

For many years I had not spoken Vietnamese. Then we heard of the boat people, setting off from Vietnam in small boats and being picked up by ships in the South China Sea. In 1978 more than 300 were picked up by a British-owned merchant ship, and flown to Kensington Barracks. My Director at the Computer Centre was very willing that I should offer my services as an interpreter there. I helped in interviewing and compiling records of all the refugees.

Mostly, they fell into two classes. There were the professionals, especially doctors, of Vietnamese birth. Then there were the Chinese who had lived in Vietnam for generations, but who were targeted by the communists.

One morning a Scotsman arrived at the barracks. He was married to a Vietnamese woman. They had seen on television the boat people file off the aircraft at Stansted. He and his wife saw someone looking just like her sister, so he had travelled to London to find out if it was her. We looked in the file, and found a possible individual. I took him to the dormitory where she was. We knocked, the door opened, and they fell into one another's arms.

Some of the refugees were housed in council flats in Clapham. I used to go over and teach them English. They became some of my best friends, and are now firmly settled into British life, some of their children having become, for instance, doctors and dentists here.

Many of the refugees were housed in the Peckham area. I heard that a number of them, grateful for their rescue from the sea, were attending a church there, even though they understood nothing of the services. With the approval of the minister, I started cycling over there and interpreting the sermons for them. It then became apparent that sermons for British people were not suited to their needs, so I would take them out to another room in the church and would preach what seemed more fitting.

Some believed in Christ and were baptised. Others saw that there was a conflict between their worship of ancestral spirits and acceptance of the gospel, so they stopped coming. One woman was keen to follow Christ until her husband told her that 'one house two religion' was not good. Some who had believed moved away to other areas, so the need diminished. In the end, I realised that I had learned more Vietnamese in Peckham than I had in Saigon.

We had been members of the local evangelical church since not long after arriving back in England. I had been an elder, and when we were without a minister I was chairman of the elders. When there was unpleasantness among the elders I felt I had to resign and continue simply as member. There came a time in 1986 when difficulties with the leaders seemed to leave us no option but to leave the church.

A new church had started nearby. We attended one Sunday morning. We didn't know the songs, we weren't sure we agreed with the message, but we did sense God's presence. Someone told us over coffee that it was a charismatic church. Had I known that beforehand, I might not have gone.

Meeting with them on Sundays and midweek, I was struck by the fact that these people had an intimacy with God which I did not have. I wanted it. 'It's the baptism of the Spirit,' they said. I didn't believe in that. I had preached against it for years. I considered that all Christians were baptised in the Spirit when they first accepted Christ.

I went forward after a meeting and told some of the leaders I wanted to be filled with the Spirit. They laid hands on me and prayed for me. Absolutely nothing seemed to happen. 'It will,' they said. 'We have prayed for you.'

That Christmastime I devoured Martyn Lloyd-Jones' book 'Joy Unspeakable.' I wanted to see whether there was a scriptural doctrine of the baptism of the Spirit. He made out a good case for it, and recommended that each person pray for it. Every day I prayed, 'Lord, I haven't got it. I want it.'

Things gradually got better for me. When I read the Bible and prayed each day, it felt good. Verses I knew well popped out at me with new brilliance. One day at work I felt as I had done when first courting Jean. On returning home I told her, 'I hope you don't take this amiss, but I have fallen in love again. I have fallen head over heels in love with Jesus afresh.' And still I was praying, 'Lord, I haven't got it. I want it.' Someone at church took me aside and told me, 'You've got it.'

After 34 years as a Christian this was a totally new beginning. It was heaven on earth. Praising God was a delight. When Jean and I prayed for people to be healed, they often were. I had considered that charismatics regarded their experiences as more important than the Bible. But now I realised that I had been the one to do this. I had allowed my low experience of God's things to limit what the Bible said. My new experience of the Lord did not contradict all I had learned before, but it was brought home to me with life and power. It was as if I had had a black and white television set, but now when I switched it on, the picture was in colour.

By 1989 our children had all left home. I retired from the Computer Centre in 1992. We heard God calling us to move out of London to the Yorkshire Dales, which we did in 1994. And here we are, looking to him to use us and bless others through us in this place.