

Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Transformation

The experience of the Practice of the Exchanged Life came to Hudson after nearly 20 years on the mission field in China. Read his account and take heart, **it can happen to you!**

“I strove for faith, but it would not come; I tried to exercise it, but in vain. Seeing more and more the wondrous supply of grace laid up in Jesus, the fullness of our precious Jesus, the fullness of our precious Savior, my guilt and helplessness seemed to increase.” Months passed. Hudson kept constantly on the move, his time divided mostly between the mission's two semi-official headquarters in Chin-kiang (where the mission's printing press was located) and Yang-chow (with its rapidly growing Chinese church). Summer brought yet another bout of serious illness that weakened Hudson for over a month.

He hadn't even regained his strength before he embarked on yet another strenuous journey up the canal to provide medical care for Mr. Judd, who was dangerously ill himself. The Gordons, who were stationed in Soo-chow-Fu, came to consult with him about problems in their work. And the Duncans were on their way from Nanking for a special strategy session with the leader of the mission. Hudson had never felt so worn-out, pressured, or discouraged. He clung desperately to the end of his physical, emotional, and spiritual rope.

Amid a pile of mail on Hudson's desk when he finally got back to Chin-kiang was a letter from his young friend and colleague, John McCarthy, written from the old home in Hang-chow. He knew something of Hudson's inner struggles because the two of them had talked about them the last time they were together. Since then he had made a spiritual discovery that he wanted to share with this friend and mentor.

In his letter to Hudson he wrote: "I do wish I could have a talk with you now, about the way of holiness. At the time you were speaking to me about it, it was the subject of all others occupying my thoughts, not from anything I read . . . so much as from consciousness of failure—a constant falling short of that which I felt should be aimed at; an unrest; a perpetual striving to find some way by which one might continually enjoy that communion, that fellowship, at times so real but more often so visionary, so far off! . . . "Do you know, I now think that this striving, longing, hoping for better days to come is not the true way to holiness, happiness, or usefulness. It is better, no doubt, far better than being satisfied with poor attainments, but not the best way after all.

The Lord Jesus received is holiness begun; the Lord Jesus cherished is holiness advancing; the Lord Jesus counted upon as never absent would be holiness complete . . . He is most holy who has most of Christ within, and joys most fully in the finished work. It is defective faith which clogs the feet and causes many a fall.' "This last sentence, I think I now fully endorse. To let my loving Savior work in me His will, my sanctification, is what I would live for by His

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grace. Abiding, not striving nor struggling; looking often unto Him; trusting Him for present power; . . . resting in the love of an almighty Savior, in the joy of a complete salvation 'from all sin'—

This is not new, and yet 'tis new to me. I feel as though the dawning of a glorious day had risen upon me. I hail it with trembling, yet with trust. I seem to have got to the edge only, but of a boundless sea; to have sipped only, but of that which fully satisfies. Christ literally all seems to me, now, the power, the only power for service, the only ground for unchanging joy . . . “How then to have our faith increased? Only by thinking of all that Jesus is and all He is for us: His life, His death, His work, He Himself as revealed to us in the Word, to be the subject of our constant thoughts. Not a striving to have faith . . . but a looking off to the Faithful One seems all we need; a resting in the Loved One entirely, for time and for eternity.”

Hudson wrote afterwards about the impact of these words saying, “As I read, I saw it all. I looked to Jesus, and when I saw—oh, how joy flowed!” And on his next trip to Yang-chow he hardly greeted his friends there before he began pacing back and forth across the room with his hands behind his back excitedly explaining what had happened to him. “Oh, Mr. Judd. God has made me a new man! God has made me a new man!” And so it seemed to everyone who knew him.

His friend Judd wrote: “He was a joyous man now, a bright happy Christian. He had been a toiling, burdened

one before, with latterly not much rest of soul. It was rested in Jesus now, and letting Him do the work—which makes all the difference. Whenever he spoke in meetings after that, a new power seemed to flow from him. Troubles did not worry him as before. He cast everything on God in a new way, and gave more time to prayer. Instead of working late at night, he began to go to bed earlier, rising at 5 a.m. to give time to Bible study and prayer (often two hours) before the work of the day began.”

