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## When Will We Ever Learn?

Herman Tang

I was sitting in a barbershop in Toronto waiting my turn for a haircut when I heard these two Chinese men talking to each other about the terrorist attacks on America on September 11. One of them said, "America has taken advantage of others for so long, it is time for them to suffer now." My heart was deeply grieved as their conversation went on.

Does America deserve the terrorist attacks? Is God judging America for her sins? Are we better than those victims who have died in the World Trade Center and at the Pentagon?

Two days after the attacks, Jerry Falwell, leader of the Moral Majority, noted harshly: "I really believe that the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and the lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People for the America Way — all of them who have tried to secularize America — I point the finger in their face and say, 'You helped this happen.'" (Los Angeles Times 9/20/01)

Less than a week later, Falwell apologized for his comments. Falwell admitted that his remarks ran counter to his lifelong theological conviction that it was impossible to know whether an event reflected God's judgment. In an interview with New York Times, Falwell corrected himself, "I am saying that no human being has the knowledge that any act is an act of God's judgment and any person is responsible for God's judgment. If the terrorist attacks did reflect God's judgment, then that judgment is on all of America--- including me and all fellow sinners." (New York Times 9/18/01)

Saying that an individual, a group or a nation is under divine punishment for sin is nothing new. The Sunday after the 9-11 tragedy, I have shared this point in my sermon as a precaution by quoting Luke 13: 1-5. I have found that one of my best friends also preached a sermon based on this passage at his church in Riverside, California. Let us look at this passage again and learn from what Jesus has to say when tragedy strikes.

<sup>1</sup> *Now there were some present at that time who told*

*Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices.* <sup>2</sup> *Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way?"* <sup>3</sup> *I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.* <sup>4</sup> *Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?"* <sup>5</sup> *I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."*

There are at least three lessons we can learn from Jesus in this passage. The first thing Jesus cautioned against is equating earthly disasters with divine punishment. I still remember years ago when earthquakes hit both Southern and Northern California, some finger-pointing, Scripture-quoting, judgment-passing Christians said that God used the earthquakes to punish sinners in Hollywood and San Francisco, the gay capital of the world.

Luke recorded the topic of conversation in his days when a group of Galileans died at the hands of Pilate (Luke 13:1-3). Jesus did not agree with the consensus of the day, which was the belief that the Galileans got what they deserved. Jesus was protective and respectful of the dead's reputation, honor, and memory. He was not harsh, cold or insensitive to the victims' death, their families' grief and the loss of life. After asking, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? Jesus answered himself, "I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." It is an emphatic no in the Greek. This was the only instance in the Bible that Jesus had twice said no.

Secondly, Jesus cautioned against equating suffering with sins. Jesus continued to raise a question by using another disaster that had happened in Jerusalem. "Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them — do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish." (Luke 13:4-5) Jesus brought up Jerusalem for a reason. From Galilee in the North, Jesus switched to Jerusalem, which is to the south of Galilee, located in the middle of Israel, the center of Jewish life. Freak accidents happen whether you are in the north or south, in the east or west, in the center or at the edge. To put it in another way, mishaps happen whether you are in America, Brazil, China, France, Australia or Kenya. It seems to me that Jesus purposely hammered at, sliced through and ripped apart the burdensome, oppressive and

heartless argument of divine punishment. We should remember that in this world the worst form of suffering may come to the nicest, the most friendly or likable man or woman.

Thirdly, Jesus cautioned against temporary relief with everlasting life. Jesus was telling the people who came to him not to be self-righteous. In other words, don't feel you are so lucky; don't act like you are an expert; or think that you are untouchable, invincible, superior or favored. Without eternal life, you are in danger of perishing no matter what spot, city or nation you are in this world. In this passage, Jesus spoke four times the word "all" — the most all's in one passage, along with the Great Commission.

Jesus said, "Unless you repent, you too will all perish." Repentance is the change in thinking that affects life. This means changing the discussion from "them" to "you", turning from sin and running to God, and putting your own house in order.

