all joined the full-time training. If we could not even love one another as teammates, how could we teach the congregation to practice loving one another? In other words, if we fail to love our teammates and to live in unity and harmony with one another, we would have failed the Full Time Training. We would be disqualified in serving God. This warning was imprinted in our hearts as

we embarked on the training. We were divided into households. And because of our different backgrounds and cultures, we had to learn to live harmoniously in communal living. The Bible reminds us:

Proverbs 17:3 The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, But the LORD tests hearts.

Proverbs 25:4 Take away the dross from the silver, and there comes out a vessel for the smith;

Isaiah 1:25 I will also turn My hand against you, and will smelt away your dross as with lye and will remove all your alloy.

We were jumping into a melting pot to be refined into pure gold. God was purging any dross of wickedness and selfishness in our lives. Needless to say, although every one of us meant well in practicing loving one another, it was never easy to live in a harmonious way. For example, Kathleen and I used to live alone in a big house, but we had to share a two-bedroom unit with another couple. We had been in the workforce for many years, yet we had to learn to listen to teammates who had no working experience at all. Differences in background, education level, culture, age, and life experience contributed to different approaches to doing things. There were different opinions and occasionally tense moments in discussions, but at the end of the day, it was all resolved by the grace of God. The time spent in team life was most memorable and rewarding. Whenever I recall those days during the

Training, they would linger on with bittersweet moments which I heartily embraced and cherished. By the grace and lovingkindness of God, we succeeded in loving our teammates despite differences in background and culture. It was a stepping stone for us to proclaim and practice loving God and loving one another, with deep conviction of heart as we began to serve God in the church.

Launching our first mission

To complete our full-time training, we separated into small groups to venture out into the mission field: China. Just the thought of exploring this vast and uncharted territory thrilled us, for many of us had never been to China. Yet at the same time, we were approaching this mission with fear and unease. We teamed up with another coworker and started surveying where we would go for our mission. After much consideration and prayer, we marked our destination and launched our mission right at the time of the Qing Ming Festival. Little did we know that multitudes would be travelling inland during the festival.

We took the train to Lo Wu station to cross the border. When we boarded the train there were not many people. But as it moved from one station to the next, people carrying similar tricolor (blue-red-white) canvas bags started to flock onto the train. By the time we reached the terminus at Lo Wo station, the people were packed like sardines. When the train finally stopped and the doors opened, people just dashed out and rushed to the exit in order to be the first in line to go through customs. We were among the first

to board the train but ended up being the last to exit. As we strolled along with our luggage, we saw in front of us a Western couple with two kids. People pushed and shoved their way past them carrying heavy canvas bags either at their sides or on their shoulders. The kids were stunned at the rushing traffic. They froze and cried. Their parents who were walking right behind them quickly came to their rescue. The kids held tight to their parents crying and screaming hysterically. But nobody took notice and people just continued to speed along. By the time we reached them, the kids were settled and they continued to move on. We were saddened to witness such an unfortunate incident. People did not care about the others but only themselves. At first I was annoyed with these people, but suddenly I was reminded that these were exactly the people who need God. It made our mission even more focused: We were to proclaim the Good News to “the lost”.

Crossing the border

There was a long lineup at the customs counter. We waited for about two hours and finally crossed the border and stepped into Shenzhen, China. We planned to go to two destinations. We took the train from Shenzhen to our first destination, where we exited the train station and tried to cross the street. Being law-abiding citizens, we waited at the crosswalk for the traffic lights to turn green before we crossed. When the lights turned green, as we took our first step to cross the street, lo and behold, we were

intercepted by droves of cyclists passing by non-stop even though we had the right of way. We tried a second time and failed to cross the road again. Finally, we gave up and decided to go with the flow, that is, follow the locals. When they moved, we moved; when they stopped, we stopped. We quickly learned our first lesson: To cast away our legalistic ways and learn flexibility in adapting to the Chinese culture.

Searching for the household church

We spent a few days at our first destination visiting people who were introduced to us by our friends. We shared our testimonies and some of them responded well. Before heading to our next destination, we were thinking of visiting a household church. But we did not know exactly where the place was. Before exploring the area, we committed the matter to God in prayer. As we strolled along the crowded streets trying to experience the leading of God's Spirit, suddenly we saw someone carrying a book that looked like a Bible, hastily passing us. We quickly followed him and indeed he led us to a household church. We were so happy to know that God had led us to the right place. Little did we realize that more grace and the wonderful leading of the Holy Spirit were in store for us.

Mysterious lead to our next destination

After the church meeting, we were introduced to the leader of the household church who welcomed us warmly. While he was sharing enthusiastically about God's wonderful grace working in his years of ministry, suddenly Kathleen overheard someone talking with another person about the place where we would be going to as our next destination. She immediately turned around and joined their conversation. A sister told Kathleen that she had traveled a long way from that place and arrived here just in time for the meeting. After the meeting, she would have to rush to take another long train ride back to her hometown. She hoped to make use of this window of opportunity to convey to the church leader the needs of the household churches there. Kathleen immediately signaled us, and we promptly joined in the conversation. We introduced ourselves to the sister and told her that we were planning to visit that place. Since we had no contact there, we asked if she could provide information for visiting the household churches. First she was taken by surprise and expressed seeming disbelief, then she beamed with joy and praised God that her effort in coming to this meeting place was not in vain. She was so happy to know that we were missionaries and were heading to the same place. She declared with tears of joy that the fervent prayers of the brothers and sisters had been answered. They were hungry for the word of God, and had asked the sister to appeal to the household church leader to send able teachers of the word of God. At great inconvenience to herself, she made a stopover to convey this message on behalf of the churches before heading home. Now she

sensed that God had led her to meet with us. We too were overwhelmed by God's leading. We were to visit that place the next day even though we had no contacts, but this sister appeared out of nowhere and stood right behind us talking about the very place we were going to visit. What perfect timing! How mysterious is the work of God! Indeed our God cares for all who hunger for His word; so we were privileged to be sent out to bring relief to these hungry souls.

Heading to the next destination

Before we went for our mission trip, we had already planned to visit a couple of destinations. The first destination was a city we had already marked out to visit. The second destination was a province we wanted to explore. We did not know exactly which cities we would visit in that province. In any case, we just chose one city as a starting point to land in, after we have been to our first destination. And now, after meeting with the sister, we knew exactly which city we should aim for in our mission. But it was actually quite a distance from the city we had planned to visit.

Help from the unexpected

The next day we flew to the city of the target province to begin our next expedition. When we waited in the baggage claim area, we soon realized that we were the only ones waiting for the check-in luggage. All the other passengers had long gone. My coworker

went out to see if there was any transportation to the city center. He came back and told us that the bus to the city center had just left, and he didn't see any taxis waiting around either. Just as we got our luggage, wondering how we were to go to the city center, a young man came towards us and asked us which flight we took. When we told him the flight number, he mumbled something and said he had just missed picking up his friend. Then he asked if we were from Hong Kong because he perceived from our accent and our appearance that we were not locals. We said we were from Hong Kong and then he told us he was also from Hong Kong. What a relief! Now we could talk in Cantonese instead. He asked us where we would be going and what was the purpose of our coming to this place. Our original plan was to stay in this city for a tour before heading to the city where the household church was. But we did not disclose our plan and just told him that we were tourists planning to do some sightseeing in the city for a day and then move on to another city (for our mission).

He told us there was nothing much to see in this city but there was plenty of action in the other city we mentioned. Knowing that we had only a few days to "tour," he suggested an alternative which made more practical sense to us: skip all sightseeing in this city and go straight to our destination. But it would take over 10 hours to travel directly from the city center to our designated city. So he suggested that we make a stopover in a city and stay overnight. That city was known as a tourist attraction and we could take a tour around that area before departing for our final destination. We welcomed his suggestion but were puzzled as how to get

to the city center. To our surprise, he offered to drive us to the city center bus depot, and told us which intercity bus we should take to get to our next destination. How could we refuse such a kind offer? Again we saw God's grace in leading us to know this person. He promptly escorted us to his new air-conditioned car and drove us to the city center bus depot. It was a bit confusing at the bus depot because there were many counters and people did not line up. But our new friend led us to the correct counter before bidding us goodbye. We managed to get our bus tickets and were on our way to an exciting expedition.

Making a stopover

The bus took off in early afternoon but was soon caught in a heavy traffic jam. It crawled its way for over two hours before it finally got out of the city traffic and entered the intercity road. After sunset, the road was pitch dark and we did not know what was in store for us. It was almost 11:00 pm when the driver shouted to us that we had reached our destination. We were dropped off in a remote area. The place was surrounded by shoulder-high grass with not even a house in sight except for a dim lamp post. We wondered where we were going to lay our heads. It reminded us of the Lord Jesus' experience, "*The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.*" (Mt.8:20).

Suddenly we heard the sound of a motorcycle approaching. Out of nowhere, a motorbike emerged from the shoulder-high

grass field and stopped right in front of us. The driver said he would take us to the accommodation. We had no choice but to take the risk of accepting his offer. Our coworker hopped onto the motorcycle first and immediately it sped off vanishing in the thick grass field. Our coworker was the treasurer and he held all the money. We had no money in our pockets except for some spare change. But what if he was taken to another place and parted ways with us? Back then, there were no ATMs and no bankcards to withdraw cash from a machine. When we realized that, it sent chills down our spine. But we simply committed our anxieties to our loving Father who never ceases to watch over us.

Minutes later, another motorcycle came right in front of us. The cyclist bid us to ride with him. There was an extended rack at the end of the biker's seat which was for carrying luggage but could also be used as a passenger seat. We wondered how the bike could fit three people with both of us carrying knapsacks on our backs. I certainly did not want Kathleen to ride alone with him. The cyclist assured us that the bike could seat all of us. I helped Kathleen get onto the bike, and she occupied half the extended "seat". With her knapsack on her back, it did not leave much room for me to sit. The cyclist had to move forward to the tip of his seat to allow more room for us at the back. After a few attempts, I finally managed to sit at the edge of the extended rack with my hands gripping the rack for support. When the bike accelerated, the sudden jerk pulled me backward, and the weight of my knapsack almost dragged me off balance and off the bike. I immediately yelled to the biker to slow down. He did and then we

entered the dark shoulder-high grass field. I exerted all my energy in my arms and legs to maintain balance and not to let myself be thrown out of the bike. A few minutes felt like eternity. Suddenly the surroundings brightened up and we entered a resort area. When the bike finally stopped and we got off, my legs were shaking due to sheer exhaustion and I could hardly stand straight. But it brought us much joy and relief when we saw our dear coworker walking over to greet us. Our loving Father protected us once again and settled us in a nice resort at a bargain price. The two riders were nice people and they offered to come with one more biker to take us for sightseeing the next morning. After we checked into our room, we prayed together, giving thanks to God for His lovingkindness and protection.

Evangelizing the riders

We had a very good night's rest. We said our morning prayers, committing the day's event to our Heavenly Father's hand. Then we checked out. The two bikers with their friend were already waiting for us. They offered to take us on a tour of the surrounding scenic sites at a very attractive price. We felt that it was a once-in-a-lifetime adventurous experience by bike, and took their offer. We enjoyed the scenic sites and at the same time we shared the word of God with our respective bikers. Despite our poor proficiency in Putonghua, we communicated well with one another. They were open to the word of God. We soon became friends and they even invited us to visit their families.

After the tour, they drove us to the bus depot. We bid them farewell while we waited for the bus. But they did not leave. They told us to look yonder where there were people standing beside their cars. These were tour guides. Our biker friends told us that these people would approach us and offer to drive us to our destination. They wanted to make sure that we would not accept these offers, for the place was not as safe as it looked. Many tourists took a tour with them and ended up being robbed. Some of the tour guides would drive them to a remote place, threatened to leave them there unless they paid more money for the tour. It was highway robbery! That was why our friends accompanied us to make sure that we got onto the bus. We deeply appreciated their kindness. They were like angels sent by God to protect us from evil ones. After waiting for about an hour, the bus finally arrived. We got on the bus and they waved goodbye as we departed. Although they faded out of sight, their faces still lingered on in our minds. We hope that we had sown the seed in their hearts and we pray that God will cause it grow in due time.

Arriving at our destination

It was another five hours by the time the bus arrived at our destination. It was late evening past 11:00 pm, and we tried to walk to the nearest motel for accommodation. We soon found out that the cheaper motels were strictly for locals. Foreigners were not accepted. We looked around and saw a more elegant building at the end of the street. By the time we reached there and took a

closer look, it looked too grand for us even to step in. However there were no other motels near by and we were too tired to explore further. We took a leap of faith and entered the hotel. We reached the counter and asked the staff for the room rate. He told us RMB160. We blurted out in unison, “That’s too expensive!” It was indeed pricey when in those days the average local accommodation was about RMB20. The hotel staff inquired where we were from. We told him that we were from Hong Kong. He looked puzzled and told us frankly that tourists from Hong Kong never complained about the hotel rates. He asked us about our professions. We told him that we were teachers. He continued to pursue the matter, and asked what we taught. We just told him that we taught literature including the Bible. Suddenly he stooped down at the counter and pulled out a book. Then he asked, “Are you teaching this?” It was an English Bible! We were excited and asked whether he was a Christian. He quickly said no, but told us that a Western tourist had given it to him as a gift but he did not know enough English to read it. We told him that we can help him in learning English and reading the Bible. We were thinking of referring him to our coworkers for future follow-up.

A seeking soul awaiting

Anyway, it was already past midnight and we were too tired to look for accommodation elsewhere. While we huddled to discuss what we should do, suddenly he interrupted and offered us a huge discount of 70% for a room of three. It was so unbelievable that we

were speechless. We accepted the offer and paid the discounted rate. He also asked us what we would like to do in the city and how long we would stay. We told him we would like to spend a few days here doing some sightseeing as well as visit a friend. In fact, he told us that, coincidentally, he had the next two days off. So he offered to take us around the city. He also wondered if he could discuss the Bible with us. We were amazed at how God had led us to him. God's way is indeed the best way. We got a tour guide free of charge and at the same time, we had the opportunity to share our testimonies with him. We were delighted to accept his offer, but we were also concerned that he might not get enough sleep since he had to work overnight until morning. He reassured us that he could get some sleep during the night shift as there was hardly any late arrivals to the hotel. So we agreed to meet the next morning at 11:00 am when we checked out of the hotel. It was another unusual experience, and we prayed with a thankful heart for God's leading. We were so touched by His wonderful grace. Indeed, He cares about every minute detail of our needs.

It was already past midnight when we went to bed. It was an air-conditioned room and it felt so comfortable inside. Perhaps after a long journey and all the excitement, we quickly knocked out until the morning. Kathleen and our coworker woke up much refreshed. Unfortunately, I felt like I had caught a cold overnight because of the air conditioning, but that did not deter us from meeting with our new friend and launching out on our mission for the day.

Mission with pleasure

When we checked out, another staff had already taken over. We saw our friend waiting in the lobby. Perhaps he didn't want his colleague to know that we were acquainted, so he just nodded and walked outside the hotel. We met him there and he directed us to much cheaper accommodation before we headed out for sight-seeing.

It was a wonderful day indeed. We thoroughly enjoyed the tourist sites, and he seemed happy with our answers to his questions about God and the Bible. Then he invited us to his home and we met his mother. She was a kind woman who treated us to a sumptuous dinner with local authentic food. Our friend told us that on the following day, he could take us for a morning tour, and asked where we would like to go after that. We told him that we would like to visit our friend (the household church leader). After getting the address, he said he would check the route to the place. When we called it a day, he accompanied us to look for transportation back to our accommodation. There were no taxis around. He hailed a three-wheel motor vehicle to stop. We did not know that it was some kind of cab. He bargained in the local dialect with the driver to take us back to our accommodation. After he was satisfied, he asked us to get onto the vehicle and soon we were home safely.

Surprise: An old acquaintance

The next morning he came to pick us up and we spent the morning on another sightseeing tour. While we were having lunch, he asked if we wanted to go for more sightseeing. We told him that we would like to visit our friend. “So you want to visit the household church!” he said. We were lost for words. Actually, it was his mother who told him about the church, for the whole neighborhood knew that this was the location of a household church, that is, a gathering of Christians in a home environment. We had to admit to him that someone had referred us to the place.

Right after lunch, we headed to the household church. When we reached the entrance, we courteously invited him to join us. He hesitated but eventually accompanied us to the place. There to greet us was a young man, to whom we introduced ourselves. When he greeted our friend, they held hands and fixed their eyes on one another. Suddenly the young man said, “Are you so-and-so?” Our friend replied, “Yes, so you are ...!” Then they turned to us and said they knew each other because they were high school colleagues. What a small world! They embraced each other, and the young man escorted us to meet his mother, the household church leader. She greeted us warmly and we had a wonderful fellowship. She told us that there was only a small group in the evening for the prayer meeting, but she could arrange for us to go to a remote village where there was a need for the word of God. Since it would take 5 to 6 hours of travelling, we had to meet at her place at 6:00 am in the morning. We were excited to go, and requested the household leader to make the arrangement. She was

so hospitable. She wanted to keep us for an early dinner so that we could go back home to prepare for our mission tomorrow. But our friend had to leave because he had to run errands for his mother before going back to work the next day. But when he bid us good-bye, he was very worried, and advised us not to go to that remote village. He said there were lots of highway robberies, and sometimes the bandits would turn violent and kill their victims. We reassured him that we trusted in our Father who is our refuge and hiding place. And we would go to see him at the hotel once we returned from our mission.

Jehovah Jireh (God Provides)

We got back to our lodging place and packed our bags for the mission. We had a prayer together to seek God's guidance and protection. Suddenly we heard someone knocking on our door. It was already past 9:00 pm. When we opened the door it was our friend standing there. We wondered why he came so late because he had to work the next day. He told us that he was just too worried about us going to such dangerous territory. All the locals knew that the road was treacherous and unsafe. Once again, he pleaded with us not to go. We were so touched by his concern for us. But again we reassured him that God keeps us as the apple of His eye and hides us under the shelter of His wings. We invited him to pray with us. After that, he requested a Chinese Bible. I was more than willing to offer him mine, and he held it dearly, thanking us. It was already close to 11:00 pm when he departed.

We asked him how he would get back home. He said it was too late to catch any transportation. It would take him about 45 minutes to walk back home but he had already prepared to do that. We were lost for words when we heard that he had to walk back home so late at night. We told him that perhaps God would provide transportation for him. He gave a faint smile. As we accompanied him to the major road, right at that moment a three-wheeler was approaching us. We waved at it, and our friend asked the driver if he could get a ride back home. Sure enough, the driver said he was about to finish his work and was on his way home, which was in the same direction as our friend's home. We watched in amazement as our friend got on the transport. He smiled and nodded his head as if to acknowledge that God had provided the transportation for him. Indeed "Jehovah Jireh" (God provides)!

A farm church

We got up early, and by 6:00 am we caught a transport to the household church. The leader invited us for breakfast. She told us that she had tried many times to contact the remote village's leader but could not get through. Finally she abandoned the idea and changed the destination to another meeting place which was closer. She will take us to the place with another sister who could speak Cantonese. After more fellowship time, we got onto a delivery truck and were on our way to the meeting place. There was a bench seat on each side of the truck and we sat opposite one

another. As soon as we left the city and entered a country road, it was bumpy all the way and we had to hold on to the wooden sideboard to avoid being thrown out of the truck. But it was an enjoyable ride because we could see beautiful scenic views of field after field of vegetable crops. It took over two hours to arrive at our destination. It was a vast field. We were greeted warmly by the farmer and his family and friends.

First message in a household church

Some of the sisters there were preparing lunch while the others were getting acquainted with us. It was a hot day. We entered a hut and sat in a circle for lunch. After lunch, the household leader introduced us again to the group. She said that some of the brothers and sisters were from other fields. They got a short notice of guest speakers coming for a visit. So they stopped their work and came over for the special meeting. We could see their desire for the word of God. Then the household church leader asked us to share. We were taken aback because it was our first mission trip and we thought we would listen to other people's sharing instead of them listening to our sharing. There was a courteous exchange between me and my coworker as to who would share. But eventually the puck stopped at me. I tried to excuse myself because I could not speak Putonghua fluently, but the sister who accompanied us immediately volunteered to translate for me. Now I realized why she was invited to join us in the first place; she was to be our translator. I committed the time into God's hand and it was

one of my most earnest prayers, pleading to God for a message that would edify the group. After the prayer, I received a message from God, and I shared for about an hour, translation included. The group sat still as if waiting for more. Then the household leader gave thanks for my sharing and started her sharing. It was another hour and a half. We were not used to sitting on stools with no back support. In the heat of the day, it was extremely difficult to concentrate. We wobbled on our seats and sometimes stretched our drooping backs. Yet we noticed that the brothers and sisters around us remained attentive and none moved even an inch. They really impressed us with their hunger and thirst for the word of God. It brought us to shame. After the household leader's sharing, we bid farewell to the group and everyone went back to their own places.

