

HOW I KNOW GOD ANSWERS PRAYER

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**THE PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF ONE
LIFE-TIME**

ROSALIND GOFORTH
**(Mrs. Jonathan Goforth) Missionary in
China since 1888**

*"Go . . . and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee."--
Mark 5:19.*



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Foreword

IT seems fitting that this little book of personal testimonies to answered prayer should have a brief introductory word as to how they came to be written. The question has been asked by some who read many of these testimonies as they appeared in the pages of *The Sunday School Times*: "How could you write such personal and sacred incidents in your life?" I could not have written them but for a very clear, God-given leading.

The story is as follows: When in Canada on our first furloughs I was frequently amazed at the incredulity expressed when definite testimony was given to an answer to prayer. Sometimes this was shown by an expressive shrug of the shoulders, sometimes by a sudden silence or turning of the topic of conversation, and sometimes more openly by the query: "How do you know that it might not have happened so, anyway?"

Gradually the impression deepened: "If they will not believe one, two, or a dozen testimonies, will they believe the combined testimonies of one whole life?"

The more I thought of what it would mean to record the sacred incidents connected with answers to prayer the more I shrank from the publicity, and from undertaking the task. There were dozens of answers far too sacred for the public eye, which were known only to a few, others known only to God. But if the record were to carry weight with those who did not believe in the supernatural element in prayer, many personal and scarcely less sacred incidents must of necessity be made public.

Again and again I laid the matter aside as impossible. But I know now that the thing was of God. As months, even years, passed, the impelling sense that the record of answers to prayer must be written gave me no rest.

It was at the close of the 1908-10 furlough--during which, as a family, we had been blessed with many and, to our weak faith, wonderful answers to prayer--that my oldest son urged me to put down in some

definite form the answers to prayer of my life, and extracted from me a solemn promise that I would do so.

But months passed after returning to China, and the record had not been touched. Then came a sudden and serious illness which threatened my life, when the doctor told me I must not delay in getting my affairs in order.

It was then that an overwhelming sense of regret took possession of me that I had not set down the prayer testimonies, and solemnly I covenanted with the Lord that if he would raise me up they should be written.

There was no more question of what others might think; the one thought was to obey. The Lord raised me up; and although he had to deal with me very sternly once more before I really set myself to the task, the testimonies that are given here were written at last--most of them in odd moments of time during strenuous missionary journeys among the heathen.

Thus it will be seen that these incidents of answered prayer are not given as being more wonderful, or more worthy of record, than multitudes the world over could testify to; but they are written and sent out simply and only because I had to write them or disobey God.

ROSALIND GOFORTH.

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1. "GETTING THINGS FROM GOD"

"Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? . . . Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows."--The Lord Jesus Christ.

THE pages of this little book deal almost wholly with just one phase of prayer--petition. The record is almost entirely a personal testimony of what petition to my Heavenly Father has meant in meeting the everyday crises of my life.

A prominent Christian worker, who read some of these testimonies in The Sunday School Times, said to the writer: "To emphasize getting things from God, as you do, is to make prayer too material."

To me this seems far from true. God is my Father, I am his child. As truly as I delight to be sought for by my child when he is cold or hungry, ill, or in need of protection, so is it with my Heavenly Father.

Prayer has been hedged about with too many man-made rules. I am convinced that God has intended prayer to be as simple and natural, and as constant a part of our spiritual life, as the intercourse between a child and his parent in the home. And as a large part of that intercourse between child and parent is simply asking and receiving, just so is it with us and our Heavenly Parent.

Perhaps, however, the most blessed element in this asking and getting from God lies in the strengthening of faith which comes when a definite request has been granted. What more helpful and inspiring than a ringing testimony of what God has done?

As I have recalled the past in writing these incidents, one of the most precious memories is that of an evening when a number of friends had gathered in our home. The conversation turned on answered prayer. For more than two hours we vied with one another in recounting personal incidents of God's wonderful work; and the inspiration of that evening still abides.

A Christian minister once said to me: "Is it possible that the great God of the universe, the Maker and Ruler of mankind, could or would, as you would make out, take interest in such a trifle as the trimming of a hat! To me it is preposterous!"

Yet did not our Lord Jesus Christ say: "The very hairs of your head are all numbered"; and "not one sparrow is forgotten before God"; and again, "Your heavenly Father knoweth what ye have need of before ye ask him"?

It is true that "There is nothing too great for God's power"; and it is just as true that "There is nothing too small for his love!"

If we believe God's Word we must believe, as Dan Crawford has tersely and beautifully expressed it, that "The God of the infinite is the God of the infinitesimal." Yes, he

"Who clears the grounding berg and guides the grinding floe, He hears the cry of the little kit fox and the lemming of the snow!"

