

# God's Dealings With Young People in Shantung

by Jonathan Goforth

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*The sermon recounts the speaker's experiences with powerful revivals in Shantung, China, where the Holy Spirit swept through congregations, convicting people of their sins and leading them to give their lives to Christ.*

**Scripture:** 2 Chronicles 7:14, Acts 2:4, Galatians 5:22, Ephesians 4:3, James 5:16

**Topics:** "Holy Spirit", "Revival"

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## Description

Jonathan Goforth preaches about powerful movements of the Holy Spirit in various locations, where people experienced intense conviction, healing, confession of sins, and transformation. Despite obstacles like secret sins, opposition from students, and disagreements among missionaries, the Spirit worked mightily, leading to repentance, reconciliation, and revival. The testimonies of changed lives, including former skeptics and enemies, demonstrate the profound impact of surrendering to God and allowing the Holy Spirit to work in hearts.

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## Transcript

A MOVEMENT began at Putoupeichen and steadily increased in intensity until it finally reached a climax on the sixth day. I have been present at movements, e.g., at Shuntehfu, which have been more powerful, more farreaching, perhaps, but none where I have felt so completely conscious of the Spirit's controlling power over a large body of people. It did seem that day as if every last vestige of opposition had been swept away and that Christ alone was exalted. We remained in this atmosphere for the remaining two days of the meetings.

A wonderful testimony meeting was held on the last evening. Spontaneous resolutions to new obedience were heard from many. One remarkable thing about these testimonies was the great number who claimed that, on that sixth morning when the Spirit's fire had swept so irresistibly through the audience, they had been healed of their bodily ailments. In my addresses I had made no special mention of Divine healing. Yet here was the testimony of these people that suddenly, at some crucial moment, that which ailed them passed away. On another occasion, in a neighbouring province, I heard similar testimonies to Divine healing. In both instances, according to the evidence of the witnesses, the experience coincided with the moment of most intense conviction.

The Chowtsun missionaries had been having considerable difficulty with their High School students. The boys had gone so far as to smash all the furniture in the school and burn the missionary headmaster in effigy. During my meetings the boys occupied the large choir loft behind me. They really sang unusually well. But while I was speaking I would notice traces of amusement on the faces of different ones in the audience. This led me to have a strong suspicion that the boys were cutting up. On questioning one of the missionaries, he replied that it was only too true.

On the third morning I had all the boys brought down and put in the seats right in front of me. They took this, quite naturally I suppose, as a great insult. When the singing began the whole school remained dumb. Not a boy opened his mouth. This continued all through the third day. The principal was very put out about it and asked me if he had not better command them to sing. "Not on any account," I replied. "The Spirit of God is going to make those boys yield and glorify their Master, and He will do it without either of us needing to lift a finger to help Him."

All through the fourth day the boys remained as dumb as posts. Judging from the cold, obstinate expression on their faces, it did seem as if they were a long way removed from the point of yielding. Yet, when I entered the church on the fifth morning it looked to me as if every last one of those boys was in tears. When I gave out the first hymn, oh, how spontaneously and lustily they sang! As soon as the meeting was opened for prayer, boy after boy came running up to the front to make confession of sin. Among other things they confessed to drinking, gambling and to visiting houses of ill fame. Some of the boys were so overcome that they had scarcely begun to pray when they fell to the floor in agony. After the meetings, the boys went in bands on Sundays and preached in the surrounding villages.

During the last four days of the meetings every prayer, every confession, every testimony seemed to be absolutely controlled by the Holy Spirit. One feature of the confessions that struck me forcibly was that so many of the Chinese leaders acknowledged the use of tobacco and whisky. In fact, it seemed to be almost general among them. At the dinner table, on the last day of the meetings, one of the lady missionaries put the question to me: "Do you really think it wrong to smoke?" "I don't quite see the necessity for asking me such a question," I replied. "Surely the Holy Spirit has made very plain these days what is the Lord's will in the matter. I might say, though, that in no place where I have been used hitherto have I listened to so many Chinese leaders confess to the use of tobacco and whisky as here in Chowtsun." "Well, but Spurgeon smoked!" she retorted, "and you couldn't get a better man than he was." "I'm sure none of us will deny that Spurgeon was a good man," I said, "but I'm equally sure that if he had only known at the time what a handle you people were going to make of his habit he would have got rid of it in short order."

