

Asia Harvest



Swing the Sickle for the Harvest is Ripe! (Joel 3:13)

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Project Pearl

The 1-Million Bibles that Changed China

From the Front Lines

with Paul Hattaway

In 2005 I picked up our telephone and heard the voice of Brother David on the other end. “Paul,” he said, “I believe the Lord wants you to write a book with me on Project Pearl. When can you come?” A few months later I had the privilege of sitting next to David’s bed in his home near Seattle, in America’s picturesque northwest. This servant of God, who had lived his life like few other people, appeared to have almost literally burned out for God. After suffering a series of heart attacks, the scourge of diabetes had severely ravished David’s once-powerful frame, now some 100 pounds lighter than at his prime.

Although Brother David’s body was struggling, his mind and memory remained razor sharp. His recollection of names, dates and details was extraordinary. Moreover, David’s spirit reflected the beauty that only someone who has met the Lord in the Most Holy Place can possess. Through decades of being refined in God’s fiery furnace, he had experienced fellowship with Jesus Christ in a new, fresh and vital way.

Project Pearl, which Brother David led in 1981, is surely one of the most courageous acts of faith and love ever performed by God’s people in the last century. Christians in China had been deprived of God’s Word for decades, and many believers at the time were too scared to carry even a single Bible with them when they visited China. The Body of Christ in China was spiritually starving, and something had to be done.

This book tells the story of how Brother David and 19 other missionaries risked their lives by taking a large boat, with one million Chinese Bibles (232 tons) in tow, past the Chinese naval patrols and onto a beach in southern China, where thousands of Chinese Christians had gathered to take the Bibles away. It was an extraordinary miracle, and one that provided a massive spiritual boost to the Church in China, which has grown in leaps and bounds since. Many leaders in China believe Project Pearl was a key element in the revival that has burned in China for the last 25 years.

I had heard about Project Pearl before, but as the details of this remarkable event were unfolded, I realized that here was a story that needed to be told to a generation of Christians around the world who struggle for role-models of what it means to know and serve God. Today there are many Christians who want to *give* a message, but few whose lives have been so shaped by the cross that their lives *are* a powerful message. There are many with theological training, head knowledge and degrees, but few with a message from the furnace of affliction.

Just weeks after I recorded Brother David’s testimony for his book, the doctors told him they would have to amputate parts of three more toes on his left foot. This would

"The story of an impossible mission" – Jackie Pullinger

project pearl

THE 1 MILLION SMUGGLED BIBLES
THAT CHANGED CHINA

BROTHER DAVID
with Paul Hattaway

tend to slow down most people, but not Brother David. Remarkably, in late 2005 he made yet another trip to his beloved China to meet with house church leaders and plan new strategies for the kingdom of God. Months of planning had to go into finding an airline that could accept his wheelchair and walker, hotels in China with ramps and facilities, and a thousand other things. When the Chinese Christians saw him they hugged him dearly and tears rolled down their cheeks. Here was a warrior of the gospel—someone who had been literally willing to die to bring them the Word of God during their darkest hour of suffering; Someone who brought them food when they were hungry, water when they were thirsty, and clothes when they were naked. There are thousands of missionaries working in China today, doing a myriad of different activities, but those who can claim to have been serving the Lord in China as far back as the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s can be counted on one hand. Brother David is one of them, and the Chinese have long memories.

In many ways *Project Pearl* is also an historical record of what *Time* magazine described as “A remarkable mission...the largest operation of its kind in the history of China.” Some Christians and even mission leaders, strongly disagreeing with the *Time* description, denounced the whole operation in the secular press. The backlash was severe, and all kinds of lies were circulated around the globe that the Bible delivery had been a terrible failure, that most of the Bibles had been washed out to sea, etc. This intense controversy, born partly out of ignorance, jealousy, and in some cases a deliberate effort to cause mischief, has continued more than 25 years to the present day. Even as news that this book was being published began to circulate, some Christians began to again gnash their teeth in anger and express their displeasure.

