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## **Cloud of Witnesses**

From Being an Accountant to a Music Professor—Kai Ton Chau  
(By Belinda)

**Kai Ton Chau concentrated in the science field in high school but majored in music while in college. After immigrating to Canada, he successfully turned his career into accounting. Music, however, is still his heart's desire. Through three decades of waiting and shaping, God eventually opened doors for him to teach and to nurture the younger generations. He is now a music professor at a Christian college in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Kai Ton had a colorful career in the "first half" of his life journey; he is now ready to move on to the "second half" that is woven by music ...**

*A Faith in God; a Commitment to Christ*

Kai Ton was born in Guangzhou, China. His father died of cancer when he was only four years old. When the Cultural Revolution started in 1967, his mother – still quite young at the time—took him and his sister out of China despite of the political and economic pressures of the time. They moved south to Hong Kong where Kai Ton's mother worked as a caretaker at True Light Middle School. She took care of the family of three with a meager income. Realizing the financial difficulties the family faced, Dr. Ho Chung Chung, principal of the school and a forerunner of Christian education in Hong Kong, offered free education and financial assistance to Kai Ton and his sister so that they could finish high school education. During these formative years, they learned about Christ, and experienced first hand the love and care of other Christians.

Kai Ton professed his faith in Christ in a Billy Graham Crusade in 1975. During his high school years, he spent much time thinking a lot about faith and life, and started to read and explore religions and philosophies of the East and the West. It was his desire to examine the credibility of the Christian faith, particularly through the microscope of science. "As a teenage, I loved science and logical reasoning. After a period of inquiry, I came to a conclusion that the Christian faith was reasonable." While accepting the Christian faith through reasoning was one aspect of his Christian walk, encountering Christ in a personal way and eventually making a commitment to Christ was a different experience. "This decision came in a night after school fellowship during the pre-college years. Prompted by a speaker at that fellowship gathering, the thought of "committing to Christ" was in my mind all night. Finally I prayed quietly and committed my life to Christ that evening. Looking back, I believe that God never let go of me. It is His desire to mold me and form me to be more Christ-like. It wasn't easy at the beginning. But now I pray often that He would continue to be the potter so that He would mode me into a vessel that is useful to Him." Kai Ton's commitment to follow Christ was germinating in his heart.

The determination, decisiveness and teaching by example of Kai Ton's mother had made a tremendous impact on him. He was a hardworking student. His tuition fees and most expenses during high school and college were paid for by bursaries and scholarships. In 1982, he left the science area, and entered the music department of the Hong Kong Baptist College with a scholarship. He majored in composition. "The study program has helped me gain a better understanding of the idea, structure, and color of a piece of music, and of the mind and heart of a composer. At the same time I started to learn conducting. Through conducting I began to experience the joy of interpreting and performing music." After graduation Kai Ton joined the Hong Kong

Philharmonic Orchestra, focusing in education and publicity. It was at this workplace he met Wendy, his future wife.

#### *From a Musician to an Accountant*

In 1988, Kai Ton set aside his career and separated temporarily with Wendy in order to pursue graduate education in choral music in the U.S. Three years later he moved to Toronto and married Wendy who immigrated to Canada a few years before. Because the global economy at that time was going downhill, and the fact that he lacked Canadian working experience, finding a music-related job was not easy. With God's miraculous guiding, he joined Child Evangelism Fellowship of Ontario where he was responsible for the financial and administrative aspects of the Christian outreach ministry. "My accountant friends advised me at that time that accounting was a secure profession. What they meant was, accountants are always needed by companies and organizations of all sizes and trades. The career possibility of the profession is less affected by the state of economy. Professional qualifications in accounting could further secure a job. I did not have any experience in accounting at that time," says Kai Ton. "When I started serving in this Christian mission organization, I thought I was going to do something for Kingdom's sake. Little did I realize that God was taking a further step to reshape my life." As such, Kai Ton began his journey in accounting study while working full-time. It took nine years for him to become a certified accountant. Later, he also received professional status in financial planning and an MBA degree. He became director of finance and administration at two Christian universities. In the next seven years Kai Ton managed his own accounting practice, providing professional accounting and consulting services. He was quite well-known to the Christian and not-for-profit community.

