

## **Hit Doubly by Covid-19 Pandemic and Flooding**

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### **Homes Battered by Rainstorms**

While the Covid-19 pandemic has yet to come under control, the continuous rainstorms since late May have caused extensive flooding to provinces around the Yangtze River and Huai River. Over 40 million people have been adversely affected.

Many cities have seen a back flow of water, and in remote regions, especially the mountainous areas, villages and cities without proper drainage systems have been hit particularly hard. In many counties, the continuous downpours have led to mud-rock flow, cave-ins, blockage of roads and suspension of water and electricity. People's lives were under threat and casualties were numerous. Homes were destroyed, and churches severely damaged.

According to media reports, the severity of flooding and the extent of areas affected are unprecedented compared to the past few decades. This might be attributed to global warming and extreme weather. Meanwhile, another contributing factor is the movement of a large rural population to the cities during the initial stage of the country's reform and opening up to meet the needs for workers developing the secondary and tertiary industries (e.g. raw materials processing and service industries). The urbanization process has resulted in positive impact in that economic growth is stimulated, individuals are offered better development opportunities and people's quality of life is improved, etc. Yet, it has also brought about negative consequences.



Firstly, it has led to a gap in the development between the cities and rural areas. According to figures of the National Bureau of Statistics on per capita disposable income in 2019, the income of urban dwellers was close to three times that of the rural villagers.<sup>1</sup> The gap between the urban and rural areas is reflected in the difference in their economic development. As more young people are drawn into the cities, development of villages in particular their living environment, medical services and drainage works have been seriously hampered. Rapid urbanization has also led to excessive exploitation of natural resources, which is detrimental to the environment. For instance, deforestation has loosened up soil over vast areas which are very susceptible to mud-rock flow and cave-in during continuous rainstorms.

In addition, sectors like import and export, retail and logistics have also been dealt a serious blow by the Sino-US trade war and city lockdown as a result of the pandemic. As major efforts are devoted to helping the economy to regain momentum, will development of cities be further accelerated? In this process, how can a balance be struck with environmental protection?

## Tearful Stories During the Flood

Heavy rainstorms have caused serious mud-rock flow, destroying people's homes and driving people out of their hometown. During the floods, mainland churches of different regions have relayed to us some heart-breaking stories:



... On 24 June, the heavy rainstorm caused a landslide. In a village in the southwestern region where people were farmers, many members in a family died in the flood, leaving behind two children under 10 years old and two very old parents. The family was in dire straits as there was no one working to support the family.

... The livestock kept by many families died and crops were also washed away, and not much food was left. Brothers and sisters of churches in the counties and villages have attempted to go into the mountains to find missing residents. However, the rain kept falling and even the rescue teams could not venture into the mountains. Could the trapped residents be rescued?

...A church for the grassroots in the mountainous area, its main door, house for the pastor, kitchen and pond were all destroyed. A couple who were elders of the church were carried away by the flood. The husband's body was found, but the wife's body was still missing. Although the church had not been completely damaged, was the site still safe? Did it have to be demolished and rebuilt?

## Looking Up to God in Times of Difficulties

Amidst the unrelenting flood, the church should not be just a building and pastors and believers should not just sit back and do nothing. Instead, they should take action and offer assistance. Pastor Cui in a church in the southwestern region said, "During the pandemic and natural disasters, more people have actually experienced God more deeply and reflected upon the meaning of life again. As a result, their life has been renewed. Indeed, the pandemic and disasters are a melting pot whereby the true and false Christians can be identified. In addition, as church gatherings and activities have ceased, we have to be on guard against the influence of heresy and traditional beliefs."

## We Need Your Prayer Support!

**Power of traditional beliefs:** In the southwestern region which was most seriously affected, the population comprises relatively more farmers with low education attainment as well as ethnic minorities. They (including believers) are still affected by traditional beliefs in their way of thinking, as for example they might believe in curses, ghosts and wizardry, etc. As the pandemic and flooding happened one after the other, they thought that these natural disasters were punishments meted out by an angry god for the sins they committed. Pray that God will give a discerning heart to these people and believers so that they shall not be led astray by traditional beliefs, and understand that real peace can only be found in the one true God!

**Onslaught of heresy:** Natural disasters provide a golden opportunity for heresy to "snatch away" believers. Heresy make-use of people's fears and publicize messages relating to the end of the world and the coming of God again... to threaten believers. Pray that God will open believers' spiritual eyes and ears so that they can see through the heresies' tricks and stay steadfast in their faith. Pray that God grants wisdom to pastors for them to use various channels to teach believers about the truth!

