

Autobiography

BLIND KOREAN PASTOR



An Yo Han

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CHRISTIAN LIFE PUBLISHERS

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FOREWORD

Ever since I came to know the "Blind Korean Pastor" An Yohan through his film six years ago, a bond of friendship has developed between us because of Calvary.

Realising the power this film has over its audience to turn prodigal sons to Christ, I inquired to have it shown again in Singapore. By courtesy of the Embassy of the Republic of Korea we had the Blind Korean Pastor film screened 23 times between September and December 1988 to all Bible-Presbyterian Churches and to several other church groups. Over five thousand people were blessed. The feedback was tremendous. Backsliders have returned to the Lord, tears of repentance and consecration were shed by both sinners and saints.

By putting three Korean songs of the film into English and having them sung by Miss Roska Sihombing, graduate of Far Eastern Bible College and Life Church missionary to Batam, five hundred tapes have been made for the nurture of grateful hearts. Since then the film has been introduced to B-P Churches in Australia, to packed houses, with the same response.

Behind this film is Pastor An's autobiography which was published in Korea, 1981. This biography has now gone through fifty-four printings, making it the bestseller in the history of publication of books in Korea. Now that it is translated into English, should it not be put into print for the benefit of the English-speaking?

Having read the English version with the film at the back of my mind, I am all the more impressed by the Blind Korean Pastor's noble thoughts and insights in the spiritual world. This book shows the way to life everlasting in the Lord Jesus Christ and revives hope for the handicapped to live vibrantly through this world below.

If you, dear Reader, have been heavily battered by the storms of life, read on to the very end. You will become a different person!

In as much as the film has turned thousands to Christ, I have no doubt that the publication of this English version will touch the lives of people from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of Light. In this regard, I must express my deep appreciation to Deacon Paul Wong of the Christian Life Book Centre for undertaking the printing of this book.

*"O send out Thy light and Thy truth;
- Let them lead me;
Let them bring me unto Thy holly hill,
And to Thy tabernacles." (Psalm 43:3)*

Timothy Tow
Far Eastern Bible College, Singapore
July, 1989

*"Who is blind but my servant?
Or deaf, as my messenger that I sent?
Who is blind as he that is perfect,
And blind as the Lord's servant?"*
Isaiah 42:19

*"Jesus answered, Neither had this man sinned,
nor his parents: but that the works of God
should be made manifest in him."*
John 9:3

*"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground
and die,
It abideth alone: But if it die, it bringeth
forth much fruit."*
John 12:24

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PREFACE

We have eyes that can see all things and their myriad colors; mental eyes that can think and evaluate; finally spiritual eyes that can feel and recognize the true way. I no longer despair of my blindness for I found the right purpose for my life. My dead spirit was made alive after I had been driven down into utter darkness. God, in his infinite wisdom, led me to the lowly places, took away my eyesight and everything I owned in order for me to see with spiritual eyes things that cannot be seen with our physical eyes. I was not able to fathom his unique plan for my life then.

I now pray, "Thank you Lord for my blindness. When this body leaves the earth my sight will be gone with it. With my new spiritual eyesight, I am ready to obey your will and glorify your name until the day you call me to heaven ..."

It is my wish that this story will help someone find God, to find hope in despair, to thank God for their seeing eyes, and to be saved from their negative attitude.

I would like to thank Mrs Sue Young Cho who translated and edited this book for me.

John An
April 1987

NOTES FROM THE TRANSLATOR

Ever since I began to realize God's leading hands on me, I wanted to serve him and obey him with all I had. Looking back, I was certain that it had been God's plan for me to translate this book for him.

After one of our church members told me the life story of a blind minister, Rev. An, he came to Toronto where we served the Messiah Korean Church and spoke at our church. He also brought the movie of his life which won the award equivalent to the Academy Award in the United States. There were no dry eyes in that congregation after the showing.

Then, Rev. An asked me if I would translate his book, which had been a best seller for a long time. Totally unprepared for such a request, I hesitated. But upon his persistence, and trusting that God would help me in this project, I accepted his request.

Since English is not my mother tongue, I needed someone who would refine the translation in order for it to be readable to the English speaking population. As I prayed about this matter, God led me to a very devout Christian friend, Mrs Dianne Nolson, who leads a neighbourhood prayer group. She was more than willing to help me.

I thank Mrs Nolson for her many hours of tedious work and also, my daughter, Sally, for her patient proof-reading.

Mrs Sue Young Cho
1987

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in 1939

Became blind at the age of 37

Graduated from Hankuk University of Foreign Studies
(major in French)

Graduated from Hankuk Theological Seminary

Received M.A. degree in Graduate Division of Social and
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Received Ph.D. degree in Golden State University

He heads the following organizations:

New Light Church of the Blind

New Light Jr. and Sr. High Evening School

Samaria Evangelical Mission for Ladies married to Amer-
ican soldiers

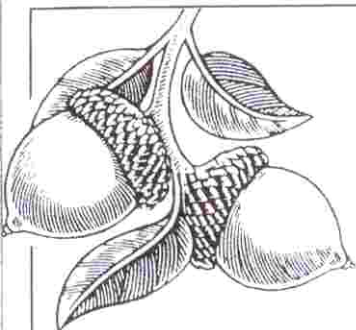
New Light Braille Magazine

New Light House for the Blind who do not have the
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PART I

*The Lord is my Shepherd,
I shall not want;
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters;
He restores my soul.*



HAPPY DAYS IN GREEN PASTURES

I

My father, Jin-Sam An, was an ever-present obstacle blocking the bright sunlight from shining towards me in my green pastures.

I was, a third child, born in October 1939. I was given the biblical name, John, while my seven brothers and sisters were given ordinary Korean names. To my father I was a special gift from God, a lamb to be dedicated to Him. My father had come to know Jesus late in life and out of a deeply penitent heart for his long, lost wandering years of sin, he was determined to make me a servant of the Lord. He dedicated my life, together with his, to God's complete control. In a way I was chosen as a ransom lamb, a sin offering. His prayer was not only to thank God for the safe delivery of a baby boy but for giving him a lamb fit to sacrifice. Therefore, I was destined to be a very special offering given to God.

Although the city of Soonchon in Pyongnam Province, where we lived, was an extremely active Christian town, Father had absolutely no interest in Christianity until the spring of the year I was born. His family had been deeply rooted in its strict traditions. Coming from a wealthy family and being a youth with a free spirit had made him obstinate and proud. Christian teachings concerning God as Creator, God as Father, original sin, the forgiveness of sin through the blood of Jesus Christ, heaven prepared for believers and the temporary nature of life here on earth, were laughing matters to him.

Then one day, God confronted him. By chance, it seemed, he was led to a revival meeting in a neighbouring town, and he returned from that meeting a changed man. He has not been the same since. I never had the courage to find out the details of his conversion, fearing that I

would not be able to face his overwhelming, mystical religious experience. The fact that father was filled with the Holy Spirit and immersed so deeply in Christianity at the time of my birth could only be seen as an inescapable reality.

From the time of my birth, father attached the disciple's name John to me as an anchor to hold me fast to his dream of making me a servant for God. Not only was I the center of his dream, but he took away all of the worldly privileges and pleasures to which I was entitled. He even donated most of his inheritance to the Pyongyang Theological Seminary, and became a student at the school himself. He moved the family there, relinquishing the responsibility of a father as the head of a family and as its provider. Instead of being the son of my earthly father, I was adopted by a God whom I had never met, and inherited poverty and suffering in place of security and comfort.

II

Ever since the time of my birth, I considered father an obstruction blocking the sunlight shining towards me. Life is light. When a man is born, I felt, there is a light in him which cannot be quenched; a light with such power that nothing can thwart it for any length of time. I decided to remove the obstacle out of my way and thus began a long and hard struggle with my father.

At first, as a child, I was happy and had a good relationship with my father. I started talking when I was only a year old. I was mischievous, but was loved by everyone in the neighbourhood. Those happy memories of childhood have always given me warm feelings. My father bestowed on me, his special son, a great deal of attention. His love for me could not have been less than any other father to his son. Instead of complaining about my loud crying, he used to say, "He will be a good

singer—he has a loud voice.” Seeing me lead the neighbourhood children in play, he would say, “Look at his leadership. He will be a successful minister.” Father would not bother to attend the school activities of my brothers and sisters, but he remembered mine and never failed to escort me, holding my hand, and thus causing a great deal of jealousy in the family. My position is similar to that of Joseph and his brothers.

My dissatisfaction with Father started with his frequent moves from church to church and the poverty of the family. At the end of World War II in 1945, we moved from North Korea (which had become communist) to South Korea. Then the Korean Conflict in June 1950 forced us to move again. This time we moved further south where my father became an army chaplain.

After the armistice in 1953, Father got a job as chaplain in an army hospital in another town and I entered junior high school there. Father’s stay as a chaplain was very short and once again, we started to move from one small country church to another. The unstable economic conditions after the war affected everyone, and poverty hit ministers as a natural consequence. Father had even more difficulty finding a church, for he had three boys and five girls, which meant there were ten mouths to feed from a skimpy church treasury. The finance committee would ask, “How many children do you have?” and Father would mumble, “Three boys . . .” They they would ask, “How many girls?” and Father would say “Five!” which would end the conversation. Even after their promises of further contact, we would not hear from them again.

After a long search, Father was given the chance to serve a small country church but the meagre pay was hardly enough to feed the members of our family and cover school and other expenses. Mother had to be frugal to manage the household with this meager income. Our meals were mainly soup made with bean

sprouts and barley powder. However, the congregation would not admit their incompetency in providing for us; instead, they blamed our poor conditions on the mismanagement of finances on our part. So Mother always had a bowl of rice ready to be set on the table in case church members dropped in during mealtime, pretending that we could afford rice instead of just barley-bean sprout soup!

I began to rebel against the extremely lowly life-style of my preacher father, whom I considered a very poor provider. In other words, he lost the respect he should have received from his son. Later on, I moved to another town to enter high school. However, I had to come home for the weekends to spend the Sundays with the family. I was simply tired of being poor, and resented father's unconditional acceptance of an unfair God who allowed such poverty. How could father give up all of his wealth to the seminary, leaving nothing for us to survive on? How could he try to force us to believe his foolish notion that we should thank God for all circumstances? Ridiculous and stupid! The most aggravating fact was that my brothers and sisters quietly accepted our situation without resistance. It was different for me. I had to fight for my life, the life I was entitled to enjoy, so I defied his way of living. With all my might I battled his persistent prayers for me. His never-changing hope for me to be a preacher was beyond my understanding. The more I thought about it, the more I rebelled. I thought, "You can thank your God! I am not going to thank Him for his poverty and humiliation. You can be a preacher! Isn't it enough for you to suffer personally? Don't you try to force it upon me!"

I was determined to remove this obstacle which shut off the light. I openly resisted my father and his church with every scheme I could think of, though sometimes such schemes were very crude. The results were quite satisfying at times.

Once, on a large piece of paper, I wrote, "There is no God! (Gospel of John An 1:1)" and put it on the front door of the church where the congregation could not miss it. The people just talked and gossiped about it among themselves, not making it a big issue, but at home it was a serious matter. Father, shocked by my behaviour, spent all night in the church in prayer, and Mother would not let me sleep a wink all through the night, trying to force me to repent while she cried and pleaded. All this talk and worry were not enough to thwart my rebellion towards my father.

The following Sunday, I put up the second verse to my "Gospel of John An" which read, "Don't believe in Jesus Christ—believe in your grandfather." I continually added more verses. Even such behaviour was not enough to satisfy my rebellion. I used to stand in ambush to startle the church members with a water gun filled with ink. I ruined their Sunday clothes for the sheer joy of vengeance for their mistreatment of their minister and his family.

My parents resumed their prayers for me but I was too stubborn to be coaxed into non-resistance. My father might have been comforted and calmed by his prayers, but my mother prayed with tears, imploring God to punish her in my place. It became a mother's ardent prayer for her wayward son.

The condemning remarks against me among the church members came into the open. In prayer during worship services, they said, "Our Father in heaven, forgive those children who do not know Thee and are possessed with evil spirits. We are ashamed of our preacher's son who has fallen out of your grace, while he should be an example for others." They not only criticized my misdemeanors, but also my father's inability to raise a proper Christian boy. I was well aware of the accusation laid upon him, but became even worse in my dire struggle against the injustice and poverty inflicted on

our family. I was much satisfied with the commotion I caused the whole congregation. Fortunately, I was a problem only on Sundays because I had to go away to school during the week. My mother could not wait for me to go back to school so I would leave them alone in peace.

The troublesome and mischievous "preacher's kid" at home transformed into a bright, vivacious and exemplary student at school. This was one proof of my victory against Father. The school was where I belonged and where I could make my dreams come true. I, a lamb given by my father to God as a sacrificial offering, enjoyed the comparative pleasures of school, away from the church and my home. Contrary to the dreary and listless world of my father, I lived in a world of bright sun, with brilliant colors. I claimed my right to live like a normal human being, and simply shut my ears to the earnest pleas of my parents. I could not have cared less about how the church members degraded me. Whenever I came home on weekends or summer vacations, I would never fail to devise new mischief to aggravate them. The warfare persisted with no end in sight, but my father's prayers could not be stopped. All the troubles I inflicted upon him were of no avail in affecting his prayer life even a little.

III

One summer day when I was home for vacation, Father seemed as if he did not pay attention to me anymore. I was alone in my room idly wasting the afternoon when I heard a commotion in front of our house. I hurried outside to find my father being scolded severely by a peddler.

"How could you raise a dog to bite people? Did you train him that way? Is it right for the minister's dog to

bite? Say something!" All the while the peddler acted like a madman, but my father held his hands together and kept his head lowered as if he had committed a serious crime.

"I am sorry for what happened," said my father, "but I would not raise a dog to bite people. It's all my fault, please forgive me." The cause of all this commotion was that our dog had bitten a little edge of the peddler's pant. This petty incident not only made him insolent but he poured out his bitterness against Christians for some unhappy experience he seemed to have had. Father happened to be a perfectly innocent scapegoat for his frustrations. In no way could I just stand and watch. Was this the reward for being a Christian, to be humiliated and mocked by a mere peddler? Then to my utter amazement, while father was still apologizing, the angry peddler slapped him hard! It was the final straw.

I dashed to the kitchen to get an axe and ran out of the front door toward the peddler. Staring at me, Father looked terribly dumbfounded, not knowing what to do. The only reason he did not turn the other cheek to be slapped once more was because he did not have the time to do so. He grabbed the axe from my hand and hung on to the peddler's pants begging for mercy for my grave sin. "It's my fault. I will pay for his sin; I assure you that I will correct him," he cried.

At last, the peddler was coaxed to leave the scene. Father returned to his room without a word, looking utterly forlorn. I was indignant at his cowardice. Letting out my frustration, I yelled at the dog, "Stupid dog! You should read the Bible and pray too if you want to live in a preacher's home."

I talked on to myself about the disgusting incident. As I was mumbling, I could hear sobbing coming from father's room. He was praying, "... reveal your love to my son. Teach him to love and forgive. He cannot be blamed because he is still too young to understand ... I am

responsible for his misbehaviour.”

His cry tore my heart. After all, he ought to complain against the unfair God who sent undue hardship to him all the time he tried to serve and please Him. It should have been a prayer of despair for having such an unruly son, but instead it was an earnest plea for God to bless and forgive me. I felt as if I was drained of all the energy in me and felt a strange nearness to God. I might have been wrong. Just what was this strange power he had? This invincible power, which made him almost superhuman in overcoming any hardship with such dignity, must have come from the God he believed in. What made it possible for him to pray like that? Was God real? Could He reveal himself to others as he had revealed himself to my father?

Father's constant desire was to draw me closer to his God in subtle persuasion, never in an open, forceful way. This invisible power was used to make a lasting impression upon me, not easily forgotten. The warfare was very fierce and became harder and harder and I needed more strength to resist. The sound of my father's prayers would ring in my ears for a very, very long time.

IV

The struggle with my father's invisible yet powerful spiritual force came to an end for a time, when I graduated from high school and entered the Foreign Language College in Seoul, Korea. At last my decision to be financially independent from Father enabled me to be free from his dominance. I could now seek the future which lay open before me. I majored in French, pursuing the career of a diplomat and had already rejected the Christian ministry. I turned aside from Father's meager financial support.

There were no regrets nor any guilt upon making that decision. I was indeed free and full of hope. Absent from Father's frequent interruptions, only the bright and colourful dream of being a diplomat and the world of power and fame were awaiting me. My extrovert personality together with the French major were perfect for a future diplomat. I was elated in studying this beautiful language. The red cover of the French dictionary seemed to represent the joy and pride of French students. The whole world was full of happiness and I was very content. The tutoring job I had to do to pay for my expenses was not a burden. The work was actually very enjoyable. As I loved teaching, the students seemed to learn a lot too.

I was popular and got full attention from the girls in college. In fact, I could have chosen any one of them for a girlfriend. Some of them loaned me money refusing to be paid back, saying that it was a gift.

We had a class trip in my senior year, but I could not afford it. The Chairman of our French department insisted on my going and provided the funds. After all, I was the life of the party!

During the trip, the girls in our group paid for drinks at the bar when the boys ran out of money. Some time later, after the trip, we treated the girls in return, visiting several bars until close to curfew. To take the girls home safely, we were paired off. I had my partner to take home but her home was too far away and we ended up spending the night at the local police station. I took the girl home the next morning to be greeted by her enraged father. He would not believe the story, and demanded that we should be responsible for each other and get married. We were treated like newlyweds.

The story of the night made exciting news in school among students and faculty alike. They teased us to no end and got a great deal of fun out of it.

Since I was very successful in the struggle against Father and the church, I did not need to fight anymore.

So, with no obligation I began to attend Father's church during vacation time. I had the peace of mind I sought. The church was no longer an obstacle in my path. I could say that I really enjoyed going and it became a routine and a habit which was rewarding. I used to count how many times my father repeated a certain word in his sermon and wandered away in my thoughts to fill up the long, boring time. In spite of my actual presence there, Father and the church were the least of my concerns. Father seemed oblivious to my attitude and left me alone to dream my dreams.

But he had not given up on me. In February, 1962, upon graduation from college, I was busy getting ready for examinations for a position at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs when Father sent me a letter asking me to visit him at once. I quickly came home. After several years of seeming silence, he started to persuade me once again to fulfill his dream. "Tie this stone onto this string," he commanded, handing me a piece of string and a stone ready at hand. I followed his instructions. "Now swing it around as hard as you can," he said. I swung the stone around. It circled around faster or slower according to the way I swung it, nevertheless the swing was limited by the length of the string.

Then my father began to explain his actions. "You may well ask what is the reason for this ridiculous game ... I don't need to go into detail about it because you are an adult with years of college training behind you. You are probably not aware of God's presence around you but I can assure you, He is there. Just as the stone could not get away from the pull of the string, you are not able to escape Him even if you think you can. All this time you have been circling around within the grace of God. You were chosen by God from the time of your birth to be His servant. He has a strong hold on you. It has been my constant prayer for you to come back to God. Now is the time," he declared.

I was caught off guard. How astounded I was at father's never ending prayers for my return! I, his baby lamb, was fully grown, now grazing on lush green pastures bright with the shining sun. My father would not let go of his string, either, telling me that I was in the wrong pasture. He would pray day and night that I would commit myself to the service of God. No matter how hard I resisted, I could see myself being drawn closer by his pull.