Farewell gift from the poor

By the time we got back to the household church leader's place, it was already 6:30 pm. We thanked her for granting us such a wonderful experience, and we left with our spirits uplifted. We immediately went over to the hotel to see our friend. He had just finished work and was about to leave. He was so thrilled to see us and we told him of our experience. We also told him that we would be catching the midnight bus back to the first city of the province. He led us to the bus depot and there he gave us an envelope. He said it was a gesture of his appreciation in knowing us. While he accompanied our coworker to a grocery store, we

opened the envelope. Apart from a letter full of kind and affectionate words, acknowledging that God had sent us like angels to open his eyes, lo and behold, it also contained RMB200. The letter explained that it was for our bus fare. We almost burst into tears when we received the money, being so touched by his genuine friendship. Back then, the average monthly salary for a hotel clerk was less than RMB400. He gave us half his salary. It was such a sacrificial offering. How could we, who were from affluent Hong Kong, receive money from a local who was not making much? Thank God that we had opened the envelope ahead of time, otherwise we would for the rest of our lives certainly regret receiving his money. When our coworker and the young man returned, we told him that we had opened the envelope and we deeply appreciate his lovingkindness, but we just could not accept his money. At first he refused to take it back. But after we pushed the money back and forth, and after we gave him further explanation, he finally took the money back. Before we boarded the bus, we embraced him and assured him that we would pray for him and would keep in touch with him.

We arrived in the city early in the morning. We planned to spend the day touring the city. Then the next morning, we took a ferry back to our first destination. We bought our ferry tickets and had a relaxing time recounting all the exciting moments since we embarked on our mission from Hong Kong.

Trouble at sea

Early next morning, we made our way to the dock to catch the ferry. The ferry departed at 8:00 am for a 12-hour ride. We booked our tickets for the 4th level of the ferry which was right at sea level. We got acquainted with a couple from Shanghai who were sitting next to our bunk bed. After a couple of hours, my coworker felt the stuffiness of the room, so he went up to the deck to catch some fresh air. Kathleen and I were sitting side by side while having a friendly chat with the couple. I was leaning my head on a steel bar right under the upper bunk bed.

Suddenly without warning, there was a violent jerk. The force was so severe that both of us were propelled forward from the bunk bed. The sudden impact also caused the steel bar (that I was leaning on) to protrude and hit the Shanghai man. That caused a cut on his thigh with blood gushing out. When we looked at our bunk's back, the steel frame of the top bunk bed collapsed into a V-shape right at the position where Kathleen was originally sitting. We thanked God for His deliverance. It was that force which propelled us from the bed that actually saved Kathleen from being hit by the collapsed frame. There was so much commotion and confusion that everybody at our level started to grab a life jacket and dash out of his or her cabin. The Shanghai couple also ran for life and we were left alone in the cabin.

We peeked out the window and were horrified to see that the front hull of another ship, a cargo ship, had rammed into the side of our ferry. Looking from a distance, it seemed that the tip of the cargo ship that pierced our ferry was only meters away from our

bunk bed, causing the complete collapse of the upper bunk steel frame. We did not know how to swim and if the ferry had capsized, we would surely drown. But somehow we maintained peace and I even took a photo of the collapsed bunk bed with Kathleen pointing at the V-shape steel frame. That was in case we perished and our bodies couldn't be found; at least if they could fish out our camera and develop the film, they might be able to identify us at a postmortem examination.

While we were wondering what had happened to our coworker, he ran into the cabin, and was shocked to see the collapsed bunk bed. When he saw that we were not hurt, he shook his head in disbelief and praised God for His protection. Then he told us what happened: When he reached the deck, it was very foggy. He stretched himself and caught a deep breath of fresh air. All of a sudden, there was a great commotion and people were yelling and rushing towards him. Some of them were pointing in the direction to his left. Before he could react, he became scared when he saw a cargo ship protruding out of the fog and heading perpendicularly towards our ferry. He immediately turned around and ran for life. Within a few seconds, the cargo ship smashed into the side of our ferry right behind him. The impact almost threw him off the ferry. In the nick of time, he grabbed the guard rail, maintained his balance, and made his way back to the cabin to see how we were doing.

Divine intervention

After he told us his side of the story, we knew it was a miracle that we survived the collision unscathed. The reason was that the cargo ship crashed right at the position between us and our coworker. We were both only meters away from the impact. Both ships were moving, and any slight change in the speed of either ship could have killed either us or our coworker. When we realized how crucial our positions were that kept us unscathed, we were deeply touched by our Father's deliverance from the jaws of death. We bowed our head in prayer with heartfelt thanks to our Almighty God who had shown mercy and grace to His unworthy servants. Then we packed our belongings and went over to where all the passengers gathered. There were hundreds of passengers packed in the lounge waiting for an announcement about the collision. But there was no announcement.

Tempers flared

Both ships were at a standstill in the open sea. We overheard that there were two fatalities from the collision. One victim suffered a heart attack and died. The other was running for his life behind our coworker. Unfortunately he bore the brunt of the impact and was killed instantly. Everybody was waiting nervously as to what would happen next. Will the ferry capsize? Is there any rescue plan? Initially the atmosphere was rather subdued and quiet. The silence could probably be attributed to our Chinese virtue of accepting ill circumstances with endurance and surrender. Although

there were hush-hush complaints, nobody protested aloud. But as time ticked on and we had waited for an hour, more and more people got agitated and grumbled because there was still no response from the ship crew. Soon the anger spread like wildfire. The atmosphere turned rowdy and nasty. People started to shout and demand a response from the ship crew. We looked around and saw the Shanghai couple. They waved to us to come over to their seat. They cleared some space for us to put our luggage. Somehow they observed that we were so calm and peaceful. We took the opportunity to share that we were in God's hand and He will deliver us to safety. They immediately responded and urged that we pray also for their safety. When the commotion had reached its peak without any formal announcement, the word spread that the collision had caused irreparable damage to our ferry. It was incapacitated but there was another ferry coming to our rescue. At least the news calmed the crowd for a while.

New acquaintance

While we were sitting with the Shanghai couple, we overheard someone speaking Cantonese. We turned around and joined their conversation. It was a group of six people from Guangzhou. We soon became friends. One of them was a medical doctor, and he was called upon to examine the two dead persons. He confirmed that one had died of a heart attack and the other was killed instantly at the deck while trying to flee from the direct hit. Our coworker quivered because he too could have died if he was a split

second late in escaping. He believed that the one who ran right behind him might have been the dead victim.

Rescue arrived

After a few hours of waiting, suddenly there was a great commotion and the people picked up their luggage and ran off. Soon we found out that another ferry was approaching us. It made some maneuvers and then parked by our side. No sooner had it stopped than ladders were mounted between the two ferries, and people were pushing their way to board the other ferry. After everyone was on board, instead of going to our intended destination, the ferry steered back to our original depot. We received word that this ferry was not equipped to sail long distance, and was called upon only for this rescue mission.

In any case, we arrived back at our original depot in two hours, and everybody rushed off to get their refund. It was hopeless for us to queue up because the people didn't queue up. They all flocked around the only counter to get their refund. The Shanghai couple had already disappeared with the crowd after waving goodbye to us. But our newly acquainted friend, the medical doctor, was very kind to us. He told us frankly that we would not be able to compete with the locals for the refund. So he asked us for the ferry tickets. Then he and his friends jammed in to get the refund for all of us. Unfortunately, the counter ran out of cash and we were told to go to the main office at the city center to claim our refund. We hurriedly took the shuttle bus courtesy of the ferry

company to go to the city center. Again our friends helped us to get our money back.

We now had two choices: either stay for another night and then take the ferry the next day, or rush to get on the last cargo ship to the nearest port and then take the city-to-city bus to our destination. As did most of the passengers, we opted for the latter. It was close to 7:00 pm and time was running out. We had to rush to the dock hoping to catch the last cargo ship, taking whatever transport was available.

Cargo ship's mechanical problem: A blessing in disguise

When we arrived at the dock, the cargo ship was still there. We ran as fast as we could and leaped onto it. Immediately the cargo ship set sail. We were literally the last group to make it. There we saw many familiar faces, the same passengers as on the collided ferry. Some of them were the early birds who got their refund right at the counter and immediately made their way to catch the cargo ship which was supposed to leave at 6:00 pm. But they ended up waiting for almost three hours by the time we arrived. That was because there were some mechanical problems which were only fixed just before we arrived. While the early birds were grumbling about the delay, we quietly gave thanks to God for letting us make it to the cargo ship. We marveled at God's way. Time and time again, when we were in deep trouble, God never

abandoned us and would always deliver us in an unexpected way. Actually, there were more exciting adventures awaiting us ...

Land route

When the ferry arrived at our destination, it was almost midnight. As we disembarked, the doctor invited us to join his group. Altogether we had nine people in the group. While some of us were waiting, the doctor and another person went to inquire about which bus to take to get to our destination. We finally boarded a bus that would drop us somewhere to transit to another bus. We felt at least we were progressing towards our destination. We were so exhausted after the day's ordeal that many of us just dozed off despite the bumpy road conditions. Suddenly the bus stopped and the driver told us to get off. It was actually a wakeup call. When we got out of the bus, it was about 2:00 am. After the bus left, we heard the sound of roaring engines and then we saw a gang of bikers coming towards us. Our doctor friend immediately asked the three of us to stay in the inner circle while the rest of the group encircled us. The bikers also surrounded us and some of them got off their bikes, approached us, and tried to get our luggage. Our doctor friend immediately halted their actions and asked why they wanted to seize our luggage. They said they would take us to the motel for lodging. The doctor told them that we would not go anywhere but would wait for the bus. The bikers said there were no buses at this time of the night, and continued to hang around watching us.

All or nil

There was a shack nearby and the doctor went there to inquire. It was a convenience store where we could get some noodles. We hadn't had meals the whole day, and it was a God-sent to be able to have something to fill our stomachs. Soon after we finished our noodles, a bus approached us. The doctor immediately ran out to stop the bus. It was actually heading to our destination. But the driver told him that the bus was overloaded. At best he could take five or six passengers. But the doctor told him to take all of us or none of us. After some shuffling and juggling among the passengers inside, all nine of us got on board. We were not sitting on any seat at all, but were actually sitting on other passengers' luggage and bags. As the bus took off for our destination, the bikers waved goodbye and zoomed off. In our quiet moments, we thanked our Father for His safekeeping. He is indeed the Rock of our salvation. He had been with us all this while and had kept us under the shadow of His wings. We sank into a deep sleep as the bus wobbled along on the uneven bumpy roads.

At long last we made it back

We got on the bus at 3:00 am in the morning and arrived in the city at 5:00 pm. The long bus ride was not without its moments of letdown. The bus was like an antique vehicle by Hong Kong standards. In fact it stalled twice. The road was hilly with ups and downs. When it went downhill, it gained enough momentum at full speed to climb uphill on the next slope. It would crawl all the

way to the peak of the slope before it sped downhill again. But at one of the uphill slopes, it came to a halt and could not make it all the way up to the top. All the passengers had to get off the bus. The driver had to crank the engine at the front many times before it could restart.

But we finally made it to the city. The bus was supposed to stop at the West Station; instead it ended its journey at the East Station without advance notice. We bid farewell to our doctor friend and his company, thanking them with deep appreciation for their help. We did not exchange phone numbers because we did not have our own private line in Hong Kong. Our phone number belonged to the church. They did not have a private phone number either. In those days, mobile phones weren't so common. We just had to remember them dearly in our prayers. After they left, we asked the bus driver how to get to the West Station because we lived on the west side of the city. He pointed in a certain direction and told us it was only a short walking distance. We marched onwards carrying our heavy knapsacks. By the time we reached our lodging place, we had walked 45 minutes. It took us a total of 36 hours from the very beginning to finally arrive at our accommodation. Although we were sore all over, we thanked God for granting us such a wonderful and uplifting spiritual experience. We had a good night's sleep and the next day we departed for Hong Kong with a renewed mind and spirit that empowered us to embark on our future ministry.

To the Land Down Under

Apart from studying the word of God in the Full Time Training, we also eventually participated in church service and ministry. There was a transition period during which we coworked with the more experienced coworkers. By the time we completed our training in mid-1990, we took full responsibility in serving the church as our more experienced coworkers were sent out to pioneer a new work in Hong Kong. This was the first time our team took full responsibility to minister in a church. We received this awesome ministry with fear and trembling. The church brethren welcomed us greenhorns and we established a deeper relationship with them. We grew together as the church began to expand. Meanwhile our church ministries had also expanded worldwide. A couple of our teammates were sent to Sydney, Australia, to pioneer a work there. After nine months, we were called upon to continue the pioneering work in Australia.

We had lived in Canada in the northern hemisphere for almost 20 years and now we were going further away from home, heading to the southern hemisphere. It never crossed our minds that someday we would end up serving in the land Down Under (a.k.a. Australia).

We joined the Full Time Training in January 1989, and we left Hong Kong for Sydney in June 1993. It was hard for us to say goodbye to the church brethren after knowing them for over four years. However, our time had come to leave, moving on to meet the needs elsewhere. We learned a lot in serving full time in the church. We witnessed the seed sown and God caused it to grow.

Whereas in Hong Kong we worked with our teammates in serving the church, and could discuss things with them, now we would be all by ourselves taking up the new work in Sydney. Now we needed to rely daily upon the leading of the Holy Spirit to take up this awesome but exciting new assignment.

June 1993: Philippines Expedition

Prison ministry in Hong Kong

While we were serving in Hong Kong, I was also involved in the prison ministry. Why did I venture into such a ministry? I was baptized as a Roman Catholic in my childhood but did not really know God. My brother, whom I looked up to, hung around with the triads. Every time I was in trouble, I knew that my brother and his triad friends would help me out, so I never backed off from any confrontation. As a teenager, I was admittedly a bit of a hothead with a fiery temper and was easily agitated. Although I had encountered life-threatening confrontations before, I managed to escape unscathed. And I took pride in telling that to my friends. In one of the confrontations, I was alone against a gang of young adults. I stood my ground fearlessly although I was totally outnumbered. The atmosphere was electrifying and life threatening. But somehow they slowly retracted one at a time.

Ever since I recommitted my life to God, whenever I recall that confrontation, I would be reminded that if it were not for God's grace and mercy, I might have been battered with serious injury or could have been killed. I might have ended up in prison because of that fight. That was why when I was invited to join the prison ministry, I felt obligated to get involved because I could have been one of the inmates if it were not for God's deliverance. I became more convinced that the prison ministry was of God's leading because when I had my first meeting with the prisoners, they were not as fierce looking as one might have imagined given the serious crimes that they had committed. They looked like ordinary people. Some had committed crimes simply out of outbursts of anger or passion. It could have happened to me in any of my past confrontations. As I left the prison after my first visit, I gave thanks to God for saving me from my wretched past and for leading me to the prison ministry.

At first I could only have one-on-one meetings with the prisoners while sharing the word of God. But as the demand grew, more and more prisoners were interested in the word of God. We applied for special permission to meet with the prisoners in small groups. God opened the door and I was granted authorization to conduct Bible studies in small groups. It was a wonderful experience for me because I could testify of God's power working among the prisoners, transforming their hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. Some were lifers but their sentences were reduced because of their exceptionally good behavior after committing their lives to God. They became role models to other prisoners,

thus attracting more inmates to seek the word of God. Some of the prisoners were Filipinos. Among them, some had committed crimes in the Philippines and fled to Hong Kong for refuge. However, they continued their criminal activities in Hong Kong and were arrested by the police. After serving their sentences in Hong Kong, they would be deported back to the Philippines to continue serving their sentences for the crimes they had committed in their own country. We were very much concerned about their spiritual well-being. But by the grace of God, our church was growing and our new work was spreading worldwide including the Philippines. Our coworkers there also got involved with the prison ministry and started to follow up on these inmates.

Stopover in Manila, the Philippines

When we were planning our flight to Australia, we wanted to stop over in Manila, the Philippines. It was our intention to visit the church brethren there as well as renew our fellowship with those inmates who had gone back to the Philippines. During our visit, we had unforgettable experiences.

The weather was hot and wet when we arrived there in June 1993. The day we arrived in Manila, our dear coworker picked us up at the airport and we took some kind of taxi called a “jeepney” to go to his home. The jeepney would stop and pick up passengers along the way. At times, it was so crowded that passengers were left dangling outside while gripping the car frame. The traffic was chaotic but we finally arrived at our destination.

The worst economic times in the Philippines

The other coworkers who were waiting at home welcomed us warmly, and immediately after we dropped off our luggage, we tried to catch up with one another regarding recent events. The weather was hot and muggy but we had the electric fans on. While we were all absorbed in our fellowship, suddenly there was a power blackout and we were left in the dark. It was alright without the lights because it was still in the afternoon, but without the electric fans, the heat became unbearable and we could hardly keep our eyes open. Our coworkers seemed unperturbed by the sudden power outage. They told us that it happened all the time.

It was actually the worst time for the people of the Philippines. The whole nation suffered from the aftermath of corruption in the previous government, and was crippled with a shortage of water and electricity. The water and electricity supplies were regulated to run at different time intervals, but sometimes either supply would be cut off without warning such as what we experienced that afternoon.

In any case, our coworkers suggested we take a nap instead. So we all retreated to our own rooms and tried to catch an afternoon nap. Although we were tired after the flight in the morning, it was hard for us to fall sound asleep because we were all so sweaty and uncomfortable. We silently praised our coworkers who had to endure this kind of power outage as part of their daily lives. Later when we got up and walked past one of our coworkers' rooms, we saw a coworker sitting by the window, totally absorbed in her reading. Without electricity and under intense heat, she simply sat

near the window in order to have enough light to prepare her work. We were amazed by her endurance. By the way, even washing our faces to refresh ourselves was deemed a luxury because of the lack of water. We had only a few large buckets to hold water for the day's use. With the addition of the two of us, we were rather strained in our water usage.

Prison visit

Unlike the prisons in Hong Kong which were surrounded by tight security, the prisons in Manila were dangerous to visit. But our coworkers took up the ministry to follow up on some of the prisoners who were deported from Hong Kong and continued to serve their sentences in the Philippines.

Our female coworkers were advised not to visit the male prison because of the lack of security measures in the prison. So our coworkers arranged a prison visit for me with two of our male coworkers. It was indeed an eye opener for me because it was clearly not the same as the prisons in Hong Kong. We met in an open area where the prisoners got together in separate groups. I was thrilled to renew fellowship with the prisoners I got acquainted with in Hong Kong. Actually, one of them was originally a gang leader with many followers. When he came back to the Philippines to continue his prison sentence, he met up with some of his followers in the prison. They still respected him as their leader. His conversion to Christianity actually drew some of them to join the Bible study which our coworkers conducted in the

prison. Because of that, the prison ministry was growing by the mercy and grace of God.

Wet and windy weather

When it rained in the Philippines during our visit, it was like pouring buckets of water that flooded the streets. For the locals who were used to the wind and rain, they would wear raincoats instead. We were not used to wearing or carrying raincoats because the weather was hot and muggy. We preferred to carry an umbrella. I remember one incident in which we were on our way to Sunday worship. One of the church brethren picked us and our coworkers up, and drove us to the meeting place. It was windy and pouring rain. We were only meters from the entrance when the driver stopped to let us off. We dashed to the entrance, but our umbrella was no contest against the strong wind and rain. It flipped out and we were totally soaked. We met one of the brethren who had already arrived. The heavy rain had paralyzed the city traffic and he had to walk a long way to the meeting place. With his raincoat on, he wasn't soaked by the rain, yet was still wet all over because of the perspiration. However he carried an extra shirt in his knapsack as a spare because he had experienced such situations before. When he saw us soaking wet, he kindly offered the extra shirt to our coworker who had to preach.

Again there was no electricity and the meeting place was hot and stuffy. It would be really hard to concentrate. But our coworker preached with intensity. We could see the sweat on his

face, and his borrowed shirt was soaked with sweat. Yet the power of his message awoke our spirits, and despite the heavy stormy weather we thanked God for a blessed day.

Farewell, Philippines

The time of our stay in the Philippines was short, but it left us with much encouragement from God. We learned much from our dear coworkers in their relentless labor of love and tenacity in serving there, despite the fact that their living conditions often lacked the most basic needs of electricity and water. They remained joyful in serving and we were touched by their lives. We were also grateful for the work that was being done in the inmates' lives. We sowed the seed in Hong Kong but God caused it to germinate in their hearts. We witnessed their lives being transformed even though they were still serving their prison sentences in the Philippines.

June 1993 to June 2004: Sydney, Australia

The Land Down Under: Another world

After a short stay in the Philippines, we set off for Australia. Around that time, our sister church in Melbourne was hosting a church camp, and they welcomed the Sydney group to join them. Our coworkers from Sydney and some of the core members joined the camp. So instead of flying straight to Sydney, we flew from Manila to Melbourne to join the camp.

Once we landed in Melbourne, we immediately realized that we had entered a different world. Prior to our arrival in Australia, we had always thought that summer begins in June. While in the Philippines, we experienced hot and humid summery weather. But once we got off the plane, we immediately felt the contrast in temperature because it was winter in Australia. Our Melbourne coworker picked us up and I felt that we were driving on the wrong side of the road. Again it was because the driving direction was opposite to what we were accustomed to in North America. Somehow we sensed that God was leading us to start everything

anew. Taking up the work in Sydney would be a life challenge that involved a new mentality and new ideas. It would be a good training ground for us to be led by God's Spirit and we were excited to accept the challenge.

The next day, we were whisked off to the camp site. It was even colder there. So it was kind of funny to experience winter in Down Under. Although it did not reach subzero temperatures, it was enough to make us shiver even with all our warm clothes on. But the reception at the camp warmed our hearts. We were introduced to the Sydney group core members. Actually we had already made acquaintance with a few of them while in Hong Kong and Canada. They went to Sydney to further their studies and later became migrants in Australia. So we looked forward to take over the Sydney work from our coworkers.

After the camp, we set off for Sydney by car. Our coworkers asked me to drive in order to get used to the roads. It felt weird with the steering on the right side of the car. Thank God there wasn't much traffic on the road. I made a couple of wrong turns, and almost ran into the oncoming traffic, scaring my passengers. In the end, I was able to find my sense of direction in driving the Australian way and arrived in Sydney safe and sound.

