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Lessons I Have Learnt From My Pastor <i>Pastor Herman Tang</i>	1
God's Wake-Up Call <i>Linda Lee</i>	5
Window <i>Daniel Hu</i>	9
H....H....Home <i>Johnny Lynn</i>	11
Are You Flourishing In The Courts Of The Lord <i>Aileen Chow</i>	13
Missions Trip to Toronto <i>Mitchell Tai</i>	16
Retreat 2002 <i>Boaz Tang</i>	21



Lessons I have learnt from My Pastor

Pastor Herman Tang

The following list is provided by the Fuller Institute of Church Growth. The list contains the survey results (done in 1991) of the personal and professional life of the clergy:

- 50% felt unable to meet the needs of the job
- 70% do not have someone they consider as close friend
- 70% say they have a lower self-esteem now than when they started out
- 75% reported a significant stress-related crisis at least once in their ministry
- 80% believed that pastoral ministry affected their families negatively
- 90% felt they were inadequately trained to cope with ministry demands

When I first read these finding, I did not think much about them. It seemed like they are irrelevant to me. But through what I have seen and experienced personally during the last 10 years in the ministry, I have come to realize that the problems are real. Pastors have their share of problems. Pastors are human. Jesus said, "I am the good Shepherd." (John 10:11). He is the only perfect pastor we can ever find. Despite his own inadequacy, Peter wrote to encourage other fellow pastors. In 1 Peter 5:1-4, he said, "To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away."

My Christian life

I became a Christian in 1968 in Hong Kong and a full time church minister in 1975. I have been an ordained pastor since 1981. After serving in the pastoral ministry full time for almost 27 years, I

have learnt something about the privileges and perils of being a pastor. I thank God the Great Shepherd for blessing my life with many godly men and women who are pastors. Among these pastors, there is one that stands out for me. He is my own pastor, my mentor and my friend.

This year our church is focusing on the Discipleship Ministry. As we are going through a preaching series on Mentoring Relationships, I think of my pastor often. Allow me to share with you some stories between me and my pastor.

A simple man

My pastor's name is Wai See Choy. I called him Pastor Choy with much respect and warm feelings. He has been my pastor since the first day I became a Christian back in Christmas of 1968. Without his guidance, I probably would not be able to have come this far in my spiritual walk with the Lord. Pastor Choy has certainly been a wonderful mentor to me. Now he is retired and living in Hong Kong with his wife. He remains active as an itinerant preacher and doing missions work. He is a simple man and he loves the Lord single-mindedly.

In 1968, I was brought to church by my friend Paul Siu. (Note: Paul Siu was the Retreat speaker for our church in year 2000. Presently he is teaching at the Alliance Theological Seminary in Nyack, New York.) This was the very first church I attended. I still remember that evening when I first stepped into that little church in Yuen Long of Hong Kong. I was kind of nervous. I did not know what to expect in the beginning. Very soon Pastor Choy made me feel welcome by his friendliness. I went back to the church again and again. Every time Pastor Choy would greet me with a big smile on his face and call my name in a confident and friendly voice. I felt that he genuinely cared about me.

Who cared?

A year after I have become a Christian, I found out that I had developed tuberculosis (TB). Back then in my community, having TB was regarded as a disgraceful thing. Because of that social stigma, a lot of TB patients would keep it as a secret and hide it from other people. Some would even refuse to go to see the doctor. Once a person has been identified as a TB patient by the Health Department, he would be put under watch. If the person was not willing to get medical treatment, the government had the authority to

compel the person to receive treatment. When people knew that I had TB, it was not uncommon that they would avoid me because of the contagious nature of the disease. However I did everything I could to get well. I went through an intensive treatment program for 18 months. I was pretty unhappy during that period of time. I felt I was alienated from other people. One time, even the physician on duty in the health clinic ordered me to stay back from his desk. He did not want me to get too close to him. Other than my own family, Pastor Choy and his wife gave me the most loving support. They invited me to their home for meals. They made special food for me. They wanted me to get well soon. The way they cared for me made me feel that I was totally accepted by them. Once I asked them why they would be so kind to me, they simply said that's the way Christians should be. I was very touched by their love.

A friend in need

When people are in troubles and in need of help, most likely they would go to someone they trust. That's what happened to me. In 1971, my father suddenly became very sick. It was an emergency situation. I was the only one at home when my father called out for help. As a young man, I really did not know what to do. My father was the hero of my life. When I faced troubles, I always went to him. He would solve the problem for me. Now my world had turned upside down. My father was lying in bed in danger of dying. Of course as a Christian, I thought of God as my helper and prayed to God immediately. But I really needed someone to help me. Out of desperation, I had to consult with someone that evening in order to rescue my father. But the strange thing was, out of the many neighbors, relatives and friends, I chose to call on Pastor Choy. To this day, I am still amazed that I would contact my pastor that night.