I decided to be open and fair by including many responses—both positive and negative—that came about after Project Pearl. These are included in a chapter called “Sweet and Sour.” Our hope is that these letters and responses will provide the reader with a balanced view of the impact of Project Pearl, when one million Bibles were boldly smuggled into China in a single day.

I pray this book will testify of God’s greatness and love for people, and will encourage many in the realization that He can use an ordinary person who is willing to take Him at His Word.

We believe this book will bless and inspire people so much that we want to get it into the hands of as many as possible. If you send a donation of any amount to any Asia Harvest project, please note that you would like a copy of Project Pearl and we will send you one. If you can not afford to send a gift, please let us know and we will send you a complimentary copy anyway. Otherwise, information on how to order Project Pearl can be found in this newsletter.

PROJECT PEARL

The 1-Million Smuggled Bibles that Changed China

by Brother David with Paul Hattaway

“Project Pearl is the story of an impossible mission made possible through an ordinary man filled with the heart and power of Jesus. Brother David is a warrior who wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak. Yet it also tells of the man I have known for decades who was gentle, kind and used the weapons of faith and prayer and wisdom to bring about a miracle for the sake of his beloved China and his wonderful Savior.” – Jackie Pullinger: Pastor and author of “Chasing the Dragon”

“I consider it a rare privilege to have been considered a true friend by this saintly brother. To me, he has always been ‘closer than a brother’ Overall, there is no other Christian I can recall in the four decades of my own Christian life who has so consistently exhibited such an absolutely Christ-like attitude towards life and towards other Christians; even his adversaries.... Quite simply, he is the most remarkable Christian missionary I have ever met.” – David Aikman: Journalist and author of “Jesus in Beijing”

On 18 June 1981, a huge barge containing one million Chinese Bibles slipped through Communist border patrols and anchored off a beach in south China. Two hours later its precious cargo had been successfully delivered into the hands of Chinese Christians who had been starved of access to God’s Word since the 1950s. PROJECT PEARL is the remarkable story of this bold and courageous project, which was led by Brother David. Along with 19 crew members, he was willing to risk his life to bring the Word of God to the hungry Chinese.

Time magazine described Project Pearl as “A remarkable mission...the largest operation of its kind in the history of China.” A quarter of a century later reports are still being received from China of the tremendous impact those Bibles had on entire communities. Chinese Christians consider Project Pearl a pivotal point in their history, and a key event which contributed greatly to the mighty revival presently sweeping the world’s most populous nation.

Finally, after more than 25 years, Brother David extensively shared this tremendous story of faith and courage for the first time. Relive the adventure and struggles, and marvel at how God took a normal, football-loving, stocky American and used him powerfully for His kingdom.

A God-Given Vision

As with all great acts for God in the Scriptures and throughout history, Project Pearl began when God gave a vision to one of His children. Brother David and his family were missionaries in the Philippines in the 1970s, when the Lord told David to work in China, because the doors for that mighty land were about to open.

Brother David visited many different mission organizations and told them what the Lord had said, but they scorned the young man and said that after having firmly shut its doors to the outside world for more than 20 years, and with Chairman Mao seemingly in total control, it was impossible that mission work would again take place in China.

Despite much discouragement, God continued to mold David and lead him towards ministry in China. To start with, David and his team managed to get a few hundred copies of the Scriptures into China from neighboring countries. This grew to thousands, and then a project where 30,000 Bibles were carried into China and delivered to the believers.

After that successful delivery, the Chinese house church leaders told Brother David that they really needed one million Bibles, as soon as possible. This figure staggered the missionaries, yet they believed God was able to do the impossible, and they prayed.

Over time, through a series of miracles documented in the book, God led Brother David and his team to purchase a tug boat, build a huge submersible barge, and print



How much space does one million Bibles require? A crew member walks on some of the 232 one-ton waterproof blocks of Chinese Bibles loaded on the barge.

one million Chinese Bibles. All of this without any starting funds at all!

