

Hudson Taylor

A Legacy of Light, Part 9

John 19:30

Hudson Taylor was born into a loving committed home of Christian parents.

Even though he was taught the Bible, was knowledgeable of basic doctrine, he was personally skeptical.

When he was 15 years of age he landed a job at a city bank where he was surrounded by young men who made fun of his old fashioned religious ideas. That began to cement his unbelief.

By the providence of God, Hudson developed a problem with his eyesight – a problem that only lasted for brief while – but long enough for Hudson to lose his job at the bank.

By the time he turned 17, he was unaware that his 13 year old sister had committed to praying for his salvation 3 times a day. He was also unaware that his mother had pulled away from an appointment with friends to privately pray one afternoon.

That same afternoon, Hudson later wrote, “I happened to have a holiday, and in the afternoon looked through my father’s library to find some book with which to while away the unoccupied hours. Nothing interested me; I turned over a basket of pamphlets and selected from among them a Gospel tract that looked interesting, saying to

myself; ‘There will be a story at the beginning and a sermon at the end; I will read the [story] and ignore the [sermon].’

While reading the pamphlet, I was struck with the phrase: ‘The finished work of Christ.’ Why does this author use this expression, I questioned. Why not the atoning work of Christ? Or the satisfying work of Christ.’

And then, the words of Jesus Christ from the cross – **“It is finished”** – came to my memory – **from John 19:30**. But, what was finished? It became clear as I read further that the debt was paid for our sins – a full and finished payment for sin.”

Then came the thought to my mind, “If the work was finished and the whole debt has been paid, what is there left for me to do?”

And with this dawned the joyful conviction, as light flashed into my soul, that there was nothing in the world to be done but to fall down on my knees and accept this Savior and His salvation and then praise Him for the rest of my life.¹

And that’s exactly what Hudson Taylor did.

The year was 1849.

Within a year he began medical studies, hoping to serve as a missionary in the unreached land of China.

In order to fully prepare for the hardships of missionary pioneering, he moved into the slum district of London called Drainside. And you can tell by the name of this district that it wouldn't be a comfortable place to live.

He found that he could live off porridge and bread most of the week, with meat occasionally. And he used all his remaining money for medical supplies so that he could personally assist the poverty stricken people in his neighborhood.

He would write to his sister that he had one big problem though; the medical doctor he worked for often forgot to pay him his weekly salary. Hudson had to remind him every week and it became so frustrating to Hudson that he finally decided to give it over the Lord and trust the Lord to remind the doctor to pay him.

He felt that this would be a good way to develop his faith, by trusting the Lord to remind his boss to pay him.

Having made this pact with the Lord, he stopped reminding the doctor and the doctor stopped paying. God didn't seem to be reminding him. Eventually, the rent was due and Hudson had no money to pay . . . his food was running out as well.

Hudson writes, "One Friday near closing time at the clinic, the Doctor again not having a clue that he owed another weeks salary, suddenly turned and said, "By the way, Taylor, is not your salary due?" Hudson wrote, "I had to swallow two or three times before I could answer and I told him quietly that it was overdue for some time. How thankful I felt at this moment – God had heard my prayer.

The doctor replied, "Well, you know how busy I am and I've just sent all the cash to the bank; otherwise, I would have paid you at once."

The next day – Saturday – trudged along. Just when defeated and discouraged Hudson Taylor was about to lock the clinic up that night, the doctor suddenly appeared, rather amused that one of his clients had just come by his office and done something he'd never done before – paid his medical bill in cash.

The doctor couldn't understand what would possess his wealthy client to come by his office at 10:00 o'clock at night and pay a bill he could have paid anytime he wanted.

The doctor then gave Hudson a handful of banknotes and said, I'll pay you the balance on Monday.

Hudson Taylor experienced incredible joy in this answered prayer of faith.

On another occasion, Hudson would write that his boss was behind in paying him yet again.

