



# East Gates

*Seeing Beyond the Impossible™*

INTERNATIONAL

January - February 2024

Dear East Gates partner,

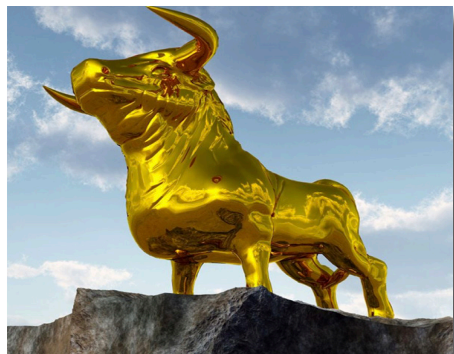
We are now fully into the New Year and we hope yours has gotten off to a good start. For most Chinese around the world, they're in the midst of celebrating the Chinese Lunar New Year which began on February 10 and continues until the Lantern Festival on February 24. This year happens to be the Year of the Dragon and for many Chinese Christians who know what the dragon symbolizes in the Bible (and it is not prosperity and good fortune!) they choose to wish their family and friends a Happy Chinese New Year with e-cards or greetings as seen on the right.

It's interesting to see how long established cultural traditions influence what we celebrate. We see this clearly in the Bible through the example of the Israelites' major enculturation while in Egypt. After God miraculously rescued them from Pharaoh's tight grip, He had Moses lead them to the base of Mount Sinai to receive His Ten Commandments or wedding vows. Because of the Israelites' great fear of God and assumption that Moses may have been consumed in His fire, they reverted to fashioning one of the most revered Egyptian gods, the bull, Apis. Soon after, Aaron establishes a festival in honor of God! The account is found in **Exodus 32:24-25**: "Then he took the gold from their hands, and fashioned it with an engraving tool and made it into a cast metal calf; and they said, 'This is your god, Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.' Now when Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, 'Tomorrow shall be a festival to the LORD.'"

In Israel's history, Aaron is not the only one who fashioned a golden calf. King Jeroboam did likewise in **I Kings 12:25-33** except he made two calves instead of one. God wants us to learn from the similarities between the two events. **First**, both leaders were motivated by the fear of man versus the awe of God. **Secondly**, they turned the hearts of the people to make sacrifices to a god-like symbol that was more tangible and sensual to them than the One true God. **Thirdly**, they assumed their syncretistic (mixed) approach of worship and sacrifice would genuinely please God because after the golden calf and calves were erected, they instituted a communal **festival** in the tradition of what they were used to.



The Chinese New Year card above quotes 2 Corinthians 13:14. "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all."



The highly regarded Egyptian bull-god, Apis, symbolized strength, fertility and vitality.



**“BE DILIGENT TO PRESENT YOURSELF APPROVED TO GOD AS A WORKER WHO DOES NOT NEED TO BE ASHAMED, HANDLING THE WORD OF TRUTH.”**

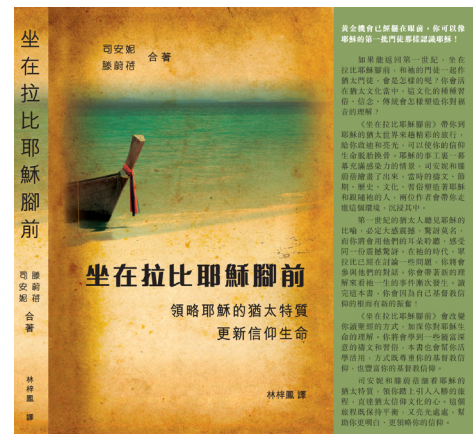
II Timothy 2:15



A bracelet worn by someone who believes that Buddhism and Christianity can be their “lucky charms.”



We’ve discovered that even in an age of technological wonders, Chinese “Christians” will still hold onto ancient traditions and practices that will impact their core beliefs in what truly brings good fortune, prosperity and success in their lives. For example, when we were in a training class one day, we asked for a show of hands of those who kept “one foot” in Buddhism and “one foot” in God’s Kingdom. About 1/3 of the students slowly raised their hands. It wasn’t surprising because most Chinese view Christianity as a Western religion even though Yeshua (Jesus), God in the flesh, was Jewish and revealed God’s purpose for humanity from Israel.



For our discipleship classes, we have translated many excellent books such as this one: “*Sitting at the Feet of Rabbi Jesus: How the Jewishness of Jesus Can Transform Your Faith*” by Ann Spangler and Lois Tverberg.



Our East Gates co-workers continually provide Bibles and training classes during these crucial times.