My calling

At the end of my high school year, I sensed the calling of the Lord. I had felt that the Lord wanted me to do something for him. But I absolutely had no idea what it was. When I mentioned it to Pastor Choy, he listened to me quietly but he did not offer me any answer right away. He gave me some Christian books to read afterward. After a week or so, he told me that he has made an arrangement for me to go to visit a Bible Seminary. Thinking back, I really felt that Pastor Choy had done it the right way in guiding me. Instead of making a decision for me, he showed me how to make that very important decision. Without pastor Choy's guidance, I

probably would not have chosen to enter the seminary and I might not have become a pastor myself. I thank God for using Pastor Choy as my spiritual mentor.

A great church

A few years ago, in one of his sermons Brother John Chen mentioned about something he has learnt regarding a great church. He mentioned the three signs of a great church. The three signs are: people are led to believe in Jesus Christ; lay people are involved in ministry; and people are called into full time Christian services.

According to these measurements, the Yuen Long Bread of Life Church, which Pastor Choy was shepherding, was worthy to be called a great church. Under the leadership of Pastor Choy, the church was constantly doing the work of evangelism. Many people came to know the Lord. Brothers and sisters were willing to get involved in serving. As a result, four branch churches were established subsequently. During the five years when I was involved in the church, I saw at least six people (myself included) who were called into full time services. All of them are still actively serving the Lord. Pastor Choy had a passion to encourage young people to serve the Lord and would have the church support them in every possible way.

Principles of wisdom

Year 2002 marks the 45th anniversary of Pastor Choy's service to the Lord. Summarizing what he has learnt, Pastor Choy has compiled 10 personal principles for a minister. I have copied them here for our mutual encouragement.

1. *Do not walk in front of the Lord, for you will lose His guidance.*
2. *Do not lose your credibility, for you will lose your congregation.*
3. *Do not brag about yourself, for you will lose your strength.*
4. *Do not fall behind others, for you will lose God's blessings.*
5. *Do not put others down, for you will lose your co-workers.*
6. *Do not covet high positions, for you will lose people's support.*
7. *Do not go with the flow, for you will lose your testimony.*
8. *Do not abuse your power, for you will lose your stand.*
9. *Do not misinterpret the truth, for you will lose your foundation.*
10. *Do not take the pulpit for granted, for you will lose your crown.*

Pressing on

When I look at the list of risk factors for pastors again, I definitely cannot say that I am exempt from these risks. I thank God for his sustaining grace in my life during the last 27 years. Sometimes in my solitude, I ponder how I have faced the risks in the pastoral ministry. I could not help but thank God for the lessons I have learnt from my pastor.



God's Wake-up Call

Linda Lee

Adapted from her testimony given New Years Eve 2001

When Pastor Tang asked me a few weeks ago to give a testimony tonight, right away I said yes. In fact, a month or so ago I had mentioned to him that someday whenever he deemed appropriate, I would like to give a testimony. What is a testimony? To me, it is a personal story of something that God has done in your life and brings glory to God. I can remember that while I was going through my trial, I prayed to God that if I made it through my illness, I wanted to be a testimony of God's goodness, glory and faithfulness. So, here I stand. To give glory to God for what He has done and what He has taught me.

I don't think I've ever given a testimony before about a personal struggle that I have been through. I have often wondered why... maybe because I've never really had to face anything so serious. I really have never had to go through any suffering. Life for me has been rather "blessed". I grew up an "ideal Chinese daughter" ...you know... straight A student, went to medical school, got married, have three healthy children. I lived the best of both worlds... working part-time as a family doctor and also getting to stay home and raise my children. I served in various church ministries. What more could one ask for? Life was good. I was busy with my life. Admittedly sometimes too busy to pray and spend time with the Lord. I believe that I depended more on myself and my own abilities than on God and the power of His Holy Spirit.

Well, all of that changed in the twinkling of the eye. Now I depend on the Lord more than I ever have in my life... all because

of that one fateful day when God gave me a wake-up call.

I remember rather distinctly the day it happened. On June 21, 2001, I literally just woke up, got out of bed to get ready to go to the office and I remember thinking... "Wow, my head feels really strange." It is difficult to describe but it felt like I had cotton balls in my head and I had to "think through them" in order to concentrate. There was no headache, pain, visual changes or any other symptoms. I just had these strange cognitive changes. Well, to make a long story short... my symptoms did not go away and continued to get worse. After about two weeks of hoping this would all go away, I knew something must be wrong and called a neurology physician. Well, this was the beginning of a long summer of seeing several specialists, having every test you can imagine done on me. The good news was that nothing "bad" was found. The bad news was that no one knew what was causing my symptoms and I was getting worse. I was hospitalized at one point and was totally disabled from work. I couldn't even take care of my family. Thank the Lord for Christian brothers and sisters from all over Rochester who pitched in and helped our needy family in this time of crisis. After three months... most specialists had given up except one who was going to send me to either Hopkins or the Mayo Clinic for more opinions. However, I believe by the grace of God and because of the faithful prayers of God's people... I slowly started to improve. By Fall I was cleared to go back to work slowly by my doctors. I called the office to let them know to start scheduling my patients. Two days before I was to go back to work, I got a phone call... I was told that it was decided that I wouldn't be coming back. I was being terminated! I was quite shocked to say the least, since I had been with this hospital system for 10 years.