Project Pearl is much more than the story of what happened with the Bible delivery, as dramatic as that was. It is also a record of how God deals with people, how He brings life to situations that seem dead, and how He uses normal people to do His will, despite all their faults and weaknesses.

For the purposes of this newsletter, we would like to jump to an extraordinary testimony that happened after the one million Bibles were delivered in 1981. Anyone serving the Lord in China hears of many amazing events that God has done over the years, but this story is one of the most remarkable we have ever heard. It has become part of the rich history of the Chinese revival, and is retold in chapter 28 of the book:

Pastor John's Testimony

Pastor John, who was in his 70s, agreed to receive a consignment of 10,000 Bibles on the day following the delivery. He was thrilled and overflowing with joy to participate in this way. His role was to receive the Bibles and distribute them among the many needy believers in his area. When the consignment of Bibles arrived at his home, John wept and hugged them with pure joy, thanking God for allowing them to have so many copies of His precious Word at one time.

After the authorities were notified of the Bible delivery the situation became so tense that John decided it was prudent to store the 10,000 Bibles until the pressure had eased. The weeks passed but the situation



remained tense so he asked a Christian farmer to hide the Bibles under his barn. The authorities were sure John was one of the main participants in the project, so they arrested him and took him to the local prison, even though there was no evidence of his involvement.

The infuriated interrogators shouted questions and abused the venerable man of God, who just closed his eyes and prayed silently. They wanted the names of the leaders of Project Pearl, but there was no way John would betray his brothers and sisters in such a way. His refusal to answer enraged the men even more, so they dragged him from the interrogation room and into the prison courtyard, where he was made to stand on a wooden box about four feet high and less than a foot wide.

Seeing that the old man would not bow to their intimidation, the guards bound John's hands behind his back, and placed a noose around his neck. A guard climbed up on the roof of an adjacent building and fastened the rope to a beam. "Now let's see how calm you are, old man!" they sneered. "The moment you grow tired you will fall off the box and die! This is all your own doing. Get ready to meet your God!"

Two guards remained behind to witness the faithful pastor's death, while the others walked off, mocking John's faith and laughing at his predicament. Instead of stumbling, however, the humble pastor felt a surge of power enter his body. His legs seemed to strengthen, and he boldly proclaimed the gospel to the two guards. The sun went down, leaving the guards surprised that the old man had not yet collapsed.

The following day dawned to find John still standing on the small box. His throat was dry, but a shower of rain refreshed him. The guards resumed their positions, sure that any minute the Christian prisoner would collapse and hang himself. The hours passed, and the only sound heard in the courtyard was that of John preaching the gospel in a loud voice. He told the guards that He was not afraid of death because Jesus Christ had already made a place for him in heaven. One of the men laughed and replied, "Old man, if I get to be your age and look as unhealthy as you do, I won't be afraid to die either!"

The bored guards turned their attention on gambling with one another. This greatly encouraged John as he thought about the similarities with the Roman guards gambling for Jesus' clothing as He hung on the cross.



The beach near Shantou, in southern China, where thousands of Chinese Christians gathered on 18 June 1981 to receive the one million Bibles.

Incredibly, the second day ended, and the pastor remained standing.

The same happened on the third day, then the fourth, fifth, and sixth! The other guards heard that the old man was still alive and they came to see for themselves. Other prisoners heard of the incredible miracle and gave glory to God. The longer John remained standing on the box without food or rest, the more the fear of God began to grip all who witnessed the extraordinary event.

As each day passed, John's physical condition worsened. His legs swelled up to twice their normal size and at times they shook uncontrollably from cramp. On the 11th day John started to feel weak and was close to collapse. The Holy Spirit sustained him, however, and he carried on. John had now become something of a spectacle, and news of the miracle had reached outside the prison walls. Some of the leading officials and men of the town came to see it for themselves.

On the 13th day a strong storm swept in and heavy rain lashed John's body, soaking him to the skin. As the box beneath his feet shook from the wind, John realized that he could hold out no longer. Every sinew in his body had been strained beyond endurance. His limbs were numb, and his torso ached for a moment's respite.