What could really be there behind this urging to follow his rugged road of poverty and suffering? How hard Father leaned on God at crucial times! I really wanted to know what kind of Being my father's God was ... I could not help but ponder over the existence of such a God. When doing this, my heart was strangely warmed. I was convinced there might be a God who could give strength to overcome impossible obstacles. Mustard seed faith seemed to germinate inside me. In my subconscious level, a seed of faith seemed to have been planted for a very long time, but it did not break the ground. After a whole week of consideration and prayer, I finally made a decision and announced to Father that I would obey him.

V

No sooner had I returned to Seoul than I got an application for a seminary. Still hesitant about it, I neglected to send the application in on time. The story might have ended there had not the new Seoul Theological Seminary been established at the time. Ignoring my doubts, I decided to go to that Seminary because I could no longer put off the results of my decision.

It was a useless act on my part, because I did not have the definite call of God for the ministry. A flash of inspiration could not make a lasting effect on me. The needed change required a commitment which could be possible only through a long period of prayer and honest

search. My sudden whim was too flippant to last. In less than a year in the Seminary, I started to waver and regretted my sudden decision. The green pasture in the bright sunlight which I had left behind, lured me back to its future of success and power. Even if I worked at it, I could not feel the slightest faith in God.

There were two forces at war in my soul, God and Satan. Satan who promises human pride, knowledge and worldly wisdom, gained the upper hand in the war. The knowledge I had acquired through my college education became a powerful shield against the Word of God. The stories of the Old Testament especially aroused my doubt and rejection—the stick turned into a serpent as Moses threw it on the ground! And the serpent turned back into a stick as soon as Moses touched the tip! Nonsense! The Old Testament was incredible! “John,” I thought to myself, “think it over. You have a college education. Your common sense cannot allow you to believe such drivel.”

The Bible says, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). I did not have this faith, so inevitably I surrendered to Satan. Since I let him have control over me, it was impossible for me to believe the Bible.

It took several months of inner struggle until I made up my mind to quit Seminary. I could not preach about a God in whom I did not believe. And I did not have the ability or the confidence to tend His sheep. Besides, to be honest, it would be far better for me and for the church.

Thus my brief Seminary life ended in 1963, and I returned to my “green pasture”. The time spent at the Seminary was never wasted because it made me even more sure that I should resume my search for happiness. I entered military service and became my own person again. My three years in the service were very pleasant in spite of the usual hardships of military life and I gave up

my habit of going to church with no feelings of guilt. I was free indeed. I vigorously participated in all kinds of youthful fun activities, such as sports, drinking and merrymaking. During the latter part of my army life, I was fortunate to work alongside seemingly affluent American soldiers and was able to share their material abundance. In 1966, I was discharged from the military service after three exciting and comparatively luxurious years.

I was a prodigal son in my father's eye but in the eyes of others, I was a model soldier, a promising young man who received many merit awards for excellence of service. I was well known among high army officers.

The Eighth American Military Army in which I served called me back to be a Korean and French Instructor in its Education Center. I accepted the offer and became actively involved in many activities in the Eighth Army, besides teaching Korean and French at college level, and also being an interpreter. My dream of a diplomatic career was partially realized while working with American soldiers and Koreans. My income was substantial, and I was very happy.

More luck came my way in 1970. The Military Institute for Foreign Languages in Monterey, California, taught up to 132 languages at a time. They were in need of a Korean language instructor and the Eighth Army was asked to recommend someone. From among many aspiring young applicants, I was the fortunate one to be chosen. Now I was going to a foreign land; the dream was going to be realized after all.

VI

The departure date was already set but there were many things to be taken care of. One major and difficult thing that had to be done before I could leave was to find

someone with whom to share my life in the distant land to which I was going. Within a limited time, I had to find a wife.

I wasted no time looking for a bride. Even though I had disappointed my parents so much, they came forward to help me. Rev. Kim, a friend of my father, introduced me to a young lady who was also a minister's daughter. She was 27 years old, a college graduate who worked as an assistant to a professor. Since there was not much time to waste, I made up my mind to marry her the moment I saw her. I was drawn by her appearance and her pleasing personality. So the decision was made on my part and she seemed to feel the same as me. Everything was going my way. I was lucky indeed!

With the blessings of relatives and friends, on June 1, 1970, we were married by Rev. Kim who had introduced us. Thus our new life was opening into a future of hope and happiness.

Our romance really began after our marriage, quite contrary to the common understanding that romance ends with marriage! It was more exciting and sweet getting to know each other, sharing the future dreams and hopes; we were very happy together. There was certainly an advantage in marrying a girl with whom I was not acquainted. I thought I was very fortunate. The green pasture seemed to be greener and wider when she was sharing the happiness with me. This trip was the realization of my dreams. The bright and new sun would bless the day of our departure to the wonderful country, I was sure. It had to!

The days were very slow in passing as we awaited the day of our trip. Then suddenly, one day, my right eye felt dry and strangely uncomfortable for no apparent reason.

PARADISE LOST

VII

The timing was all wrong to find that something was wrong with my eye. As I blinked, the eye was uncomfortable and the sight became a little blurry. It was also becoming bloodshot. There was no reason to suspect the seriousness of the symptoms because I had not strained or injured the eye in any way. It would surely get better with time, I thought. However, it became worse instead.

"Wouldn't it be a good idea to visit the doctor," my wife suggested one day. One of my high school friends was an ophthalmologist at a nearby hospital, so I visited him there to have my eye examined. Who would ever have imagined that it had been only the beginning of the longest ordeal of my life, the darkest tunnel through which I had been destined to pass, the deepest pit of utter darkness.

"Has your vision been blurry for a long time?" the doctor asked.

"Yes, for about a week."

"Has it been bloodshot since then?"

"Yes, and with the redness of the eye, it was uncomfortable and my vision was becoming worse too."

By the tone of his voice, I suspected the seriousness of my condition. "Is there something wrong?" I asked. Ignoring my question, he asked, "How is your left eye?"

"It is all right so far."

He gently patted my back and said, "Don't worry, you'll be better soon. Just take the medicine I've prescribed. You'll be all right."

His extra careful examination as he checked my eye and the questions he kept asking left me with certain doubts about his diagnosis.

"Are you sure I am going to be all right?" I asked again.

"Of course ... there's nothing to worry about, because you are a lucky guy," he said laughingly, yet with an uncertain tone again. He gave me the medicine with a prescription and said once again, "Take care, and if you run out of medicine, go to the nearest drug store and get some more." I knew that, as a doctor, he tried to calm me down but something was very wrong; I could sense it. I caught the worried look in his eyes even as I was leaving the hospital.

Since there was nothing I could do but believe the doctor, I tried very hard to shake off this worried feeling. I took the medicine faithfully. But I could see no improvement in my eye. Instead, the symptoms got worse and I began to see double. The more I thought about the conversation I had had with the doctor, the more worried I became. I repeated the doctor's words, "It may get better because you are a lucky guy." "I would have to be miraculously lucky to be healed of these strange symptoms," I thought. "He said that I am a lucky guy because I would need the luck. Only with luck would I be well again." I needed luck indeed! His diagnosis was not clear enough to satisfy my suspicions. There was no detailed explanation of the symptoms or of the cure. He just said to take the medicine and to keep on taking it and that I need not consult him further. Was I worrying needlessly?

I tried to think of all kinds of good reasons to comfort myself, but without much success. My eye was getting even worse after using up all the medicine the doctor gave me. I was forced to accept the fact that I was being driven into a dire struggle which could be a losing battle in the end.

I was devastated. The conversation I had had with the doctor relived itself in my mind endlessly. Maybe he could not bear to tell me the truth since the truth was so tragic. I might have cancer or glaucoma for which there was no cure. Therefore, it might be just as well that he had not revealed the truth. He said that there was no use for me to see him anymore. He did not say clearly that I was going to get well. The constant worry captivated me and I was too scared to discuss it with anyone.

I was reluctant to burden my wife who was pregnant with our first child. When she was full of excitement for our bright and hopeful future, I did not have the heart to shatter her dreams. There was no alternative but to endure alone and take the medicine daily. Nothing happened. My eye remained the same. Without any suspicion of my eye condition, my wife kept busy getting ready for the trip, and this was an extra burden on me.

After some period of doubting and wondering about the effect of the medicine, I was driven to go to the nearby drugstore to inquire about what the medicine did for my eye. The druggist said, "Well, I cannot really tell you exactly what it does for your eye except that this medicine is a supplement for nutrition. Just by seeing this medicine, I cannot tell you much." Obviously, his answer was not what I wanted to hear.

I left the drugstore and went to see one of the well known ophthalmologists. His opinion was no different from the other doctor's. He repeated the same examination procedure and kept me waiting for over an hour to talk to me. "I cannot tell you at this moment what it is," he said. "There are still many eye ailments that modern technology is not able to detect. Nothing can be done at this moment, but wait and see." These periods of waiting brought no improvement; instead things became worse.

Even if the truth might crush my spirit, I had an urgent desire to find it. I rushed back to see the first doctor, for I felt that I was entitled to know reality. There he broke the

news to me! He suspected that I might have staphylococcal disease, for which there is no cure or known cause. Most likely my eyesight would gradually become worse until I would not be able to see at all. He tried to comfort me, suggesting that I should see other doctors in case he might be wrong. He continued to speak on, but his words were no longer reaching my ears. There were no more words I wanted to hear.

The sky turned dark in that instant. I was sinking deeper and deeper into despair. However, a moment later, I regained my composure and asked myself, "Now I know the truth, what is there for me to do?" The doctor was bewildered and did not know what he could do to soothe me. He said that I need not worry about my left eye as it was fine. He then added that I may get well, since I was a "very lucky guy". I remained silent, because mere words had no power to change the merciless reality. So I stood up and left the office. I could hear him say as I left the office, "Don't give up hope. You still have one healthy eye."

IX

In utter despair, I acted dazed for several days and suffered silently, not telling my wife anything at all. What was there for me to do? I had to do something, after all, I wasn't blind yet. I could not give up my plans to leave for the U.S.A. In the hope of a lucky twist of fate, I postponed the date of our departure indefinitely. I might get better yet.

I could not muster the courage to tell my wife. She was expecting our first child in March of the next year. Finally, I reluctantly mentioned one day, "I think it is a good idea to postpone our departure because of my eye.

It also may be inconvenient to have the baby in a foreign country." My wife was reluctant about it, but agreed.

The Eighth Army was willing to postpone my departure date until I received the required treatment for a certain period of time. After taking care of the immediate problem, I temporarily maintained a certain peace of mind. Then began the endless visits to all the known eye doctors in the country. Every day I went searching here and there for the doctor who could cure my eye until I exhausted all the possible avenues of hope. The date of our departure came and went during the search. In the meantime, our first baby girl came into the world.

The departure date had to be postponed again and then again. When I could not meet the deadline after the third time, the Eighth Army found a replacement for me. The joy and excitement of being a father for the first time was shortlived and the long and painful ordeal resumed again.

My eye condition remained the same, however, with no sign of improvement at all. My healthy eye gave me the needed strength to go on. Modern medical technology had been of no use for my condition, but there were still ancient Chinese doctors and I could follow their countless methods of treatment, taking various herbal medicines. There was no method which was not tried. I put cooked and mashed robin eggs in my eyes, put the meat of a worm in my eye. I even drank the soup of boiled worms. Nothing worked. One long year went by and 1972 came.

Right in the midst of my desperate search for the cure, God allowed me to experience a short but refreshing break by the birth of our second daughter in April. Our first daughter had begun to take her first steps and to talk. She and the newborn child were great gifts from God to ease my burden. They were the only hope of my life. I leaned on them heavily. However, it was only a brief relief which prepared me to face the seemingly impossible future.

About the early summer of 1972, I became nearly blind in my right eye and at the same time, my left eye started manifesting the same symptoms as the other. My vision became blurry and my eye was uncomfortable.

The thing I had dreaded most had come! I felt as if both my body and spirit were bound together and thrown into the dark hell of despair. I was on the road to death all alone. There was no one who could walk with me; not even my own mother, my wife or my two loving daughters. I screamed out, "Oh, God! why are you going to take the light away from me? What have I done to deserve this?" Sinking deeper into despair I cried unto God, cursing Him and at the same time imploring Him. Of all people, why me? Why? Why?

It was evident that I was going blind because the symptoms of my left eye were exactly the same as the right one had been. Doctors and medicine were of no use to me. I was overwhelmed with fear and anxiety waiting for the ultimate fate of facing the world in complete darkness. Time dragged ever so slowly. It was a dead-end street.

Fear of becoming blind was not the only burden at this time. Financial problems began to build up. For three years, the search for remedies for my condition had exhausted our money and there had been no income. Now all the savings we had were gone and we needed money in order to survive.

We sold our house and moved into a smaller place. We managed, thereby, to have some money to live on for a while. The future was uncertain. My wife was not aware of the blindness in my right eye, nor of the symptoms of the other eye.

One day a friend of mine came to visit me and said, "I can understand well enough the hard time you are having with your eye, but in my opinion you seem to have let the worry take hold of you. It may be a good idea to get your mind off your eye, and start living as if

nothing has happened. I know that St. Paul's Catholic Girls' High School in Nonsan, Choongnam Province, is in need of a French teacher. I think you are the right person for that position. You may have to get used to country life, but the fresh air in the country will do you some good." Of course he did not know about the problem in my left eye.

It was a reasonable suggestion. I had no good reason to reject it. However, I needed time to think it over. I was just waiting for nature to take its course. Ultimately I would end up a blind man. Deep inside me, however, was this slight hope that God would have mercy on me. So, in the hope that it might work, I decided to take the job. I could at least relieve some of my wife's burden by paying my own expenses. The question was whether I could tackle the teaching job with only one eye, which was quickly deteriorating. But then I said to myself, "Let troubles come, I will endure them until the last minute."

After a few days of consultation with my wife, the decision was made. Without resistance, she was the one who would follow my lead.

"I'm just worried about you," she said. "How will you be able to handle a teaching job with your eye trouble?" She was concerned, yet nevertheless, showed her willingness to consent to all my plans.

X

As long as there was a little vision remaining in my left eye, I managed to teach, and in fact, even enjoyed it. French teachers were most popular among high school girls and spending time with the students so young and full of dreams, relieved my heavy burden for a short time. Needless to say, the serene country atmosphere and the

delightful hours of lesiure and fun with the girls were of no avail for the healing of my eyes. On the other hand, trying to adjust to a new and orderly life, I was becoming physically and emotionally drained.

Then, one day, without warning, my left eye began to deteriorate just as the other eye had. To give up teaching for me meant completely giving up my last hope of a fruitful life. I was determined to hang on to the very last minute and see what would happen. Not being able to see was a big problem, but hiding the fact from those around me was an even greater difficulty. However, it was crucial since I would be dismissed if the school found out about it. Nothing could swerve me from my dire struggle against adverse circumstances. It might have been easier had I revealed the truth to the school authorities, but at the time, I thought it best to assume a normal life as long as I could. Vaguely, at the bottom of my heart, there was still a thin ray of hope that someday God might, just might, have mercy on me. The hope lingered on, and I was hesitant to let go until the very end.

Teachers at the school called me the 'thinking man' because whenever I had a chance to relax, I would sit on a chair with both hands on my face to rest my worn eyes and mind. I seldom chatted with the other teachers, and they had not yet guessed the truth.

XI

Eventually my sight became so poor that I could not even read the change of schedule posted on a board at school. I had to ask for help. I was forced to admit my situation to a fellow teacher who sat next to me in the office. He could not imagine how I had kept the secret so successfully for such a long time and apologized for

being so insensitive to it. He offered to help out in any way he could.

Another problem was that I could not read the textbook to prepare for class. Earlier, through a friend, I had been introduced to a history teacher of a boys' high school in the same town. We had become roommates and later, through conversation, I discovered that he had some knowledge of French and could lend a hand in my desperate time of need. It really seemed to be a God-sent gift, graciously given, to have had a roommate who knew French. I memorized the chapters for the next lesson as he read the textbook to me. The difficult situation was taken care of temporarily. I struggled through classes pretending that I could read.

From time to time, I would wander into the wrong classroom and the girls would tell me to go to the next class. When this happened, I would jokingly say, "Oh, I just wanted to say 'hi' to you lovely girls as I was passing by." Constantly pretending, joking and lying to hide my handicap was really running me down.

One day, the students, suspecting my condition, asked me to repeat a certain part of a page in the text. I pretended to be mad at them saying, "Why didn't you pay attention when I read it the first time?" They insisted, however, in order to find out the truth. Frustrated, I did not know what to do next. Putting down the textbook, I turned toward the blackboard with my back to them. Tears were pouring down my cheeks from the pressure of pretending. I remained standing to compose myself, wiped my tears with a handkerchief, and turned around pretending something had gotten in my eye. The girls cruelly taunted, "You didn't cry, did you? Did something get in your eye?" I just stood there not knowing what to say. "Uhh, I ... I think there's some dust in my eye," I finally mumbled, wiping my eyes again.

The girls started to feel a little guilty and ashamed about acting so unkind. To cover up the awkward

situation they began to clap their hands and asked me to sing their favorite song, called "Barley Field". They must have remembered this song from the times I sang it at school picnics. What an inappropriate time to sing! The clapping became louder as I hesitated, and some of the girls began humming the song for a prelude.

"As I walk through the path between barley fields," I began with some effort. It was so quiet that not a sound could be heard—just my wavering voice.

"I stopped upon the voice of someone calling to me." The words of the song filled me with utter despair, nostalgia and a yearning desire for the past. The song made a deeper impression on me then, than it had ever before. I felt a sudden repentance in the girls for taunting me, and I could sense their tender concern for me. Basking in their compassionate hearts, my voice became louder and louder.

"As I whistle a tune reminiscing the days gone by, I can almost hear the old familiar tune in my ear." The girls joined in, as if we had rehearsed this. "But there is no one behind, only the crimson sky in the twilight." From that day on, I was known affectionately as "Barley Field".

XII

The understanding my students showed was a great encouragement, but it couldn't alleviate my condition. My eyesight worsened with time and I finally reached the stage where it became impossible to teach.

When I returned home for summer vacation in 1974, I accepted the reality that I could not go back to school. There was no need to hide the facts from my wife or the

school authorities anymore, because I could no longer summon up the courage to pretend. I confessed everything to my wife and sent my resignation to the school. I had no hope.

I just sat at home, moping and worrying, for there were no more doctors to visit and no new medicines to try. Absolutely nothing could be done for my eyes. I kept asking the Lord, "Why me? What have I done to deserve this?" It seemed so unfair for me to be pressed down in this world of darkness, completely cut away from the world full of bright light. This anger and resentment against the God who had allowed this to happen to me only worsened my eye condition.

By 1975, my left eye was nearly blind too. Although I had given up hope, my mother and my wife were persistent, and they continually suggested new ways of seeking a cure. My mother brought many Christians home to pray for me. A minister known to have healing power laid his hands on me to pray, but it all seemed futile.

My wife mentioned one day that she had heard about a well known lady who specialized in 'needle treatment'. She was located in a town a short distance from Seoul, where we lived. Her needle treatment involved draining unclean blood from a blood vessel connected to the spine, leading to the eyes. It was thought that this unclean blood was causing my sight impairment. This treatment was known to have cured the incurable. Even though my wife implored me to go, I could not be persuaded.

Sitting around the house not knowing what to do next, I became listless and despondent. Just how many doctors had I visited? How many strange remedies had I tried? Nothing worked, absolutely nothing. I was not about to be pushed into trying another strange treatment, no matter how convincing it might sound. Ignoring my wife's pleadings gave me some peace of mind.