Hudson headed home discouraged and confused again with the Lord. The doctor had forgotten that week again and he only had one half-crown in his pocket for the weekend – in today's economy, a half-crown would be worth around 10-12 dollars.

When he arrived at his apartment, he was met by one of the many poverty stricken men who lived near him in Drainside.

He begged Hudson to come and see his wife who had only recently delivered a baby; neither the mother nor the newborn were doing well. So Hudson reluctantly agreed – he wrote in his journal that he wasn't in the mood to help anybody that night.

And he was rather frustrated with God at the moment.

When he arrived at their apartment, several children were huddled inside this bare one room dwelling – which Hudson described as truly wretched.

A woman was lying on a cot in the corner and a baby lay in her arms crying. Hudson knew without any medical examination that the baby wasn't getting any milk because the woman was malnourished. In fact, the entire family was hungry.

Hudson immediately knew that the Lord wanted him to give this family his half-crown, but his heart refused.

In a letter to his sister, later, he shared the feelings he battled – and I quote – "They needed food, but I did too. So I shared with them that although their circumstances were very distressing

there was a kind and loving Father in heaven. And something in me cried, “You hypocrite – telling these unconverted people about a loving Father and not prepared to trust Him yourself. My voice nearly choked at the thought.”

Then this poor father asked Hudson to at least pray for them before he left their apartment. He agreed to pray for them and they all knelt down in that little room. The battle raged in Taylor’s heart as he began to pray – and then – he wrote his sister, without any desire or joy, I got up, reached into my pocket and pressed into the hand of this man my last bit of money. The family could hardly contain their gratitude.

Only then, he wrote, did the joy of the Lord flood my heart. I knew – he wrote – this entire family would soon have food.

When he returned home, he ate his last bowl of porridge and before he got into bed, he got on his knees and thanked the Lord that he had been empowered to give everything he had away and then he reminded the Lord that he was out of money and out of food too.

Later the following day, an anonymous package without a return address or name arrived; the package contained a pair of winter gloves – and inside one of the gloves was 4 times the amount of money he had given away the night before.ⁱⁱ

He would later writing, “How often my mind has remembered this incident – and the lesson: that faithfulness to God in little things allows us to gain experience and strength for the more serious trials of life.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Maybe you’re there right now . . . this is what God is doing in your life as He deepens your faith and trust and prepares you for even greater challenges in days ahead.

Hudson Taylor sailed for China in 1853; he would spend 51 years serving in that country.

When he first arrived and for the first several weeks, he realized that his respect among the people and his ability to be revered as a religious teacher were being hindered by his Western apparel.

His black overcoat had earned him the nickname, “The Black Devil” . . . and much of the taunting he encountered from young people had more to do with his strange apparel than his gospel.

So he went against all protocol and advice from others and decided to do something radical. He removed his western clothing and put on the customary robe and slippers of a Chinese tutor.

He even shaved the hair off his forehead too to match the Chinese custom for teachers.

I’ve done the same thing. Now you know why.

Hudson wrote his sister the rather shocking details that would create a scandal – and I quote – “I had better tell you at once that on Thursday last at 11 p.m. I resigned my locks to the barber, dyed my hair a good black color, and in the morning had a proper queue or what we call a pigtail woven into [the back of my] own hair . . . then, in Chinese dress, I set out.”^{iv}

The reaction back in England was to be expected. He lost support without ever being contacted . . .

Hudson Taylor would eventually begin his own mission board, calling it the China Inland Mission.

And he would be known for his sensitivity toward the Chinese culture and custom; his words are thought provoking as he will later instruct his missionary teammates – “Rude people will seldom be out of hot water in China and though earnest and clever and pious, they will not accomplish much. In nothing do we fail more, as a Mission, than in lack of politeness.”^v

Hudson Taylor and his family would suffer tremendously. One wife and several children would die from diseases. He would marry again, only to experience the still born death of twin babies, a boy and a girl.

