

The Heavenly Man: The Remarkable True Story of Chinese Christian Brother Yun Study Guide

The Heavenly Man: The Remarkable True Story of Chinese Christian Brother Yun by Brother Yun

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Contents

The Heavenly Man: The Remarkable True Story of Chinese Christian Brother Yun Study Guide	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters One through Four.....	4
Chapters Five through Nine.....	6
Chapters ten through Thirteen.....	9
Chapters Fourteen through Seventeen.....	11
Chapters Eighteen through Twenty-one.....	14
Chapters Twenty-Two through Twenty-Five.....	16
Chapters Twenty-Six through Twenty-Nine.....	18
Characters.....	20
Objects/Places.....	23
Themes.....	25
Style.....	27
Quotes.....	29
Topics for Discussion.....	31



Plot Summary

Brother Yun was named Liu Zhenying at his birth in 1958 in the farming village Liu Lao Zhuang, which is located in the China province called the Henan Province. At sixteen, Yun's life is forever changed when his mother urges her family to accept Jesus as their saviors and to commit their lives to following God's way. Yun does so and their first prayer - the restored health of his father - is granted within days. Yun's thirst for knowledge drives him to ask questions of his mother, but she had accepted Jesus as a young woman and now doesn't remember much. Unsatisfied and longing for information, Yun goes in search of a Bible. In China in these days, Bibles are illegal and the one man who probably has a Bible refuses to allow Yun to even look at it. Yun is told that if he wants a Bible he must pray for it. When that doesn't produce results, Yun prays and fasts. It takes weeks but one day Yun has a vision of two men giving him a Bible. The two men show up and Yun much later learns that the owner of the Bible had had a vision of his own - that he was to give the Bible to Yun, but he hadn't acted sooner out of fear.

Yun immediately begins to study diligently until the day he hears God command that he must now spread the gospel as he has learned it. Yun begins to answer requests to preach and teach, though the responsibility carries incredible danger. In fact, Yun is arrested on the day he goes with his future wife, Deling, to buy a marriage license. He is accused of causing social unrest and of disturbing the peace with his preaching. Yun manages to evade the law for some time except for some minor brushes but is eventually arrested. He is in jail while Deling gives birth to their son, Isaac. Yun is released but both he and Deling know that his light for Jesus is so bright that it will attract people hungry for the word. This proves to be true, and Yun is arrested when their second child, Yilin, is just seven months old.

Yun is tortured, held in solitary confinement and threatened, but each time he meets pain with courage and continues to share the gospel with anyone he encounters, including prison guards and convicted prisoners. When he finally escapes China, he begins a tour in North America, talking of his experiences in China. When someone calls him a liar, Yun is hurt but soon comes to realize that he is not free of persecution even in a country where freedom of worship is a protected right.



Chapters One through Four

Chapters One through Four Summary and Analysis

Brother Yun was named Liu Zhenying at his birth in 1958 in the farming village Liu Lao Zhuang, which is located in the China province called the Henan Province. Though the province is heavily populated, Brother Yun recalls a happy childhood with lots of open places to explore. The people of his village are poor and often burn corn husks for a bit of warmth in the winters and entire families usually sleep outside during the heat of summer. Yun says Christianity is not tolerated, and Christians in his region of China were sometimes nailed to the walls of their churches, crucified there for their beliefs. Other believers were dragged to death behind horses or cars and others were hanged. Yun's mother had been saved as a young girl, but when the pastor of their church is killed, the church members scatter.

In chapter two, Yun's father is told he has cancer and will die. He calls on a Daoist priest to cast out the demon he believes is inside him. The family, already poor, is now destitute in their efforts to buy medicine so that Yun begs for food from friends and neighbors on a daily basis. One night, Yun's mother prays for her husband's recovery and then calls the children to do the same. They do and Yun's father recovers. The family then calls on friends and neighbors to come to their home. The guests arrive, believing Yun's father has died and they are coming to a funeral. Instead, the family shares about the miraculous recovery, and a great many of the people come to believe in God from that event.

Yun's mother becomes the accepted spiritual leader, though she is illiterate and can remember little from her previous teachings. When Yun wants to read for himself, his mother tells him that there are no Bibles to be found. When Yun's deep desire for a Bible becomes evident, his mother takes him to another village where a man who had been a priest refuses to show his Bible. Yun returns later, asking only to see the book and promising he won't even touch it. The man says Yun should pray for a Bible if it means so much to him. Yun does so, eventually fasting as well. One day, two men arrive with a Bible for Yun. He later learns that the owner of the Bible had had a vision in which God instructed him to give Yun his Bible, but it was weeks before he heeded the vision.

There follows a section written by Deling, describing her own childhood. She says her family was also very poor and that her mother was insane for awhile. Deling was afflicted with hemophilia, and it was only extensive prayer that ended her disease. She says that she committed herself to Jesus and pledged to follow Him always.

In chapter three, Yun says he begins by reading the entire Bible, a painstaking task since he didn't understand all the characters and had to look up many words. He then memorizes entire books. Then he has a vision and goes to the Gao Village to teach. Not knowing what to say, he recites the book of Matthew. The long walk home is



accomplished in minutes and Yun arrives to find that a man he'd told his mother to expect had been there and would return at sundown.

In chapter four, Yun's mother and Deling's mother arrange for the two to marry. When the two go to get their marriage license, Yun's name sparks some interest and he's arrested. After they are married, Yun is almost arrested again but escapes.

Deling's account follows. She says that her mother, a believer, had determined that Deling would be married to a preacher and that Yun was the only unmarried man who fit her mother's requirements.

Yun credits Marie Morsen with establishing Christianity in China and seems to be a great admirer of her efforts. When he travels to her gravesite in Norway and discovers she has no tombstone and no one cares for her grave, he's greatly upset. The Christians there say they remember Morsen and her contributions to furthering Christianity in other ways, but Yun isn't happy with this explanation. He seems to shame them into taking action by giving them a set time to correct the problem as he sees it, promising he will bring back people who have learned the art of stone cutting while imprisoned for their beliefs if the people of Morsen's home don't do so. When he returns, there's a new monument. When the dedication occurs, Yun says that those who have worked toward establishing God's kingdom deserve respect.