**Becoming a peacemaker:** At this moment, the church needs to lead believers to pray for the disasters and the families affected. It should mobilize brothers and sisters to visit and comfort the affected families and help with clearing the debris and repairing broken furniture. In this way, Jesus' love can be conveyed in a very concrete way. Pray that God calls upon city churches which

have more resources and manpower to proactively support the needs of churches in remote regions, since we all belong to the same family in God!

**Rebuilding after the disaster:** During the flood, a lot of houses and churches were destroyed, and rebuilding them will be an arduous task. Pray that God provides for people's daily needs, leads people who have been displaced back to their hometown and guides rebuilding the churches as soon as possible. Pray that God grants strength and peace to pastors who are travelling to different places to care for believers!

**Needs of the people and the economy:** The flooding happened before the pandemic was over. People's economic activities were adversely affected and the poor families in particular have a hard time in making ends meet. Pray that God guides the relevant government departments in helping those in need to tide over difficulties. Since early this year, many believers have become unemployed and offering to the church have dropped drastically. The offering is not enough to pay for pastors' salaries. Pray for God's grace on believers so that they will help each other and take care of the needs of the unemployed believers and pastors!

***The Lord is my shepherd and I shall not want. (Psalm 23:1)***

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Remark:

<sup>1</sup> On 17 January 2020, the National Bureau of Statistics released figures on China's economy in 2019. According to the statistics, the per capita disposable income for the whole of China in 2019 was RMB 30,733. Per capita disposable income for urban citizens was RMB 42,359, while that for rural villagers was RMB 16,021.

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# Book Gifting riding on a Roller-Coaster

© Sheung Un  
Book Gifting Team



Since the beginning of this year, the mainland has experienced initially the torment of the gravely unanticipated coronavirus pandemic and subsequently one of the most serious floods. Amid the catastrophes, the Book Gifting Project means a lot more to me than ever this year.

## Respond to the urge: Now is the time

After the Chinese New Year, we maintained close communications with seminaries and bible schools in the mainland. On the one hand, we are concerned about the teachers' and students' well-being; on the other hand, we would like to be kept up to date on school re-opening progress so as to resume the Book Gifting Ministry, although whether or not graduation ceremonies can take place has yet to be determined. It was until after mid-May when a strong urge that said "now is the time" suddenly arose in us; book gifting then resumed. Simultaneously, we began receiving news regarding schools that announced their graduation arrangement. There were altogether 14 schools which would hold their graduation ceremonies between the end of June and July.

At that very moment, we were thankful indeed to be able to resume the book gifting. Despite that the resources our team had in hand at the time consisted of only 5 loaves of bread—even the two fish were lacking—we decided to boldly and trembly roll out all necessary distribution arrangement.

## With a trembling heart: Boarding the roller coaster

Book gifting went through turbulences resembling that of riding on a roller-coaster. In mid-June, there was a reoccurrence of confirmed local infection cases in Beijing. All provinces immediately initiated high level precautionary infection control measures. Despite feeling reluctant, the planned graduation ceremonies of more than 10 schools had to be called off.

One of the schools in the eastern region had planned for their graduation to be held on 24<sup>th</sup> June. The gifting books had already arrived at the school. The announcement came in the morning of



the 24<sup>th</sup>, the graduation ceremony had to be shelved. Not only did we feel disappointed, the teachers who organized the ceremony told us that their school principal actually made many prior visits to the concerned government bureau. He was hoping to hand out the graduation certificate to each graduating student, acknowledge their effort in equipping themselves in the past three years and give each of them his blessing for their ministry ahead.

While we were anticipating the book gifting to be suspended, the roller-coaster ride suddenly took a sharp upward turn. At 2 p.m. on Friday, 19<sup>th</sup> June, another school in the eastern region that was supposed to hold their graduation ceremony in early August suddenly notified me that their students must graduate two days later (i.e. by morning of 21<sup>st</sup> June) and leave the campus by noon of the same day in order to be compliant with the latest infection control measures. I immediately enquired if the school could arrange the distribution of books to the graduates after the ceremony. The vice principal replied saying that material dissemination was also severely restricted, it was not possible to give the books to the graduates later.

I therefore immediately investigated how to reallocate the book gifting packages (as explained, we had only 5 loaves of bread) and contacted the logistics company. They handled our request immediately with their vehicle departing at 5 o'clock and targeted to arrive within 48 hours. At that moment, I could do nothing else but pray and keep praying. Normal delivery generally takes 3 days. If there is an accident on the highway, border or custom clearance issues or encountering bad weather, etc., the delivery time will very likely be longer.

