

A SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF WATCHMAN NEE

Let me love and not be respected;

Let me serve and not be rewarded;

Let me labor and not be remembered;

Let me suffer and not be regarded

'Tis the pouring not the drinking;

Tis the breaking, not the keeping —

A life suffering to seek others' blessing,

A life loving and true comfort giving

Not expecting pity and concern,

Not accepting solace and applause;

Even lonely, even forgotten,

Even wordless, even forsaken.

Tears and blood my price for the righteous crown shall be;

Losing all, my cost for a faithful pilgrim's life.

'Tis the life, O Lord, that You chose to live

In those days when on earth You walked,

Gladly suffering all injuries and loss

So that all might draw near and repose.

I cannot see how much farther I shall go;

Still I press on knowing there is no return.

Let me follow Your pattern so perfect and true,

Bearing ingratitude without complaint.

In this time of trial, O Lord, I pray

That You'll wipe all my hidden tears away;

Let me learn, O Lord, You are my reward,

Let me be others' blessing all my days.

This maxim, which was composed by Watchman Nee around the year 1930, could very well sum up his life and ministry.

Watchman Nee was born on 4 November 1903, in Swatow, China.

His birth was an answer to prayer. His mother, Ho-Ping, was afraid that she might bear only daughters like her sister-in-law who gave birth to six daughters. Ho-Ping already had two girls. Though she was at that time only a nominal Christian, she nonetheless prayed for a son and vowed to give him back to God. In the following year she gave birth to a boy and, following the family tradition, named him Shu-Tsu, which means, To continue glorifying the ancestors. It was not till 1925 that Shu-Tsu changed his name to Watchman (which in Chinese is To-Sheng).

When Watchman was six years old the family moved back to Foochow, their native place. He received his early education through private tutoring in Chinese calligraphy and the study of the Four Books and Five Classics which had been the foundation of Chinese culture for two thousand years. Early on he showed his adroitness in learning. As a boy Watchman was lively and active, and thus he received more chastenings than did his elder sisters. In order to protect him, however, his sisters would sometimes take upon themselves the blame for mischiefs perpetrated so as to relieve their brother of punishment.

In 1916, at the age of thirteen, Watchman entered the vernacular Middle School in Foochow, sponsored by the Church Missionary Society (Anglican), to receive a Western-style education. This was a step towards Trinity College, which was staffed mainly by Irish missionaries from Trinity College, Dublin. Being brilliant, he did not need to study hard to rank at the top of his class. Though he observed Christian traditions such as baptism, communion, Sunday School and so forth, he had nonetheless failed to accept Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour. He loved the world and sought for earthly glory. He liked to read novels and to attend movies. He wrote articles for newspapers, and with the money he received he bought lottery tickets. He was at one time the chairman of his school's student body.

During this period China was experiencing great national unrest. Naturally, as a young man Watchman was affected by the political movements all around him. At the same time he developed a strong aversion towards the Church and to preachers. He despised preachers, considering them as dogs to the missionaries. When he was told by his father that he had been promised to God to be a preacher, he could not have disagreed more. Not so, was his firm response, making it clear he had planned his own future in a far different direction. He would never be a preacher, vowed Watchman.

In the latter part of February 1920, Miss Dora Yu, one of the first Chinese evangelists, came to Foochow to conduct revival meetings in the Methodist Tien An Chapel. Mother Nee, being an old acquaintance of Dora Yu, attended the meetings and was saved. The high school boys were free to attend these meetings, and a number of them did. Yet Watchman had till then absented himself. Though his mother had invited him to attend, he declined. In fact, at this time he hated his mother because one day, a month earlier in January, at the end of the winter holiday, a valuable vase in the house had been found smashed. His mother was certain that it was the work of her son, Watchman; so she subjected him to the indignity of a thrashing. Though she discovered later it was a mistake, she had never apologized.

Now, however, mother Nee was saved. She began to have family devotions. When she commenced to play on the piano the very first hymn, she was deeply convicted by the Spirit of God that she must make an open confession to her son before she could worship publicly. To the utter surprise of the entire family she suddenly stood up, walked over to her son, wrapped her arms around Watchman, and cried out, "For the sake of the Lord Jesus, please forgive me for beating you unjustly and in anger." This touched Watchman deeply. Never had he heard of a Chinese parent accepting such loss of face. If his own mother could be so transformed, there must be something

powerful in the preaching of this visiting evangelist. Christianity, he thought, must be more than a creed. This lady preacher was therefore worth a hearing. And hence, next morning he told his mother that he was ready to go and hear Dora Yu.

Young Watchman went as he had promised. He was touched in heart by the gospel on the very first evening. He knew that the gospel of Jesus Christ was true. Indeed, he had no problem in accepting it, but he had a serious apprehension. On 18 October 1936, at a Workers' Conference at Kulongsu, he offered the story of his own salvation. Here is what he himself testified:

“In 1920, after I had attended the Revival Meetings led by Dora Yu, I experienced a great struggle in my heart. On the one hand, I must settle the issue of whether or not I would accept Jesus Christ as Saviour; but on the other hand, I must settle the issue of whether or not I would decide to be His servant. For I felt that if I should accept Jesus to be my Saviour, I must at the same time receive Him as my Lord: I would have to serve Him throughout my life. At that time I was only seventeen years old. I had dreamed many wonderful dreams, and I had spent much effort in laying out a great plan for the future. May I humbly say here—and my fellow-students, several of whom are here, could bear witness to the truth of it—that had I diligently pursued my plan I could have well succeeded. Accordingly, my receiving the Lord's salvation must be two-fold: I must not only be saved from sins, I must also be saved from the world. I was convinced that I could not set aside the Lord's calling, merely becoming a saved person and not a serving one as well. I wanted these two things to happen together.

“That night (29 April 1920), in the very deep of the night, I was alone in my room to settle these two questions. I knelt down to pray. At first I had nothing to say. After a while, and without premeditation, I began to see many sins appearing before my eyes. I

saw myself a sinner. Never in my life had I seen my sins in such a way. Yes, I indeed saw my sins, but at the same time I saw the Lord Jesus. On the one hand I saw the blackness of my sins, but on the other hand I saw the redness of the blood of the Lord Jesus. I witnessed the Lord Jesus hanging on the cross, bearing in His own body my sins. It was as though the Lord were calling to me: 'I have borne your sins. I am waiting for you to come.' How could I any longer resist when under the impact of such love? Formerly I had mocked believers in Jesus Christ, but that night I could not mock them anymore. I asked the Lord to forgive my sins. As I confessed them, the burden of them rolled away from me.

“During that time, many new things happened to me. For the first time I realized I was a sinner. For the first time I prayed and asked the Lord to forgive me of my sins. For the first time I received into my heart true joy and peace and knew as well that my former joy and peace had been false. After prayer I rose up and sensed great freedom. It seemed as if my entire room were flooded with light. I did not know where I was.

“All the things I had planned in the past years were now finished. It might have been easy for others to lay down their dreams and plans, but for me this had proven to be most difficult. And yet that night I received a new life. Both my salvation and my call were simultaneously resolved. And since that night I have never doubted my call: Within that very hour I knew the Lord had saved me. I knew He had died and that He now lives for me; therefore, I too must die and live for Him. I must serve Him in all my life.