Let me draw to a conclusion by suggesting some applications for our church:

- Be compassionate toward people
- Sympathize with those who suffer
- Respect human life
- Treasure your friends and relatives
- Share the good news of Jesus' salvation



## City Church

Aileen Chow

As many of you might wonder, "Where's Barry and Aileen? Haven't seen them in church lately." Well, since late August we have been attending the City Church in Batavia. Here's our story:

I did not want to leave RCCC when I moved to Batavia. Barry and I had thought of finding a home church in our community before we got married. We talked about it but we never took any action. I thought I could not leave my family and friends at RCCC because I was brought up in this church since it first started. The thought of going to another church and not seeing them made me sad at times. I told Barry that I did not want to leave. However, things changed a year later.

When Barry and I attended RCCC, we made sure that we got up early on Sundays for the hour-long drive. Every Sunday morning we rushed out the door with our breakfast-to-go: a plate of waffles and two glasses of orange juice. During the one-hour drive to church, we sometimes like to eat in the car, listen to the radio, or just talk. The distance between Batavia and Penfield is about 45 miles. Sometimes, we prayed for safety on the road. We spend most of the time in Rochester on Sundays and return home by late afternoon.

Barry and I thought if we continued to go to RCCC, we must make a commitment to serve in the church. We gave ourselves two options: It was either we serve 100% in this church, which also includes traveling to Rochester to be a part of the church. Or, we look in Batavia for another church to serve in wholeheartedly. We picked the first option at first and we soon learned the distance was making it difficult for us to serve more, and to be involved with church activities and group gatherings. We felt a burden, and as a couple we want to serve more in a church and to also be part of the community. We realized that attending RCCC was not meeting our needs. I am happy to say though, that we are still continuing to meet with the Grapes Fellowship on Friday nights. ☺

On August 26, 2001 we attended our first service at City Church in Batavia. We heard comments about City Church from people we knew, so we decided to see for ourselves about the church. The church is in the center of the city. When we entered the church, the ushers welcomed us with smiles and shook our

hands. There were a lot of people that we didn't know, but they said hello to us. Barry and I felt very excited to be the new people among them. When the service started, the worship was incredibly loud and lively. The front stage had many musicians and singers (sometimes a choir). We clapped to the beat of the drums and sang with the singers. It was a joyful moment that we have not experienced before. We attended City Church the following week and got to meet other people. The next Sunday we heard the pastor of the church talk. The pastor of the church is Pastor Marty Macdonald.

One Sunday a group of drama kids gave a touching presentation that made my eyes tear. It was about Christians going out to help the needy families in their neighborhood. They performed by acting it out through a song that I cannot put out of my head. This presentation was about the church's outreach mission program called "Adopt-A-Block." Adopt-A-Block is a door-to-door outreaching program in the church. The mission of Adopt-A-Block is to help and care for the needy families who live in the inner city of Batavia. In the past, the City Church has helped them by giving them food, by maintaining their homes, or by requesting if they needed any prayer requests. I was moved by the drama presentation that night after the service, Barry and I rededicated our lives before God. We felt this was our service to God, to help the needy in the our community.

On October 27th we began our first day with Adopt-A-Block. The group welcomed us and they were glad that we came out to help. Every Saturday the Adopt-A-Block group meets together at 9:00 A.M. for prayer and announcements. Then the group splits into their respective neighborhood blocks. Our leader, Larry, took us to his neighborhood in the city. Larry told us that the people in this neighborhood knew him very well and were expecting him. He has been serving in the Adopt-A-Block in this neighborhood for a year and a half. He shared with us that he enjoys the experience of serving and caring for these people. Larry knocked once at every door, explaining to us how this door-to-door mission worked. He left Adopt-A-Block flyers at every door. Our mission was to find anyone who needed help. If someone answered the door, Larry would ask him/her, "Is there anything we can do for you?" Often times the answer was "No." Some of the houses we visited were old or rundown.

