

Asia Harvest



'Put in the Sickle, for the Harvest has Come!' (Mark 4:29)

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In Memory of George Chen
Forever 'In the Garden'

In Memory of George Chen

By Paul Hattaway

“During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered” (Hebrews 5:7-8).

“For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him” (Philippians 1:29).

In recent times, many Christians around the world have written to express their concern at rising persecution in their nations. Believers can sense that it will soon be their turn to experience suffering, as the Word of God promises all believers. Some ask for advice about what they should do, not realizing that one of the main reasons we have written many books and newsletters over the years is to communicate how Christians around the world in “free” countries might learn spiritual lessons from the persecuted believers we are privileged to serve in Asia.

In this newsletter (our final one of the year), we would like to share the testimony of a man you have probably never heard of before. If you have ever prayed for or supported our China Bible project or other initiatives, in one sense your participation was due to **the influence George Chen had on the DNA of Asia Harvest at the very beginning.**

We had planned to finish the year by writing a different newsletter to this one. However, as soon as we heard the sad news of the passing of George Chen, we knew we needed to change plans and pay respect to this humble, broken man of God, who learned the secret of intimacy with Jesus in God’s special garden.

George Chen was the very first Chinese Christian I ever met in my life. In the 1980s I was a new believer in Christ, saved just a few months, when the direction of my life was radically changed after hearing Chen speak at a church in my home country. I knew next to nothing about China at the time and my life was directionless. I had never had a single thought of going to China.

I was speechless after hearing the testimony of this man who spent 18 years in prison for Jesus. He had endured horrific conditions, and had not only survived the ordeal, but had emerged with an unconquerable faith! George Chen’s eyes shone as I spoke with him after the meeting. He encouraged me to unreservedly make myself

available to God, and to consider being a “donkey for Jesus” by carrying Bibles across the border from Hong Kong to the spiritually starving Christians in China, who had been without Bibles for three decades.

As recorded in my biography, the Lord miraculously propelled me to China through a series of astonishing events, despite being a teenager with no money to my name. I found myself in China just weeks after that pivotal meeting, and I had also been exposed to a type of Christianity that was completely foreign to most Westerners. I recalled my meeting with George Chen in “An Asian Harvest”:

“His testimony impacted me deeply. in the formative time of my Christian walk. He had spent longer behind bars because of his love for Jesus than I had been alive at that time.

This precious man had learned to appreciate the small blessings of life.... George taught me that the kingdom of God cannot be defeated by evil men or governments. Whatever terrible things Satan and the world can throw at Jesus’ disciples, His purposes will not be thwarted.

A deep revelation of my Heavenly Father’s invincibility filled my heart with faith and purpose. There was no reason for me to be afraid. Wherever God would take me, His plans would be fulfilled one way or another. I was now part of an unconquerable army!”

Friends, let me share a secret of how a child of God can overcome hardship and intense persecution. This lesson has been learned from many brothers and sisters in China, Vietnam, Laos and other countries over the years. The first step God calls us to is **endurance**. The Apostle Paul told Timothy, **“You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ”** (2 Timothy 2:3).

However, there are additional steps for God’s children to gain victory in suffering. If the Lord gives His grace and power, we can overcome whatever wicked men may do to us, even if our bodies should die in the process. The final step, which requires supernatural strength from the Holy Spirit, is when we learn to **embrace** suffering and persecution, rather than just putting up with it.

If the Lord brings us to that wonderful place where we only fear God and not what men can do to us, but we fear only God, it opens the door to glorious and intimate fellowship with the Lord Jesus. Paul knew of that intimacy when he wrote about the fellowship of sharing in Christ’s sufferings: **“I want to know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”** (Philippians 3:10-11).

George Chen was a man whom God took through the furnace of affliction. He possessed a rich faith that cannot be gained any other way. When I heard he had departed to be with the Lord forever, I gave thanks to the Living God for crossing my path with George Chen many years ago, at the very moment my own call to ministry and the subsequent formation of Asia Harvest was being birthed.

As we come to the end of 2021, we acknowledge that this year has been tumultuous in many ways, both throughout Asia and for most of the Christians we know around the world. But through it all, our Heavenly Father has been faithful and totally trustworthy, as always. By His great power, **2021 has proved to again be the most fruitful year we have ever had**, with more Chinese Bibles successfully printed and delivered than ever before! This journey began 33 years ago when I met my first ever Chinese Christian, George Chen.

It is our privilege to share the testimony of George Chen with you. It may be the first time it has ever been written down for the Body of Christ to read and appreciate.



A Chinese prisoner paraded in public in 1967 with a tall 'dunce hat' listing his crimes. Many Christians embraced this humiliation and joyfully used it to witness for the Lord, as their hats often listed their crime as 'believing in Jesus'.

