



Ji Ma's Testimony

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Peace in Christ!

My name is Ji Ma. I grew up in an atheist environment in mainland China, and took pride in self-accomplishment before I believed in Christ. My family moved to Thousand Oaks in 2000 and we found out there was a Chinese church nearby after our neighbors preached the Gospel to my wife Shu Ping. Our eldest son was only a few months old at the time, and Shu Ping decided to check out CCCTO. I did not object and went along every Sunday, but I thought at the time that religion in general was just spiritual fantasy to make people feel good. Thanks to God, He did not let my pride and bias blocking my ears and eyes. I met several Christians at CCCTO, they were all perfectly normal, educated with sound reasoning. Many were very talented, and all of them were very humble. So I began to listen and think seriously at the Good News Sunday class for seekers. Soon I was convinced that there is God and He created everything, I no longer resisted the reality of sins. Pride and greedy, those were obvious manifestations of the sins. I prayed to God in Jesus's name earnestly the first time when sudden unplanned events occurred during my mom's journey to US. That started my spiritual journey of not only knowing God in Bible but also experiencing God in real life. Soon I repented and accepted Jesus as my personal savior and was baptized at CCCTO on March 4, 2001. My wife Shu Ping was baptized at CCCTO on December 3, 2000.

My inner life and everyday life changed after I became a Christian. In the past, I solely depended on my self-abilities, now I depend on God and ask the Lord for directions more and more.



Previously I would argue with my wife trying to prove myself and would resist apologizing sincerely, now it appears that the Lord has given me new viewpoint and humility to see truly - how much Shu Ping has done for me and for the family and my lacking and shortcomings in contrast. Praise the Lord, He led us gradually got involved in serving at fellowship and at the church, and God's grace continued to pour in our family. My mom, Shu Ping's parents and our two children subsequently believed in Christ and were baptized at CCCTO.

In December 2020, I accepted the invitation to join the elders training class that would last for more than a year and half, thinking only to better equip myself. I knew at the time the enormous responsibilities of an elder as well as my lack of spiritual capabilities and trainings. But more importantly, I did not know at the time if God called me out to serve as an elder. As the class went on, I learned that the responsibilities of an elder were a lot more than what I had known, which is to protect, feed, lead and care for the flocks. I also got a good chance to reflect and became more aware of my own shortcomings in spiritual leadership qualities when we had focused discussions on "Spiritual Leadership" book by J. Oswald Sanders. I started giving reasons and excuses to myself and was even telling my wife Shu Ping why I should not be an elder. And in small group discussions at the training class, I would ask from time to time the similar question, how do you know whether it is God's calling or just men's ideas? Looking back now, I realize this is part of God's answer to my question. In September 2021, my attitude had a sharp 180-degree turn. I no longer struggled with the calling question, I was at peace with all the possible challenges an elder would face. The contrast of my attitude change was so big, I concluded it was God's answer for my stubborn question. Not too long after, I shared this with my wife and Pastor Ming. If it is indeed God's calling, we will be able to face any future challenges with trust and peace. We will get the answer and confirmation through the examinations and feedbacks from the pastoral team, the coworkers, and the brothers and sisters. Regardless, we will continue to serve at CCCTO with the roles God prepared us for His church, with joy, with humility and without complain.

And finally, I would like to share with you the following Bible verses from 1 Corinthians 1:30-31: **³⁰ It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."**



馬驥個人見証

弟兄姐妹，主內平安！

我叫馬驥，來自中國大陸，在無神論的環境中長大，信主前是個驕傲、自以為是的人，不相信有上帝，只知道依靠自己。2000年我們全家搬到千橡城，同街的鄰居向我太太淑嫻傳福音，也讓我們知道了附近就有華人的教會。那時我們的大兒子剛出生幾個月，淑嫻決定要去千橡教會看看。我也不反對，每個周日就跟着她去教會了。不過那時我只以為，宗教信仰是麻痺人的精神鴉片，無知之人的精神拐棍而已。感謝神，祂沒有让我的偏見和驕傲蒙蔽了我的耳朵與眼睛。到千橡教會後，我开始接觸到一些基督徒。和普通人一樣，這些基督徒也有思想，不少人還很有才華，並且都很謙虛。所以，我開始在為慕道友舉辦的好消息班上認真聆聽和思考。很快我就相信有一位神，祂創造了一切。我也沒有那麼抵觸有關罪的問題，驕傲和貪心都是罪的明顯表現。當我媽媽來美國探親的行程出現了一些意外情況時，我第一次真正憑信心奉耶穌的名向神祈求，從此踏上了不僅在聖經中認識神，也在生活上經歷神的信心之路。很快我就決志信主了，並於2001年3月4日在千橡教會受洗，而我太太淑嫻是在2000年12月3日在千橡教會受洗的。

信耶穌後，我的內在生命和日常生活都有了轉變。過去，我只知道依靠自己，現在我越來越多的來靠神，尋求主的帶領。過去，我總要和太太爭，也不甘心認錯，現在好像主給了我新的眼光和自知之明，讓我真正地看到淑嫻為我、為家庭擺上的和付出的，以及自己的虧欠與不足。感謝神的保守帶領，我們也逐漸更多的參與到團契、教會的事奉中。神的恩典也不斷地臨到我們家，我媽媽、我岳父岳母和我們家的兩個孩子也都在千橡教會信主受洗了。

2020年12月，我接受牧長團的邀請，參加教會一年半多的長老培訓班。當時心裏只是抱著被裝備的想法，因為我知道長老責任很重，而自己在屬靈上的裝備和能力都欠缺。但更重要的是，我當時並不清楚神對我的呼召。隨著培訓的深入，我認識到長老肩上的責任比我過去想像的要多得多，長老要保護、餵養、帶領、關懷教會的群羊。而課程中屬靈領導素質的自我衡量反思，也讓我再次清楚地看到自己的不足之處。我開始給自己找理由和借口，甚至告訴太太淑嫻為什麼我不應該成為長老。在培訓的小組討論中，我也不時地問同樣的問題，你怎麼知道這是神的呼召，或只是人的想法呢？現在回頭去看，我意識到這也是神對我所提問題的部分回答。2021年9月，我對此問題的態度發生了一個一百八十度的大轉變。我不再為呼召這個問題而糾結。對長老可能會面對的所有挑戰，我都能坦然面對。我態度轉變的反差是如此之大，我斷定這是神對我一直糾結的呼召問題的回答。不久



之後，我就告訴了淑嫻，也分享給了李明牧師。如果這真是神的呼召，我們就能憑信心坦然面對未來的挑戰。神也會通過牧長團、同工和弟兄姐妹的考核和反饋來應證這個呼召。無論如何，我和淑嫻都會繼續以神為我們預備的角色，在千橡教會喜樂、謙卑、不發怨言地事奉。最後，我想用新譯本《哥林多前書》一章的一段經文和大家共勉：³⁰**你們因著神得以在基督耶穌裡，他使基督成了我們的智慧；就是公義、聖潔和救贖，**³¹正如經上所說的：“誇口的應當靠著主誇口。”