While we went knocking door-to door, the other groups were busy painting a house or raking the leaves. Although not very

many people answered the door when Larry knocked, we had a fun time talking with Larry and getting to know him. The Adopt-A-Block program strives to establish a friendly relationship with people first before sharing the Gospel. Despite the cold, snow and wind, we got through the whole neighborhood before lunch time. The groups met together once again and ended the day with a prayer.

On November 3rd, we joined the Adopt-A-Block group again. Barry and I revisited the same neighborhood, but this time Larry was not with us. We walked the block with a few high school students who were also involved with the program. A few high school students told us they had pulled an all-nighter because they were at a "Super Bowl Party"--an event held by the churches in the community for the kids. They said they had a series of fun that night. First, they went to a hockey game and listened to a guest speaker, then they went roller blading and bowling. After that they played arcade games all night until 3:00 or 4:00A.M. Barry and I were surprised to see them, still wide-eyed and eager to serve God through Adopt-A-Block. It was fun being with the young boys because we got to know them while we walked through the neighborhood. Barry had the opportunity to knock on each door this time. A few people came out of the house to talk with us. We also helped rake leaves at two houses. At our last stop, we encountered a man at his front yard. We talked with him and learned that he was an ex-convict who was saved by a pastor in the Jail ministry at City Church. He said to us that he really wanted to attend our church. We were thrilled. A moment later an elderly woman came out of her house and said there was someone who needed a ride to our church. We arranged to have the City Church van to come through the neighborhood to pick the man and woman up. When we left that day we were happy that just by reaching out to the people in this neighborhood, we were leading them to know God and City Church. In closing, Barry and I ask for your prayers as we serve in this ministry each weekend. We would like you to pray for our safety, and for reaching out to people in this neighborhood in Batavia.





## Upstate Gospel Camp And Me

Wei Feng

Since 1998 I have attended every Upstate New York gospel camp - a total of three times. Each time I attended, my feelings were both the same and different. The same feeling was when I saw so many seekers repented and accepted the Lord, my heart was filled with praise, thanksgiving and joy. What was different was that each time I went to the gospel camp, I had a somewhat different role. Serving in the gospel camp, I saw the Lord's grace, mercy, guidance and protection, as well as my spiritual growth each year. Today I thank the editors for the opportunity to share my testimony on ECHO. May His name be glorified.

On the Labor Day weekend of 1998 when I came to the gospel camp at Niagara Falls from Albany, I had just become a seminary student for one or two weeks. That was the first gospel camp I had ever been to. However, I had to take the responsibility to coordinate 40 campers from Albany. Thank the Lord that because there were several coworkers to work with, the whole weekend went smoothly. In that year's gospel camp, many people from Albany were saved. Later on some of them became coworkers in the fellowship or church until they left. Many good memories remain till today.

In the gospel camp of '98, I was deeply impressed by the love and commitment in serving the Lord of the brothers and sisters of RCCC, especially the Olive group. The messages of main speaker Brother Zhiming Yuan and Sunday worship preacher Rev. Tony Hsu moved many seekers and Christians. The chairman of the camp, Brother Sherman Chen, gave me an opportunity to share a testimony of my calling to full-time ministry to the audience in the camp. I wrote an article based on that testimony to remind myself not to forget God's calling and leading to serve Him. Actually when I listened to that testimony tape afterwards, I felt embarrassed. Even though all my experiences were real and reflected God's grace, I discerned the pride in my heart and my spiritual immaturity. Each time I remembered the testimony, it served as a poignant reminder to me. In that camp, I came to know several Upstate Chinese church pastors. The conversation with Pastor Lin from Syracuse was truly a blessing to Jing and I. In the following years, every time we joined Upstate Chinese ministers' prayer meeting, we learned a lot. We also came to know Pastor and Mrs. Tang of RCCC.

The next gospel camp was in 2000, at Niagara Falls again.

The main speaker was Brother John Huang. Because of Pastor Tang and the coworkers' trust, I was given the task to preach on Sunday's worship. At the same time, as a deacon of Albany church, I was coordinating again the registration, transportation, etc. of over 40 people.