From short term mission to long term commitment

The Sydney group was very small and we had already met the main core members in the camp, so our coworkers spent only a few more days in Sydney with us before heading back to Hong

Kong for their new assignment. There were four Christians in the group and the rest were mainly family members and a few students. In Hong Kong, we used to serve in a bigger church with over 100 people. Even our Bible study group exceeded 20. Here in Sydney, I would be thrilled if we had about 20 in attendance including the occasional drop-ins. Sometimes it would dwindle to just 7 in attendance. We prayed to God to grant us patience and strength not to lose heart in building the work in Sydney. It was a humbling experience and a real challenge for me to share the word of God faithfully week in and week out whether we had a few or many attendees.

We were supposed to serve short-term in Sydney, get the church registered, train up the core group to be lay leaders, and then hand the work over to other coworkers.

While we were in Hong Kong, we had a team of coworkers who took turns preaching. But in Sydney, we were by ourselves in ministering the word of God. Being trained in project management during all the years of my professional career before serving God full time, I immediately calculated the number of messages and number of Bible studies I needed to conduct during my ministry in Sydney. After an honest evaluation, I felt confident about serving the church with all that I had. I also thanked God for granting me so many previous spiritual experiences that I could draw upon to share.

However, due to the expansion of our church's ministries worldwide, there weren't any coworkers who could replace us after we had completed our objectives. We had to extend our stay in

Australia to continue to build up the church. That posed a real problem to me. The problem was that we had only a handful of people to start the church. They were so eager for spiritual nourishment that they grabbed every opportunity to listen to our sharing. I had to share the word of God to the same group of people attending the Sunday services and Bible studies, and even at dinners and outings, and on practically every occasion. After our first term of service, it almost drained my entire resources and I feared that I had nothing more to give.

Rely on past experiences or depend daily on God

Then I realized how shallow my spiritual life was. In my first year in Sydney, I had not relied entirely on God to supply my “service” materials. I relied mostly on past experiences rather than daily dependence on God alone.

Frankly, in the early stages of the ministry, at times I felt I had nothing more to feed the flock with. In my second year of service, I still tried to do it “My Way”! I would go to a Christian bookstore and buy some books. My intention was not to read them for devotional purposes but to get preaching material. At one point, I even resolved to conduct a book review as my preaching, hoping that it might sound good and challenging to the congregation. But deep inside my heart, I knew that I was only imparting knowledge.

There is a vital difference between imparting knowledge and imparting life. When one passes on knowledge, the recipient hears it and it registers in the mind, yet it brings little effect on one’s life.

So we first need to internalize the word of God through faith in practicing what we have learned. After that, we can share with our hearers the reality of the word of God in our lives. Only then will the hearer be imparted with life. In other words, the knowledge received must go through a process of spiritual regurgitation in order to produce life. When we experience the depth of God's word, we can reproduce life.

Time flew by, and we ended up serving a total of 11 years in Sydney. I tried my best to preach and share the word of God week in and week out. I oftentimes had to beg our heavenly Father to feed me first and grant me insight into His word so that I could feed His people. It was like sojourning in the wilderness. I was like a dry and thirsty land longing for the morning dew and daily sustenance of water to quench my thirst. It was an uncomfortable feeling at first not to depend on my own self. But gradually, I learned the vital principle of spiritual life: **Not I but Christ**. As Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, I made up my mind to know nothing but Christ, following in his footsteps and drawing close to God. In other words, whatever hindered my devotion to God, including even my past spiritual experiences, I would count it as nothing in order to be renewed daily by the grace of God.

Time and time again, God's grace did not fail and He granted me new insight and wonderful experiences to share with the people just when I thought I had nothing more to give. During our 11 years of service, by God's wonderful grace and mercy, we built up the ministry from a handful of people to a gathering of about 100 attendees. We witnessed God's power of transformation

in people's lives and learned a lot during our ministry in Sydney. We would like to share with you some of those wonderful moments of how we experienced God's unfailing love.

The borrowed car

The car that we drove back to Sydney from Melbourne actually belonged to a sister who had left for the Full Time Training in Hong Kong. During her absence, she was very kind to offer her car to the coworkers in Sydney. Because we were taking over the work in Sydney, we also continued using her car. But she would soon complete her training and return to Melbourne in a few months' time. So we had to look for another car to replace hers as well as return her car in the best condition.

After we had gone on a trip to attend a coworkers' meeting, and as we were on our way back from Melbourne to Sydney, we felt the car having a problem in changing gears (the car is a standard drive). It was still a long way from home, about 200 kms. We prayed that we would not be stranded on our way, and so we drove at a steady pace without changing the gears too much. Thank God, although it took longer than usual, we managed to make it back to Sydney. The next day, we took the car to a mechanic recommended by a sister in the church. It was a costly repair job.

A few days later, when we came home from our Bible study, we saw a young man fixing the stairway's light in our apartment building. We thought that he was one of our neighbors living in

the same apartment building. We greeted him and thanked him for fixing the light. We asked if he lived in the apartment building, but he said he lives at another apartment block opposite ours. He saw that some young kids were hanging around our apartment block in the middle of the night when our ground floor stairway's light went bust. He felt it was unsafe for those who lived in our apartment if they came home late at night. So he came over and fixed the light for us. What a wonderful neighbor! We asked him if he was a Christian. He said no but his mother was a Christian. He is Armenian and his name is Tony. We told him we were church workers. We became friends with him, and later found out that he was a car mechanic. We told him that we just had our car fixed for \$800. He was surprised when we told him what was fixed. He said that it should cost at most half the price. In any case, he volunteered to inspect our car the next day.

It was no joke. The next day, he hollered from downstairs and asked me to come down so that he could examine my car. We said we would pay him whatever it would cost to fix the car. He told us he would do it for free because he regarded us as friends. Since that day, every now and then, he would come over and fix my car. I served him coffee, and acted as an apprentice whenever he needed my assistance. I recorded the time he spent so that I could repay him. When he knew that I had to send the car back to Melbourne to the original owner, he even arranged for a paint job so that the car looked new. Apart from the paint job and the spare parts which I paid, he never asked for his labor costs. I counted the total hours he had spent, and it added up to over 20 hours in 6

weeks' time. I couldn't afford to pay him as a car mechanic. But I managed to come up with \$200 and humbly asked him to accept what I could afford. He stared at me and refused to accept a cent.

We sent the car back to Melbourne just in time for the sister who had come back from the Full Time Training. When she and her family received the car, they couldn't even recognize that it was her own car. It looked like new and drove like new. It was a good testimony to her family that we were good stewards of the car we borrowed. That reminded us of what Jesus said in

Luke 16:10 He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.

We learned to be faithful in small things so that God would entrust us with greater things.

Our first owned car

The church brethren knew that we had to send the car back to Melbourne and that we needed to buy another one. So they took out from the reserve fund a sum of \$4000 to buy a used car. Our friend Tony offered to find a car for us. No sooner had we sent the car back to Melbourne than Tony found a used vehicle for us. It was a clean and basic 11-year-old car with standard shift and no air-conditioning. Tony repaired it into top shape and the car cost us a total of \$3800. We were happy with the car although in the

sizzling summer, it was really hot to drive after leaving the car under the sun for a few hours.

An upgraded car

But Tony was not pleased with the car. He told us that he would find us a better car with automatic shift and air conditioning. We told him not to worry about that. After we had been driving the car for about 18 months, suddenly Tony called us one day and said he had found the perfect car for us. He asked us to sell the first car. We did not want to burden the church financially with an upgrade, so we declined his offer. But he persisted and told us that we could resell our car for \$4300 which would just cover the cost of the other car. But how could we sell our car at a higher price than what we had paid after driving it for more than a year? Tony told us that the car was actually worth more than \$3800 but he did not include his commission when he sold the car to us. He kept on asking us to sell the car and finally we told him to give us a week to sell it. We committed the matter in prayer: if we could really sell the car within a week for \$4300, we would consider the replacement.

In the first few days, only a couple of people inquired about the car but did not even come to inspect it. Then on Thursday afternoon, we received a call and a couple wanted to take a look at the car. They came and test drove it. They were interested in the car but made no commitment. Friday was the deadline we promised Tony: unless we sold the car by Friday, we would not accept his

offer of getting the other car. By Friday noon, there was still no deal. We thought that God had closed the door on this, and we were at peace with it. Suddenly early afternoon, the same couple called and wanted to see the car again. They came around 3:00 pm and did another thorough check of the car. Finally they made us an offer and we settled for \$4300. God once again answered our prayers. That was exactly what we needed to exchange for the other car, which was also an 11-year-old car but with automatic shift and air-conditioning. We took the car to the car insurance company to appraise it for the insurance. It was appraised at \$5500. Again Tony got us a real good bargain and of course he didn't take a cent as commission.

We drove the car for a couple of years. One summer, we went back to Canada for a home visit. We lent the car to a brother in the church who was in need of a car. After we came back from our trip, the brother returned the car and he had it polished neat and clean. We thanked him for keeping our car so well, and as usual, we parked it in our parking lot. The next morning when we looked out the window, to our horror the car disappeared! Meanwhile, we had a couple of coworkers from Hong Kong who were staying with us. We went separate ways in search of our car. We realized that the car was stolen after our brother had polished the car so neat and clean. We finally had to go to the police station to report the missing car.

The church brethren were kind enough to arrange a car for us while Tony looked for another car. Two weeks passed and in the middle of the night at 3:00 am, we received a call from the police

saying that they had found our car and that we had to go to fetch the car immediately. We called our dear friend Tony and he immediately came over to pick me up and then we went to fetch the car at the location reported by the police. Indeed we found the car, but literally everything inside was stolen, including the seats. Tony had a small stool stored inside the back trunk of his car, and he used it as a seat to drive my car while I drove his car and we went back to his apartment.

The next day, we called the car insurance company and the appraiser came to inspect the car. It was written off and I received \$5000 for the stolen vehicle. God works in mysterious ways. The value of my car appreciated rather than depreciated.

Act of God

We did not want to burden the church brethren in their lending us a car at their own inconvenience. Again we committed the matter to God and hoped that we could get another car as soon as possible. It was already three weeks since our car was stolen and Tony still could not find a suitable car for us. We started to get a bit worried. Then suddenly Tony asked me to go with him to see a car. It was in our neighborhood, and when I looked at the car, it was better than the two vehicles that we had had. I thought it would cost us dearly. Tony told me to keep silent while he bargained with the owner. He was indeed an expert in car mechanics. He pointed all the faults to the owner and the owner kept on agreeing with Tony. In the end, he bargained the asking price of

\$5000 down to \$3500. When we took it to the car insurance company for appraisal, it was appraised at \$6000.

We had the car for about a year. Then one evening, we went to our Bible study meeting in the city. Suddenly there was a catastrophic hail storm. It was the worst hail storm ever recorded in Sydney and it caused billions of dollars of damage. Unfortunately, our car was parked on the street and the whole car was punched by hailstones. We brought it to the insurance company and again it was a total write-off. We were paid the full amount of \$6000 for the damage.

Pay back in full

We had to trouble Tony again to find us another car. To make the long story short, with the insurance money he upgraded us to a better car again, and we kept it until we left Sydney, at which time a sister in the church bought it from us for \$4000. We had served in Sydney 11 years. It was never our intention but somehow we changed cars a few times. The church gave us \$4000 for our first car and also a basic monthly car allowance. Apart from that, all those years we never burdened the church for any car expense including car insurance, maintenance, and gas. When we left, we returned \$4000 to the church in full. We owe our gratitude to our dear friend Tony. He maintained every car we had, and would always find us a better bargain each time we had to change to another car. We also deeply appreciate the church brethren who arranged a car for us to use while Tony was helping us find a car.

But we knew all along that it was God who took care of our daily needs.

From house to house

During the 11 years we served in Sydney, we moved a few times. Each time it was God who directed us to move to another premise.

The coworkers whom we replaced lived in a one-bedroom unit in Sydney. After we arrived in Sydney from Melbourne, through the kindness of the church brethren we stayed with a church family while our coworkers were still with us for a few days. We moved into their unit after they left Sydney for Hong Kong for a new assignment.

Family visits

Our families in Canada were all excited to know that we had moved to “Down Under” for the new work, and were eager to come for a visit. Our first family visitor was my niece Yvonne who visited just shortly after we had settled in Sydney. She came for a few days and stayed with us in the small apartment. We did our best to entertain her in Sydney while we were still unfamiliar with the city. She has a kind heart and was content to go along with us wherever we took her while we were also exploring the city. One of the highlights was to go to the zoo and cuddle a koala. That was memorable. Soon after that, it was forbidden to hold a koala because it induced fear in the cute and delicate animal.

A few months had gone by and we received news that Kathleen's mom, her sister Bella, and Bella's husband Richard would come for a visit in December. We welcomed their coming, but we were faced with a couple of practical issues. First was transportation. We had just returned the car to Melbourne, and Tony, our dear mechanic friend, had yet to find us another car. Then we had the problem of accommodation. We puzzled over how our small one-bedroom apartment could accommodate all five of us. We had to commit the matter to our Heavenly Father in prayer.

Timely deliverance of the car

Only a couple of days before their arrival in Sydney, our mechanic friend Tony gave us a call in late evening. It sounded urgent and he wanted to meet with us immediately. We thought it must be something serious, so we dropped everything and went down to wait for his arrival. Soon we saw him driving a red car, and he stopped right in front of us. He picked us up and drove away. We asked him what the urgency was. He just giggled and asked how I liked the car. It was a standard shift and it felt good. He told me that this was the car for us. He got it fixed and it cost \$3800 in total, just within our budget. What a pleasant surprise! We thanked him for getting us a car, and more so, we thanked our Father who once again delivered what we needed in the nick of time. A couple of days later, we were able to use the car to pick up Kathleen's mom, sister, and brother-in-law.

An unexpected offer of accommodation

In November 1993, we received a call from a Melbourne coworker who told us that one of our Singapore coworkers had an auntie living in Sydney. He asked if we could get in touch with her. We contacted this auntie and introduced ourselves as friends of our Singapore coworker. The auntie sounded very warm in receiving our call and wanted to meet with us. So we set a time to meet together for lunch. We called her Auntie Doris, and she was also a sister in the Lord. She was kind to us and treated us for lunch. Somehow there was a strong bond of love within us because we were in the family of God.

A few weeks had gone by and suddenly we received a call from Auntie Doris. She told us that she would be going back to Hong Kong for a few months and she wondered if we could find someone to stay in her apartment during her absence. Offhand we could not think of anyone who needed accommodation. But Kathleen told her that her family would come for a visit soon. Auntie Doris immediately welcomed them to stay in her apartment. She even invited us to move into her place because it was a two-bedroom unit. She told us that we could stay until such time as when she decides to come back to Sydney. When she mentioned the date of her departure to Hong Kong, what a surprise! It was the same day as the arrival of Kathleen's family. It is impossible to arrange such perfect timing unless it was divine intervention.

In the morning we picked up Kathleen's family at the airport and drove them to Auntie Doris' apartment. While we were on the way to the entrance, we saw Auntie Doris who was coming out

with her friend and was leaving for the airport. Kathleen introduced her mom, sister and brother-in-law to Auntie Doris right at the entrance. They thanked her for her hospitality. Auntie Doris and Kathleen's mom were about the same age and they embraced one another warmly. Then she was taken by her friend to the airport. Once again we testify to God's timely provision of the accommodation and it greatly encouraged Kathleen's family. Our God is a great God who keeps us under suspense but would always deliver with pleasant surprises.

Kathleen's family stayed in Auntie Doris' apartment while we stayed in our own unit. Kathleen's sister and brother-in-law stayed for only a week before leaving for Malaysia. But her mom stayed for another few months. So after Kathleen's sister and brother-in-law left, we terminated our lease of the one-bedroom unit and moved into Auntie Doris' apartment to stay with Kathleen's mom. After a few months, she left and we remained at Auntie Doris' apartment.

Urgent need for a new home

A few months had passed, and one day we received a call from Auntie Doris. She told us that she had just booked her flight back to Sydney and would arrive by the following weekend. She kindly welcomed us to stay with her. But we thought this would inconvenience her with our ever-growing church work. So we decided to look for another place for accommodation. But we only had a week's time to move out. We really had to commit this matter to

God. Kathleen specifically prayed to God that we would not spend too much time in looking for accommodation, for we needed to devote our time to the church work. She pleaded with our loving Father to grant us a suitable place to move into within a week, so as not to inconvenience Auntie Doris.

We also shared this matter with the core members of the church, and we prayed together for God's provision. On Monday, we went to the real estate agent who had dealt with our previous apartment unit. She was happy to see us and said she had an apartment which would be perfect for us. She took us to see the place and it was a two-bedroom unit with a rent of \$160 per week. Our original intention was to rent a one-bedroom unit as before, since it would be less expensive and we didn't want to burden the church with the rent. That evening we went to visit a sister in the church. She was one of the core members and was the church treasurer. We told her about the two-bedroom unit we had just inspected but we hesitated to rent a two-bedroom unit because that would increase the financial burden of the church. She was amazed that the rent was so low. She told us that a few years earlier, the rent for a two-bedroom unit in that area was already that price. Either there was something wrong with the apartment or it was really a good bargain. We told her that the apartment looked very clean. She suggested that we go and inspect the unit again the next day. She also called another sister in the church, also a core member, to accompany us to inspect the place. If it was indeed clean and neat, we should rent it right away.

Early next morning, we called the real estate agent and she arranged for a 10:00 am appointment. When we arrived at the apartment complex with another sister in the church, we discovered there was already another couple waiting there. When the real estate agent arrived, somehow she could not find the key to the apartment. She called her office and was told that another agent had the key. She apologized for the mix-up and asked us to come back in the afternoon for the inspection. Since the sister lived just a street from the apartment, she invited us to go to her place first. We prayed that God would grant us this place even though there was another couple who was ahead of us waiting to see the place, so that we would not inconvenience Auntie Doris.

Stiff competition

At the appointed time, we went back to the place hoping to be ahead of the couple. But they were already waiting at the front entrance. It looked like we had a strong competitor who also eagerly wanted the apartment. The real estate agent arrived and we all went in to inspect the place. The sister spoke softly to us and told us that it was a real good bargain. We immediately told the real estate agent that we wanted to rent the place. However the other couple also expressed that they wanted to rent the place. So we all went to the real estate office to fill in our application and returned to the sister's place, eagerly waiting for the verdict.

God granted us a second chance

Time ticked by and we did not hear any response. During the waiting period, we were a bit regretful that we did not rent the place the day when we first inspected it. God had provided this place for us and we just let it slip away. Anyway, together we prayed that God would give us a second chance. Finally the real estate agent called us to go back to the real estate office. The couple was already there. The real estate agent told both parties that she had submitted both applications to the landlady. Then she explained to the couple that we were actually the first ones to inspect the place. We just came back to reaffirm the rental. She had also explained this to the landlady and the landlady accepted our application instead. The couple was disappointed but did not make a fuss and left.

Faithful in small matters

We were so grateful to the real estate agent who spoke on our behalf. She later told us it was because she knew us from the previous rental and she thought we were really nice people. So she sided with us! In actual fact, we had little contact with her since we settled in the previous rental unit. We thanked God that He touched her heart and that she remembered us fondly. It reminded us that we are always being observed. People would remember us even in small things.

In the end, God indeed granted us another place to live just in time for Auntie Doris's arrival. Before we left her place, we

cleaned the whole unit including areas and spots where she could not reach, and making sure that all the ceiling lights were working. When she came back home, she marveled at such a neat and tidy apartment. She called us and deeply appreciated our effort in keeping the place in such an immaculate condition. We in turn thanked her for letting us use her apartment especially when Kathleen's family was here. The bond of love between us grew. She treated us just like her own children and we respected her as our mother in the family of God.

The last move

We stayed in the two-bedroom apartment for many years. The landlady was also very kind to us and did not raise the rent for the first few years and then made small increments later. We had Bible studies in our place and Auntie Doris also joined us. The group started to grow and the living room seemed too small to hold the bigger group. Then Auntie Doris told us that her family had just bought a two-bedroom unit on the same street and only a few houses away. She offered to rent the place to us. It was actually a brand new unit with a bigger living room. We hesitated to take her offer because it would cost more to rent the place. But Auntie Doris was very kind to us, and offered to rent us the better unit at the same rent we were paying. She told us that it was an offering to God. We were so touched by her love. We accepted her offer and moved into the new place. We stayed there until we left Sydney in June 2004.

Miraculous healing

It was back in 1994 around Christmas time. Kathleen and I both love fruits, and Australia produces the best varieties available anywhere. One afternoon we ate some fruits. Late that night Kathleen felt nauseated and started to vomit; she also experienced severe abdominal pain. She took some medicine and went to bed. But she tossed and turned all night because of the severe pain. She was also running a fever. We suspected that it was a case of food poisoning.

It just so happened that her mom was visiting us from overseas. She was due to leave Sydney in the morning for Melbourne because a brother in the church kindly offered to drive her to Melbourne for a visit. She is very observant and noticed that Kathleen was not feeling well. She would have given up going to Melbourne if she had found out that Kathleen was suffering from severe pain. Kathleen reassured her that it was just the normal time for her woman's pain, so her mom left for Melbourne and would be back in a few days' time.

Kathleen rested the whole day but the pain persisted. The next day we went to see a doctor. Because we were on work visas, we didn't have any medical coverage. The most economical way to deal with the problem was to see a gynecologist. It cost only \$8.00 a year for this service as part of the family planning project.