Time slipped by quickly in spite of everything. The New Year came around, and on a late spring evening, my oldest daughter, Eunil, came home crying hysterically. My wife ran to her and asked what the matter was. She whimpered, "Mommy, is Daddy really going to be blind?" Her sob changed to a wail as she continued, "The kids in the neighborhood said that Daddy is blind—or that he is going to be pretty soon!" My wife tried to console her, saying, "He is not going to be blind. Don't believe a word that they say to you. He is having some eye problems right now, but soon he is going to be all right."

Rumours must have been circulating in the neighbourhood. It was a hard and cruel fact to accept. The reality was too much for Eunil to face. Not for myself nor for my wife was I concerned—now my worry lay with the effects this would have on my precious daughter. I had been in my room, overhearing this conversation between my wife and daughter. I opened the door of my room and called for Eunil. Upon seeing me, she rushed into my arms and asked, "You are not going blind, are you Daddy? Please tell me!"

Holding her tightly, I tried to reassure her. "Don't worry! Look at me—see, I am looking right into your eyes. My eyes are perfectly fine. I wouldn't be able to see my little girl like this if I was blind, would I?" But even as I said these things, I could barely recognize my daughter through my blurred vision. The heartbreaking reality was crushing me hard. "Promise me, Daddy!" she pleaded. "Promise me you won't go blind!"

What could I say? So I repeated my reassurances, this time with less conviction in my voice, "Yes, I promise, I am not going blind."

I had been concentrating on my problems so much I had forgotten about those around me. I then realized that I was not the only one suffering. I had been neglecting my responsibilities as husband and father. My family shared my burdens with me because they were

part of my life. They would sink deep into despair with me if I didn't try to stand up and do something. I was not going to be able to give up as easily as I thought I would. Together, we would try and we would endure. With this thought in mind, I was driven to keep on trying to find a cure. I must keep the promise I had made to my daughter—I would not be blind! What I really needed was courage and willpower to go on, but it seemed as if I had been drained of all courage.

Not for my sake, but for the sake of my family, I knew I could not give up. It was my responsibility to make them happy. Then I remembered the lady who healed people with her needle treatment, and I asked my wife to visit her and obtain more information.

My wife found out plenty of information about the positive effects of the lady's treatments, but she was concerned about the pain that the patients had to endure. The poor sanitary conditions made this method even more dubious. The worst thing was the method itself, which involved puncturing a hole at each joint of the spine with a thick needle. Moreover, the treatments would go on an indefinite length of time before there would be any sign of improvement. My wife could not even bear to think about the ordeal.

Strangely, this exotic and painful method appealed to me as it seemed to imply that nothing worthwhile could be attained without suffering. I dared to face anything, even if I would die from it. My attitude was that if I perish, I perish. I said to myself, "If you want to be able to see again, you should be willing to risk anything."

My wife and I spent the next couple of days running around preparing for the trip, and arranging for my mother-in-law to take care of the girls. Bravely and full of hope, we started on our journey, knowing that we had no guarantee of a cure. No sooner had we left home than I began to feel fear and doubt creep up inside of me. Not a word was spoken during the one hour bus ride; my wife seemed to sense how I felt. Finally the bus dropped

us off in the seacoast town of Pyungtack and left. The crisp breeze of the sea touched our cheeks.

We left our luggage at the depot to be picked up later, and started the walk toward the house of the lady who would perform the treatment. It seemed like the longest walk I had ever taken. My heavy feet dragged from the fear of the awful treatment. I was scared and worried. I was doubtful of my patience to endure the excruciating pain of drilling holes in my spine. This walk to her house might well be the last time I would have my sight. I could become totally blind on my way back. This ominous thought welling up from the dark corners of my mind could not be controlled, and suddenly I stood still.

“What’s the matter?” my wife asked. I said nothing. She soon guessed my thought and we went on walking without saying a word. My heart was too heavy for words. My hands sweated as I trudged along. I pictured Jesus bravely walking on the road to Golgotha carrying the heavy cross on his shoulders. The pain and suffering of Jesus seemed so real that I could almost feel the pain myself. Warm tears overflowed my eyes. What pain Jesus had gone through to take away my sin and shame! He already suffered on the cross for me and still was willing to help in my time of need. My face became hot with shame.

Jesus was reviled when He walked down the road to Golgotha, but there was no one even to taunt me on my road. As for me, I had a wife who walked beside me and who comforted me. I gained new courage thinking of Jesus and his pain. Nothing could comfort me more. I stopped to thank Jesus, saying, “Thank you Jesus” over and over again. He was the one and only beaming light in my utter despair. His light was sufficient for me!

XIII

"This is going to hurt! Are you sure that you can endure it?" asked the lady when we arrived at her house. She seemed to be in her sixties, and was very confident of herself. She demanded complete obedience to her commands and suggested that if I had any doubts, I should leave at once. She made me repeat time and time again that I would keep on going to the end. She led us to a simple little room, where we first had a light lunch. She then cleaned up the room in preparation for the treatment, setting out an old box for me to rest my upper body on and a pillow for me to lean on for comfort. I stripped off my shirt and took my place.

Just before the treatment began, my wife gave me a cross to hold on to, and she uttered a prayer, "Lord, help us to lean on Thy cross that Thou didst carry for our sin. Please give us strength to endure this, and help us to see the light."

The lady came into the room with a little box in which were needles, a little bunch of cotton and a bottle of alcohol—all the supplies that she needed. She dipped the cotton in the alcohol, and wiped my spine up and down with it. Thus began the treatment. It not only involved sticking a needle through the spine, but it was digging and drilling in and out of the flesh to locate the vein. This was all done without anaesthesia! The pain penetrated into every inch of my body, right to the tips of my arms and legs. Between my tightly gripped teeth, a shrieking sound came out and my body twisted from the unbearable pain. Sweat streamed down my body. Whenever she pricked my spine with the thick needle, I saw a light flickering in front of my eye. At last she would find the vein and then she would stick the needle in the vein to get the black blood out. The ordeal went on until I was just about to pass out. She would wait long enough for me to come out of it, then start all over again. As this

went on, I felt as if I was in a nightmare. Time seemed to run into eternity, never to end. The pain continued relentlessly, unbearably.

As I was told by my wife later on, the first session lasted two hours and 45 minutes. The lady made 307 holes in my back, from the top of my neck down to the last tail bone. I had an incredible urge to stop everything, to just get up and leave. But I didn't even have the strength to do that. I felt as helpless as a frog in front of a snake. In other words, I surrendered myself completely to this strangely powerful lady. The pain slowly came back as I regained consciousness. I felt the pain running through my whole body as if I was in a burning inferno. I could not lie on my back for the pain, so I just lay there prostrate and spent the night in agony. This, as it turned out, was only the beginning. I was told that the treatment might continue a month or two until I could see. I noticed no sign of healing after the initial ordeal. Should I continue? Although I had strong doubts, I had to endure till the end—no matter what the final result would be! The verdict of my fate was awaiting me. A month of this senseless ordeal passed. One day my wife, not able to take the strain anymore, passed out. She did not have the sustaining power that I had. So my mother came to take her place by my side.

I, too, did not last much longer after my wife left me. Not only did the numerous holes in my spine give me pain, but I could not hear, my limbs started to swell and I experienced difficulty breathing. Just as my wife had implored many times before, my mother now advised me to quit treatment. "You could die from this!" she warned. "Let's quit the whole thing and go home!" But I could not give up, because that would mean that I would be sentenced to a lifetime of blindness. I was determined to go on. Then, when I was unconscious for a long period of time, she just packed our bags and took me home.

The one hundredth and second day after the treatment had started, I was taken to a hospital for a

complete checkup. On April 16, 1976, I became totally blind and my health seemed completely ruined. The verdict of the doctors came in—loss of sight in both eyes, loss of hearing in the left ear, a case of the mumps, extremely elevated blood pressure, and neuralgia on the left side of my head. On that bright spring day, I came out of the hospital feeling totally broken down physically and emotionally. I had run into a cold, dark dead-end wall, and I had nowhere to turn.



PART II

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half-dead. Now, a priest was going down the road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion ..."



O Come BACK to the Lord...

박세훈, 1943

Oh come unto the Lord. Oh, come back to the Lord;

No mat-ter how hea - y And how great your sins may Be;
Our Lord is wait-ing for Your re-tum both night and day;
The No mat-ter how hard hit And how beat-en you may be,

There are no sins that Christ our Savior Cannot bear or not ac - cept,
He is an-xiously wait-ing for you With His doors kept o-pen wide,
The Lord's hands will comfort you greatly They will touch and will heal you:

The great depth of the Lord's lov-ing hear't, It is far deeper than the skies.
As if He is waiting in the night For His lost child to come back home.
Oh Come un - to our Lord who loves so Please come back home, pl. come back home.

I WILL NOT FORSAKE YOU

XIV

My darkness turned into a dividing wall between the world and me. The people and things around me seemed slowly to slip away from me in my very confined world. The separation started with my wife and two daughters. In fact, my wife did not even come to visit me once while I was in the hospital.

"Your mother-in-law passed out when she heard of your blindness," my mother told me quite unexpectedly, in an effort to make me understand my wife. "Your wife went to take care of her mother and the girls went along with her." I had expected my wife to greet me at home by the time I was able to get out of the hospital. I was crushed when she wasn't there. Even if she was so badly needed by her mother, I thought that the girls could at least have come to see me. Several days went by, and I heard nothing from them.

I began to suspect that all was not well. I could not wait any longer, so I demanded that my mother send for them at once. But she, knowing all along what had happened, gently held both of my hands and said, "Let us pray," and then she asked God to "help us to forgive and forget; help us not to blame others. Give us strength to endure hardships." Her prayer had never seemed so sincere as now. She pleaded with me to forgive my wife for leaving me at a time when I needed her the most. She had peace of mind because she had already forgiven her. For me it was a different story. It was utterly unreal and unbelievable that our marriage of six years could end this way. I had trusted my wife not to give up on me. After all, if it was true, it had been her idea, not mine. Again, I demanded her presence. Mother was forced to try to bring my wife to

me. However, she came back with my mother-in-law instead. She was right.

My mother-in-law was very uneasy as she said, "I told your wife to stay home. She has made up her mind not to come because there is no hope for you. You can't imagine how much it hurt her to have to make such a difficult decision. You should realize that you are no longer able to support a family, or even yourself. But you still have your parents, brothers and sisters who can care for you. We thought it would be best for you if we take care of your wife and children. Please try to understand her." Asking my forgiveness, she continued, "Even if you cannot accept the decision, it is too late now. We have decided this is how it will be ..." It seemed as if my wife's family had persuaded her to leave me. As far as I know, my wife had never been the kind who could insist on her own will. Her nature was instinctively to follow a leader. She could still have been very indecisive about it. She might have stayed away for fear that she might actually change her mind once she saw me. There was a possibility that she would return. Do I deserve the right to be her husband? Do I dare forgive her and try to understand her? She deserted me because she could not accept my blindness. I had no power over my misfortunes. However, I could not be persuaded just like that. I would have no peace until I saw her in person and heard from her directly. Our relationship could not be taken so lightly that it could be ended so easily.

I was insistent that I meet her face to face. "It doesn't matter what you say," I said to her mother. "I have the right to hear the truth from her. After all, I lived with her for six years, and fathered our two girls." My determination was as invincible as a fortress. For the second time, my mother was forced to get my wife while my mother-in-law just sat there, with her meaningless explanations.

At last my wife came, but she came without the children. She explained their absence in a pained voice,

"The children have been told that you have passed away, so until things are settled, it was best to leave them at home." She was careful not to say anything to hurt me. And though not a strong willed person by nature, she seemed determined in her decision.

"Forgive me," she pleaded. Our mothers left the room so we could be alone. She continued to cry as if crying would somehow make things right. She was asking me for forgiveness through her endless weeping. I could understand that she did not have much to say. As she was not about to start a conversation, I said, "Your mother told me everything. I understand how you feel. There is nothing to forgive. You have stood by me so long, comforting and supporting me. I am the one who should ask forgiveness from you. I don't exactly know how to say this, but can you forgive me just one more time?"

She didn't say a word, so I continued, "People may think there is no future for me, and I am not asking for your help. I believe that I may be able to take care of you and the girls. My blindness is not the end of the road. It is my desire to start all over again with what I have left, though it may seem hopeless to others." She still sat quietly, saying nothing.

"I will give you time to think it over. However, I want to make it clear that I am still your husband, and I am the girls' father, even if I am blind. My last hope lies in you and the girls. You are the only source of strength for me to survive. Please, please give me a chance!" I begged her, I pleaded with her, but she would not open her mouth. I kept asking questions, now expecting no answer. "How are the girls? Do they really believe that I am dead? Are they forgetting me already?"

Finally, to my surprise, she started giving me answers. "The girls' grandmother has been telling them those things." I felt that I needed a little more time to talk, before we closed our conversation forever. I asked her to

stay a few days to allow me some time to put things together as to what should be done. She agreed to stay with me a little longer. I was grateful for her thoughtfulness and for her submissive character. It did not matter anymore now whether she would change her mind, because I was beginning to understand and sympathize with her more and more.

My mother went back to my father, who was alone at the parsonage, while my wife stayed with me. My mother left, hoping that my wife would be compelled to change her mind. But I had other plans in my mind. A few days after my mother's departure I decided that it was time for my wife to go back to her mother and the girls, where she belonged. I did not have enough peace of mind or self-confidence to be a competent and understanding husband any longer. It would be too much to ask my family to share this burden I was carrying. The role of an ordinary father and husband was not mine anymore. I had to be brave enough to let go of the most precious people in my life. I was not entitled to claim them—they deserved their freedom. After all, if my wife could dare to attempt to raise the girls without me, then I, being a grown man, could dare to live on my own. Considering all the circumstances, I did not want to chain her by my side any longer. Things were settled and there was no need to change the plans, however bleak they may have seemed. It was best to let her go. I felt the same towards my parents and my brothers and sisters. I did not have the desire to burden them in any way. I had once been a responsible and able head of a family. I realized that I could not live in the past. Against all the odds, I was resolved to come out the winner. It would take much rearranging, thinking and extra strong will power but I would put it all back together somehow.

Three days after my mother had left, I told my wife, "I think it would be best for you to go back where you belong now. The girls need you. I just want to thank you for your kindness in staying with me these last few days.

You were right in making your decision. It was wrong of me to think otherwise. Let's leave our future plans to take care of themselves and bravely go on. Of course, I'm uncertain as to what I should do, but I think I need time to be alone. If any workable plans come up, I'll be sure to let you know. You don't need to worry about me because I'm able to manage alone." As before, she did not utter a word, but she just wept. That same afternoon, she left me, not saying a word about the girls. She walked out of the door, and was gone forever.

XV

Thus I let go of my wife. Now I was back to complete darkness and helplessness. In a way, I felt relieved with a sense of satisfaction at having done my duty. I have kept my promise to my family. "I don't want to live with you if you become blind," is what my daughter had once said to me. I could picture my daughters' faces many, many times. Hadn't I promised my daughter that I would never be blind? It was most unfortunate to have been pressured by fate, unable to keep my promise. She no longer is obliged to stay with me because I am blind now.

With the responsibilities of a head of the house suddenly gone, I had plenty of time on my hands. The darkness was no inconvenience for me because I didn't have any urgent thing to do. Everything I was most worried about being now settled and finished, I lay in bed doing nothing. I did not need to bother to think anymore. The final sentence was pronounced that I was blind. Was there a possibility for me to start over again? Would I ever get used to the darkness? If I had been younger, it might have been a different story, but I was thirty-seven, at an age when rehabilitation was most unlikely.

Death is departure. You leave the world of senses, you leave your possessions and you leave your body. That is death. I was slowly dying to the world that I had known, and things that used to belong to me. The last thing left to leave was my body. It was all so clear what should be done next. It was so utterly dark and alone that I felt as if I would slip away into emptiness. Just a mere nudge would surely be powerful enough to pass me into eternity. But there was no need to hurry and I did not want to die just yet.

Nobody was by my side during this trying time to help me. I had to face it alone. The thought of writing a will came to my mind, but I wondered if anyone would even bother to read it. I was not worth enough for anyone to be concerned with. Endless dreary thoughts filled my mind everyday.

After spending a few days with no human contacts, suddenly I felt the urge to take action. I had become hungry, which was a sure sign of life and desire for life. As I was about to finish off my life, I had to hurry and do it before the hunger pangs could become so great as to postpone the suicide.

Kicking off my covers, I jumped out of bed. Before someone might appear to interrupt my plan, I had to hurry and end my life. I knew exactly how to do it, too. I flung open the closet door and grabbed a tie. Then I walked to the kitchen. I remembered the big nail on the kitchen ceiling. Searching the floor, I found an empty wooden box on which to stand in order to reach the ceiling. Carefully lifting my feet, I climbed on the box, groped for and located the nail. Next, I tied one end of the tie to the nail and the other around my neck. Making sure the tie was securely fastened, I kicked the box away and my body swung in midair.

My neck began to hurt with choking pain and my chest felt as if it was about to burst. I could not breathe and my eyes seemed to be popping out from the unbearable torture. Frantically, I twisted my body and kicked in the air with all my might. If I had hung there a little while longer, I would have surely died. My violent body must have been powerful, because the nail which I had anchored the other end of the tie on began to bend and I was thrown down on the kitchen floor. Apparently God did not want me yet. Maybe God meant for me to linger on in this world of darkness a little longer to pay back what I owed.

For a while, I was oblivious to what had happened until I came to and found myself lying there gasping for breath. The air I breathed in was refreshing to my body and I was so happy to be alive, and I felt ashamed of my behavior.

XVI

I could not make the attempt again because the courage was drained out of me and the hunger pangs became most urgent. The light of life was in me and the hunger sensation proved that desire for life was strong. It gave me a wonderful feeling to be alive and I breathed the air into my lungs deeply. It would take a long time to rearrange my life into some kind of working order.

My primary concern was to satisfy my need for food, so I found some rice and looked for the sink to wash it in. There was a wood-burning stove in the corner of the kitchen, and I moved it to the middle of the kitchen for fear of starting a fire if anything was too near it. Carefully, I set the rice pan on the stove, but had to have some wood to burn. I had some books and the box I used to try

to hang myself. I broke the box into small pieces, piled them all to one side, and went into one of the bedrooms to get some paper and a match. Carefully, piling the paper and wood on the stove, I lit the fire. Nearly two hours passed before I completed this simple task. I did everything so slowly because I had all the time in the world. Besides, to me, day and night were just the same, in the endless stream of time. I was moving along feeling everything with the touch of my fingertips.

The smell of smoke from the fire drifted into my nostrils and soon the warmth of the fire reached my face. It seemed to have been a very long time since I had been able to feel the pleasant sensation of warmth. Slowly, my body was coming alive again after the numbness I felt with the shock of black darkness. The warmth penetrated deep into my stomach making me feel more comfortable. I put more pieces of wood onto the fire. The rice was boiling and I could smell its wonderful aroma. Contentedly, I waited until the fire was almost gone. Now I could eat. I took the pan off the stove and fetched a pair of chopsticks and a spoon from the kitchen drawer. After much searching, I finally found some leftover food to go with the rice and then set the table. A strange mixture of feelings awakened in me, both sadness and joy, thinking of the painstaking effort to get a bowl of rice to fill my stomach and the joy of satisfying my hunger. I saved the leftovers very carefully to eat later.

