

Asia Harvest



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

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Winds of Change in China

From the Frontlines

with Paul & Joy Hattaway

“Since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin. As a result, they do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God” (1 Peter 4:1-2).

In our March newsletter we exhorted readers to keep walking in God’s grace and truth, and to beware of the twin pitfalls which all Christians much avoid—legalism on one hand, and the false prosperity Gospel on the other. Having seen the faith of countless believers shipwrecked by these two distortions, we wanted to encourage all who love the Lord Jesus to continue in God’s Word and relationship with Him.

Quite a few people has strong reactions to our message, both positively and negatively. Helen from Australia wrote, “Many thanks for your wonderful message to us in the March newsletter. It was very powerful and it has strengthened me so much. I feel greatly encouraged.”

Stan from Illinois shared: “I couldn’t agree with you more. The Christian life is not about living up to a standard; it is about living under an influence. The influence is the Holy Spirit, of course. Legalists think about living up to the standard. Prosperity gospel people do not think about living under the influence, only about the benefits that the influence is supposedly guaranteed to bring. Hebrews 11 is the chapter that really puts the nails in the coffin of the prosperity gospel. That chapter lists the heroes of the faith, but they fall into two categories—those who get rescued and those who meet horrible deaths (sawn in two, etc.) What strikes me is that BOTH categories are held up side by side as models of genuine faith. There is no hint that the rescued ones had more faith or better faith than the ones who died for Christ. It’s the total opposite of the prosperity gospel explanation of suffering.”

On the other hand, others challenged us for mentioning the Prosperity Gospel in a negative light. One man wrote, “I felt very discouraged after reading Paul and Joy’s message. If our churches are too legalistic and others teach false doctrine, what is the answer? Are we not to continue to invite our neighbors to church even when they never come? Our church is dying in our small community. We are all over the age of 50. What can we do?”

Friends, we believe one of the major problems in the Church today is that much of what is portrayed as faith is actually just humanism with a Christian veneer thrown over the top. For example, Western culture teaches that from an early age, “You can be whatever you want, and you can do whatever you put your mind to.” Is that true? Certainly not! On the contrary, we can be what *God* wants us to be and do what *He* calls and empowers us to do, if we walk in obedience to Him. We meet many Christians who have become

disillusioned because they were told they hold the keys to a successful life, if only they strive hard enough, or believe strongly enough. Then as the years pass by and their hopes and dreams fail to materialize like they expect, they grow increasingly despondent and their hope fades. Disappointment sets in—even bitterness towards God—even though He has never once told a person to try to fulfil their own dreams and desires. When the inevitable trials and hardships of life come along their faith crumbles, just as Jesus warned in the Parable of the Sower: *“The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away”* (Matthew 3:20-21).

Humanism is rampant in many parts of the Church today. In subtle ways it places people in God's position and attempts to place God in our position. Everything is turned upside-down. In the Bible people were exhorted to believe in God, but these days we've heard preachers tell their audiences that God believes in them! We are told to trust ourselves, but Jesus said we should trust in Him. Humanism says people are basically good, but God's Word declares, *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”* (Jeremiah 17:9).

The Prosperity Gospel is not merely about financial matters. It is a broader philosophy that believes if a person follows Christ then things will generally go well for them in this life. Such a teaching is popular and enticing, but is it Biblical? Did you ever consider that of the 12 men Jesus called to be apostles, ten were murdered for their faith, one (John) died in exile on a small island, while one committed suicide? Was something wrong with the apostles' faith? How about Christians in China, Iran, North Korea and a host of other nations who are beaten, imprisoned and even killed because of their love for Jesus? We have even heard people say that persecuted believers need to trust God more in order to “experience the victorious life” that the Bible promises!

Such talk is nonsense to anyone who has swallowed the lies of the humanistic 'Prosperity' Movement. The Scriptures state that even the Lord Jesus *“learned obedience from what he suffered”* (Hebrews 5:8). If the sinless Son of God needed such a lesson, how much more do we!