Yun tells his mother that he's had a vision about his need to teach others, and she seems skeptical at first, but comes to believe when the man Yun says will arrive at their home comes dressed as Yun said he would. Yun's mother says that the man had been so excited to learn of Yun's vision that he had run all the way home to tell his village that Yun would be coming to teach them only to walk back to Yun's home again that day.

Deling's accounts sometimes give a different perspective of the events. For example, Yun says he was detained after applying for their marriage license but doesn't say anything more about it. Deling says she waited for him for some time, but he never returned and she eventually just gives up and goes home. At one point, the stress of constantly running from the police causes her to have a miscarriage.



Chapters Five through Nine

Chapters Five through Nine Summary and Analysis

Yun continues to work with the church and is arrested at age seventeen for his role in spreading the gospel. His father dies in 1977 and Yun feels the loss deeply. In 1978, believers are baptized by cutting holes in the frozen river in the middle of the night when police aren't likely to be patrolling. Then leaders from several religions are invited to participate in a summit for the Three-Self Church, which some believe is a step toward religious freedom, but Yun sees it as a way for the government to control believers while promoting specific political causes.

Yun describes recurring persecution. On one occasion he is in a meeting with one hundred-twenty other people but grows tired and goes into the cornfield to sleep. He's found but isn't arrested because the authorities can't prove he'd been involved with the meeting because he is outside.

In chapter six, Yun describes a "crime wave" in 1983 during which many church leaders are arrested. Yun is sent to Shangnan County where he is arrested while a church service is underway. A wooden cross is tied to his back and he's forced to march through the streets of the city with a police car leading the way and pronouncing Yun's crime of preaching, disturbing the peace and confusing people. Yun refuses to give his name, fearing reprisals on his own people. Yun is bound and left in a room while authorities try to figure out his identity. He says that the ropes snap of their own accord and he leaves the room. He is then faced with a tall wall with glass embedded at its top. Yun hoists himself partway up the way and is then hoisted over the wall and past a ten-foot-wide open septic system, landing safely on the other side.

In chapter seven, Yun and some others go to the Hubei Province after Yun's beating. There, Christians are so worried about being arrested that one mother gets on her knees and begs them to leave her home. When Yun asks for a blanket, the woman declines, saying that if Yun's group is arrested, the authorities would figure out who gave them the blanket and punish that person as well.

Deling tells of an incident in which a group is arrested by an officer named Zhang. At the same time the arrest is taking place, Zhang's mentally ill brother cuts off their mother's head and throws her body in the latrine. When Zhang asks his brother why he would do this, the brother says that it's because Zhang is persecuting the Christians. The incident is seen by the Christians as God's judgment, and Zhang's family accepts Jesus and stops their persecution.

In chapter eight, Yun and Deling travel to the north to "The Village of Love," where a man named Zhen has a vision of the arrest of several Christians. Yun believes he is part of the vision. Yun and Deling agree that Deling should return home. Upon his arrest, Yun hears God's voice saying, "I know," which comforts Yun because he knows that



God is with him, just as God has been with all those persecuted for their beliefs. When the authorities begin to question Yun, his first thought is how he can alert those still in danger of arrest. Rather than answering, he yells out that he is "a heavenly man," that he lives in a "Gospel Village," that he is the son of "Abundant Blessing" and "Faith, Hope, Love." He continues to shout, hoping to alert the others, and it's from this incident that he becomes known as "The Heavenly Man." A group is following, praying for Yun. When he sees them, he shouts that he isn't a Judas, which makes them understand that he won't betray them and that they should escape.

Yun and four others are taken to Wuyang City where they are jailed. It takes four weeks for the Public Security Bureau to discover Yun's true identity. When officers from Nanyang arrive and identify Yun, he's taken back to Nanyang, taking a severe beating on the way. When Yun begins to pray to God to receive his spirit, he is suddenly filled with an understanding that he, as a teacher, is not vital to God's church and that any way God uses him is a gift. He says that the pain and fear are gone with this understanding.

At the Nanyang prison, Yun is told that he'll be released if he confesses his "crimes." He says he wants to tell his captors that they will go to hell for their crimes but instead says that he's in no condition to confess. He promises to reflect on his past if they'll give him time to recuperate, and they agree. For thirty-eight days Yun fasts, though he doesn't reveal this to the guards. When he's questioned again, he can't even sit up and is carried into the interrogation room. Though tempted, he continues to rely on God and obeys when God commands that he continue to rest.

While Yun is in jail, Deling is under pressure by some to divorce Yun while she is still young enough to remarry. She says that it's a common occurrence, but that she didn't want to do such a thing.

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Moments of doubt are sometimes evident in Yun's writing, though these doubts aren't enough to cause him to turn his back on God. He says that he is arrested in 1981, but the car taking him to jail has a flat and he escapes, though he says he lay on the ground and cried out to God, asking why he continues to be persecuted. Yun says he and other believers are reassured by the fact that many of their predecessors were also persecuted.

Yun talks a great deal about those who are willing to risk their lives in order to teach and to learn about God, but he also talks about those who are afraid. In Hubei Province, Yun and his group are put out of a home, literally without a blanket. Yun says that the young mother of the house fears for her family and the retribution that will occur if it's discovered she has helped the believers. It's interesting that Yun doesn't gloss over this incident but also doesn't seem to judge or excuse. He says that their own "brethren" had turned them out but doesn't say whether he understands their fears or believes they should have been more willing to risk their lives as Yun and the other teachers are doing. Yun later says that the Christians he encounters to the north are willing to risk



arrest and even death and that he and Deling are never turned away from the home of a Christian there. While Yun is imprisoned in Wuyang City, several women bring him gifts. Though he doesn't receive the gifts from the guards, the fact that these women were willing to provide for him uplifts him.

Yun speaks freely about God's miracles in his life. He says that he doesn't eat or drink anything for more than a month - a feat he knows to be medically impossible. He doesn't try to explain it away but says only that it happened and that God is responsible.