The next step I had to take after filling my hungry stomach was to revive the senses which were not in use. It is amazing to find out how much sensation we have in our body. Although I lost the important sight, I had plenty left to work with. My hands and feet could feel warmth and cold. My tongue could taste food. My nose could smell, and I still had one ear which could hear. Those were very precious sensations I was to develop to explore the new world of darkness.

Since I was stepping into this new world, I decided that I must start using my other senses to manage without sight. I touched my watch and told myself that it was a watch. This is a book, I said as I touched the book. I repeated these exercises with the sensitive touch of my fingertips and trained myself to know all the objects in my room. Long days were spent in this manner. The longing for the world of light sometimes was so intensive that my heart was about to burst. I thought I was going mad. There was no hope. I spent endless time just getting used to the arrangement of this one room. By and by, I got used to the kitchen, bathroom and other rooms in our house. This training was hard on me because my age had dulled my sense of touch. Had I been younger, I felt it would have been much easier. Nevertheless, I persevered until I could get around the house comfortably. Moreover, this training gave me the will to live and relief from despair. Somehow, I survived those first hard months.

I would open the drawers of desks, dressers and kitchen cabinets to feel by the tips of my hands the things that were there, memorizing their shapes and textures. My dead world began to revive slowly. It was a wonderful new experience. Amazingly enough the senses of my fingers were all I needed to keep in touch with the world. The awareness of the little world around me disappeared as the movement of my fingers stopped so I kept up my activity to be in touch deeper into a bottomless pit and losing touch with myself.

Through perseverance, I succeeded in struggling for one long month that way, but I realized that there was a limit to everything. The continuous training was too hard for my body and mind to bear. Since my eating habits were irregular my body became weaker; my side began to hurt; my neck swelled; I became feverish and my blood pressure rose. My will to cope with the world of darkness collapsed again! I was crushed under the heavy load pressing down on me. I gave up.

No one came to check on me, not even my wife or any relative. I was eagerly waiting for someone. Stepping out to the living room, I had opened the door and was taking in the warm sunshine when suddenly I heard a voice. The lady next door was giving some instructions to her maid out in the yard. The sound of a human voice made me stand up on my feet.

I don't know how long it had been since I heard a person speak. There was only a low wall dividing my neighbors and me, so I could hear them over it. As I could hear their voices, my heart palpitated because, strangely, I was not able to hear them before. I was so excited over this incident that I could not fall asleep that night. A thin ray of hope was still there for me to grasp. My neighbour's voice kept ringing in my ear. The next day, I was out early just to hear them again, but there was no sound. This expectancy itself was sufficient to give me a kind of joy in my unhappy and boring existence.

The next time my neighbour talks, I thought, I'll try to carry on a conversation. I prepared several topics to discuss in my mind. I thought again, if the maid is kind enough to listen to me, maybe I can ask for something to eat. It did not seem to matter whether she pitied me or not, I just had to have some human contacts to survive. Trying to listen for some sound from next door all day long, I hardly noticed how tired and weak I was becoming. Suddenly it was night, it was dark and chilly. I awakened from my slumber still not hearing a sound from the neighbour.

I realized another ailment had stricken me. My one hearing ear was going deaf, too. I tested it by clapping my hands, but I could not hear a thing. Not being able to hear and see, I felt as if my arms and legs were tied so tightly together that I could not budge. Whether asleep or awake, it felt like death just the same. It was life in death. All this while, I was secretly waiting for my wife to return to me.

I did not bother to keep track of time, but I did know that many days passed. No one came to see me. I was anxiously waiting for someone although I had wanted to be left alone in the beginning. It dawned on me afresh that my wife was gone forever never to return. Completely cut off from all human contacts, the heavy silence and loneliness hung heavily on me. I was utterly desolate.

Slowly and cautiously I got up and felt my way to my room. The house was dark and silent as a tomb. I felt like the chill of the cold draft cutting through me. The house was absolutely empty. What was I to do now? Suicide seemed to be the only solution. Everyone who could leave, had left me and everything that I could lose had been taken from me. What was left of me? This useless body, was hardly worth living for. It was merely a futile dream to expect a saviour like Miss Sullivan to get me out of my desperation as she did for deaf and dumb Helen Keller. Once a philosopher said, "Life itself has endless possibilities. Life means creation ...". People should be able to live a creative life just because they have life in themselves; however, for me the possibility was very slim. Life could be creative for those who enjoy three meals a day, go where they want to go, hear what they want to hear and see what they want to see. I could do none of these things. It had no meaning for me, a blind and deaf person.

Another philosopher once said that the past and the future are interrelated with the present and the essence of the universe is in the ever changing "now", creating new things along the stream of time. He also said quality of life is not dependent on thinking or talking but on actual personal experiences and direct observations. How could I, with my handicap and experience observe anything? How could I undergo anything in utter darkness and silence? There was no future for me. Therefore, I concluded that I deserved to die. It had better be successful this time.

A razor blade was a good idea. After a long search, I found a razor but unfortunately there was no blade in it. I continued to look around and finally found it under the vinyl floor covering. I thought I was ready for I had no grudge against anyone, because all had been forgiven. Just a cut through the vein on my neck would do the job successfully. However, I was not quite ready yet for I felt I left undone some matters which should have been taken care of. I wanted to be free of all debts. Primarily my wife came to my mind. I realized that instead of having grievances against her and the girls, I was the one who had to apologize for causing them much pain. Secondly, I thought of my parents, brothers and sisters to whom I had become a burden. There was absolutely no one to be blamed for my misfortune. I was the one who needed to be forgiven for being so stupid and unworthy.

The peddler who slapped my father, friends in church and school, the teachers and the high school girls in Nonsan, doctors I had visited, the doctor-friend who had told me the truth about my eyes and the old lady in Pyungtack who had treated me—all these people appeared in front of my eyes. Though they were not physically present, I asked for forgiveness. If I had held a grudge against anyone, if I had hated anyone, I wanted to clear it all. Without regret and with a clean heart, I was ready to leave the world once again. Various thoughts kept coming to my mind to delay my decision to die. Tears welled up in my eyes and started pouring down like water from a spring. This lingering attachment to the world had to be severed first before I took the final action. It was not as simple as I had thought it would be. I somehow was unwilling to let go. Patiently trying to erase all memories of my loved ones, I waited for the tears to stop flowing. It was an effort to restore my composure.

XVII

While my body and mind were engrossed in the suicidal attempt, I suddenly lost consciousness, and fell to the floor.

"John! John!" I heard someone calling me. Not thunderous and loud but continuous, the voice seemed to fill up the room. Taken aback, I opened my eyes to see the bright light shining in my room and sweet smelling fragrance filling it. Still ringing around me, the voice continued to shout my name, ordering me to get up.

"Who are you?" I blurted out, and did not quite realize that I could miraculously hear and see. "Where are you?" Frantically waving my arms, I asked over and over again.

"I am Jehovah your God. Don't say you are all alone because I am *always* with you. You will know that you are not alone. Read page 320 of the Old Testament; it belongs to you."

"What page?" I asked.

"Page 320," the voice repeated, fading away and disappeared into the air. The bright light which filled my room and the voice were gone and again I found myself in complete darkness.

"John, John." I could still hear the voice again and again, and I seemed to see the bright light, too. Whether in a dream or not, I could not tell. I was breathless and overjoyed with excitement.

"I am not alone. He is still with me," I said to myself. He clearly told me that He was Jehovah, my God. It really puzzles me why God manifested Himself before me when I was not seeking Him. Thirty-seven years of my life, I had not had any personal experience of knowing God, or ever seeking to know Him. Going to church, singing in the choir and saying public prayers were mere

outward gestures of pretension and habit. Moreover, recently, God had been totally left out of my consciousness. He had been forgotten for a very long time. How and why He appeared to me at this crucial time to tell me that He was still with me was something I just did not know. He said He would prove Himself. It couldn't be real. It was incredible! My heart was pounding from the incident. God's message for me was on page 320 of my Old Testament. I had better read it right away.

I found the Bible and rushed out of the house. Right then, I noticed that my hearing was restored, for I could hear the footsteps of the people walking on the streets. I yelled to the people who passed by.

"Excuse me—you who are passing by right now."

"What can I do for you?" was the voice of a youth who must have been on his way to school.

"I am sorry to bother you. As you can see, I am blind and I want to ask you a favor." After I told him my story briefly and asked him to come into the house to read to me from the Bible on page 320; he opened it and said, "Joshua, chapter one."

"Joshua chapter one?" I had never paid attention to this chapter before. I begged him to read it for me.

"As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not fail you or forsake you. Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you. Turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go ... Be strong and of good courage. Do not be frightened neither be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." The student went on to the end of the page with gladness, noticing my delight in hearing the Word. The voice of the student gradually changed into the voice I heard in that bright light and was talking to me personally! I could hear, "Be strong and courageous; be not frightened,

neither be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go," over and over again. The boy left me after finishing the chapter and I was by myself once again.

This time I knew I wasn't really alone, though, because He was with me and He would not forsake me. This new found faith and dependence on God filled my heart with joy overflowing! A spring of hope, happiness and strength seemed to spurt from the bottom of my heart. This joy I had was something I had not known before, and it now knew no bounds. Spontaneously, the hymn burst from my mouth, "Though friends forsake me, Jesus still loves me. Jesus is my friend, He is the only one. Though the world may change, Jesus will remain true to me." Tears flowing, I sang this hymn over and over.

XVIII

The more I thought of what the Lord told me through those Bible verses, the more strength and courage was built up in me, even if the ever-present pitch darkness surrounded me. With the overflowing joy within me, the darkness seemed to disappear. He remembered me in my distress and told me to be of good courage because He would never forsake me. The assurance He gave me would always be there to comfort me!

Be strong and be of good courage ... With the power that comes from God, Joshua was able to lead the Israelites to the land of Canaan, for he alone could not have done it. Joshua was but a mere weak man, had God not been with him. He believed that only the power of God could help him and because of his faith, he performed a great miracle.

In the past, I tried to draw strength from my knowledge, talents and money—all of which were secular, transient values; now they were of no value at all to me in my crisis. Those indeed had been obstacles placed between God and me, so I could not find the true light I was seeking. I said the repentant prayer: "Father, forgive me for my ignorance. I know now that you are the only source of all power and that it cannot come from any other source in the world. Please help me to have power to overcome this despondency I feel because of my blindness."

Is there any meaning for the life of a blind person? What is the purpose of life for the blind people like me? I was assured that God would help me find the goal for my life. Physically I had lost my sight, but how blessed I was to find the new light—the Saviour Jesus Christ. God had no way of showing me the way while I just sat around doing nothing. No! He dared me to move on and take a brave step forward, looking for the light. It was as though He was commanding me to rise and go toward the promised land across the Jordan River, where there is milk and honey for his chosen people, the Israelites. Out of a dungeon of darkness, I was ready to emerge and seek out what I was called to do in this world.

Although I had no definite plan, I could not just stay idle in the dark room. My pilgrim journey was about to begin. Countless and endless hardships and obstacles would be placed in my path no doubt, but it would be well worth it if I could only find the reason for living. Sure now of my intention, I packed a few personal belongings and a transistor radio for my personal 'pilgrim's progress'. I did take time to write a little note to the first person who might happen to notice it as follows:

"This is going to be a short note, because I cannot see. I am leaving this house by the leading of God to find His plan for my life. He has given me the confidence that He will show me the way. Beneath

*His warm protecting arms I am going to be all right.
You don't need to look for me."*

This note was written to no one in particular. I just had a desire for someone—anyone—to know about me. Anyone who happened to come around would read it. It really didn't make any difference who it might be. I continued, "I am leaving the house just as it is now because a certain someone may come to stay ..."

Never had I thought of selling the house because secretly I was expecting my wife to come home again. However, I shook off the silly thought, for I knew she would never return. She was already put out of my life and would in no way hinder my decision. And I went on writing, "I don't blame anyone and I forgive everybody and I even forgive myself. To many people around me I am a debtor, both materially and morally. So, mother, or anyone, sell the house for your needs. Whatever you do to the house, let it be done according to the will of God and that will suit me well."

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Leaving the note behind, it was near dusk when I actually left the house. But the sunset did not affect me in the least as I no longer could see the light. With a little bundle tied around my waist, I set out on the streets aimlessly. The reality of life on the streets was beyond the imagining I had in the confinement of the home. I stumbled along through the neighbourhood trying to remember the pictures in my mind. After passing the doctor's house situated directly opposite my house, I came upon the wide road in front of apartments that led to the Girls High School. A lot of patience and intuition were needed through these first groping explorations. It was dangerous, if not impossible, to walk in the middle of the road, so I stuck close to the buildings at the side, groping with my hands. Inconvenient obstacles were

strewn all over my pathway. Stumbling on a stone, running right into the electric pole, bumping my forehead, being blocked by an open door—at times I would receive a blow and bump that would take my breath away. My body was worn out from the ordeal and from my irregular diet.

Once I was out of the familiar road, I lost all sense of direction, walking aimlessly, not knowing where I was going. The contempt and sneering of heartless people was harder to endure than the actual struggle of getting around. I was the target of ridicule among the children on the streets. Adults would ignore me and go on their way, but the kids would make cruel remarks!

“Can’t you see?”

“Look at him, he has his eyes open but he pretends he is blind.”

“No, he can see; he is just acting so he can be a lazy beggar.”

Some of them would wave their hands in front of my eyes to make sure that I couldn’t see. Some would even throw dirt at me and stick out their legs to try to trip me. Some would follow along to bother me. I must have been a pitiful sight. In spite of all my troubles, I was sure of God’s presence with me and His power in me. It was hard, nevertheless.

God kept reminding me, saying, “Have patience, have courage.” Tears ran down my face endlessly, like a baby overwhelmed with bitter self-pity and despair. At last, the first long day of my journey came to an end.

“Watch out for the bicycle!” one of the high school girls cried out tauntingly, when the bicycle was standing at the opposite side. Startled by the sudden warning, I quickly moved toward the wall where the bicycle was, and as I tried to grab the falling bicycle, the bicycle and I came tumbling down together hopelessly. As I just lay

there completely bewildered from the shock and the bump, I heard the girls giggle at the pitiful sight. Right there lying on the ground, I decided to call it a day because both my body and my mind desperately needed a rest. The streets were getting quiet because most of the pedestrians had already gone home, so I realized that it was evening. I was starved and exhausted, ready to collapse.

Maybe it was a hasty decision to leave home with no destination, so I thought of a recently married friend whose house was pretty close by, where I could spend the night and think further. I would have to call him over the phone, tell him my story and have him come to get me for I could not find my way there alone. First I had to find a public phone booth.

The girls who had giggled at me when I fell down, stayed around until I got to my feet again after quite a while. They were watching me closely.

"Are you still there?" I asked. "Will you show me to a public phone? I have to call someone."

There was a moment's silence as I raised my arms asking for a hand, for they hesitated to come near me. Then, a small and warm delicate hand took mine.

"Please come this way," a girl said sweetly.

"Thank you." She carefully led me without saying a word. I too, remained silent. The rest of the girls tagged along.

"Here at this store, there's a phone," she said.

"Thank you kindly," I replied and truly meant it. "You can go now. I can handle it." However, she hesitated to leave and stayed a bit longer to apologize. "I am sorry. I did not know that you couldn't see." With this, she disappeared.

XIX

"What happened? What are you doing there at this time of the day?" My friend bombarded me with questions as he rushed to the store. But before I had a chance to answer his questions, he put me in a car and drove me to his home.

"I am glad you called me. Since it is getting dark, you just spend the night with us here," he said kindly. He mentioned that he had heard of my story and was sorry that he did not call on me earlier. He was more than glad to be of any help. He continued, "Let's spend a few days here thinking of some future plans."

His wife greeted me kindly, an uninvited guest, and prepared such a hearty meal for me that I melted in gratitude, basking in their warm hospitality. He made me stay in one of his rooms and they both took care of me to the best of their ability. He intentionally avoided asking tedious details of my misfortunes and uncertain plans for fear that I might feel uncomfortable. A few days were spent in comfort and peace, then it dawned on me that I was really a burden on my friend. It was out of the question that I should stay with a friend when I had chosen to be independent of my own family. I was not going to be a burden to anyone. The flow of passing time could not bring any solution for my problem. I had a call to fulfill and I could not just stay here with no particular view in mind. This seemed only a temporary pause before the long journey. Especially when my friends went to work, it was quite uncomfortable staying there even though they were very kind. I did not want to inconvenience them indefinitely. Yet, I just did not know what to do.

Then one day a group of friends came to see me. They discussed among themselves how to solve my dilemma. One of them suggested that I go home with him, so he

could share the burden. I could spend some time with each of them in turn if only to break the monotony.

But my friends with whom I was staying said, "Spending time with friends here and there will not solve the problem. We should get at the core of it. Of course it is entirely up to John, but I think that it will be best for him to return home."

Another well meaning friend said, "Nothing would be changed if he returned home ..." Then someone else added, "The adverse circumstances have to be taken care of first ... I don't think that visiting around is the solution either. It will take time before we can decide on what has to be done. Until then, we should be glad to have him at our homes."

At this moment, Mr. Whang declared with impatience, "It is up to John to decide what he wants to do. I will have him stay at our home until he makes up his mind." They concluded that they had no solution for me either. However, I could catch their desire for me to return home. Nobody could help me even if he wanted to.

I felt sorry and ashamed at being such a burden to friends. I should have told them that I would return home to ease their burden, but I knew for sure that I should leave home in search for the will of God for me. I would have told them of my plan if they could have understood my confrontation with God.

I knew I had to say something to the thoughtful friends. "Thank you everyone, for your concern. I need time to think about what to do with my life. As you suggested, I could visit around at your homes, but at the moment I think I would rather spend one more night here ... so why don't you go your ways now. I will call on you when I know what I am going to do." Since there was nothing particularly helpful they could do for me, they agreed to leave. As they left, each one assured me of his willingness to help me any way he could.

"They were not any help in coming here ... make yourself at home and take your time," said Mr. Whang tiredly. With those words, he went to his room.

I made up my mind to leave at once. Thanking my friend for a few days of rest, I was ready for my journey ahead. I should not look for a comfortable and easy life. For the last time, I went into the cozy bedroom to have a good night's rest before starting off. Tossing and turning, my mind full of many thoughts, I could not fall asleep. I rose to go to the washroom. Quietly I tiptoed into the hall. From my friend's bedroom, I heard him talking to his wife. "What kind of a woman is Mr An's wife? How could she run away from her poor blind husband?" I did not want to hear this, but not wanting to make more noise for fear they would catch me eavesdropping, I stood still as a statue.

My friend's voice was low, but his wife's was getting sharper as she said, "Why don't one of you go to see her and talk her into returning?"

"We would, but no one knows where she is."

"I heard that he has parents and brothers and sisters."

"We'll find out about that soon."

"Do you think he will return home if his parents ask him?"

"I don't know ..."

"He may stay with us indefinitely. Why do you keep him?"

"How can I drive a blind man out? He has been a friend of mine since we were young."

"I know you are good friends, but doesn't he have other friends?"

"Let's give him some time. I'm sure he will do something soon."

"How long?"

“Lower your voice, he might hear you.”

As quietly as I could, I walked back to my room, forgetting to stop at the bathroom. I regretted terribly my staying with them. It had been a mistake to impose on a friend even for a short time, and to listen to their conversation, even accidentally. I was too selfish to consider others. I was too busy thinking of myself. Because of my thoughtlessness, I brought shame upon my family. My friends might eventually contact them to take me back home if I remained here.

