

# Practicing the Presence

*How to make our Heavenly Father real in the melee of everyday life*

*"Lives Transfigured by His Presence-6"*

Desmond Ford

I want to tell you the story of a man who found for himself the truths we have just considered.

This man influenced one-quarter of the world. That's a greater influence than anyone who has ever lived—except Christ and Paul. Imagine, one-quarter of the world!

As a boy, he was so weak, sickly, and bespectacled, that he had only two years of school in his life. But God chose him to bless one-quarter of the world.

## Hudson Taylor's boyhood

The man's name was Hudson Taylor [1832-1905].

Hudson was born in Yorkshire, England. His father was a very zealous Christian who longed above all to see the land of China opened up for the gospel. He often talked about it at home. One day Hudson, who was four years of age, said, "When I'm grown up, I'll go to China."

Hudson's family sadly smiled. They knew this four-year-old boy couldn't even go to school. They didn't know how he would survive the winters of Yorkshire, let alone go to the sweating tropical areas of China.

Hudson grew, and passed through his adolescent troubles. He eventually found employment at a bank, and there his friends wiped his mind clear of all Christian views. Soon he was scoffing and swearing.

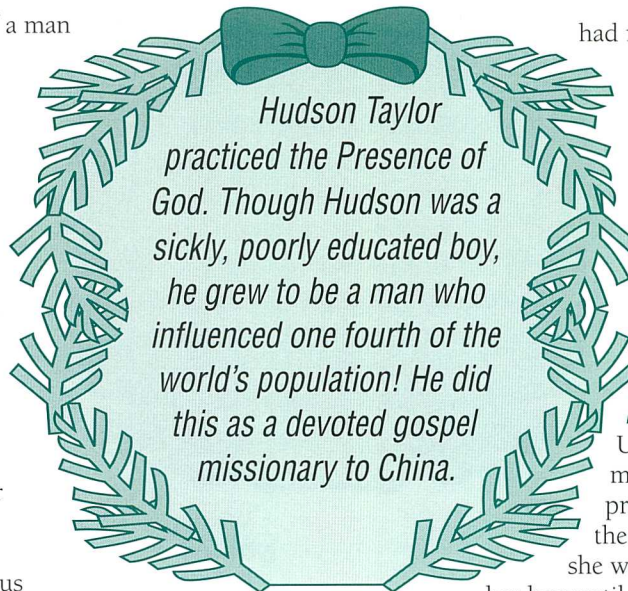
## Hudson Taylor's conversion

When he was 17 he was on holiday at home, alone. The whole family was away, and he was looking for something to do. He wandered into his father's library and saw a box of religious pamphlets. He thought, "They end with a moral. I'll read the stories and leave the morals."

Hudson picked up one of the tracts and began to read. After a few moments he came across the statement, "The Finished Work." As he read that phrase, the Spirit of God struck him and, in so striking him, struck millions of people.

"The Finished Work." Hudson had always thought of Christianity as a dreary struggle, a battle to compensate for your bad deeds by doing good ones. He had given up the conflict long ago.

But surely, "The Finished Work" meant something else. The Spirit taught him in that moment that the barrier between humanity and God had been dealt with by Christ. Hudson



had raised the barrier through his weaknesses and follies, his failures and sins, his selfishness and pride, his impurities and his blasphemies. Christ had dealt with the barrier—and it was done. The Lamb of God had taken away the sin of the world, and there was nothing Hudson had to do but accept that work. If Hudson accepted it, God would care for the rest.

So Hudson accepted it. At 17, Hudson Taylor gave his heart to God.

## A mother's prayers

Unbeknownst to him, Hudson's mother, about 70 miles away, had been praying for her boy. She had risen from the lunch table to go into her room where she was staying as a guest. She prayed for her boy until God gave her the assurance that her prayer was heard. She was on her knees for hours. Finally, assured that Hudson was a saved boy, she rose from her knees.

Hudson told his sister not to tell his mother what had happened to him. He wanted to share the glad news himself. When she came home two weeks later, he ran excitedly to tell her. "Mother! I have great news for you!"

"My son, I know it," responded mother.

"You know it? Has Amelia told you?" asked Hudson.

"No, the Spirit of God told me when it happened."

## Hudson prepares for China

In the following months, Hudson's faith was tested. One night he rose from his bed, terribly concerned lest he should ever deny the Lord who had paid for all his sins, past, present and future. He knelt by his bed and said, "Lord, if you will keep me from falling away, if you will keep me from denying you, I'll do anything and I'll go anywhere."

Hudson felt the presence of God come into that room, and as though the words had been spoken, the conviction came to his mind: "Your terms are accepted. I will keep you and you shall go for me to China."

He gave up his featherbed. He was so weak and sickly, he knew that if he tried to work his way to China, he would end up in the sea, dead. He said, "I've got to get ready for China." So he gave up his featherbed and began to take long walks on the moors, trying to develop himself physically.

In one week he learned 500 Chinese characters from a little *Gospel of Luke* in Chinese.



## Hudson Taylor in Hull

But how would Hudson get to China?

