

## Greenleaf in Drought

By Shelley Tvedt

Believers in America are living in a period of spiritual dryness, but many others in the world have experienced the severe conditions of spiritual drought. Drought is a time of unfruitfulness when the seeds sown do not root and no fruit is produced. Is it possible for Believers to bear the Fruit of the Spirit when all around us is the barren wasteland of the world?

In the 1957 book Green Leaf in Drought, author Isobel Kuhn shares how C.I.M. (China Inland Mission) missionaries Arthur and Wilda Mathews endured persecution in Communist China. The story beautifully illustrates the "Fruit of the Spirit" being cultivated in the lives of God's people during the spiritual drought of difficult and even impossible times.

When Arthur and Wilda found themselves captive behind the "Bamboo Curtain" with their 13 month-old daughter, Lilah, they struggled with questions that cannot be understood by the human heart and mind. Why had God moved them further into China just when they should have moved out? Why did God allow them to be taunted with the promise of release only to have it withdrawn? Why did He allow them to be dependent on the Red Regime for finances knowing the heart of the enemy was to starve them and make them appear foolish? How would they survive for two months on \$37.50? Why did God allow them to live in the deplorable conditions of tremendous heat and stench in summer and coldness and inadequate fuel in winter?

Why did He allow the Mathews to be humiliated by the enemy when Arthur was required to gather leaves, grass, and roots for fuel in the winter, only adding to the humiliation of being forced to make coal balls – coal dust and sheep dung mixed and molded with water. Kuhn explains that for "a gentleman to come in any contact with dirt, let alone manure, was unspeakably degrading in Chinese eyes. The melted snow-water made big cracks in his hands which were painful and yet he sat there day after day patiently molding them."

These were God's servants. Why wasn't He providing for their needs? Wouldn't God's great care and provision for the Mathews be a better testimony to the Chinese people than this humiliation?

God was cultivating the Mathews family to root deeper in their relationship with Him. Through trials and tribulations, they learned the Joy that comes from yielding to and waiting on God. They learned the truth of Psalm 138:7 – 8: *"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me. The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of thine own hands."*

Even little Lilah waited on God at the age of three as she sat "down to millet porridge with nothing on it," but she "dug in vigorously at the same time saying, 'When the Lord Jesus makes the policeman give Daddy some money, then I'll be able to have milk and sugar on my porridge.'" Another evening, when Arthur was feeling awkward about their meager supper of bread toasting over a fire of coal balls and leaves, Lilah burst out with song...

"In heavenly love abiding,  
No change my heart shall fear;  
And safe is such confiding,  
For nothing changes here.  
The storm may roar without me,  
My heart may low be laid,

But God is round about me,  
And can I be dismayed?"

What about the Chinese people around them? They were witnesses to the struggles and harshness of the Mathews' lives. Yet, they saw Arthur, Wilda, and Lilah's cheerful smiles and heard their evening "praise and love-service to the Lord" before retiring to bed each evening. They heard them tell the hard-of-hearing milk lady that they didn't have any money to buy milk for their daughter and then the next day they called her to return as they miraculously had the money to buy it.

Unbeknownst to them, God had let His "Feather Curtain" fall on the Mathews, providing just what they needed as only He can do. The people around them could not understand how these missionaries did not starve or freeze to death. They marveled that they remained clothed, illnesses passed, and blessings came. The suffering and trials these missionaries experienced were not only for their own spiritual growth and as a testimony to unbelievers, but also for the benefit of Chinese believers around them as "only eternity will show what those 'green leaves in drought' meant to the Chinese onlookers."

Could it be that God allowed these trials to come upon the Matthews so that the "weak and frightened" Christians around them would be strengthened to hold firmly to God's hand? They witnessed these missionaries produce the "fruit" of faith and trust. They saw how their perseverance and love for God gave them His peace and joy so that they learned meekness, temperance, goodness, and faith as they faced life's difficulties.

How about us today? Green leaves are still possible in the greatest droughts of life through the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of a yielded believer. Jeremiah says: "*For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit*" (Jeremiah 17:8). So many of us believers want our lives to be comfortable with the least amount of sacrifice. We do not realize the tremendous blessings reaped unto ourselves and others when we delightfully yield to the will of God, no matter the circumstances or cost of walking with Him.

Satan delights when we surrender to doubts and become unfruitful. Doubts are common when the "[c]loud of battle-dust inevitably dims the over-all picture of the campaign. The individual soldier must just trust the strategy to his commander and obey the orders given to him personally... But when the battle is over and the dust has settled, what has happened and the reason for certain orders will become apparent to even the common soldier." We can find that "*the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not*" (Isaiah 58:11).

Through delightful yielding, it is truly possible to bear fruit even in drought. Take heart. Bear fruit for the Master in plenty and in want.

[Read [Green Leaf in Drought](#) by Isobel Kuhn and be encouraged. All Quotes that are not Scripture are excerpts from the book, [Green Leaf in Drought](#) by Isobel Kuhn.]