The next day, as soon as my friend had left for work, I quietly walked out of the house. The future was bleak indeed. Yet I had no choice but to move on aimlessly because there was no place for me to linger. No concrete plan was in sight.

“Make yourself at home. I will come home directly from work,” my friend had said as he left for work that morning. However, I thought it best to leave the way I did in order to avoid any complications. I did not want to impose any more inconvenience on anyone. There was no need to contact friends, relatives or family for I had left everyone I had known, all my past memories and things I had cherished behind me to start a new life, because it could be called life to live in darkness. It was death. Time seemed to lose its meaning when there was no difference between day and night. In the midst of darkness, amazingly I could sense a flow of time toward some direction when I was constantly running into things and hurting myself. This continuous encounter was a clear proof of my going somewhere no matter how uncertain my direction was. Thus I roamed around with the flow of time, endlessly. Soon the little provisions I had brought along ran out, and I started begging and looked for a place to sleep through the night on a street corner or a park bench.

In the early summer evening it was a little too chilly to stay outside, so I tried to find a warm spot to spend the

night by a chimney along a wall, where I could feel some warmth of the heat. It wasn't too difficult. One sleepless night, I got up to take a stroll just to kill the time. Staying close to the wall of the house, I walked up and down the alley very quietly so as not to disturb the people in the house.

"Who is it?" suddenly a policeman screamed at me, thinking I was a thief trying to break in. He knocked me to the ground and beat me mercilessly without giving me a chance for explanation.

"You were going to break into the house, weren't you?" he shouted, and kicked me once again.

"I am blind," I pleaded, "I was not trying to break in. I was taking a walk because I couldn't fall asleep."

"Don't lie to me!" he said as he punched me again and again in the stomach and side. "So you are blind, you liar." He knocked me to the ground and beat me until I was unable to move. I could in no way convince him that I was blind. The policeman dragged me roughly to the police station. It would have been much easier had I simply followed him. As I stumbled and groped trying to follow him, I sensed his eyes peering steadily into my face.

"Are you really blind?" he asked. He would find out himself with the flashlight he had, so I did not say anything.

Finally, convinced of my blindness, "I am very sorry. You really are blind," he apologized. I remained standing just waiting for the man to release me. He really seemed ashamed for his careless attack upon a poor innocent blind man.

"Well," he said, "I am very sorry. Why don't you come along to the police station anyway to spend the night. It is cold outside ..." I accepted his offer, but soon regretted it. I will never seek to spend the night in the police station even if it was rainy. One night was enough.

“How could a blind man look for a wife? Would he be able to touch her? A lame woman with seeing eyes would be a perfect match because he can be the legs and she can be the eyes.” The people at the police station joked about it so heartlessly. They teased and made fun of me with insults to kill the boring night hours. I was an easy prey for them to ridicule.

Many many more humiliating experiences were waiting for me to endure, all of which I dreaded very much. To find the meaning of life for me, I plowed through the long and hard road ever so patiently. Hoping and yearning that there might be some kind of light at the end of this journey, I plodded on.

Nothing would be impossible for me to conquer if I could only see, I thought. The eye is the window of the body. The window was slammed down right in front of me to confine me in the world of dark despondency. In search for the open window to my spirit I was progressing slowly on this journey; it was the only alternative for my life. When God closed the door, He meant for me to seek another one, and I was willing to follow His will for me, no matter the cost.

I had an unquenchable yearning to have a home to go to. But home is not a home if no one is there to welcome you and love you. The cruel fact that I was not wanted by anyone hurt me deeply. I heard people getting on and off the bus and footsteps disappearing into the distance toward their homes, where they could share evening meals and hearty conversation. How I wished I had a home—I slumped down around the chimney outside to spend the chilly night. Good and happy days were gone from me, and the merciless reality was ever before me.

A spiritual home, where my spirit could find rest was what I really needed at this point. For this purpose, I left everything behind—home, family and friends. I desperately needed the higher power which is beyond human power. Only the faith I had that I would find the light at

the end of this journey kept me going in spite of the most adverse circumstances. The Word of God, "Be strong and courageous, I will not forsake you," never failed to give me hope to go on, believing He would guide me to the light. This was the only means by which I could find the light through the darkest tunnel where time and space mean nothing at all.

One day I was nearing a busy section where people hustle and bustle 24 hours a day. I had arrived at the Seoul train depot. A bench in the depot would serve as a bed and the washroom would be most convenient. You cannot imagine how hard it was to find a washroom. The train depot would be the most ideal place for me and here is where my long journey came to an end.

XX

My overwhelming predicament which seemed so impossible was now chipped away into half its size since a place to sleep and a washroom had been conveniently located for a blind beggar like me. Streams of people coming and going made it easy for me to beg also. Nobody paid special attention to me or bothered me, so it was a blessing indeed.

The train depot not only provided a place to stay, but the chance to get acquainted with people and to share some human affection. Among the throng of people moving around the depot, there was a certain group of people who were stationed in the depot just as I was — the newspaper peddler, shoe-shine boys, and porters. These people did not pay attention to me even if I was an intruder into their territory. Even though they ignored me, I was grateful that they let me stay. They accepted me as one of the unfortunate people as they were. We had a common understanding.

As we got familiar after seeing each other for some time, some of them began to take an interest in me. They would show me to the washroom and share their lunches with me when I was hungry. They included me in their conversation. Thus I was slowly being accepted into the community of the poor.

A new light began to shine on my dark path. It dawned on me that the long journey was over at last. The light awakened my dead spirit in personal encounters with these people. My spirit and body basked in the warmth and light. Here, in the Seoul train depot, I experienced the new light I was seeking for so long. Yet I still had the important task of deciding which path to follow. That is, what I should do with my life. One thing was certain — this depot was where the Lord had led me. He started His work with me here through a newspaper boy named Jin Yong. It was around eleven o'clock and there were only a few travellers left in the depot. Like any other evening, I sat on an empty bench fingering my beard in deep thought. Then the clatter of footsteps stopped in front of me and someone said, "Mr An, I am going home now, see you in the morning." It was Jin Yong.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down the road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was. And when he saw him, had compassion on him, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him ...

Many people passed by the beaten man, but who took the trouble to care for him? The despised and persecuted Samaritan showed compassion to the man, beaten and stripped. The poor and lowly shoe-shine boys and

newspaper boys were the 'good Samaritans' for me. I can never pay the debts I owe for their kindness. Jin Yong, especially, was close to me and most helpful. At the end of a long day of newspaper peddling, he would come to me to say goodbye for the night. Like all the others, he would go home in the evening and come back in the morning. However, this night, with a sad and forlorn voice he bid me 'good-bye', and I answered, also depressed to have him leave. He turned away, but the sound of his footsteps halted; then he turned around and walked back toward me. Grabbing both of my hands, his face and breast buried on my dirty, shabby knees, he cried. I sat there speechless. No words can picture this scene. His gentle touch and heartwarming tears falling on my knees sufficed more than any words.

He cried for me and no doubt he might have been crying for himself, too. Deep down in our hearts, we had compassion for each other. We could understand the common feelings. I fondly patted his back.

At last, Jin Yong implored me, "Let's go to my house."

"Thank you, but it's all right," I answered. "I am used to living like this now. Don't worry about me, I am fine. I know how you feel about me. Go on home."

However, he persisted, "It may be all right for you, but I cannot leave you here any longer. Just for today, come home with me, I won't go home if you don't come along." He pulled my hand.

Jin Yong's house was a small shack located up on a hill, in the poorest section of the town, as I had suspected. As we walked up the hill, he said, "My parents passed away and I have only a grandmother who has been taking care of me." The kindly grandmother greeted us in that one room shack. She was in ill health because of a stroke she had suffered earlier.

Jin Yong introduced me, "Grandmother, this is Mr An, the man I told you about."

"I am so glad to meet you, but as you can see, I am not a good hostess because of my poor health." Moving away the blanket, she tried to get out of her bed.

I said, "Please stay in bed and rest. I am sorry that you are ill, I did not know about it."

"I would have prepared supper had I known that you were coming," she mumbled. Actually, she was not able to take care of Jin Yong either.

Jin Yong made me sit in the corner of the room and went to the kitchen to prepare our supper, saying, "It will take a little while to get supper." The truth is that he made big meals every night so there would be enough for his grandmother to eat the following day until he returned home in the late evening, for he left too early in the morning to cook.

The grandmother and I did not have much to say. She mumbled to herself, "Poor child. He is so young ..." My heart was heavy to know that Jin Yong carried such a heavy burden on his small shoulders. Other boys in the train depot shared similar burdens, even though they did not deserve such a fate. The heavy burden of poverty and hardship were crushing them down. Childhood dreams and hopes were a luxury they could not afford. They struggled to feed themselves, working long hours in their lowly places. Jin Yong did not deserve such a life. What's more, he also suffered for his grandmother. I felt ashamed to be an added burden on Jin Yong. It amazed me how he maintained a constant peace and joy in these circumstances. He never seemed discouraged and was always very kind. To be independent from everyone, I had left home, and now, here I was depending on a young boy. I could not help feeling a great inadequacy.

I thought men are to carry each other's burdens because we care for each other. True happy life could be found only in helping others. It was embarrassing for me to recognize my ignorance until now about sharing

burdens. I had not believed in depending on each other and helping out. That is why I did not lean only on my family and I did not want them to take care of me. I felt that I was responsible for myself alone. I was moved by Jin Yong's silent acceptance of his ill fate without rebellion or grudge. Now here he was carrying my burdens, too.

Even though I was eager to help Jin Yong in any way I could, I was a useless and helpless blind man. I had no possessions or ability to be helpful in any way. However, according to the old proverb, where there is a will, there is a way. There is definitely some possibility if you want it badly enough. If Jin Yong could give out of the little that he had, anybody could give. I knew that I had something to give if I really wanted to, but only later, through Jin Yong, I learned the truth.

We enjoyed the meal Jin Yong prepared and went to bed, but neither of us could fall asleep. It was as though we had left undone things which should be done. He wanted to know more about me, my childhood days, and especially how I became blind and more. I was more than happy to have the chance to please him by telling about myself, in fact I felt good pouring everything out about my childhood days, my parents, brothers and sisters, the church and school life, days in the army and how I became blind. Taking in everything I said, he blurted, "You are a lucky man! I really envy you." For a moment, I was taken aback as to what he really meant by envying. The happiness I once had had was gone forever. What good could it do me now? Perhaps he was trying to comfort me.

Later I realized that Jin Yong actually meant what he said. He envied me as he said, "You went to school and learned as much as you wanted. You just don't know how lucky you are to be educated." He envied my education and wanted to learn so badly to the extent that he ignored my handicap.

"You may be envious of me, but my learning has no use now." I was talking to myself, too. "Look at me! I am just a beggar roaming the streets."

Jin Yong stubbornly insisted, "You are wrong. You can say that because you are satisfied with your knowledge. I am different. You talk about the practical use of learning. It doesn't matter whether I can use it or not." He made me feel good inside. I began to catch a glimpse of light.

"So you really want an education," I said with a tone of excitement. He got up at once and took something off a hook on the wall. It was a boy's winter school uniform, along with a hat. "This is the uniform and hat. Do you know why I bought them even though I'm not a student? You should be able to guess. For several years now, I have had these hanging on the wall and have been patiently waiting for the day when I can actually wear them to school. Someday, somehow I will ..." Then he added, "I not only bought these, but also several textbooks. I put them on this shelf – it just feels good to have them around while I dream this dream. You may not understand how I dare to dream the impossible dream when I can hardly afford food. I know I am crazy but I cannot help yearning for my dream." As he talked, his voice quivered with emotion.

The Seoul train depot, the shack on the hill – they are precious memories. There I had the taste of human love and concern and my spiritual eyes were opened. God had His eyes on me. God seemed to have planned every detail of my journey. The Lord, my Saviour, showed me the light in the lowly places.

I thought myself to be totally inadequate with nothing left to give. What I had, though, I had had no meaning because of my handicap. I did not dare to give, but now, through Jin Yong, I had found that I did have something to give and someone to give it to. It was God's grace to give me this insight. His will for me was to give what I had, and I had already found someone to whom I could

be of some help.

I was useful after all. I was given a golden opportunity to show my love and concern through teaching the boys what I had learned in school. I was deeply moved to watch Jin Yong carrying out his responsibility so thoroughly are trying to give away what little he had. The new light was shining in my dark corner giving meaning to my meaningless life.

The reason why I could not find the light earlier was that I tried to seek it from the higher and not the lower places. Light was where people tried to help each other. God had been leading me through the valley of death for me to see the true light. He stripped everything from me to teach me how to live. My spiritual eyes opened when my physical eyes were closed. He had His hands on me all along. For the first time since I became blind, here at the train depot, the lowliest place in the city, I accepted the will of God for me without bitterness. I thanked Him.

“It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him.” This Bible verse had been read to me by the minister, my mother, my wife and many others, but it did not touch my heart until then.

“That the works of God might be made manifest in him.”

At the time I thought they were able to believe those verses because they would never be the way I was. In fact they bothered me more than they comforted me. Now I knew what the verse meant. Without reservation, I accepted the will of God for me, and set myself to be strong and courageous for He was going to help me. I had resolved to dedicate the rest of my life to Jin Yong and the boys in the depot through sharing my knowledge. I would spread the love of God and His words and glorify God with my service. I would truly live! My mission was to teach them and encourage them and I

thanked God. I promised that I would do my best.

Holding Jin Yong's hands, I prayed, "Thank you Lord for allowing me to share my education even though what I have is merely human knowledge. Out of this lowly place, may Your name be glorified. Your love is more precious in this place. I rejoice in serving You and will press on to exalt Your precious name. I am a humble and lowly servant and will live only for You as long as I live. Please give me the wisdom and courage for this task. Help me to share other's burdens. Help me to love them unconditionally and share what little education I have. I believe that everything will be done according to Your will. More than any other place, let this lowly place glorify Your name. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen."

VARIOUS PEOPLE ON THE STREETS

XXII

Above all, I had to set myself in order spiritually. Out of abundance of faith comes forth the powerful Words of God. In order to start my new life of giving, I should know more about the laws of God and His love for mankind. I was not prepared at all.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." Knowledge of God was more urgent than worldly knowledge. The Word of God, the Bible, was what I needed. First, I had to learn Braille in order to study the Bible and to prepare myself to teach the boys. I asked Jin Yong to find some blind people among those passing by and introduced them to me, so I could get information

concerning a Braille school. Since I found the meaningful goal in my life, I felt I could handle any difficulty. My struggles were now joyful and rewarding experiences. I welcomed challenges.

One morning, led by the faithful Jin Yong, I went to the Braille school to meet the principal. He was kind and very understanding about me and allowed me to attend the school at once. I learned Braille in Korean and then in English. Although I knew Braille now, there were just a few Braille books published due to the lack of interest in blind education. Japan and France were advanced in this area. Later, by contacting the British Embassy and ordering the texts, I learned Japanese, French, Hebrew and Latin Braille. Hebrew and Latin were very useful in understanding the Bible. I felt almost as though I could see again as I was able to read and write.

After this training, I was to return to the boys in the depot with whom I had made a lifetime commitment to share the knowledge of God first and then worldly knowledge. However, I felt it was premature for me to work with them, because I was in need of much more preparation. For these boys, physical needs were more urgent than spiritual needs. They couldn't afford the luxury of speculating spiritual matters, for their need was to survive physically. I was dependent on them for food and other physical needs; none of them really wanted to heed my advice or teaching. For them, I was a Christian blind man, harmless and foolish. The dream of educating them and giving what I had, seemed to be a meaningless dream which had no practical value.

After much speculation and thought, I came to the conclusion that alone I was powerless but with the help of the church I might be capable of doing something worthwhile. The base of my mission should be the church, but I would need a seminary education to be a Christian worker. Getting education was a dream which would take years to be realized. The new challenge was

to find a way to go to a seminary to better prepare myself and to learn the Word of God.

Come late fall, the air was getting chilly to be living outside with no heat. Jin Yong was worried. He said, You can't spend the winter here. You'll freeze. Go to Noryangjin train depot where I knew of a friend who lives near the theatre and the tea house. He looked around there for a warm and sunny corner where people passed by in crowds. One day, he took me there to introduce me to several of his friends and made an earnest request that they take good care of me. Jin Yong felt bad about leaving me there, but he could not leave Seoul train depot because of his business there. So, without him, I settled into my new abode by the tea house.

In spite of the cold winter months, I was quite comfortable, and the boys took care of me faithfully. Jin Yong came to see me often. I also found many other friends who were just as kind as Jin Yong. Bang Wool had become especially close to me and was a great comfort during my stay there. He also was a shoeshine boy, the youngest and shortest of them all, who got his business from the customers around the tea house. He looked about ten years old, but he didn't know his real age or name. The name Bang Wool was a nickname given to him by his pals.

His bright and happy countenance shone above his adverse circumstances. His job was to remove the shoes from the customers in the tea house and take them to the shoeshine boys outside. Almost without fail, he would get shoes from every single person who came in, so he was in and out of the tea house more than anyone else. He was the errand boy for the shoeshine boys. Everyone loved teasing him and sometimes people would hit him on the head as a joke. He would just laugh it off even though it really hurt. He never got upset. Once in a while, I suspected he was lonesome as he would whistle

some sad popular tune, "The sky looks hazy and gloomy in this dark street, so alone ..." He was just too mature for his age. I spent a lot of time with him since he and I slept in the same area. Most of the boys had a home or shelter of some kind but both Bang Wool and I were homeless. Actually, Bang Wool did have a place to sleep in the tea house. He was allowed to sleep on chairs lined up to stretch his little body on, in return for cleaning up the place after the guests left.

For a while, some of the boys shared their rooms with me, but the arrangement was only temporary. Then one day, Bang Wool said, "Mr An, you can sleep with me. The people in the tea house kindly agreed to let you sleep in the tea house. I clean up the place for the privilege of staying there, so you just feel free to stay. I know how inconvenient it is to stay with those boys. I'd rather be alone, but I don't mind you." That was how I came to spend many days with him. My bed was a couple of chairs put together and he shared the blanket with me, so I was very comfortable. I used to enjoy listening to his busy activities for hours, then sharing the evening meal, which might just be some bits of bread; and crawling under the same cover with him, which gave me a warm and cozy feeling. He was such a good companion, just like Jin Yong had been. I spent a lot of time sitting around enjoying the warmth of sunshine and chatting with the shoeshine boys. My days were rather too easy and I was sitting too comfortably. Although my time was not totally wasted, it was a time of waiting for a breakthrough. In the morning I studied Braille and in the afternoon, I listened to the transistor radio, the religious English program from 4 to 8 p.m. It was a great help for my faith and study as well as English practice. I copied the address of the counseling centers the radio announced and wrote to them about my personal story:

"Dear Counselor,

I might compare myself with Jonah who was called to go to Nineveh to preach. Hesitating to proclaim the good

news to the Gentiles, I got on the ship to Tarsus. Our ship hit a storm, and I was thrown out into the sea to be swallowed up by a whale. I am repenting of my fault in the darkness of the stomach of the whale... Please heed my cry and send me to Nineveh. I would be a truly faithful servant for God by proclaiming the Good News ... Please send me to Nineveh ...!