He and those who served with him would be persecuted and often have to escape with their lives.

Hudson one time made the comment that the China Inland Mission never established a missionary outpost without first surviving a riot – and they would establish more than 300 mission stations.

Imagine a church planter in America being told that in order to really be successful you'll have to survive a riot before you can get your church off the ground.

Little wonder his testimony would influence thousands of people to consider giving their lives to another country.

Hudson Taylor was personally supported by Charles Spurgeon, C.I. Scofield, and D.L. Moody. He often received financial gifts in the mail, just in time, from his good friend George Mueller – who was surviving his own ministry tests of faith. All in all, however, Hudson Taylor was known for his optimistic spirit. He credited his confidence in the Lord with a statement that I've written in my own notes and have often read and re-read; it goes like this – “If we are obeying God, the responsibility rests with Him, not with us.”^{vi}

In a letter dated 1879, when Hudson Taylor was 47 years old and away from the mission, he wrote to the secretary of the mission in which he rehearsed several action points that would continue to give their ministry organizational health & effectiveness, along with spiritual vitality.

Let me give you five of these action points – they were to be originally applied not only on an institutional level – by the China Inland Mission – but by all the believers individually.

Let me do something a little different in our session today and let step away from a detailed biography and give you his own devotional comments on 5 action points that will give us all spiritual vitality and ministry effectiveness on a personal level and on a team level.

1. First, Hudson Taylor said, 'Improve the character of the work'

In other words, most often what a believer needs is not to begin something new, but strengthen and improve something they are already doing.

On an organizational level, Taylor wrote, this may involve new job descriptions, establishing new

reporting procedures and other lines of communication.

In other words, self-evaluation and internal evaluation of any ministry organization is a healthy, though sometimes painful process.

If it's worth doing, it's worth evaluating.

Howard Hendricks taught this same principle to us in the phrase – “plussing”. That is, taking something you're doing that's worth doing and then doing it better . . . more efficiently . . . more effectively.

2. Hudson Taylor said, 'We must deepen piety and devotion'

Paul would write to Timothy, his son in the faith, “*Timothy, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.*” (1 Timothy 4:7)

That word discipline is *gumnazo* (γυμναζω) – from which we get our word gymnasium. It literally means “exercise.”

In other words, godly piety and devotion demand exercise. If you want to grow in godliness you have to be willing to work up a spiritual sweat.

I remember years ago, we were at the beach with our girls – they girls were out in the water and I told them, use our umbrella as your marker and stay in front of us. No matter how hard they tried, they drifted . . . each wave would push them down the shore. The undertow would shift them further and further away. Sometimes they'd would literally need to get out of the water and run back up the beach to where we were and start over again.

What a picture of my life and yours. It's so easy to drift.

Every wave of demand, every pull of pressure, the undertow of problems and challenges – perhaps even laziness and apathy thrown in causes us to drift without realizing it.

No one will ever deepen their piety and devotion without intentional effort and a constant readjustment to the umbrella location of God's purpose and design.

3. Thirdly, Hudson wanted his staff to consider this phrase: here it is – remove stones of stumbling, if possible

He was thinking of tough assignments that needed to be tackled. Some decisions needed to be made; obstacles to that needed to be overcome . . . and then he adds – if possible. I love that realism.

If possible. Some stuff just can't be changed.

Some obstacles are not going to move until Jesus comes . . . you just have to deal with them.

But wherever you can remove things that hinder your spiritual and ministry life, do it.

I love his realism. In fact, Hudson would often remind his missionary team by saying, "Don't forget, there are three stages for missionary work – and this applies to life:

Impossible . . . difficult . . . done.^{vii}

Hudson didn't want missionaries joining the team who weren't willing to face challenges. In fact, every candidate who applied to the China Inland

Mission would be trained at their center they had set up in the slums of London. If they couldn't make it there, they wouldn't be allowed to come to China.^{viii}

Remove stones of stumbling if possible.

