

Mind the Root, Especially in the East

By Dan Camp, *contributing writer, editor, member Board of Directors/Advisory Board for IOM America*

I am enjoying a beautiful spring afternoon in China, away from teaching, writing in solitude (one of my favorite things). And I am mindful that our Father is at work, not only in me, but also around the world, as He pours out the truth about Jesus' wonderful Grace.

In China, it's our understanding that all of us, who are residents here, are under an especially watchful eye this week, as the government gauges and monitors suspicious or unwanted activity on Asia's number one social media, *WeChat*.¹ Western social media and news sources are blocked routinely here, and from time to time there is a flexing of the bureaucratic muscle, which serves as a warning against proselytizing. It is difficult for many friends in America to grasp that on an average day, we literally cannot access the community communication programs that are so normal for them. They post to our "FB and Insta..." timelines, and complain that they don't hear back from us. We must not love them anymore. No, dear ones, we just live in the real world!

I've been praying about telling the story of our being *swept* here late last August. And there are a few trusted and wise friends who continue to advise against me doing so. It is true that the law continues generally to work against faith. One example is a dear friend of our school coach was just released from two years in prison for a faith-related offense. Most of our school momas and babas (moms and dads) are believers. But one, who is not yet a believer, told me last fall, "The government has decided that Christians mean no harm" - including the ones born here. The broad general consensus now is that those who honor the law will be left alone, although there are no guarantees. Those who are straightforward with nothing to hide, and who have begun to build rapport with local officials are experiencing amazing tolerance. If you are reading this with a sense of political unbelief, don't worry; this calm and generous attitude *is* coming from the mega-metropolises to a province near you.

Though this story is true with no fictional characters, I am compelled to maintain my own policy, "Harmless as a dove, wise as a serpent." Therefore, I am not broadcasting certain details which could incriminate the innocent (and you may have already noticed I'm softening some of my verbage). But those are not the things you're interested in, anyway! You want to know that Grace really does work, and that the Indwelling Life can be entirely relied upon in every culture and situation! And that just happens to be our story! My Mrs. of forty years calls it "*Unconventional*." She expects to sit down and write it with me, when we are not too busy living it.

For us, it started about ten years ago. I often say we had reached a place in our lives, for which we were not prepared. Of course, this was true of every significant stage of our married life. Smile! But this was different. Instead of births and parties (which had populated our humble existence for years), suddenly, we began to receive an influx of invitations to deaths and funerals - and the numbers were increasing fast. Those who were going Home, without "our permission," became closer and closer.

Then one pleasant spring day, we received a call that went something like this: "Sis, you're the only girl in the family, and we think it's time for Mom to come and live with you and your husband. Please come up to Tennessee soon, and let's talk about it. No, Danny's not invited." So she

went, and learned that Mom's minor liver condition was now liver failure, *and* Mom had been diagnosed with incurable lung cancer. Well, obviously she needed to come and live with us! After all, it wasn't appropriate for those guys to be changing her bedpans! So she came, and life changed for us from a sophisticated, status quo feigning of, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart," to, "We're not gonna make it through this without a radically different approach to LIFE! And it's going to have to be a lot more *radical* than the brand of performance-based *high church* that is going around right now."

Do you know how long it takes to disciple a new believer *completely* into the authentic Gospel, the *Life* of Christ, and of His *Grace*? It doesn't take long at all! In fact, time is not the main issue, but knowing someone who knows the Life and Grace is a necessity. My Centurion² friends say, "We often think that what is obvious to us, must be obvious to all – it is not." And someone else rightly said, "You don't know what you don't know." I like to add that you don't know *what* you don't know, until you don't know *that* you don't know – *until* you know! One of the watershed moments of Grace for us was when we sat in the living room of close ministry friends, from days gone by, and my old buddy literally *cried out*, "Oh, Father, we just didn't know."

Allow me to fast-forward a bit. You don't need to hear our "How Story." If you already have a How Story, you already know that Jesus IS The How; and if you don't have a How Story yet, it's coming (and no amount of "trying to get there from here" will help – HE WILL DO IT). So, Father dropped us into a Grace-based community that we had not imagined existed in a little town like ours. And before Mom went Home fully aware of Jesus' robes of Righteousness (rather than her own), she began asking us to teach her everything we were learning. We *got* Grace, Mom *got* Grace, the kids *got* Grace, and lots of our friends *got* Grace, and the *song* just keeps getting passed on.

