

# SPARKS OF GLORY

Stories of Asian lives set ablaze for God

AsiaLink

The background is a solid orange color. On the right side, there are several bright yellow, teardrop-shaped rays of light pointing downwards and outwards. In the bottom left corner, there is a vertical bar with a white dotted pattern.

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Stories of Asian lives set ablaze for God

ASIA  
LINK.



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## PREFACE

Every now and then, we cross paths with someone who leaves an indelible mark upon our hearts. Whether they are supremely talented, intellectually astounding or abundant in love and compassion, we walk away from those encounters knowing we've been in the presence of someone special.

Each chapter of this book focuses on a person or couple who have made such an impression, not purely through their character or abilities, but through the presence and power of God at work in their lives. These people come from a variety of countries and faith backgrounds, but they have all found salvation in Christ before going on to be used by Him in incredible ways. In each case, a small spark has led to hearts being set ablaze for the glory of God.

These stories challenge our attitudes in evangelism, our devotedness to prayer and our willingness to count the cost of following Christ. And yet at the same time, they remind us of God's ability to store treasure in the most fragile jars of clay, to pour out blessing from the most unimpressive of cups, and to comfort us when the road gets tough.

Our prayer in sharing stories of God's work in and through these people is to inspire awe in the power and promises of God, to awaken a passion for His name, and to stir a longing for the coming kingdom – a longing so strong that we cannot help but join with God in His mission, wholeheartedly pursuing His plans and purposes for this world.

May the fire in our hearts be rekindled, and may He receive all the glory!



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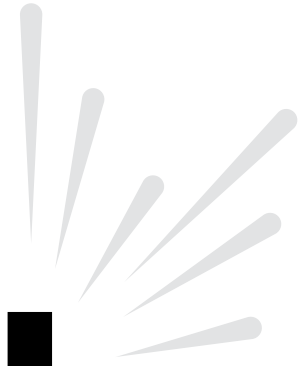
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# KAWL



Myanmar



**K**awl ambled slowly through the prayer garden, an oasis he had created within this piece of land which he owned on the outskirts of the city. The large leaves of the mango tree blew in the breeze which, in the early morning, was cool and pleasant. The black-naped oriole birds were trumpeting their call to one another while feasting on luscious green and orange speckled mangoes. On the edge of the garden, a woodpecker was drilling into the soft wood of a pine tree in search of tasty bark lice. The teak trees stood tall and straight, their silver trunks like sentinels guarding this hallowed place. Wildlife flourished among them, reminding Kawl of God's faithfulness to him and his family.

Small prayer huts were dotted throughout the garden where disciples of the Lord Jesus came to pray for their country, their families, and the ministry in which most of them were engaged. These cubicle-like buildings were made of bamboo, some with tin roofs and others covered with banana leaves. The large trees shaded them somewhat, but in the heat of the day they would become like ovens causing the tears of those who cried out to God for the lost to dry up just as quickly as they fell.

His family would soon join him for the weekly service in the little church which he had erected on the property. Local Christians from nearby villages would also come to worship. In this country where the cruel Tat Ma Daw military regime held sway, it was understood that his church and prayer garden could be forced to close if they so desired. At this point in time there was peace, but Kawl knew how tenuous that was and took nothing for granted. He loved the stillness and the quiet of this place. Here, he could think and pray about the issues which faced his ministry and his country.

Born in May 1952, he was the youngest child in the family. His parents were born in the Chin State of western Myanmar and like their ancestors, they were farmers and hunters. However, his father was known for his love of travel and adventure, passions most unusual for people of that mountain community. Most people were born, lived, and died within a few miles but Kawl's father had been eager to explore. As Sal began to make short journeys to other communities and to the border area, he discovered that there was money to be made in trading. As a result, his entrepreneurial life took off. This resulted in him becoming a successful businessman, able to enhance the lives of his wife and children. He traded with India and China and opened weaving mills and sewing centres staffed by local people. In this way, his business began to grow.

Recognising the academic ability of his youngest son, Sal decided to send him to university in Mandalay. There, Kawl completed his degree. Now, in his later years, he was grateful for the investment his father had made in him. Like his father, Kawl had within him an entrepreneurial spirit which enabled him to start

small businesses while studying. Later, just as Jesus changed Peter's role from being a fisherman to being a fisher of men, Kawl's desire to increase his wealth would be transformed into a passion for winning and discipling souls for the Kingdom of God.