4. Number 4: Oil the wheels where they stick

Hudson Taylor actually had in mind with this statement, personal relationships. He said to get out the oil can of love and apply liberally to those relationships that just tend to stick.

He would write that there is no substitute for loving one another.

Even though he confided as an older man that one of his greatest challenges in missionary service was the trouble he had with the missionary family of the China Inland Mission – yet he pressed his entire staff to have well-oiled relationships.

Even still, he would often encourage himself and those around him by saying, "Things will look up, with God's blessing, if looked after."

What a balanced bond of perseverance and trust.

5. Finally, supplement what is lacking.

In other words, don't just point out the problem – supplement what's needed to fix it.

He once wrote, "Criticizing plans is easier than creating them . . . plan imaginatively. Add whatever is lacking as you plan and carry out your plans for God.

Improve the character of the work;

Deepen piety and devotion;

Remove stones of stumbling, if possible;

Oil the wheels where they stick;

Supplement what is lacking.

One of the things Hudson Taylor would be marked by was a sense of humility; and a deep sense of joy – almost a sense of surprise – that God had chosen to use him for His glory.

He would write, "I often think that God must have been looking for someone small enough and weak enough for Him to use . . . and He found me."^{ix}

On one occasion, Hudson Taylor, the world renowned missionary to China, was being introduced to speak at a large church in Australia. The moderator of the service introduced the missionary in eloquent and glowing terms. He told the large congregation all that Taylor had accomplished in China, and then presented him as "our illustrious guest." Taylor stood quietly for a moment and then said, "Dear Friends, I am merely the servant of an illustrious Master."^x

In 1905, after having resigned as the head of the China Inland Mission, he decided to take one last tour through some of his beloved cities and mission stations in China. During that tour, he would pass away.

He was buried next to his first wife, Maria, in a small English Cemetery in a village near a river. Let me give you an interesting update.

Their graves were treated with utter disregard in China – in fact, the cemetery was actually covered over by development in the 1960's and their grave markers destroyed.

However, in recent years those industrial buildings were torn down and Hudson and Maria's graves were found to be the only two graves in that cemetery still intact.

On August 2013, their graves were moved to a local church where a memorial garden is being designed to honor their lives.

Over Hudson Taylor's 50 years of ministry, he was responsible for leading nearly 1,000 missionaries into that vast country.

Together they would plant hundreds of churches, start and develop 125 schools; there would be more than 500 Chinese converts who would turn around and join the mission as staff members and volunteers.

The China Inland Mission would become the largest Protestant Missionary organization in the world.

Hudson Taylor would learn to speak in 3 different Chinese dialects, evangelize all 18 provinces of the interior and prepare a translation of the New Testament in the Ningbo dialect.

But if he were here today, I'm fairly confident he wouldn't care to hear any of that repeated.

He would stress that he was simply the servant of an illustrious Master – someone small enough . . . to be used by God; someone weak enough to be available for God to use.

He had been struck with the truth of Christ's words on the cross – it is finished – and he never got over the completed work of Christ on his behalf and he never forgot that to Christ alone belonged all the glory.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/17/2013 by Stephen Davey.

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i Dr. & Mrs. Howard Taylor, Hudson Taylor: The Growth of a Soul (OMF International, 1996), p. 67

ii Howard Taylor, Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission: Volume 1 (OMF Book, 1996), p. 132

iii Ibid. p. 135

iv Adapted from Frederick Taylor, J. Hudson Taylor: God's Man in China (Moody Press, 1965), p. 99

v Alexander Strauch, Leading With Love (Lewis & Roth, 2006), p. 61

vi Howard Taylor, p. 31

vii Ibid, p. 276

viii Ibid, p. 226

ix R. Kent Hughes, 1001 Great Stories and Quotes, (Tyndale House, 1998), p. 213

x Ibid, p. 493