Each gospel camp was indeed a chance for me to be trained by God to serve and work with Him. I also learned to invite other brothers and sisters to work together and share the burdens. Thank the Lord that everything was well taken care of as we united our hearts and spirits in one. I also had more time to prepare the Sunday sermon.

I am most thankful for the change of my mother. Two years ago my mother came to Albany from China to see us. Because of the love, care and gospel sharing from many others, my mother's attitude towards Christianity and my going to seminary started to change. On the first day of gospel camp 2000, my mother surrendered her life to the Lord! On Sunday morning, my mother prayed in tears to the Lord that He might use me to preach His word. I knelt down on the floor in tears too, gave thanks to the Lord and hugged my mother. We were thankful that on that Sunday morning the Lord used me, an unworthy vassal, to see some seekers raised their hands to follow Christ.

Two years after the first Niagara Falls gospel camp, I worked with the brothers and sisters of RCCC again and was touched by their commitment. My heart was also encouraged by their affirmation of my spiritual growth. Since Jing was pregnant, she stayed at home by herself and didn't come to the camp that year. I planned to call her each night, but I had so much to do Saturday night, including preparation for the Sunday morning sermon, that I forgot to call her. I knew later that she prayed Saturday night that I wouldn't call her, because she found herself bleeding and was afraid that my knowledge of it would influence my preaching the following day. The bleeding turned out to be a miscarriage. Although we were deeply grieved, we still thank the Lord for His protection of Jing during those days she stayed home alone, and for keeping the ministry from interruption.

On the Labor Day weekend of 2001, the gospel camp was held at Delta Lake in Rome. The main speaker was Pastor Chuang from Boston, and the Sunday worship preacher was Pastor Chang from Binghamton. Jing and I moved to Rochester at the end of May. I had the opportunity to work together with the brothers and sisters

of RCCC, and to co-chair the gospel camp with Sherman. I saw or experienced myself all the works on prayer, preparation, promotion, correspondence, literature, registration, lodging, transportation, video/audio, children program, finance, etc. So many brothers and sisters served faithfully either before, during, or after the gospel camp. They printed and folded the camp handbooks one by one, worked on registration forms one by one, copied gospel camp audio tapes one by one... I was very thankful and knew more clearly that each year's gospel camp is truly the result of so many brothers and sisters' serving with their unreserved love.

Brother David Pan was leading the prayer work in the camp. Though he had a cold, he started fasting after arrival at the camp. During each speaking session, prayer warriors of other churches took turn to join the watchman prayer meeting, but Brother Pan kept on leading all the prayer meetings. On Saturday, the temperature suddenly dropped. When we got some rooms with heat, he refused to move there, and gave the opportunity to others. Thank the Lord for His protection, when the camp came to a close, Brother Pan's cold was healed. After the temperature dropped, all the children and almost all the ladies who lived in cabins were assigned new rooms with heat. However, Brother Min Tang and his wife Shirley, who was in charge of room assignment, together with their boy Justin stayed in the cabin.

During those three days, I saw God's presence and the coworkers' loving heart for the Lord and for the lost souls through so many moving testimonies and faithful services. Even though we had all kinds of difficulties, I praise the Lord that through prayer, the coworkers of each church united and served as one.

This year's camp was another success. Many seekers were saved. While some others didn't make the decision in the camp, they were saved several days or weeks later. The coworkers shared that through serving in the camp together, supporting and encouraging each other in love, we reached a closer relationship with the Lord and with each other.

I thank the Lord for leading me to the gospel camps. Each year I gained a lot spiritually. It is my prayer that God will keep blessing this ministry to lead more people to salvation and train more disciples for Him..

## **“To Wed Or Not To Wed”... Thoughts From A Wedding Coordinator**

Lily Lee

I am single; what do I know about coordinating weddings?