“After I was saved I continued my study in school. While other students brought novels to class to read, I brought the Bible. Not long afterwards I went to Shanghai to stay with Miss Dora Yu in order to

learn how to serve the Lord.* However, I was sent back by her after only a short stay. She did not explain to me why she was sending me back; she simply said that it was not convenient for me to stay there. I understood later on that the problem was in me—that it was because as a youth I liked to eat well, dress well, and sleep till eight o'clock in the morning.

“After I returned to Foochow I continued my schooling. I did not faint in heart, since I knew God had called me. I knew I had many weaknesses, but God would never forsake me. Although I occasionally lost my temper and exhibited other bad habits, my schoolmates realized that I was different from before.

“Now when I was newly saved I did not know how to lead people to Christ. I thought that the more words I spoke to them the better, that if I said more, then people would be saved. But I was a total failure, for no one got saved. I felt I was powerless.

Later on, I met a lady missionary, Miss Groves. She asked me how many souls I had won since I had been saved. I replied that I had preached the gospel to my fellow-students but that they would not listen; and therefore, the fault lay in them. She suggested, however, that the fault probably lay in me. She probed further and asked me if there was anything standing between me and God—if there was any hidden, unconfessed sin. I had to acknowledge that there were such things. She asked me if I was willing to deal with them immediately; to which inquiry I responded positively.

“She further inquired about how I witnessed to people. I said I had no plan. I simply said what I felt like saying, without any regard to

* At that time there was some student unrest, and sensing the need of adjusting himself to a whole new direction in life Watchman quietly disappeared and went off to Shanghai to join Dora Yu's Bible School for a one-year training in the Scriptures.—*Translator*

their listening or not. She told me that I was wrong in doing so. ‘You should first speak to God and then speak to men. You should first bring people *to* God before you speak to them *for* God. You should pray to God, seeking to know for whom He wants you to pray. Write these names in a notebook and pray for them daily. Then when opportunities arise, preach the gospel to them.’ I accepted her advice.

“That very day, in fact, I dealt with many sins and unrighteous things. I asked the Lord to cleanse me with His blood and forgive my sins. From that day onward, I prayed for those whose names were written in my notebook. At the beginning I prayed for them hourly. I found it was rather difficult, for I did not have much to say. Even in class I prayed secretly for them. After a few months, my schoolmates considered me a laughingstock. Whenever they saw me approaching them, they would say that the preacher was coming, and they did not really listen to what I had to say to them.

“Later on I asked Miss Groves why I was still ineffective after having used all the methods she had taught me. She encouraged me to keep on praying till some would get saved. Thank the Lord, I can testify that all of those except one whose names were written in that notebook got saved. There were sixty to seventy names written down in it. Thus did I learn the lesson of never giving up but always praying.”

Watchman carried a Bible with him everywhere. He was constantly reading it. He once testified that he read nineteen chapters of the Bible consecutively each day. He also used various approaches by which to search the Scriptures. He went through the whole Bible—both the Old and New Testaments—several times within a short period. Having a photographic mind, he was able to remember much of what he had read. Moreover, his knowledge of Biblical truth greatly increased.

In searching the Scriptures he realized that he must obey the Lord

by being baptized by immersion. So, on 27 March 1921, he was baptized in the water at White Teeth Rapids outside of Foochow. Declared Watchman on this momentous occasion: “Lord, I leave my world behind! Your cross separates me from it forever; and I have entered into another. I stand where You have placed me in Christ!”

In his heart Watchman wanted to follow everything that was to be found in the Bible but nothing that was not there. So as he continued studying God’s word, he felt the need to remember in simplicity Jesus’ death at the Lord’s Table. He talked to his friend Leland Wang, who happened to have the same conviction. And thus, one Lord’s Day evening in 1922, in the early part of the year, three of them—Leland and his wife, and Watchman—broke the bread of communion in a small house where the Wangs lived. They found much joy and release in thus worshiping the Lord. Later they were joined by others.

For much of his spiritual growth, Watchman turned to Miss Margaret E. Barber for help. Miss Barber had first come to Foochow in 1899 with the Church Missionary Society, but then in 1920 she had returned to Foochow independent of any mission board, depending on the Lord alone. She lived in a bungalow at White Teeth Rock. She and her fellow-worker, Miss L. S. Ballard, gave themselves to pray that God would raise up young men and women to win rural China for Christ. Naturally, these young believers turned to her for help.

“During that time,” continued Watchman in telling the story of his salvation, “I felt I would not be effective in work without the power of the Holy Spirit. I must carefully deal with this problem before God. I needed to seek the power of the Holy Spirit. So I went again to my spiritual sister, Miss Barber, for counsel. I told her that there were few people getting saved in my community. Did I need to receive the power of the Holy Spirit or to be filled with the Holy Spirit in order

to win more souls? Her answer was yes. At that time I was very young and ignorant concerning spiritual things. I knew God had already saved me and had also called me. Though I had not yet gained complete victory, I had laid aside many improper things in my life. I further inquired of her if she had any way or method by which to be filled with the Holy Spirit. She replied that I must consecrate myself to God. I said to her that I had already consecrated myself to Him, but that I still saw my own self. How could I consecrate more? Her answer was that I must ask God to accept my consecration just as I would have asked people to accept my gift. As I continued to ask how, she told me a story:

“Mr. Prigin was a brilliant young man. While he was pastoring a church he was at the same time studying for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Two months before the final oral examination, having already been assured by his professors that he would have no trouble passing it, he was challenged by God to lay aside his ambition. For some time he had been asking God to fill him with the Holy Spirit because he was conscious of his unsatisfactory spiritual life as well as of his lack of power. He attempted to argue with the Lord by suggesting how much more glorious for Him to be served by a Doctor of Philosophy; the Lord showed him, however, that He had no such need. If he really wanted to be filled with the Holy Spirit he must not take the examination. He was perplexed. He agonized over this issue for two months, till the very Saturday before his examination was to occur on the following Monday, and while he as usual was once more waiting before the Lord for the message he was to give on the Lord’s Day. He was still troubled by this inner struggle. In desperation he finally yielded to the Lord and notified the school authorities that he would not come for the final examination. Yet he had been left so exhausted that he could not prepare for the message for the next day. Upon mounting the pulpit the next day to preach he simply told the congregation the story of what had just happened to him. There was not a dry eye in the whole congregation. He became

a man greatly used by God.”

“After I heard this story,” continued Watchman at the 1936 Kulongsu Conference, “I told the Lord that I was willing to set aside all hindrances to my receiving the power of the Holy Spirit. Between the years 1920 and 1922 I had confessed my sins and had apologized to at least two to three hundred people. I reckoned that each single sin was an obstacle. If I could get rid of all these sins, I would surely receive power. Nevertheless, having done all this I still did not receive power.

“By January of 1922 there was already a small gathering of the Lord’s people at ‘Tze Yuan’ [‘Tze Garden’]. I remembered one day that I was going to have to preach that very day. So I opened my Bible, trying to find a suitable subject. I happened to read Psalm 73, verse 25, which states: ‘Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.’ Upon reading it, I confessed that I could not say these words as the psalmist had said. At the time I knew that there was something hindering the relationship between me and God. For over ten years I had had deep affections for Charity.* She was not saved at that time. I tried to preach the gospel to her, but she always laughed at me. We truly loved each other. I let her laugh at the Lord Jesus whom I preached. In my heart she always occupied a very large place. I had frequently asked myself if I should continue to let her occupy such a place in my heart. We all know that when a young man is in love, it is most difficult for him to lay it aside. Although with my lips I said to God that I was willing to lay her aside, in my heart I was unwilling to do so. I now read that verse in the Psalms again. I could honestly confess that I could not lay her aside. During that entire week I could not say, ‘Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon

* Charity Chang was Watchman’s schooldays sweetheart.—*Translator*

earth that I desire besides thee' The Spirit of God had put His finger on this very issue as the hindrance to my being filled with the Holy Spirit. On that particular day I still went to preach, though I did not know what I was preaching about.