Only six months earlier Hudson had lamented his spiritual weakness saying, “I have continually to mourn that I follow at such a distance and learn so slowly to imitate my precious Master.” But this was no longer an imitation. He now experienced the truth the apostle Paul described when he wrote that “Christ lives in me.” Instead of bondage, Hudson felt an exciting new freedom within; instead of failure, he sensed victory; instead of fear and weakness, he knew beyond doubt that his Lord would be sufficient.

The difference seemed so amazing and so simple that Hudson wanted to share the secret with anyone and everyone he knew—starting with friends and loved ones. To his sister Amelia Broomhall, whom he knew to be burdened by the cares and responsibility of a family that grew to ten children, he wrote: “So many thanks for your dear, long letter . . . I do not think you have written me such a letter since our return to China. I know it is with you as with me—you cannot—not you will not. Mind and body will not bear more than a certain amount of strain, or do more than a certain amount of work. “As to work—

mine was never so plentiful, so responsible or so difficult, but the weight and strain are all gone.

The last month or more has been, perhaps, the happiest of my life, and I long to tell you a little of what the Lord has done for my soul. I do not know how far I may be able to make myself intelligible about it, for there is nothing new or strange or wonderful—and yet, all is new! . . . “Perhaps I may make myself more clear if I go back a little.

Well, dearie, my mind has been greatly exercised for six or eight months past, feeling the need personally and for our Mission of more holiness, life, power in our souls. But personal need stood first and was the greatest. I felt the ingratitude, the danger, the sin of not living nearer to God. I prayed, agonized, fasted, strove, made resolutions, read the Word more diligently, sought more time for meditation—but all without avail. Every day, almost every hour, the consciousness of sin oppressed me. “I knew that if only I could abide in Christ all would be well, but I could not.

I would begin the day with prayer, determined not to take my eye off Him for a moment, but pressure of duties, sometimes very trying, and constant interruptions apt to be so wearing, caused me to forget Him. Then one’s nerves get so fretted in this climate that temptations to irritability, hard thoughts, and sometimes unkind words are all the more difficult to control. Each day brought its register of sin and failure, of lack of power. To will was indeed ‘present with me,’ but how to perform I found not.

“Then came the question, is there no rescue? Must it be thus to the end—constant conflict, and too often defeat? How could I preach with sincerity that, to those who receive Jesus, ‘to them gave he power to become the sons of God’ (i.e., Godlike) when it was not so in my own experience? Instead of growing stronger, I seemed to be getting weaker and to have less power against sin; and no wonder, for faith and even hope were getting low. I hated myself, I hated my sin, yet gained no strength against it. I felt I was a child of God. His spirit in my heart would cry, in spite of all, ‘Abba, Father.’ But to rise to my privileges as a child, I was utterly powerless.

“I thought that holiness, practical holiness, was to be gradually attained by a diligent use of the means of grace. There was nothing I so much desired as holiness, nothing I so much needed; but far from in any measure attaining it, the more I strove after it, the more it eluded my grasp, ’til hope itself almost died out, and I began to think that—perhaps to make heaven the sweeter—God would not give it down here. I do not think that I was striving to attain it in my own strength. I knew I was powerless. I told the Lord so, and asked Him to give me help and strength. Sometimes I almost believed that He would keep and uphold me; but on looking back in the evening—alas! there was but sin and failure to confess and mourn before God.

“I would not give you the impression that this was the only experience of these long, weary months. It was a too frequent state of soul, and that towards which I was tending, which almost ended in despair. And yet, never did

Christ seem more precious; a Savior who could and would save such a sinner! . . . And sometimes there were seasons not only of peace but of joy in the Lord; but they were transitory, and at best there was a sad lack of power.

Oh, how good the Lord has been in bringing this conflict to an end! “All the time I felt assured that there was in Christ all I needed, but the practical question was—how to get it out. He was rich truly, but I was poor; He was strong, but I weak. I knew full well that there was in the root, the stem, abundant fatness, but how to get it into my puny branch was the question. As gradually light dawned, I saw that faith was the only requisite—was the hand to lay hold on His fullness and make it mine. But I had not this faith.

“I strove for faith, but it would not come; I tried to exercise it, but in vain. Seeing more and more the wondrous supply of grace laid up in Jesus, the fullness of our precious Jesus, the fullness of our precious Savior, my guilt and helplessness seemed to increase. Sins committed appeared but as trifles compared with the sin of unbelief which was their cause, which could not or would not take God at His word, but rather made Him a liar! Unbelief was I felt the damning sin of the world; yet I indulged in it. I prayed for faith, but it came not. What was I to do?