When the gynecologist listened to Kathleen's description of her symptoms, she told me to rush her to a hospital because she suspected some kind of internal infection or inflammation. That

can be extremely serious. She couldn't pinpoint the exact cause. It could be appendicitis or some sort of intestinal infection.

The cost of hospital stay was about \$800 a day, which was an astronomical figure to us when compared to what we were earning. So we sought a second opinion by going to a medical center. It cost us another \$28 to see the doctor. This time, after listening to Kathleen's description of her pain, the doctor didn't even bother to examine her. He simply said there was nothing that he could do and strongly recommended her to go to hospital immediately. So we drove to the nearby hospital.

Being in Sydney for only a few months, I wasn't familiar with the local directions. I looked at the street map and drove Kathleen to the nearest hospital. Unfortunately I missed the exit and ended up driving farther away from the hospital. Meanwhile Kathleen doubled up in pain. She couldn't sit long enough in the car for me to figure out how to get to the hospital. She preferred to go home to rest instead. Just as we arrived home we received a phone call from a sister in the church. She had some urgent matters to deal with and needed our immediate attention.

We met the sister at a nearby food court to discuss her problem. When she saw Kathleen, she immediately sensed her pain and suffering. She forgot her own problem and wanted to take Kathleen to the hospital. She understood our financial concern and assured us that she would foot the bill. We deeply appreciated her kindness but Kathleen preferred to wait another day to see if her situation improved. The sister urged Kathleen to see her own

family doctor, but it was already late afternoon, so we left it to the next day before seeing the family doctor.

Another day went by and Kathleen's pain had not subsided. She was still feverish and vomiting, so we went to see the sister's family doctor. He was a fine Christian too. After examining Kathleen and listening to her description of her pain, he also recommended her to go to hospital at once. He also suspected some kind of internal infection or inflammation which, if not treated soon, might deteriorate into a life-threatening problem. Against all odds, we elected instead to commit this matter to God, and if Kathleen's situation did not improve by next morning, we would have no alternative but to take her to hospital. By now we had three doctors who all arrived at the same diagnosis and recommendation. But we committed our case to our Heavenly Father. He remains our refuge in times of need.

I truly admire Kathleen's endurance and tolerance of the pain. I tried to persuade her to go to hospital but she insisted on waiting. We remember the Bible verse in Psalm 25:3:

Psalm 25:3 None of those who wait for the Lord will be disappointed

That evening Kathleen stayed in bed, still in severe pain. I was in agony watching her struggle with the almost unbearable pain. I knelt by her bedside, laid my hands gently on her abdomen, and began to cry out to our God for help. I poured out my heart in agony and pleaded to God for healing. I was praying for a miracle. After the prayer, I noticed that Kathleen had fallen asleep. While I

knelt by her bedside watching her peaceful sleep, I wept because she had not been able to sleep at all the previous nights.

When I woke up the following morning, I turned and looked at Kathleen to see how she was doing. I was startled to see that she wasn't in bed. I immediately sprang up and ran out to look for her. Then I saw her standing in the kitchen preparing breakfast. I tried to be composed and asked her how she felt. She gazed at me with a faint smile and told me that God had answered our prayer. All the pain had disappeared and she felt wonderful after a long night's sleep. She told me that while I was praying to God, all of a sudden she heard what seemed like an explosion inside her abdomen. She described it as an inflated balloon that had suddenly burst under pressure. She immediately felt relief and fell into a deep, sound sleep. My jaws dropped! I was in awe and lost for words to describe how I felt. Did God really answer my prayer? I looked at her while feeling perplexed and deep in thought, but she reassured me that she really felt all right. She turned around and was ready to set the table for breakfast. She hardly missed a beat as she walked gracefully towards the dining table. There was absolutely no sign of pain. We hugged each other and gave praise to our loving Father who had compassion on His lowly servants. It was actually Sunday and we went to church beaming with joy and were ready to testify of God's miraculous deliverance of Kathleen's potentially life-threatening suffering.

The next day, Kathleen's mom returned from Melbourne. She hardly noticed that a miracle had just occurred during her

absence. We were content to listen to her as she happily shared about her experience of God in Melbourne.

The Sydney church established

When we arrived in Sydney in June 1993, our first priority was to register the church with the government. It took us three months to complete the registration, and finally the Sydney church was officially formed. Since there were no coworkers to take over our work in Sydney, we kept on renewing our work visas every year to continue the work there.

A new chapter in serving

In April 1996, we had a church Easter camp and we were so privileged to have our teacher Rev. Eric Chang as our keynote speaker. It was also during the camp that we received our ordination. As we knelt down and received the laying on of hands from Rev. Eric Chang, all of a sudden a flashback of our past filled my thoughts and I knew that if it were not for God's lovingkindness and grace, our marriage would have been in jeopardy and Kathleen would not have knelt alongside me receiving the laying on of hands. I just felt so unworthy to receive the ordination. I was so overwhelmed by God's love that tears of joy gushed out uncontrollably. A new chapter had begun in our lives. As more is given, more is required. I prayed that I would serve God faithfully and not disappoint Him.

Political uncertainty in Hong Kong approaching June 1997

After the camp, Rev. Eric Chang discussed with us the future plans of the Sydney church. He explained that 1997 would mark a major milestone for Hong Kong. The United Kingdom will hand the colony back to China. Although China pledged that there will be no policy changes in Hong Kong for 50 years after the takeover, there was a lot of skepticism among the Hong Kong people. In the face of uncertainty, many fled Hong Kong and migrated overseas as the year 1997 approached. There was a sudden influx of migrants from Hong Kong into various countries. Many migrants were subsequently introduced to Christianity and this created a boom in the Chinese churches overseas. Demand for pastors and church workers followed. Quite a number of pastors left Hong Kong for employment at overseas Chinese churches. The Christian community in Hong Kong became unsettled and some churches ended up understaffed.

From working status to migrant

When Rev. Eric Chang invited potential candidates to take over the Sydney church from us, surprisingly none of the coworkers accepted the invitation. They all pledged their loyalty to the Hong Kong churches that they were serving, reassuring them that whatever happens, they would stay and witness the China takeover. In view of this, Rev. Eric Chang suggested that we apply for immigration status instead, since he did not foresee any coworkers coming

to take over the Sydney work from us in the next few years. On the one hand, we admired and were touched by our coworkers' faithfulness in staying with their church brethren in times of uncertainty. On the other hand, it clearly meant that we were to stay for a much longer term in Sydney than we had originally anticipated. Soon after our dear teacher left Sydney, we submitted our application for immigration.

Kathleen fell sick

In Australia, winter begins in June. Most of the time, the weather would be nice and sunny in the afternoon, but would turn much cooler after sunset. It was on one sunny afternoon in June that we paid a visit to a family. The family was so hospitable that they invited us to stay for dinner. By the time we left, it was already sunset and the temperature suddenly plummeted a few degrees. Our car was parked some distance away and we braved the wind and rushed to our car. Since we did not intend to stay at the family's place that long, we were not warmly clothed for the sudden drop in temperature. Kathleen was shivering even after we got into the car. That night, she felt sick and started coughing. She was an experienced nurse in Canada before she turned to serving God full-time. She thought that she had just caught a cold, so we did not take the matter seriously. She took some cough syrup, hoping that the cough would subside in a couple of days. But the cough persisted and got worse. We bought different kinds of cough medicine but none helped.

When the church met on Sunday, everyone was very concerned about Kathleen because she looked so weak. Everybody offered suggestions for fighting the cough. The cough persisted for about a week, so we started to take it more seriously, especially because Kathleen had lost weight noticeably. She was often out of breath and felt too tired to even stand up straight. We prayed earnestly to God for healing. We knew that He had done it before, and that He would never forsake us.

Kathleen was diagnosed with pneumonia

We had a brother in the church who was a medical doctor. He gave us a surprise visit on a weekday because it was his day off. After he examined Kathleen, he expressed deep concern that she might have contracted pneumonia. He recommended that she go to the hospital immediately for further examination. We took his advice and immediately went to the hospital.

In the evening we were to have a baptismal training session. Kathleen urged me to go, while the brother and his wife were very kind to stay with her waiting for the medical checkup. So I left with a heavy heart and went to the Bible study. I shared with the group about Kathleen's absence and we all earnestly prayed for God's mercy. Later we received news from the medical doctor brother that Kathleen had indeed contracted pneumonia. It would be a life threatening situation had she delayed in getting proper medical treatment. She had to be hospitalized for a few days. Since we were not permanent residents or Australian citizens, and had

not bought medical insurance, it would cost a few thousand dollars to pay the hospital bill. The financial cost was immediately settled because the church brethren reassured us that they would take care of all the hospital expenses. We deeply appreciated the love and care of the church brethren. Although we knew that money was not an issue because our heavenly Father would take care of our needs, we had never imagined that it was going to be accomplished through a miraculous deliverance.

The hospital deferred all payments

In usual hospital practice, once patients are admitted to the hospital, they have to pay in full all the hospital bills immediately. In fact, not long before that, a relative of a church sister fell down the stairs and broke her leg. She was treated in the same hospital that Kathleen went to. She was also a visitor, but she had bought medical insurance in Hong Kong. However she was required to pay all medical expenses immediately after each hospital visit. She could claim back her insured portion only after she has returned to Hong Kong. But in Kathleen's case, she was never asked to pay when she was admitted to hospital. It was already a sign of God's mercy.

The nutritionist's compassion

When Kathleen was hospitalized, a nutritionist came by that evening and asked her to fill in an order for her daily meals. When she came back to pick up the order, she discovered that Kathleen had left the form blank. The nutritionist was curious and asked why she did not fill the order. At first, she gave the excuse that friends and family would bring meals for her. But the nutritionist advised her to take the order because the meals were specifically designed to improve her health because she was so weak and frail. Finally Kathleen told the nutritionist that we could not afford to pay the hospital bills and she would do her best not to incur additional costs with the food bills. The nutritionist was very concerned about Kathleen and wanted to know more about our situation. When she realized that we were church workers on work visas with low income and no medical insurance, she was moved to tears and told Kathleen that she will foot the food bills. She comforted her, telling her to rest well in order to get better. Meanwhile she reported our situation to the hospital's social welfare department.

The next morning, a social welfare officer came and met with Kathleen. She reassured Kathleen not to worry about the hospital bills for now. She left an application form for me to fill out, to indicate how much we could afford to pay on a monthly basis in order to settle all outstanding hospital expenses. She comforted Kathleen, telling her that even if it took years to pay off all debts, the hospital would accept our honest assessment of our financial situation. Based on our income, we could hardly afford more than

\$50 a month to pay for the hospital expenses. It would take years to pay off the total cost which amounted to \$4000. The social welfare officer indicated that I could defer the monthly payments until such time as I felt I could start paying. That was real comforting indeed. But was it God's plan to deliver us from paying the hefty hospital bill? True enough, God had a much better plan ahead!

Applying for Medicare at coworker's advice

We informed our family and our teacher Rev. Eric Chang about Kathleen's situation and requested their prayer support. As a result, we were overwhelmed with love and best wishes. Apart from prayer support, our family and our beloved teacher all pledged their financial support to pay for the hospital bills.

News about Kathleen's hospitalization traveled to Melbourne. Our Melbourne coworkers pledged their support to us and one of them suggested that I apply for Medicare immediately. I took his advice and the next day I went to the Medicare office to submit our application. When the officer reviewed the application forms, she frowned and said she could not accept our application because we were not residents of Australia. I indicated that we had just submitted our application for permanent residency over a month ago. Then she told me that all applications must be submitted in person and Kathleen should submit her own application. I told her that she was hospitalized and could not come in person. She

hesitated a while and then accepted our applications, but she also said that there was no guarantee that they would be approved.

No payment at Kathleen's discharge

Kathleen was discharged after spending a few days in the hospital. The morning she was discharged, Mrs. Chan, the mother of a church sister came early to the hospital. She had always been very kind to us. Ever since we settled in Sydney, she would often invite us for meals and cook the best food for us. When she found out that Kathleen had contracted pneumonia and was hospitalized, she made nutritious food for her every day. We were so touched by her lovingkindness. In fact she even bought me yummy barbecue pork and roast duck so that I didn't have to cook at all. Some concerned brothers and sisters in the church also loaded me with delicious food, and I had some to spare even after Kathleen was discharged from hospital.

Anyway, Mrs. Chan came early to the hospital because she wanted to settle the hospital account for us. Before she arrived, we went to the accounts office and were told that not a cent was required! The social welfare department at the hospital had waived all outstanding expenses. We left the accounts office praising God for His wonderful grace. When we met Mrs. Chan, she told us that she had already brought the money to pay the hospital bills. We told her that we did not need to pay anything. She was stunned because it was her friend who had broken her leg some time back, and was hospitalized in the same hospital, yet had

to pay the fees in full at every hospital visit. We told her that God had taken care of our needs. She was so touched by God's love for us that tears ran down from her bewildered eyes. Together we returned home full of love and praise to God. We also knew that God would reward Mrs. Chan for her constant caring of His lowly servants.

A miracle happened

A couple of weeks after Kathleen was discharged from the hospital, we received a letter from the Medicare Department. When we opened the envelope, we found two Medicare cards inside. Both cards indicated that we were on visitor status. However, the expiry date was January 1997. We were puzzled as to what this might mean. In any case, it was just about the time for us to go back to the hospital to hand in our application form for the monthly payment of the outstanding hospital expenses. We went straight to the social welfare department and handed in our application. At the same time, we presented the officer with the two Medicare cards we had just received. She looked startled and asked how we got the cards. We told her that while Kathleen was hospitalized, I submitted the application forms for Medicare. She said she had never seen a Medicare card given to visitors in all her professional work. She rang the Medicare office immediately to authenticate our cards. To everybody's surprise, it was indeed issued to us and the starting date of effect was May 16th, the date on which we submitted our application for permanent resident status. That

meant that the card was valid before Kathleen was hospitalized. The social welfare officer took the application form we had just submitted for our monthly payment, and tore it in front of us. She said, “You don’t need this application anymore. Medicare pays for all your hospital bills. **My dear, someone from above must have been watching over you!** All the best to you, and do take good care of yourselves.” To which we said, “Indeed, our God is real and is watching over us.” We marveled and echoed with joy in our heart. We inexplicably experienced another miracle that once again proves the reality of God, for He is a wonderful and compassionate God.

A few days later, Kathleen had to go to our family doctor for a checkup. When she handed her Medicare card to the receptionist, she was just as startled as the social welfare officer. This time we reassured her that the card was valid. Still, she called the Medicare Office for confirmation and again the card was valid. The receptionist said she had never seen a visitor carrying a Medicare card in all her life.

Kathleen’s testimony: It’s all worth it if it brings glory to God

Thanks to the church brethren and friends who showered us with so much love and gifts, Kathleen recuperated well. After a few weeks of rest, on Sunday worship she wanted to testify of God’s benevolence to her. As she was sharing about the nutritionist’s reaction and many other incidents, concerning which she testified

of God's love, the people were so touched that many shed tears, men and women alike. At the end of her sharing, we passed our two Medicare cards around for them to examine. The Spirit of God moved that day and many marveled and acknowledged that it was a miracle indeed.

She also explained that while in her sickbed, she prayed that it would be worth it if her suffering and illness could glorify God. In fact, during her illness, the church was drawn even closer and the bond of love was evident. God was indeed highly honored and glorified in Kathleen's ordeal, and truly her suffering and sickness made it all worth it.

God is mindful of us even in seemingly trivial matters

We started our ministry in Sydney in June 1993 and left Sydney in June 2004. During the 11 years of serving there, God literally supplied all our needs, great and small. We came to Sydney with luggage consisting of clothing, our Bible references, and a guitar. In all the years living there, we spent less than \$1000 in home furnishings and items, which ranged from a dining set to pots and pans, as well as a new bookcase, a new TV, and a new guitar for Kathleen. When our neighbor left for Hong Kong, he gave us a leather sofa and a single leather chair. That completed our home furnishings. We truly experienced what the Bible says in:

Matthew 6:8 ... for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him...

Matthew 6:32 ...for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things...

We never asked people for the things we needed. Yet somehow God promptly provided. Sometimes the provisions came from kind and loving church brethren, sometimes they came from unexpected people, such as our former neighbors whose names we didn't even know until the day they moved out. If we were to share with you every instance of how our Heavenly Father supplied our needs, we could fill a book with all the stories. I would like to share with you just one of those memorable incidents.

We were planning to have a Bible study group at home, but we had no teapot to serve the group. One Sunday after church service, on our way back home, we dropped by a grocery store to buy some groceries. There we saw a teapot on sale. The original price was over \$16 but it had been reduced to just \$10. We were delighted. So apart from some groceries, we also picked up two teapots as we remembered that one of our church families needed one too. However, when we went to pay at the counter, we discovered that we had exceeded our budget and didn't have enough cash to pay for the extra teapot. As a result, we didn't buy the teapots at all. We just paid for the groceries and left. We thought we could go the next day to another grocery store near our home to purchase the teapots.

The next day, while talking to the family that needed the teapot, we were told that they had also found out about the sale on teapots and bought one. So we only needed to buy one for our Bible Study group. For some reason, I was tied up with other things and couldn't go to buy the teapot until Tuesday. We needed the teapot by Friday for the group. When I went to the grocery store, I saw that there were a couple of teapots left but the price was back to \$16. I asked one of the staff if the teapots might still be on sale. He checked and confirmed that they were still on sale. I was so thankful that I immediately picked one up; I also bought some mushroom caps.

At the checkout counter, the cashier rang up \$18 for the teapot and the mushroom cups. I thought that it must have been a mistake because the mushroom cups were only a few dollars per kilo and I bought only a small bag. So I asked the cashier about it, and discovered that she had rang up the original price for the teapot. I told her that it was a mistake as I had checked with another staff to confirm the sale price before bringing it to the counter. She called for a price check and finally acknowledged that it was still on sale. She told me that normally all sales end by Monday, and since it was now Tuesday, all sales should have ended. But somehow the teapot sale had been extended another day.

Although I missed the normal closing date of the sale, it was amazing that I was still able to get the teapot at the sale price. When the cashier confirmed the sale price and readjusted the bill, it came to \$2. I was stunned and asked why she charged me only \$2 this time. She said it was company policy that if the customer

had been charged incorrectly for any item, it would be given free of charge. Therefore she only charged me for the mushrooms. As I walked back home, I held on to the teapot for dear life because it was a gift from God. He knew that we wanted to use the teapot for the Bible study group and not for our own leisure.

I was so touched by God's love. He truly knows our needs. It wasn't because of the amount of money saved that I was so happy. It was just that God had shown me that He was mindful of us even in trivial matters. It touched me deeply how much He loves us even though we really don't deserve such love. It was my mistake that I didn't buy the teapot on Monday, yet God overlooked my mistake. If we love our God wholeheartedly and follow Him every step of the way, we will experience His living reality. He is a God of love and mercy.

Snatching them out of the fire

The year 2002 had been very special. We were literally experiencing what the Bible says in:

Jude 22-23 And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire...

The phrase "*snatching them out of the fire*" means rescuing people from the jaws of hell fire, from eternal damnation! It is that serious! That year, our hospital visitations brought us into contact with quite a few dying patients. Their ages ranged from 28 to just under 80 years. Seven had died. But each one was snatched out of

Satan's hand in the nick of time. They renounced their idolatrous worship and repented of their sins before committing their lives to God. Each deliverance was tense and urgent. We were like a SWAT team equipped with the armor of God, with much prayer support from the brothers and sisters to fight the dark powers of Satan. Amazingly God worked in mysterious ways while we felt so unworthy to be coworking with the Most High in the rescue operation of souls.

Just to cite a couple of those deliverances. We had a sister who was a doctor working in one of the hospitals. She came in contact with an elderly man who was dying of lung cancer. She shared with him the word of God. He had never heard the gospel before but now he was interested in knowing more about God. The next day, he was transferred to another hospital for further observation. But thank God we had a brother who was a doctor at that hospital. So she referred her patient to this brother and he started to follow up on the dying patient the moment he was admitted to hospital.

The next morning, the patient fell into a coma. When the sister finished her work, she went back home. It was already 8:00 pm. The brother called her and told her that the patient had been in a coma since 9:00 am. She called us to tell us about the patient, and wanted to visit him despite her exhaustion after a twelve-hour shift. We had no previous knowledge of this patient but we felt the urgent need to go with her. We were so deeply touched by her love and compassion for her patient because she cared so much for his soul.

We drove to the hospital and arrived at around 9:30 pm. We stopped outside the hospital and prayed earnestly to God to grant this patient a window of opportunity to regain his consciousness so that he could commit his life to God. Kathleen and the sister went up first while I went to park the car. By the time I walked into the patient's room, he was already surrounded by his family members. The sister introduced me to the family as her church pastor. The patient's wife received me warmly but I felt a cold reception from the other relatives. In fact, deliberately or not, they turned their back towards me, so I had to look over their shoulders to see the patient. Unfortunately they were a notch taller than I, so I had to stand on my toes to catch a glimpse of the dying man. They were talking to one another and the time was ticking away. I prayed quietly in my heart and pleaded to God for an opportunity to do something.