John closed his eyes as his legs gave way, and the beloved pastor fell unconscious as the noose tightened around his neck.

About ten minutes later John opened his eyes to find himself stretched out on the prison floor. His whole body was in

excruciating pain, especially his arms which had been tied behind his back for almost two weeks. Now that the ropes had been loosened, the blood rushed to his limbs and caused intense pain. Not knowing what had happened, John finally became aware that someone was trying to help him sit up, and a bottle of water was being pressed against his chapped lips. A few minutes more passed before he was able to make out that the person was one of the guards who had been assigned to watch him die. The second guard was nearby.

"Please don't die! We want to know your God!" the men pleaded. "Please, uncle, help us to know your Jesus!"

"Why?" John asked in a faint whisper.

They explained to John that when his legs had finally collapsed in the midst of the storm, his body hung in the air, swinging back and forth from the overhead beam. Then, a moment later, a bolt of lightning suddenly illuminated the courtyard, cutting the rope just above his head and causing him to fall to the ground. Shaking with fear, the two guards dragged the unconscious prisoner inside and tried to revive him.

Pastor John gradually regained his strength and led the two desperate men to faith in Jesus Christ. Dozens of other guards and prisoners who heard what happened also repented of their sins and placed their trust in the Lord. Realizing that they risked the wrath of God if they continued to persecute the elderly Christian, the authorities released him from prison. John returned home, and later dug up the 10,000 Bibles and distributed them among the believers.

CHINA BIBLE PRINTING



Current Total: 1,359,363 Bibles printed and delivered.

We are partnering with house churches in China in a long-term goal to print Bibles for Christians. We receive countless requests from house church leaders throughout the country, requesting God's Word for their flocks. These Bibles are distributed free of charge to all parts of China, equipping the believers and helping add fuel to the fires of revival that are burning brightly. **Each full Bible costs just \$1.80 to print and deliver.**

ASIAN WORKERS FUND

Thanks to your gifts we are currently able to support 376 Asian evangelists.



The **Asian Workers Fund** assists church-planting evangelists who are involved in strategic ministry in Asia. These servants of the Lord have committed their whole lives to the Gospel but are hindered by lack of finances. We only support evangelists/missionaries and not pastors, as we believe pastors should be supported by the flocks they shepherd. Please pray about whether you or your church could help in the support of these dedicated workers, at **\$25 per month** each. A prayer card will be sent to all regular donors.

CHINA CHILDREN'S PROJECT

Current Total: 3,648 Children's Bible Teachers Trained and Equipped.



Thank you for the generous response to this strategic project to reach China's children for Christ. Each teacher, on average, is expected to teach 100 children and establish them in the Word of God. Teachers attending the training have their travel costs covered and a set of materials provided for free. These materials include a children's Bible, teacher's manual, teaching books with visual aids, and VCD (video cassette disc) teaching. **The total cost of \$47 per set** includes printing and production, and training expenses.

SOUTHEAST ASIA BIBLE FUND



Current Total: 118,357 Bibles Printed in 21 Languages

The Communist nations of Laos and Vietnam contain more than 250 different tribes, dozens of which had full Bibles or New Testaments translated into their languages prior to the arrival of Communism in 1975. In some cases, missionaries labored for years translating the Word of God for a tribe, only to have their work cut short by the change of government. Since then, these believers have been deprived of Bibles by the authorities. **Each Bible costs an average of \$2.70 to print and deliver.**

CHINA LIVING MARTYRS FUND

Because of your partnership we are supporting 1,088 living martyrs.



"A martyr is 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 Voice of the Martyrs)

The **China Living Martyrs Fund** assists pastors and evangelists who are unable to work because of their injuries or illness. They and their families face extreme poverty and hardship. Through an occasional or monthly gift of \$25 you can help support one or more of these living martyrs. A prayer card is sent to every regular supporter.

PROJECT SMILE



Your generous gifts have so far helped bring a smile to the faces of 5,728 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 received of **\$60 will help a child have a better life.** A laminated prayer card of a child helped through Project Smile is sent to all donors.