The true Gospel has not changed, and never will. God's kingdom always advances through human weakness, not strength;—for when we are weak, He is strong. This is the truth, whether we like it or not. Those who really want to follow Jesus must find the true Jesus of the Scriptures, not the twisted caricature of the Lord that is often portrayed today. Only knowing the true Jesus will set people free to know and obey the will of God.

Whenever God has moved in awesome power throughout history there has been no room for humanism in the Church. Christ alone is exalted, and all people are humbled. May we learn this lesson in our own lives and churches. Any true faith will display the equation shared by John the Baptist: *“He must become greater; I must become less”* (John 3:30).

Winds of Change in China

Christians around the world continue to be fascinated by the Church in China—the world's most populated country. The nation is going through rapid transformation economically, socially, culturally and spiritually. We examine how these changes are affecting the kingdom of God in China, and specifically how it may affect some of the projects we implement there.

Often as people grow older they long for things to stay still, so they can get their bearings, put down roots, and enjoy a consistency in their lives. Things never seem to work out that way, however. The world is in a constant state of transformation, and our time can easily be spent trying to catch up with the changes going on around us.

Of all the places in the world we know, nowhere is changing as swiftly and as dramatically as China. In part, this is because of the draconian decades of hard-line Communist rule, when the nation closed its doors to the rest of the world from the 1940s to the late 1970s. Feeling left behind by these lost decades, China has frantically been catching up since at breakneck speed.



The uncomplicated China of yesteryear — Until a few decades ago almost everyone in China wore blue 'Mao suits' (blue was the cheapest material available at the time).



China Today — One of countless new shopping malls that fill the cities of modern China.

We have been greatly privileged to serve the Lord Jesus and His Church in China since the late 1980s. The pace of change has been so swift during that time that often when we meet younger missionaries starting out, it's difficult to describe what China was like back then without sounding like 'old fogies' reminiscing about things "back in the day"!

Just a little more than 20 years ago the streets of cities like Beijing and Kunming were filled with bicycles and donkey carts. Today they have become mega-municipalities with glistening skyscrapers, congested highways and all the latest shopping malls and facilities like any other major world city.

More changes seem to occur in five years in China than in a generation in other parts of the world. Consider this for example: The first place many visitors to China see is the town of Shenzhen, just across the border from Hong Kong. It was a farming village in the 1970s, then a sleepy town with about 50,000 people in the 1980s. Remarkably, today Shenzhen is a massive, modern city, home to more than 8 million people!

New Challenges for the Church in China

The rapid transformation in Chinese society is inevitably also influencing the way the Church functions. For decades the Body of Christ experienced the largest revival, numerically speaking, in the history of Christianity. One of the foundations for the revival was suffering and sacrifice. The Church gave their all to Jesus, and He used them for His glory in a marvellous way so that today there are at least 100 million Christians in China.

Late last year the government made two announcements. The first was that they were relaxing the one-child policy that has been in place since 1979, and which has wreaked havoc on the family structure of the nation.

The second announcement they made did not receive widespread coverage in the media, but it has major ramifications for the Church: **The Chinese government announced it was immediately closing down all prison labor camps.**

For decades, prison labor camps were dark, abominable places where hundreds of thousands of Christians were sent as punishment for their belief in Jesus. Many were never heard from again.

Countless faith-filled testimonies, like that of Brother Yun in his biography *The Heavenly Man*, included accounts of the brutal punishment metered out in those awful places, where prisoners were forced to work 14 to 16 hours a day, seven days a week.

A few years ago I was present at a meeting in a remote area of China with about 30 house church leaders. At lunch time the main leader stood up and announced, **“Let’s thank the Lord for the food, and then everyone who has spent time in a prison camp for the Gospel can start eating!”**

Every head turned around and stared at me, and people began to chuckle under their breath. They knew their foreign guest had probably never been imprisoned for the Lord before. All the other men and women in the room had spent time in prison labor camps, some for decades.

Sensing that I was feeling a little anxious, the Chinese broke into hearty laughter and then lovingly served me first.

Labor camps caused untold suffering to multitudes of believers and their family members in China. Now, all of a sudden with the stroke of a pen, they have been consigned to history!

