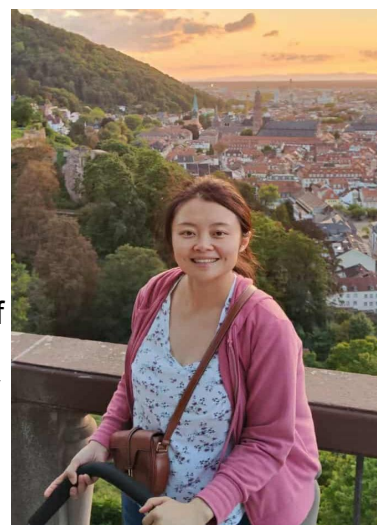


KAREN MILLEN'S

TESTIMONY

In 2013, when I had just arrived in New Zealand, a friend invited me to join a Chinese church's Bible study group. Every week, a group of us young people would gather in the evening to study the Bible together. At that time, I didn't really understand the content of the Bible, but because I enjoyed socializing, I kept attending for about half a year. At the end of that year, I was invited to a Sunday service. The pastor asked, "Who wants to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior?" Several people from my Bible study group raised their hands. I thought raising my hand simply meant bringing that season of study to an end, so I raised mine too.



After raising my hand, the pastor led us to pray the sinner's prayer. The following weekend, we came to the stage and received a sprinkling baptism. A few months later, a friend introduced me to the Auckland Baptist Tabernacle in the city center. When I went there for the first time, I naturally introduced myself as a Christian, and everyone simply assumed I was already a sister (part of the body of) Christ. The sermons there rarely spoke about sin; instead, they often focused on the love of Jesus—that no matter what mistakes we made, He would forgive us, for He died on the cross for our sins out of His unconditional love.

I grew up in an environment where parents rarely express love verbally, instead, they often use criticism to motivate their children to grow. My grandparents favoured boys over girls, showing more affection to their grandson than to me. Growing up in this environment made me lack a sense of security. I always believed that I had to work harder and achieve more in order to be worthy of love. So, when I first heard about Christ's unconditional love, I was deeply touched, often moved to tears. Also, in the honour-shame culture I was taught, I had always been afraid of making mistakes, and even more afraid of being exposed. When I read Jesus' words to the woman caught in adultery, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more" I felt the freedom of being unconditionally forgiven.

I once again prayed the sinner's prayer and accepted Jesus Christ as my Saviour. Yet because of language and cultural barriers, I still did not truly understand sin. I thought sin was simply the mistakes I made in daily life—measured by human standards of right and wrong. I didn't know God, nor did I realize that sin is an offense against a holy God. What I wanted was simply Jesus' unconditional love, someone who would tolerate my faults without limit. But I didn't understand that this forgiveness was bought with His very life. Whenever I read or watched movies of Jesus' suffering, I was moved that He endured so much pain for our sins, but I didn't understand why my mistakes would cause Roman soldiers to flog Him, Jewish people to reject Him, and ultimately for Him to be crucified. After all, my sins hadn't offended the Romans or the Jews.

To me, Jesus was a good teacher, a gentle elder who loved me unconditionally. At the church entrance were written Jesus' words: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." But to me, Jesus was just one loving way, a kind of truth, but not the only way. I couldn't understand why He was "the life." I was living just fine—why would I

need His life? And why would I even need to go to the Father?

In 2018, I returned to China. Without a church, I stopped reading the Bible, stopped praying, and had no fellowship at all. From 2018 to 2022, I practiced yoga, meditation, and read Buddhist scriptures, Hinduism, and New Age teachings. I even tried to explain the miracles in the Bible through science. I thought of Jesus Christ as simply the leader of Christianity, just like Buddha was the leader of Buddhism. When people asked about my faith, I would answer, "I used to be a Christian."

In 2022, I returned to Auckland. While staying at my former pastor and his wife's home, I had no choice but to open the Bible again. In the past, I only liked the God of the New Testament and disliked the God of the Old Testament. I thought the stories in the Bible had happened over 2,000 years ago and 2,000 kilometers away, and had little to do with me. But this time, when I read how the Israelites would cry out to God when they needed Him, but forget Him once their lives were comfortable, I suddenly realized: I was just like them—I only loved what God gave me, but not God Himself.

When I began to doubt whether I was truly a Christian, people around me comforted me: "You've always been a born-again Christian, you've just grown cold for a while." But one day, I heard the testimony of Charo Washer (wife of Paul Washer). She was baptized as a teenager, but it wasn't until age 34 that God truly gave her new life. At that moment, I understood—throughout all those years, I had been a legalist with a heart of stone. I treated Christianity as a to-do list, without a genuine desire to know God. So I knelt down and prayed, asking God to give me a new heart.

One night in May 2023, I was listening to Paul Washer's sermon "What is the Gospel?" When I heard Jesus cry out before His last breath, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" I could no longer sit still. I fell to my knees, weeping bitterly. For the first time, I truly experienced the despair and darkness of being forsaken by God—that was exactly my life before, a life with no hope. But Jesus on the cross not only endured separation from God, He also bore all of God's wrath against me, a sinner. Because the one I had offended was not the Roman soldiers, nor the Jews, but the eternal, holy God. At that moment, I saw the ugliness of my sinful nature. I realized I was truly a great sinner, dead in my sins—but Jesus is a greater Saviour! He knew all my filth and brokenness, yet still chose to save me.

That night, I knew I had to cling to the hem of Jesus' garment. My only hope was in the cross. Anything I did was nothing more than filthy rags. Yet even as I wept, I also laughed with joy, because I was convinced that God Himself had chosen to save me—otherwise I would never have seen the glory of Christ.

That night, I finally understood what Jesus meant when He said He is the life—because I was dead, completely dead in sin, but now I have a new life in Christ. Thanks be to God! From the day I first stepped physically into a church in 2013, to truly becoming a member of the body of Christ in 2023, God gave me ten years to see clearly: by my own utterly corrupt nature, I could never truly seek Him. Only because God Himself put faith in my heart, am I now able to proclaim with all my heart: Jesus Christ has saved me.