George Chen — In the Garden

Churches throughout China suffered continual hammer blows throughout the 1950s and 1960s, as Satan's fury was unleashed on them. One Christian who suffered greatly was George Chen (*Chinese name*: Chen Minying), who endured inhumane treatment at the hands of his persecutors, only to be preserved by the hand of God. He was even given an international ministry after his release from prison.

Chen was born in 1932 to a humble family in Zhejiang Province. The chaos engulfing China at the time caused them to move to Shanghai, where George grew up. After hearing the Gospel he surrendered his life to God, and the Holy Spirit gave him a gift of evangelism.

Chen founded three rural churches with a total of 300 members, most of whom he had personally led to Christ. The believers had a hunger for the Word of God and desired to spread the Gospel, which soon caught the attention of the Communist authorities. Chen was first arrested in 1960 and imprisoned as a counter-revolutionary.

For the first three-and-a-half years, George was one of five inmates crammed into a cell that was so small the men had to lie on their sides, head-to-toe, like sardines



Inmates at a prison labor camp in China in the 1970s.

in a can. A wooden bucket in the corner of the tiny space served as the toilet for all the men. George was often so hungry that he ate toothpaste to satisfy his cravings. Chen's wife and son were not allowed to contact him during his incarceration, and for years he was oblivious to the fact that she had died, and his son had been killed by the Communist authorities.

In 1964, Chen was moved inland to a prison labor camp in Anhui Province, where he served a further 14 years.

After months of backbreaking work, seven days a week, the prison leaders were infuriated that they had been unable to make the evangelist deny his faith in Jesus.

They ordered Chen to perform the worst job in the prison, daily shoveling human excrement to be used as fertilizer. The massive amount of waste produced by 60,000 prisoners flowed into a large cesspool a short distance from the cells. He later recalled the struggle of those long and difficult years, and how he was often troubled by thoughts that God had abandoned him:

"I spent my days deep in human waste, turning it with a shovel to make compost. They thought I would be miserable, but actually I was happy. It smelled so bad that no one came near me, so I could pray and sing aloud all day.

If I was not a Christian I would have died, because the smell was maddening, and the stench terrible. But I enjoyed being alone in the cesspool, so I could pray to our Lord, recite the Scriptures, and sing hymns loudly."

To counteract the thoughts that he had been forsaken, as he stood deep in human waste every day, George often sung the beautiful words of his favorite hymn, ***In the Garden***:

*I come to the garden alone
While the dew is still on the roses
And the voice I hear falling on my ear
The Son of God discloses.*

*And He walks with me
And He talks with me
And He tells me I am His own
And the joy we share as we tarry there
None other has ever known.*

Finally, in 1978, the political situation relaxed a little in China, and Chen was released from prison and placed under house arrest. Eighteen long years had passed.

When he entered prison, the Cultural Revolution had yet to begin, and Mao held complete power. Now, the Cultural Revolution was over, and Mao was in the grave.

George was afraid that nobody would remember who he was. Most of all, he wondered if any of the Christians he had once known were still alive, or if there were any believers left in China at all. With trepidation, he slowly made his way home, not knowing what he would find.

For almost two decades, George Chen had been both burdened and blessed by the memory of his church members. Countless times, as he stood in the excrement pit, he prayed aloud for them, asking the Holy Spirit to sustain their faith and help them to overcome. As he got off the bus in his home area, he failed to recognize many of the buildings or faces of the people he passed.

Then, from behind, came a cry of shock from an elderly woman. “Pastor... is it you?” One of his former church members was still alive! In a typically constrained Chinese manner, the two did not hug, but shook hands as tears rolled down their faces. George was relieved. Now he knew that he was not the only Christian left in China. There were at least two!



Millions of books (including Bibles) were burned during the Cultural Revolution, creating a famine of the Word of God in China.

God is Good!

News of the pastor's return spread throughout the neighborhood like wildfire, and soon the shining faces of many other believers pressed against the windows of a house he was invited to stay in. Many people were beside themselves with both shock and joy. They presumed the pastor had died decades earlier, and not a word had been heard to suggest that he was still alive.

The biggest shock was to come. When George asked one of his old friends if any fellowship of believers had survived, he was told, "Yes! God is good! He has sent His Spirit to breathe on us, and now we have many members. We are so glad that you have returned, because we do not have any Bibles and few of us remember many of the words of Jesus. Please teach us, pastor. Please!"

The Lord Jesus Christ, who promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against His Church, had done a great miracle. **During the 18 years Chen had spent in prison, when he had often worried that all Christians had been killed or fallen away from the faith, God had caused the three churches to increase from a total of 300 to 5,000 believers!**

George was amazed, and he hardly slept that night as he tried to take in everything he had heard. His rejoicing was soon tempered, however, when he was told that his wife had died years earlier, and his young son had been killed. The prison officials had cruelly withheld this information from him.