I wrote about my failure to answer God's calling to the ministry, how I became blind, my heartfelt repentance of my sins and my honest desire to go to a seminary to become a minister. It took great effort to write these letters and to send them. I copied the addresses of the organizations which offered counseling, although a big problem was that there were no people to copy the letters for me into English. The tea house that I slept in at night was the only possible place where I might find someone who could help me, so I followed Bang Wool every time he went in there. The owners were reluctant to have me around because the guests thought I was such a pitiful sight with dirty and worn clothes. Again I was reminded of how I was such a nuisance to them.

I was grateful that I had been endowed with unwavering persistence to withstand the most unbearable insults and ridicules thrust upon me. Gradually I was molded into a shameless beggar who could most naturally face people and implore, "I'm not begging for money but I'm looking for someone who can write English. Please help me."

After several tries, I eventually was able to find someone. In this manner, a single letter was completed, but had to be sent overseas. To get a stamp was another mammoth task because I had no money. It was an impossibility to make money for the stamp. By and by, I could detect the sounds of the footsteps of pedestrians — the footsteps of a gentleman, a housewife, a young lady, a boy, the different sounds made by different shoes such as tennis shoes, leather boots or ladies shoes. I was an expert in footsteps. Standing at the side of the street, I

waited for the people to pass. If I happened to meet a seemingly generous gentleman, I hung onto his arm like a leech and told him my story, whether he wanted to hear it or not.

At times, I was treated harshly as if I was a pesky animal. At times I was quite successful in finally picking the right person. That was how I got the money for a stamp. However, it did not end there. Even though I wrote countless letters to different organizations, I received no reply. The winter was nearly over and there was still not a single letter from any of the places. I was not sure whether any of them had even received my letters. I talked to myself, "Isn't it only a vain dream to study to be a minister?" Some caring boys tried to change my mind for they didn't want me to be discouraged. In fact, they were more anxious for me than I was. I was embarrassed sometimes that I had many doubts as to whether I should try any further. I might be wrong to seek for more education; it might be only an impossible dream.

These unfortunate boys were going through more problems than anyone could imagine. In cold winter months, they earned the money with cold hands and shivering bodies. The little money that they did receive was often taken by force from them. A gang would come around and collect dues regularly. The money they demanded was always more than the boys could afford and it seemed that they never got enough. Once in a while, the gang would beat some of the boys to extract money. Considering all these hardships, I resolved again to further my education in order to be whatever little help I could to save the boys from their misery.

How incompetent I was! I could not do a thing to be of any help but only a nuisance for those boys. I was merely a silent listener when the gang beat up the boys – I was totally helpless to defend them. The gang laughed at me. I really felt that I had to do something, but I did not know

how.

"It is beneficial to suffer for I learn Thy Laws," the Bible says. Suffering is a blessing in disguise. The more the boys went through, the greater was my desire to get the ability to help them. Trusting that God would lead me in the right direction, I just kept busy in what I thought I ought to do and waited for a reply from the organizations I had written to. "Knock and it shall be opened unto you."

In the early part of February, 1977, I received the long-awaited letter. "Come quickly, hurry!" Bang Wool ran out and grabbed me, dragging me inside the tea house. The lady in the tea house said, "There is a letter here from the United States." One of the guests read me the return address. It was from Tom Frances, General Secretary of the Foundation of Helen Keller, which is also called the Milton Association for the Blind. The contents of the letter were exactly what I had been hoping for such a long time.

This is the third time that we have received a letter from you. We are assured that your desire to be a servant of God is in accord with the will of the Lord and the purpose of our organization. We would be more than happy to assist you in the love of God if you do not waver and are persistent in your pursuit.

Please find a seminary of your choice and register, trusting that what we say is true. Please send us a letter with information on tuition and other expenses required for your schooling. Upon receipt of your letter, we will take care of your expenses.

We pray that we can play a part in seeing your dreams fulfilled. Wishing you a great success.

*Sincerely yours,
Tom Frances*

This short letter answered all my expectations. My joy could not be expressed in words. All the boys were just as happy as I and heartily congratulated me.

"It was not in vain," they cried. "Your endless efforts have finally paid off."

"Mr An, the blind man, is going to be a seminary student!"

XXIII

I was overflowing with joy at the unexpected reply. I had to take action in haste because the new school term was just about to begin. As I already had a university degree and one year of graduate school training, I decided to enroll in the third year of seminary. There were several papers to get ready for school and with the help of the boys, necessary steps were easily taken care of. I chose the Hankuk Theological Seminary in Sooyoori, Seoul. The dean of the school required a special interview with me before the admission was granted, because I was a special student. He was very considerate and cooperative. So I returned to school as a blind man where I had left school with seeing eyes.

My heart was heavy at the same time thinking about leaving the boys whom I had grown to love so dearly. We may be separated but they would always be in my heart. I had to bid them goodbye for further training to be better equipped to help them and to make their yokes lighter. I was sad nevertheless. Would I really be able to help them after my education? Wherever I am, I will work for those boys, I thought. It really makes no difference where I am. What I really hated was leaving this close human relationship with mutual understanding. The strong attachment I had with them was hard to sever.

These boys openly envied me and said things like, "You will change after you leave us." "We are very happy that you will be out of this situation." "Don't forget us. We are glad to have known you."

I said, "How could I ever forget you? Of course I will return to you." They said, "We would be happy to hear of your success. Just remember us and these happy days with us. Why bother to come back to us? You will not live like us after your success." Their generosity really moved me and made me reluctant to leave them.

To balance out my good fortune, it seemed that the boys suffered more from many gangs. They demanded undue increases in dues and threatened to drive them out of the territory if they failed to provide money within three days. After these three days they appeared again, but it was impossible for the boys to meet the deadline. The gang began to break the shoeshine boxes and caused a great deal of racket while the boys were trying to defend themselves. The boys were mercilessly beaten up.

Suddenly, Bang Wool, who was usually quiet, approached one of the gang members who was about three times his size and began to bite his large arms ruthlessly. The gangster pushed him down and punched his face knocking out two front teeth. He was rushed to the emergency ward of the local hospital and was treated. He suffered through the night; his face was swollen and he was unable to eat. How I wished I could have been of some help!

XXIV

Some days later, I suddenly thought of my father, how he had so earnestly wished for me to become a minister, how he had waited so patiently. I had disappointed him

in those days and turned away from him completely. As I remember, he always seemed to have the answers to everything, so he should have an answer for my present dilemma. I had hurt him so much by disobeying him and resisting his help then. However, I was certain that he would welcome me in spite of my stubbornness. Full of loving thoughts about my father, I was dying to tell him what he had waited so long to hear — that I had decided to become a minister. The mere thought of it did wonders to lift my burden.

One week before school began, in the latter part of February, when Bang Wool's wounds were rapidly healing, I boarded a train to visit my father who was serving a small mining town church, and where he had tried to persuade me to be a minister by his ridiculous illustration of swinging a stone tied to the end of a string, trying to show me that in this same way, I could never get out of the love of God.

It was nearing dusk when I got off the train. Snow was falling softly and I felt the chilling touch of a few snow flakes on my chin. Then I had to transfer to a bus and reached the town after 10:00 p.m. It was snowing even more there. Recollecting the town and the church, I knew I would have to climb a hill to get there, and then walk about 300 metres more. I set out to climb up the hill until about halfway up, I lost my sense of direction because of the snow and wind. I was stranded there in the snow and no one was around to give me a hand. I slipped and fell numerous times in the piling snow.

I fumbled around and found a long stick and used it as a guide to keep me on the road. It seemed to take a lifetime to climb that hill, but I took my time because there was no reason to hurry. It was past 12 o'clock midnight when I finally reached the top. Only a little further down, and I would reach the church! I was delighted in anticipation of seeing my father again after a long absence. This time I was bringing happy news for

him. The rough road and hardships were nothing at all compared to that joy. Yet, the road seemed still so far. The church was not there after the long walk down the hill. I must have wandered off the road and got lost completely. Once in a while I bumped against doors and houses and then there was nothing. So I decided to turn back and climb up the hill in order to find the right direction. But I could hardly find my way to the hill either. I was determined to handle it alone without seeking help because I detested people pitying me. Whatever would be, would be, according to the will of God. I would wander around until I found the place or I would give up. Depending on God alone to lead me, I continued on endlessly. "Lead me in the right direction, Lord." I prayed earnestly. But there was no answer. I was cold and hungry in the icy snow. Under the roof of a lonely house, I leaned against the wall, threw my tired body against it and sank to the ground. I was exerting all my remaining energy to stay conscious but then I found myself drifting into oblivion, into the world of unconsciousness.

The sound of a church bell awakened me from the depth of my unconsciousness. I came to realize that the bell was for early morning prayer service, which used to begin at five o'clock. The bell was ringing from my father's church, which I had been looking for all through the night. Again, "Ding, dong, ding, dong ..." It could not be too far away. I was drawn to the direction of the bell as fast as I could manage.

Father was praying in the church early in the morning! What a homecoming! A lost son had returned. It seemed that the silence spoke louder than most words. I had no need for his advice and Father had not much to exhort me about either, for our inner voice communicated with each other already.

It took me a few days to recuperate from my ordeal in the snow. I noticed an old lady by my bedside constantly

watching over me. Father was taking care of this blind lady. Her life story was a sad one — she had been living with an alcoholic husband and an adopted daughter until two years before, when her husband suddenly died. Two months after that, her eighteen-year-old daughter disappeared and never was seen again. Blind as she was, she did some manual labor around the neighbourhood in order to have some income to survive on. Upon hearing her situation, my father called on her and invited her to live in the house next to the church with all her needs being met by my parents. Later, two more blind grandmothers joined her.

“Your father is the most blessed minister alive. He has given light to our spiritual eyes as well as our blind eyes,” said one of the ladies. They were happy and content, giving thanks to God continuously. All three of them said almost in unison, “How could a wholesome and healthy man understand the blind so well and be so sensitive to their needs?”

Realizing how difficult it was for them to go to the outhouse, he had connected a rope from the room to it for them. Father not only met their enormous physical need but their spiritual needs also. Their spiritual eyes had seen the light through my father. His life was the answer I had been seeking. I stayed with him a few days, basking in his love and acceptance, all the time not talking too much.

Then, the day before I left, I told him all about my decision and about the myriad of experiences I had had leading up to the final decision.

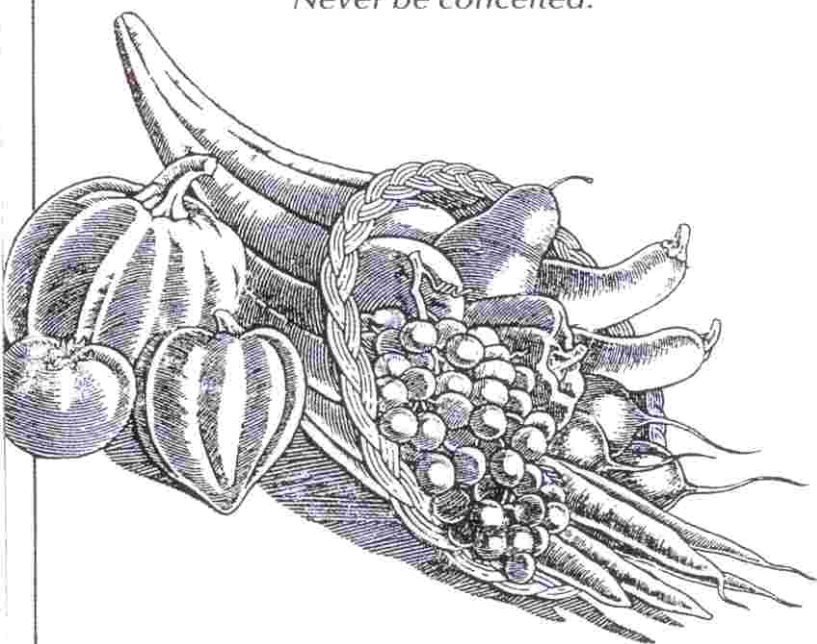
“Thank you, Lord! How happy I am, and how grateful I am to You. This happiness is not only from getting my son back, but also for his spiritual return.” As always, he mumbled his prayer, mixed with conversation, not knowing how to control his boundless joy. He held both my hands and started to pray. “I am really thankful for my son who went astray from You a long time ago. Though

his eyes cannot see, he can see You now with his heart and spirit. I am so thankful for his decision to serve You as a proclaimer of the Good News ...” Toward the end of the prayer, my father mentioned that he wanted to help me in any way he could. The time had come for me to say farewell to my parents and return to Seoul.

I came to accept the fact that the way I could be of service to the needy boys who had been so helpful to me was to prepare myself for a special ministry in the seminary. I was very content in knowing that I had the total support of both my Heavenly father and my father here on earth.

PART III

*Rejoice with those who rejoice,
Weep with those who weep;
Live in harmony with one another;
Do not be haughty,
But associate with the lowly;
Never be conceited.*



Jesus Came And Touched Me

T. Tow

Korean Melody

1. Jesus came and touched my soul, He came to save me.
2. Jesus comes and stays with me, He'll not de - sert me.

The first system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The melody is written in a key with one flat (F major or D minor) and a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are placed below the notes.

When I lay dead without hope, He breathed on me.
I shall never leave his side, He stays with me.

Fine

The second system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The melody continues from the first system. The lyrics are placed below the notes. The system ends with a double bar line and the word "Fine" written above the staff.

He fills my soul with His love, No more am I a - lone.

The third system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The melody continues from the second system. The lyrics are placed below the notes. The system ends with a double bar line.

Filled with His great power divine, I must now press on.

D. C.

The fourth system of music consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The melody continues from the third system. The lyrics are placed below the notes. The system ends with a double bar line and the words "D. C." written above the staff.

LIGHT OF LOVE

XXV

My first Thanksgiving day at the seminary was one of great excitement, as we students enjoyed a very special dinner of fried chicken, a rarity in our rather monotonous dinner menus. Just as we were about to start eating, however, the lights went out.

"Why do the lights have to go off at a time like this?" "Don't worry, they'll fix it right away. Just be patient and wait a little." Complaints could be heard everywhere and people were rushing about to get the lights fixed. Everyone just sat there waiting. Then someone started singing to take our minds off the food. Everyone joined in until we got the light back.

Since the darkness was a part of me, I did not feel the need to sing along with them. Then, thinking about the trick I was going to play, I could not help but grin. I devoured drumstick hungrily – in fact, I ate so fast that I did not stop to think how good it was. Then I exchanged my plate with the one next to me and started singing as if nothing had happened. After singing a few more songs, the light came back on again.

"Hey, who stole my chicken leg?" my friend exclaimed looking at his empty plate.

"What are you talking about?" I asked innocently.

"I trust that everyone here is a Christian. Tell the truth! Who stole my chicken leg?" He was looking around at everyone's eye to see who looked guilty. "John, it was you! Whoever thought you would do such a thing?"

"You mean that you first didn't suspect me because I can't see?" I asked. "Light has no effect on me so I just went ahead and ate."

“Well! With my eyes wide open, you took my plate away without knowing. Ha, Ha ...” he chuckled.

“Everyone here is handicapped in the dark except me.” I couldn’t help laughing, too. We had great fun that evening.

Those two years in the seminary were very pleasant and satisfying indeed. It was a much needed period of preparation and discipline for my future work for the Lord. Above all, I gained a deeper faith in God, and I also trained myself to be more free in my physical movements and to use other senses of my body. Gradually, it seemed that the darkness of despair was being replaced by the light of God. I wanted this light to fill me and overflow to others through me. Yet it was easier than done. It goes without saying, there were various inconveniences in going through the classes with normal, sighted students. Throughout the public school system in Korea, they had no facilities for the blind and the seminary was no exception. Not a single Braille book was available for me. It was nearly impossible to keep up with the academics with others. Since note-taking was not possible, I had to find a substitute.

First, I taped the lecture on cassette recorder, and then wrote them in Braille. For tests and reports, I wrote in Braille and then typed out what I had written, which meant that I was putting in more hours than the other students. The professors would require two to three reports a week, which generally meant we had to read several books each for references. Not one of these books was available in Braille. So again I was forced to bother some of my friends to read the books aloud to me as they were researching for their own reports. I’ll mention some more of the problems I encountered: while typing I would sometimes lose my train of thought, but there was no way for me to reread what I had already typed. Then I would have to bother a friend again. These were some of the challenges I faced.

Through numerous obstacles and inconveniences, the Lord was teaching me how to be patient and strong. Indeed, at times these challenges seemed almost joyful to relish. God was faithful to me in providing helpful friends whenever I was in need of help. One of those people was Rev Tom Frances, who gave me a great deal of financial help while I was in the seminary. Without it, I would not have received the necessary education. I was and am still grateful to all who made it possible for me to endure those hard yet happy years.

With the passing of time, I was slowly getting used to my blindness, but it wasn't always easy. In spite of my handicap, I mingled freely with my friends. In fact, I could almost say that I enjoyed some prerogatives that normal people do not have or cannot appreciate.

The dormitory lights were off at 11:00 p.m. every night without exception, even during exam time. Therefore, beyond that hour, it was impossible for anyone to study, except me. In the quiet of the night, when everyone else was fast asleep, I could study all that was necessary far into the night. I studied better at night when my surroundings were settled down because I needed more concentration to read with my finger tips. I got totally helpless, however, when my fingers became sore and were bandaged. Even so, I used to think that sighted people are handicapped too, sometimes.

One part of the daily routine the seminary students hated most was the morning exercises that everyone had to participate in. Blind or seeing, our sleepy heads would not cooperate very well in the early morning. I was not exempted from this compulsory exercise. At first, I did the exercise as well as I could along with the others, but of course, I had no way of knowing exactly what movements everyone else was doing and I was constantly offbeat. I would stand up while others were on their backs, and did my arm exercises while everyone else did leg exercises. My fellow students were watching me with

much mirth. Sometimes, watching me do my exercises so diligently was so funny, they could hardly continue with their exercises because they were laughing so hard.

"Please, John, do us a favor — don't exercise in front of us," they would beg me. "We just can't concentrate because of you. If you really want to do it, do it alone in the moonlight when no one can see you." So that was another one of the privileges that I enjoyed. This is an example of how I tried to look at my handicap in a positive, lighthearted manner, trying not to look at the negative side. I was gradually able to accept my blindness as the will of God and managed to find little bits of humour in countless different inconveniences.

My activities in the school were in the classes, the dormitory, the washrooms and the cafeteria, and then students were always nearby to assist me. When I stood outside of my room, someone would ask, "Where do you want to go? Can I help you get there?" However, the concern and kindness of fellow students reached the limit around exam time. Most of the students tried to avoid me, and even didn't greet me for fear that I might ask for help. It was expedient for them to stay away from me for they did not have the heart to turn me down when I asked. So I usually gave up on being a nuisance during exam times. Even if I tried, there were more questions to ask, and then I rushed on to their rooms to bother them again. Rushing about ever so anxiously, I often lost my sense of direction and hurt myself running into posts and walls. Not only the legs or arms or shoulders, but my forehead also got bumps and bruises. In order to laugh it off, I used to think of the bumps I got as stars — stars of generals. I would say to my friends, "I just received two stars this time to get through exam time." Then some of my friends would respond by saying, "That's too bad. Maybe you can get three stars next time, if you try." Thus we laughingly resumed our friendships after these busy and trying times were over.

XXVI

Into my world of darkness and gloom, the shining light began to slowly penetrate and gradually fill me up to the brim. My earnest desire was to know God and His love, and the close fellowship we shared among the students made it possible for me to feel the light in my body and my spirit. To my understanding, my peers never acted differently towards me because of my handicap. Sometimes even if they helped me because of my handicap, they treated me most casually as if I was one of them, a normal human being. We accepted each other just as we were.