Chapters ten through Thirteen

Chapters ten through Thirteen Summary and Analysis

In chapter ten, Yun is imprisoned where he is brutally beaten repeatedly and subjected to many humiliations. He is put in the urinal, covered with feces and shocked. He continues to refuse to eat. A man named Li is in the cell with Yun and comes to realize that Yun is serious about his commitment to God, prompting Li to make a commitment of his own. When it's realized that Li is Yun's friendly, Li is moved to another cell. Yun's brother-in-law is in a different cell and tries to rush to Yun's aid, but is beaten away. Yun escapes pustules suffered by all the other prisoners and prisoners are offered lenient sentences for informing on Yun's activities.

In chapter eleven, Yun's mother and Deling have visions the same night assuring them of Yun's safety. They are allowed to visit only when invited and are not surprised to be invited the following day. Yun has also had visions and is not surprised to find the visitors. Yun and his family share a Lord's Supper of crackers and grape juice, and then Yun says that the only food he wants is to have his mother sharing the gospel. Deling says that she didn't recognize Yun when she saw him, and that it was her first opportunity to tell him that she is pregnant.

In chapter twelve, Yun is again beaten. In his cell, he preaches to other prisoners and leads a mass revival. Deling tells him that she is expecting a child. Deling says that she is urged to have an abortion. She doesn't keep her appointment for the abortion and goes into early labor so that there's nothing that can be done about the lack of an abortion. Deling sends Yun a message about the birth of their son and Yun names him Isaac. Yun says that a woman named Sister Zhi lives in a village called Iron Buddhist Temple and that her son was ill. Christians prayed for the boy and Zhi's husband came to believe. The husband's cousin works in the prison and intervenes on Yun's behalf, a fact that Yun says makes his life in prison much easier.

In chapter thirteen, Yun is placed in charge of a murderer named Huang who continually tries to kill himself and to hurt the guards so that he's tightly restrained. Huang is to be executed for his crimes and Yun is told that he is responsible for Huang's behavior until the execution. Yun immediately begins caring for Huang and shares his own food with him so that Huang notices Yun's Godly attitude. Yun then shares the gospel with Huang who accepts Christ. Huang shares his story - that he'd been in trouble but his father had bought him a lighter sentence but that Huang had then gotten into more serious trouble and had intended to kill himself but was captured by police before he could carry out his plan. On the night before his scheduled execution, Huang writes a letter to his parents, using his own blood when he doesn't have sufficient ink, and urging them to accept Jesus. Huang hugs Yun tightly just before the execution, telling Yun that they'll meet in Heaven. Then Yun is paraded through the streets while his crimes are announced on a loud speaker. However, rain and bitter winds mean that no one remains outside to hear

and see the display and Yun notes that it was a "failure" from the authorities' point of view.

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An interesting point is that Yun is taken to the hospital and that nurses are brought to the prison in an effort to save him from starvation. The interesting point is that the guards responsible for constantly beating Yun seem to be concerned that they'll be in trouble from upper officials if Yun dies.

The lives of Deling and Yun's mother are very difficult while Yun is in prison. While Yun is not in prison he seems to spend all this time focused on teaching and preaching the gospel so it's never fully explained why the family is in better condition while Yun is not in jail though it seems likely that Yun does some work in the family's fields but doesn't talk about that.



Chapters Fourteen through Seventeen

Chapters Fourteen through Seventeen Summary and Analysis

In chapter fourteen, Yun is taken for his trial where he listens to a taped recording of himself preaching to a gathering. Yun says that the sound of the voices is so sweet that he asks to hear it again but is refused. On another court appearance, Yun's cousin is presiding, but through God Yun sees it as a ruse to attempt to get him to confess. Yun is shown a number of items and he admits that they are all his, prompting the court officials to briefly believe he has had a change of attitude. Yun is shown his daily devotional book, "Streams in the Desert," and that day's devotion is John 19:11, "Jesus answered, You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore, the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." Yun takes that as God's promise for his current situation and continues to refuse to answer any questions related to his co-workers or to name any people who had also taught the gospel. Yun is sentenced to four years in Xinyang Prison Labour Camp. While Yun is in prison, Deling and Yun's mother work their fields, though they don't have the knowledge to plant correctly. Despite the fact that they are often ridiculed by their neighbors for doing something incorrectly, they tend to make acceptable harvests even when their neighbors do not. When the wheat fields are all damaged by hail, the one planted by Yun's wife and mother is the only one spared. When Yun's mother is trying to bring the harvest in one night shortly after Isaac's birth, the cart turns over and she is injured.

In chapter fifteen, Yun describes his work at that prison camp. He and the others are beaten routinely and never have enough to eat. The prison warden understands the real reason Yun is in jail and takes him off the most difficult jobs. Yun then meets Father Yu, a Catholic priest who is initially wary of Yun but eventually comes to realize Yun's deep love for God. After serving his time, Father Yu becomes a bishop for the underground Catholic Church in China. Yun then meets Shi Zhou Ba who, as an eight-year-old boy, had lived in a Buddhist monastery. Yun brings Shi to Christ during their stay in prison.

Yun has a Bible that was smuggled in in pieces, some in a loaf of bread baked by Deling. A man named Yong sometimes reads the Bible and when he's caught with it, the pages are confiscated. Yun asks for it back, but the request isn't immediately granted. Yun then receives a letter from his friend in Christ, Brother Xu. Brother Xu writes that Billy Graham is going to be talking to China's Prime Minister and that he plans to seek an audience with Billy Graham to plead Yun's case. That letter and Yun's reply are intercepted and Yun is moved to a solitary holding cell. When an officer eventually comes to his cell, the officer says that Yun had gotten a lenient sentence because it was believed his attitude had improved. The officer then says, "We're afraid if we keep you locked up you'll take over the entire prison," then charges against Yun are reiterated, including a poem in which he'd referred to the prison camp as a "graveyard." Yun is taken to the torture room and he describes what happens as vicious. Later the director



enters Yun's cell and returns his Bible. Yun is visited by his mother. Though the visit is brief, her presence is a gift to him. Brother Xu knows that his letter about visiting Billy Graham was intercepted but attempts it anyway. He is captured and arrested - an event that captures worldwide attention.

