

The Lord's Call

“During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”—Acts 16:9

When I heard of the news that Rev. Douglas Wu needed to return to Taipei to receive a long period of treatment for his Hepatitis C infection and that as a result the churches in South Africa would have no shepherd, I was immediately filled with the desire and the hope to serve these churches. Later I heard the whisper repeatedly saying, “Please come and help us in South Africa.” I was touched and decided to pray, feeling a great amount of peace in my heart. At the same time, I learned that brother Philip Ling also had this fervent heart to go there and serve. After our church brothers and sisters agreed with this ministry and having a better understanding of the local environment and needs, brother Philip and I decided to take on this journey in peace.

Do Not Worry About Anything

We understood that South Africa is a place with terrible public order when one can get hurt at any time, and that there could even be a risk of putting one's life in danger. Philip and I were determined to watch out for each other through thick and thin. Yet are we really safe even in the U.S.? There are shootings in school grounds, military compounds, even in supermarkets and shops; violence and murders in families; robberies in alleys and thoroughfares; break-ins to houses are happening all the time. To be honest, there isn't a place in the world that one can feel safe. Philip and I did not worry because we knew that the Lord would go with us and He would certainly guard and protect His servants! When we were willing to be humble and obedient, expectant and trusting and to be still before the Lord, what He prepared for us was more than we could have asked or imagined. Mrs. Christine Pi and Theresa Poon, a board member of CIM, went to South Africa before us in May to help with the ministries and made arrangements for us already. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Jehovah-Jireh, Jehovah-Shalom.

All Things Are Possible with God

We arrived safely in Pretoria on Friday morning and began serving on Saturday. We arranged Bible classes, training sessions, visitations, coworker counseling sessions and meetings at the Rustenburg Church. Together we studied the book of Philippians, explored the teachings of serving as well as the blessing of spiritual gifts, the meaning of tithing, and also training on how to share the Gospel.

During visitations, we realized each brother and sister had different hardships. The people from Fu-Qing have a tradition of marrying young and sending their children back to be reared by relatives in China until a certain age before returning them to the parents in South Africa. As a result, there are many problems among husband-and-wife as well as parent-and-children relationships. This is especially so with the brothers and sisters who live in mining areas and the impoverished regions. They live in a constant fear of being robbed, shot, and houses being broken into. Most of them live in their stores, with large boxes as their mattresses. They do this to save money from having to pay rent as well as for gas in having to commute to and from home. They also assume that it's not as easy for thefts when somebody actually lives inside the store. Throughout their lives, the most important thing for them is to make money. Their spiritual lives are indeed most dry!

While in South Africa, coworkers invited us to dinner every night. They all used a different reasons to have us drink with them, for example, “the red wine goes with the steak.” We would politely decline time and time again and they respected that. However, during the first night's dinner, a sister at another table expressed her disappointment of us to her husband. She thought she saw three pastors drinking wine but it turned out that we were drinking a kind of herbal tea that has a similar color as wine from a distance.

After that sister found out we were only drinking herbal tea, she was overjoyed and praised the Lord! Apparently there have been incidents of Christians getting drunk and these disagreements became a stumbling block!

Everything we do must: 1) be done for the glory of God; 2) bring benefit to others and not to weaken them to fall; 3) honor our bodies, for they are the temples of the Holy Spirit; 4) be holy, to commensurate with our salvation as we are called to walk and behave in a manner reflective of God's grace. Today, we have the freedom in Christ to choose something that does not please God or glorify Him.

We also discovered that the brothers do not practice praying vocally. Therefore we tried exerting a little pressure while encouraging them, asking each to pray aloud after each dinner fellowship and coworker meeting before we closed. During the last worship service, all the serving coworkers opened their mouths to pray. During the community praying, many brothers and sisters were touched and prayed aloud. I also asked one particular brother to pray for our safe journey from Rustenburg back to Pretoria and later to the U.S. and for the final week of serving in Pretoria. Praise the Lord, he prayed well! These were made possible only by the works of the Holy Spirit. May all the glory, the honor, and the power be to our Heavenly Father.

Praise the Lord, during the week of serving in Pretoria we experienced genuine acceptance, care, and love. This prompted me to think of Psalm 133: 1-3. What a picture of beauty and unity, with God's love and His predestined blessing within it! This was all possible because of the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit in the brothers and sisters in South Africa, opening their spiritual ears and bestowing on them humble, teachable, and softened hearts. There were brothers who were willing to stop drinking, gather every Friday night to worship the Lord, study God's word, and pray to the Lord.

God's Ways are Higher Than Our Ways; His Thoughts are Higher Than Our Thoughts

Before we left for South Africa, we heard that most of the brothers and sisters there were busy with working at their stores and might not have the time to fellowship with us. When we arrived in Rustenburg towards the end of May, the miners had been on strike for eight months. As a result, the stores near the mines experienced a 50-70% drop in their sales. Because of this, the shop owners were not as busy and had more time to communicate with and understand each other. The coworkers also had more time to accompany us to do visitations. Whether it was day or night, we were able to have good fellowship and communication with them, discuss how the church could continue growing and developing in the future, and the goals of their spiritual lives.

The five weeks went quickly. I thank CIM for allowing me this opportunity to serve. I also thank Mrs. Pi, Mrs. Wu, and Theresa for arranging all the logistics for our ministries. I want to thank all the brothers and sisters who prayed for us, all those who hosted us, and for the angels who surrounded us on this journey. May our everlasting and all-powerful God receive all the thanks and praise. The brothers and sisters in South Africa need God's servants to lead them, to guide them, and to help change their value systems and perspective. This journey also allowed us to see how challenging it is for Rev. Wu to shepherd, care for, and teach at three churches and fellowship in South Africa. He needs more long-term coworkers to go and help him. The seeds God has planted in those places need to take up roots and grow in His word. These young believers need encouragement to live out their faith. Are you willing to partner with God, allowing His living water to use you to bring the Good News to their lives? Can you also hear the whisper saying to you, "Please come to help us in South Africa!"