Of course this change doesn’t mean that persecution has ceased in China. In fact, just recently reports have emerged of church buildings being demolished and of believers being arrested and fined. As long as the kingdom of God continues to clash with the kingdom of darkness there will be hardship and suffering for those who follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

Christians in China continue to be fined, harassed, and discriminated against because of the Gospel. While prison labor camps have been closed, please note that these were not the same as general prisons, where people can still be sent without trial for up to three years. The labor camps, however, were the staging point for the most severe persecution.





The Chinese Church has now entered into a new phase. It is wonderful news that the labor camps have been abolished, and severe persecution has undoubtedly decreased from the levels of the past.

We should be thankful for the positive changes. They are the direct result of the Lord's intervention and His gracious response to decades of prayer.

Most of us would agree that if our lives were under constant threat of being fined, beaten and imprisoned, then news that labor camps have become a thing of the past would be greatly welcomed!

As the winds of change continue to blow throughout China, a fresh and difficult challenge has emerged.

A wise friend of ours summed it up this way:

"For more than 30 years God tested the Chinese Church with persecution, and they endured faithfully. Their faith was purified and they won tens of millions of people into God's kingdom. Now God is testing the Church in China with an even greater challenge: Prosperity."

Church history shows that Christians are strongest when they are united against opposition, but when times are easy our faith tends to grow weaker. Is this principle true in your own life, and in the churches in your part of the world?

It was also true in the Old Testament, as Israel struggled to break free from the cycle of pride and laziness caused by prosperity. God summed up the plight of His chosen people this way: *"I cared for them in the wilderness, in the land of burning heat. When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me"* (Hosea 13:5-6).

A Note of Caution

Friends, please continue to pray fervently for God's will to be done among His children in China.

Even though believers now face some different challenges than previous generations, the Body of Christ in China remains huge and influential.

Recently, *The Telegraph* newspaper in the United Kingdom ran a surprising story under the headline: 'China On Course to Become World's Most Christian Nation Within 15 Years.' The article claimed: "Mao thought he could eliminate religion. He thought he had accomplished this. It's ironic—he failed completely."



need for some time to come is the **China Bible Fund**. There are other factors at play which cause the dire shortage of Bibles in China, especially among the rural house churches we are privileged to serve.

While the economy is growing in many parts of China, all Bibles printed

Although the Chinese Church may function differently going forward, the fact remains that there are tens of millions of people who have been purchased by the Blood of Jesus throughout China. They love Him, and they will continue to testify about what God has done in their lives.

These disciples of Christ are well aware that there are more than one billion lost souls in China, among hundreds of unreached ethnic groups, and that their work is far from finished!

Although systematic, government-orchestrated persecution of Christians is definitely decreasing in China, it would be a mistake to assume that there is no longer any persecution. It persists, especially in rural areas away from the public gaze.

The Need for Bibles

We constantly review and tweak the projects we help with, as we desire to be involved in the most strategic opportunities for the advancement of God's kingdom in Asia.

While things are changing quickly in China, one project that will remain a great

outside the control of the government-approved church are considered 'illegal'. Those involved with their production or distribution continue to risk arrest and prison without trial.

Secondly, almost all of the Bibles we print inside China are for rural believers in farflung provinces. Despite the economic boom in other parts of China, people in rural farming communities remain extremely poor by any standard, and in fact their plight has been exacerbated by the soaring cost of living. Millions of house church Christians remain unable to afford Bibles, even if they were able to access them. These factors have resulted in millions of believers being starved of God's Word. They are forced to survive on the few crumbs they are able to gather from beneath the table of the registered churches.

As long as the need for God's Word exists, we pray the Lord will give us resources and opportunities to help meet that need. One of our key leaders recently told us, "***For as long as God gives me breath, I want to continue providing Bibles to believers who are unable to obtain them from any other source.***"

Living Martyrs' Fund

Since the start of the new Millennium we have supported more than a thousand persecuted church leaders and their families in China through the **Living Martyrs' Fund**.