In chapter sixteen, Yun is taken for another appearance in court and after hearing again the charges against him is released but is forced to sign an agreement. He opposes the final point which requires his membership in the Three-Self Patriotic Church, arguing that if he is stripped of political rights, he doesn't actually have the right to membership. He is required to remain in his village unless he has permission to leave and to report to the local officers monthly. He returns home where it takes some time for Isaac to warm to him. Yun then has a dream about running with a "bright light the size of an egg," and Deling realizes this is a vision that Yun's light for God will be too bright to hide from others. She's right and they soon begin having visitors in search of Yun's words. Yun takes a Bible verse from 1 Peter to mean that he should not report to local authorities and stops meeting that term of his release. Foreign teachers become common, many bringing Bibles, but Yun says they soon ask that only those who can preach for more than two hours at a time are welcome. One night Yun and some others pray for four afflicted with demons. Three are immediately freed but the fourth man remains angry and wild. Finally Yun's group admit they can't heal the man's mind and suddenly realize this is what God was waiting for - their submission. The man was then healed.

In chapter seventeen, Yun ignores a vision Deling describes and the advice of Deling and co-workers that he should leave the area. His refusal leads to his arrest again. This time he's sent to Da'an Prison Labour Camp for a three-year sentence. Yun soon becomes known for his constant kindness and generosity. He is not allowed visitors or letters but soon discovers a woman who runs a tiny store in the prison after asking the woman for the opportunity to hold a hymnal she has on display. Though never named, the woman becomes Yun's friend and even offers to carry messages for him.

When Yun and the other prisoners are ordered to write a plan for their lives for the coming year, Yun puts a great deal of thought into the order and admits he doesn't really know what to write. Yun says that he is always tired and weak from lack of food. These things have taken over his life so that he has lost his direction. Yun uses this direction, which the prison officials likely hoped would make Yun realize that he should simply bow down to their rules in order to get out of prison, to renew his walk with God.

Yun notes that 1985 is "a powerful year" for Christianity in China. This is seen to some degree by the attitudes of those who arrest and guard Yun during his time in prison. Some hate him without really knowing why. Others realize he's being persecuted for his beliefs and are lenient with him because of this. Yun's dedication seems representative of others who have become disciples for Christ during this time.

Though Yun seems to be generally upbeat because of his faith in God, there are times when he seems to lose hope. One of those occurs during his initial term in prison just



prior to Yun's final trial during that time. Yun begins to wonder if he might be sentenced to death. One day he's told all about the government's efforts to make him understand how he should be acting and the officials immediately say they have decided to just let him go home. This contrast to what Yun is being told about his crimes and the actions taken are interesting and evidence of the upheaval and the differences of opinion during this time in China's history.



Chapters Eighteen through Twenty-one

Chapters Eighteen through Twenty-one Summary and Analysis

In chapter eighteen, Yun is playing gospel music over the prison's loudspeakers when he is called by the prison's education director. Yun believes he might be in trouble but is introduced to a doctor who says that she has heard that Yun is a skilled masseur and that her father has had a stroke. Doctors have said that long-term massage therapy could help her father heal. The doctor asks Yun to stay with her family. Yun agrees and hurries to tell a co-worker, Chaun, of the opportunity. The two pray and Yun goes to the doctor's home. He immediately begins ministering to the doctor's father, telling him about Jesus and urging him to take Jesus into his heart. Both the ailing man and his wife kneel and are saved, and Yun returns of his own accord to prison. Chaun and Yun become "unofficial pastors" at the prison.

Yun says that his second child, a daughter named Yilin, was seven months old when he was jailed and that the family occasionally visits him in prison. Yun notes that the family is skinny, that Isaac continues to wear the same clothes though he is growing taller and has holes in his shoes. Isaac says that he is tormented at school for being Yun's son. Yun says this is the most difficult prison time he's faced.

In chapter nineteen, Yun is being released after nineteen months in the prison camp and five months in jail. There's a tense moment when Yun fears he's about to be arrested again before he can leave the grounds, but it doesn't happen. Yun and Deling immediately join Yun's mother in giving thanks upon his return. The year is 1993 and the children are asleep when he arrives. Yun is immediately asked go many places to teach and preach but he decides he wants to wait and listen for God's commands on the subject. He comes to realize that his love for God must come first in his life, but that his love for his family must come second ahead of his ministry. Yun and other local Christians begin the Prophet Samuel Training Centre. Students remain in caves for a period of intensive Bible study with the goal of being ready to go out as missionaries.

In chapter twenty, Yun describes the outpouring of aid from foreign countries in the form of Bibles and money that eventually includes denominational tracts and other gifts. Yun says that the gifts soon provide a division among the house churches that have so long been unified. As Yun seeks to create a unity, he is met immediately with opposition. As he falters, God tells him that there have been others charged with this task who have also failed, renewing Yun's determination. Yun meets with Zhang Rongliang, the man who had been among the officers who once arrested Yun, seeking his help in the cause of unity. Zhang initially refuses to discuss the issue, citing his belief that Brother Xu, leader of another sect, is wrong. When a meeting of the faction heads meet, Brother Xu - at the urging of another member - begins to wash Zhang's feet, which prompts a step toward unification. Yun says the movement continues through the present day.



In chapter twenty-one, Yun is again imprisoned in 1997 along with several others who are meeting in Zhengzhou City. Yun attempts to flee and jumps through a window, injuring himself. He's beaten severely over the course of the coming days with the tormentors focusing on his legs so he becomes dependent on others to carry him to and from the torture chamber. Meanwhile, Deling is also jailed, a fact that weighs heavily on Yun's mind. Usually children who have no parents at home to care for them are taken into state custody and brainwashed to believe their parents abandoned them. Isaac and Yiling are taken in by Christian families and moved around to avoid authorities until Deling is released. Deling says that when she first meets with Isaac after her release, he says that he has a "heavy burden" of worry about the future.

Deling says that being a Christian during this time in China is difficult and that spending so much time away from her husband is especially difficult. She says there were times she was angry because of the struggles and seems to occasionally be angry at Yun for both his time in prison and his time traveling to preach. This is also weighing on Yun's mind and he eventually comes to realize that he must make some changes in his life. Yun says that the lives of many Christians are in "disarray" because one of the adults spends so much time away from the family in service of their ministry. He begins to urge people to take spouses and even children along whenever possible.

