

Unable to Speak—Crisis in the Marriage of Pastoral Staff

Compiled by: Xihe

She grew up in a Christian family. The family was full of love. She was determined to become a full-time pastoral staff. She entered the seminary before she was twenty, beginning the long-anticipated journey of her life, never forgetting the Lord's calling.



He grew up in a Christian family too. He started serving in the church since his teenage years. He was loved by all the brothers and sisters. He was willing to be equipped for the ministry and be used by God when he returned to his hometown.

During her few years at the seminary, she met him—her senior at the school. They were quickly wed. After their marriage, she followed her husband to serve in his hometown. What became of the married life from such a perfect coupling?

Pastoral Couple = A Perfect Match?

The female protagonist of our article, Keyin, is a pastoral staff in the mainland. She had received training from CCL. Our staff has journeyed with her for over ten years, building a life-on-life relationship. She spoke candidly about her expectations when her marriage first started, “From when I was little, I saw that mum and dad had a great relationship. My understanding of family and marriage became—if it was good that both parties believed, then it was even better if husband and wife both served together! If both parties loved each other, then it was even better for a wife to be pampered by her husband! This was how I imagined an ideal marriage would look like.”

She continued, “He and I were married the year before I graduated from seminary. We were seen by many as a perfect match. But this ‘perfection’ lasted all too briefly. It was so brief that I can’t quite remember it anymore. I once asked myself, ‘Must a husband who has graduated from seminary be a good pastoral staff or a good husband?’ As the goodness of our relationship before marriage gradually disappeared, all we had were conflicts, non-

communication, helplessness, loneliness and suspicion. I was subject to emotional abuse for a month, a year... I put up with it again and again, but the most difficult thing for me to accept was that my husband was actually a homosexual! No longer was there love or respect in our marriage, neither companionship nor trust."

"Living in a foreign place, having to live with a sham marriage, while having to serve joyfully in the church, I strived to endure after the unpleasantness in our marriage. While the Lord spoke to me through the Bible, at the same time fortunately my mother and servants of the Lord in faraway lands 'accompanied' me on this path. Only when faced with a situation that could not be changed by human hands, did I start to learn to hand over everything to God."

A Scarred Marriage

Keyin desperately longed to win over her husband through the Lord, but alas it was not to be. Then question after question came, "Does God really love me? Does He really control everything? Does God not hear my prayers? Were all my decisions and choices wrong? Do I go on like this? What should I do..."



"I was recharged through the prayers and encouragement of those who cared about me. There were those who comforted me through the telephone, and I received visits from people from afar. But during this time, I was occasionally filled with such emotions as 'pressure', 'victimization', 'suspicion', 'bitterness' and 'resentment'. And when this happened, my heart would cry out, 'I can't stand it anymore!' I did not

understand the intentions of God, but my feelings were real. I often felt I was on the edge of depression. But I praise to God for His protection, whenever I felt that way I would receive a phone call from someone who cared about me."

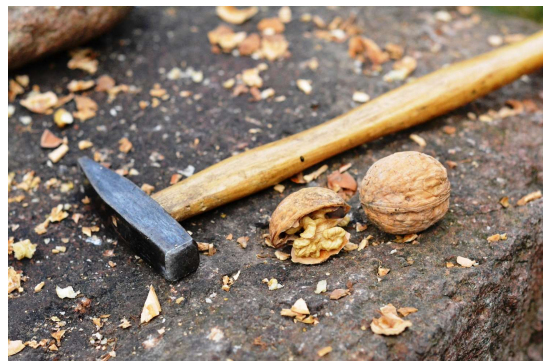
On the edge of falling into depression, Keyin heard the words of the Lord enter her heart: "You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent. LORD my God, I will praise you forever." (Psalm 30:11-12)

She continued sharing, "I finally understood that the Lord was always here! A marriage

needs love and respect. I needed to be renewed by the Lord. I needed to rely on God to adjust my own attitude and get back on the right path. At that time, I changed a lot of my habits and behaviors. Yet my situation did not improve, and in fact, it worsened! But my heart of relying on the Lord became stronger and stronger. I opened myself more and more to God, admitting my helplessness, and the Lord kept giving sufficient grace and power. I was startled to discover that from some point on, I was no longer anxious or uneasy, but I saw that the Lord was my beloved. He was always with me, whether I was serving, eating, learning or traveling.”

Observation: Behind the Heavy Pressure

In today’s culture and society, it is quick and easy to get a divorce. Ministry of Civil Affairs recently released the *2015 Social Services Development Statistics Bulletin*, indicating that in the mainland, 3.841 million couples went through the procedures of divorce according to law that year. The divorce rates are nearly doubled compared with a decade ago.