That ended the subject for the time being, but, just as I was leaving, a missionary, who had been present at the table when the above conversation took place, drew me aside and said, "I understand you are going to Chingchowfu. Now there are two missionaries at that station who are real saints of God. They both smoke, and I thought I would warn you that if you say anything about tobacco there it is bound to hurt them and it will only do more harm than good." "I'm sorry that I can't profit by your advice," I replied. "I will be giving an entirely different series of addresses at Chingchow from what I have given here. I cannot recall just now whether there is any mention of tobacco in them, but if there is, it will come out."

At Chingchowfu, as at Chowtsun, the schoolboys provided at first a strong element of opposition. There were usually five or six hundred students, male and female, present at the meetings, including a large number from the Normal school. On the very first day of the meetings the Spirit fell in convicting power upon a large number of the older church members. Day by day the movement increased in intensity,

finally spreading among the schoolgirls. But the boys remained untouched. On the sixth day, when every one else in the building seemed to be broken, they sat looking on cold and unmoved. As I was giving my addresses I would constantly notice the Normal School students, with their heads down, reading from books in their laps. I pleaded with them repeatedly to lay whatever they were reading aside and listen to what God had sent me there to say to them. For a little while they would pay attention and then down their heads would go again.

On the sixth evening, just as I was about to begin my address, one of the missionaries came up on the platform and asked for permission to say a few words. "I have again and again urged you people," he said, "to deny yourselves so that you might contribute more bountifully to the evangelistic fund and thus make it possible to bring the Gospel to the millions that are around us. But since these meetings began the Holy Spirit has been pointing out to me that while I smoke such expensive cigars I have no right to talk to you people about selfdenial. I have resolved, therefore, to give up this useless luxury, and the money which hitherto I have spent on it will from now on go into the evangelistic fund." This was one of the missionaries concerning whom I had been warned not to say anything about tobacco lest I should hurt him. He was indeed a saint, but he gave no sign of being hurt that evening, and blessed indeed were all those who were privileged to listen to his words of selfdenial.

On the seventh day one of the Normal School students came up on the platform carrying a pile of books. He flung them down with evident loathing, then, turning to the congregation, he cried, "These are 'devil' books. Some of us boys picked them up in the city. They are written for the express purpose of polluting the mind with vile thoughts. Through them I have been led to commit adultery. While these meetings have been going on the devil has prompted us boys to keep reading these books so that we wouldn't hear God's truth and be convicted of our sin." A definite breach had now been made in the opposition of the students. One after another came forward and in great brokenness told how they had been led astray by this vile literature. Hour after hour scores kept pressing toward the platform. Finally, after the meeting had lasted for five and a half hours, with dozens still waiting for an opportunity to confess, the missionaries practically compelled me to go away and take a rest.

On the forenoon of the eighth day, the stream of confession was such that I was not able to give an address. That evening the other missionary at the station came up to the platform and confessed that he, too, had come to see, during those days, how absurd it was for him to press upon his people the necessity for sacrifice when he was spending so much money upon tobacco. He declared that, like his brother missionary, we was going to give up the habit, and that henceforth the money which had been spent upon it was to be devoted to the evangelistic fund.

The evening before I left Chingchow I had supper at the home of this missionary. In the course of the meal he said to me: "My tableboy here has never professed faith in Christ, and during these meetings he has shown no signs of being deeply moved. I wonder if you would mind speaking to him?" "Very well," I said, "when he comes in to clear away the dishes you and the rest of the family go into the sittingroom, and I'll remain here and talk to him." "How is it," I began, by asking the boy when we were alone, "that you have not yielded to your Lord, when so many others have done so?" "But I have yielded," he replied, with a smile. "I was standing there among many others on that seventh evening until halfpast twelve, waiting for a chance to confess; but then you stopped the meeting. What troubled me was that after I had decided to follow Christ I felt that I had nothing to give to Him. It didn't seem right that one who had died for me should receive nothing from me in return. But I didn't see how I could spare any money to give to Him, for I only get a few dollars a month, and I've got a wife and two children to keep. Then my master got up and told

how he had determined to give up tobacco, and immediately I thought to myself, 'Why, of course I'll give up smoking, too, and just hand the extra money over to the Lord.' And since then I've been so happy that I've scarcely been able to contain myself for joy."

When I returned to the sittingroom and told the people there of the result of the interview, my host burst into tears. "I would give up a good deal more than tobacco," he said, "if I could bless others like that."