While in college, he met and married a young woman named Chit from just over the border in India. Their marriage had been short and tempestuous. Kawl's desire to succeed in business led him down paths which resulted in reckless living. He began to attend parties, drinking to excess and taking drugs which took his life off course and led to the downfall of his marriage. As Kawl partied, Chit stayed home to look after their two children, a boy and a girl. She resented his involvement in this world of drink and drugs and before their little boy had his first birthday, she divorced him.

Looking back, he knew that she and the children had suffered badly due to his selfishness and his unwillingness to care for them. Within six years she took the children, Denpo and Hla, and returned to India. There, trying hard as a single mother, she opened a small restaurant where she and the children prepared meals, made bread, and eked out a modest living. The business enabled her to send both children to school and then to college. Their lives should not have been like that and Kawl would eventually come to regret his choices as loneliness and separation set in.

For many years, however, he continued down that same road of self-indulgence. His parents were disgusted and dishonoured by his behaviour and lost trust in him. His businesses began to fail, leading him into the deepest valley of depression. The friends he had in the world he now inhabited could not fill the great void which existed within him. They did not care that he was now in a difficult situation; they were only interested in him when he had money. They offered no friendship or support. Instead, recognising that he could offer them nothing more, they moved on to the next person foolish enough to fulfil their cravings for a good time. Kawl missed his children and his wife and was dismayed that he had become estranged from both his young family and his parents because of the choices he had made.

Chin State was known for its many churches and Christian influence, and as a child Kawl was taken to church and Sunday school by his parents. Most of the people in his village attended, but as a young boy and teenager he had paid little attention to what was taught. He had one good friend who was an evangelist and who, despite Kawl's poor life choices, had worked hard to maintain contact. Kawl's friend often invited him to church, but he always refused, giving one excuse or another.

He remembered well the occasion when the Spirit of God powerfully broke

through that defence. His friend, after yet another invitation was extended and refused, graciously took his leave. But as Kawl watched him go, he felt compelled to follow. He had drunk copious amounts of local rice wine that day and when he entered the church building where his friend was preaching, the congregation stared at him thinking he was drunk. He sat down and began to listen as the message of salvation was shared with everyone gathered.

There in that little church, he recognized at last his need of forgiveness and the amazing truth that it was available to him right there. As he heard about the Saviour's love, he marvelled that Jesus could befriend a sinner like him, but he believed it. Kawl decided there and then to follow Jesus and, with His help, to change his lifestyle. He laughed to himself now as he remembered that most of the people who were in the church knew him so well, they thought he was faking it. But his friend recognised the very real work of the Holy Spirit which had taken place.

In the days to come, the dramatic change which took place in his life convinced others too. His family found it hard to accept at first, even though his mother had been praying for years for his salvation. On one occasion, not long after he was saved, he visited his parents' home. He had established a prayer routine and that day, in the home of his parents, he went upstairs to a small room to pray. One of his relatives was suspicious of his newfound faith and followed him thinking he was either going to drink or take drugs. Peeping through the cracks in the wood, he saw Kawl kneeling and muttering and concluded that he was already under the influence of something other than the Spirit of God.

Kawl recognized then and now that his reckless lifestyle and untrustworthiness had caused this suspicion in his friends and family, and he bore no grudge. As he observed their dilemma, wanting to believe this truth but afraid it was just another attempt to manipulate, God taught him a valuable lesson which he would later take into his own ministry: Kawl held a firm belief that anyone who demonstrated even the slightest change indicating God's work in their lives should be pursued and disciplined, not neglected as he had been by some church leaders who might have known better. He believed that God's grace was a transforming power which should never be underestimated, even when poured out on the worst of sinners.

In the days and months following his conversion, Kawl's friend encouraged him greatly. He invited Kawl to accompany him as he travelled through villages and towns in the area where they both lived, preaching the gospel. Kawl's knowledge of the Bible at that time was limited to what little he remembered of the Sunday school stories from many years ago; the ones he should have listened to instead of fooling around with the other boys. However, as he began to read

the Scriptures a passion for the lost began to form in his heart. He recognised the Lord placing within him a burning desire to share his own experience of grace and to help others caught in drug and alcohol addiction. He had so much to learn but he was hungry and thirsty for more of God and His Word.