After a while, they went out of the room one by one, to have some food. Kathleen immediately asked the patient's wife if she wanted me to pray for her husband. She welcomed the suggestion and I immediately seized the opportunity to move closer to the patient right at his bedside. It was already past 10:00 pm and he was still in a coma. I didn't really know what to say. So I put my hand on his forehead and bent down close to his ear. I spoke softly, calling his name, "Mr. Ma". Instantly he opened his eyes and stared right at my face. I was taken aback because of his instant response. Then he started to struggle and wanted to get out of bed. All of us were so shocked that his wife shouted, "HE IS AWAKE! GO QUICKLY AND TELL THE OTHERS TO COME

IN!” Immediately the relative who had stayed with us all the while in the room, dashed out and called the rest to come in. Meanwhile, I held the patient firmly and told him to calm down. Kathleen, the sister, and the patient’s wife started to help him sit up on his bed. Later a nurse was called in to help him get out of bed and to seat himself on the sofa chair. Everybody was stunned and fired questions at him. He responded by nodding or shaking his head as his mouth was covered with an oxygen mask.

When everyone calmed down, I started to share the word of God briefly with him. But I wanted to make sure that he understood what believing in God through Jesus meant. Finally, I told him that I would pray for him. But immediately one of the relatives protested and said, “He is a Buddhist. He may not want you to pray for him. Why don’t you ask him first?” I then understood why I had felt such a cold reception when I was introduced as a church pastor. They knew that as Buddhists they shouldn’t believe in our God. The choice was clear. If he wanted me to pray for him, he would in fact be denouncing his Buddhist faith. So I looked at him straight in the eyes and asked him whether or not he wanted me to pray for him. I told him that God loved him despite his Buddhist belief. But he had to make a choice. I put my hand next to his and told him that if he wanted me to pray for him, he would have to hold my hand as a sign to show everyone that he consented. He started to move his fingers and then with his utmost effort, he raised his hand and grabbed hold of mine firmly. His wife immediately yelled out, “HE WANTS YOU TO PRAY FOR HIM!”

The other relatives had nothing to say. So I prayed for him and committed his life to God. After the prayer, he opened his eyes and looked at me with a faint smile. I could see that he was at peace and I really praised our God Yahweh for overpowering the forces of darkness again. After that, I said to the relatives, “You are all Buddhists, aren’t you?” They didn’t reply. Some of them turned their heads and avoided eye contact with me. One of the relatives who had blocked my view earlier looked at me with a friendly smile and I saw tears in her eyes. Another relative said they had been in the room since 4:00 pm and that Mr. Ma was as good as dead because there was no response at all when they called him. Well, I didn’t raise the dead. But by God’s mercy and grace, I did wake up somebody who had been in coma for over 12 hours. You the reader can judge whether it was a miracle or not. The most important thing was that our rescue operation was complete, and we left praising and giving God all the glory. The next morning at 4:00 am, Mr. Ma passed away peacefully. Though he died, he had nonetheless gained abundant life by the grace of God.

Another deliverance from the jaws of hell

The Saturday immediately before Easter Sunday, I received an email from a couple who was living in Melbourne and attending our sister church there. They asked us to visit their relative who was hospitalized at Concord Hospital in Sydney. He was suffering from kidney infection and had already been in hospital for a few months. His situation had turned from bad to worse.

Since it was approaching Easter and our church was going on a retreat during the Easter holidays, it meant that we were preoccupied with camp preparations. We were hard pressed to find any time for the hospital visit. But it just so happened that we found out that a sister in our church worked as an intern at the same hospital. So we immediately informed her about this patient. When we mentioned the patient's name, she immediately knew who he was. His was one of those "problematic" cases. After his surgery, he had been very temperamental at times because of the sudden surges of unbearable pain that he felt. The doctors were having problems helping him to get better.

Anyway, our sister was kind enough to visit him on a daily basis and was updating us on his situation. Wednesday afternoon, the day before we set off for our camp which was a 90-minute drive from Sydney, we felt compelled by the Holy Spirit to visit the patient despite our hectic schedule. So we met him while his wife was attending to him at his bedside. He was still alert enough to listen to us even though he could not reply because he was wearing an oxygen mask. He nodded his head and raised his hand to show that he understood what we were saying. Just before we left, we asked his wife whether we could pray for him. She consented, even though she said that she didn't have any religious convictions. So we prayed that God would minimize his pain and grant him peace in his suffering.

We came back from camp the following Thursday. The intern doctor continued to update us on the patient's progress. Saturday noon, the sister called us at home right after she had finished her

overnight shift. She said the patient was in a critical condition last night and all his family members were gathered at his bedside to prepare for the worst. She implied that he would not last long. I was in the middle of preparing my Sunday message, so I struggled to decide whether we should go to visit him or not. But somehow the Holy Spirit convicted me to go. Kathleen and I rushed to the hospital in the afternoon. After we parked the car, we prayed to our dear Heavenly Father that He would grant the patient an openness of heart to receive the gospel, to repent of his sins, and to be baptized.

When we entered the patient's room his wife was also there. But surprisingly, he was very alert. The intern doctor told us that he had been slipping into semi-unconsciousness the night before. So we briefly shared with the couple the salvation work of Christ and the need for repentance. Then his wife told us that before their marriage, her husband had enrolled in some seminary studies. She had not known about it until recently when her husband brought up the subject. Then we asked him to confirm whether that was true or not. He nodded his head and raised his hand.

At that moment, we both felt God's immense love for him. We asked the patient to consider the fact that we would not have been there at his bedside at that moment if his relatives in Melbourne had not expressed their concern for his critical condition and requested us to visit him. We could not possibly have known how bad his situation was if it were not for the fact that we had a sister in the church who just so happened to work as an intern at that hospital.

We never did learn why he neither went to church nor told his wife and children about his religious convictions even after all the years of marriage. Yet all of a sudden, he brought it to the attention of his wife. Perhaps he realized that his time was running short and that he needed to make a decision to restore his faith in God.

We shared with him our conviction that God really loves him and that at his most critical moment our loving God is still full of mercy and compassion. That love would make it possible for the dying patient to return to Him. He nodded his head and was quite emotional in his response. We asked him if he would like to repent, seek God's forgiveness of his sins, and be baptized. Instantly he raised his hand. We were taken by surprise at his quick response. We turned to his wife and asked if she would consent to his baptism. She told us that she has no religious preference. But if her husband knew exactly what he was doing, she would have no objection at all. So we asked him again, repeating the condition of baptism through repentance of sins. Because his wife was sitting behind him, he would have to raise his hand high enough to show her that he really wanted to confess his sins and be baptized. Again, he immediately raised his arm upright while at the same time nodding his head many times.

At that moment, we had no reservations about conducting the baptism. We prayed for him, asked God to forgive his sins, and then sprinkled water on his forehead to baptize him. Then we prayed that God would grant him freedom and deliverance from the powers of darkness and the bondage of sin, and that he may receive the Holy Spirit. When we looked at him after the prayer of

commitment, we saw that his eyes were beaming with joy. He looked at us with a smile of thanksgiving on his face.

Our hearts were deeply touched by God's immense love. Indeed, He doesn't want anyone to perish without first giving him or her the opportunity to repent of sin and to turn to Him for salvation through Christ. When one sinner repents, truly all of heaven rejoice.

As we left the hospital, we recalled the prayer that we said before we entered the hospital. God indeed had opened the dying patient's heart and prepared him to receive the best gift of his life, namely, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Our prayer had been answered.

We visited him twice the following week. The last time was on Saturday, exactly a week after his baptism. He was slipping into unconsciousness. When we called to him, he could barely open his eyes. He nodded his head slightly and then slipped back into an unconscious state again. The next morning, he passed away.

His wife recognized his final commitment to God and arranged for a Christian funeral. In fact she told us how amazed she was by his alertness during the time of his baptism. She was with him all those months while he had been hospitalized. She told us that during the last few weeks of his life, he was drowsy most of the time because of the morphine which had been administered to him. Our sister, the intern doctor, also testified that every time she went to see him, he was usually asleep. She was astonished to learn that we had been able to baptize him because when she had checked on him the night before, he was in such a grave condition

that the doctors had to call his family in to prepare for his imminent death.

God is indeed merciful and compassionate. If for one reason or another we turn away from Him, or backslide to the point that we fear He would not accept us even if we wanted to repent, somehow God's love would be beyond our comprehension. If only we renew our faith in Him, truly confess our sins and seek forgiveness, His love will overcome our multitude of sins. His grace is sufficient to redeem us from our wretchedness. So don't be afraid to surrender your life to Him and receive forgiveness of your sins. Then, and only then, a new life empowered by the Holy Spirit begins.

India – Nepal Mission

Introduction

In November 1996, we received our permanent residency in Australia. We had already served in Sydney for over three years, and had built up a core group in the church. They were on fire for the word of God. We thought that in order to grow stronger in the Lord, it would be good to broaden our thinking and perspective by launching out to the overseas missions field. But where should we go for our mission trip? Australia is an affluent society just like other western countries such as Canada and the United States. Perhaps it would open our eyes if we ventured to the under-developed countries instead.

We sought advice from our teacher Rev. Eric Chang. He replied that there were needs in India and Nepal. We communicated with our India and Nepal contacts and they expressed their delight in receiving us. So we discussed this with our core group and confirmed our mission trip to both countries. We encouraged our core group to join us for the mission. A lay couple responded and we started to prepare for the exciting venture to these two countries. When the news of our mission trip spread to our sister

church in Melbourne, a lay couple there also wanted to join us for the mission. We started planning our schedule for the trip. Kathleen had just recuperated from pneumonia which she had contracted in June 1996. But she insisted on going on the mission trip with us. Because India and Nepal were under-developed countries, naturally hygiene was a concern. I admired her courage because I knew that her health was still quite frail. We all felt that she should rest at least six months before going on the mission trip. Having taken that into consideration, we finally set our date—January 1997—to launch out on our first overseas mission trip.

Our first stop, Malaysia

The three couples left Australia at different times. At that time, we had a coworker who was serving in Chennai, India, and we would love to pay him a visit. Therefore Chennai would be our first stop in India. When we explored which flight to take, we discovered that the most economical way to fly from Sydney to Chennai was via Malaysian Airlines. We could get a free stopover both ways at Kuala Lumpur (KL). We had sister churches there and when they knew that we would be passing through KL, they warmly invited us to stay for a few days before going to Chennai. We welcomed the idea because we had been hard pressed with church work before we left Sydney. We hardly had a break especially with Kathleen still weak. It would be best for us to take a short break to

allow ourselves to rest well, bodily and spiritually, before launching out to the mission field in India.

Arriving at KL during the Chinese New Year

When we arrived in KL, it was just about the time of the Chinese New Year (Spring Festival). We did not celebrate Chinese New Year as much in Sydney, but in KL, it was a different atmosphere. Everybody was eager to go back to their hometowns to celebrate the Spring Festival. We had good fellowship with our coworkers in KL, and were invited to share with the churches on two occasions. Everybody wanted to take a break from work to celebrate the Chinese New Year.

Going to Cameron Highlands

The KL coworkers were very kind to arrange a holiday package for us to Cameron Highlands. It was about a four hours' drive from KL. We took a 24-passenger tour bus to Cameron Highlands. As we boarded the bus, everyone was given a plastic bag. We were wondering what it was for. Someone told us that the road was so steep and winding that some passengers might get nauseated. So the plastic bag was meant for anyone who might throw up.

The road was indeed hilly and winding, but that did not deter the bus driver from speeding at the turns. He would slam on the brakes before the oncoming traffic and then speed off again. It made the whole trip jerky at times. We just prayed for a safe

journey to our destination. Even some of the locals in the tour bus threw up. Amazingly, we survived the whole jerky and wobbly journey and arrived at Cameron Highlands.

We discovered that the place was not particularly crowded because it also happened to be the time of an important Islamic holiday. With Malaysia being an Islamic country, most Malays rested at home during this important festive period. That was fine with us as it allowed us to rest well.

Wild rainy weather

We did little traveling in the first three days. Most of the time we rested, though we visited one or two tourist attractions nearby. The weather was unpredictable; it would be sunny one moment, then suddenly change to pouring rain. But so far, whenever we were out in the open, it did not rain. We really appreciated God who was pulling the strings behind the scenes and protecting us.

On the fourth day, it was sunny in the morning. Since we were leaving the next day, we hoped to do more sightseeing that day. Kathleen also felt strong enough to take longer walks. We decided to take a stroll up to the top of the mountain.

It took us about two hours to stroll casually to the top of the mountain. It was so scenic and beautiful to look down from the top. The mountain top was unpolluted and we felt so refreshed breathing in the fresh air. We stayed there just admiring nature and meditating with praise and thanksgiving to God. Then suddenly we felt a few drops of rain. When we looked up at the

sky, it was turning dark and cloudy. The wind started to pick up speed and the raindrops became bigger and fell more rapidly. We felt it was going to pour!

Pray like Elijah

We had to make a quick decision: either stay on top of the mountain under a shelter or dash down the hill before the rainstorm. The weather had turned cold because of the gusty wind and I was deeply concerned about Kathleen's health. She had just recovered from pneumonia and it would be detrimental if she caught a cold on the mountaintop. We said an urgent prayer seeking God's protection desperately. Then we took our chance and dashed down the hill.

It started to rain lightly but steadily increased as the wind also picked up speed. It took us about 20 minutes to reach the foot of the hill. But it would take about another half hour at a fast pace to get back to our lodging place. By now, the rain was pouring like buckets of water. We ran across the street and hid under a bus shelter. Although we were not soaked, we were wet enough and felt cold in the plummeting temperature. We tried to hail a taxi but there was none. We were indeed stranded in the wild weather.

Kathleen turned to me and said, "Why don't you pray like Elijah?" Yes, the Bible told us about Elijah:

1Kings 17:1 Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, “As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word.”

The Lord God answered Elijah’s prayer and there was no rain for 3½ years. But would it be too much for Kathleen to ask of me to be like Elijah? Who was I? But then, I also remembered that the Bible said:

James 5:17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.

There was nothing special about Elijah. He was a man with a nature like ours! The only difference was that he was a man of great faith. Certainly I was nowhere near the likes of Elijah, but I could pray the same prayer pleading for God’s compassion on us. When I was embracing Kathleen, I could feel that she was shivering from the cold. I sensed the urgency and told Kathleen that I would pray like Elijah. Tears gushed out of my eyes as I cried out to God pleading that He stop the rain for ½ hour so that we could make it back to our lodging place.

After the prayer, when we opened our eyes, to our amazement, the rain tapered off and the sun broke through the dark clouds. We were in awe that a miracle had happened! God *really* answered our prayer! We immediately took stride and ran down towards our lodging place. As we descended the slope holding hands, we

sang the song “The Lord is my strength”. Tears of joy streamed down our eyes because we were so touched by the love of God.

Time’s up

When we made it almost to our lodging place, instead of heading straight back there, we stopped by at a souvenir shop to buy souvenirs before leaving Cameron Highlands the next day. We were so attracted by the many selections that we lingered a while to buy our souvenirs. By the time we got out of the shop, it started to rain again and was gaining momentum towards a heavy down-pour again. We quickly ran straight back home. Though it was only a short distance of about 50 meters from the souvenir shop, we were all soaked by the time we reached our lodging place. We looked at our watch and it was over 30 minutes since we started running down from the bus shelter right after our prayer. I prayed for the rain to stop 30 minutes so that we could make it back to our lodging place. God took our prayer literally and gave us a window of exactly 30 minutes. But we overstayed and lingered in the souvenir shop. The downpour after the 30-minute break sent a clear message that it was no mere coincidence. It was indeed a prayer answered, and God had taken our plea literally!

Thank God that we had a restful holiday at Cameron Highlands, and most importantly that we experienced the love of God so immensely that we felt invigorated to serve Him unreservedly in this coming mission.

Chennai, India

We arrived in Chennai, India, and were picked up by our dear co-worker Pastor Boo. He was an inspiration to us, and a pioneer in exploring new mission fields. When we went from Hong Kong to Sydney via Manila, he was building the church in the Philippines. After the work was established, he was sent to Chennai to pioneer another new work. We were so happy to meet him. He shared with us his experiences in serving in Chennai. He advised us of things that we should take note of in interacting with the Indian locals. His words proved to be valuable advice in our Indian expedition. We spent a few days with Pastor Boo and then flew to Calcutta to begin our mission.

Calcutta, India

The lay couple from our Sydney church had arrived in Calcutta a couple of days earlier. They were already serving in the church there. The lay couple from our Melbourne church also arrived on the same day. The whole mission team was warmly welcomed by the pastor and his coworkers. We stayed in the same hotel where conditions were sub-par by Western standards. But we already had low expectations, and as long as the room was tidy, it was acceptable to us.

What you fear is what you get

When we arrived at the hotel, we had two rooms to choose between us and the Melbourne lay couple. We let them have the first choice and we settled for the alternative. That evening, the mission team sat together to discuss the agenda and to fellowship together. We shared how we felt about the living and hygienic conditions of India. The Melbourne lay couple told us that before they came for the trip, they had heard about the poor hygienic conditions in India. They asked the whole church to pray for them, particularly about not falling sick during the mission trip and not to see any rats (which they feared most). After the fellowship meeting, we all headed back to our own rooms and rested.

In the middle of the night, we were awakened by a shrieking sound and also heavy rambling and trampling noises that came from the room right above us. It was the room of the Melbourne couple. We wondered what happened to them. After a short while, it stopped and so we continued our sleep. The next morning when we met together, they told us their horror story! They encountered what they feared the most: *rats!* That was why they shrieked out loud as they jumped and trampled around to avoid the sudden intruder. After it vanished into a dark corner, they stooped down to look under the bed. To their horror, they saw mouse traps! That was a clear indication that the room was infested with rats, otherwise there would not be mouse traps under the bed. What they feared most actually happened and haunted them the whole night. They left the lights on, stayed in bed and just stared at the ceiling until daybreak.

We went with them to the hotel counter and filed a complaint. Fortunately, someone just checked out and they were able to change to another room. This time the management guaranteed them that there would be no more rats! But it was an unforgettable experience for all of us.

Time for a break

In Calcutta we had a packed schedule with activities that included running a children's program, conducting Bible studies, and preaching. We received positive feedback from the attendees and the pastoral team of the church. We knew that the Spirit of God was moving, and that our labor of love was not in vain.

Each day we had three sessions: morning, afternoon, and evening. That left us no time to tour the city. The pastoral team was kind enough to set apart a day for us to take a break. The pastor's wife took us out to tour the city. It was an eye opener for us.

The sacred cow

Calcutta is a city of over 10 million people. One could imagine the traffic conditions in the city. Even elephants were on the roads. Were they on the roads as a publicity stunt or as a means of transportation? We were told that every day the traffic, which was already in chaos without the elephants, would be compounded by these huge mammals trotting by your side. Oh, there were more surprises in store. Suddenly the traffic came to a standstill. Guess

what? A cow was resting in the middle of the road. In the Hindu religion, cows are sacred. One is forbidden to chase away a cow by force. Policemen were there but they could not do anything to the cow. The confrontation lasted for about 15 minutes. Finally the policemen somehow managed to persuade the cow to move to the sidewalk and traffic resumed. How strange it was to see a cow dictating the traffic.

The orphanage

Despite the heavy traffic, we made it to our first tour site, the orphanage founded by Mother Teresa. We were warned beforehand not to caress or embrace any of the orphans. The reason was that the orphans longed to be loved. If you expressed your sympathy or affection by caressing or embracing them, they would cling tight to you and never want to let you go. If you try to free yourself, they would cry and feel hurt as if they were being deserted again. So any momentary show of affection might result in more trauma to the orphans.

As we were shown room by room where the orphans lived, we noticed that many of them had physical defects. When they saw us, they all responded excitedly. Some of them smiled at us. A few reacted even more emotionally by fixing their eyes on us, leaping up and down, stretching out their hands, and mumbling something as we passed by. Our hearts were deeply troubled. On the one hand, we dearly wanted to embrace them. On the other hand, we were already warned of the consequences of being overly

affectionate to these lovesick orphans. That would only create more hurt and pain after a brief moment of joy and hope. We stealthily tried to touch their hands to express our affection. They reacted with beaming joy, and that pierced and imprinted in our hearts an unforgettable memory of them. Though we did not see Mother Teresa, we saw the fruit of her love to these orphans. She stood out as a role model for us to love the unloved.

The Home of the Destitute

Our next stop was the Home of the Destitute, whose residents were homeless people left for dead. They treated the place as their home where they would spend the last days of their lives. We took a tour inside the building and walked past people who were lying on their sick beds. Some of them were down to skin and bones. The atmosphere was lifeless and grief stricken. Our hearts were heavily burdened to see that death is such a harsh reality. We had the opportunity to talk to some of workers there and to hear of their experiences. To serve there, you would either turn stone cold or have a big heart. Some came from different countries to serve as volunteers in this place. One can never be the same after having served as a volunteer in this dark and gloomy place. Some of the volunteers were not Christians, and they came for various reasons. Whatever the reasons might be, we deeply appreciated their voluntary service. May God be merciful to those who show mercy!

Just a cup of tea

After taking us to see the aforementioned places, the pastor's wife knew that our hearts were heavy. So she took us to an Indian restaurant for a treat of the authentic local food. We had a wonderful and sumptuous meal at the restaurant. Ever since we began our mission in Calcutta, we were treated with authentic Indian tea every day. It was an art to see the street hawkers prepare the tea which was so tasty. After the meal, the pastor's wife asked if we wanted to order any drinks. I was planning to order tea. My dearest wife Kathleen cautioned me not to take the risk of ordering tea. I did not heed her warning because I seldom had stomach problems. On the contrary, the lay couple from Sydney and my wife were the ones who had weak stomachs. They took extra care to choose what they ate and drank. Whereas everybody ordered sealed bottles of distilled water as a hygienic measure, I ordered a cup of tea. When the waiter brought me the tea, the cup of tea was set on a bowl of hot water. I wondered if it was a customary practice. I took a sip and it tasted very good. I recommended it to my Australian team because they were tea lovers. But they declined. I enjoyed every sip and savored the last drop.