Unknown to the foreign missionaries or myself the Chinese leaders at Chefoo had agreed beforehand to discountenance all public confession in my meetings. They had concluded, they said, that such emotional movements, as had been the rule in Manchuria and Korea, could only be from the devil and not from the Holy Spirit. All the Christians were strictly warned not on any account to confess their sins publicly. When, on the fourth morning, several of the women began to show very evident signs of conviction, two of the deacons went over to them and said, "Now, remember what we agreed." The women stopped immediately.

On the fifth morning I had just begun my address when one of the elders stopped me and asked me to give him a chance to confess his sins. He said that he couldn't endure the burden any longer. He confessed to lying, stealing and adultery. After the elder had resumed his seat and I had just got nicely started again, an evangelist cried out that he simply could not hold back and that I must give him a chance to confess his sins. He proceeded to tell how he had had a very serious quarrel with another evangelist. For a long time the two of them had not been on speaking terms with one another. The foreign missionary, unaware of the difference between them, had sent them to an outstation to conduct a communion service. He realized now how awful had been his sin in administering that sacred rite while nursing hatred of his Christian brother in his heart. What had made matters worse, all the Christians at that service had known that the two of them were enemies. He concluded by absolving the other of all blame, and assuming the whole burden of guilt to himself. I proceeded with my address and again had only been speaking for a few minutes when the other evangelist broke in and begged me to let him have a moment or two. It was he who was to blame for the quarrel, he said; his brother evangelist was entirely innocent. After that I saw that it was useless for me to go on speaking. The movement continued throughout the remaining meetings.

On the last day the large tent, which had been built especially for the meetings, was crammed to capacity. Among the many who testified that day to God's wonderful dealing with them during the meetings was the elder whose confession had started that remarkable movement on the fifth morning. "I believe," he cried, "that I'm the happiest man in the tent today. My elder brother, as many of you know, was a notoriously wicked man. He wouldn't allow me even to mention the name of Jesus in his presence. I didn't dare open my mouth lest he should kill me. Yet today he came to me and asked me if there were any possible hope that Jesus would have mercy upon so great a sinner as he. You can just imagine what an inexpressible joy it was for me to lay before my brother, right there and then, the way of salvation and see him accept Jesus as his Lord and Savior. Don't you think I have good reason for being the happiest man in the tent today?"

As I was nearing Hwanghsien, in the cart, I was met by Dr. A- with his children and several of the evangelists. After the usual greetings had been exchanged, one of the evangelists asked me: "Do you expect that the Holy Spirit will use you here to bless us with revival power as He did in Manchuria?" "Why, of course," I replied, "the Holy Spirit is always only too willing to revive His people, irrespective of their location. It doesn't depend upon Him. It depends upon you. Are you ready or not?" Nothing more was said

on the subject at the time, and we continued on our way to the city.

On the second morning the evangelist, who had put the above question to me, broke down in his prayer. He said that twentyseven men and women had been turned over to him to be prepared for baptism; but that he was unworthy to teach them as he had not yet been filled with the Holy Spirit. He needed to be first taught himself, he declared, before he could presume to teach others.

At the breakfast table, on the sixth morning, Dr. A-- told me that that night two of the Chinese leaders, one of whom was the evangelist already referred to, had wakened him up long after midnight to get him to pray with them. "Mr. Goforth has been here five days already," they said, "and yet there has been no real sign of revival. We're so troubled by the thought that the Lord might pass us by that we can't sleep." When I heard that I was greatly encouraged. I felt sure that God's time for favor was close at hand.

Yet, during the forenoon meeting that day there was no marked movement. In the afternoon I spoke on the Spirit's help in prayer, taking as my text Rom. viii. 26, 27. During the opening session for prayer and confession that followed my address I became aware of an everincreasing tension. For about the first twenty minutes the people seemed to vie with one another in their eagerness to pray. Sometimes there would be two, sometimes three or even four people praying at the same time. But, as the sense of tension increased, the praying gradually died away. Finally, it seemed as if no one dared to pray. The presence of God seemed completely to fill the building.

How long the silence continued I am unable to say, but at last the tension was broken by a voice crying, "O Lord, you've come!" It was the evangelist referred to above. Instantly the cry was taken up all over the audience. Some fell to their knees and began confessing their sins. Others started to sing praises. Every one seemed to be praying or singing or confessing, quite apart from any thought of those around them. Though it was the most complete disorder it seemed to be the most perfect order. After this had gone on for an hour I felt that I ought to close the meeting. In a loud voice I pronounced the benediction, and told the people that the meeting was over. Not a soul appeared to hear me. At any rate, no one paid any heed to me. So for an hour and a half longer the movement continued, sweeping everything before it. I have never known intercessory prayer rise to such a height of intensity as during the latter part of this service. Even small schoolboys, with the tears trickling down their checks, were seen praying for their unsaved parents and friends back home.

