



Jesus is WORTHY:

A Case Study from Mongolia

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The Letter

The sun defied all my expectations and came up that Christmas morning.

Just 24 hours earlier we had awakened to a horror that Christmas Eve and Christmas Day never broke. I got out of bed and went straight to the desk, knowing somehow I had to communicate what was happening to friends and family back home.

Christmas Day, 1994

Erdenet, Mongolia

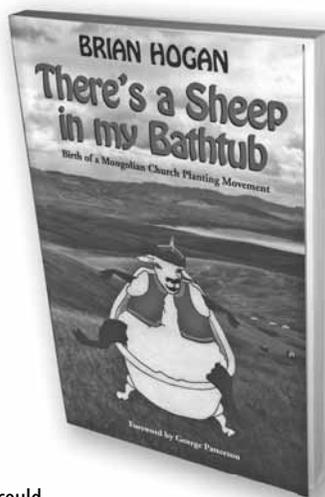
Dear Family,

Today is Christmas Day. Yesterday our son died. This letter will be tough to write. I usually enjoy writing to you and the words flow easily. There are no words for this. Yesterday morning Louise woke to find a perfect baby boy lying dead in his bed. Jedidiah was 52 days old.

I wish you could have known my son. I wish you could have held him and seen how beautiful his hands, eyelashes, lips, everything was. He learned to smile in his last week. He had a smile more gorgeous than a sunrise. Jed used to stare so intently at our faces-- just as if he was memorizing every detail.

I don't understand this "Sudden Infant Death Syndrome." I know whoever named it never lost a baby to it. The name should reflect that something in the parent suddenly dies. I have heard a few

facts which provide a sort of cold comfort. Our living in Mongolia had nothing to do with this. The highest prevalence of S.I.D.S. is in New Zealand, a Western country. It usually strikes healthy boys, under six months, during the winter. Jed had a full checkup by an American doctor just a week before he died. He was perfectly healthy.



Yesterday was the longest day of our lives. Louise woke and noticed it was six a.m. and Jed hadn't awakened her all night. She knew. Her scream woke me to a nightmare I have yet to awaken from. I ran to where he was sleeping and picked up my only son. Jed was not there. I prayed for God to raise him from the dead. He didn't. Louise and I wept in shock and disbelief. The girls woke when Louise had screamed, but had obeyed my command to stay in bed. They were calling to find out what was wrong. I had to go in and hold them and tell them their little brother was dead. I won't even try to describe this.

Louise went to get Magnus and Maria. They got up and came immediately. Praise God for our team. There is no way we could have walked through this without them. Magnus and I labored over Jed's body again in anguished prayer. I knew (and know) God could return life to Jed, but I began to realize the answer this time was this body was no longer a vessel for Jedidiah's life. . . .

We deeply love you and appreciate you,

Brian, Louise, Melody, Molly, and Alice Hogan

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AS TEARS RAN DOWN MY CHEEKS, ALL I COULD THINK WAS "JESUS IS WORTHY."

Grieving with Hope

On Thanksgiving Day, 1997, Baika and I were staring out over the endless Pacific Ocean when he calmly declared, "Your grief over the death of your son was the most miraculous thing I have ever experienced."

Baika Puntsag, today pastor of Denver's Amazing Grace Church, America's first Mongolian Christian church, had come to spend the Thanksgiving holiday with us [in California] in a very strange way...

"I think you must be wondering why I wanted to be with you." The twinkle in his eye might have been the afternoon sun glancing off the breakers.

"I didn't want to ask, but yeah, I'm curious. Why us?"

"Even though we never actually met in Mongolia, I know your family.... I was saved in the early days of the coming of Christ to Mongolia.... My friend shared about the horrible shock of the news of Jed's death that came during the Christmas party. She also told us about the gathering at your home after the burial and the memorial service. As she told us what you had shared and how you and Louise had responded to this tragedy, we began to weep. My own hard heart melted as I cried."

"That means a lot to me. We all cried a lot that Christmas," I assured Baika.

"That is not why we were crying though. We were crying at our understanding through your grief."

I was completely confused, "What...?"

"Your grief over the death of your son was the most miraculous thing I have ever experienced," Baika explained.

As he said this, the memory of several of the believers in Erdenet saying something very similar, when we were saying our goodbyes a year and a half earlier, came rushing back to me. I had quickly forgotten their statements about our grief being a miracle because it made no sense to me. I had felt that my grief, which I couldn't hide, was a bad advertisement for the Kingdom. I had begged God to allow us to grieve in private in the States with family, and had been completely puzzled when He had made it clear to both of us that we were to stay in Erdenet during the worst months of mourning. I began to get a strange buzzing sensation as if I were about to open a door into a room filled with mystery.

"Could you please explain that for me, Baika?"

"Brian, you can't really understand what it is like for Mongolians. In your country everyone seems to believe in life after death. But in Mongolia no one has any hope for this at all. When loved ones die, they are gone forever! You will never meet or see them again. Mothers in my country sometimes lose their minds when they lose a child. But you were different. You were the first people we had ever seen, or even heard about, who grieved with hope. It came across in what you said about going to where your son is, even if he wasn't returning to you here, in the song you taught during the funeral meal at your flat, and the statement of faith you made at Jed's memorial service. You were being watched, then and over the months that followed. Seeing you and your family grieve with hope filled the gaping hole that has always been in every Mongolian heart. When I heard about your grief, I knew it was all real. The Bible, Jesus, heaven, all of it. That's why we were weeping that New Year's Eve; we had just had our faith confirmed...."

"I have continued to follow Jesus, and I have come to America to get an education in journalism so that I can start a Christian newspaper and radio station in Mongolia."

I was filled with extreme joy and overwhelmed with love as I realized how far out of His way God had gone to make sure we understood. It was all worth it. God had redeemed even our deepest sorrow and turned it into glory and worshipers. As tears ran down my cheeks, all I could think was "Jesus is worthy."

This thought was carved onto Jed's headstone the next time I visited Erdenet.

Since that day other Mongolians have shared variations on Baika's story, both old friends and strangers, in Mongolia and in the USA. I will never understand like they do, but it is clear that something happened in the hearts of the Mongolian believers as they watched and heard about our grief. At the very point where we felt weakest and doubted God's plan the most, the Father was doing His biggest miracle through us! f