Paying for the consequence

After the meal, we were taken back to our lodging place and we called it a day. In the middle of the night, I was feeling sick with a stomachache. Before the break of dawn, I had already had a few diarrhea attacks. I started to vomit and had a high fever. The lay

brother from Sydney, a medical doctor, diagnosed me as having food poisoning. All leads pointed to the cup of tea that I drank at the restaurant because no one else fell sick. Thank God that when the lay couple from Sydney came to India, they brought along lots of medicine as a precaution. It proved to be a “life-saver” for me. I stayed in bed recuperating while the rest of the team went out to conduct the morning and afternoon sessions. But we all prayed earnestly that I could feel well enough to attend the evening session because I was scheduled to preach in the evening.

God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble

The diarrhea attacks continued intermittently once every two hours. I wondered if I could attend the evening session. As I meditated on the word of God, it dawned on me that God was teaching me a lesson on humility. I trusted in myself, thinking that I had a strong stomach that could digest anything. I even laughed at my Australian teammates for not being venturous in eating and drinking. It ended up that it was I who got sick. I asked God for forgiveness, pleading that He give me grace and strength to share in the evening.

After the afternoon session had ended, the team returned to the lodging place to see how I was faring. I was very weak and still had diarrhea attacks, but the fever subsided. We prayed together and then went to attend the meeting. We started the meeting with the song worship. Although I felt weak in singing along, I tried to

focus on the lyrics and offered my praise to God. When I was handed the time to share after the song worship, I started with a fervent prayer and then preached the message. Amazingly, perhaps because I was so focused on the message, I did not feel any stomach pain at all. I was able to preach flowingly and with conviction. I thanked God that as I humbled myself before Him, I experienced His wonderful grace that was indeed sufficient for me in times of weakness.

When the evening session ended and we returned to the lodging place, I had diarrhea again. Instead of feeling sad that I was still sick, I felt much joy knowing that God had given me a window of opportunity to complete the evening session by His wonderful grace and strength. I had less frequent diarrhea attacks overnight and it stopped completely by next afternoon.

We completed our mission in Calcutta by the grace and mercy of God. After that, our Sydney couple headed back to Sydney, whereas the Melbourne couple stayed with us and we were on our way to Nepal as our next mission.

Nepal

Before we left Sydney for our mission trip, we had emailed our coworkers in Nepal to confirm the date of our arrival. In those days, internet service was not easily accessible. After leaving Sydney, we no longer had the means to check our email to see whether or not our coworkers in Nepal had received our last email. By the time we headed to Nepal, it had been over two weeks

since we left Sydney for the mission trip. Since nothing had changed, we just followed the schedule and arrived in Nepal as planned.

Taxi on strike

We were full of excitement after a successful mission trip in Calcutta. In the evening, we landed at Kathmandu airport. We got our luggage and tried to look for familiar faces that would greet us at the airport. But after waiting for some time, our Nepal coworkers did not show up. We tried to find a phone booth to contact them, but we did not have the proper change for the phone. It was already late at night, after 9:00 pm, so we decided to go into the city first and then contact them the next morning. But to our horror, we were told that the taxi drivers were on strike and there was no other transportation to go to the city. The airport shuttle buses had been long gone while we were waiting for our coworkers. We were really stranded! What a start in Nepal!

Relief on hand

While we were pondering what to do, someone approached us and asked if we needed transportation to the city. He was a hotel representative, and if we stayed in his hotel, we would give us a free ride. When we asked about the hotel rate, he gave us a discounted rate equivalent to about US\$12 a night. By Nepalese standards, it was about average for budget accommodation. In fact

it was more than reasonable for us by our Australian standards, so we accepted his offer. At least we wouldn't be stranded at the airport.

Meeting with our coworkers

After a nice sleep, we got up in the morning much refreshed. We immediately called our coworkers using the hotel phone. They were so surprised to hear our voices and that we had arrived. They quickly rode their bicycles to the hotel to meet with us, and then took us to another budget hotel which turned out to be even cheaper and nicer. They told us that they had never received our last email and were wondering if we had changed our mission plan to Nepal. In those days, email communication was not always reliable. It was not unusual for emails to be lost. It worked out to be a test of faith for us. Yet God never abandons us, and once again we knew that God was carving another route for us to experience Him deeply.

After we settled in another hotel, we went with our coworkers to their home. It was wonderful to renew our fellowship with one another. They shared about how they started this work. It was very hard for them because they had to learn the Nepalese language before they could evangelize. But through their hard work and dedication, they were able to communicate with the locals and gradually they had a small group that met regularly.

They regretted that they did not receive our last email which had our flight details to Kathmandu. Due to time constraints, they

could not arrange for all the members to meet with us. But they arranged for small group meetings so that we may share the word of God with them for the next couple of days. For the rest of our stay, they suggested that we take a mountain tour package, for that would be an excellent experience because many tourists come to Kathmandu for the sole purpose of mountain trekking.

Setting sight on the Annapurna mountain range

We toyed with the idea of mountain trekking, but were unsure if we were equipped to take the mountain tour. The Melbourne couple was very keen to go. They told us that they did regular exercises and were fit to go hiking. But we had no trekking shoes for the rugged mountain terrain. The weather was still very cold, and especially so if we were to go up the mountain. The mountaintop was still covered with snow. But my main concern was Kathleen's health. She had just recovered from pneumonia not too long ago. We worried that the high altitude would be too much for her lungs to bear. But we remembered that when we were in Cameron Highlands, Malaysia, we went all the way to the top of the mountain and she felt fine. It would be an opportunity of a lifetime to trek on one of the mountain ranges near the Himalayas. Together we committed the matter to God in prayer.

After leaving our coworkers' home and returning to our hotel, we went to the city center to inquire about the mountain tour package. There were quite a few selections. We chose the Annapurna-Poon Hill trek. It was a three-night and four-day package to trek

to the peak of Poon Hill, 3200 meters above sea level. We were provided a tour guide and a porter. We went out shopping to equip ourselves with the basic essentials to prepare for our trek.

We spent the next two days meeting in small groups organized by our coworkers. We proclaimed the word of God to the people, and shared our testimonies with them. We also came to know some of them and how they had experienced God. We were mutually encouraged in the Lord. We saw the potential of these brethren and knew that God would cause this group to flourish in fruitfulness under the leading of our dear coworkers.

Annapurna, Here we come!

We were all set to go on our Annapurna-Poon Hill trek tour. We left our heavy luggage at the hotel and went to the travel agency early in the morning. There we met our tour guide and our porter. The tour guide was a young chap who spoke a little bit of English, but the porter spoke no English at all. Anyway, we took a tour bus and arrived at the base of the mountain trek. The weather was pleasant and we started our trek around noon time.

Day 1 — 7 hours' walk

At first we were planning to carry our own knapsacks. But the tour guide told us to leave our heavy belongings for the porter to carry. That was what he was hired to do. The porter did not look strongly built. In fact he was rather slim. We were concerned whether he could carry all our heavy belongings. But the tour guide

reassured us that the porter would have no problems carrying our luggage. He had teamed up with this porter before, and had seen him carrying much heavier luggage than ours. So we rearranged our belongings and carried a lighter knapsack. We left the rest of the luggage for the porter but we wondered how he was going to carry them all. What an eye opener for us! We saw him carefully putting our belongings one by one into a big basket with a strap. Then he stooped down with his back leaning against the basket, and wrapped the strap across his forehead. He slowly got up and signaled to the tour guide that he was ready to go. We looked at him with amazement as we followed the tour guide to begin our quest up the mountain, with the porter steadily following us.

The road was not too steep and not too rough. Since it was the only way to go up the mountain, we shared the same road with donkeys that carried heavy loads up the mountain. As we progressed up the mountain, we saw quite a few locals carrying heavy loads the same way as our porter. It was their technique of carrying heavy loads. When we reached a place where we took a short break, my curiosity prompted me to ask the tour guide if I could try to carry the basket just like the porter. He smiled and gave his consent. I turned around and bent down with my back against the basket. The porter helped me put the strap across my forehead. When it was all set, the tour guide warned me to be careful and not to overly exert myself or stretch myself beyond my ability. Then he signaled me to stand up slowly with my forehead tilting forward to lift the basket. I immediately felt the weight pressing against my neck right down to my spine. It was so heavy

that I could not even stand upright. They all signaled me to stop the experiment, and I humbly surrendered, realizing that it was no easy task to carry a heavy load this way. We deeply appreciate the labor of these porters whose profession was to carry goods and supplies up the mountain.

We managed to walk up the mountain, leisurely taking photos and having short breaks. The tour guide told us that there were not many places for accommodation along the trek and that the nearest lodging place was still some distance away. He gently reminded us that if we maintained the same speed, we would not be able to make it to the lodging place until very late at night. So we picked up speed in going up the mountain. But the road became steeper and steeper. The porter remained in good composure while we were getting tired. The sun began to set around 6:00 pm and the tour guide cheered us on, saying that we were almost there. It would be best to beat the clock and make it to our lodging place before sunset because the temperature would plummet to a few degrees above zero. But we only had snacks after an early lunch. By now, our energy was more or less drained. Our legs were getting heavy and sore. The temperature was dropping. The tour guide encouraged us to press on. We struggled one step at a time and finally made it to the lodging place. It was a rundown shack but at least it was warm and we had our dinner there. We thanked God for a wonderful day.

Day 2 – 10 hours' trek

We woke up early in the morning. Our legs were so sore and stiff that we found it hard to lift them. But the journey had to go on. The tour guide told us that we might need to walk for more than 8 hours to make up for the lost time. If we had started early, we could have walked at a slower pace and still make it to our next destination around sunset. We looked at the porter. He was all ready to go. There was no excuse for us but to get on our feet and move on.

Sharing our faith

We got to know the tour guide a little bit more. Most Nepalese are Buddhists because Nepal is a Buddhist country. Our tour guide was raised as a Buddhist when he was a child. He shared about his family and his belief. He also told us that he had been a tour guide to some Christian trekkers who shared their Christian faith with him. So we also shared our testimonies with him and encouraged him to be open minded to explore further. He was interested in what we were saying, and would sometimes ask about the Christian faith.

Fighting the cold and hunger

We covered a lot of ground that day. But because of the stiffness of our legs, we were slow in hiking up the mountain. The sun had already set and we had yet to find a place for dinner. We had

consumed most of our snacks and all our drinks but we were still very hungry. We finally arrived at a resting place and stopped for dinner. It was already past 8:00 pm. We ordered food and hoped that the people could serve us faster, but the woman told us they did not have enough cooked rice and we had to wait for them to cook more. We had no choice but to wait for them to cook the rice. Meanwhile we were sitting in an open area fighting the cold and hunger. Finally, after waiting for over 45 minutes, food was served before us.

Uninvited intruder

Our Melbourne brother was eager to give thanks to God for the wonderful hot dinner. While we shut our eyes and were listening to him giving thanks to God, suddenly we heard some flapping noise. Something had landed on the table, with the noise getting louder and too close for comfort. As soon as our dear brother finished his thanksgiving prayer, we opened our eyes and what a sight! There was an uninvited intruder, a hen, standing on the table with one of her claws stepping on the plate of rice in front of our Melbourne brother. We all burst out screaming, and the lady who served us rushed out from her shack and grabbed the hen.

Our dear brother's plate of rice was spoiled but there was no more rice left! He looked dismayed as he stared at his plate of rice. We all wanted to contribute our rice to supplement his, but he declined and just brushed aside the portion of rice that the hen had stepped on and consumed the rest. We deeply appreciated his

response because all along he did not burst in anger. He was the one who gave thanks for the food, and Satan played a trick on us. But we maintained our peace. We finished dinner and headed to find a place for accommodation. By the time we arrived, it was already past 10:00 pm. It was a long and memorable day.

Day 3 – Arriving at the foot of Poon Hill

We started early again after a good night's rest. Our legs were not as sore and stiff as before. It looked like we were getting in shape after two days of trekking. We enjoyed the scenic view as we strolled up the mountain. This time we arrived before sunset at the main lodge at the foot of Poon Hill. Many trekkers had already arrived. We had nice hot drinks and a good dinner. The temperature was getting a bit lower because we were already in higher altitude.

The tour guide told us to sleep early because we would have to start going up Poon Hill at 2:30 am if we were to see the sunrise at 6:30 am. He also cautioned us that it would be freezing cold overnight, and advised us to dress warmly and be ready for the early morning trek. We were concerned about Kathleen, as to whether her lungs could stand such bitter cold and high altitudes. But she said that so far, apart from the stiffness of her leg muscles, she felt fine. So we gathered together to pray and committed our morning trek to our loving Father, seeking His mercy and grace to face our ultimate challenge.

We tried to hit the bed early at 9:00 pm but the room was getting colder and colder. We put on all our warm clothes but still found it hard to sleep in the freezing cold. We were wondering how we could ever manage to go up Poon Hill with the bitter cold temperature in the wee hours of early morning. No sooner had we fallen into sleep than we were woken by our tour guide. It was already 2:00am.

Day 4 – Poon Hill

As we gathered together, we all shared that we did not have a good night's sleep. The tour guide and the porter were used to it and were ready to go up the mountain. As for the Melbourne couple, they said they were eager to take up the challenge. So we prayed together for God's mercy and then started our quest at 2:30 am to reach the top of Poon Hill.

The strong fell

Many trekkers had gone ahead of us. The trek became steeper and more hilly than before. The air was fresh but bitter cold. We had to walk a bit faster to keep warm. After half an hour of walking uphill, suddenly our Melbourne sister stopped. She felt dizzy and was fainting. That took us by surprise. Among the four of us from Australia, she was the fittest, and did regular exercises and walking. Even after the first three days of trekking, she felt less sore on

the legs than any of us. But now, after only half an hour of walking, she felt dizzy and was short of breath.

Team's decision: Go or withdraw

We waited a few minutes to see if she might improve. But she looked pale and was leaning against the rocky hill. Kathleen had an ointment which she would often carry with her in case of headache or dizziness. She gave it to the Melbourne sister. Her husband suggested that Kathleen and I forge ahead while they abandon the trek. But we felt that we would either go up together or withdraw together.

Pray for healing

The tour guide and the porter joined us as we huddled together and prayed to God for the Melbourne sister. After the prayer, she said she felt much better. We thanked God for His immediate deliverance. Even the tour guide was so stunned that he praised God. He told us that he too experienced the power of our Almighty God. Indeed! Yahweh our God reigns Supreme. He is our Helper, our Stronghold and our Shelter. So we forged on in high spirits but at a slower pace. We knew that we might miss seeing the sunrise but at least we would have gone up Poon Hill.

Perfect timing

On our way up, many trekkers hurriedly went past us to the top of Poon Hill. They wanted to catch the first glimpse of sunrise. Meanwhile our Melbourne sister recovered fully and we managed to speed up a little. The clock was ticking away and it was already 6:00 am. We were still a few hundred meters from the top. We had tried our best, but it felt so near yet so far. It was daunting to rush up to the top of the mountain in 15 minutes. Kathleen bid me to go faster so that at least one of us could take a photo of the sunrise. So I picked up pace and tried my best to trek up the hill. I was still about a hundred meters from the top when I turned back and looked at the rest of the team. Then to my utter delight, I saw the sun coming out from the top of the mountain range. I immediately called out to them, and pointed to the rising sun. God is wonderful! We didn't need to reach the top of the mountain to catch the first glimpse of the sunrise. We were all jumping with exceeding joy that we saw the sun rise at Poon Hill. After taking some snapshots, we continued to go up until we reached the top of Poon Hill. We thanked God that we had accomplished the ultimate challenge of reaching the summit.

The summit was actually quite flat like a plateau. But immediately we felt the gusty wind and freezing temperatures. We could not stand for more than 5 minutes before our hands and faces were frozen and I could not take any photos. It was so unbearably cold on the mountaintop that we quickly retreated downhill. We pitied the trekkers who whisked past us on the way up. They were waiting on top of the mountain against the gusty wind and sub-

zero temperatures. The earlier they arrived at the summit, the longer they had to endure the bitter cold. All the more, we thanked God for giving us perfect timing to go up to the top of the mountain. We were able to see the sunrise and our bodies were still warm because we were always on the move.

Down the Snowy Hill

For the descent from the top of Poon Hill, the tour guide took us along another route. It was another unusual experience. The path was covered with snow, and at times we could not even see it. It was also quite bushy. But that proved to be a great help because sometimes when there was no visible path, we would bend our knees and slide down from bush to bush. It was lots of fun yet quite dangerous, for we could miss catching the bush while sliding down the slope.

Most rewarding news

We had gone through all kinds of trek conditions including steep and snowy slopes. But we finally managed to make it down to the foot of the hill by late afternoon. We took the tour bus back to Kathmandu. We bid goodbye to our tour guide and our porter. We became friends, and the most rewarding news of all was that the tour guide said he had experienced God and had found his new faith in the Only True God. (We maintained contact through

emails, and years later, he told us that he and his wife got baptized and had become Christians.)

In this mountain trek, we completed our ultimate challenge of reaching the top of Poon Hill and seeing the sunrise. If we boast, we boast in the Lord (1Cor.1:31) to accomplish the feat. We learned that despite our physical weakness, God's mercy and grace empowered us to complete such a feat. May Yahweh our loving God be highly exalted, for He deserves all honor and praise.

As we departed from Kathmandu, the Melbourne couple headed back home to Australia while we were on our way to our next venture: New Delhi, India.

New Delhi, India

When our coworkers in Nepal found out that our next stop was New Delhi, they told us that they had been there before, and shared with us their good and bad experiences. They gave us some advice as to where we should go for sightseeing given the few days we were to stay in New Delhi. They also warned us about what we had to watch out for, and this proved to be valuable information. They suggested a district called Paharganj where we could get relatively low budget accommodation.

New Delhi airport: Encountering deception

Kathleen and I were all set to go to New Delhi, and arrived at New Delhi airport in the evening. After we picked up our luggage, we went to the counter as suggested by our coworkers, where we could book our train tickets for our sightseeing tour. At the counter, we told the clerk that we would like to book a train tour to Taj Mahal and the Pink City given the few days that we will stay in New Delhi. The clerk worked out a train schedule for us, and the train tour would cost about US\$200. He demanded everything to be paid in cash in US currency. We told him that we did not have enough US currency to pay for the train fares. He asked how much US money we had on hand. We had only about US\$80. He then formulated another train schedule for us, and right on the dot it cost us US\$80. It made us wonder how he could empty our pocket of US money with such precision. But at least we booked the train tickets, and it was already past 9:00 pm. We were the last customers and the clerk closed the counter right after we got our tickets. Before he closed the counter, we asked where we could get a taxi. We were forewarned by our coworkers that people will approach us to take a ride in their taxis. We would be ripped off unless we went to the “Government Approved” counter at the airport to hire a taxi. The counter clerk also told us to go to a certain counter for a “Government Approved” taxi, and cautioned us not to go to the wrong counter.

“Government Approved”

We went to the counter as directed by the train counter clerk, but it was already closed. We were about the only tourists left at the airport. As we went towards the exit, someone called us and we saw a counter that was still open for business. We went over and the clerk asked if we were looking for a taxi. We said yes. Then she raised a signboard with the words “Government Approved” written on it. She told us that we had come to the right counter. We asked her how much is the taxi to Paharganj. She checked the fares and told us that it will cost 400 rupees. What a shock! That was way off the mark of what our Nepal coworkers had told us. We thanked them for warning us or else we would have taken the bait especially when we were desperate for transportation to Paharganj. So we told the clerk that it was too much. Then she reduced it by 50 rupees. We suspected that it was fake. We left immediately while she was yelling for us to come back for further negotiation.

We passed on a few other counters, and again there was a counter where the clerk asked us if we were looking for a taxi. Again she waved a signboard with the words “Government Approved” on it. We knew it was another fake operation but for curiosity’s sake, we approached her and asked how much it would cost to go to Paharganj. She said 350 rupees. At least that was 50 rupees cheaper than our first offer. We bargained and she reduced it to 300 rupees, which was still about double the amount our coworkers had told us. So we left and did not bother to respond to many other counters along the way which waved the same sign-

board, “Government Approved”. How deceptive! There should be only one “Government Approved” counter for hiring a taxi. Yet there was a whole line of counters with a ready-made “Government Approved” signboard. We wondered why there was no police intervention against such blatantly fake operations.

When we approached the airport exit, we saw a soldier standing there guarding the door. We stopped and asked him where we could find the “Government Approved” taxi counter. He shook his head and spoke in a local dialect. Apparently he did not understand English. We exited the airport and wondered where we could hire a taxi. Then someone approached us and asked if we were looking for a taxi. He showed us an identity card with “Government Approved” stamp on it. When we asked him for the taxi fare to Paharganj, he gave us a quote of 300 rupees. Without our approval, he tried to move our luggage. We stopped him and asked for a better bargain. While I was negotiating with him over the taxi fare, Kathleen was glancing around, and all of a sudden, she saw a neon signboard some distance yonder from which she vaguely made out the word “Taxi”. She said we should walk over to that signboard. Once the person saw that we were heading to the signboard, he followed us and reduced the fare to 200 rupees. We knew for sure that he was another counterfeit operator, so we ignored his pursuit and finally got to the right taxi counter. The taxi fare turned out to be 160 rupees and the counter clerk even cautioned us that the fare covers everything and we did not need to pay anything extra even if the driver demanded more. The clerk gave us the license plate number of the correct taxi, and we had to

search for it. Finally the driver approached us and led us to his taxi. We checked the license plate and hopped into the back seats because there was another person already occupying the front seat. We did not really care who that person was because by that time, it was already around 10:00 pm. But at least we were riding on a “Government Approved” taxi.