He went to the port of Hull to help a doctor who was a pharmacist. Hudson said, "While I'm in Hull, I must practice learning to trust God. I've got to learn it here in England before I go to China."

The doctor, who was a very busy man, said, "Now Hudson, whenever your wages are almost due, you are to remind me." Hudson thought, "I won't remind him. I've got to learn to trust God. God will have to remind him."

The time came when Hudson had no money to pay his rent, no money for food. All he had was an English half-crown (about 30 cents). He was doing missionary work in the area and was often roughed up and his tracts torn to pieces.

One day a man came to him in a panic and said, "Please come and see my wife and pray for her." Hudson went into an upper room in the slum district. A woman was lying in the room, surrounded by crawling, half-naked children. She was obviously dying of starvation.

Hudson began to pray. As he prayed, he thought, "What a hypocrite I am. This family doesn't need prayers, it needs money. This woman needs food."

Then he thought, "I've only got half-a-crown. I owe that for the rent. I have no food for the morrow. I have no wages." Then he thought, "If I don't give this half-crown, I can't go to China."

So Hudson gave the money to the family and the woman's life was saved. He left the room very happy. "Now I can go to China."

## Cash in the night

But Hudson still had no wages. He knew he must pay the widow woman who owned the property where he lived.

He worked late that Saturday night. Suddenly, the doctor comes in and says, "Taylor! Don't I owe you your wages?"

Taylor's heart pounds and he can only mumble, "Yes, sir." He's so excited he leaves the room. Then he hears the doctor saying, "I'm sorry. I don't have any money here. It's all gone to the bank."

Hudson swallows again. Then two hours later, the doctor returns and, chuckling, says, "That's funny. Old So-and-So [he mentions a wealthy patient] has come in this late at night and insisted on paying his bill. He wouldn't even give me a check; he gave me cash. Hudson, it's yours."

Hudson thought, "I can go to China."

## Medical training

A small missionary society sprang up called "The Chinese Evangelization Society." The group heard about Hudson Taylor, and contacted him. "If you'll come to London, we'll pay for you to go through a medical course and receive a doctor's training."

Hudson accepted the offer. But he sensed he must still learn to trust God. So he resolved to live daily on one loaf of bread and one pound of apples.

He must walk four miles to the training hospital, and four miles back. All the way back he's surrounded by street vendors with things that smell wonderful. There are cream puffs and jam tarts and all sorts of lovely things. But day-by-day Hudson lives on his loaf of bread and a pound of apples.

## Hudson Taylor's romance

His heart is filled with China, but also with a certain misborn affection. Hudson was a very soft-hearted, loving and lovable

character. His was a temperament such as couldn't survive, it seemed, without human love.

Hudson has fallen in love with a music teacher, Miss Vaughan, a friend of his sister's. But she's not in love with China. She thinks, "My charms will soon sweep this foolishness out of his head." Hudson thinks, "God will soon convince her she's got to go to China."

They are both mistaken.

## Illness

Hudson became very ill while in London.

He attended an autopsy and picked up something. The chief surgeon told him, "You take a cab and go home and put your affairs in order. Your life is over."

But Hudson had lived a clean life—he'd never used alcohol—and while very sick for weeks, he did recover.

## Leaving for China

Ultimately, the day came when Hudson left for China.

Three members of his family came to see him off. He heard his mother weep when she turned her back to go down the gangplank. He said, "I understood John 3:16 in a way I'd never understood it before: 'God so loved the world, he gave his only begotten Son.'"

He ran down the gangplank, held his mother again in his arms, gave her a big kiss, and then ran up the plank. He took out a small New Testament, wrote inside the cover, "The love of God that passes knowledge," and tossed it to his mother.

## The voyage to China

Then Hudson was off on a voyage of 23 weeks.

The ship to China was, of course, a sailing ship, the *Dumfries*. She nearly dumped Hudson and all the crew into the sea within the first two weeks.

They were caught in a storm so severe that everyone gave up hope, and were sure that it was a watery grave for them all. Then, when they were out of it, in a matter of days, they found themselves becalmed and drifting towards perilous reefs.

Hudson learned very quickly that unless God is in charge of the storms and the calms, there's no hope of survival in life.

## Greeted by hardship

Hudson arrived in China after 23 weeks at sea. (On the return trip the *Dumfries* sank.)

He arrived in Shanghai with letters of introduction to three people. But one man was dead, another gone to America, and the third was away. To Hudson's sorrow, in the coming months the money promised him from the Chinese Evangelization Society never arrived.

He lived in the shadow of the great banks of Shanghai. But his clothes were tattered and tawdry and poor. He had no money. He became a laughing stock to the missionary society in Shanghai. He felt unable to tell them why he was so poor, as that would be dishonorable and put the Chinese Evangelization Society in a bad light.

God must have given Hudson this experience purposefully, because for a period of 40 years, Hudson was going to be in charge of the most widespread, powerful missionary organization in the world. During that time, Hudson Taylor ran the organization with thoughtfulness, care, and sensitivity. He sought to meet the needs of all the young missionary couples that came from America, England, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand—hundreds and hundreds of them.