As he began, he would simply share what had happened to him because of Jesus' love and the forgiveness offered through His sacrifice. By that same grace, men and women began to respond to the message. Families broken by substance abuse were restored and healed, and lives were changed for the glory of God. Kawl did experience ridicule from some villagers and friends who had been part of his world before his conversion, but he was a new creation. All he wanted to do was share the message of salvation with those who were lost. As the Holy Spirit worked in his life, he became less and less concerned by what people thought of him and increasingly intent to honour God in everything.

The path was not always smooth for him even then, but when he got it wrong, the knowledge that God was with him and was using every situation to create in him a clean heart and a right spirit encouraged him greatly. There had been some difficult days early on in his ministry. At times he would flounder and try to do things in his own strength. He remembered the day he was asked to pray for someone who was very ill. He had never been asked to do this before and was so embarrassed and disappointed when immediately after he finished his prayer the person died. The family were distraught. Having believed that a miracle would be worked, they were now faced with the death of their loved one. Kawl himself had been confused, wondering why this dear soul had not been healed. In response, God graciously revealed that this was not about Kawl, but about His own sovereign plans.

As time passed, Kawl's heart ached ever more for the lost - those who lived seemingly happy lives yet were on their way to a lost eternity without God. He was particularly burdened for those who were unreached. In a neighbouring state there were entire people groups who had never heard about Jesus. Some of them were animists, some Muslims. All of them were poor, surviving by hunting and by growing rice and crops to feed their families. Life for these people was dark and filled with fear as they strived to honour the gods of their fathers, often using what little they had in sacrifices to buy their favour. Kawl knew that they had no assurance, no matter how much they offered or how great a portion of their hard-earned crops they sacrificed. It hurt him to see them so deceived by the enemy of God.

He began to travel up and down the border with Bangladesh and the Bay of Bengal, ministering to all who would listen. As he did so, he experienced an outpouring of God's abundant grace in ways he could never have imagined. He

preached to tens of thousands over the space of seven years and had the immense privilege of baptising over 4,000 new believers. He established churches and encouraged older Christians to disciple the new believers. Sometimes this meant him having to find an older believer from his own area who was willing to go out, establish a church and disciple those who were coming to faith. It was costly in both time and finance but God always provided, whether through Kawl's own resources, gifts given by others, or proceeds from the sale of land he had inherited.

However, alongside blessing came persecution in various forms. Kawl had established strong relationships with many village and town officials, giving him opportunities to share the gospel in various places where the Buddhist monks still held sway. This resulted in him becoming a threat to their authority, their territory, and their ability to control the minds and ways of the local people. They employed various tactics to intimidate him. They sent letters telling him to stop preaching to their people, which he always ignored. They tried to oust him from the villages where he had been housed by threatening those who gave him hospitality. For a while, everywhere he went it became difficult to find a place to stay as people were afraid of what might happen should they take him in. Groups of monks followed him from place to place, threatening those who let him a room, resulting in short rentals which always seemed to be terminated without good reason.

On one occasion, a friend who recognised Kawl's frustration at his inability to rent offered to rent out a room in his own name, allowing Kawl to use it as a frequent visitor. This seemed an ideal solution until the night some youths, encouraged by the monks, began to throw rocks at the house causing damage to the roof and walls. It was no longer safe for Kawl or his friend to stay there, so he once again packed his bag and moved on.

He boarded a small boat headed for the small islands in the Bay of Bengal. He was tired and felt the need for some rest and a place of safety for a short time, but God had other plans. Upon arrival on the island, thinking he could hide himself away until things began to die down, Kawl discovered afresh the truth of Isaiah 55:8-9, where the Lord declares that His thoughts are not our thoughts and His ways are not our ways. Rather, His thoughts and ways are far higher.

Even there, in what Kawl had intended to be a hiding place, God used him to teach and preach the good news. Within just a few days of his arrival, there was a small congregation of around 50 adults who had given their lives to Christ. He stayed there for several weeks, discipling those who came to faith and thanking God for His faithfulness.

His memory of that little community was still vivid. Before he arrived, they had been animists, worshiping spirits who dwelt within every element of

nature. They were totally bound in fear by the many spirits to whom they felt an allegiance. As he preached to them about Jesus being the only way to God, he saw how perplexed and confounded they were. It was difficult for them to accept that there could be a supreme spirit who ruled over others. It would have been easier for them to accept that he was proclaiming yet another spirit to whom they would owe allegiance. As he watched their faces fill with confusion, he began to pray. This made them more confused, and they thought he was crazy! Some of them were filled with fear but he continued undeterred, asking God by the power of His Holy Spirit to lift the veil from their eyes and allow them to see the truth.