“Later on, I began to reason with God. I asked Him to give me power first, and then I would lay her aside. But God never reasons with men. In my youthfulness I promised God many things: I would go to Tibet to preach the gospel; I promised Him I would do this and that; but God would not listen. His finger persistently pointed at this girl friend as my obstacle. No matter how I prayed, I could not get through. My heart was really heavy. I even begged God to change His heart. But no, He insisted on my dealing with this matter. It was as though there was a piercing of my heart with a sharp sword. God wanted me to learn a deeper lesson; otherwise I would be of no use in His hand.

“On yet another day I preached in the morning. In the afternoon I was in my room under great heaviness of heart. I told God that since I would be going back to school the next Monday I wanted Him to fill me with the love of Christ. I was now ready to lay aside my lover. The love of Christ had so constrained me that I was determined to put her aside. With this decision made I could say from my heart the words of Psalm 73.25. My inside was filled with unspeakable joy. Even though I had not ascended to the *third* heaven, I could say I had been to the *second* heaven, so happy and full of joy was I. The world now became insignificant to me. I felt as though I were floating on a cloud. On the night when I was saved, the burden of my sins had been rolled away. On this day (13 February 1922), all obstacles in my heart had been removed. Not long afterwards many people were saved.”

It has been told that after this surrender of heart to God Watchman changed his clothes, put on coarser dress, took a roll of gospel

posters, went out to the streets, and affixed these posters to the walls. Such was the nature of his farewell to the world. He also composed a hymn on this occasion:

*What length, breadth, height and depth!
 What greatness is His love!
 How else could I, a sinner vile,
 Be in such grace and bliss?*

*My Lord has paid the price
 To buy me for Himself.
 So, willingly I'll bear the cross
 To follow Him steadfast.*

*I've now abandoned all
 That I may thus gain Christ.
 No thought or care of life or death,
 Nothing can hold me back.*

*Friends, pleasures, gain and fame . . .
 No longer useful be.
 My Lord became so poor for me,
 His poverty I'd share.*

*I love my Saviour dear;
 His praise is my desire.
 For Him, let ease be turned to pain,
 Let gain be turned to loss.*

*My Comforter Thou art,
 Jesus my gracious Lord!
 Who do I have in heav'n but Thee?
 Who else my love on earth?*

*I care not for the pain,
 Hardship and loneliness.
 Dear Lord, embrace my spirit, soul
 and body with Thy love.*

*I ask of Thee, my Lord,
 To guide me with Thy grace;
 Stand by my side to give me strength
 To safely pass through life.*

*Satan, flesh, and the world
Do tempt and press me sore;
Unless Thy might upholds me, Lord,
I just might shame Thy name.*

*While time is fleeting by,
Lift me above this world;
That at Thy return I can sing,
“Hallelujah, Amen.”*

During the second academic semester of 1922, evangelistic meetings began to be held at school. Hundreds came to experience the saving grace of God. At lunch times and in the evenings, there would be students praying in the chapel. The proctor of the school was amazed at the lack of disciplinary cases. During holidays, students (wearing gospel placards on their chests or backs) would go out to the streets to preach. In January of 1923 Miss Ruth Lee (formerly an avowed atheist but now a fulltime Christian worker) was invited to Foochow to conduct evangelistic meetings. Though only four preaching services were scheduled to be held, many people were saved. Watchman and his fellow-workers felt the need of continuing on. The Spirit of God moved so mightily that the meetings could not be stopped. Daily, many came to hear the gospel. Watchman recalled, “I have never seen a greater revival. People were saved daily. It seemed as if whoever met us got saved.” This continued on for about a month before they formally rented a place. Such was the beginning of the work in Foochow.

Watchman continued with his story. “In 1923 I was a young man. I had six fellow-workers who were also young in age. I frequently had arguments with one of them. We each had our temperament and particular idiosyncrasy. I said he was wrong, and he said I was wrong. Every Friday we had our co-workers’ meeting. The two of us often quarrelled. The other five would sit there listening to our wrangles. I acknowledged that I sometimes was wrong, but I believe he made more mistakes than I did. It was easy to confess my own fault, but it was hard to forgive another’s fault. On Saturdays I usually visited

Miss Barber, carrying my accusation to her. I told her that my fellow-worker was so wrong in this and other matters that she should admonish him. Then she would say to me, ‘He is five years older than you are. You should listen to him, because the scripture says, “ye younger, be subject unto the elder” (1 Peter 5.5)’.

“I asked her whether I must be subject to him with or without reason. This, I had said to myself, I could never do. Christians should be reasonable. Yet she would not listen to me, but merely insisted on what the Scriptures said. I was very angry within. Why should the Scriptures say such a thing! I dared not lose my temper before her. On most Saturdays I would go to her and accuse that fellow-worker who was older than I. But she always would answer the same way—that the younger should be subject to the older. She said it again and again. I was dying with frustration.

“On one particular Friday afternoon I had battled with that older brother most fiercely. In the evening I returned to my room and cried. (I can laugh now; but at that time I rarely laughed, though I frequently lost my temper.) I thought that by going once more to my spiritual sister I could receive some sympathy from her and at last get her to avenge me. Who would have thought that I would get absolutely no sympathy from her but would be strongly chastened by her instead! I deeply regretted that I had been born five years later than that older brother.

“Yet once more we two brothers quarrelled. This time I regarded him as totally unreasonable. I was sure now that I would be vindicated. So I went again to sister Barber to accuse my older brother. I asked her whether I should still be subject to one who had committed such gross error. She answered, ‘Right or wrong is an altogether different question. Let me ask you, Today you accuse your brother before me with such an attitude; are you like one who bears the cross? Do you have the spirit of the Lamb?’ After all these many

years I still cannot forget the questions she put to me that day. The duration of the contention between the older brother and me was about a year and a half in length. As I even now recall it, I today feel that that was the most precious time of learning in my life. I praise the Lord, for His ways are higher than our ways. During this one-and-a-half years, I came to know what bearing the cross meant. Today we have more than fifty co-workers in China.* Had I not learned the lesson in those one-and-a-half years, I today would not be able to work with anybody. During those eighteen months I had no opportunity to voice my opinion and see it vindicated. I returned time and again to my room to weep. I suffered greatly. But as I think back upon it all this day, those eighteen months were indeed most precious. God knew I was a difficult person. So He arranged a special environment by which to smooth off all my sharp corners. Thank and praise the Lord, His grace carried me through. Today I would like to say to my younger fellow-workers: If you are unable to stand the grinding of the cross, you are useless in the Lord's hand. Only the spirit of the Lamb, gentle and meek, is approved of the Lord. Your ambition and ability are useless to Him. In walking this way your attitude should constantly be, I will not reason with people but will instead be willing to bear the cross. In the Church, bearing the cross, not reasoning, is the law.”