Searching for accommodation

We told the taxi driver to take us to the hotel recommended by our coworkers. When the taxi driver arrived at the street, it was jam-packed with people even though it was late at night around 11:00pm. He stopped the car and told us that our hotel was in the middle of the street. He requested another 20 rupees to drive into the street. We were already told by the counter clerk not to give extra money to the driver. So we told him to drive us right to the hotel. He refused to go if we did not pay him extra money. It was highway robbery! He was so rude that we decided to exit the taxi and get our luggage. He and his friend got out of the taxi, opened the trunk, and threw our luggage out near the ditch, and sped off. We were left there picking up our luggage and we strolled on to find our hotel.

Actually it was not far to the hotel. When we walked in, there in front of us was a tourist yelling at the receptionist for a refund. She complained about the room being filthy and having no hot water for a shower. There was a heated argument and we just stood there waiting. Finally she got her refund and as she turned

around and saw us, she told us not to stay in the hotel. It turned out that she too was a Canadian. We asked her where she would be going for hotel accommodation. She told us to follow her and we ended up going to her intended hotel which was also for low budget accommodation. We asked her how to get to the train station because we would be taking an early train. She said that it was within walking distance from the hotel, and that it would take her only 15 minutes to get there.

A room to lay our heads

We arrived at the hotel and the Canadian woman bid us goodbye while we went to the hotel counter to book our accommodation. At first the receptionist told us that the hotel was already fully booked. We were so disappointed and did not know what to do. We told her that we would stay only a few hours overnight because we had to leave at 5:30 am to catch the train. She then told us that there was a room clean enough to stay for the night, but was not really the best. In desperation, we took it.

When we entered the room, it had a stinky smell. The bed sheet was obviously used. We had to request a clean bed sheet. When we took a shower and turned the tap to the maximum, we only got a slow drip of cold water with occasional flushes of hot water. The room had no window. All it had was an opening at top of the door that allowed in some fresh air as well as outside noise. Nonetheless, we counted it a blessing to have a bed to lay our head. We thanked God for an extraordinary day of events.

Somehow we felt that God was teaching us to learn discernment and that this was only the beginning of the lesson.

Friends or foes?

The night was late and we had only a few hours left for sleep. We set the alarm clock to 5:00 am, which would give us ample time to catch the 6:15 am train. Early in the morning, after checking out at the counter, we departed from the hotel to walk on the streets carrying our heavy luggage. A tricycle was waiting at the front of the hotel ready for hire. But since the Canadian lady told us that it takes only 15 minutes to walk to the train station, we did not take the tricycle. The driver was trailing us as we forged ahead. But after dragging the heavy luggage for about five minutes, I was already exhausted. And seeing no end of the street, we stopped walking and got onto the tricycle instead. It was actually quite a distance to the end of the street and we were happy that we took the tricycle instead.

The driver stopped at the end of the street and asked us to get off. We paid the fare and asked for directions to the train station. But he mumbled something in a local dialect, and then whisked away back in the direction of the hotel. We were left in the dark not knowing where the train station was. Suddenly three local men approached us and asked if we were going to the train station. They looked friendly and polite. We said “Yes!” So they offered to lead us to the train station. One of them started to help us by taking the luggage. We hesitated, for who were they, friends

or foes? Seeing that we were pressed for time and there was no taxi nearby, we decided to take our chances and follow them. But after walking across the street, they were leading us to a darker and darker place. Our instincts told us not to follow them. Suddenly we remembered that God was teaching us to have discernment. We stopped and asked them where they were taking us. They tried to reassure us that they were taking us in the right direction. They were tall men and were surrounding us as if trying to block our vision. But Kathleen kept looking yonder and suddenly she saw the lights in the opposite direction. She told me to go towards the light instead of following these “friendly” locals.

We seized our luggage, thanked them for their help, and started moving towards the light. They were still following us and saying that they would take us to the train station. As we approached closer to the lights, we clearly saw that it was the train station. The three locals then vanished. We thanked our Father that He alerted us not to follow these locals and protected us from being lured into their evil snares. How frightening it would be if we had followed them.

In the nick of time

What a relief that we finally made it to the train station. When we entered the station, it was already crowded. We looked at the huge train schedule signboard, and was very confused about which platform to board our train. It was already 6:00 am. We tried to ask the locals and showed them our train tickets, but they could not

speaking English. We looked around but could not find an information desk. I asked Kathleen to stay put while I went to the counter to ask for directions. But there were long lineups at all the counters. I gave up and went back to Kathleen. We were really desperate because time was slipping away. We were so near yet so far, and could not find our way to the right train platform. While we were silently crying to God for help, suddenly an elderly man approached us and asked if we needed help. We were overjoyed that he could speak English. We showed him our train tickets and he pointed to the signboard and indicated the correct platform. He even told us how to get to the platform. We were so thankful for his help and with minutes to go, we lugged our luggage and dashed to the platform. We climbed one story, ran along a long alley, and then descended to the correct platform. We located our train compartment, and right after we hopped into it, the train started moving. What a start for the day! We thanked God that we made it to the train in the nick of time.

Conclusion

When we booked our trip to New Delhi, we thought it would be a short break for us after completing our mission to Calcutta and Nepal. But we got more than we bargained for. Apart from enjoying the tour to Taj Mahal and the Pink City, we learned the precious lesson of spiritual discernment. If we were not in tune with the Holy Spirit, we would have been deceived many times. The deception could have even been life threatening. But God

came to our rescue when we quieted down our hearts and listened to His leading. It reminds us of what the psalmist wrote in Psalm 46:1,10, that God is our refuge in times of trouble.

Psalm 46:1,10 ¹God is our refuge and strength, abundantly available for help, a very present help in trouble ... ¹⁰ Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen. I will be exalted in the earth.

If we quiet down, be still, and acknowledge Him as our God, He will surely come to our rescue. All glory and honor be to God! We were full of exaltation in the presence of our loving Father as we ended our mission trip on our way back to Sydney.

North Thailand – Indonesia Mission

Introduction

We thank the Lord for granting us the privilege to participate in the mission trips. When we were planning the trips, we had a few places in mind such as Myanmar, Vietnam, India, North Thailand, and Indonesia. Since the airfares were quite expensive to go to any of these places, we thought of combining two mission trips into one to make the airfares more worthwhile. In July, we had a sister coworker who just joined us in Sydney. So we felt comfortable about going for a six-week mission while she held the fort in Sydney.

While we were inquiring about airfares, it just so happened that there was a special package deal called “Circle Asia” which covered most of the destinations we intended to visit except India. When we first inquired about the air tickets, we didn’t have enough in our church’s mission fund to cover the payment. But miraculously by God’s grace, some church members contributed to the mission fund. By the time we had to pay for the tickets, the

fund had just enough to cover the amount, and we finally decided to go to North Thailand and Surabaya, Indonesia.

So, after much deliberation in organizing the itineraries which covered all the destinations, we were set to go from Nov 11th to Dec 22nd, 1999, to North Thailand and Indonesia with a team of brothers and sisters.

Bali (November 11th – 15th)

We had hoped to get some rest in Bali before going on the North Thailand mission. As usual, there would be plenty of work to do before heading for a long trip. We were quite tired and exhausted when we left Sydney. In fact, we were just recovering from the flu. We were so busy that we missed calling our Bali brother before leaving Sydney. The last time we talked to him was over a month ago, and he didn't give us his address. He just told us to remember his phone number and to call him once we arrived in Bali.

Flight postponed: A blessing in disguise

In any case, a sister kindly took us to the airport and then left for work. When we showed our air tickets to the counter attendant, she couldn't find such a flight and referred us to another counter. In a rush, we lugged our luggage to another section of the airport to verify our tickets. In the end, we were told that the flight was for November 12th, the next day. We were stranded at the airport. We made our way back home and called our Bali brother. He was

surprised to hear our voice because he had forgotten about our arrival. In fact he had just got back from Surabaya that morning. So even if we had called him the night before, we wouldn't have been able to contact him. We wouldn't even be able to leave a message because none of his servants understood English. We thanked God that we got hold of him, and he promised to pick us up on the evening of November 12th. We ended up having a very sound sleep on our own warm bed which we would miss for the next 6 weeks.

We arrived in Bali on November 12th at 11:30 pm, but we had a hard time making a phone call because we didn't carry the proper change. Some people tried selling us a phone card for US\$15, which was a rip-off. We were lost and didn't know what to do, but somehow an Indonesian lad came over and offered to make the phone call for us. We finally contacted our Bali brother and he immediately came to pick us up. The phone call should cost around 100 rupiah but we paid the lad 1000 rupiah because that was the smallest change we had. That worked out to only Australian 22 cents. But we really appreciated his help. Our Bali brother fetched us with his pickup truck, and we were warmly received.

Over the next few days in Bali, we were treated like royalty. This brother was very generous and didn't allow us to pay for anything. He showed us around and pampered us with plenty of nice fruits. We had to plead with him to let us treat him for dinner. Finally, he let us treat him just once during the whole time we were in Bali.

Durian experience

Our Bali brother told us about the different kinds of tropical fruit that Indonesia grew. Kathleen told him that she loved durian. But I abhorred it because I tasted one many years ago in Canada, giving me unpleasant memories of eating it. But our dear brother told us that Indonesia produces the finest durians. One time he took us out for a tour and stopped at a street where both sides were crowded with hawkers selling durians. The whole atmosphere was scented with the fragrance of durian. At first I was a bit annoyed as to why he took us to the “durian” street. But he was so happy to tell Kathleen that this is the best place in the world to select the best durians. He jumped out of his car and ran across the street to one of the hawkers. He sat right there and started to eat some durians. He waved to us and bid us to join him. We were thirsty, and Kathleen could not resist the invitation. She told me to join the brother as a matter of courtesy even though I did not like durians. I reluctantly escorted her across the street and joined our dear friend. Kathleen tasted the first seed and immediately commented that it was the best she had ever tasted. She and the brother both encouraged me to try the durian while they clinically consumed one seed after another. Finally, to be courteous to our friend, I tried one seed. Wow! My eyes brightened. Just one bite changed my whole impression of durians. It was so tasty and delicious. I could not help but grab more seeds to satisfy my appetite. In the end, I ate nine seeds in quick succession. I was about to consume more when the brother told us that if we were not used to eating durian like the locals, we should not eat too

much at one go or else we would end up with indigestion or a stomachache. So we stopped the eating, but the flavor of the durian lingered on.

As I reflected on my durian experience, I learned a spiritual lesson. Sometimes one bad experience in the past can hamper us for a lifetime. Many years ago in the early 1980's, Kathleen's brother-in-law, a Malaysian, was excited over the fact that he could at last buy durian in Canada. In those days in Canada, durians were rare and expensive. Kathleen's brother-in-law wanted to share a durian with the family. I was not so keen about the smell, but being courteous, I joined the family in watching him carefully open the durian. He passed one seed after another to each family member. When I had mine, I had to stop breathing to take my first bite. I found it absolutely tasteless. I almost vomited but finally forced myself to swallow it. Since then, whenever the family had durian, I would shun it and part company with them. I was really a party pooper. Every time they assured me that it was much better than before, I would stubbornly reject their kind offer and walk away. I was not really a good witness because I would sometimes even show my disgust as I walked away.

While we were serving in Hong Kong, one day someone bought our team a durian. It is considered an exotic and expensive fruit in Hong Kong. Our coworkers were thrilled to receive the gift and they gathered around and opened it. I expressed my dislike for the fruit and just walked away. No matter what other people said, including my dearest wife Kathleen, I stubbornly did not give durian a second chance.

This time in Bali, I simply could not refuse the persistent invitation of our dear brother and Kathleen. I forced myself to try eating durian again. It was an eye opener for me. I wonder why I was so stiff-necked all these years. Sometimes one “traumatic” experience can distort the whole picture and make us biased and cynical, blinding us from seeking the truth or the true value of a thing or person. Sometimes one bitter argument over a small issue can end a relationship between two friends. A simple misunderstanding can end a friendship if we do not give the other party a second chance. Sometimes being brought up in some established doctrines can hinder us from exploring new grounds for the sake of the truth. In this “durian” experience, the Spirit of God taught me to have a bigger heart to forgive, to give the benefit of the doubt, and to give a second chance in overcoming bad experiences. And most importantly, I learned to be open-minded in seeking the truth and not to be confined by my own set of rules or values.

The Lord is my Song

The Bali brother also entertained us with his piano playing. He was close to 60 years old and had been an entertainer for over 40 years, playing the piano in famous hotels and performing in piano concerts. To be honest, among the people we knew, we had never heard anyone play the piano as well as he. He sang two songs while playing the piano: “Amazing Grace” and “God will Make the Way”. Sometimes we lose the spirit of songs because they are all

too familiar to us. But when this dear brother sang the songs with his beautiful piano accompaniment, it was so uplifting that it felt like we were in heaven listening to angels singing. It reminded me of:

Exodus 15:2 The LORD is my strength and **song**, and He has become my salvation; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will extol Him.

Indeed, the Lord God is my strength and my song. Music can be so powerful in lifting one's spirit to praise God. This brother came to know the Lord seven years ago, and his whole life had since changed dramatically. He had deep compassion for the homeless, the poor, and the outcast. In fact, most of the servants in his mansion were previously homeless people. But he gave them jobs with higher than average pay, and all of them eventually became Christians. Though his Scripture knowledge was shallow, he was very generous and giving. While we were there, we tried our best to answer his questions about the Bible, and he was very eager to listen.

Sow the Seed

On Sunday we attended a charismatic church, and were introduced to another brother. When this brother found out that we could speak Cantonese, he was excited and wanted to take us to visit his secretary's mom who spoke Cantonese. He wanted us to share the gospel with her. The next morning, he came to visit us at

9:00 am. We met him only the day before, and we shared with him about our mission trip. He ended up giving us a considerable sum of money as expenses for the trip. Then he urged us to go with him to visit this Cantonese-speaking auntie. We had only two hours to share the gospel with her because we had to leave by noon to North Thailand. The auntie was so happy that we could talk with her in her mother tongue and she was very receptive to the gospel.

We never cease to be amazed by the love of God. His timing and arrangement are often unpredictable. He brought us all the way from Sydney to Bali just to share the gospel with this auntie shortly before we departed for North Thailand. We sowed the seed and prayed that God would cause it to grow in her heart. This brother, together with our 60-year-old musician brother, took us to the airport and urged us to come back. We left Indonesia full of praise and thanksgiving to God. The experience touched our hearts and encouraged us to continue on our mission trip.

North Thailand (November 16th – 27th)

We flew from Bali and arrived in Bangkok on November 15th. We stayed at my brother's place. Ever since January 1998, he and his family had been living in Bangkok for business reasons. The next day, my brother took us to the airport and we were on our way to Chiang-Rai. Meanwhile, two lay couples from our Sydney church joined us for the mission to North Thailand. They would meet up with us at Chiang-Rai.

Living with the hill tribe

When we arrived in Chiang-Rai, our coworker was already waiting for us and he welcomed us warmly. He had arranged for a pickup van to take us to the hill tribe. The road was bumpy and winding. We finally arrived at our destination after a few hours' drive. We were amazed by how our coworker could adapt to such high-altitude conditions. He was a disabled person with a hunched back, a disability that impaired his respiratory system. In his condition, it would be particularly tough to live at high altitudes. But he testified that in all these years since he had settled in this place, God had granted him grace upon grace to overcome his disability. In fact he had tried all kinds of medicine and learned so much about their effects that he became the village's "medical" consultant. He was a living testimony to God's wonderful grace and awesome power.

Before we headed for the mission trip to North Thailand, we saw some photos of the kind of accommodation we would be staying at. We were mentally prepared for the simplicity of life there. Still, we were taken aback when we arrived at the hill tribe where we were to stay. The place was unhygienic with animal feces deposited here and there. Chicken, ducks and dogs were running around in the front yard. Kathleen adjusted much better than I. Once we arrived at our hut, we unloaded our luggage and Kathleen took off her shoes to put on slippers. Then she would go out to the front yard and chat with our coworker's wife. To my shame, I was a bit of a slow learner in this area. It took me a

couple of hours before I reluctantly took off my shoes and walked in my slippers.

After we settled at our coworker's place, we started to discuss the work there. He and his wife were living in a Lahu village with about 30-plus villagers. They were all Christian by birth but lacked teaching in the word of God. We were told there was a meeting place made of straw and bamboo. It was so run down that it was deemed unsafe. So our coworker proposed to the villagers that they build a safer meeting place with concrete and cement. They agreed and took immediate action. They demolished the old church and started to build a new one, with the aim of completing it just in time for Christmas. With that in mind, we decided to consolidate the work in the village with a series of Bible studies on communal living. Among the two lay couples from Australia who joined us from November 16th to 27th, is a sister who was 12 weeks pregnant. Our coworker's wife in Thailand was also about 12 weeks pregnant. So we tried to limit the amount of traveling on those bumpy roads for the safety of the two pregnant sisters.

Sharing the Gospel and participating in their communal life

As it turned out, we conducted two Bible study sessions every day while we were in the village. We also visited two drug rehab centers and one other village where the coworker's wife's family lived. During this mission trip, each of us had a chance to lead Bible studies, share, or preach three times.

Since our theme was about the body life and communal living, we not only shared the word of God with the villagers, but also took into account the physical conditions of our dear coworker and his pregnant wife. So we participated in some manual labor. Since winter was around the corner, we wanted to gather more wood for our coworker so that he may have enough to keep the place warm for the winter. We went to the bush, chopped the bamboo and carried it back to his home. We also ploughed his yard to reshape the landscape for more land use.

One day our coworker suggested that we visit the rice field down the valley. We walked down the hill and crossed the stream before reaching the rice paddy. We saw some workers threshing and winnowing the rice stalks to collect the rice grains. We thought it would be an interesting experience and so we tried to do the same thing. Then we realized it was not easy at all. I tried to thresh the rice stalks but only a few grains fell out. My hands and arms were lined with cuts because I did not thresh the stalks correctly. Then I realized how precious each grain of rice was to the farmer. It was the product of blood, sweat and tears.

After that, we were introduced to our coworker's mother-in-law. She was short and tiny, yet was waiting to carry a bag of grain up to the village. I offered to carry a bag of grain back to the village, but my coworker told me that it would be too heavy for me to carry a full bag, which would weigh over 30 kilograms. But seeing my eagerness to help, they filled the bag 1/3 full for me to carry. I was so amazed that our coworker's mother-in-law with her tiny frame was about to carry a whole bag. I was holding my

bag with both arms and started to go up the hill. As I turned around, I saw my coworker's mother-in-law placing the bag at the bottom of a strap. While holding the top of the strap, she turned around with the rice bag against her back. She bent down and wrapped the strap around her forehead. Then she slowly got up and carried the bag on her back by means of the strap around her forehead. I was astounded to see how this tiny woman could carry 30 kilograms of grain and walk uphill. After walking five minutes uphill, I was struggling to keep my balance and had to stop to catch my breath. Then I saw this tiny lady steadily climbing uphill fast approaching me. I immediately had to get up and keep going. Every time I made a stop, I would see her catching up with me. It took me 40 minutes just to carry the bag of rice from the valley to the village up the hill. I was exhausted by the time I finally arrived at the grain storehouse and unloaded my 1/3 full bag. Minutes later, my coworker's mother-in-law arrived. While I was out of breath and feeling a bit dizzy, she was so composed as to smile to greet us. It put me to shame indeed. In any case, for the little we did, our participation won the villagers' hearts even though we looked clumsy and in fact did little to help.

Medical workshop

Apart from the manual work, we also held a special medical workshop conducted by our medical-doctor brother from Sydney. It was attended by both the Lahu villagers and their neighboring Akah villagers. At the end of the workshop, our brother offered

free clinical checkups for those who needed medical attention. These were the most touching moments of the mission trip. After treating a brother from the Lahu village for his headache, we saw an Akah young girl coming for medical care. Her foot was full of infected sores but our dear brother wasn't afraid of the infection. He bent down and gently washed her foot with salt water. The girl was in severe pain and two men had to hold her still. After the foot was cleansed, Kathleen helped out in the bandaging. One after another, patients came out mostly from the Akah village. The Akah villagers were well known for their lack of hygiene and for not taking baths. Even the Lahu villagers abhorred the filthiness of the Akah villagers, who were under the control of a witch doctor in the village who believed that water was evil. There were about seven patients that evening, and it took about two hours to attend to them after the workshop. It was way past the village bedtime which was about 10:00 pm. But we sowed the seed of God's compassion for these Akah villagers and we prayed that eventually they would also become Christians. We also hope that the Lahu Christians will break the barriers and evangelize to their neighbors with love and compassion.

Visit to the drug rehab center

Our coworker also arranged for a visit to a drug rehab center near Chiang-Mai. It was a few hours' drive from our place. We were invited to share the word of God there, and were all keen to go. A van was supposed to pick us up in the afternoon. But when we

were set to leave, the driver suddenly had mechanical problems with the car. Since we lived at the hill tribe, there was no convenient access to auto parts. My coworker had to ride on his motor-bike to the nearest village to buy the parts. By the time the van was fixed and ready to go, it was already late afternoon. But our first meeting was scheduled for 8:00 pm. After a short prayer, we quickly drove to our destination.