Under the “one-child policy”, every child is seen to be a treasure by their parents. Not only are they used to being spoiled, but they do not understand how to relate to other people, and are not willing to accommodate others. Thus it is easy for conflicts to arise between spouses after marriage. Only children carry with them the hopes and expectations of all those around them, as well as their parents. If they are pastoral staff, then they face even more pressure. When faced with marriage problems, those involved may adopt the attitude of “not washing dirty linen in public”. They dare not seek outside help and thus the marriage is on red alert.



Traditionally, pastoral staff have to maintain a “perfect” image, and no mistakes are tolerated. Moreover, they must face the psychological pressure of not being cared for. Keyin served important positions in the church. The brothers and sisters there had great expectations from her, and her ministry was very fruitful. On the other hand, her husband was laid off from the church. Afterwards, he went from sporadic church attendance to not attending church at all. Often a fault line arises in a marriage when the wife is professionally more successful than her husband.

“I Cannot Live Without the Lord!”

Keyin said, “Through these experiences, I was taught to truly rely on God. I reconfirmed God as my first priority in my life. **I can live without anything, but I cannot live without the Lord!** God transformed me from a weak and dependent person, to someone who relies on God totally. I am no longer subject to fear or cowardice, and I can accept any result that the Lord gives. I can rely on God for true joy.”



Even when faced with a crisis in her marriage, Keyin continued to be a good wife. This included caring for her husband’s daily life. She saw this as serving the Lord. **For five years she struggled, broke, recovered, and enjoyed the Lord’s love for two years, but alas the marriage still ended.**

The Lesson of Pain

Keyin was the one abandoned by her husband, but she still thank the Lord because despite all the regrets in her marriage, God’s love never left her. Afterwards, the Lord prepared for her another husband, a brother who loves the Lord and knows how to love his wife and family. The Lord had taught her these five aspects about a marriage:

1. Both parties must put effort into maintaining and treasuring the marriage with loving actions.
2. Both parties will have a closer relationship only if they are willing to come closer to the Lord.
3. Both parties must communicate often and establish good communication methods and habits.
4. Both parties must have a capacious soul, not only so the ship can stay afloat, but for it to sail. For example, bear with each other and forgive one another with love; being willing to give; not bearing grudges; not allowing anger to remain overnight.
5. Both parties must love, trust and respect each other.

Keyin went from trauma and hopelessness to experiencing inner healing from the Lord, and received many blessings from Him. She shared sincerely, “I have the care and prayers of God’s faraway servants, the companionship, bearing and commitment of my husband beside me, and I am surrounded by my innocent son. Moreover, our whole family trusts in the Lord. I saw myself as extremely weak, but I received the Lord’s moulding and saw His grace. Thank the Lord for my gift of ‘pain’.”

Please Pray for the Families of Pastoral Staff

The story of Keyin is just the tip of the iceberg for mainland pastoral staff. How many other workers have experienced crisis in their marriage, or even struggling now? Please remember the needs of the families of mainland pastoral staff. They run ahead for the Lord, at the same time they need our prayers. May the Lord fill those flaws within marriages, and strengthen the relationship within the families of pastoral staff so that they may concentrate on serving the Lord.

We Need Your Support for Leadership Training!



In leadership training, quality is more important than quantity. It needs the dedication to mentoring, to walk with leaders and to promote healthy and holistic growth of leaders in order to resist wrong values, the temptation of extramarital affairs and the social impact.

Through yearly persistence and based on the one-to-one and small group pastoral ratio which helps foster deep and living mentorship, CCL hopes to achieve our long-term goals:

To gather 300 life mentors, to equip 3,000 team coaches, and provide them with diverse resources and training, in order to train up 30,000 pastoral leaders who will lead 300,000 lay leaders, including small group leaders, disciple trainers and voluntary leaders.

We invite you to support CCL's life-on-life leadership training. If you are moved and would like to make an offering, please contact us for details, thank you.

[Preview: Apart from the crisis within Keyin's marriage, at the same time she also experienced many difficulties serving within the church. Wave after wave of pressure came like a tsunami. In the next issue, we will talk about her painful experiences within the church. We hope and pray that our readers continue to care for the families of pastoral staff.]

After the Demolition of the Crosses
— **What Lies Ahead for Churches in East China?**
Compiled by: Zhong Guoxin



CCL has recently organized a quarterly prayer meeting for ministries in China, at which brothers and sisters who are concerned about the latest situation of mainland churches after the demolition of crosses reflected on how the Chinese church should develop in the future, praying together for God's guidance.

Dr. Otto Lui, CCL's Associate General Secretary (Training), was the speaker that day. He expressed that we should keep caring about mainland churches, and reminded us not to be simply "bystanders". We must show concern to mainland churches in times of major adversities, but more importantly, we should care about how the churches should further develop afterwards. In the mainland, crosses have been removed continuously for two years, and the incidents stopped just before the "National Religious Work Conference" in mid-April this year. In the past half year and up to now, while there is no major cross demolition incident, the authorities are still stringently monitoring the church. Some church workers and lawyers involved in cross demolition incidents have been detained. The "five entries and five transformations" measures (See the footnote) are being implemented in the church. Many church leaders hence have gathered together to pray and discuss the future direction of the church.