Because I did not want to look untidy as the handicap often did, I kept my hair very neat and oiled. However, I thought it necessary to change the hairstyle to protect my forehead from the constant bumping it got. I also let my hair grow longer than others to save trips to the barber shop.

"Where did you get that funny helmet?" my friends used to tease me about my hairdo. We mingled very comfortably in each other's company. Except the morning physical exercises, I was right in the middle of all kinds of activities in the seminary. My body and spirit slowly overcame the overwhelming darkness which bound me. Impossibility was giving way to possibility by the power of God. The darkness was powerless in the presence of the light of God.

I had heard that there was a new sun clock decorated with all kinds of beautiful flowers in the town of Incheon where the tuberculosis sanitorium was located. One sunny Sunday in the fall of 1978, before graduation from the seminary, a friend and I went there to 'see' the sights. The beauty of this gorgeous flower clock apparently was a sight to behold. I could almost see the sky through smelling the fresh air and I could picture the flowers

through their wonderful fragrance. The warmth of the sunshine I felt made me think of all the creatures living in this universe. The flowers seemed to sing their joyful praises to the Lord and the Creator seemed to smile at His creations, including me. Reluctant to leave this heavenly place, we lingered a long while, taking in all the beauty of God's creation.

Then, quite unexpectedly, my companion told me that there was someone who wanted to talk to me, and led me to a man sitting alone on a bench. "I want to talk to you ... I'm sorry to bother you," he hesitated, but went on. "I'm a tuberculosis patient in the third stage." Again he hesitated. He paused for such a long time that I became a little impatient, and then he blurted out, "How can you be so happy to be alive?" Taken aback by this unusual inquiry, I was speechless for a moment. He continued, as though not really expecting an answer, "I've been watching you for a while. I just don't know how to describe it, but you have that certain peace and happiness in your expression which so few can have. I don't mean to offend you by saying this, but I was curious about how you can be so happy in this miserable world with your enormous handicap. Your countenance amazes me." I did not say a word, I just stood there grinning. Then he said, "You both look like students. What school do you attend? I would like to correspond with you." He really made my day! As we walked away, I praised God for His mercy and love.

We exchanged something valuable with each other. I had given him inspiration for the light of life and in return he had given me confidence in myself that I could be of some help in spite of my handicap. About a month after this incident, a letter came from him saying:

"It must have been the grace of God that our paths met that certain sunny day. Until then, I had given up trying. The long battle with tuberculosis had drained me to the point of taking my life. There was absolutely no desire or will power to continue, then you came at the

perfect time to save me. I grasped the living light in you. I realized that life is worth the living indeed if even a blind man can enjoy life the way you do. Life is very precious. Since I laid eyes on your peaceful expression, a new life and hope has sprouted in me. I am now taking care of my health the way I should and have mingled and gotten acquainted with a lot of other patients. As a result, I am much better and happier and believe that I will be completely healed in the near future. I have confidence that I am going to overcome and triumph over this sickness."

XXVII

Seminary life was filled with a lot of activities and studies as I prepared myself to be of service for the boys I had left behind. However, I was burdened to find a practical way of helping them. What could I actually do for them? What in my education would benefit them? The burden I felt for them could not be lifted, especially after taking some time to visit them and seeing how their circumstances had worsened.

However, the fact that I was able to help the sick man in Inchon always lifted my spirit. Living my life to the fullest with my very unfortunate handicap had been an inspiration for this man. So I resolved to do the same among those boys to give them courage and the will to live. Even then it was not enough to satisfy my desire to help them. I had no peace about their condition.

A few of us in the school dormitory were invited for dinner at a friend's home. Starving for a good home-cooked meal, we eagerly sat around the table taking in the mouth-watering aroma of the delicious food. Several couples with whom I was not well acquainted had also been invited. I did not want to make a fool of myself by fumbling around for my food, so I just began with the rice and soup directly in front of me. A friend beside me

got a piece of meat for me after a while, but soon he forgot me. As the evening wore on, everybody started to loosen up and we all enjoyed ourselves, laughing and joking.

Taking this chance, I courageously asked, "Excuse me. I've been entertaining my nostrils so far, so would someone do me a favour by arranging the different dishes clockwise so I can remember where everything is. For instance, put the *Zucchini* dish where nine o'clock would be. That way I'd know what I'm eating."

"Isn't that a smart idea?" someone said. I enjoyed the meal after all and began to get into the conversation.

The only way that I could recognize people was through their voices. Especially when there was a large number of people around me, I could not easily start a conversation unless they approached me first. Then I thought of the clockwise system I used to eat that meal, and remembered the people by their seating arrangement. The evening was a truly enjoyable one.

That evening gave me a new idea I had never thought of before. What if I organized a group of blind people where I could share mutual hardships and feelings, and we could help one another. I could share with them my ideas – the clockwise system, for instance. At last I knew where I belonged and where I should go. From this point on I proceeded to take practical steps toward my goal. I was to help the blind to be independent economically and to prevail over alienation from society. The blind needed a society for themselves for this purpose. But most importantly, I was to show them the love of God and that God loves all men – the poor, the rich, the high and the low. I was one who could share the common difficulty with them to help them out of their darkness by the light of life which is in God. I could be a shepherd for the blind. So I set out to take practical steps organizing a group of blind people and studying their difficulties.

COME LOW UNTO US

The Promotion of the Blind Association

XXVIII

In the year of 1979, upon my graduation from the seminary, I established "The Promotion of the Blind Association", believing that blind people need a place of their own to meet and discuss their affairs. The Board members consisted of the people I had known through church, school and the School for the Blind. We collected some money for expenses and rented an office near where the shoeshine and newspaper boys were because the rent was reasonable.

Jin Yong suggested that I find an office in a poor area where there were a lot of unemployed who could afford time to help the blind. We needed all the help we could get. We were right in the midst of the poor and needy, in the dark and lowly place. God led me into this lowly place. Whether we could get any help or not was not an important issue. Jesus would be there with us in the lowly places and that's where He should be and where we belong.

The very first project we launched through this organization was to be financially self-supporting by managing a barley tea factory. This did not require a lot of investment and the blind could easily manage it since it was a rather simple project. In this way, we figured that we could unite together in an effort to improve financially.

The second project was to publish a Braille magazine that we called "The New Light", the only monthly magazine put out by a blind Christian organization at that time.

Jin Yong, my efficient aide, helped to set up the barley tea factory, by buying a tent which would be a working area with the necessary equipment. Without much difficulty, the barley tea was produced from this tent factory, but we could not secure enough consumers to buy our product. It took more sales technique than we had. Also, there was not enough personnel nor enthusiasm from the blind people themselves. They had been let down too many times before to be positive in their attitude even before things got started. They did not put their best effort forward. That was harder for me to take than the failure in sales. Problems began to develop when the investors did not get profit from the factory, since there was not enough time to succeed, people slowly slipped away into their old places, and we simply closed it.

Jin Yong was very disappointed as well, for he stayed by me constantly and worked very hard. The people in the neighbourhood were suspicious of the activities of the blind and they stood far off merely watching what the helpless blind people were up to, contrary to Jin Yong's thought in the beginning that they might be of help. However, Jin Yong did not lose faith in himself nor in his goals, despite discouragements and the fact that he was upset. He was my only source of human encouragement.

The original idea of publishing a Braille magazine went sour too, for we did not have the funds. No blind person could afford the luxury of buying a magazine. So my two great projects failed, and everybody left my side, except Jin Yong. But he alone was all I needed. He encouraged me to keep going so I kept my faith. I could not let him down by my discouragement. Of course, I had the Lord Jesus who gave me hope and faith in my reason for living. I knew He stayed by my side all along, leading every step of the way.

I could not give up for other reasons, too. I owed much to countless people, the seminary and especially the

Foundation for the Blind in the United States, for my survival and education. The only way I could repay them was by serving and helping the blind and the poor. And lastly, I also owed my father who was, at the time, taking care of three blind grandmothers. I did not have the courage to give up.

XXIX

The Barley Tea Factory had to be resumed and the "New Light" magazine had to be published. I was rejuvenated and started to work nonstop day and night. I slept in the office. For a few people still remaining with me, I had to provide food on the table. I wrote magazine articles at night and spoke at churches and at other gatherings as much as I could handle. However, the reward for my tireless work was too little, even discouraging.

Generally, there was very little understanding among people concerning the problems of the blind. When I mentioned eagerly about the organization for the blind — the magazine and the barley tea factory — they did not have any idea why I was concerned about others while I had enormous problems of my own. Communication was not possible with those whose philosophy was contrary to mine. They advised me to return to my former wife and two girls and rest a while until I decided what to do with my life. All they would do was to buy barley tea from us.

Of course I missed my wife and the girls, but now they are out of my life. They belonged to the past and what's important is the present. I am forever grateful for my wife leaving me because I didn't have her to lean on; I leaned on God. I would have been a helpless and pitiful blind man being taken care of by my wife and family, merely

existing and being a burden, had she not left me. I would have been full of grievances and frustration. Even though I was physically blind, I was able to open my spiritual eyes through Jesus Christ, who led me to a worthwhile life. I've found a place in life.

I believe it was in God's plan for her to leave me, so I could find the light of life. I no longer had the slightest grudge against her. She was being used by God for my sake. God who is full of mercy and love forgave her already, I am certain. At this point, I could not and would not go back to my wife, nor she to me. God had provided a proper place for me to be.

My kind and understanding friends had no way of knowing my spiritual awakening. One of my friends blurted out, "I just cannot understand what you are saying. It does not make sense. When you need to take care of yourself, you worry about other blind people and the poor." Their reasoning of this world and my reasoning of heavenly places could not come together.

I happened to think of the eye doctor, the high school classmate I visited to have my eyes checked long ago. I had the desire to show him how well I had managed myself since I saw him last, when I was in despair knowing about my possible blindness. And I also wanted to consult him about my health. I thought he would have a general idea even though he is not a physician. I had a high fever occasionally, side aches from neuralgia and high blood pressure.

He was very happy to see me and promised to buy barley tea for the hospital he worked at. After a routine checkup of urine and blood tests, he announced that I needed a complete rest for a while because nothing was normal in my body. Respiratory function and blood circulation were in bad shape and my heart was bad and the blood pressure was dangerously high and irregular and I was suffering from malnutrition. He recommended hospitalization to have a complete rest and checkup.

In spite of my strong will power and fervent desire to achieve I could not cope with the ill health. Yet I could not afford the time or money for the luxury of hospitalization. Trusting that somehow God would pull me through, I kept on working to collect enough funds for my two important projects. When I was not invited as a guest speaker or lecturer, I visited various manpower offices seeking for a job I could do. Then, one day, as Jin Yong and I were on our search for work, suddenly I lost consciousness and passed out.

XXX

After eight hours of emergency treatment, I regained consciousness and was comforted by the smile of Jin Yong by my side. He had taken care of the details all the way. For Jin Yong's sake I should not be discouraged, but I was in despair, for who would pay the enormous doctor's fee, and the unfinished projects which I believed to be in God's control still remained. "What went wrong? Didn't I follow the leading of God? Where are you Lord? Lead me in the right direction, Lord! Not my will but Your will be done. Lord, help me ..." Then I received new courage from the Lord by praying earnestly and sincerely. And I was thankful that I did not have a serious illness. I was physically exhausted and, therefore, a prolonged recuperation period was necessary.

God works in a mysterious way, completely beyond our comprehension. He is in control of everything that happens in our paths whether we are aware of it or not. My hospitalization was one of the things God allowed to happen to accomplish His will for my life. Wonderful

things kept happening during my stay in the hospital. Streams of people came to see me. The boys I left in the train depot came in groups bringing me a gift of money collected for my work. They brought the newspaper article which said:

A BLIND SCHOLAR PASSED OUT TRYING TO HELP THE UNFORTUNATE

John An, the president of the Promotion of the Blind Association, proved that a blind man can contribute to our society. To help and promote the status of the blind, John An, a pastor, being blind himself, pushed himself heroically, but too far, and from physical exhaustion passed out on the street . . ."

The rest of the article described my life story and what I had been trying to do and my future dreams as well, in much detail. A certain newspaper reporter dropped in to interview Jin Yong to find out the story about me as I was taken to the Emergency Ward. He also took a few pictures, and the article was written in the evening paper.

The boys encouraged me with many kind words and expressed their wish to be a part of my worthy cause. A little while later, another group of boys came with Bang Wool, the boy I had known at another train depot in Noryangjin, and they also brought me some money and words of comfort. I felt this warmth all over me. God in His endless mercy led me to the train depot to meet those kind, yet unfortunate, boys to show me the will of God for my life in lowly places. He helped me to have courage by sending those boys to me again in my desperation. I thanked God again. Hereby I was rejuvenated to keep on in my pursuit for the will of God. He did not forsake me after all. He was leading me constantly even though I was not aware of it. Overwhelmed by His love, I uttered prayers of thanks all through the night.

More blessings came by my way the following day. The nurse came to inform me that I was exempted from the hospital bill. I was truly grateful. And what's more, she handed me a bundle of money. "Here is 300,000 Won. A little while ago in the morning, an elderly gentleman came," and she went on to explain that a man of about 60 years of age had come to her and asked how I was, and what the expense of my hospital bill was. Then he gave her the money to pay for it, and said he did not need to visit me. Through the newspaper, he had heard about me and had left without leaving his name. And since there was going to be no charge for my hospitalization, she brought the money to me. It was a pleasant surprise. I could not be absolutely sure but I suspected someone who would do such a thing was my father. I was deeply touched again by the love of my father, which is like my Father in heaven.

At the time Father was serving a little church in the suburb of Inchon. He had come to see me twice previously. Once when I graduated from the seminary, and another time when he moved to Inchon. Mother accompanied him both times, but uncontrollable tears kept her from coming to confront me face to face. Only Father came up to say a few words. He was contented with his son and believed in what I was doing, but he was careful not to interfere with my work and wished to bless me from a distance with real concern. And he let me know that he would be available whenever I was in need of him.

Once, he asked me, "Before you start with your new project, how about coming home to rest a few days?" Upon his kind advice, I hesitantly said, "I don't want to burden you with my worries, Father." He did not insist and said, "Yes, I understand. You do well to depend upon God for strength rather than man, son." After leaving a few words, he turned around and left. There was no doubt in my mind it was my father who left the money with the nurse.

There was no need to find out who it was, for it sufficed to realize that God is in control over my life and there are people who care for me. God's timetable was perfect to send Father to me in my time for need. Again, I felt a warmth in my soul.

I knew the money was not for my personal needs. It should be used for a more worthy cause, for the work of the Lord. Surely my cup was running over with the blessing of the Lord and the love shown to me through Christian brothers and my father. I no longer had the hospital expenses to fear.

As I was pondering over the many worthy projects I had in mind, I suddenly felt restless about spending my time in a hospital. I was getting impatient. However, Jin Yong did not agree with my thinking and called in the doctor to persuade me to stay in the hospital longer, knowing that he alone could not handle my stubbornness. Against doctor's advice I resolved to leave the hospital. Jesus led me to the hospital bed to reinforce in me the mission I was to carry out. And since I was convinced of His will, I was ready to resume my activity. Thus I returned to my office.

I resumed my busy schedule right away. An endless stream of people, former members of the Promotion of the Blind Association and others I had known, came to see me. Three young ladies whom I had taught at the Girls' High School in Nonsan, surprised me with a visit bringing with them a large sum of money. They lived in Seoul working or for further studies I was very pleased to see them.

A week later, the three ladies brought ten more ladies, high school classmates, and gave me 200,000 Won they had collected by working overtime hours or doing something extra to save up money. They promised further help in the future.

Then a few days later, my high school classmates, who used to insist on my return home to tend my own

business, came, but this time they did not mention about my personal welfare. In turn, they told jokes, "God isn't fair showing Himself to the blind and not us." And others said, "It is not a coincidence to have a blind man as a friend. We could not just watch and stay away, so we collected some money for you. Use it as you wish." The enormous sum of a million Won was given to me. I was encouraged and comforted over and over through these thoughtful friends.

This is a letter that I received from the tuberculosis patient I happened to meet in Inchon on our visit to the sun clock:

"You have lost your physical sight, but you have received a new light in your spirit through your faith in God. Never let go of your faith and love of life. Keep your bright light burning and brighten the darkness around you. May you accomplish great things in the power of your God that you trust so much. I believe your God will not disappoint you as long as you keep your trust in Him ..."

He was kind to send me such an encouraging letter. He also mentioned his desire to come and see me in the future. God was personally speaking to me through many channels and this man, I believe, was one of them.

My first project was to provide a house of prayer for the blind. I trusted that when we worship Him in His house of prayer prior to all other good and noble projects, He would take care of the rest. Our hearts should be right with the Lord in order to improve the poor condition of the blind and unfortunate boys. Without God in control, our worthy plans could not be worthy.

Glory to God for all things! I realized I had disappointed God by trying to do it on my own and not depending on Him; and I fell flat on my knees in repentance. I had been wrong. The love of God should be preached to these people, and I was to show His love

to all my neighbors.

I called a staff meeting of the Promotion for the Blind Association to discuss future plans. Most of them were disappointed in my plan for a church for the blind, for they expected financial help from the organization. They opposed, for they already attended neighbourhood churches and they could not see the need for a church for the blind. More and more people came to suggest that we open the Barley Tea Factory again, but I was already firm in my plan for the church. The precious fund was not to be used for the factory and certainly not to be distributed among ourselves. Our hearts have to be united in one mind in the Lord. We needed a place of worship, where the Word is preached and believers gather together for fellowship and service, and where many worthy projects could take place. There was no doubt in my mind.

A little room where we could gather was all we needed. As we talked, the very reluctant staff members were persuaded to follow my plan. Finally we were ready to search for a place of worship.

My important task was to teach the blind themselves that we need the Word of God to be united. The day after the decision to build a church, a blind man came to argue with me. He presented a very strong viewpoint, "It is nonsense to build a church for the blind. Since I am not a staff member nor a donor of funds, so I probably don't have any right to speak up — but I wanted to give my opinion just the same as a blind man for whom you are going to build a church. Of course, I know you have the right to spend the money as you wish because you raised the funds. As I remember, you mentioned that we became blind for the glory of God. The church is a place where we gather to give glory to God." As I listened silently, he continued emphatically, "Your idea is good. But as for me, I could not afford the time to consider the grace of God or the glory of God. I am a beggar sitting on the street corner, maintaining life through the coins the

passersby toss at me. Do you mean to say that I glorify God the way I survive? I am sure God would not want to be glorified by us, when He could receive glory from normal, sighted people. Why do you insist on building a church?" He even waved his hands and raised his voice to make his point.

After a long silence, I opened my mouth. Slowly I said, "Yes, I believe you can glorify God through begging. God needs a person like you to glorify Him. In the lowliest places, God can manifest His glory even more greatly." He could not understand my point. In fact he felt insulted and became angry. I continued gravely, "What I just mentioned is entirely possible. Your life may be pitiful and lowly, but God spreads His wings of love and care around you just as He does to others. You said you live by begging on street corners. Did anyone ever stop and thank you at any time? Tell me about it if it ever happened?"

"Well, once or twice. However, they could not be in the right frame of mind to say things like that."

"You are wrong. Imagine this ... there might have been people who were carrying pills in their pocket to commit suicide. Passing by you, he noticed your pitiful existence, then he thinks it over. By watching you, who tries to maintain life by begging, he would realize that life is precious even when you are blind. Life must be worth living. He might have found a new hope and courage through you and might have thanked you once. I am sure of that ..."