Out in the cold

The sisters were sitting inside the van while the brothers were sitting in the van's open area at the back. In the beginning, we were thrilled to be in the open area. We all stood up, raising our hands just like in the movie Titanic! What a feeling to stand up against the breeze on the open trunk of a van. But since we were already late, the driver was trying to make up for lost time, and drove ferociously downhill. As the van picked up speed, the wind gathered strength and it was chilly cold. The sun started to set and the temperature quickly plummeted. We stooped down and took shelter behind the passenger compartment against the gusty wind. We were not prepared for such bitter cold temperatures. We were all shivering and I was feeling numb from head to toe. The cold became so unbearable that I prayed silently in my heart that our loving Father would keep us warm under the shelter of His wings.

Chill warning

We finally arrived at our destination before 8:00 pm. I was struggling to stand upright. My face was numb, and I needed help to get out of the trunk. It was a strange feeling because I felt empty as if my brain had completely shut down. I was walking, zigzagging like a drunkard. Each step weighed a thousand tons! I simply could not control my motion. It was a frightening experience. Kathleen saw me wobbling and losing my balance. She quickly came to my aid and grabbed me on one side while another brother supported me on the other side. They helped me get into a room to warm up. After our luggage was unloaded, and while I was “defrosting” with Kathleen by my side, the rest of the group immediately joined the meeting where the attendees were waiting for us. The drug rehab chairman warmly welcomed our party and the program immediately commenced with one of our sisters leading in songs. Kathleen gently rubbed some ointment on my forehead and nose and I slowly regained my strength. Indeed, just like what the book of Proverbs says, “*A prudent wife is from the LORD*” (Proverbs 19:14). How blessed I am to have a caring wife. Then Kathleen warned me that I could end up with a stroke. Just the thought of it brought a chill to my bones. God was merciful and kept me from falling into serious sickness. We prayed to God with a heart of thanksgiving and praise because nothing serious happened to me. We joined the meeting after the song worship. One of our sisters shared her testimony and that ended an eventful day.

Sharing in Mandarin at the drug rehab center

The next morning, I recovered well and we attended the meeting after the morning breakfast. The audience consisted of drug addicts and the rehab center workers. Some were of Chinese descent and could understand Mandarin. The others were mainly Thais who spoke the Thai language. I was supposed to share in Cantonese with my coworker translating into Mandarin. Then a Thai native would translate from Mandarin into their native language. The reason was that my Mandarin was poor. Actually when we had the Bible study with the hill tribe villagers, I was trying to share in Mandarin which was then translated into Thai by my coworker. I struggled so hard to complete the Bible study, and afterwards my coworker told me frankly that he would prefer me to speak in Cantonese instead, because it was very draining for him to translate my Mandarin. Since then I refrained from sharing in Mandarin with the group. But when my coworker introduced me as the guest speaker and said that I would be speaking in Cantonese, the Rehab director raised his hand in objection and requested me to share in Mandarin instead. Before the meeting, we had breakfast with the organizers and I chatted with the Rehab director in Mandarin. But public sharing requires much higher proficiency in Mandarin. I confessed to the audience that my Mandarin was poor and preferred to share in Cantonese, but the Rehab director insisted that I speak in Mandarin. He assured me that he understood my Mandarin, and even said that my Mandarin was on par with my coworker's! What a joke! My coworker stood beside me with an awkward and embarrassing

smile. Anyway, he stepped down from the platform and allotted the time to me to share in Mandarin, with the Thai brother translating into his native language.

It was the first time for me to share in a public meeting of over a hundred people in Mandarin. I began my sharing with a fervent prayer. It would be one of the most earnest prayers in my life, pleading to God to open the ears of the listeners so as to understand my poor Mandarin. I wanted God to convey the message to the hearts of these people despite the language barrier. As I uttered one phrase at a time, I wondered if my translator could really understand my Mandarin. But I could hear the Thai brother fluently translating each phrase in their native language. Anyway, I left it to God to grant wisdom to the Thai brother to understand my Mandarin as I focused on my sharing. As I was sharing, I could see the stunned look among my Sydney group and my coworker. I glanced at my wife Kathleen. She nodded her head and smiled. I took it as an encouragement and continued my sharing. After the message, the Thai brother greeted me warmly and said that he understood every word I spoke. My coworker and my Sydney brothers and sisters also came forward and excitedly told me that I spoke very clearly. I praised God for His mercy and we really sensed the power of the Holy Spirit moving, not just in helping me share in Mandarin, but in the fact that the message touched their hearts. We left the rehab center full of thanksgiving and praise.

Taking the driver's seat

During the trip, we discovered that we had to be very flexible, and we learned to be led by the Holy Spirit on many occasions. The Spirit of God would call upon us to use whatever skills we have to glorify His name. We left the village on the morning of November 26th. We planned to stay overnight at Chiang-Rai so that we could go straight to the airport the next morning. The driver of the pickup truck came uncharacteristically punctually, and we left the place around 9:30 am. After driving to the next village, he stopped. We waited almost half an hour wondering what was going on. When our coworker queried the driver, he reluctantly told us that he only got his license two weeks ago. He just had an accident the day before and was afraid to drive all the way to Chiang-Rai. He hoped that his friend would come and drive us instead, but his friend never turned up. When my coworker asked who among us knew how to drive a manual shift car, only I responded. He immediately said I had to take the driver's seat. Without waiting for my answer, he got out of the car and told the driver that I knew how to drive a manual shift. The driver immediately pounced on the idea, passed the key to my coworker, and hopped right into the open trunk of the pickup van. My coworker gave me the key and expected me to drive!

Risky drive

I first drove the van to the gas station to fill the tank. To my horror, there was no gas cap. The driver told us that the cap was likely lost during the previous night's accident. We found a plastic bag and a rubber band, and used that as a temporary gas cap. We knew it was not going to be an easy ride. So we prayed to our dear God to watch and protect us so that we could arrive safely in Chiang-Rai. With two pregnant sisters in the van and with the bumpy, hilly and winding roads ahead of us, I drove cautiously with fear and trepidation. The sisters on the passenger seats sang hymns of praise perhaps to ease the tension. We finally made it down the hill onto a much better paved highway. When we were approaching the city, the traffic was at a standstill. Then we saw street patrols ahead of us who were stopping every car for inspection. It suddenly dawned on me that I did not have my driver's license with me. I told my coworker about it and asked him what to do. He turned around and asked the driver whether he could resume the driver's seat. Then he told us that he did not have a permit to drive into the city. His license was valid only for the rural tribal areas. We were caught in a dilemma. While we were still a few cars from the police, we prayed for God's deliverance in this critical situation. After the prayer, my coworker asked us to hand him all our passports and asked me not to utter one word. He would do all the talking. Finally our turn came and the police officer approached me. I rolled down the window and greeted him with a smile. He spoke Thai to me which I obviously did not understand. I looked puzzled and turned to my coworker. Then

my coworker who sat by my side answered the police officer. They were exchanging words while we were all waiting silently in suspense. My coworker handed all our passports and IDs to him. He inspected every one of us and finally gave back all the passports and IDs to my coworker and waved us off. What a relief! If I were caught driving without a driver's license, the consequence would be unthinkable. Our God reigned and He delivered us from the schemes of the evil one. We made it to the city center of Chiang-Rai and arrived safely at the hotel. I surrendered the car key with much relief! We toured the city and stayed overnight. The next morning, we took the flight back to Bangkok. The two lay couples from Australia headed to different destinations after that. We stayed with my brother in Bangkok for a few days before heading to Indonesia to continue our mission trip.

Indonesian Mission (December 6th –15th)

This trip was quite different from the North Thailand mission in that we were given a "Mission program" way ahead of time even before we had left Sydney. Everything was well planned and organized in a packed 10-day mission. Our destination was Surabaya, the second largest city in Indonesia after Jakarta.

Identity crisis

We had a lay sister joining us for this mission. In the last two years, there had been Christian-Muslim conflicts and race tensions against the Chinese of Indonesia. Because of the East Timor crisis, there was also an anti-Australia sentiment in Indonesia. So there were three things that worked against us in going to Indonesia: We are Australian, we are Chinese, we are Christian. We thank God that our lay sister still wanted to go with us despite our unfavorable situation. We could have used our Canadian passports, but opted to go as Australians. We became Australians before going on the mission.

Kickback or stay back

We arrived in Surabaya via Singapore after spending a restful time there. We had a wonderful time with the Singapore coworkers as well as some lay people. At Surabaya airport, while we were lining up at customs, I was approached by an officer who offered to let us bypass the lineup so that we could leave faster. I was hesitant. With a bit of discernment, I realized that there is no free lunch. He would expect some kickback from us for his favor. I thanked him but declined his offer. We ended up taking over an hour to get through and meet with our dear coworkers who were waiting for us. That depicts the situation in Indonesia. Without bribery, things just stall. Money rules in this predominantly Islamic country, but the Holy Spirit rules in our heart.

Timely reunion

Already on the first day of arrival, we experienced God's wonderful grace. We arrived in the morning whereas our lay sister was to arrive in the evening. So we planned to pick her up by taxi in the evening. One coworker would go with me while the other would stay with Kathleen to get dinner ready. There was heavy rain in late afternoon, and we were forced to change our plans because the taxis would not come to our home to pick us up because of the floods. So we had to leave quite a bit earlier to take public transportation to the airport. The rain stopped just before we departed, and when we walked to the main street, there was a taxi right there. So we ended up taking a cab to the airport. The plane was delayed, so we had to wait in the airport a couple of hours. But time flies by when there is sweet fellowship, and we had a lot of catching up to do in our conversation. We finally found a bench to sit on, with our backs turned towards the arrival gate.

The plane arrived and lots of people were swarming to the arrival gate. But based on our morning's experience, I thought it would take at least 40 minutes for the lay sister to come out. So we remained seated on the bench and had more fellowship. All of a sudden, someone walked over and stopped right in front of us, and started to take off her sweater. When her face was exposed, lo and behold, it was the lay sister. She was given executive class in her flight and so she was almost the first to come out of the airport without lining up. Even though the flight was an hour late, her quick exit made up for the lost time and we arrived home at

10:00pm. God was merciful to us, and sent us home faster because Kathleen and the other coworker were waiting for us for dinner.

Play dumb

During our stay, we could see the heavy workload that the coworkers were taking on in Surabaya. The main challenge was transportation. Each trip took at least two hours via public transport. We were warned that we shouldn't speak Chinese when we are taking public transportation especially if we are taking the "Bemo" (passengers van) or the "Kol" (a bigger Bemo packed with over 20 passengers). Thugs and gangsters would sometimes raid a van and rob passengers of money and valuables. If they know you are Chinese, your life may be in danger. We thank God that He had been faithfully protecting our coworkers travelling in and out by these modes of public transportation, and we admire their courage. Their faithfulness in ministering to those who hunger and thirst for His word was not hindered by the risk and the long hours of traveling by public transportation.

All walks of life

In the mission in Indonesia, we met four socially diverse groups of people, whom we classified as:

1. The “Students”

This group consisted of university students, most of whom were very poor. But they all learned to share things in common, and were actually practicing communal living. In their testimonies, they would often talk about living in hunger and how God had met their needs. Some of them used their skills to make handicraft or carpentry items, and sold them for a living. When they had nothing to eat, they would go to the nearby sewage to pick up vegetables for dinner. Each time our coworkers visited them, they would bring a dish and have dinner with the students before the Bible study. We saw the word of God made alive in their lives: “*He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack*” (2Cor.8:15). Before each Bible study, we would have singing and sharing. Their sharing was spontaneous and uplifting. Truly, “*Blessed are the poor.*”

2. The “Professionals”

This group consisted of professionals who are Christians and have the heart to serve the community with their professional skills. They also offered financial support where there was need. In fact they were supporting the Bible School which was the third group we encountered. In contrast to the other groups, these professionals were wealthy people and mainly Chinese. To their credit, the few whom we knew among them were very devoted Christians. They helped the Bible School in offering their professional skills to teach students computer skills, music, construction, etc. so as to

equip them with practical skills when the students go to remote villages. So this group played a major role in evangelizing in the remote villages.

We had the privilege of visiting one of the villages which was inaccessible by car. We had to walk on a dirt road up and down the hill for 30 minutes before reaching the village. We were told of the history of the village which was being evangelized: a brother of this group, an architect, surveyed the poor village which had no electricity and was inaccessible by car. Then he brought along a team of workers as well as a medical team of Christian doctors and dentists to the village. They installed electricity in this village and began taking care of the sick. Eventually even the witch doctor and his whole family were converted alongside the other villagers. Indeed, they brought forth the light of Christ and overcame the powers of darkness.

Some of the brethren worked freelance so that they could be more flexible and devote their time to help out the Bible School group.

3. The “Bible School”

This group consisted of students aged 18 to mid-twenties. They were located about a two hours’ drive from Surabaya, with at least an extra hour required for public transportation. When we visited them, there were a total of 36 students. Most of them came from very poor families from different localities within Indonesia. We spent two nights and three days there, and were impressed with

their lifestyle. Needless to say, they lived out a truly communal life, sharing everything in common. We heard testimony after testimony of how their lives were changed during the practice of communal living. Among the students, some were former gang leaders. But they were transformed by the word of God and became as tame as lambs.

Call on the Name of the Lord before the break of dawn

There were two big bedrooms separated by a meeting hall, one for the sisters and the other for the brothers. Their devotion to God was evident. When we were invited to share in their fellowship, we were given two time slots to choose from: 3:30 or 4:30. Little did we realize that they meant a.m. not p.m. They would wake up at 3:30 am for their own quiet time; at 4:30 am, they would gather together praising God with songs and sharing. None of the musicians had to look at the song sheets or music scores. They just played in perfect harmony. We came at a time when they were busy preparing for their Christmas celebrations. They would stay up late in the evening past their bedtime, but would as usual wake up with joy and thanksgiving, praising God. On one of the nights, the medical team of Christian doctors and dentists also came and they occupied the brothers' bedroom. I was assigned to sleep with all the male students and their staff in the principal's room. In total there were 20 of them crammed into one room. They all went to bed close to midnight. Then at 4:30am, before the break of

dawn, they began singing and chanting the name of the Lord our God. Even though we were so tired and worn out, our spirits were lifted to higher heaven. It was one of the most memorable and sweetest moments in prayer, crying and yearning for the presence of God. No wonder these students had such fervor and devotion for the Lord our God. If they were given more intensive teaching in the word of God, they would be powerful men and women of God. Our coworkers were trying their best to offer them systematic and exegetical training in the word of God.

A lesson to learn

Meeting with this group was truly inspiring. It testifies not only that communal living is workable and biblical, but also that the power within is through prayer and thanksgiving, calling upon the name of the Lord our God. The principle of inversion applies to the family of God: It seems that when we are poor, all things work through Him. When we are rich, we become arrogant, and disunity creeps in and corrupts our souls.

4. The “Potentials”

This last group consisted of brothers and sisters from other groups, some of whom the coworkers hoped to build up as core members in the Surabaya Ministry. These brethren longed for the word of God and were effective in their service for Him. We

prayed that they will continue to grow in the word of God so that His ministry may expand to save more lost souls.

Final words on the Indonesian Mission

It was the second last day of our stay. In the evening we attended a meeting with the “Professionals” group. After the meeting, one of the members told us of an elderly woman, 78 years of age, who had been hospitalized for three months. Her condition deteriorated and she had just slipped into a coma. Her daughters were Christians and they desperately hoped that their mother would receive baptism before she passed away. But when they approached their church pastor, he declined to baptize her because he insisted on baptism by immersion. Obviously this elderly lady couldn’t go through immersion, so they were disappointed and desperate. That was why this member of the “Professionals” group approached us about whether I would be willing to conduct the baptismal ceremony. I was only too glad to oblige. However it was already very late in the evening. So we prayed together, pleading with God to grant the elderly woman a peaceful night of rest and that she would be alert enough to receive baptism the next morning.

Cause of illness: Physical or demonic?

The next morning we went to the hospital, and explained the procedure to the family members. We were somewhat startled when we found out that the elderly lady could understand Mandarin. At least I could share with her using my limited Mandarin. Another amazing thing was that she was in coma just the night before, but this morning she was mentally very alert. God had answered our prayer! We found out further from her daughters that all along she had been a very healthy woman in spite of her advanced age. However, she had some dealings with a witch doctor who demanded payment from her. She refused to pay. The witch doctor warned her sternly that she would suffer severe consequences if she didn't pay up by a certain time. Indeed, she fell ill soon after the deadline for payment had past. The illness persisted and her situation deteriorated. I perceived that her illness might be caused by the curse of the witch doctor.

Condition of baptism: Full allegiance to God only

I managed to share the gospel message with the elderly woman in Mandarin with a little help from our Indonesian coworker. I instructed her to renounce all idol worship and to believe in God alone. I also explained that baptism would only bring salvation to her soul but not physical healing. The elderly lady could not speak because she was wearing an oxygen mask, but she obviously understood what I was saying to her as she nodded her head in

response. Those who stood by her bedside witnessed her positive response. So I proceeded with the ceremony and she was baptized.

Prayer for healing

Immediately after the baptism, I suddenly felt that the Spirit was moving me to pray for the relief of her pain. So I asked her where it hurt the most and somehow my hand just gently landed on her abdomen. She reacted violently as if to evade my hand. Her whole body was shaking as she stared at me frightened, and mumbled as in excruciating pain. I couldn't understand her reaction. Her daughters immediately told me that I was touching the exact sore spot which might have caused her unbearable pain. I perceived that the Holy Spirit had moved me to touch just the right spot.

I apologized to her at once and reassured her that this time I would pray for her healing. I stretched my hand hovering over the painful area again, and slowly but gently rested on the sore spot. As I laid my hand on her while she was still mumbling in pain, I prayed that the power of the Holy Spirit would set her free from any demonic possession, and that God would mercifully grant her healing. After my prayer, she immediately became completely silent. When her daughters asked her how she felt, she couldn't say anything because she had an oxygen mask on. She just looked bewildered and surprised.

Another deliverance

We didn't pursue her situation any further because we were asked to visit another elderly lady in the same hospital. In fact, it was this lady who had introduced the first elderly lady to our sister in the "Professionals" group. She was also hospitalized for three months, and her condition was deteriorating too. She had suffered a stroke and was paralyzed. She could also understand Mandarin, so I shared the gospel with her in broken Mandarin. She was very receptive and eventually she was also baptized. We never cease to be amazed by the love of God who brought His ill-equipped servant, awkward in the Mandarin language, all the way from Sydney to save two precious souls who were almost 80 years of age. Our hearts were touched by His unfailing love. Not only that, the son of the second elderly sister had been a backsliding Christian because of a bad experience with other Christians. But after this incident, he was revived! The next morning, we left for Hong Kong with hearts full of amazement, and were touched by the compassionate love of God.

Good news from afar

After we returned to Sydney, we received news from our coworkers that the first of the two aforementioned elderly sisters had been discharged from hospital the next day. Even the doctor was completely dumbfounded. His original diagnosis was that she would die at any moment because she was in a coma the night that we were told of her condition. Those who witnessed the deliver-

ance testified that it was a miracle. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Following her miraculous healing, her Buddhist husband and atheist youngest son were all converted to Christianity.

Conclusion

We were called to be ever ready to do the best we could by God's grace. When we committed our inadequacies to God, He filled the gaps and made His mission complete. Although language barriers may be a problem, love is never a problem. Love is the most beautiful language that God has bestowed upon all who believe in Him for the salvation of the lost.

June 2004 Onwards: A New and Exciting Ministry

After we left Sydney on June 2004, God led me to a new line of ministry. In the beginning, I was leading a team on a Sabbathical mission. As one of my main projects, I was to lead the team on a book by book study of the New Testament. I opted to use a statistical approach to conduct my survey of the New Testament.

With advances in information technology, computers can instantly perform complex statistical calculations. I did a bit of research looking into the computer-based Bible tools available on the market. Unfortunately, they could not speed up the analysis for a complete book study. As I waited upon God, He gave me a vision of a spreadsheet full of Bible words. It resembled a bird's eye view of the words in the Bible organized in columns by books. I shared this vision with the Sabbathical Team. We were all excited about this God-given vision. Before long, we embarked on developing the software which we named "Eagle's View".

In July 2007, we launched the “Eagle’s View” Bible tool which is available for free download. Readers interested in the software can download it from www.eaglesviewsoftware.com.

By God’s grace and armed with the Eagle’s View software, I plunged into the awesome task of conducting a New Testament book by book survey. Finally, by the end of 2009, I had completed my survey and published the English version of the book called:

An Eagle’s View of the New Testament

The following year, the Chinese edition of the book was completed and published. I feel privileged to be led by God into this new ministry. As He leads, I am still in the process of upgrading the “Eagle’s View” software.

Ever since I left Sydney in June 2004, it seems as if God has been leading me to embark on new ministries which I had never thought of doing. Whenever I am faced with a new challenge, God equips me with grace upon grace and wisdom to accomplish His work. I am in awe of His leading. God has opened my eyes to see that there is still so much work that needs to be done. I plead to Yahweh Father, “Lord, send me!”

Isaiah 64:8 But now, O LORD, You are our Father, We are the clay, and You our potter; And all of us are the work of Your hand.

As soon as the book is complete, I know that God will once again lead me to fulfill His ever demanding ministries. My response is, “**Lord, I am ready! Please continue to make my life a miracle!**” God

is the potter, I am the clay. May God continue to mold me so that my life may reflect His glory. May all glory and honor be unto Yahweh, the Only True God.

— End —



