

4 BECOMING A FOLLOWER OF JESUS

The meeting at Uncle's house the next week marked a turning point in my life. I had come to a few of these gatherings and everyone was always very welcoming. For me the most special moment of these gatherings was when everybody prayed for one another. One person would share what he'd been through, what was troubling him, and then everybody prayed for that person. As I began to know the people better and learned their stories, I could see that in a lot of ways they were just like me. They had similar struggles and fears. But there was an observable difference; they were peaceful even in the midst of problems and they attributed this to their relationship with Jesus. I still felt like an outsider because I did not share this kind of experience with them. Every time I attended the group I had this new kind of warmth. I would come away feeling refreshed and inexplicably happy.

As they prayed, they would ask me if there was anything I wanted to ask God for. I normally declined or muttered something about wanting to have good health and luck. I was still unsure if I got that job because of Uncle Wirachai's prayer to his God, but things were going better in my life now since I had begun to associate with these people. That night as they shared their stories of praise to their God and shared their problems, I was compelled to ask them to pray for me. So as they came around to me my heart started to pound.

The leader said, "Ton, do you have anything you want us to ask God to help you with this week?"

My mouth felt dry, and I kind of croaked out, "Actually I do. I am glad to know all of you, and I am grateful for your kindness to me. But I do not have the experience that you have with God in your lives. I am not sure I believe in Jesus, and I am afraid of what my family would say if I did become His follower. Pray that I can know for sure who He is."

Uncle Wirachai spoke up. "Ton, we have all been in that position. You cannot believe because of what someone else says, you need to have

your own experience of Jesus. All of us here in one way or another have come to a point where we knew that Jesus is the Truth, the Life, and the Way to know God. One of my favorite verses in the Bible is one where Jesus says that He is standing at the door of our hearts. For those who invite Him to enter in, He will come and bring them new life. We are going to pray for you tonight that you can know Jesus for who He is and hear His knock upon the door of your heart.”

I did not know what I was expecting to happen as they prayed. I sat there feeling nothing and then suddenly I began to weep. At first it was just a few tears, but then I began to sob and had the strangest feeling of peace, as if all my doubts and fears were gone. I felt as if a warm hand pressed down upon me and drew out of me every dark thing. The people were very respectful and nobody pestered me about what had happened. I went home feeling very light and warm inside and slept deeply.

In the morning I thought to myself that I had better wait for a while and see if this feeling goes away. Maybe today I would feel like Jesus is real, but tomorrow I wouldn't. So I waited and did not say anything to Uncle about what had happened to me that night. He had given me a Bible and I read some parts. Although I did not understand everything, it was as if I heard the voice of Jesus talking to me. One day a few weeks later I read in the Bible where Jesus said, “If anyone wants to come after me, deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me.” I could not get that out of my mind. It kept ringing in my heart and I knew it was time to talk to Uncle again.

That night when I got home from work I wandered by Uncle's house.

“Hello Uncle. What are you reading?” I noticed he was reading under the mango tree.

“I am reading the Bible.”

“That's good. You love God so much.”

“Reading the Bible is like reading a love letter from God. I'm reading the part about Jesus being crucified. Every time I read this part, Jesus' sacrifice always touches me. The love He has for me makes me want to follow Him closer and closer.”

“That's interesting. Actually, that is what I wanted to talk with you about. I think Jesus is knocking on the door of my heart”

Uncle turned slowly towards me and closed his Bible. “Tell me what

has happened Ton.” I told him about how I felt that night when I cried and then the impact of Jesus’ words about following Him. After I finished I said, “I think that He wants me to follow Him, but I don’t know how to start. And I am afraid that my family is going to reject me when they find out.”

“Ton, I am so happy that you have come to the place where you want to follow Jesus. Remember, Jesus said that we need to count the cost of following Him. You are going to have people reject you, and your family will misunderstand you. But you will never regret turning your life over to Him.”

Uncle continued, “Let me just go back over for a minute what this Good News means and how we respond to it.”

“We believe in a living God, the creator of all things, who is holy, just, and merciful. As humans we are created in His image and were made to live in relationship with Him. But our first human parents rebelled against God’s commands and the whole creation fell and feels the effects of this sin, this disobedience. The result of our sin is separation from God during this life and eternal separation from God who is holy and must judge our sins. However, God is also rich in mercy and He prepared a way for us to be reconciled to Him. He sent His Son Jesus who did something for us that we cannot do for ourselves. Jesus died on a cross to bear our sins. On the third day He rose again and returned to heaven and will give the gift of life to all who trust in Him.”