During this period Watchman grew in his spiritual understanding. He discerned the difference between law and grace, hence he was able to preach a pure gospel. He also was led by the Lord to preach on the difference between the kingdom and eternal life, on the difference between grace and reward, and on the Second Coming of the Lord. He traveled to various places to lead meetings. “Between 1921 and 1923; reported Watchman in 1936, “the number of the saved increased quickly. At first I thought holding evangelistic

* It should be kept in mind that this was spoken in the year 1936.—*Translator*

meetings constituted the entire work of God. But by 1923 I realized that this was not His whole work. In reading the Book of Acts I saw that God wanted to raise up assemblies in various localities and that in the Church there should not be a mixture of the saved and the unsaved. Wheat and tares grow together in the world but not in the Church. There should indeed be the ingathering of souls and revivals in China, but there should also be the testimony of the Church: there should be people who in every place maintain the testimony of God. I now understood this to be God's purpose. Yet due to the fact that my fellow-worker did not have this light, I was sorely tried in spirit at the gathering in Foochow where I had been placed by the Lord. As the light we each received was different, our ways of working also differed. My brother's focus was on evangelism and revivals, but I wanted to build the local church."

In 1924 the question of ordination became a point of conflict between Watchman and his fellow-workers in Foochow. Some among them intended to invite an ordained missionary from Shanghai to come and have them ordained as ministers. Watchman strongly disapproved. He believed that according to Ephesians 4.11 ministers are the gifts of the ascended Christ to His Church. He accepted *divine* ordination, but not human ordination. He even preached a message on the ark of God among the Israelites, to the effect that once it had departed from Shiloh it never returned to that place, this thus signifying a warning to the believers not to backslide into old ways. This greatly displeased those brothers who were seeking after man's ordination.

Shortly thereafter, while he was away preaching, his fellow-workers in Foochow formally announced his expulsion from the work there. This aroused the resentment of many of the brethren in the gathering. They were determined to defend Watchman. In order to avert a split, however, he quietly left Foochow. A hymn which he wrote at the time gives expression to his inner feeling about

the situation:

*If from the right course I depart,
At once comfort I'll find;
But I remember how my Lord
Did suffer agony.*

*I'd utterly forsake this world,
And sever all the ties.
My path may narrow more and more;
I'm but a pilgrim here.*

*Though men may scowl and laugh to scorn,
I only want His smile.
Let others fancy outward shows,
His "best" is my desire.*

*Not after greatness do I seek,
Nor success in this life.
But humbly I would serve the Lord
That day to gain His praise.*

*I'm daily gazing at the light
Out of His judgment seat,
That all my living and my works
May stand the test of fire.*

*You may run after name and fame,
Or glory, wealth, and friends.
You can have all your great success,
Your followers and praise.*

*In solitude and poverty,
I wish to prosper not;
But faithfully I'll follow Him
Until I reach the goal.*

*I know, while here to earth He came,
His only gain was "death."
That's why no other wish have I
But with Him to suffer loss.*

*Since all my glories lie ahead,
Now patient I must be.*

*I will not go before my Lord
Much glory to receive.*

*That day, my honor I'll receive;
The Lord will dry my tears.
Today, while He must tarry still,
I'll press on faithfully.*

Having left Foochow, Watchman now traveled to Nanking and Shanghai. He received a word from the Lord in Luke 4.43 which records what Jesus declared: "I must preach the good tidings of the kingdom of God to the other cities also: for therefore was I sent." In November of the same year (1924) he went overseas with his mother to Malaya and spent about half a year abroad preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In May 1925 he returned to Foochow and rented a tiny but in Lo Hsing Pagoda, a small village down from the city near the sea. The following two years were a transitional period for him. It was also a time of rapid spiritual growth. Though he began to have a cough, he used this opportunity at Lo Hsing Pagoda to study intensively the Holy Scriptures as well as to read extensively the writings of such servants of God as Dean Henry Alford, B. F. Westcott, Martin Luther, John Knox, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, David Brainerd and others.

In 1926 while Watchman was preaching in South China he fell ill. He was told that he had tuberculosis and had only a few months to live. "I was not afraid of death, I had peace in my heart. But that night, when I thought upon the work of God, I felt I should not die. I must put into writing what lessons I had learned from the Lord in the past years, so that they would not go to the grave with me. And thus did I prepare to write *The Spiritual Man*."

On and off as his health permitted him, Watchman wrote this monumental three-volume work till he accomplished the writing of all of it in June of 1928. At that time it was his thought that he had

made his very last contribution to the Church; and so he prayed, “Now let Your servant depart in peace” (see Luke 2.29).

It should be noted that towards the end of 1926 Watchman had been invited to Nanking for rest and to help with the translation into Chinese of the Scofield Correspondence Course. By May 1927 he went on to Shanghai. There he renewed his fellowship with some brothers and sisters who had arrived in that city ahead of him and who had already begun to break bread at the Lord’s Table in Peace Wang’s house at Hsiu Garden. From there the gathering moved to Keng Ching Lane, and then, in 1928, to Wen Teh Lane along Hardoon Road.

It was while Watchman was in Shanghai that he experienced deliverance from sin. “For years after my conversion I had been taught that the way of deliverance was to reckon myself dead to sin and alive to God (see Romans 6.11). I ‘reckoned’ from 1920 to 1927, but the trouble was that the more I did so, the more alive to sin I clearly was. I simply could not believe myself dead, and I could not produce death. Sin was still defeating me, and I saw that something was fundamentally wrong. . . . No one, you see, had pointed out to me that ‘knowing’ (verse 6 of Romans 8) must precede ‘reckoning’ (verse 11). For months I was troubled and prayed earnestly, reading the Scriptures and seeking light. I said to the Lord, ‘If I cannot be brought to see this which is so fundamental, I will not preach anymore. I want first to get clear on this.’

“I remember one morning—how can I ever forget it!—that I was sitting upstairs reading Romans and came to the words: ‘knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin.’ *Knowing this!* How could I know it? I prayed, ‘Lord, open my eyes!’; and then, in a flash, I saw. I had earlier been reading 1 Corinthians 1.30: ‘ye [are] in Christ Jesus.’ I now turned to that

passage and looked at it again: ‘of him [God] are ye in Christ Jesus . . .’ The fact that you are in Christ Jesus is *God’s* doing! It was amazing! So then, if Christ died, and that is a certain fact, and if God put me into Him, then *I* must have died too. All at once I saw my oneness with Christ—that I was in Him and that when He died I died. My death to sin was a matter of the past and not of the future. It was Divine fact that had dawned upon me.

“Carried away with joy I jumped from my chair and ran downstairs to the young man working in the kitchen. ‘Brother’; I said, seizing him by the hands, ‘do you know that I have died?’ I must admit he looked puzzled. ‘What do you mean?’ he exclaimed. So I went on: ‘Do you not know that Christ has died? Do you not know that I died with Him? Do you not know that my death is no less truly a fact than His?’ Oh, it was so *real* to me! I felt like shouting my discovery all through the streets of Shanghai. From that day to this I have never for one moment doubted the finality of that word in Galatians 2.20: ‘I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me.’”

At the beginning of 1929, Watchman returned to Foochow to attend to some family affairs. In his heart he was ready to say or do anything God required if only he might recover his health. One day he met on the street his former professor at Trinity College. The latter looked at him through and through, and then sighed, “What has happened to you? We had high hopes for you at school, that you would achieve something great. Now look at yourself. What a pity!” It was true that his health was broken and that in the eyes of the world he had nothing praiseworthy to show forth. For a moment he felt very ashamed and was close to tears. Then, in the very next instant, he looked up to heaven and said, “Lord, I praise You that I have chosen the best way.” At that very moment the Spirit of glory filled his heart!