As youth, Chinese were not taught critical thinking skills so we teach our students they must pray under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to discern what is truth and what is error. Do not let the serpent (dragon) bite you as he did Adam and Eve in the Garden. Do not blindly follow leaders like the biblical High Priest Aaron or King Jeroboam when you know God’s will through His Spirit and Word. They do not contradict each other.



## TRIBUTE TO ZHANG GUIYAN (SONNY)

August 2, 1945 - January 3, 2024



On January 3, 2024, our beloved and precious East Gates Project Director of 35 years, Zhang Guiyan, (affectionately known as Sonny) went to be the Lord. For the thousands who knew him, he was a servant leader and spiritual warrior of the highest order. One of his parting words were, “Continue East Gates’ work in China. Keep feeding and loving the sheep.” We are. The batons have been passed. Our high calling in service to our Chinese brothers and sisters moves forward in faith and prayer.



At Sonny’s *Celebration of Life* service in Shanghai on January 6, family and friends gathered from around China. In three short days, news travelled quickly and hundreds came to attend. One pastor and his wife drove 10 hours straight from Jilin province to pay respects. They drove another 10 hours back so they could preach the next day. One pastor stated, “If there would have been an opening at the Funeral Home a week later, hundreds more would have had time to come. Ironically, Sonny told his son and church friends he did not want flowers or a lot of fanfare at his funeral. We believe God had different plans.



Christina was one of five individuals asked to speak at the funeral service. She represented East Gates and the Graham family.



From the individuals who were asked to represent Sonny’s family and ministry, came many moving testimonies. One speaker shared: “During Guiyan’s lifetime, he was always concerned about God’s family and helping the church have the right connections and resources to bless others. He helped build church libraries and was well-known for his major involvement with Bible printing and distribution.”



As a word of comfort, one brother quoted **Revelation 14:13**, “Yes,” says the Spirit, ‘they are blessed indeed, for they will rest from their hard work; for their good deeds follow them!’”

Amen and Amen...



## GOD'S WORK THROUGH EAST GATES CONTINUES...

The day after the funeral was Sunday. We decided to make a surprise visit to Sonny's small House church in Shanghai. He had been attending here for decades. It was so indicative of his humble, unassuming but deeply spiritual nature. The Chinese brothers and sisters were SO glad to see us. We could sense God's powerful presence in the small apartment. The only one missing was Sonny.

The elderly hostess wanted us to sit up front but we chose the back row. We were so glad we did because in the row just in front of us was a visually-impaired brother who was asked to give the opening prayer. It was so sincere and passionate, we quickly started recording it (see below).



The visually-impaired brother is in the gray jacket (left). One could tell immediately this "upper room gathering" was part of God's faithful remnant. There was overflow in the side bedroom.

"We give thanks to You because of this. It's because we cannot leave You. If we leave You, we are like blind men, walking blindly on the ground and bumping blindly and our heads will be broken and bloody! O Lord! If we have Your will, we can walk on the truly bright road. O Lord! You gave it to us. Not everyone can receive it. We must work hard for it. When we follow You, we must follow You with an honest spirit. O Lord! We cannot just say with our mouths, "Lord, Lord, we follow You. This is not enough. This will still not gain You. O Lord! We must follow You with an honest spirit. We also thank You for Your love and thank You for bringing us into this way. O Lord! We thank You and we praise You. But because there are many shortcomings in us, because we were born with sin in our mother's womb, therefore, our old self and old sins are very stubborn and we cannot eliminate them by ourselves. We rely on the Holy Spirit to help us. O Lord! We thank You for Your love. Thank You for your help. Thank You for supporting us and allowing us to gain You and allowing us to be with You and in You. O Lord! We ask for Your love. Ask for Your mercy to come to us. Thank you, Lord. Praise God. We give You all the glory, honor and reputation. Because You are the only true God, O Lord! Thank You. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ! Amen."

A guest pastor from a rural area gave the one-hour long sermon that morning. Her topic was, *Stay Christ-centric in 2024*. Highlights from her talk were, in the busyness of our times, do not get distracted. Listen to God's Voice only. Meditate on **II Timothy 2:19**, "...the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are His,' and, 'Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to keep from wickedness.'" The pastor admonished the congregants to repent of whatever the Holy Spirit would reveal to them and to live out **I Timothy 2:1-3**, "...I urge that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made in behalf of all people, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior..."



(Left to right): Sonny, Christina, Ned, Bassanio and Michael. We love this photo because it pictures all of us together in 2016 at the Amity Bible Printing Press in Nanjing, China. Sonny and Michael are now back in God's Garden. They ran a stellar race. We pray we may as well.

We say, "Amen and Amen!"

Ned and Christina Graham