Deling says that because she has violated the "one child law" she is fined on several occasions. One time she is unable to pay the fine and the door of the home is broken as punishment. Yun is seeing this same problem in other families. In some cases, mothers are forced to undergo abortions or sterilizations, as Deling is sterilized. Yun tells families to hide expectant mothers and that he will care for the babies. As a result several babies pass through Yun and Deling's home on their way to adoptive parents. Deling says that in some cases, the adoptive parents are too poor to feed the child and Yun continues to help put food on those tables. Deling admits she is initially angry with Yun on this point but came to believe in this cause as she heard the story behind each baby.



Chapters Twenty-Two through Twenty-Five

Chapters Twenty-Two through Twenty-Five Summary and Analysis

In chapter twenty-two, Yun is unable to walk at all but Brother Xu says Yun should consider escape. Yun soon has a vision of his own in which he escapes the prison and immediately follows the Lord's directions. He walks past gates that should have been locked and guards that should have refused to allow him to pass so that he is soon outside the prison. He catches a cab to the home of Christian friends who have also had a vision of his return and are expecting him. They hide him in a pre-arranged location, and a huge storm which makes the efforts of the tracking dogs useless. Yun cites the prayers of two men as being instrumental in his escape, Brother Xu and Brother Musheng, who are both in prison at the time of Yun's escape. Yun's legs were healed prior to his walking out of the prison, but he doesn't realize this fact until he's safely away.

In chapter twenty-three Yun's life is increasingly difficult after his escape because the authorities want badly to take him into custody. It's decided that he cannot preach because authorities would doubly punish anyone found helping him. Yun goes into hiding and is told that he should take a time of rest and recuperation to spend time with his family and to wait for God's directions. Yun comes to believe he's supposed to leave China. The way is cleared through prayer and a forged passport. Though the passport looks nothing like Yun, he trusts God and clears customs in China on his departure and upon his arrival in Germany. Yun is hospitalized in German and held in a refugee detention center.

In chapter twenty-four, Yun describes the "Back to Jerusalem" vision passed on to him by another missionary. Yun says that the goal is not for everyone to rush to China for a convention but to spread the word of God in all places between China and Jerusalem, the birthplace of the gospel.

In chapter twenty-five, Yun describes the differences between churches in the Western world and those in China. He says that in China, a call to give an offering for a person heading out on a missionary trip meant that everyone empties his pockets, and that this offering often represented every cent that person has, not merely what he has in cash on hand. As a contrast, Yun says that Westerners are content to give the minimum. He also points out that Western church sermons are often about feeling comforted and comfortable and wonders why those people never seem to hear the Lord's message to go out and preach in the various slums of the world.

Yun says that his mother suffered several strokes over the last years of her life but was always healed. In 2000, while in Germany, Yun hears that his mother died.

About two weeks after Deling's release she has a vision that Yun is free and goes to Zhengzhou where she learns Yun has escaped. Deling says that from this moment on, she realizes that nothing is impossible for God. Deling's own faith has been incredible, though it's easy to read statements she makes as indications she is sometimes disheartened and she sometimes wishes things were different for her family.

Yun's escape puts him in a precarious position because the authorities are now searching for him with renewed vigor. Not only is he wanted, he has made the officials look incompetent and now they want very much to recapture Yun. While this makes life dangerous for Yun, it also increases the danger to those who harbor him. This means that Yun is no longer welcome as a minister because of this increased danger, and his family has difficulty finding a place to stay.

Yun says there is complacency among the Christian members of Western churches, which he compares that to the churches of China where members never sleep. Yun attributes this difference to the fact that the Chinese congregations are always on the run, and he says that it's impossible to sleep while running. Yun says he fears what will happen to the Chinese churches if the persecution ends and wonders whether that same complacency will take over in China.



Chapters Twenty-Six through Twenty-Nine

Chapters Twenty-Six through Twenty-Nine Summary and Analysis

In chapter twenty-six, Yun is in Canada in 2000 preparing for a television interview when someone presents him with a copy of an email attacking several of Yun's claims and announcing that Deling and the children are currently in Myanmar. Yun is especially angry that Deling and the children might be in danger if officials from China or Myanmar read the email. There are letters in support of Yun sent immediately from Christian leaders in China and the Canadian tour continues.

In chapter twenty-seven, Yun, Deling, Yilin and Isaac have plans to travel to Thailand. Yun has a dream that he is questioned at the airport and an identification card prompts his arrest. Yun assures Deling he will be fine, and the family splits up to travel in several small groups. Yun walks into the airport to find the scene exactly as it appeared in his dream and immediately knows he's in trouble. He's arrested but Deling and Yilin make their way safely to a mountain hut and then on to the home of Christians in Thailand. Meanwhile, Isaac has made his own way over the border farther to the north and is reunited with Deling and Yilin. They all move into Yun's apartment though Yun has been arrested.

In chapter twenty-eight, Yun's beatings stop but he remains in custody and learns the Chinese government has been told that Yun is in custody. Yun alerts friends in the area of the situation and they prevail on the Germans to intervene. Yun's Burmese jailers don't want to be in the middle of the situation and keep the Chinese away. Yun is then jailed in Yangon City where the conditions are horrible. All the prisoners are ordered to worship Buddha and Yun has to fight again for his right to worship as he believes is right. Soon he has a following, though there is a difficult language barrier. At one point he "baptizes" some fellow prisoners with water from the bathroom sink. Yun is sentenced to seven years in prison but this time doesn't tell his family the length of the sentence. Yun is released after only seven months and seven days of this sentence.

In chapter twenty-nine, Yun arrives in Frankfurt where he reconnects with Deling, Isaac and Yilin. He is in poor health with parasites and nutritional problems. Yun and Deling have now been married twenty years. Both say there have been rocky times, but they are happy. Yun urges readers not mourn for him if he is called to Heaven but to help carry on as Yun has, spreading the gospel to anyone, anywhere.

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Yun notes that he had expected little or no persecution once out of China. He says he had endured the physical torture in China and was surprised at how much this kind of



slander and persecution hurt. Yun later notes that every Christian must endure some sort of suffering during his Christian life. Yun spends some time talking about the role of prayer as it relates to those being held in prison for preaching Christianity. Yun seems to believe that time in prison is not always something to be escaped, as is indicated by Brother Xu's indication that it was the correct time for Yun to escape but that he was to remain in prison. Yun had also said that he would remain in prison for as long as it was God's will. Now, with the years of torture behind him, Yun says that he urges Christians not to automatically pray for the release of a person being held in prison but to be certain that is God's will.