No more wonderful testimony, perhaps, has ever been given of God's willingness to help in every emergency of life, than that which Mary Slessor gave, when asked to tell what prayer had meant to her. "My life," she wrote, "is one long daily, hourly record of answered prayer. For physical health, for mental overstrain, for guidance given marvelously, for errors and dangers averted, for enmity to the Gospel subdued, for food provided at the exact hour needed, for everything that goes to make up life and my poor service. I can testify, with a full and often wonder-stricken awe, that I believe God answers prayer. I know God answers prayer!"

I have been asked the question: "Has God always given you just what you have asked for?"

Oh, no! For him to have done so would have been great unkindness. For instance: when I was a young woman I prayed for three years that God would grant me a certain petition. Sometimes I pleaded for this as for life itself, so intensely did I want it. Then God showed me very clearly that I was praying against his will. I resigned my will to his in the matter, and a few months later God gave what was infinitely better. I have often praised him for denying my prayer; for had he granted it I could never have come to China.

Then, too, we must remember that many of our prayers, though always heard, are not granted because of some sin harbored in the life, or because of unbelief, or of failure to meet some other Bible-recorded condition governing prevailing prayer.

The following incidents of answered prayer are by no means a complete record. How could they be, when no record of prayer has been kept all these fifty years? Had there been, I doubt not that volumes could have been written to the glory of God's grace and power in answering prayer. But even from what is recorded here I, too, can say from a full heart, I know God answers prayer.

"He answered prayer: so sweetly that I stand amid the blessing of his wondrous hand and marvel at the miracle I see, the favors that his love hath wrought for me. Pray on for the impossible, and dare upon thy banner this brave motto bear, 'My Father answers prayer.'"

2. EARLY LESSONS IN THE LIFE OF FAITH

"I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications."--Psalm 116:1.

WHEN a very little child, so young I can remember nothing earlier, a severe thunderstorm passed over our home. Terrified, I ran to my mother, who placed my hands together, and pointing upward repeated over and over again the one word "Jesus."

More than fifty years have passed since that day, but the impression left upon my child-mind, of a Being invisible but able to hear and help, has never been effaced.

* * * * *

The most precious recollections of early childhood are associated with stories told us by our mother, many of which illustrated the power of prayer.

One that made a specially deep impression upon me was about our grandfather, who as a little boy went to visit cousins in the south of England, their home being situated close to a dense forest. One day the children, lured by the beautiful wild flowers, became hopelessly lost in the woods. After trying in vain to find a way out, the eldest, a young girl, called the frightened, crying little ones around her and said: "When mother died she told us to always tell Jesus if we were in any trouble. Let us kneel down, and ask him to take us home."

They knelt, and as she prayed one of the little ones opened his eyes, to find a bird so close to his hand that he reached out for it. The bird

hopped away, but kept so close to the child as to lead him on. Soon all were joining in the chase after the bird, which flew or hopped in front or just above, and sometimes on the ground almost within reach. Then suddenly it flew into the air and away. The children looked up to find themselves on the edge of the woods and in sight of home.

With such influences bearing upon one at an impressionable age, it is not surprising that I came even as a very little child to just "tell Jesus" when in trouble.

* * * * *

Through the mists of memory one incident comes out clearly, which occurred when I was six or seven years of age. While playing one day in the garden, I was seized with what we then called "jumping" toothache. I ran to my mother for comfort, but nothing she could do seemed to ease the pain.

The nerve must have become exposed, for the pain was acute. Suddenly I thought, "Jesus can help me," and just as I was, with my face pressed against my mother's breast, I said in my heart:

"Lord Jesus, if you will take away this toothache right now, now, I will be your little girl for three years."

Before the prayer was well uttered the pain was entirely gone. I believed that Jesus had taken it away; and the result was that for years, when tempted to be naughty, I was afraid to do what I knew was wrong lest, if I broke my side of what I felt to be a compact, the toothache would return. This little incident had a real influence over my early life, gave me a constant sense of the reality of a divine presence, and so helped to prepare me for the public confession of Christ as my Savior a few years later, at the age of eleven.

* * * * *

About a year after my confession of Christ an incident occurred which greatly strengthened my faith, and led me to look to God as a Father in a new way.

When Easter Sunday morning came it was so warm only spring clothes could be worn. My sister and I decided at breakfast that we would not go to church, as we had only our old winter dresses. Going to my room, I turned to my Bible to study it, when it opened at the sixth chapter of Matthew, and my eye rested on these words: "Why take ye thought for raiment . . . seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you."