Now when I use the expression, "We *got* Grace," it's like a cold or the flu that we *caught*. Some Grace folks say they *caught* Grace. It doesn't matter what you call it. It's just very humbling to have been, for many years: in Christ; in the heart of the Bible Belt; in established and respected Christian families; in outstanding church assemblies; and most humbling of all, in the Word - and yet, not having understood real Grace. But you don't know what you don't know – until you know. And then the lights go ON! And we heard, "My sheep hear My Voice" is literal for believers," and we responded, "We'll take some of that, too!" And, to our surprise, Father started talking to us! Obviously, we understood that He was not speaking to our physical ears, but that our *spiritual* senses had been turned on.

But – fast-forward again – when He assured our hearts and minds that He was introducing us to a new Chinese friend, who needed our help in her school in Beijing, we began to pray about coming. We learned the director had been on a similar track of Christian education in the U.S., had a wonderful family in China, had parents who were respected Chinese university professors, and had enjoyed working for a while with one of the leading staff providers for international educational organizations. When God laid it on her heart that He wanted to open a school, she invited several other moms to meet in her living room with the kids. Fellow teachers at heart, they followed Christ in her, and the school grew. She reached out and developed solid friendships to send her middle schoolers to the U.S. for their high school years and diplomas. She developed respectful relationships in China, and hired teachers who had some English; but she dreamed of the difference it could make to have real English speakers teaching her students. She talked with her contacts, and a name came up - the name of a tenured, award-winning teacher and director of several schools for home schoolers. I really don't know how, except for Jesus working; but I know that He knows how, because He is the How. (Are you catching this covert theme?)!

We started meeting with everyone who was anyone to us. Frankly, we were trying to find a STOPLIGHT. There were so many critical and necessary lights – and not a single Red one! And we asked the Lord, “Are You kidding, us?! Is this even possible at our age?! We don’t know a word of Chinese, and it’s been years since our last short-term to the Yucatan! We have three schools to run, and many people are counting on us!” And, boy, do home schoolers count on those who are assisting them!

Surely our schools would provide a roadblock! But two of our daughters, who had told us unequivocally the year before, “Mom, we would **NEVER** want to do what you do,” suddenly changed their tunes – **BEFORE** they knew what we were considering.

“This is getting outrageous,” we thought. We have one parent left, 83 years young, “Grams,” who will surely throw up a big, REDLIGHT! “You want to do what?” she asked. “Well, I’ll be fine here. Y’all go on and have a good time!” Unbelievable, and then our passports and visas, which were supposed to take six weeks, arrived in five days.

We are in our fourth half-semester of teaching every class known to man to every age group, in English, and we have quite literally seen everything imaginable in terms of *fruit* to the Glory of God. We would have been happy teaching poor migrant kids, which one of our Teen-Pact “daughters” close by has been doing, rather than influencing wealthy movers and shakers and their precious children. But God!

Let me close by sharing that we had hoped, against hope, when we arrived in the East, we would find that 1 John 4:1³ had **not** affected any of the nations on this side of the world. We thought maybe all the believers here, despite the presence and work of the devil, would be filled with Grace and living by Grace and enjoying nothing but Grace in every relationship, every day. Very sadly and very quickly, we learned that legalism and works righteousness – dead works – are here, too.

I’m **not** faulting our dear brothers and sisters in China, Korea, and Japan. I’m simply stating that the failure to understand and embrace the pure Grace of Jesus is *universal*. But do you know what that means?! It means around the globe, the most incredible privileges still await those who will declare the truth about Grace in any and every language. It means slaves of the flesh (*sarx*) can be set free in the West, just like Father is setting them free in the East. It means those who don’t yet know their true identity and the reality of God’s total forgiveness and indwelling *have another thing coming*, as we say in the South. It means schools, teachers, professors, directors, and administrators, who depend on His Grace in the East, can flourish just like they do in the West!

And, yes, there is a “To Do” list, but Father has it, and He *doesn’t* share it. If He did, do you know what would happen? His people would run off and begin doing things all over the world for Him – without Him – and He can’t have that, can He? It’s a good thing that God fired everyone, except Jesus, at the Cross (John 5:30; 15:4-5; 15:15-17; Romans 8:15; Gal. 2:20).

Please, friends, let’s stop asking the proverbial questions, “What can I do? And what am I supposed to do?” And let’s get busy enjoying Jesus. If we think that we were called to live for the good of the world, we’re only about one quarter correct.

If we will mind the Root, He will mind the fruit.

¹ *WeChat* is a mobile text and voice messaging communication service developed by Tencent in China, first released in January 2011.

² The Chuck Colson Center for Christian Worldview CENTURION. The Centurions Program educates people of strong faith with relevant skills, biblical knowledge, and a solid Christian worldview, so you can not only navigate culture, but re-shape it in a way that is pleasing to God.

<http://www.colsoncenter.org/get-involved-in-the-center/centurions-program>

³ *"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world"* (1 John 4:1, NASB).

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