Chen remained under house arrest until 1981, when he was "rehabilitated" by the government and his criminal records were erased.

Remarkably, for a man whom other Christians had forgotten about and assumed to be dead, God opened the door for George Chen to obtain a passport, and he shared his testimony in church meetings around the world during the late 1980s and 1990s. At each meeting, he invariably took time to thank the Body of Christ for sending missionaries to China in the past.

Chen remarried and spent much of his latter life traveling between his home and southwest China, where he ministered among ethnic minority groups, especially the Lisu people in the high mountains straddling the border with Myanmar. He was much loved, and he often drove a van hundreds of miles to deliver loads of precious Bibles to spiritually hungry Christians.

Although he officially retired in 2012 at the age of 80, George Chen continued to travel to China, where he advised house church leaders in Henan and Yunnan provinces. After many years spent 'in the garden' with Jesus Christ, his life shone into

many dark places, and had become a sweet fragrance that attracted many souls to the kingdom of God.

Just a few months ago we received this photo of George. He looked fit and healthy, and we remarked that he would probably live to one hundred.

It wasn't to be, however, and the Lord Jesus Christ finally called His servant home on October 27, 2021, when George Chen died peacefully in his sleep while in Hong Kong.

He was 89 years old.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (Psalm 116:15).

"Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work" (Revelation 22:12).



George Chen earlier this year, aged 89.

THE GOSPEL MARCHES ON IN CHINA

Despite many troubles and challenges, our work continues to progress in China. As long as the Lord continues to hold the door open, we will continue to print as many Bibles as possible and to equip the house church believers while there is still light, for ***"night is coming, when no man can work"*** (John 9:4). By God's grace and power, we recently passed the all-time milestone of **15 million full Bibles printed and delivered** to the Chinese house churches, adding fuel to the revival fires blazing across that great land.

We appreciate your prayers and partnership in the Gospel, and we realize that without your support, no Bibles would have been printed nor workers helped. **Let's continue to press forward while we have the opportunity!**

CHINA BIBLE FUND



*Current Total: **15,990,766**
Chinese Bibles printed and distributed.*



We are partnering with house churches in China in a long-term project to provide Bibles for Christians. We receive countless requests for God's Word from church leaders throughout the country. These Bibles are distributed free of charge, equipping the Body of Christ and helping add fuel to the revival in China.

Each full Chinese Bible costs just \$1.80 to print and deliver.

ASIAN WORKERS' FUND



*We currently support **1,578** Asian evangelists
among **1,198** unreached people groups.*

The **Asian Workers' Fund** supports indigenous church-planting evangelists among unreached Asian tribes and ethnic groups. These disciples have committed their whole lives to the Gospel but are hindered by lack of finances. To date, the evangelists we help have reportedly led **658,233 people to faith in Jesus Christ**. You can help support these dedicated workers for **\$25 per month** each. A prayer card and occasional updates are sent to all regular supporters of this project.

ASIAN BIBLE FUND



*Current Total: **1,356,295** Bibles printed in **131** languages.*

The **Asian Bible Fund** provides the Scriptures in numerous languages in Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and anywhere in Asia that God's people need His Word.

Each Bible costs an average of \$2.70 to print and deliver. We also print millions of Gospel booklets for evangelism through this project.

LIVING MARTYRS' FUND

*Because of your partnership we are supporting **1,939** living martyrs.*



A martyr has been defined as "a Christian who chooses to suffer death rather than deny Christ or His work. One who sacrifices something very important to further the Kingdom of God and endures great suffering for Christian witness."

The **Living Martyrs' Fund** supports Christian widows and church leaders and their families throughout Asia who are unable to work because of injuries or illness caused by persecution. They and their families face extreme poverty and hardship. Through a gift of **\$25 per month** you can help support one of these living martyrs.

THE CHILDREN'S FUND



*Your generous support has so far reached **183,859** children throughout Asia.*

The **Children's Fund** introduces children to Jesus in India, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, and a host of other Asian countries. Activities include printing and distributing Gospel literature designed for children, funding Sunday school training classes, providing free surgeries for those with special needs, and generally lifting children out of spiritual and physical poverty. It costs an average of just **\$10 to reach a child for Christ**.

PERSECUTION & RELIEF FUND



Transforming lives from ashes to beauty with God's love.

Over the years Asia Harvest has provided assistance to the victims of natural disasters that have struck Asia. In addition to providing aid through medicine, tents, blankets, food and water, rebuilding homes etc., the Christians we partner with take every opportunity to share the Gospel, and many people have come to know Jesus Christ. This project also provides physical and spiritual relief to Christian communities and families throughout Asia who have been affected by persecution.



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