It was as if God spoke the words directly to me. I determined to go to church, even if I had to humiliate myself by going in my old winter dress. The Lord was true to his promise; I can still feel the power the resurrection messages had upon my heart that day so long ago. And further, on

the following day a box came from a distant aunt, containing not only new dresses but much else that might well be included in the "all these things."

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An unforgettable proof of God's loving care came to us as a family about this time, when my parents were face to face with a serious financial crisis. Isaiah 65:24 was literally fulfilled: "Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

At that time, it is necessary to state, we depended on a quarterly income, which came through my mother's lawyer in England. Unusual circumstances had so drained our resources that we found ourselves, in the middle of the quarter, with barely sufficient to meet a week's needs. My dear mother assured us that the Lord would provide; that he would not forsake those who put their trust in him. That very day a letter came from the lawyer in England, enclosing a draft for a sum ample to meet our needs till the regular remittance should arrive. This unexpected and timely draft proved to be a bonus, which did not occur again.

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Some years later, having moved to a strange city, a great longing came to do some definite service for my Master. One day there came to the Bible class I attended a call for teachers, to aid in a Sunday-school nearby. When I presented myself before the superintendent of this Sunday-school the following Sunday, and offered my services, it is not much wonder I received a rebuff, for I was young and quite unknown. I was told that if I wished a class, it would be well for me to find my own scholars. I can remember how a lump seemed choking me all the way home that day.

At last, determining not to be baffled, I prayed the Lord to help me get some scholars. I went forth praying every step of the way, the following Saturday afternoon; and canvassing just one short street near our home, I received the promise of nineteen children for Sunday-school. The next day a rather victorious young woman walked up to the Sunday-school superintendent with seventeen children following. Needless to say I was given a class.

In the autumn of 1885 the Toronto Mission Union, a faith mission, decided to establish a branch mission in the East End slums of that city. Three others with myself were deputed to open this work. Everything connected with it was entirely new to me; but most helpful and inspiring I found it. For in face of tremendous difficulties, that seemed to my inexperienced eyes insurmountable, I learned that prayer was the secret which overcame every obstacle, the key that unlocked every closed door.

I felt like a child learning a new and wonderful lesson--as I saw benches, tables, chairs, stove, fuel, lamps, oil, even an organ, coming in answer to definite prayer for these things. But best sight of all was when men and women, deep in sin, were converted and changed into workers for God, in answer to prayer. Praise God for the lessons then learned, which were invaluable later when facing the heathen.

* * * * *

The time came when two diverse paths lay before me--one to England, as an artist; one to China, as a missionary. Circumstances made a definite decision most difficult. I thought I had tried every means to find out God's will for me, and no light had come.

But in a day of great trouble, when my precious mother's very life seemed to hang in the balance, I shut myself up with God's Word, praying definitely for him to guide me to some passage by which I might know his will for my life. My Bible opening at the fifteenth chapter of John's Gospel, the sixteenth verse seemed to come as a message to me: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit." Going to my dear mother and telling her of the message God had given me, she said: "I dare not fight against God."

From that time the last hindrance from going to China was removed. Surely the wonderful way God has kept his child for more than thirty years in China is proof that this "call" was not a mistaken one. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will make plain thy paths" (Prov. 3: 6, marg.).

During the summer of 1887 a book written by Dr. Hudson Taylor came into my hands. In "China's Spiritual Needs and Claims" the writer told many instances of God's gracious provision in answer to prayer. The incidents related impressed me deeply. A little later, a few weeks before my marriage, when I found I was short fifty dollars of what I would need to be married free of debt, I resolved not to let others know of my need, but to just trust God to send it to me. The thought came--if you cannot trust God for this, when Hudson Taylor could trust for so much more, are you worthy to be a missionary?

It was my first experience of trusting quite alone for money. I was sorely tempted to give others just a hint of my need. But I was kept back from doing so; and though I had a week or more of severe testing, peace of mind and the assurance that God would supply my need, came at length. The answer, however, did not come till the very last night before the wedding.

That evening a number of my fellow-workers from the East End Mission called, and presented me with a beautifully illuminated address and

a purse. After these friends had left I returned to my home circle assembled in the back parlor, and showed them the address and the purse unopened! Not for a moment did I think there was anything in the purse till my brother said: "You foolish girl, why don't you open it?" I opened the purse, and found it contained a check for fifty dollars!

This incident has ever remained peculiarly precious; for it seemed to us a seal of God upon the new life opening before us.

3. "GO FORWARD ON YOUR KNEES" (1887-1894)

"I will go before thee, and make the crooked places straight: I will break in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron" (Isa. 45:2).

IN ATTEMPTING to record what prayer meant in our early pioneer days, other than purely personal testimonies must be given; for we were, as a little band of missionaries, bound together in our common needs and dangers by a very close bond.