“When my agony of soul was at its height, a sentence in a letter from dear McCarthy was used to remove the scales from my eyes, and the Spirit of God revealed to me the truth of our oneness with Jesus as I had never known it before. McCarthy, who had been much exercised by the

same sense of failure but saw the light before I did, wrote (I quote from memory): “‘ But how to get faith strengthened? Not by striving after faith, but by resting on the Faithful One.’

As I read, I saw it all! ‘If we believe not, he abides faithful.’ I looked to Jesus and saw (and when I saw, oh joy flowed!) that He had said, ‘I will never leave thee.’ ‘ Ah, there is rest!’ I thought. I have striven in vain to rest in Him. I’ll strive no more. For has not He promised to abide with me—never to leave me, never to fail me? And, dearie, He never will. Nor was this all He showed me, nor one half.

As I thought of the vine and the branches, what light the blessed Spirit poured direct into my soul! How great seemed my mistake in wishing to get the sap, the fullness out of Him! I saw not only that Jesus will never leave me, but that I am a member of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. The vine is not the root merely, but all—root, stem, branches, twigs, leaves, flowers, fruit. And Jesus is not that alone—He is soil and sunshine, air and showers, and ten thousand times more than we have ever dreamed, wished for or needed. Oh, the joy of seeing this truth!

I do pray that the eyes of your understanding too may be enlightened, that you may know and enjoy the riches freely given us in Christ. “Oh, my dear Sister, it is a wonderful thing to be really one with a risen and exalted Savior, to be a member of Christ! Think what it involves. Can Christ be rich and I poor? Can your right hand be rich and your left poor? Or your head be well fed while your body starves? Again, think of its bearing on prayer. Could a bank clerk

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say to a customer, 'It was only your hand, not you, that wrote that check'; or 'I cannot pay this sum to your hand, but only to yourself?'

No more can your prayers or mine be discredited if offered in the name of Jesus (i.e., not for the sake of Jesus merely, but on the ground that we are His, His members) so long as we keep within the limits of Christ's credit—a tolerably wide limit! If we ask for anything unscriptural, or not in accordance with the will of God, Christ Himself could not do that. But 'if we ask any thing according to his will . . . we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.'

"The sweetest part, if one may speak of one part being sweeter than another, is the rest which full identification with Christ brings. I am no longer anxious about anything, as I realize this; for He, I know, is able to carry out His will, and His will is mine. It makes no matter where He places me, or how. That is rather for Him to consider than for me; for in the easiest position He must give me His grace, and in the most difficult His grace is sufficient. It little matters to my servant whether I send him to buy a few cash worth of things, or the most expensive articles. In either case he looks to me for the money and brings me his purchases.

So, if God should place me in serious perplexity, must He not give me much guidance; in positions of great difficulty, much grace; in circumstances of great pressure and trial, much strength? No fear that resources will prove unequal to the emergency! And His resources are mine, for He is

mine, and is with me and dwells in me. “And since Christ has thus dwelt in my heart by faith, how happy I have been! I wish I could tell you about it, instead of writing.

I am no better than before. In a sense, I do not wish to be, nor am I striving to be. But I am dead and buried with Christ—ay, and risen too! And now Christ lives in me, and ‘the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’ . . . “And now I must close. I have not said half I would, nor as I would, had I more time. May God give you to lay hold on these blessed truths. Do not let us continue to say, in effect, ‘Who shall ascend into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down from above).

In other words, do not let us consider Him as far off, when God has made us one with Him, members of His very body. Nor should we look upon this experience, these truths, as for the few. They are the birthright of every child of God, and no one can dispense with them without dishonoring our Lord. The only power for deliverance from sin or for true service is Christ.” It all seemed so simple and practical —as Hudson’s sister discovered for herself.

“But are you always conscious of abiding in Christ?” someone asked Hudson many years later. “While sleeping last night,” he replied, “did I cease to abide in your home because I was unconscious of the fact? We should never be conscious of not abiding in Christ.” The discovery of this simple secret soon changed Hudson Taylor’s life and ministry in ways he could never even have imagined before.