During the "National Religious Work Conference", compliments were paid to four provinces: Jiangsu, Guangdong, Ningxia and Hebei for their excellent work in religion. A common feature is that in these four provinces, the religious bodies work in tandem with the government, and both sides maintain a harmonious relationship. The overall theme of the conference was returning to harmony. Religious groups were called upon to align their work with the overall direction of the government. There was no discussion at all on the conflicts

in Zhejiang. On the other hand, during the time when the crosses were torn down, some Christians took the initiative to protect the church together, and others actively embarked on community work. Bodies similar to social enterprises in Hong Kong were established, whereby the Gospel was spread through community service. This is also a form of “church transformation”.

How Should the Church Transform?

Amidst the tension between government policies and the church’s responses, how should the church further develop? There are four suggestions as follows:



1. Speeding Up Small Groups Ministry

Reflect on the meaning of the cross as an object, put emphasis on nurturing people, and convey the message that it is more important to erect a cross in the heart of believers.

2. Teaching the Bible with More Focus on Application

The emphasis of teaching used to be on “spiritual matters”, and little teaching was done on how we should bear witness in this secular world. Practical application of Christian ethics was quite overlooked. Discussions on controversial subjects were also avoided. Currently, more stress is put on how to bravely apply Biblical teaching in one’s life and work.

3. Bearing Witness Publicly

The *Law on Management of Foreign Non-Governmental Organizations* in the Territory of Mainland China was passed in April this year to further restrict foreign NGOs. As a result, mainland Christians have to take an extra step to establish their own organizations, say, for helping the poor, so that they can bear witness to the Lord openly in the community.

4. Developing More Indigenous Ministry Projects

As education on “anti-infiltration” has been stepped up and more restrictions imposed on foreigners, church ministries have increasingly been taken up by local leaders. Reliance on overseas resources has been cut back. As a result, more innovative ways of local ministry are being developed.

How Should We Pray for the Mainland Church?

1. Churches should grow based only on God's will, and not on what is allowed or disallowed in the society. God still reigns among mainland churches. Let us pray that God shows His will and walks hand in hand with His servants, so that they can focus and work on core ministries with wisdom coming from the Lord.
2. There are both dangers and opportunities in church development. Let us pray that God gives church leaders wisdom and creativity so that they can diversify the ways of serving.
3. Let us pray that the church's teaching can really be applied to daily life, and believers can learn and reflect on how to apply the Truth to their own circumstances so that their acts can be consistent with their beliefs, and that they can bear better witness in the Chinese society where great emphasis is placed on moral values.

Footnote:

The "five entries" in relation to the church refer to policies and rules, health and medical services, science and culture, poverty alleviation, and building harmony. The "five transformations" in relation to Christianity refer to the localization of religion, standardization of management models, localization of theology, making financial affairs known to the public, and the accommodation of Christian doctrines.

Prayers



1. Serious Marital Crisis

Ministry of Civil Affairs recently released the *2015 Social Services Development Statistics Bulletin*, indicating that in the mainland, 3.841 million couples went through the procedures of divorce according to law that year, a 5.6 per cent increase compared to the year before. Quite many Christian marriages, even those

of pastors, are at risk, due to temptations such as extramarital affairs. Lord, we plea for your protection on couples, and a supportive network for Christian families, in order to prevent marital crisis.

2. The Rise of Young Pastoral Staff

Many large cities, such as those in East China, have seen the rise of young pastoral staff. Most of them are from the post-80s generation and the only child in their families. They tend to lack both communication skills and spiritual growth, and get into disputes with senior pastors easily. May the Lord lead the development of church teams so pastoral staff of various generations can complement each other and serve together.



3. Integrity in Education Sector



China Youth Daily reports that some students in Guizhou found that their preferences on their university applications had been tampered with. Some institutions flagrantly accepted students who did not meet entry requirements by changing their preferred institutions on their applications. The education sector is not exempted from the big issue of integrity in the mainland. May the

Lord give wisdom to Christians in the education sector so they can be the light and salt in their field and change the unhealthy tendencies.

4. Reaping the Harvest for the Lord

The picture shows the fields surrounding a church in South China. Knowing that this area will be turned into a factory district in a few years, the church is planning for a marketplace ministry to reap a spiritual harvest when the workers move in. May the Lord move more churches to see the importance of marketplace ministry, to sow the seeds of Gospel by caring for business people in the community. May the Lord also raise up more Christian leaders in the marketplace to share the Gospel with others.



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