* * * * *

In October, 1887, my husband was appointed by the Canadian Presbyterian Church to open a new field, in the northern section of the Province of Honan, China. We left Canada the following January, reaching China in March, 1888. Not till then did we realize the tremendous difficulties of the task before us.

Dr. Hudson Taylor, of the China Inland Mission, writing to us at this time, said: "We understand North Honan is to be your field; we, as a mission, have tried for ten years to enter that province from the south, and have only just succeeded. It is one of the most anti-foreign provinces in China. . . . Brother, if you would enter that province, you must go forward on your knees."

These words gave the key-note to our early pioneer years. Would that a faithful record had been kept of God's faithfulness in answering prayer! Our strength as a mission and as individuals, during those years so

fraught with dangers and difficulties, lay in the fact that we did realize the hopelessness of our task apart from divine aid.

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The following incident occurred while we were still outside Honan, studying the language at a sister mission. It illustrates the importance of prayer from the home base for those on the field.

My husband was finding great difficulty in acquiring the language; he studied faithfully many hours daily, but made painfully slow progress. He and his colleague went regularly together to the street chapel, to practice preaching in Chinese to the people; but, though Mr. Goforth had come to China almost a year before the other missionary, the people would ask the latter to speak instead of Mr. Goforth, saying they understood him better.

One day, just before starting as usual for the chapel, my husband said: "If the Lord does not give me very special help in this language I fear I shall be a failure as a missionary."

Some hours later he returned, his face beaming with joy. He told me that he realized most unusual help when his turn came to speak; sentences came to his mind as never before; and not only had he made himself understood, but some had appeared much moved, coming up afterward to have further conversation with him. So delighted and encouraged was he with this experience that he made a careful note of it in his diary.

Some two months and a half later a letter came from a student in Knox College, saying that on a certain evening a number of students had met specially to pray for Mr. Goforth. The power of prayer was such, and the presence of God so manifestly felt, that they decided to write and ask Mr. Goforth if any special help had come to him at that time. Looking in his diary, he found that the time of their meeting corresponded with that time of special help in the language.

"I cannot tell why there should come to me a thought of someone miles and years away, in swift insistence on the memory, unless there is a need that I should pray. We are too busy to spare thought for days together of some friends away; Perhaps God does it for us--and we ought to read his signal as a sign to pray. Perhaps just then my friend has fiercer fight, a more appalling weakness, a decay of courage, darkness, some lost sense of right; and so, in case he needs my prayers--I pray."

At last the joyful news reached us women, waiting outside of Honan, that our brethren had secured property in two centers. It would be difficult for those in the homeland to understand what the years of waiting had meant to some of us. The danger to those dear to us, touring in Honan, was very great. For years they never left us to go on a tour

without our being filled with dread lest they should never return; yet the Lord, in his mercy, heard our prayers for them; and though often in grave danger, none received serious injury. This is not a history of the mission, but I cannot forbear giving here one incident illustrating how they were kept during those early days.

* * * * *

Two of our brethren, after renting property at a town just within the boundary of Honan, and near the Wei River, moved in, intending to spend the winter there; but a sudden and bitter persecution arose, just as they had become settled. The mission premises were attacked by a mob, and everything was looted. The two men were roughly handled, one being dragged about the courtyard. They found themselves at last left alone, their lives spared, but everything gone.

Their position was serious in the extreme--several days' journey away from friends, with no money, no bedding, and no clothes but those upon them, and the cold winter begun.

In their extremity, they knelt down and committed themselves to the Lord. And according to his promise he delivered them out of their distresses; for even while they prayed a brother missionary from a distant station was at hand. He arrived unexpectedly, without knowing what had occurred, a few hours after the looting had taken place. His coming at such an opportune moment filled the hearts of their heathen enemies with fear. Money and goods were returned, and from that time the violent opposition of the people ceased.

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A few months after the above incident several families moved into Honan, and a permanent occupation was effected; but the hearts of the people seemed as adamant against us. They hated and distrusted us as if we were their worst enemies. The district in which we settled was known for its turbulent and anti-foreign spirit, and as a band of missionaries we were frequently in the gravest danger.

Many times we realized that we, as well as our fellow-workers at the other stations, were kept from serious harm only by the over-ruling, protecting power of God in answer to the many prayers which were going up for us all at this critical juncture in the history of our mission. The following are concrete examples of how God heard our prayers at this time.

We had for our station doctor a man of splendid gifts. He was a gold medalist, with years of special training and hospital experience, and was looked upon as one of the rising physicians in the city from which he came. Imagine his disappointment, therefore, when month after month passed and scarcely a good case came to the hospital. The people did not