

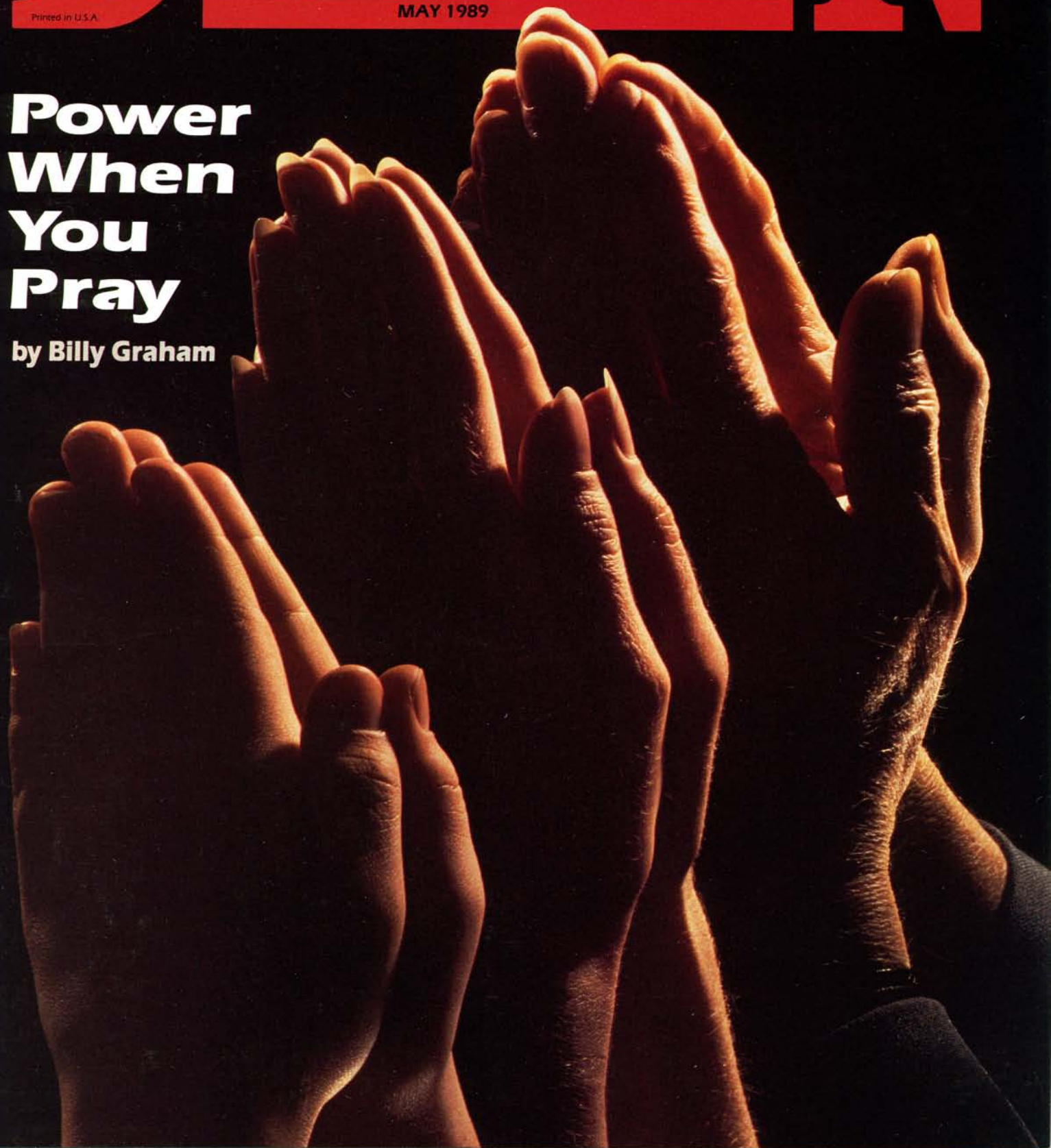
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Power When You Pray

by **Billy Graham**



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Just in Time

by Sok Em,
as told to Allan Hyndman

If your God is so powerful, throw yourself into the fire. If it doesn't burn you, I will believe in your God."

I had known Jesus Christ as my Savior for only one day, and at first I didn't know what to say to the man who challenged me. But the Holy Spirit seemed to put a response into my mind.

"You believe in black magic," I said. "You jump into the fire first. If black magic keeps you from getting burned, then I will jump in." The man just walked away.

I knew almost nothing about God before I accepted Christ. My people were Buddhists or practiced no religion. Others feared evil spirits which they tried to appease with black magic.

In 1975, five years before I became a Christian, the Khmer Rouge forces took over Cambodia (Kampuchea). They drove people from their homes in the cities and placed them in labor camps. Families were often separated so they would not try to escape. Many Cambodians died during this time. Some were killed in order to minimize resistance; others starved to death as they were forced to work long hours on the land.

One time soldiers tied me up, planning to shoot me later—a common way they inflicted terror in people. For some reason they returned to release me. Another time soldiers shot at me as I gathered food from a field they planned to burn.

I felt that our only hope for survival was to flee. I had been married

Sok Em is pastor of the Hamilton Cambodian Evangelical Fellowship, associated with Buchanan Park Free Methodist Church in Hamilton, Ontario. He and his wife, Savy, have three children. They live in Stoney Creek, Ontario. Allan Hyndman is senior pastor of Buchanan Park Free Methodist Church. He and his wife, Vivian, have three grown sons and live in Hamilton. © 1989 Allan Hyndman.



for only a year, and my wife, Savy, was seven months pregnant. Our escape would be difficult for her and risky for our unborn child.