On 11 a.m. Sunday morning, the books arrived at the school right on time. How abundantly the Lord's unseen hands guided and protected us! By 1 p.m., we received photos from the school. Staring at the photos, how could we not be deeply amazed by the Lord's gracious providence?



Reflecting upon the entire event triggered by the “sudden” graduation message, I asked myself, “Why did I insist on trying to make the delivery?” What came to my mind at that moment was that despite the school being in such chaotic conditions, they still felt the need to inform me immediately, which indicated how much the book gifting mattered to them. Moreover, as the students had to rush to graduate as if they were refugees on the run, if the book gifting packages could invigorate and encourage them, my insistence would be more than justified and my conscience before God would be clear even if the packages ultimately failed to arrive on time.

## Our hearts are connected: Walking with the graduates

Most schools were unable to hold their graduation ceremonies; some were cancelled, some were deferred, some just had their students quietly departed. As for the graduates, however, they could still hold on to the book gifting packages. The package represents God's providence, the package is an emblem of love and blessing from brothers and sisters in different parts of the world, the package will accompany them as they venture out into ministry.

Electronic books are also included in this year's package. We try various means to help them gain access to electronic books and at the same time express our concern for them in the process. Every feedback received allows us to gain understanding of their feelings and their needs.

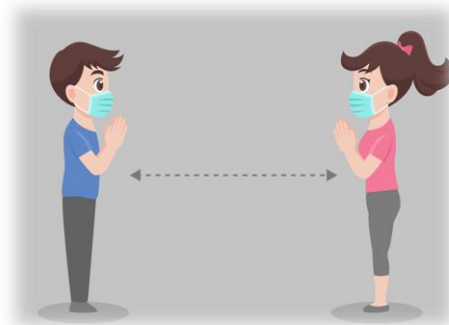
The challenge of managing the book gifting project this year made me experience pressure, hardship, fear, despair, anxiety, doubt, so on, yet I thank God for using various incidents and occasions to remind me that everything is accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit, and the needs of the graduates are backed by numerous individuals through prayer and donation. Please continue to remember and support the "2020 Mainland Seminary Graduates Book Gifting Project". Our operating expenditure from October to December is USD 141,026. Thank you!

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# Prayers

## 1. Distance between People

A pastor in the northern region gave a sharing about the impact of the pandemic on believers: “Some believers pay much attention to physical distance between people; though they still attend Sunday services, they are hesitant about joining fellowships. For self-protection, some avoid face-to-face contact. We are thinking about the way to minister in a post-pandemic era.”



May the Lord give wisdom to pastors, help them make good use of online and offline modes to minister to believers; may the Lord also bless believers with a peaceful heart, so that they can strike a balance between maintaining social contact and physical distance.

## 2. Harvesting Time Now



As the pandemic eased, a pastor in the southwest described now as the best time to bring people to Christ: “When the pandemic first struck, many neighbours felt anxious, lost and fearful. Churches then encouraged believers to share supplies, care for non-believer family members and friends and share with them the meaning of life. After half a year, the relationship between believers and their family and friends has become closer,

with some willing to know more about their faith. Some are willing to join Sunday services when churches re-open.”

May the Lord bless the spiritual seekers, open their hearts and accept Jesus Christ as their Lord. May He also lead believers to bear good witness for Him.

## 3. Exchanges after Resumption of Classes

Due to the pandemic and heavy floods, not all theological seminaries in different regions have reopened. A teacher from a Bible School in the southern central shared: “Students who are eager to be equipped are feeling lost not knowing when they can resume face-to-face classes given the constraints of online learning. Being only able to teach online, teachers feel guilty about not being able





to give students personal guidance for their spiritual lives through physical contact.”

May the Lord’s mercy be with the teachers and students, spare them from feeling unsettled or guilty, but give them hope that once classes resume, they can have deep learning and exchanges about life.

#### 4. Resumption of Economic Activities



In the mainland, it is common for peasants to go to first tier or second tier cities to do product processing or retail services in return for higher salaries, so as to support their families. But because of the pandemic after the Chinese New Year and the recent floods, many have been forced to remain in their home towns. Also, job opportunities have dropped sharply; due to the Sino-US trade war, city lockdowns, export-import trades, retail and logistics sectors have yet to recover.

May the Lord have mercy for the people living in rural regions, bless their land produce so there are sufficient supplies for the people; may the Lord also bless the processing, retail, logistics sectors etc., improve domestic sales and create more job opportunities.

~ THE END ~

#### Pray for China

Published since 1974

~ Pray for China publications can be served as a platform to express the latest situations and needs of churches and leaders in the mainland.

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