Plenty. After a handful of weddings under my belt, I have learned a few things. Recently, at the last wedding that I coordinated, guests have asked if I “do this professionally.” I replied, “No, actually, I am getting ready for retirement.” I have never thought of getting paid for my ministry. My brother had once asked me if I knew how much wedding coordinators were making. “Sure,” I said. “They make about 15% of the cost of the wedding, but I would never charge my friends. Friendship is worth much more than that.” So finally, when his turn came to be wedded, he asked me to coordinate his wedding. I asked him, “Where shall I send the bill”?

Pulling together today’s wedding requires much details, a lack of sleep, interpersonal skills and money. This has become secondary compared to the social, cultural and emotional makeup of the wedding--the coming together of two families, long-lost relatives and many special guests. Parents and everybody else, besides the bride and groom, can become quite entangled in the planning process. A happy and successful outcome depends on keeping the perspectives in place and remembering that love surpasses all differences in choice or color of tablecloths or napkins. That being said, the very reason to wed is a public statement to unite two loves, two lives together blending a lifetime commitment to serve each other. On the other hand, for some couples, to wed means simply running down to city hall to register for the marriage license and bypass the bells and whistles of putting on an elegant wedding.

Some years ago, you could have read a commentary that I ended up sending to the Democrat and Chronicle. I was inspired to write to the newspaper about what I thought and saw was a bemusing sight in Rochester. Every February 14<sup>th</sup>, I would see grown men shop for the first time at Wegmans’ florist section, or at JCPenneys’ lingerie section for the special love of their life. And you can tell that they don’t do this often enough because of their awkward shopping behavior. Seeing these young and older men eyeing which flowers to get had given me a warm, fuzzy feeling, and I wanted to say to them, “practice your love every day--not just on February 14<sup>th</sup>.”

Speaking of love, studies have indicated that Rochester is definitely not the city for singles. It is more suited for families to raise their children. Every once in a while I will pick up an article from the newspaper that reveals detailed statistics analyzing the good and bad of the singles' lifestyle in Rochester, mostly how lonely the lonely is. The bottom line of these surveys seems to indicate that the married man gets the best deal; he lives longer and is the happiest among the single males and females.

If you are or were once single, do you remember feeling the pressure from all around you to get married? How many invitations have you received that says....You and your spouse (or significant other) are invited... Gosh, why can't I go alone? Do I need a date or a spouse to be my security blanket? How many times have you entered a restaurant, and the hostess asks, "table for two"? No, I just want a table for one and please tuck me away in the far corner so that I don't get picked up.

Perhaps some of us still want to hold on to the old ways. While in and after college, I received propositions from well-intended matchmakers who wanted to arrange these "Yum Cha" (Dim Sum) luncheons to meet interested prospects. Well, after the pressure started to take its toll, and to put an end to these propositions, I gave in to one meeting. Obviously, you know what happened; I remained single. Just the other day, I ran into a good-intentioned acquaintance at Southtown who barraged me with invitations to join this and that singles' meeting and activities. When I politely said I would be tied up Saturday night, she asked if I was dating. When I said, "No," she demanded to know why I was not dating. So, what does one say? In Rochester, or any city, you will find kind-hearted individuals asking these questions or making these comments, "Why aren't you married? What is wrong with you? Do you know that your biological clock is ticking?" What does one say, or do?

Rebekah was married to Isaac for 20 years before she conceived. Hannah was childless until God gave her Samuel. Sarah took things onto her own hands before the Lord gave her Isaac at age 90! These are amazing examples how God reigns no matter what our biological clock says. Certainly, we make choices every day that produce consequences, but the determination to trust and believe that God has ultimate control assures us that we are loved--regardless of our church, community or society's demands, perception or pressure.

Remember the 3 Cs: Clarity, Commitment and Contentment. Our Father in heaven has a perfect plan for each one of us. Knowing that God's perfect love for us is not conditioned upon any basis is enough to see and define clarity and purpose for our life, making it full by serving Him. Knowing that God sacrificed His only Son to redeem us is enough to make a solid commitment in whatever we do daily by serving others. Knowing that God provides for all our needs is enough to be satisfied with contentment by also serving God and others ourselves.