I continued eagerly with more, "Among the many passersby you meet daily, undoubtedly there are many lonely ones and some who are burdened with hardships that life brings. Some may even think of dying. You can be a saviour if your existence could give hope and courage to these people. How insignificant your life may be, but you can help others in your unique way. That's how you glorify God, the Creator of the universe. There is nothing to complain of even though we are unfortun-

ate in the eyes of the world. Don't lose courage. We cannot insist that begging is necessarily a blessing and that a pitiful and lowly life is something to brag about. But we know it is of no use to complain about our lot in life. You can find a gem in the midst of unfortunate circumstances if you look for it hard enough. Only we, the blind, would appreciate the priceless gem when it was found, while the ordinary people would never bother to look for it. So let's be wise. We hang on to life in spite of our handicap.

The world around us is not all darkness and gloom just because we cannot see. You see, there are three kinds of sight. One is the physical eye which can see things; second is the mind with which we can think and understand; and finally, the third and the most important one is hidden in the deepest part of our hearts — it is the spirit which can see God. Our eye and mind cannot begin to perceive the marvelous and wonderful things of the spirit world. God can be revealed to us only through spiritual eyes. What is most urgent for us is our immediate need to open our spiritual eyes to meet God, not our physical eyes to see the things of the world. Therefore, our suffering is not all bad. We try to seek God more because we have this urgent need to find meaning in our lives in spite of our handicap. God might have chosen us blind to give us stronger spiritual eyes by allowing our physical eyes to be blinded.

Everybody suffers in one way or the other. We are not the only ones. St. Paul, a follower of Jesus, suffered his entire life from physical ailments of some sort — persecutions from Romans and Jews alike, imprisonment, hunger, cold, shipwreck, and other things. He endured all of these hardships willingly out of love for Christ, until he gave his life in the end. He fought the good fight . . .

He sat quietly for a long time as if everything I said touched his heart. At last, slowly, he said, "Let's say

that we can glorify God through our handicap, and say that we could value our life though it may be lowly, and we live it with our best effort. Even so, our life is too long to endure! When will we be able to let down our burden of life?" With a sigh and a heavy heart, he poured out his desperation.

"I also cannot know," I said, "how long you have yet to endure your seemingly miserable life. However, you and I know for sure that life does not go on forever. We all have to die someday. It is wise to take one day at a time and live life to the fullest, for today may be the last day of your life. The life on earth lasts a hundred years at the most, but life after death lasts forever. Therefore, this life is only a little while. We are merely a speck of dirt, creatures of our God, the Almighty, the Creator of the vast universe. The apparent great difference between us and the normal people, the rich and the poor, matters little to our God. Everyone of us is as a drop of water in the big ocean, very insignificant, but we share a common fate. So we are to love and understand each other and live harmoniously.

This life will pass on in no time if we look ahead to the future life in Heaven. Our lot is to glorify God where we are planted. Only this kind of belief in God will give us courage that we need to live this life." He sat quietly and listened. So I continued, to finish what I had to say. "Our burdens of life will not be easy right away just because we start a blind church. But I am sure that only a church will be able to provide us with the faith and courage we need to survive. And it will enable us to value our lives, however lowly they may be. God does not take glory for Himself. He will glorify us if we glorify Him. When we value our lives and live abundantly, trusting His mercy, we are glorifying God. Only then we are delivered from a pitiful existence and start living as human beings. Our survival depends on the church. You and I have to begin right here."

XXXI

After the man's lengthy visit, there was no more disagreement about starting a church for the blind. I launched the church project immediately. There was a large vacant room on the main floor of our office building, so I signed a contract to rent that room, together with our office, and proceeded to take necessary legal procedures to start a new church.

The last Sunday of June, 1979, we held our first "New Light Church" service with a little over twenty people in attendance. The staff members of the Promotion of the Blind Association and their friends, and Rev. Son, a minister in the neighbourhood church with a few members of his congregation.

Although I did not expect a large crowd at the first service, I was a little disappointed by the lack of concern shown by the neighbours. Our church, mainly of the blind, desperately needed the help of gifted neighbours in many ways.

Rev. Son and his church members did not return the next Sunday. However, the attendance grew gradually. Most of the blind people have never had a chance to see the light in the world isolated in their dark corners. They were people who were more ready to receive the Word of God than ordinary people. The hungry hearts accepted the Word of God deeply and a fire began to spread. I did my utmost to satisfy their hunger through the worship service.

We still needed to have our needs met in spite of our church growth. Since we were very limited in what we could do, we needed help from those around us. Surely there must be some willing Christians. But there was no one who showed interest in our small church. I went around visiting in the neighbourhood with Jin Yong, seeking for help but with no avail. Some said, "You are

doing a great job, but we already belong to another church." And some didn't express it with words, but I sensed their unwillingness to take part with a blind minister. I realized it was a mistake to depend on them.

More disappointment was awaiting me. Around monsoon season, we had many rainy days. Then one Saturday, it rained all day and continued on Sunday. It was a chore for them to come to church on a fine day, let alone on a rainy Sunday. I was almost sure no one would show up, but I would not give up and kept praying for the sun to come out. Jin Yong and I waited until ten o'clock, the regular worship time, but no one came. I stood outside the church door getting a little wet. I waited until eleven o'clock. All I could hear was the falling of the rain, but no sound of footsteps. Oblivious of Jin Yong's advice to give up, I was glued to the spot, lost in disappointment.

I could not muster enough energy to go back to my office, so I turned to walk to Rev. Son's residence. I merely needed someone to talk to, not specifically to receive help. Talking with someone might give me some relief, I thought. He might have some helpful suggestions since he had shown interest in us at the first church service.

As Jin Yong and I entered his house, he gave us a warm welcome, but our conversation did not bring any helpful results. He was kind enough to listen to my long story and took quite a long while before he opened his mouth. "Unfortunately, there are a lot of Christians who seek after big churches rather than a small church nearby. Our church is suffering too. The big churches can offer a lot — they provide a bus for members who come from a far distance, and people enjoy the recognition of belonging to a big and well known church. These people are not interested in the glory of God, but glory for themselves. We cannot ignore the reality. People would rather mingle with a better and bigger church than with a small, poor

church. So there seems to be a rich God for the rich, and a poor God for the poor." He even raised his voice as he spoke, then became soft and weak knowing that his opinion did not make any difference. "People prefer a bigger church, not lowly churches like ours. You cannot help it." He looked just as melancholy as the sound of raindrops outside in the Sunday afternoon. He meant that we blind belonged to each other, and we couldn't expect any help from the sighted people. It was an impossibility to expect any help from the nonbelievers in our neighbourhood when Christians would not help.

Although the visit with him was not very pleasant, I was convinced that we should give up our ideas of getting help. There are reasons for everything, and I can understand human frailty. I admit I am like anybody else. We, who suffer and hurt the same in our dark world, are destined to help and love each other. No one is higher or lower in the sight of God when we are merely a speck of dirt in the vast universe.

Then one day, the boys at the train depot came to cheer me and brought me wonderful news. They volunteered to help in our church for the blind. I was overwhelmed with the joy of answered prayer. The Lord was caring for me all along. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." These boys would be blessed by the Word of God by coming to church every Sunday. When they give a little, they would receive a hundredfold back in rich spiritual blessing.

XXXII

"My heart is at rest in the midst of a noisy world." More than I ever dreamed, these boys were a great help for the blind; by helping others they became closer to one another. On Sundays, the people did not leave the church after the service was over. They would sing

hymns and pray together the whole day, sitting side by side with the blind and sighted alike, not bored at all. Finally, the door of their hearts was opened. The church atmosphere, once so bleak, was now saturated with the love of the Lord and the fellowship of the blind and others. We seemed to abide in the Lord and the Lord in us.

Before the boys started at the church, I mentioned a few helpful pieces of advice on treating the blind. "Only a sincere attitude can affect the blind, for they can see the world through their feelings only. They do not welcome pity. They are able to sense your attitude, so if you ever get tired of helping, it is better to stop all together rather than to pretend. Uninterrupted by the sight of many things of the world their sense of touch, hearing and feeling are keener and can feel brightness as warmth, coldness as the dark, a shiny surface as light and roughness as darkness. Their heart is filled with the light when they feel sincerity and warmth in you. That's how they see the light. What they see might be brighter than what you see. Therefore, your sweet fragrance may brighten the dark path of your blind friends."

The boys shared the common ground of lowly places as one of us. Sincerity was probably the only thing they had to share. We and the boys were just as eager to worship the Lord singing hymns and praying. The Lord came to the lowly places to bless us. We became one big family of fellowship and worship. By and by, the neighbourhood children started coming to help out. We sometimes had to turn away some of the volunteers because we had too many.

One Sunday evening, I was resting in my office after the service. Jin Yong came to inform me that someone was there to see me. No sooner had Jin Yong finished his last word, than I knew it was my father staring at me intently behind him. I was speechless. Finally, I broke the silence and said, "Father, how did you come here?"

"Now you recognize me without seeing me," he said. "I am much moved to see what you are doing in spite of your handicap. I have known all these years of your coming back to the Lord. I could not be more proud of you now."

He was nearly choking with emotion as he spoke. Trying hard to control my emotions, I said, "It is not the first time for you to come here, is it?"

"No," he said. "I was here when you had your first service. The Lord told me everything about you."

I asked, "But you found out about my hospitalization by the newspaper, didn't you?"

"Yes" he answered. "I visited you once then, too. It was by the Lord's providence that your article was written in the newspaper for me to read."

"Father, I really appreciated your money. I know you gave more than you could afford. It has been a great help." I wanted to make sure that it was he who brought the huge amount of money.

Slightly embarrassed, Father said, "Don't mention it. I owe you so much!"

Of course I understood his feeling, but it was I who owed him a lot, not he to me. I had some more questions, "Why did you just walk away from me and not say a word?" I really did not expect the answer he gave me.

"Because of your mother."

He surprised me. "Why mother? What about her?"

"Of course, she has been with me every time." It just puzzled me why. Father said slowly, "You know women cry a lot." Mother could not refrain from crying throughout the service, so Father led her out of the church quietly. "We might as well face you when we could control our tears." He went on, "I know how happy she was to hear you preach. We have been waiting for it

many years. She would rather wait until she is brave enough to see you with a happy smile. So here I am alone." In the warmth of my father's presence, I need not say any more. The quiet moment was very precious to me. Then I said, "I cannot begin to say how sorry I am for hurting you all these years of my wandering." That seemed to be the only proper thing to say then.

Father was a man of few words, but this day he lingered on as if he had something he wanted to say. "You don't need to apologize; rather we would like to ask for your forgiveness." He said, then, "The only one who is to forgive is God. God had already forgiven you. You are doing a great service for Him through the special church." Thus he went on with his conversation, "I am just telling the truth as it is. You don't need to be so humble before your father. I was much impressed. I have never heard such a thankful prayer than yours uttered in your church service — how the blind people sing hymns reading with their fingertips, and how they search God's Word, seeking to know more about God; this made me look around in wonder and admiration. And I noticed the tear drops falling under the dark glasses of those blind people as they listened to your sermon. Who in the world would love the Lord more than these people?" I envied the brilliant life of love shining throughout the countenances of your people. I could not stop thanking God for you and your very precious work. I thank the Lord for everything." He meant what he said.

Now came the final thing he wanted to say, "Now I have a question to ask. Of course, I know God loves everyone of us alike, blind or not. If someone owes you an apology, and if the person is indeed sorry for his debt, are you willing to forgive and bless him?"

In what he was saying, I could read the meaning between the lines. As I listened, the turmoil once forgotten began to stir up in my mind. But then I calmed myself with composure and said, "Yes, I could forgive that person. In fact, nobody owes me anything. I need

the forgiveness. In the love of God, I have no one to forgive and if there was someone who owed me anything, he has already been forgiven."

He asked further, "Would you be willing to do the same if that someone is your wife?" Although I was expecting his question, I was taken aback for a moment to find a proper word. Then with control I said, "She does not owe me anything. I, in turn, have to thank her for I found the true way because of her." He held my hand and patted it quietly, and he even forgot to pray. Then he let go of my hand, saying, "Well, my burden is off my shoulders now. This morning as I sat in your church service, there was a lady with two girls on either side in the front pew of the church. They were your wife and two girls. Undecided as to whether I should run to see them or not, I lingered around. Soon they disappeared from the church. As I ran out to catch them, they were already descending the hill quite a distance from me. I thought it better to let them go in peace. I came to see you instead."

Somehow I was relieved at this and said, "You were right to let them go. It does not make any difference now if she comes back to me or not. Don't worry about it, Father."

To this, he said, "I believe they might come to see you again. The children helped the blind as they went down the hill. They will come again."

XXXIII

A few days after Father's visit, Jin Yong came to inform me of a piece of good news. He found 500 Won in the offering box. I had placed the box in a corner of the church and had been telling the congregation about the meaning of giving to the Lord from time to time. As yet,

they had not experienced the love of Christ enough to give thanks through an offering. Instead they came to church to receive some material benefit. They had not been expected to give in their life. I wanted to teach them that they should have the desire to give even if there seemed to be nothing much to give. It gave me great joy to learn that someone had learned to finally give.

"By giving," I said, "you prove the love of God which abides in you. Your heart will eventually be full of light and love overflowing to those around you. The desire to give out of gratitude for God, and the desire to share with those in need will make us happy and fulfilled. To give is more blessed than to receive, and that is the only way to be rich and happy. Therefore, offering cannot be too much emphasized." There was a hush in the congregation as I spoke.

I could not decide alone how this most precious money could be used, so I asked the congregation about it. By this sudden and unexpected question, the congregation was silent for a while, then I again urged them, "Please do not hesitate to give your opinion as to what we should do with this precious offering." I waited until someone slowly stood up to say, "I understand your decision to seek our opinion, but I think it would be best for you to decide. I am sure we would agree with you whatever your project may be because we have the same goal. However, if you insist, I would like the money to be used for the Braille magazine, the "New Light".

It was the voice of the blind person who had once come and complained about organizing the church for the blind so vehemently. He thought it was nonsense to think of starting a church when mere existence for them was a dire struggle. Who else would speak up in such a way except the person who gave the 500 Won?

He continued to say, "We are indeed blessed by the leadership of our minister, this man of God. It is unfortunate for those outside the church who are groping around in the dark as we used to. We are the light for these people and this light must be shared. It is long overdue. I am sure we could publish the magazine on our own even if what we have is not much. The 500 Won will start and it is only the beginning of our giving. Let's get going on this project. Yes, we have already begun!"



EPILOGUE

*When my physical eye can no longer see
I see the light with my spiritual eye.*

The abundant blessing is mine because

I can see The gates of heaven

open before me

XXXIV

Beautiful autumn has finally come and summer has ended. We can hear the reverberating sound of hymn singing long after the worship service had ended. Immersed in the sweet melody of heavenly hymns, I was so deep in thought of the future plan of those boys who were so helpful to our blind congregation. I owe them two years of my life during which they sustained me and gave me hope. My pledge to help them with my life was now in the slow process of realization. I had a dream to start an evening school for their education.

Everything I planned to do for God was well on its way. The church was growing, the Promotion of the Blind Association was doing well, and the "New Light" magazine was being published. The final project was evening school for the boys.

The sanctuary turned into classrooms in the evening because the boys work during the day. The school will be a two-year program without vacations and tuition will be free. Volunteer teachers will be recruited from pastors and other organizations, which will not be too difficult. I will start first with those boys from the train depot area who help in the church with the blind people and poor children around the neighbourhood. As I was planning these dreams, I felt the warm sun light on top of my hands. We blind people are endowed with extra sensitive feelings of touch, sound and skin that ordinary people cannot begin to fathom. These senses transform a dark world into a bright world with the light brighter than eyes could see.

I want to take care of the boys alone at first, which means I will be busy — textbooks to be copied into Braille and to practise writing the main points on the blackboard for them to read, and so on. If I did a good job of teaching, I would have no problem getting more

students. I was confident.

I would teach the subject and some songs. I would say very comforting and soothing prayers once in a while and go easy with evangelizing.

I thought of the many problems as I gained more students. Undoubtedly some will have family problems, some financial problems. I was indeed ready for any problems. I should be and I wanted to be where there was a need. No obstacles or problems would be big enough to stop me from doing what I wanted to do. I would proclaim the love of God to all who would listen. Endless plans for the bright future unfolded in my thoughts in the sunny afternoon in my office. The light was so bright in my room, I could almost see it. It seemed as if I was dreaming. It was not a dream! It was a reality I could touch and see.

“Thank you Lord for my blindness. You took away my physical eyes which will decay with this body when it dies, but you gave me the invaluable spiritual eyes to see the truth. Thank you for calling me into your service. With all my heart and strength I will serve you where you planted me until the day you call me to heaven. I truly value my unique ministry. Lord! Just give me the strength to carry on your work and help me to obey Your will until the end.” I prayed.

T. Tow

Barley Fields

Korean Melody

Andantino

The piano introduction consists of two staves. The right hand plays a series of chords and single notes, while the left hand plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The tempo is marked *Andantino* and the dynamics are *mf*.

The vocal entry begins with two lines of lyrics. The piano accompaniment continues with the same eighth-note pattern in the left hand and chords in the right hand. Dynamics are *mp*.

1. One day I was walk - ing
2. One day I ran A - way from home

The vocal entry continues with two lines of lyrics. The piano accompaniment continues with the same eighth-note pattern in the left hand and chords in the right hand. Dynamics are *mf*.

And wandering through the Barley Fields
From my Pa - pa I'm a prodigal son

The vocal entry continues with two lines of lyrics. The piano accompaniment continues with the same eighth-note pattern in the left hand and chords in the right hand. Dynamics are *mf*.

I heard a voice call - ing, call - ing, call - ing me.
I spent all that he gave me I spent I spent all.

For old times I whistled a tune.
A prodigal son I was lost in sin.

O how sweet the notes in my ears Look - ing a - round.
O what shame to my father's name Pa - pa Pa - pa

I saw no one Looking around me I saw no one
I'm coming home Papa O Papa I'm coming home

On - ly the twilight of an evening glow -
Where are you my son O my long lost son.

Twilight of an evening glow A dying sun,
Here he comes all tattered and torn My son was dead

mp

A fading light that dims, that dims my eyes.
He lives a - gain My son, my son come home.

rit.

A fading light.
He lives a - gain. *rit.*

THE JOHN AN STORY . . .

A real life drama -

Happily married and all set to join the Military Institute of Foreign Languages, California, USA, as Korean language instructor, the cruel "hand of fate" struck, robbing John of the most precious gift of sight. Frantically seeking doctor after doctor, treatment after treatment, was of no avail . . .

The thing I had dreaded most had come! I felt as if both my body and spirit were bound together and thrown into the dark hell of despair. I was on the road to death all alone. There was no one who could walk with me; not even my own mother, my wife or my two loving daughters. I screamed out, "Oh, God! why are you going to take the light away from me? What have I done to deserve this?" Sinking deeper into despair I cried unto to God, cursing Him and at the same time imploring Him. Of all people, why me? Why? Why?

Plunged into his world of darkness, John was deserted by wife and children, left to face the future alone.

God reached down and lifted John from the depths of despair to fulfil his father's dream, that he should become a preacher of the Gospel. Through years of hard testing, Rev John An today heads the New Light (Presbyterian) Church of the Blind, New Light Evening School, New Light House for the Blind. He edits the New Light Braille Magazine.