Returning to Shanghai he continued to serve the Lord with all the strength he had remaining. “Each afternoon I had fever, and through the entire night I could not sleep. I sweated cold sweat. I could hardly believe I could continue to live. Some brothers advised me to take more rest, but I felt I would rather work than rest. If God considered my work unfinished, then I would live. Otherwise, I had no longing to live in this world. I prayed and asked God to show me what I should do before I left this world. I forced myself to get up from bed and lead meetings. On the way to the meetings I had to hold on to the lampposts from time to time to steady myself. I would pray, rest, and then walk on. I told the Lord that it was worthy to die for Him.”

Watchman’s disease worsened. He explained the situation as follows: “At night I woke up every five minutes. I perspired a great deal. My hearing was so poor that people had to put their mouths near my ears for me to hear. My voice got coarse. Death seemed to be imminent. Telegrams were sent to various places asking for prayers. Nothing seemed to happen. A sister who was a nurse saw me and wept, for she had seen many severely-ill patients but none worse than I. Probably it had become a matter of three or four days before I would die. And when I learned about it from others I said that that was fine with me. In fact, I tried to comfort them.

“One day I inquired of God why He was treating me thus. I confessed many sins and tried to set all things of my life in order. My only fear was lest I would be unfaithful and without faith. I fasted and prayed for a whole day, rededicated myself to God, and promised to do His work only. From morning till three o’clock in the afternoon, my fellow-workers were praying in sister Ruth Lee’s house. God granted me faith. Indeed, He gave me several words from the Scriptures concerning faith: ‘in faith ye *stand* fast’ (2 Cor. 1.24), ‘we *walk* by faith’ (2 Cor. 5.7), and ‘the righteous shall *live* by faith’ (Rom. 1.17). I rejoiced and thanked God that my Lord had healed

me.

“Immediately the testing came. I felt I should stand up. Yet how could I stand up? My heart struggled within me. After all, there was self-love in me. It was better to die in bed than to die attempting to stand. But the word of God was powerful. I had been in bed for one hundred and seventy-six days. I had not dressed myself once in all that time! But I found my clothes and got dressed. My perspiration fell like rainfall. Satan tempted me by suggesting that since I could hardly sit, how could I ever stand! I said in response, If God said stand, I stand: ‘in faith ye *stand*.’ As I stood up, I felt as though I were standing on cotton.

“Then God’s word came to me to ‘*walk* by faith.’ I thought it was quite a feat to stand; but how could I walk? I asked God where I should go. Go downstairs, came the answer. But the stairway was so straight up and high. I told God that I could walk in the room, but how could I go downstairs?!? I prayed and went to the door that led to the stairway. I opened the door and started to go down. I said to God that even if I died in walking I would walk. ‘Yet *I* cannot; therefore, help me, O Lord.’ I went down the stairs, indeed, holding on to the railing. There were in all twenty-five steps on the stairway.

“Upon my arrival at the bottom of the stairs, I walked quickly across the lane to sister Lee’s house. I prayed, ‘O Lord, hereafter, I shall *live* by faith.’ I knocked at the door. Unfortunately, there was no Rhoda who came to open the door for me (see Acts 12.13-14). The brothers and sisters had been fasting and praying for two or three days. And as I walked in, the scene grew similar to that with which Peter was confronted. The eyes of seven or eight people were all on me. No one dared to say a word or even to move. There was absolute silence. From half an hour and then to an hour, everyone was in the presence of God. I sat down with my heart full of thanks to the Lord. Whereupon I gave a brief portion of my testimony. Therefore I was

no longer bedridden.

“About four years ago [which would be around 1932], I went to a doctor’s house where some curtains were being auctioned . It was the house of the German doctor who had previously taken my chest X-rays. [In the space of two months] I had had my X-rays taken by him three times. On each occasion he voiced pessimism about the results. And on the fourth and last occasion I had gone to him, he refused even to take an X-ray of me. Instead, he showed me one taken of another person whose condition was better than mine but who had died within two weeks of having had the X-ray taken. He told me not to come back again. What he meant was, that I was to go home and wait for death. Yet who would have thought that this doctor would die first? I lifted up my hands in praise to God! By the grace of the Lord, and under His blood, I had remained alive!

“Moreover, through my illness I came to know what God wanted me to do next. God was seeking for overcomers in many places, people who would put themselves in God’s hand. Before I had become sick I not only had conducted meetings in many places but had also had the ambition of writing the best commentary on the entire Bible. After the illness, however, it became clear to me that this was not God’s will for me. Now it so happened that many years before, towards the end of 1922, I had published some issues of *The Present Testimony* magazine in Foochow. It now became clear to me after my severe illness that in the future, instead of gospel truths, commentaries, prophecies or doctrine, the central message of life would be printed in that magazine. Having had fellowship with brothers and sisters in many places, I saw that God had raised up many assemblies. But I also saw that as soon as the testimony concerning the Church began, opposition and slander came from all sides. Yet nothing moved us, for we knew what God had entrusted to us. Even as Paul had learned, we knew we must not be disobedient to the heavenly vision (see Acts 26.19).”

After the visit from the West of some “Exclusive Brethren” to Shanghai in October and November of 1932, Watchman was invited to repay their visit by going to England, the United States and Canada in June 1933. While in Great Britain he had the opportunity of seeing George Cutting, the author of the well-known Christian tract, *Safety, Certainty and Enjoyment*. Once, however, he slipped away from his Brethren hosts and visited the Christian Fellowship and Ministry Center at Honor Oak Road, London. He did not meet its key leader, Mr. T. Austin-Sparks, whom he had especially gone to see, but he did break bread with the saints there on the Lord’s Day. When this was heard of by the Exclusive Brethren, it was to them an unpardonable sin. After Watchman’s return to China, and following many communications back and forth, in 1935 they formally severed all fellowship with the brethren who met in the assembly in Shanghai as well as in other Chinese localities. Watchman and the brethren with him maintained that fellowship must be open to all God’s people. It is based on life, not on light. “Wherefore receive ye one another, even as Christ also received you, to the glory of God” (Rom. 15.7)*

In God’s providence an unexpected and happy turn of events came into Watchman’s life. His schooldays sweetheart, Charity Chang, whom he had much earlier given up for the Lord’s sake, was eventually saved and began to walk with the Lord. They met again, and their buried feelings towards each other were rekindled. After much prayer he concluded that it was God’s will for them to be united in marriage. The matter was negotiated and finalized by Watchman’s mother and Charity’s uncle, Chang Shui-Kwan, who

* For a more detailed discussion of this years-long incident, together with the complete text of the final reply made to these Exclusive Brethren by Watchman Nee and his fellow brethren at Shanghai, the reader can consult “A Reply to the Brethren Assembly in London,” in Watchman Nee, *Back to the Cross* (New York: Christian Fellowship Publishers, 1988), pp. 105-22.—*Translator*

was the family's legal head. It was the wish of Watchman's mother to have the wedding held on 19 October 1934, for that day was the anniversary of her own wedding. Watchman at first objected, because this would fall on the last day of the Fourth Victory Conference, held at Hanchow. He did not wish his wedding to interfere with the working of the Spirit of God at the Conference. He yielded to the persuasion of the brethren, however, and was united with Charity in a Christian marriage on that very afternoon.