"Moving from being a musician to an accountant was a big change indeed. Many people see music is emotion oriented, while finance and accounting deals with a lot of lifeless numbers. This is not always true. In fact, both art and humanity pursue higher goals – to be more beautiful and better. God is the creator. He is also the sustainer. Through art and economy we learn of and experience God's faithfulness and provision. It is, therefore, our response and responsibility to be good stewards of God's creation. Life itself is worship. We glorify God through music; we also glorify Him through being good stewards. The most importantly point is: we need to learn to develop sensitivity and a connection in every aspect of our lives – to realize God's power and grace through everything, and respond accordingly." His awareness of God's loving-kindness and graciousness in the God—human and interpersonal relationships deepened during the time he volunteered at Living Water Counseling Centre. In other words, music has nurtured Kai Ton's sensitivity to God's grace and love; while finance and accounting has helped him to be a better steward of God's creation.

#### *Pursue a Doctoral Degree in Worship Studies*

In terms of his studies in theology, Kai Ton experienced a winding road in that direction. "Soon after I moved to Canada, I started to think about taking theological education. It was my desire to set the music knowledge and skills I've learned on a Christian foundation. I understood the situation clearly – Chinese churches at that time did not hire music ministry staff. Deep in my heart, however, I felt the call to serve the Chinese church. Because of this, I resigned my paid position at an English-speaking church and became a volunteer choir director at a Chinese church. Later I learned that a seminary offered a masters degree in worship studies. Naturally I became quite excited. The focus of that program was not in music, but the theology

of worship. That was exactly what I had hoped for—to develop a theological foundation for musicians like me. I prayed about this opportunity for a long time. Two years later I was ready to put things into action. When I planned to apply to the seminary, I had a shock. The program was suspended indefinitely!” Since God did not open doors, Kai Ton continued his accounting career. Meanwhile he obtained a certified financial planner designation and an MBA degree. During his many years in the accounting profession, however, he still love music and continued to serve in music ministry. He believes that music can bring praise and glory to God. From a seminary professor in Hong Kong, he later learned about a program of worship studies in the U.S. In 2007, he was admitted into the doctoral program of the Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies in Florida.

In God’s providence, the admission process went smoothly. “The moment before I stepped into an airplane, I was very excited. Yet I was nervous too! Excited, because I finally set foot on the road I had dreamed for more than ten years; nervous, because I didn’t have a clue what lies ahead.” During his studies at the institute, Kai Ton once again experienced God’s miraculous provision. “My pastors provided me tremendous support and encouragement. Because of the fact that this institute is not a traditional seminary, however, our church was not able to support me financially as if I were a seminary student. I was at the institute in Florida when I got the news. Obviously I felt quite disappointed. It was my wife who gave me a lot of encouragement during that time. Miraculously when I came back home a week later, I received an e-mail. A formal professional colleague of mine asked me to work part-time, on a short-term basis, for his company. I then figured out how much I would be paid for the job. My remuneration came up to the exact figure of the tuition fees and travel expenses for three years!” As such, Kai Ton began an extremely challenging time period in terms of his daily routines. Not only did he have to manage his accounting business, he also had two part-time jobs. At the same time, he drove his children to and from school every day. On top of these there were books to be read and assignments and projects to be done. “When I look back, I can only give thanks. God’s provision is sufficient—financially, physically, and mentally. He looks after me and takes care of me and our family.”

#### *Being a Music Professor – A Dream Fulfilled*

In the summer of 2008 God gave Kai Ton another vision. A Christian college in Grand Rapids, Michigan, established a music and worship program a few years ago. He was invited to apply for a music professor position. Having prayed together and discussed with his wife, he decided to leave the accounting profession, and gladly responded to God’s calling. From a human point of view, Kai Ton seems to be making another sharp turn in his career. But this is how he sees it. “I taught Sunday School shortly after I graduated from high school. Since then I started to understand the importance of building young lives. Looking back, I had benefited tremendously from the teaching, sacrificial love and financial support of many Christ followers. Because of that, I had prayed that if it is God’s will, I would be an educator and a nurturer of young people. Thirty years later, He answered the prayer.” There is no doubt that the path for the past thirty years was a winding one. Kai Ton believes, nonetheless, each experience brings more beautiful colors to life. The step we took before is a preparation for the next step. Instead of looking at these turns as career changes, he says that whenever he makes another move, he encounters further grace from God, puts more experiences in the pocket, affirms God’s faithfulness with more conviction, and brings more sharing and encouragement to fellow travelers in life’s journey. It is with such a heart and enthusiasm, Kai Ton embarks the “second half” of his musical journey.

"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him'" (Lam. 3:22-24).