To wed or not to wed; Jesus led the way for 33 years on earth. He was one solitary life that changed humankind.



## Following

### A. De Votion

“From this time many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him.” (John 6:66)

What a moment? What a turning point? Unfortunately for these so-called disciples, it was a sad moment and a wrong turn. They used to follow Jesus. They were fascinated by His miracles, healing and leadership. They looked to Him for the satisfaction of their physical, emotional and political needs. Yet they never came to grips with their spiritual need, so much so that when Jesus explained who He really was and His mission on earth, they were offended.

There are different paths for people to come to know and accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. We all were born blind spiritually. It takes time and certain experiences to make our eyes open. These experiences may be the love and care of certain Christians, a setback in fortune or relationship, a serious illness, or the death of someone close. I am not aware of anyone who suddenly discovered his spiritual need by a lightning strike.

In closing his first epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul wished their whole **spirit, soul** and **body** be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was obviously concerned with their needs at the spiritual, emotional and physical levels. Every human life on earth has these three elements dating back to the creation of Adam. God formed Adam from the dust of the ground. That was the creation of the body. God then breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life and he became a living being. That was the creation of the soul and the spirit. The word "soul" and "spirit" are often used interchangeably to refer to the non-physical being of a human life. Sometimes the word "soul" is used separately to indicate our sentiment or emotion, whereas "spirit" represents our real inner being; our image of God as He intended when He created Adam.

Our physical body will deteriorate and be gone one day. Our soul (emotion) can only function with our body. Our spirit, however, will last forever (Ecclesiastes 3:11). While we are on this earth, our life is composed of these three elements and we have needs at all three levels. There is nothing wrong with starting our faith journey at the physical or emotional level. In fact this is where we usually begin. In our outreach to non-believers, we probably wouldn't start with a fire-and-brimstone sermon by telling them unless they repent and believe they are on a one-way ticket to hell. To be effective, we need to begin with understanding and meeting people's physical and/or emotional needs. That is why Christian churches through the ages have been involved in all kinds of caring, helping and charitable activities. Similarly in one-on-one personal evangelism, we often have to show our care for the person's physical and/or emotional needs first before going to the spiritual level.

Jesus did the same during his ministry on earth. He showed His care by turning water into wine, multiplying fish and bread to feed thousands, healing the crippled, the blind and the sick, and even raising Lazarus from the dead. While we can't perform miracles like Jesus did, we can show our love and care by inviting people over for dinner, giving them rides when they need transportation, listening to them when they need someone to talk to,

making a phone call, a hospital visit, a genuine smile, a warm greeting, etc. These acts of love and care can open a lot of doors because they satisfy people's physical and emotional needs, but sooner or later we have to get to the spiritual need. Until the person recognizes that, there will be no repentance, no believing, and no salvation.

Many people loved, respected and followed Jesus for His miracles. The problem began when Jesus started to relate to them on a spiritual level. Doesn't that look familiar to you? It is frustrating to see people coming so close and yet getting so far away from salvation. Yes, we pity the so-called followers who turned back and no longer followed Jesus, but they can be a mirror to our own spiritual journey. Is our discipleship based on satisfaction of our physical or emotional needs or do we follow Jesus out of a much deeper, spiritual desire?

Jesus asked Peter three times whether or not he loved Him. To paraphrase the Greek translation, Jesus asked the first two times if Peter loved Him unconditionally and sacrificially, and Peter answered that he loved Him affectionately. Jesus asked the question on a spiritual level. Peter responded on an emotional level. In the third ask, Jesus had to come down to Peter's level by using the same "love" word Peter used. Peter was saddened by this. He should be. His following Jesus thus far hadn't yet reached the level Jesus wanted him to be. In a way, Jesus' asking Peter three times was intended as a spiritual wake-up call. Peter was saddened but awakened. That short dialogue paved the way for Peter to proceed to the next leg of his spiritual journey into true discipleship.