Deling says that she feels guilty over Yun's most recent arrest because she feels that they'd been warned by God and had simply ignored the warning. Yun himself says that his arrest is his wake-up call. Deling says she'd felt their lives would be idyllic in the West.

Yun says that he should have been moved to a labor camp during this final incarceration but remains ill a great deal of the time, a fact that he doesn't understand until later. Each time the doctors examine Yun to decide if he is now well enough to go to the prison, Yun becomes mysteriously ill with fevers and other symptoms which he eventually comes to realize is God's way of keeping him in the jail where he's needed to win souls.



Characters

Liu Zhenying

Known to his Christian friends as Brother Yun, he was born in Liu Lao Zhuang in China's Henan Province. Yun is sixteen when his father falls desperately ill and the family is driven into horrible poverty as they try to buy medicine. When all else fails, Yun's mother calls the children together and tells them what she recalls about Christianity from her own youth. Yun is deeply touched and hands his life over to God at that point. His dedication is seen in his prayers and fasting in his quest for a Bible. When that is presented to him, he comes to realize that God is calling him to preach and teach. Stepping out on faith, Yun begins to address groups of Christians, at first merely quoting scripture he's memorized. Yun is eventually arrested and is in jail during the birth of his son and is arrested again when his daughter is just seven months old. Through it all, Yun is faithful to whatever God asks of him. He works toward unity of the Chinese churches after foreign gifts and literature causes splits among the previously unified Christians. He faithfully walks out of prison and later out of China, trusting that God will clear the way. Yun eventually takes his message farther west, to North America, though there are those who don't believe his stories.

Deling

Wife of Yun, Deling is a young girl when her mother chooses Yun for her future husband. Deling says that she had no idea what was to be expected of her with regard to marriage. Deling is a Christian and vows on several occasions to remain by her husband's side, which she does despite the urging of some to divorce Yun while he is in prison and a decree by the state that she must have an abortion of their second child. Deling's devotion may sometimes be compromised by daily life. She points out the hardships that face her while Yun is traveling to preach or is in prison. Deling notes that Yun once gave her the equivalent of about seventy cents, not because he was selfish with his money but because this is all he had. Deling says she sometimes has difficulty keeping up with Yun's generous spirit. Deling's faith, though often tested, remains vital and she boards a train and travels to Zhengzhou based only on a vision when she believes Yun is to be released from prison.

Yun's Mother

Never named, Yun's mother is an important part of his life throughout his life. She was a Christian from a young age but had forgotten much of what she knew when she led her own family to Jesus. She suffers greatly when Yun is being harassed for his Christianity but seems to remain faithful and is often praying when the family faces trials.



Yun's Father

Never named, Yun's father is dying of an apparently terminal disease when Yun's mother calls on the entire family to turn their lives over to God and to pray for Yun's father. They do so and the man lives several additional productive years, and the cancer that had nearly ended his life is gone and never returns.

Isaac

Son of Yun and Deling, Isaac is named for the Biblical character. Isaac seems to feel the pressure the family faces when Yun and Deling are both imprisoned.

Sister Juan

The young sister who accompanies Yun to Shangnan County where Yun is arrested and forced to walk through the streets with a cross on his back. Sister Juan is the young girl who takes over preaching for Yun when he becomes too hoarse to continue preaching. It's noted that she had never addressed large groups prior to this meeting and Yun tells her to talk on the "salvation of the cross." Yun notes that she is terrified during that initial time of teaching but later filled a role as leader in the Born Again network of churches.

Zhang

An officer who leads a raid that results in the arrest of a group of Christians, including Yun, his mother and Deling. While the officer is overseeing the raid, his mentally ill brother kills their mother, cutting off her head with a rusty knife and throwing her body into a latrine. When Zhang asks why, his brother says he committed the murder because of Zhang's persecution of the Christians. Some see the incident as God's judgment and Zhang's family accepts Jesus as a result.

Zhen

A believer who has a vision that several of them will be arrested. Yun immediately knows that he is to be one of those arrested. When Yun is later taken to prison at Wuyang City, he finds Zhen incarcerated there. It's Zhen who greatly encourages Yun during their time together in prison. When Yun is severely beaten, Zhen wipes the blood from his face with his own sleeve.

Brother Li

A man who is a ruthless criminal prior to being arrested and put into the cell with Yun. Yun says he knows Li is placed in Yun's cell in order to watch over him and to report on him to the authorities. However, Li watches Yun's actions and comes to realize that Yun



is simply a young pastor, that he has no evil in him and that he is consistently good. As Li is carrying Yun to a meeting one day, he tells Yun that he has come to accept God.

The Woman at the Storefront

This woman is never named but Yun describes her as having been rude to him the first time he sees she has a hymnal at her storefront at the Da'an Prison Labour Camp. After Yun convinces her to allow him to see her hymn book, he sings for her and they become dear friends with the woman eventually offering to serve as messenger for letters between Yun and his family.

Huang

A murderer who continually tries to hurt himself and guards. Huang is put into the cell with Yun who cares for the man, prays for him and eventually wins him to Christ. Huang is put to death for his crimes but leaves behind a letter to his family written - literally - in his own blood for lack of ink.

Xu Yongze

A man called "Brother Xu" by Yun who is a devoted teacher and preacher. Xu sends a letter to Yun telling of his intention to contact Billy Graham, American evangelist, to plead Yun's case. The letters are intercepted, but Xu tries to contact Graham anyway. Xu is arrested before he can reach Graham and is sentenced to a prison term for his work in the Gospel. Xu remains in jail when Yun escapes, and the two men talk soon after Xu's eventual release.



Objects/Places

Liu Lao Zhuang

Located in the Henan Province, this is the farming village where Brother Yun was born.

Gao Village

Where Yun first teaches after surrendering his life to Jesus.

Three-Self Church

A church supported by the Chinese government that reportedly allows Christianity but actually is a political move to promote specific causes. The three refers to self-propagating, self-supporting and self-governing.