In the last few years, as the level of persecution has lessened, we have noticed a decrease in the severity of the injuries these believers suffer. The worst injuries and illnesses occurred when church leaders spent time in prison labor camps.

Now that the camps have closed, we expect the number of believers needing help will diminish over time. In the meantime, we will continue to evaluate the regular reports we receive from those we assist through the project.

Despite the changes affecting China, we will continue to support many church leaders who have severe and long-term ailments as a result of persecution received in the past.

Many are permanently disabled and will require assistance for years to come.

They are unable to work, and in a nation where there is no unemployment or disability benefits, these men and their families often live in dire poverty. The support they receive through the Living Martyrs' Fund makes a huge difference in their lives. It enables them to purchase basic necessities like food and medicine.

Responding to the changing needs, in the last few years we expanded the Living

Martyrs' Fund to include persecuted Christians in Vietnam and North Korea.

While the level of persecution may be reducing in China, there are no such changes underway in North Korea! It remains the number one persecutor of Christians in the world, and the needs there are staggering.

In upcoming newsletters we plan to share more details about ways you can pray and help the kingdom of God advance in North Korea.



Pray the Name of Jesus would continue to be glorified throughout China as one generation hands the baton of the Gospel to the next generation.

ASIAN WORKERS' FUND

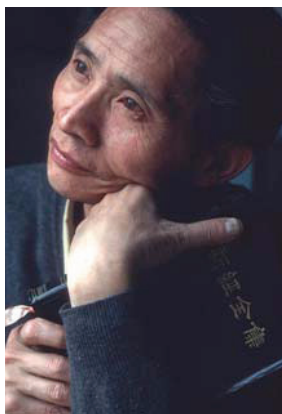


We are currently supporting 798 Asian evangelists working among 440 unreached tribes and ethnic groups.

The **Asian Workers' Fund** assists indigenous church-planting evangelists who are involved in strategic ministry to unreached people groups in Asia. These servants of the Lord have committed their whole lives to the Gospel but are hindered by lack of finances.

You can help support these dedicated workers for **\$25 per month** each. A prayer card and occasional updates are sent to all regular donors of this project.

CHINA BIBLE FUND

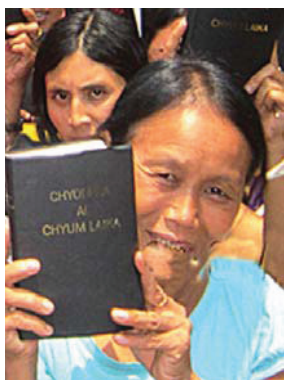


Current Total: 7,628,696 Chinese Bibles distributed.

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 BIBLE FUND



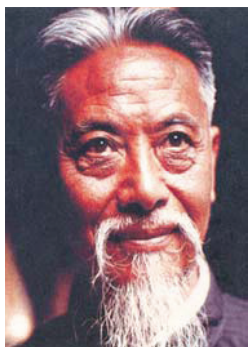
Current Total: 396,053 Bibles printed in 48 languages.

Asia is home to many ethnic groups where people have been deprived of God's Word, sometimes for decades. The **Asian Bible fund** provides the Scriptures in numerous languages in Southeast Asia, North Korea, the Indian subcontinent, and elsewhere. The one country where the Asian Bible Fund doesn't apply to is China, where our China Bible Fund functions as a separate project.

Each Bible costs \$2.70 to print and deliver through the Asian Bible Fund.

LIVING MARTYRS' FUND

Because of your partnership we are supporting 766 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** assists pastors and evangelists in China, Vietnam and North Korea 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 **\$35 per month** you can help support one of these living martyrs. A prayer card is sent to every supporter of this project.

PROJECT SMILE



Your generous support has so far helped bring a smile to the faces of 13,515 children in Vietnam.

Project Smile helps children from poor families in Vietnam who were born with disabilities such as cleft palates, cleft lips and club feet, as well as others who need operations for burns, cancerous growths and other conditions. The cost of helping a child varies depending on the kind of surgery required, but each gift of **\$60 changes a child's life**. A laminated prayer card of a child helped through Project Smile is sent to all donors.

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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