Had Jesus followed His Father on a physical level, He would have yielded to Satan's temptation in the wilderness by turning stones into bread. Had Jesus followed His Father on an emotional level, He would have asked the Father to take the cup away in Gethsemane. But no! That was not the kind of following our Lord wanted us to have. He gave us the example of true discipleship when he prayed to His Father "not what I will but what you will."

May we learn from John 6:66, reflect on our own spiritual journey, and be a true disciple of Christ.



## A China Mission Letter

Dear Brothers & Sisters:

Praise be to the Lord!

God had put together a great team. We were teachers of seven men and seven women with ages from 18 to 60. We had punctual people, laid-back people, energetic, calm, impulsive, cautious, social and talkative people, quiet and thoughtful people ..... We had one electrical engineer, a manager at Baskin Robbins, an accountant, and a Vietnam veteran. Our leaders were a high school principal wife, a native Chinese who grew up in a family involved with the China railroad system and studied ESL outside of China for 20 years, and an elementary teacher. Each of us came from different nationalities and backgrounds, yet we found similarities in all of us. Each of us was extremely different from the other. During the six weeks we spent together, God showed us that all ages and all types of people could be used by Him. Each one of us had something different to offer and help one another. We each had a skill, hobby, or good characteristic that was importantly needed for the team.

For example, I had no experience in teaching in classrooms, but I could help rehearse the songs we taught the students. My partner was an experienced elementary teacher, so he handled the classroom discipline, while I in turn helped with conducting the students with the musical activities. Together we would help each other and brainstorm ideas and activities for our students.

We had 16 students in each class. Their ages ranged from junior high to college. One of our students, we shall call student "A" to respect her privacy, invited us to her home for lunch on Sunday. In order to meet us, she came to church with us. We hope the seeds were planted in her heart that day. Student "A" also spent every possible moment with us. Currently we are maintaining our friendship through the internet.

I met student "B" who had attended the ERRC summer English program for four years, and accepted Christ last year. He is

starting his sophomore year in college. He needs Christian friends, but finds it difficult to find out who else is Christian on campus. I know that God is great and will guide "B" to Christian brothers and sisters.

Near the end of our stay I met student "C", who I found out is a Christian too. He also attended ERRC for more than one year. During the night before we left, student "B" and "C" victoriously dragged us from our worried packing, and asked us to spend time worshiping with them. So we sang worship songs and prayed with them; they were so hungry for Christian fellowship.

Another student, "D", had a comic book that illustrated salvation, complete from Adam and Eve to Jesus' Resurrection. This book was given by previous ERRC Christian teachers. She realized that there is a God, but she is afraid to believe because her parents work for the military. Yet she asked a teacher to especially read the comic book and record it for her to listen to. I learned this important shield of faith that fights discouragement. Never let discouragement and hopelessness in results prevent us from doing work in the Lord. Know that whenever we obey the Lord and care for others in His name, God will grow the fruit in His time. From these students we saw the fruit of previous Christian teachers, who never got to see what we saw. And in turn, God will grow our seeds for the future harvesters.

Most important is that all these students needed SO much prayer. I realized the importance of many banners in the mission field that call out: "Pray for China!" They need God to create chance meetings and friends that will help them in their young faith, yet in China there are so few. There are many difficulties. We experienced complaints about the Christian content we taught, yet that is found in America as well. We could not speak of Christianity openly, and there was great fear on the subject of Christianity.

Thank you all for your prayers of faith! I was overwhelmed by the love and generosity of my dear brothers and sisters in Rochester, and their heart for China. In addition to praying for our own country, please remember China: that the young generation will believe the Truth, and save the future China. God bless you wherever you go, whatever you do, for your part in the Tianjin

ERRC 2001 summer team. Praise God who allowed these experiences to be possible.

In our Lord Jesus Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Josephine Au". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "In our Lord Jesus Christ,".