Shangnan County

Where Yun is arrested and forced to walk through the streets carrying a cross.

Hubei Province

Where Yun is sent after his arrest in Shangnan County in an effort to keep him safe from the authorities.

Da'an Prison Camp

A labor camp where Yun serves his second sentence.

Village of Love

Where Yun is arrested but refuses to give his name as anything other than "Heavenly Man," earning himself the nickname.

Wayung City

Where Yun is taken after his arrest at the Village of Love.



STREAMS IN THE DESERT

The name of Yun's daily devotional book. When Yun is shown the book in court, he opens to that day's devotion to find Scripture from John which reads, in part, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above," which Yun takes as God's promise in that moment.

Xinyang Prison Labour Camp

Where Yun is sentenced in 1984, to serve four years hard labor for preaching the gospel.

Zhengzhou Number One Maximum Security Prison

The facility from which Yun escapes.



Themes

Faith

Yun's faith is the overriding theme of this story. The level of his faith can be seen in his initial belief in God. Based only on his mother's words that God is the only thing that can save Yun's father's life, Yun and his siblings pledge their love and loyalty to God. Over the coming months, Yun's determination to learn more about God grows so he is willing to do whatever it takes to expand that faith. Yun is told by a man that in order to receive a Bible he must be willing to pray and fast. Yun does so to the point that his family fears for his sanity, but Yun never seems to doubt that he will receive a Bible if he continues to pray and fast.

Another example of Yun's faith is when he has a vision that he's to go forth and share the word of God. Yun tells his mother that he's going in one direction and she is to expect a visitor from another. Yun goes so far as to explain what the man will be wearing. This exemplifies Yun's faith in that he doesn't fear that the man might not come or that he will look ridiculous to his family if the man doesn't come.

Willingness to Obey

Yun's belief in God is very strong and prompts his willingness to obey God's commands. This can be seen very early in Yun's Christian life with Yun's desire for a Bible. Yun visits a man who reportedly has a Bible. Though the man is fearful of showing the book to Yun, he advises Yun to pray for a Bible of his own. After some time of prayer, the man tells Yun he should also fast. Yun continues this fasting and praying diligently until he receives a Bible of his own. Another example of his willingness to obey God's commands is seen when Yun has a vision that indicates he is to go to neighboring villages to teach. Yun is also willing to put himself in danger. He faces arrest often and has seen Christians crucified on the walls of the local churches, hanged and dragged to their deaths. Despite this constant threat, Yun continues to do whatever he believes God directs him to do. When Yun is arrested the second time, he says his arrest is a direct result of his unwillingness to heed God's commands.

Another example of this willingness to obey is seen when Yun prepares to leave China. Yun is given a passport but says the photo looks nothing like him. He hears God tell him that he should simply go to the airport and only say what God commands. Yun later notes that God hadn't commanded him to say anything and so he doesn't. Some two years later, Yun learns that China had a voice-recognition program at the airport, so that if he had talked he would likely have been arrested. His willingness to obey was vital to his ability to escape the country.



Purpose

Yun says his purpose from the day he gives his life to God is to serve God and to spread the Gospel. It's interesting that Yun is continually placed in situations where he is able to serve in this way and that he continues to be willing to serve despite the hardships and torture he endures. His attitude about his purpose can be seen during his first prison term when Yun and the other prisoners are ordered to write a plan for their lives for the following year. Yun admits he doesn't know what to write at first but then recalls a Bible verse from Revelations that prompts him to realize his devotion to God had been weakened by his physical condition. Yun admits that the reason for this weakening is the lack of food and rest but doesn't use that as an excuse. He renews his devotion to his calling at that moment and pledges to return to the purpose. At another point, Yun says that he gets so caught up in the teaching and preaching that he forgets he is supposed to do all these things because of his love for God. He says that having the purpose in mind isn't enough unless his love for God is the basis rather than his desire to achieve something on his own.



Style

Perspective

The story is written in first person, partly from the perspective of Yun and partly from his wife, Deling. There are also brief sections from two of Yun's brothers in Christ who witness his miraculous escape from prison. This division is not confusing and offers a less-restrictive point of view than is typical of first-person stories. Yun's side of the story sometimes differs from Deling, which provides readers with a broader look at some aspects of the story. For example, Yun says he is arrested when he and Deling go to get their marriage license but tells nothing more about the incident other than saying that it happened. Without Deling's perspective on that point, the reader would have been left to know nothing else about the incident. However, Deling tells her side of the story, including that she waits for Yun for a long time, but he never returns to the place where she is waiting. Deling says that when she can wait no longer, she gives up and returns to her own home. Despite the dual perspectives, there is no indication of what happens to Yun at that point, including whether he was actually jailed. It is known that Yun and Deling marry later so Yun is either jailed for only a short time or else is released without being sent to jail. The majority of the story comes from Yun's perspective. The sections written by Deling are separated from those written by Yun and are presented in a different font, making it evident to the reader which of the two is writing at any particular point.

Tone

The story is very dark in many places, though there is an overriding feeling of hope, based solely on the final challenge which is death. Toward that end, the characters of the story claim to have no fear of death and undergo torture and persecution for the sake of the Lord. An interesting point about the tone of the book is that Yun at one point steps away from the typically accepted journalistic methods and directly addresses the reader. He is talking about his second arrest and that his arrest is the direct result of not heeding the advice and warnings of his wife, co-workers and God. He then says, "If you are a servant of the Lord, let me encourage you ..." The address is out of keeping with the majority of the book, which puts a great deal of emphasis on this point. There are several points in which this method of emphasis is used, including a section at the end of the book in which Yun urges the reader to help with the work Yun began.

There is a point near the end of the book at which Yun relates a time when he was accused of having lied about his story. Yun puts this down to persecution in the name of Jesus and says he will never be free of this. However, it should be noted that some of Yun's claims seem to be self-serving. For example, he says that he "commanded" several people to kneel and confess their sins, and they did so. This could be a result of the translation of the events into English or could be completely true. It's left to the reader to decide.