The jungle trails were mined with explosives and guarded by soldiers. We ran for three nights and two days, and hid for one day, without food or water before we reached the border of Thailand. There, other refugees were camped in crude shelters made of branches and leaves.

Only two hours after we reached the border Savy gave birth to a girl whom we named Chap. Both mother and daughter were fine, but we had made it just in time.

After living 10 weeks in the border jungle, a battle erupted around our campsite and we were caught in the cross fire. Savy hid with the baby in a low area of the ground. When there was a lull in the shooting, Savy got up from her hiding place and came toward me. She had walked only about five meters when a shell exploded right where she had been crouching. I saw the little pillow on which our baby had slept fly into the air. "Where is the baby?" I screamed. I was relieved when Savy showed me that the baby was with her. They had moved just in time! Not until much later did I understand that God had been protecting us.

We moved farther into Thailand

and ended up at the Khao-I-Dang camp, where some 125,000 refugees lived. We were given a small piece of land on which we erected a little bamboo house.

Near us lived 80-year-old Taing San and his family. He led one of the groups of Christians who met to sing, pray and read the Bible together. I often ridiculed them.

But Taing San was kind to us. Every day for two months he came to our house. As he helped us with our work, he talked about the Bible, that it says we all are sinners, but Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead to save us from our sins.

One day I thought about the kindness this neighbor had shown us and what he had said about Jesus. I wanted to believe that what the Bible said was true and I wanted to accept Jesus as Savior. I struggled for two weeks before Savy finally asked, "Are you going to believe in Jesus?"

We decided to go to Taing San's house that evening. When he opened his door, I said, "We have come to confess to Jesus and become Christians." That night, March 14, 1980, my wife and I both accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior. We finally came to know the God who had been watching over us. The very next day was when I had to face the challenge to test my new faith in God by throwing myself into a fire.



I was baptized in May of 1980. Three months later Taing San and his family moved to California. Another refugee and I led our group of believers for several months until my family was moved to another refugee camp.

At the new camp I attended a Bible school for refugees. It was at that camp that I came face to face with one of the soldiers who had tied me up and left me to be shot years before. He had deserted the armed forces, fled to Thailand and was now a refugee. At first he was frightened because he too remembered the incident.

But God had freed me from hatred and bitterness. I said to the soldier, "I've become a Christian and God has forgiven my sins. I am a new man and I have forgotten the wrongs of the past." What a joy when he said that he was a Christian now as well.

Eventually my family and others were moved to yet another refugee camp. Seven months later we were sent back to live in Khao-I-Dang camp again, where I became one of the elders in our church. Many of the elders were leaving to begin new lives in other countries. By 1984 I was one of two elders who were left, and we assumed pastoral care of the whole camp which now numbered 30,000 to 40,000; about 400 attended our church.

During the months of living in refugee camps, we continued to sense God's care for us. Both Savy and our son, Samson, overcame life-threatening illnesses. We believe that they were healed because God answered our prayers and those of our Christian neighbors. The Lord allowed us to face the enemy many times, but we learned that "the one who is in [us] is greater than the one who is in the world."*

In June, 1985, we were notified that our family had been accepted for settlement in Canada. A church in Edmonton, Alberta, wanted us to lead a group of Cambodian refugees. Before the church completed its application to sponsor us, the Canadian government invited us to go under its sponsorship.

We flew to Toronto, where we went through immigration and customs. We were directed to an immigration line where a woman asked, "Are you going to Hamilton?" I couldn't understand her English clearly and didn't distinguish between Hamilton and Edmonton, so I answered "yes."

A van took us to Hamilton, Ontario. We had no idea we weren't going to Edmonton. I wondered why no one from the church had met us, so I asked someone, "What is this city?" When he answered Hamilton, I asked, "Where is Edmon-

ton?" He said that it was more than 2,000 miles away!

We were in a strange country, and not even in the right city. Again I turned to God for help: "Father, I don't know what to do. I came to Canada to be a pastor to Cambodians, but I don't even know if there are any in this city. Help us."

We were taken to a hotel in Hamilton near the Canadian immigration building. The next morning Sovandy, a young Cambodian who was welcoming newly arrived refugees, knocked on our door. After we became acquainted, he asked if we would be interested in going to a church which quite a few Cambodian families attended. As we talked further, Sovandy became excited when he learned I was a pastor. "We've been praying for someone to help lead our Cambodian people. I must call our pastor!"

Before long, Pastor Allan Hyndman came to our room. As we talked, we learned that we believed alike and had the same hopes for the Cambodian people.

Pastor Hyndman said, "Just last night at our prayer meeting we asked the Lord to send us someone who could give leadership to the Cambodian people in our congregation. We know they need instruction in Christian living in a manner and language they understand."

That same night I had been praying, "Lord, help me to find someone who can help me understand why I am here and what I should do."

I became the Cambodian pastor at Buchanan Park Free Methodist Church. Since then, the Lord has opened to us a growing understanding of his will. Our group has grown to 40 Cambodian families, and we know of about 100 other refugee families in Hamilton and its suburbs.

The Lord had prepared us for his service. Now I realize that the God who knew me before I knew him had always cared for us, and even saved our lives—just in time. ☩

*1 John 4:4, NIV; taken by permission from The Holy Bible, New International Version, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society, East Brunswick, New Jersey