

The Light of Hope— The Road to Resolution

by Uno Shigehiro

I was born in Fukui Prefecture in February of 1964, and lost my eyesight at age 25 due to an incurable disease (pigmentary degeneration of the retina), and thereby became a visually impaired person. I was an elementary school teacher at the time, went on a leave of absence on the presumption I would resign, and three years later I was forced to resign.

In my high school days I encountered a wonderful English teacher, dreamed of becoming an educator like that teacher, and found work at an elementary school in my hometown. I had various dreams at the time—like teaching English in junior high school and coaching baseball, which I loved, but a short 6 years later I was now resigning from that job. I so loved the genuineness of younger children, but I had to say good-bye to them. I also broke up with the girl I had been thinking of marrying at the time. She was also an elementary school educator; we did educational research and enjoyed sports together, became close, and began thinking about marriage. But when I became visually impaired, and the future looked bleak, our relationship weakened and collapsed. We had gone together for 3 years, and the feeling of loss was so painful that I just can't express it in words.

I Just Want to Disappear

I was unable to work, of course unable to drive, and unable even to read a newspaper—in the middle of all this, one of my relatives said something to the effect that if one of his relatives was handicapped, it might affect his own son's marriage prospects; when I heard this, I despaired my life, and completely lost the will to live. I didn't have the courage to commit suicide, but I wanted to just disappear like a slug that has been sprinkled with salt. I didn't show my tears to others, but at night in my own futon my tears spontaneously spilled out. I wondered where all those tears could come from, since they flowed uninterrupted every night.

Maybe this just is a bad dream. Over and over I asked, "Please just make this a bad dream." Why did I have to lose my eyesight? Why is it my fate that I must suffer like this? Is there a God? Not knowing Jesus Christ at the time, I repeated this unanswered soliloquy. I folded my hands together in front of the Buddhist altar, prayed to my family deities, and since my grandfather was a Shinto priest, also went to the village shrine

to worship many times.

Seeing me look like this, my mother shed tears with me. Just knowing that there was someone who would cry for me became a source of encouragement, and I felt freed from my feelings of isolation. However, when thinking about the future my heart was uneasy. My parents did everything possible for me. One time, my mother said the following: "Shigehiro, maybe living is too hard for you because you can't see. If you ever think you just can't live on, Mom will die with you, you know." My whole body shook when I heard those words. My mother was only 48 years old. My mother said she wouldn't mind giving up her own life for someone like me, who was sightless and useless. My mother really understood how I felt. Maybe it was even more difficult for my mother than it was for me. My mother's words were a great comfort, and to properly respond to my mother's feelings, for the sake of my mother and for my own sake, I resolved to live my life to the fullest.

At age 25 I entered a school for the blind in order to get certified in acupuncture and massage. After that, I got certification as a teacher for a school for the blind. Elsewhere, my mother, desiring to leave as much money for me as possible, began to work unreasonably hard. She would always say, "As your parent, the only thing I can do is leave you money. I can't sleep at night when I think of you, Shigehiro. That's why I work like this. If I don't work until I am ready to drop, I can't get to sleep." From the weight of the physical and emotional stresses in her life, she developed cancer, and died at age 55. I was 32 at the time. That was the death of my mother, who so worried about my future.

Self-Centeredness is Just What Sin Is

At age 30, a new career path opened up, and I became a teacher at a school for the blind, and at 35, concerned about relational problems in my family, I began going to church. The pastor listened to my concerns, and taught me about human sin in a way that was easy to understand. "Mr. Uno, you are concerned about human relations, but the way you think about things is self-centered. That's what Christianity calls sin. To speak in the extreme, crime is also the result of sin. Mr. Uno, if from now on you live—not with yourself—but with God at the center of your life, great blessings will be brought about in your life. Please, read the Bible. You will assuredly be granted a way to solve the problems you have now, Mr. Uno."

After I lost my eyesight, right away they took me to church, and at the time I could not believe in God, but this time the minister's words reached straight into my heart, I felt I

wanted to believe in Christ, and I started reading the Bible. And through the Christian television program *Lifeline* I was introduced to the Immanuel Hikone Christian Church, started going there, and was baptized on December 15, 2005.

Enjoying God's Works

I was on the phone to H, a Christian teacher at a school for the blind in the Hokuriku region. "Young Uno, have you ever read chapter 9 of the Gospel of John?" "No I haven't. Tell me in simple terms what's written there." "Well, Jesus saw a blind man on the road. His disciples asked him why this man was born blind. Was it some sin he himself committed? Or was it a sin committed by his parents? Jesus answered his disciples' question this way. It wasn't because of a sin he or his parents committed. It was so that God's works could be made manifest." (John 9:3.) 'Young Uno, God's works will be made manifest in your life from now on—in hope believe Jesus, and look forward to them.'

When I heard these words from the Bible, the enigma that I had despaired about for a long time was then resolved, and a brilliant light of hope leapt into my heart. My insecurity about the future vanished, and joy bubbled up. If my mother was still alive, and I could have shared these words from the Bible with her, I thought what a great consolation and encouragement they would have been to her.

And God has explained, "You are precious and honored in my eyes." (Isaiah 43:4). God has accepted us unconditionally, and even though I can't see with my eyes, He has testified to me that my existence is precious and honored.

Four years ago, I married a Christian lady. Every week on Sunday, being able to attend church worship services as a couple is a great joy for me, and a blessing from God. Jesus is at the center of our home, and hence our home has peace. "Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife" (Proverbs 17:1).

(Listen to the rest of the story at church.)