It was among the boys of the High School, however, that the movement seemed to sweep with the greatest power. Unknown to the missionaries, or even to the Chinese teachers, the boys had formed an infidel club. All the older boys, it appeared, were members of this club. In their secret meetings they would read together certain infidel books, reprinted in Japan, which they had managed to smuggle into the school. When the fire touched their hearts, these boys came one after another and flung themselves down before the platform, confessing their sin of unbelief and pleading with God to renew their faith. The leader of the club was so agonized that I thought he would break his hands over the back of the bench in front of him. "Lord Jesus!" I heard him cry, "get ready a whip, put lots of cords in it and drive this devil of unbelief out of my heart."

By three o'clock next morning all those people, men, women and children, were back in the church, where they prayed and sang praises till sunrise. It was the middle of winter, and there were no fires in the building, yet they did not seem to mind. When I came before them at ten o'clock to lead the regular meeting there was a new light in their faces. They had seen visions at that morning watch. When I left

Hwanghsien I was assured that there was not a single man, woman or student left unconverted in the congregation.

Years later, I was asked, on a certain occasion, to address a large officers' training school in Peking. I took as my subject: "The Christianity of General Feng." After I had spoken, eightyfour of those young men declared that they were going to read the Bible in order to find out the secret of the revolution which had been wrought in the life of that remarkable man. As I was about to leave I happened to notice one of the young officers, with a New Testament open in his hand, talking earnestly with a group of his fellowstudents. "Men," I overheard him say, "there's nothing can save our country but this Book of God!" Then, noticing me, he bowed and said, 'Do you remember me?' "I'm afraid I don't," I replied. "But you surely remember Hwanghsien," he went on. "I was attending the mission school there when you conducted those revival meetings, years ago. It was on that memorable sixth evening that I had the devil of unbelief burnt out of my heart. Naturally I can never forget that time."

Every imaginable obstacle seemed to be present at Pingtuchow to hinder the work of the Holy Spirit. For one thing, conditions in the High School were about as bad as they could be. The headmaster was an ex-Presbyterian elder. In 1900 this man had denied his Lord to save his life. The matter had been brought up before the Presbytery, even so kindly a man as Dr. Corbett having felt that some notice should be taken of so serious a case. In the midst of the discussion the elder had flown into a rage and denounced the whole Presbytery. After that there was nothing else for it but to put him under suspension. The man was a very able scholar, however, and he had immediately been taken up by the Baptist Mission and appointed principal of the large High School at Pingtuchow. It was a most unwise move. A man in that unrepentant state was the very last person for such a responsible position. He had only been in charge of the school for a few months when a spirit of mutiny began to appear among the boys. About the third day of the meetings it became quite evident that the Holy Spirit was working among the scholars. Yet, whenever a boy made a confession, the principal would immediately follow, saying, "O Lord, comfort his heart. He's a good boy. He has really nothing to worry about."

The native pastor of the Pingtuchow church was always on the platform with me during the services. I was conscious that somehow he was not a help to me. One day, at the close of the forenoon service, he announced: "I wish all Chinese leaders and the missionaries of our church to remain after the meeting is dismissed." It seems that after the rest of us had left, he said: "My reason for asking you people to stay behind is that we may have special prayer for Mr. Goforth. His views on baptism are all wrong and must surely hinder the Lord." At that, I am told, one of the missionaries immediately jumped to his feet and cried: "In God's name, brethren, let's get down on our knees. It's not Mr. Goforth's views on baptism that are the cause of hindrance amongst us. It is our own sin."

But it was not until the sixth morning that one of the visiting missionaries made me aware of what was, perhaps, the most serious obstacle of all. This missionary said to me: "We believe that you are working in the dark. The hindrance here is far more serious than you imagine. The missionary who is in charge of this station at present is at deadly enmity with the one who has just gone home on furlough. This one has written to the Board asking them not to allow the other back to the field; while the other has approached the Board in person to urge the recall of the one here. The quarrel is common property among the Chinese leaders, and they have all taken sides, some for one, some for the other. The Chinese pastor hates the missionary who is here now, and boldly proclaims his allegiance to the one who has gone home. We missionaries have consulted together, and I have been sent to ask your advice as to whether we should not do our utmost to bring the different parties together." I at once said, "No, don't interfere. Leave

the matter in God's hands."