Over the next few days as he spoke with them, God slowly lifted the veil. One by one, each of these villagers responded to Christ's call on their lives, repenting of their sins and asking Jesus to be their Saviour. That was a time of great learning for him as he recognised his own deep need for the leading of the Holy Spirit. His eloquence would never win souls for the Kingdom, only the Spirit could do that. The villagers, so grateful to God for His gift of salvation and the peace and joy which now flooded their previously anxious lives, erected a large stone on the outskirts of the village to commemorate the work of God. Several years later, Kawl saw while visiting the area that the stone was gone, having been removed by the monks who wanted no association with the Christian faith which had begun to spread within their communities.

As Kawl's ministry grew, God began to work deep within him, causing him to reflect more and more on the hurt he had caused others. He was confronted afresh by the fact that he had neglected his wife and children and had not seen them in years. His children would be grown by now and yet he knew nothing about them. He wanted to put that right. He decided to make plans to visit them and ask for their forgiveness.

At the same time, a church leader who recognised Kawl's gifting offered him a scholarship to study theology in South Korea. Such opportunities were almost unheard of and the honour bestowed upon him by this offer excited him. He made plans to travel to Yangon to obtain a passport and a visa in eager anticipation of what lay ahead. However, on the journey God convicted him that he could not take up this opportunity without first seeking reconciliation with his estranged family, even if this meant that the opportunity would be lost. He knew if he was disobedient to God and went to South Korea without trying to put right the mistakes of the past there would be no blessing.

He made the long journey up into India where his wife and children were living and there he asked for their forgiveness. Chit had also come to a saving faith in Jesus in the time they had been separated, and she was pleased for her children to be reconciled to their father. God granted them a second chance at marriage

and Kawl enjoyed the blessing of a wife and family once more. Some years later, Chit was called home to be with her Saviour and Kawl rejoiced that God had granted them some beautiful years together.

A year after the reconciliation, by God's grace, Kawl was offered the same scholarship and was able to accept with a lighter heart and spirit. God, Who is no man's debtor, had blessed him far beyond anything he felt he deserved. His time in seminary was a gift and he applied himself to his studies with the same vigour he had exhibited during his young years in his business. He returned to Myanmar in 1994 with a Master of Divinity, ready to take up ministry in the western region once again.

His studies had taught him many things and also emphasised some convictions he had developed previously. His passion for new converts was not diminished but his understanding of the need for effective discipleship was heightened by his time there. He recognized afresh that evangelism without discipleship could lead to spiritual orphans and so a new depth and emphasis of ministry began. At the same time, the Lord shifted Kawl's focus to regions in the central area of Myanmar where the proclamation of the gospel had been sparse.

The Tat Ma Daw, a cruel and evil regime, were increasing their power and influence over the region and brought trouble to the church in cooperation with the Buddhist monks. The monks exerted their influence primarily through religious coercion, while providing the army with an easy and down-to-earth connection with the local people. In return, the military gave power and authority to the monks allowing them to exert whatever influence was needed in villages and towns to help them retain influence and control. As churches began to grow and multiply, the monks used their power to coerce local police into discouraging and suppressing these church plants. The confrontations with both monks and police over the years became numerous and were at times a source of great discouragement.

Latterly, Kawl's ministry had been one of teaching and training those who were continuing the work of church planting and leadership in the Irrawaddy Delta. He established a Bible college to train up men and women for church planting, teaching, and children's work among the unreached people groups, and it flourished. God had graciously allowed him not only to pass the torch to the next generation, but also to restore his relationship with his son, Denpo. Denpo now worked alongside him in training and ministry, which proved a great blessing to both. Kawl had found love again three years after losing Chit. His new wife and their three children also became involved in the ministry, giving him support and help as he moved into old age.

Recognising that leadership brought with it the responsibility to encourage

and maintain these workers and their families, he sometimes had to sacrifice what God had given him to make provision for them. His entrepreneurial mindset caused him to encourage them into finding ways of providing for themselves using their God-given gifts and skills. Many provided for their families through hunting and fishing, but if they were in need Kawl would help as far as was possible.

He remembered the car, which was dear to his heart and had been a gift from a business friend when cars were not the norm in his country. When the new pastors needed funds amid the struggle to establish churches and make ends meet, the car was sold to provide for them. God continued to provide for both Kawl and his churches down through the years. Those with whom Kawl partnered in lands far away told his story, encouraging others to support this vital work. With their prayerful help and support, and the continued assistance of his son Denpo, this ministry which God had birthed in him would continue long after he was called home.