The majority of the story is set in China, beginning in the 1970s and continuing through the early part of the 2000. There are few descriptions of the appearance of people and places, such as the color of a person's hair or the living conditions. However, there are extensive descriptions of events and of the conditions of the prisons where Yun serves his various sentences. What is described in greater detail are the political, social and religious climates of the day in China. These are not conducive to freedom of religion, though Yun says that the Chinese claim to have no limits on worship. Yun's descriptions are generally not favorable to the Chinese government. Yun says that there are those who say Christians are welcome to worship as they please in China, but that the truth is that those who don't obey China's dictates are arrested and beaten. During one of his own arrests, Yun is asked to choose the form of torture he'll endure with the guards mockingly saying that this is his opportunity to choose.

Structure

The book is divided into twenty-nine chapters of varying lengths, generally between eight and twelve pages. The chapters are both numbered and titled. Titles provide a clue as to what the reader can expect from that chapter. Chapter titles including "Humble Beginnings," "A Hunger Fulfilled," "Go to the West and South," "God Bless My Whole Family," "The Path of Persecution, The God of Peter Is Your God, God Wants All of My Heart, Be Still and Know that I Am God, Through the Valley of Death," "The Fiery Trail" and "End of the Fast" are the names of the first eleven chapters. The remaining chapters are "God Gives Me a Son and Many Brothers," "A Precious Soul from the Lord," "Future Hope," "A Graveyard Covered with Thorns," "God Pours Out His Awesome Power," "A Second Time in Prison," "A Painful Family Visit," "God's Oil Station," "The Road to Unity," "The Third Time in Prison - My Lowest Point," "A Miraculous Escape," "Leaving the Bamboo Curtain," "Back to Jerusalem," "Reflecting on Four Years in the West," "A New Kind of Persecution," "A Sudden Change of Plans," "A Seed in the Ground," and "A Future as Bright as God's Promises."

The book also includes eight pages of photos. These are split into two sections, dividing the book roughly into thirds. The photos are black and white and depict the author, his family including wife, mother and children, and the prison from which he escaped. The story is presented roughly in chronological order with some points of foreshadowing. For example, Yun tells the story of a warning from God prior to his second prison sentence in which God says that Yun should take his wife and son and flee. Yun doesn't leave and indicates that this was a mistake prior to telling of his arrest. This type of foreshadowing occurs at several points throughout the book.



Quotes

"I will be in this prison for exactly the length of time God has determined. I won't leave one moment early and I won't stay one moment too long. When God determines my ministry in prison is complete, I will come out." Introduction, Page 12

"When we made a firm commitment to follow Jesus regardless of the cost, we didn't really understand what that could involve! 1938 was a terrible year for persecution in China. Hundreds of house church leaders were hunted like criminals and sent to prison." - Deling, Chapter Six, Page 69

"The government and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement have fooled many Christians around the world by insisting there is freedom of religion in China, freedom for people to choose. They boldly claim Christians are no longer persecuted for their faith." Chapter Seven, Page 70

"We felt so honoured to be wanted criminals as we walked hand-in-hand together for Jesus. It's a great honour to be humiliated for the name of the Lord." Chapter Eight, Page 79

"A spirit of faith spoke from within me, 'The gospel grows through hardship and will spread throughout the world. The truth will enter everyone's heart. Truth is always truth. Nothing and no one can change that.'" Chapter Nine, Page 95

"You were labeled a counter-revolutionary and an enemy of the state, but I know you're really just a Christian pastor who wants people to believe in Jesus. I don't know why our government sends people like you to our prison camp." - A warden, Chapter Fifteen, Page 168

"When we sentenced you we thought your attitude had improved so we only gave you four years. But after arriving in the prison camp you've gone from bad to worse and have continued your religious activities. We're afraid if we keep you locked up you'll take over the entire prison." Chapter Fifteen, Page 177

"I had experienced so much in those four years, but God had been faithful. I'd suffered some horrible tortures, but God had been faithful. I'd been dragged in front of judges and courts, but God had been faithful. I'd been hungry, thirsty, and had fainted from exhaustion, but God had been faithful." Chapter sixteen, Page 187

"When God starts to move, the best we can hope to do is go along for the ride. All man-made plans and strategies become futile and worthless, and are swept away like an umbrella in a mighty hurricane." Chapter Sixteen, page 195

"But I tell you from my heart that the most difficult thing I've ever experienced was seeing the condition of my family when they came to visit me in those days. They were



all skin and bones from lack of food, were dressed in rags, and I could see they were all struggling terribly." Chapter Eighteen, Page 211

"I have learned that when the Lord tells us to do something there is no time for discussion or rationale, regardless of the situation we face. When we are sure God has told us to act, as I was on this occasion, blind obedience is called for. Not to obey God implies that we are wiser than him, and that we know better how to run our lives than he does." Chapter Twenty-two, Page 255

"Don't pray for the persecution to stop. We shouldn't pray for a lighter load to carry, but a stronger back to endure." Chapter Twenty-four, Page 287

'In China I had been used to beatings, torture with electric batons, and all kinds of humiliation. I guess that deep in my heart I had presumed that now I was in the West my days of persecution had ended." Chapter Twenty-six, Page 308



Topics for Discussion

Describe Yun's life as a youngster. What is the monumental event that changes his life at sixteen? What is it about his father that prompts this event? What are the roles of Yun's mother and father in his life?

How does Yun come to meet Deling? How do they come to marry? Describe their lives as husband and wife. What does Deling say about the pressures of being the wife of a preacher? Of being the wife of a man in prison?

Describe the prison escape. Why doesn't Brother Xu walk out with Yun as well? What happens to Yun's ministry as a result of the escape?

What is the Three-Self Church? Does Yun agree to join this church as a condition of parole from prison? What reason does he give for this decision? Can you list any other churches that have performed this role in society?

Who is Isaac? Huang? Brother Xu? Yiling? Zhang? Zhen? Yilin? Deling? Choose two of these characters and discuss their relationships to Yun.

When Yun arrives in Canada he discovers someone has written and distributed an email in which the author claims not to believe some of Yun's stories, including the fact that he had fasted for seventy-four days. Are these fantastic tales that are difficult to believe? Do you believe Yun's story? Support your answer.

Describe three instances in which Yun believes a particular event will happen, prays for it and sees that prayer fulfilled. Are these miracles? Why or why not?