## Balancing Act

Sam Ng

There is a popular Cantonese saying: “My neighbor’s rice always smells better than mine.” Sadly, this kind of attitude permeates our daily lives. We are so inclined to believing that everybody else has better gifts than we do, and forgetting that God sees each of us as a unique creation, created in his own image. I must confess that I fall in the same trap time and again, wondering why I’m not as smart as “A”, why I don’t play the piano as well as “B”, and why I don’t grow as tall as “C”. The list of course does not end here. There is one gift of mine, though, that I feel nobody has it better.

While driving up to Toronto during the past Thanksgiving break, Wendy and I listened to a series of talks on the topic of love and marriage. Aiming to challenge brothers and sisters to reflect upon the increasing number of divorce cases even within the Christian community, the speaker reminded us of God’s real intention in laying down the system of marriage. He referred to Genesis 2:18, “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’” The word “helper”, according to the speaker, carries the connotation of “balance” in the original Hebrew. He explained that God sees it “not good” that Adam is living alone because he is “unbalanced”, and Eve is created to promote a sense of balance when the two are brought together to unite as one.

At first, such interpretation struck me as odd. How is it that your spouse is created to balance you? I don’t feel like I’m unbalanced in the first place. And after all, what does it mean that I’m “unbalanced”? Psychologically? Mentally? Or physically? (I believe I can walk in a straight line without much difficulty.)

I was then enlightened when the speaker continued to elaborate on his point: When two people get married, the “balancing out” between them in fact refers to the process of becoming more like each other. The ultimate goal in this process, however, is that through becoming more like each other, both persons become more like God. It sounds abstract, but it’s not.

How does a couple become more like each other? Theoretically there can only be three different scenarios: (1) The husband remains the same, and the wife becomes more like the

husband; (2) the wife remains unchanged, while the husband becomes more like the wife; (3) both the husband and wife change to become more like each other, and they converge to a midpoint where they meet. I think most of us would agree that (3) is probably the case that we'd like to experience ourselves. If you think you're experiencing either (1) or (2), my guess is that either you feel happy with your life, but your spouse is very sad and frustrated, or vice versa.

How does case (3) come about? How do two people change to become more like each other? Why is it that during the process they would also become more like God?

Simply, it's by giving up and giving in--giving up my old ways which my spouse does not appreciate, and giving in to the ways of my spouse that I did not appreciate. Only through this can we put our own selves down and unite with our spouse to become one in God. And as we put our selves down, we also engage ourselves in a process that transforms us to become more like Jesus. So many times marriage becomes a burden to people because we insist in our own ways; that is, we fail to give up and give in.

Last year when Wendy was still studying at UR, she would stay home every afternoon, for all her classes were in the evening. Sometimes I thought that with her at home, I had less time to study on my own because I had to spend time to talk to her, to listen to her, or sometimes just to sit with her when she's feeling blue. Sometimes I'd be almost late for classes because whenever I told her that I was leaving home for my class, she would hide my bag somewhere, or snatch it from me so that I needed to exercise some cautious violence to get it back.

"Why couldn't I have my own schedule?" I thought. So much for your spouse balancing you.

This year, Wendy's not around in the afternoon any more for she has gotten a job teaching in an elementary school. Do I now have more time to study and get to all my classes on time? All I can say is that without her around, I can't help gluing my eyes on the TV, and I end up having less time to do my work, and going to classes even later.

Now I'm really unbalanced!

Brothers and sisters in our fellowship know so well that

Wendy is an extremely caring person. She remembers every little detail about other people's needs, and is always willing to walk that extra mile to help others in whatever way she can. In this wonderful way she's also balancing me out. (Conversely, I'm the "counterbalancing" force, for when people call to ask Wendy for yet another favor but unfortunately hear my stern voice on the phone, they begin to rethink whether they're exploiting my lovely wife too much.)

Through Wendy and our marriage, I see the face of Jesus, and I know I'm growing to become more like Him. This indeed is the intention behind the gift of marriage in God.