Even today, in Yangon's great Shwey Da Gon temple with its huge golden dome and immense diamond pinnacle, thousands of lost souls bring sacrifices and thanksgiving to idols and statues which can offer nothing in return. Kawl's passion was to see each of them won for the Kingdom of God and His Christ. His heart broke over their devotion to that which cannot satisfy when they could meet with God and know Him to be everything He claims to be in His Word.

The sun was climbing over the horizon, causing the grey light of dawn to give way to blue skies and a tell-tale sign of the heat to come. As he made his way through the canopy of trees to the little prayer hut which he favoured, he felt greatly blessed. He opened the door gently, noticing that its hinges needed some oil, just like his heart. He opened his Bible, the Word of the living God which he loved so much, and began to read, allowing the oil of gladness to flow through him. As he knelt on the rough dirt floor, he lifted his hands in prayer and adoration. He thanked God for using him, a broken and marred vessel, in ways he could never have imagined. He thanked Him for building him up in his faith, growing the gifts He had placed within him and allowing him to see thousands not only won for Christ and His Kingdom but also nourished and fed as disciples.

God had restored his broken family and allowed him the privilege of passing on the torch of ministry among the unreached people of this troubled nation. The Lord had protected him and his loved ones over many years as well as allowing his ministry to flourish. He would be here for a while; he had much to give God thanks for and there were many souls for whom he wished to pray.

*Kawl was called home to be with the Lord in 2013.*

## REFLECTION

### 2 Corinthians 4

The Bible is full of stories of ordinary, flawed and sometimes broken people being used by God for His sovereign purpose. Abraham, who was so afraid of Pharaoh that he gave him his wife Sarah, declaring that she was his sister; Joseph, who was a bit of a teenage pain in the neck for his friends and family as he boasted and used little discretion or sensitivity in sharing the dreams God gave him; Moses, who murdered a man (albeit because he was beating an Israelite) then tried to cover up his mistake; David, who took another man's wife for himself, then had her husband killed to cover up his wickedness; Jonah, a missionary who got angry with God for saving and redeeming a people he felt were beyond redemption; Peter, the disciple who disowned Jesus three times to protect his own skin...

In and of themselves these people had nothing to offer God. But in His sovereign grace and mercy, He chose to use them for His glory and for the extension of His Kingdom. None of them was beyond redemption, none beyond forgiveness, and none too broken or marred to be used in astounding ways.

Clay jars were used to store many things in biblical times: dry goods such as wheat or rice, sometimes oil or even wine. These jars were fragile, and so they were easily broken and cracked. The Apostle Paul talks about those of us who have a saving faith in the Lord Jesus being jars of clay, inside which great treasure has been placed. All of us who come to faith in Jesus have cracks and chips. Even those who make that decision to follow Jesus early in life will come up against situations which will leave brokenness and hurts, causing us to be flawed.

God does not write off such people. Instead, He uses us, putting within us the treasure which is the light of the gospel of the Lord Jesus. The treasure within us is not of our own doing or something which we have earned, it is the gift of God to us. In this way, everything we do and accomplish for Him is through His power. He uses our weakness to show His glory and strength. In our brokenness, He uses us to bring healing to others. Perhaps you feel inadequate and too flawed for God to use you mightily. If you have trusted Christ as Saviour and Lord then yes, you are a jar of clay, fragile and imperfect. But within, you have treasure which God wants to pour out to others.

Some of us have children, siblings or friends in our midst who keep us awake at night, causing us distress with their lifestyle choices. Kawl's parents knew that pain! But take heart: His mother never stopped praying for her son and was blessed to see him living as a man of God, pointing others to Jesus.

Be encouraged, keep praying for your children and your grandchildren, your nephews and nieces, your siblings and friends, and remind yourself that they are not beyond redemption. God can still redeem them and enable them to live for His glory!

Some of us have reached an age of maturity when it's harder to minister because of physical limitations. Kawl recognised that even though he grew older and weaker, he was still able to pray for his family, his people and his nation. He did so diligently, acknowledging that all he had accomplished was by God's grace alone.

As you consider God's call on your life today, are you focused on your flaws, cracks and brokenness? Do you feel you are unworthy or that your past sin has rendered you unsuitable to be a servant of God? If so, are you imposing worldly limits on your understanding of how God might use you for His glory? Through him, all things are possible!