But a vicious storm of animosity broke out after his wedding. Charity's aunt, Chang Mei-Chen, had vigorously objected to the match. She had in mind that her niece should have married a wealthy man. Bitter over what had happened, she placed a harshly-worded advertisement in a national daily paper for a whole week as a means to attack Watchman's moral character. She also printed tracts and distributed them among Christian circles. Indeed, she caused quite a turmoil among many Christians. This forced Watchman for a time to cease public ministry, and he retreated to a place that was far distant from Shanghai. Even when he and his wife returned to Shanghai after several months, Watchman still did not want to preach in public. At the suggestion of Ruth Lee, though, he did consent to lead a study on the Old Testament book, the Song of Solomon, with about ten fellow-workers at West Lake, Hanchow, for two weeks. The notes taken were later published in Chinese as *The Song of Songs*.

During the first part of the year 1935, Watchman felt the need for a breakthrough in his spiritual life. He thought of traveling to England to visit Mr. Austin-Sparks for help. While on his way there, but before he left China, Watchman and his wife spent some time with the American missionaries, Dr. and Mrs. Thornton Stearns, in Chefoo, North China. It so happened that at this same time Miss Elizabeth Fischbacher from Scotland was also a guest in the Stearns' home. They had wonderful fellowship together. Especially through the help of sister Fischbacher Watchman came into an experience of

the outpouring of the Holy Spirit while he was praying by himself. He was refreshed in his spirit. Whereupon he sent a briefly-worded telegram from Chefoo to Shanghai which simply declared: "I have met the Lord." Instead of continuing forward on the contemplated journey to England, he returned to Shanghai. Every morning for a whole week he met with his fellow-workers there searching the Scriptures together on this new experience of his and praying together. Then during September and October of the same year (1935), in a Special Conference that was called, he spoke on the theme, "The Victorious Life and the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit." A revival broke out, and soon it spread to South China.

But as the Spirit of God was moving, the enemy was also busily at work. Several important incidents happened. In reviewing the situation Watchman and his fellow-workers came to the conclusion that Calvary must precede Pentecost, that the cross always precedes the power. This was indeed a most valuable lesson to learn.

In 1937 the Sino-Japanese War broke out. In the middle of 1938, Watchman traveled to England once again. This time he was able to see and fellowship with Mr. Sparks. He also ministered in both England and Denmark. It was in Denmark, incidentally, at the International School in Helsingor, that Watchman delivered a series of messages on Romans chapters 5-8, and which he had entitled, "The Normal Christian Life."

Returning to Shanghai in July 1939, Watchman took upon himself the work of training his fellow-workers. Realizing that the war would be long and the financial needs of the work would be great, he went into a business that ultimately proved to be a dark chapter in his life. Though he managed to channel some of the profits of his pharmaceutical firm to support his fellow-workers during that difficult time, he was greatly misunderstood by the church-at-large; with the result that at the end of 1942, he was asked by the

responsible brothers in the assembly at Shanghai to discontinue ministering there.

Believing in the sanctity of the Church, Watchman accepted their decision and retreated to Foochow. There he quietly prepared for the future. He began to buy some houses on Kuling Mountain, outside the city of Foochow, for creating a future training ground. He patiently endured all misunderstanding and refused to defend himself. Later he traveled to Chungking, the war capital of Free China. There, at the earnest and persistent requests of the saints who gathered in the name of the Lord Jesus in the capital city and the surrounding suburban areas, he ministered God's word to them for a short period. These were hidden years for Watchman.

The eight long years of the Sino-Japanese War finally came to an end. On 16 August 1945 the Japanese surrendered unconditionally, and the armistice with China was signed on 9 September at Nanking. Watchman managed to return to Shanghai, but the assembly there was still not ready to receive him. Not until April of 1948 did he have the first opportunity of addressing the saints in Shanghai. In his first address, and referring to himself in the third person, Watchman said that he was like a widow who had to raise a family of children. Because of this she had to remarry, hoping thus that she might be able to feed all of them. Unexpectedly, however, all her children deserted her after the second marriage. He used this simile to explain how he felt compelled to engage in business. At this point in his address Watchman broke down in tears. As he continued speaking, a great many of the saints touched the life of Christ and felt the authority of the Spirit. The atmosphere of the gathering suddenly changed. All the past misunderstandings vanished without the need of further explanation. The floodgates of God's blessing were thus opened, with quite a revival breaking out in Shanghai. People rededicated their lives to God and gave their all for the Lord's interests.

Watchman's burden at that time was the training of workers. He felt that his ministry was to minister to those who ministered. And hence, from June to the end of September 1948 the first training conference on Kuling Mountain was held. About seventy fellow-workers attended. These were months of intensive training. Meetings were held four or five days weekly. In the morning sessions Watchman would speak on such important subjects as the character of God's workman, the ministry of God's word, spiritual authority and submission, and so on. The afternoon sessions were given over to personal testimonies: one after another, the participants would give their own testimonies, to be followed by critiques—first by the other participants and last by Watchman himself. This was done for the purpose of helping to perfect the fellow-workers, since objective observers usually see more clearly than the persons themselves. However, this kind of critique could only be done among those who were fully committed to the Lord and to one another in the Lord. The evening sessions were devoted to helping in the training of new believers. The now well-known fifty-two Basic Lessons were given during these sessions.

A second training conference was held, commencing in the spring of 1949. About a hundred people participated this time. There was a point at which the completion of the conference was very much in doubt. The civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists came very near to Foochow. Though the training sessions were eventually moved down from Kuling Mountain to the city itself, there was a real question as to whether they could continue. After days of prayer and waiting on the Lord, Watchman received assurance from heaven above that the training should continue and that it would be completed.

Upon the conclusion of this second training conference, Watchman went to Hong Kong. From there he returned to Shanghai, which had already been occupied by the Communist army since 25

May 1949. He was concerned about the churches in China and wished to take a closer look at the changing circumstances. According to his observation, he felt the work could still continue on for a number of years. At the end of that same year he once again returned to Hong Kong where his family was. In January 1950 he conducted a special conference at Hong Kong that lasted a month. A revival broke out. This marked, in fact, a new departure in the history of the Lord's testimony there.

Watchman strongly sensed, however, that his responsibility lay with the brethren back in China. Though he knew the danger awaiting him, he decided to return to Shanghai once more. In spite of the pleadings of some brothers that he not return, his heart was nonetheless set toward Shanghai. Once back in that city, he himself worked most diligently, and exhorted the saints to "buy up the opportunity, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5.16 mg.). Moreover, he planned and prepared feverishly for the future days when he felt the movement of the workers would be restricted and the work would be prohibited entirely. Such days, unfortunately, came sooner than he thought.

In April of 1951 the new Communist government called the leaders of the various Christian groups in China (among whom was Watchman) to Peking for a meeting, during which the government explained its attitude towards the freedom of religion as guaranteed by the Provisional Constitution proclaimed by the Communists. There would be freedom of religion, government officials indicated, but such a privilege was to be enjoyed only by people loyal to the People's Republic of China and not by "reactionaries" or "anti-revolutionists." A drastic change soon came to the Church in China. "Accusation meetings" against those in all walks of life were now being staged all over the land. Christian groups were no exception. Under such pressure as this, Watchman and his fellow-workers labored day and night to prepare Bible materials and

spiritual messages for the saints as means of strengthening their faith.