“So this is the gift that he offers us, freedom from our sin, breaking out of the cycle of karma, fullness of life now and eternity in his presence. But God does not force anyone to receive His love. It is a choice He leaves with each of us to make.”

“I like to use this illustration to help people understand what it means to receive God’s gift of life. Jesus said we can only enter God’s kingdom by faith, by trusting in Him. In another place, one of His followers said that it is by grace through faith that we are saved. The hand that receives God’s gift is faith. Suppose this book here is a piece of solid gold. It is mine, but I want to give it to you. What would you have to do to receive it?”

I was confused, “I don’t understand what you mean exactly.”

“What would you have to do physically to receive this gift? If I try to put it on your shoulder, it would fall off.”

Uncle laid the book on my shoulder and caught it as it slipped down.

“Oh I get it. I would have to put out my hand to take it, like this” as I extended my hand towards him.”

“That’s right” And he placed the book in my hand.

“In the same way, faith is like the hand that receives God’s gift. He wants to give life and forgiveness to everyone, but we have to receive it. I like to call it the hand of faith and you can use your hand to remember the points. The kind of faith that the Bible talks about has four dimensions. First, it means we repent. We turn from known sin and turn towards God. Next we trust in Him, not in our own merit and good deeds, but in the work that He did on the cross for us. The third thing is that we commit our lives to Him. Jesus rose again from the dead and is Lord of all and we have to make Him the new boss of our life. That means every day we get up and dedicate ourselves to obeying Him. Then when you become His disciple, you are born anew into a family that lives under God’s rule. The group that meets together in homes that you have come to, that is one of those new families that meet to encourage one another as they follow Jesus. As a member of His new family, you serve God with the gifts He has given you. So are you ready to repent, trust Him for freedom from karma and sin, commit your life to His Lordship, and serve Him in His new family?”

“You know Uncle, I cannot believe I am saying this, but I really am.”

“Good, then the last thing is that we start this journey with Jesus by a simple prayer.”

“I believe that Jesus is the truth and can bring me forgiveness and life. But I am worried about my friends and family.”

“There will be people who react to you in a negative way. You cannot help that. Jesus told us that when we suffer for His name and are reviled we are to rejoice. But you can help your friends and family to see that following Jesus faithfully is not the same as leaving your own culture and customs and following the religion and customs of foreigners. When they see that you love them, respect them, participate with them in their social life, and live a life of peace, joy, and purity, they will start to understand that Jesus is for us too, and not just for the white people.

“I have heard my parents talk about people being brainwashed when they become a Christian.”

“Ton, what I would do is remind them of what brainwashing really means. Brainwashing is when we try to change a person’s attitude from good to bad, like training someone to kill, to steal, to sell drugs or commit suicide for some kinds of belief. Brainwashing teaches us to do bad and useless things, but believing in Jesus Christ will wash our lives clean, just like how He has washed mine. From a selfish old man, I learned to love and give to others.”

When he finished speaking Uncle Wirachai leaned forward and said in a soft voice, “Are you ready to start your journey with Jesus?”

Uncle then prayed a simple prayer sentence by sentence and I repeated it after him:

“Dear Jesus, I open my heart and invite You into my life. I’m a sinner who cannot free himself from sin. I repent and turn from my sins to follow You. I believe Jesus died on the cross to set me free, I trust Your work on the cross to save me from my sin and karma and bring me new birth as Your child. I believe that You rose from the dead, so I willingly submit my life to You as my Lord because You love me and care for me. Thank You for making me Your child and a part of Your family. I will serve You with the gifts that You give me. Amen.”

After I finished praying, Uncle Wirachai prayed that I would understand more about Jesus and be faithful to Him, and that God would bless me.

As I lay in my bed that night I thought about how different I felt. Just a few months before everything was black; I felt that I was a victim of my past lives and had bad karma. I was in despair and wanted to end my life. Now everything was full of light and joy. I had hope, a future, and someone in my life who would never forsake me. I am no longer a victim; I am God’s child. I still had debts, and money was tight and it would be for a long while. But I felt a deep peace and joy that my life was in the hands of God, who loved me deeply.

To Help You Learn

Please answer the following questions in the space provided below or in your notebook.

1. Have you ever felt Jesus knocking at the door of your heart?

2. What are your biggest obstacles to following Jesus today?

3. Describe the “hand of faith” that Uncle Wirachai talked about.

