

An Abnormal Gospel

My world was rocked in January when I spent time interviewing leaders of China's illegal "house church" movement. For five days I prayed, worshiped and shared simple meals with these precious saints—most of whom have spent lonely years in communist prisons for preaching the gospel. As I listened to their firsthand accounts of miracles, and of the cruel treatment they received from police guards, I felt like I had encountered New Testament-style faith for the first time. When I returned to the United States I began wondering if what we call Christianity here bears much resemblance to the real thing.

One leader explained to me that she oversees 5,000 churches in a rural area. "Are you a bishop or an apostle?" I asked, trying to understand the terms they use.

"We do not use titles," the woman told me. "We just call each other brother or sister."

The 80 believers I met are responsible for more than 35 million Christians in China. That's quite an impressive number. But no one arrived at our meeting place in a limousine, nor were any of them followed by an entourage of bodyguards and publicists. Most of these people live as fugitives, yet their faces are radiant with joy.

Mr. Yu, as I will call him, is like the apostle Paul of China. He has seen people raised from the dead, and once he saw God supernaturally paralyze a government official who was threatening to stop an open-air evangelistic meeting. But Mr. Yu didn't expect special treatment when he spent time with me and his colleagues in January. He wore a simple, short-sleeved shirt, ate the same fish and rice we did, and he showed up for prayer like everyone else before each meeting. He usually took

his seat in the back of the room.

These people wept every time we prayed for China. They were gripped by a sense of spiritual urgency. Many of them are anxious to see the political situation change in their country—not so they can move to the United States, or so they can buy a home, but so they can send missionary teams to closed Muslim nations like Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan.

I felt ashamed when I returned home. The humility of my new Chinese friends exposed my pride. Their childlike faith revealed how much I trust in technology, education and the idols of Western materialism. Their infectious passion to fulfill the Great Commission forced me to see my self-centeredness.

I've had enough of our abnormal, Americanized brand of Christianity. It is as impotent as it is lethal. After spending time with my brothers and sisters in China, I've realized that some of what I see in the church (and even what is reflected in the pages of this magazine) makes God sick.

How desperately we need the Holy Spirit—our Refiner—to strip us of our titles, our limousines, our front-row seats and our “what's-in-it-for-me” message. We need a return to simple humility!

May God forbid that we ever export a man-centered, adulterated gospel to other nations. Let's ask the Refiner to send His fire and burn up our dross so we can experience a China-style revival in our country. What they have is genuine. We've settled for a cheap imitation.