Shortly before he lost his freedom Watchman wrote a hymn which might reveal his heart condition before the Lord at this time:

*Since long ago at Bethany we parted,
 Within my heart there is a ceaseless void;
 How can I take my harp down from the willow?
 How can my songs without Thee be enjoyed.?*

*And when at night I'm keeping lonely vigil,
 Grown numb alike to sorrow and to cheer,
 Then I recall the promise of Thy coming,
 But sigh, O Lord, why, why Thou dost not yet appear?*

*The manger wakes the thought: I too am homeless;
 Thy cross strips earthly pleasures from my soul;
 Thy coming bids me seek a better country,
 For Thou Thyself art now my final goal.*

*Since Thou art gone my joy has lost its flavor;
 My song the sweetness I would fain convey.
 Since Thou art gone the sense of void o'erwhelms me,
 Oh, how I long that Thou wilt come and not delay.*

*Though even now I know Thy loving presence,
 Yet in my heart there's still a sense of lack.
 Enlightening and tenderest sustaining
 Can no more satisfy: I want Thee back.*

*Despite Thy peace within, I still feel lonely;
 Despite Thy joy there still remains a sigh;
 When I feel more content, the silent yearning
 To see Thee face to face becomes an uttered cry.*

*What exile cannot but desire his homeland
 And long his people once again to greet?
 What soul on alien soil forgets his kindred?
 What parted lovers never yearn to meet?*

*O Lord, how can these earthly loves and pleasures
 With all the joy of Thy return compare?
 Then, if I cannot here behold Thy countenance,*

*What can I do but sigh till Thou, my Lord, appear?
Could'st Thou, O Lord, forget Thy word of promise
Soon to return and take me unto Thee?
Yet day by day and year by year I've waited
And still I wait, and no return I see.*

*Remember, Lord, the years I have been waiting
While Thy dear footsteps linger far away.
How long? How long? Oh! must I wait still longer
Till Thou shalt come again in glorious array?*

*From generation unto generation
Thy saints have come and gone, but have not seen
Thy glorious promise pass into fulfillment.
How long, how very long the time has been!*

*Why cannot we, dear Lord, discern Thy footsteps?
Why are the heavens still so closely sealed?
Oh! must our waiting be prolonged still further
Before Thou in Thy matchless splendor art revealed?*

*Lord, I recall the many years I've waited
For Thy return—yet, Lord, not I alone,
But Thy dear saints through many generations—
Beseeching Thee to come back for Thine own.*

*To countless tears and countless fervent pleadings,
By Thine appearing haste to make reply.
Oh, may Thou come, the echo of the ages,
Come, come and answer now this mighty corp'rate cry!*

In April of 1952 Watchman was ordered by the Communist Chinese government to go to Manchuria. There he was arrested by the Department of Public Safety on the 10th of April. He was kept imprisoned in Harbin. No one knew what had happened to him for the government kept everything secret. Between 1952 and 1956, the government quietly prepared materials for his prosecution. On 18 January 1956 the Religious Affairs Bureau called a series of meetings in the Church Assembly Hall at Nanyang Road, Shanghai. The whole congregation was required to be present. A list of criminal charges was brought against Watchman and his fellow-workers. The

first official announcement of his arrest was printed in the *People's Liberation Daily*, Shanghai, on the first of February.

On 21 June 1956 Watchman appeared before the High Court in Shanghai and was found guilty of all charges. He was given the maximum sentence of fifteen years imprisonment, running from 12 April 1952. He was to serve his sentence in the First Municipal Prison in Shanghai. There he was assigned to translate scientific textbooks and journal articles from English into Chinese for government use. His wife Charity was permitted to visit him once a month under supervision. By April 1967 he had served his fifteen years, but he was not released. The authorities had attempted to force him to renounce his faith. Rumors had already been circulated that Watchman had given up his faith. But the Lord was dearer to him than his freedom. And thus his sentence was extended another five years.

He was secretly transferred from the Municipal Prison to Tsing-Tong Labor Farm in Tsing-Po County, a suburb of Shanghai. His wife was able to visit him there once. Then, suddenly, for several months there was no news of him. As a matter of fact, in January of 1970 Watchman was transferred to a stricter labor camp called White Mao Mountain Farm in far-off KwangTeh County, Anhwei Province. Unfortunately, his beloved wife Charity, having suffered a fall, passed away in late September 1971. This was a serious blow to Watchman, but he received it with resignation. He had long harbored a secret wish to be reunited with his wife after serving the entire twenty years. It was told that he once said to a fellow-prisoner, "My term of imprisonment and my wife's life are racing against each other. If I can be released while she is still living, I will take good care of her. For she has suffered much for me." His intense feeling of loss was nonetheless expressed in a letter he wrote to his sister-in-law, in which he said he was so heartbroken that he experienced a sorrow deeper than that of losing his parents. He asked

that a pinch of his wife's hair and the face towel she used be brought to him as a memorial for remembrance.

On 12 April 1972 he completed his twenty-year prison term. There was expectation that he would be released, but nothing was heard. On 22 April he wrote to his sister-in-law:

Elder sister Ping-Tseng:

I have received your letter of 7 April and learned from it that you have not received mine which acknowledged the receipt of each parcel you sent me. All the things you mentioned in your letter I have received. I am most grateful to you.

You know my physical condition. It is a chronic disease, an organic disease. When attacks come, they are most painful. At times of recession the disease is still with me. The difference is in the degree of activity, not in the sense of recovery. The summer has arrived. More exposure to sunlight may change a little the color of the skin, but it cannot affect the illness. However, please do not worry, because I maintain my joy. I hope you will also take good care of yourself. May your heart be filled with joy.

Wishing you well,

Shu-Tsu

April 22

The chronic disease to which the ailing Watchman referred was a severe case of heart disease. For several decades he had suffered enlargement of his heart. It was said to have doubled its original size. The doctor had told him he might drop dead at any time. He could not lift any weight. Many nights he would sit through till dawn because he could not lie down. The Lord had healed his tuberculosis miraculously and instantaneously, but his heart disease was never cured. Watchman himself once testified that in the healing of his tuberculosis he had experienced *the healing* of the Lord, but in the case of his heart disease he knew the Lord as *the Healer*. He lived daily by the resurrection life of the Lord. Indeed, it was nothing short of a miracle that he was able to live through the twenty years of hard

imprisonment. The Lord's life and the prayers of the saints must have sustained him.

On 6 May of the same year he wrote another letter to his sister-in-law:

Elder sister Ping-Tseng:

Tomorrow will be the half year anniversary of the death of sister Wei [a reference to Watchman's wife Ping-wei Chang]. The change during this half year is indeed very great. In looking back and touching the souvenir [i.e., the pinch of Charity's hair and face towel that had been sent him at his request], it causes me persistent heart pain. For the past twenty years [i.e., during his imprisonment] I was unable to serve her even once. This shall be my lifelong regret. It is all my fault that gave her trouble. My sickness lingers on. It fluctuates often. I try my best to live frugally that I may not trouble others. In sickness I really think much about my own people [i.e., his relatives] hoping to be with them. But I must submit to the dictate of environment. In the past ten days I was beside myself in pondering over sister Wei. How is your health? You are in my constant remembrance. Elderly people must take special care of themselves. Are you still considering coming to the South? I am at a loss as to what to say. I can only wish you well.

*Shu-Tsu
May 6*

On 16 May he wrote again to his sister-in-law:

Elder sister Ping-Tseng:

Your letter from Beijing dated the 6th and your letter from Shanghai dated the 11th have all been received. I hope this visit of yours could be longer so as to get more rest. In my illness I too long to have more contact with my own people. The mountain here is natural and the water is clear. One thing special here is that the children grow up healthier than those I saw in Shanghai. Hope you may have more rest. The ashes of sister Wei is a real problem. Let us decide about it after you come here. I do not have

any particular need. Maybe bring me a flashlight. I wish you well.