My subject at the missionary prayermeeting that morning was, "Have faith in God" (Mark ii. 22). Before I had concluded my talk, the missionary, who was concerned in the quarrel, interrupted me saying, "By the grace of God everything that I can straighten out shall be straightened out this day before sunset." At the close of the prayermeeting the first thing he did was to send for the Chinese pastor and make matters right with him. Following which he wrote a letter to the Board retracting everything that he had said about his brother missionary. At the service that evening the native pastor took the initiative and went and shook hands with the missionary before all the people.

At the forenoon service on the seventh day the principal of the Boys' School came up on the platform and asked me, in a peculiar manner, for permission to confess his sin. I told him that he had perfect liberty to confess any hindering sin which the Holy Spirit prompted him to get rid of. "My great sin," he began, "has been that I have hated the foreign nations without praying for them. Take the Japanese, for example. Think of the injury that they have done to China!" He then proceeded to enumerate all the real or fancied wrongs which he claimed Japan had heaped upon China. "Yes," he said, "my great sin has been that I have hated the Japanese without praying for them." He went on to tell how Germany had injured China in various ways. His sin, he said, had been that he hated the Germans without praying for them. Then there was America. By her stringent immigration laws she had cruelly humiliated the poor Chinese people. He had sinned in hating the Americans without praying for them. There were several Swedish missionaries in the audience. "I don't think," he said patronizingly, "that we have anything in particular against the Swedish nation. At any rate, they're too small to do us any harm, even if they wished to."

But all this was merely by way of introduction. Like a true orator, he was working towards a climax. Continuing, he said: "There was a certain Englishman in China named Marjory. He was employed by a mandarin down south to cast a cannon. The mandarin supplied him with the right kind of metal, but, being a pigheaded Englishman, he insisted upon using a metal of his own choosing. The cannon was finally cast, and the mandarin sent about twenty of his men to test it. On being fired off, the cannon burst and blew those twenty men to bits. The official was so enraged that he drew his sword and killed Marjory. Then the British came down upon China and forced that cursed opium upon us. When the war was over, the British exacted an enormous indemnity from China, and their plea was, 'You have killed Marjory and let his poor wife and mother starve.' But how could I help but think of those twenty Chinese wives and mothers who were left to starve because of an Englishman's pigheadedness? It enraged me against the British, and I didn't pray for them."

At this juncture I laid a hand on the man's shoulder, and said: "Brother, you know perfectly well that there is not one atom of truth in what you say about Marjory. Furthermore, you are not confessing sin. You are not being prompted by the Holy Spirit. You are merely taking advantage of this opportunity to vent your spite upon other people." At that the High School boys rose in a fury. I had insulted them by questioning the veracity of their principal. Shouting and yelling and kicking they left the church. I thought they would kick the church door off its hinges as they went out. Yet, strangely enough, a mighty conviction seemed to fall upon all who remained.

After the meeting I was discussing the incident with one of the lady missionaries. Her face was wet with tears. "Why are you taking on like that?" I asked. "Have you forgotten the subject of our prayermeeting the other morning, 'Have faith in God'? Do you imagine that God is going to allow His Son to be disgraced in this fashion? It cannot be. I believe that, before these meetings end, He will bring those boys back in a

body to confess their sin and honor Him." "Oh, I wish I had your faith," she replied, still very doubtful.

After leaving the church that day the boys went through a time of terrible searching by the Holy Spirit. That night many of them could not sleep. On the eighth morning they stood up before the church in a body and acknowledged their fault. And, to crown the devil's defeat, the principal himself came up to the front, weeping, and confessed his sin.

At the final meeting, just as I was about to pronounce the benediction, the Chinese pastor intimated that he wished to say a few words. "Mr. Goforth," he said, "your addresses these days have shown us that you have a wonderful knowledge of the Bible. But allow me, as an insignificant Chinese brother, to beg of you that in the future, as you search the Scriptures, you will be careful to note what the Lord says regarding true views on baptism." It was an awkward situation. There were a number of Presbyterian leaders and representatives of other denominations in the audience. It looked like the devil's move to bring on a controversy and spoil everything. I decided to risk silence, and pronounced the benediction. Then I turned to the pastor and said quietly: "During the years that I have been leading these meetings I have been among Episcopalians, Congregationalists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists and members of many other denominations, and I have found that no amount of baptismal water can keep the devil out of the hearts and lives of Christians."

Three years after these meetings were held it was reported that about three thousand had been added to the church in that region.

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