*Shu-Tsu
May 16*

A further letter to his sister-in-law was sent date 22 May:

Elder sister Ping-Tseng:

I talk with my superior about my leaving this place. He said, "It is impossible for you to go to Beijing or Shanghai. You have to go to a small place or village. When the proper document arrives, the government will process it according to its policy. You have no need to talk further with me."

So please try to find among my own people one who can facilitate my release. You can tell that person that I have my own livelihood and that I hope he will accept me. Please ask the community council to issue a permit of my acceptance into their locality.

Hope you can find one among my people. Shun-Tau Ma can also be one to consult with. Please discuss with him or somebody else. [Shun-Tau Ma was the husband of another of Watchman Nee's nieces who together with her husband had taken care of Mrs. Nee during Watchman's imprisonment.]

Saturday night my illness struck again. For several hours my heart trembled. I could endure only after I took medicine. I slept in bed the whole Sunday. In sickness I desire much to be with my own people just like "the fallen leaf returning to its root." I have lost contact with my own people for twenty years. So, I can only ask of you.

When you come, can you bring me one kilogram of meat hash and a kilogram of dried beef. The doctor told me not to eat egg yolk, fatty meat and internal organs because they will seriously damage my weakened heart muscles. So I can only eat lean meat without which I will be in lack of protein. Pretty troublesome.

Wishing you well,

*Shu-Tsu
May 22*

On the very same day brother Nee also wrote a letter to his niece's husband:

Shu-Tau, my nephew-in-law:

I believe your aunt [Watchman's late wife] while living must have told you about my condition.

You know my elder sister sends me my living expenses, so I have no problem of livelihood. I am old and sickly. I long to return to my own people as a fallen leaf returning to its root, to find a resting place. I earnestly hope you can take the responsibility of settling this matter. I depend on you to negotiate on all sides.

Your aunt had passed away six and a half month ago. My heart is broken. I could hardly live. I hope you will do your uttermost to send the document here. Your aunt while living mentioned many times of Hui-Nee and her children. I wonder how the children are now? Much remembrance.

I heard that in going to Chekiang there will be a problem of food coupons. [Brother Nee's niece had died and her husband had evidently moved to Chekiang.] I think I eat very little, and so it can be solved. Never mind.

Have not corresponded for twenty some years, but much remembered.

Wish you wel

Shu-Tsu

May 22

Two more letters were written by Watchman: one on 25 May to his sister-in-law and one on 26 May to his nephew-in-law Shun-Tau Ma:

Elder sister Ping-Tseng:

Tomorrow I shall be transferred from Maple Peak to the farm in Mountain Slope. So when you come, do not buy a ticket to Maple Peak. You should disembark at Mountain Slope. This station is a little farther than that of Maple Peak. It is the next

station. I had written a letter to you earlier than this one. I wonder if you have already received it. I hope to see you soon.

Wishing you well,

Shu-Tsu

May 25

Shun-Tau:

While in Maple Peak I had written you a letter, asking you to get a permit from your community council, proving that you are willing to take me in and also to provide for my living (you know my elder sister sends me my living expenses). Your attitude must be firm and clear . . .

Today I am transferred from Maple Peak to White Cloud Mountain Renovation Group. Hope you try your utmost best to get a reply. This document must be sent directly to the 14th Corp of White Cloud Mountain Farm. Please ask the community council to address the paper to White Cloud Mountain Farm, Kwang-Teh City, Anhwei Province. I eagerly hope to return to my own people. Please do your best.

Wish you well

Shu-Tsu

May 26

Then on the 30th of May 1972 Watchman Nee wrote what proved to be his last letter:

Elder sister Ping-Tseng:

I was transferred to the 14th Corp of Mountain Slope. This is a distance of 10 li [equal to 3 1/3 English miles] from the station. And also you must climb over a mountain. It is therefore not easy for you to come. You may [want to] cancel your trip. In sickness I still retain joy in my heart. Please do not worry. I shall still encourage myself not to moan over my sickness. As to the ashes of Ping-Wei [Watchman's late wife], please do what you feel right. I commit it to you and fully agree with your desire. Short paper but long affection.

Wish you well

*Shu-Tsu
May 30*

It appears as though brother Nee knew he would soon depart from the world. Indeed, he went to be with the Lord in the early morning of the next day.

On the first day of June 1972, while his sister-in-law was yet at Shanghai, she received a telegram from the White Mao Mountain Farm Labor Camp that simply read: “Watchman Nee died of sickness at the foot of the mountain.” Immediately upon hearing this sad news it was decided that Watchman’s sister-in-law, Ping-Tseng, his niece’s husband, Shung Wu, and his grandniece, Shao Ling Pao, would travel together to the Labor Camp. Two days later, on the third of June, the party of three arrived in Kwang-Teh County, but Shung Wu was able to proceed farther and to reach the Labor Camp at dusk of that same day. Having inquired about Watchman’s death, Shung Wu was told that, not having seen the prisoner come out of his room, shortly after nine o’clock in the morning on the 30th of May, prison officials pushed open the door of his room and found Watchman on the bed, barely breathing. Immediately they asked the Camp’s hygiene officer to examine him. Realizing the seriousness of his situation, they sent Watchman Nee by car to the Labor Camp Clinic which was situated at the foot of the mountain. All efforts there to rescue him failed and the stricken Watchman died at 2:00 A.M., 31 May. Captain Loh of the disciplinary corps declared it to have been a suicide—for, he said, he had a suicide note as proof. Prison officials had found a note under the mattress near his pillow. When pressed for it by Shung Wu, Captain Loh showed the note to him. It was truly in Watchman’s handwriting, written in large letters on a page taken from a notebook. It read:

Christ is the Son of God, who died to atone for men’s sins and who rose on the third day. This is the greatest fact in the universe. I believe in Christ and die.

*Signed,
Watchman Nee*

Upon his reading the note Shung Wu told Captain Loh that this was not a suicide note at all. Watchman had apparently had the premonition that due to his physical condition he would not live long. But he believed in the Christ he confessed even unto death. Furthermore, did not the telegram itself say that Watchman had died of sickness? Naturally, Captain Loh did not understand the meaning of the words, "I believe in Christ and die."

Captain Loh also reported to Shung Wu that because of the heat, they had cremated Watchman's body without waiting for the arrival of his relatives.

The next day, Ping Tseng and Shao Ling Pao both arrived at the Labor Camp. They were told the same story and were not allowed to enter Watchman's room to gather up things left behind.

Later, permission was given to the party to go to the crematory to collect Watchman's ashes. It was not a real crematory but a Labor Camp kiln which served the dual purpose of producing bricks and cremating bodies. The three relatives found the person who a few days earlier had cremated Watchman's body and inquired of him about the condition of the body. Said the cremator: "It was a peaceful body, nothing abnormal at all." "Would you say it was like the body of anyone who had committed suicide?" they asked. He replied that he had cremated many corpses and could surely recognize among them those that had committed suicide, but that he was certain Watchman's death was not a case of suicide because his body appeared so peaceful and joyful and most normal.

Indeed, Watchman Nee had kept his faith in Christ even unto death, and had maintained his joy to the very end.

Watchman's ashes were first buried temporarily in a mulberry field at Hai-Ning, Chekiang (a province west of Shanghai); but in October of 1989 they were finally laid to rest in Shang-San Public Cemetery at Soochow (not far from Shanghai), with a simple white marble tablet having been erected over the remains as a memorial.