Wow! That is a lot for one person to go through in six months. But I praise the Lord because I can stand before you today and give testimony of the goodness and greatness of God. Psalm 96:1-4. "Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord all the earth. Sing to the Lord, praise His name among the nations, His marvelous deeds among all the peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise!"

What have I learned?

1. The importance of prayer and faith.

Hebrews 10:22-23 is one verse that I clung to when I was ill. "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of

faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.” In the end, what really matters is not our own efforts or promises to God, but that our God is faithful. We can trust fully in His promises to take care of whatever situation we are in. I think I was on almost every prayer list in Rochester... Here, Browncroft, Community Bible Study and others. I was not ashamed to ask for prayer... I think sometimes people don't ask for prayer because they think it is too personal or don't want people to know that something is wrong. God wants us to pray. There are so many verses in the Bible that tells us that we should pray. Not because we are obligated but because we know that this is where the power of the believer lies...in prayer. The foundation is that God is faithful and will answer our prayers.

2. God is completely reliable and trustworthy. He is Sovereign.

Going back to my job situation. I was truly shocked when I got that phone call, mostly because I didn't think they could do that to a doctor. But I could still see God's sovereign hand in what had happened. He made it pretty obvious that my job was not where he wanted me... seeing 30 patients a day... it was like a factory... I was not able to truly minister to people... and I have known this for some time. I give praise to the Lord again because



He knew exactly where He wanted me. At first, I was thinking that I wasn't going to return to practice again. I looked into many other options like nursing home care or becoming a school physician. Where I ended up was the job that I least thought I would take. It is with a small Christian practice. I was able to negotiate with the hospital (my former employer) and they gave me my patient list. I wrote a letter to all 1,000 of them and presently at last count have had 900 transferred over to me. Praise God... because I thought I would have to start all over again. My patients have blessed me so much. Many shared with me that even though they didn't know what was going on with me, they were praying for me. I took to heart the story of Joseph where he tells his brothers that he holds no bitterness against them for what they did to him. "You intended it for evil but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done." God intended all of this for my good!

3. Not to take life for granted. “Teach us to number our days aright

that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” (Psalm 90:12)

Have you done all that God wanted you to do today? Did you serve God's purposes and fulfill His will today? After the 9/11 tragedy, I think we all realize that we do not know what tomorrow will bring. Everyday be prepared to finish the race well. One speaker I heard said, "make every birthday count" Meaning, make every year, every month, or rather every day count for God. Success and prosperity are a blessing but they also can become a snare. I recently read a passage from a book called Fresh Faith during worship a few months ago. I'd like to read it again. "How many of us have recalled all that God has done for us in the past 12 months? How many 100's of mornings did you wake up with strength in your limbs to get up and function? You didn't manufacture the strength yourself, it was a gift from God. When was the last time you thanked God for your mental alertness, for a functional memory, or for the skills to hold down a job? 'Every good and perfect gift comes from above coming down from the Father.' James1:17. So, how do we avoid the snares of prosperity and becoming too comfortable? Develop a habit of gratitude. A grateful heart recognizes God's provision. God is our praise. He alone is the source of our blessings. Remember the story of Joseph and the famine? He saved up and prepared for the seven years of famine before the famine hit. Store up now for the bad times that will come ahead.... Not to be morbid but we are all under a death sentence. We are all mortal because of sin. This is reality...illness, accidents, war. Develop a habit of prayer time in God's word. Store up now in the good times for the trials ahead."

4. Never underestimate the little things that you can do to help other people when they are undergoing hardships and trials.

So many people really touched my heart with the ways they showed their concern. One brother gave me a Christian music CD that just ministered to me so much. I listened and worshiped God through some of my darkest hours using this CD. Many people brought our family food, took the children out so that they could have as "normal" a summer as possible. Some books that were given to me to read just helped me so much in meditating on the promises of God and the power of prayer. Pastor Tang and other friends would drive me to doctor's appointments so I wouldn't be alone. I could tell you story after story of how God used His people to truly bless me and encourage my family and me in our time of need. Never think that what you do for someone else has little significance. It can have eternal impact and turn out to be a

tremendous blessing.

In conclusion, I end with a question to us all as we face this year 2002. How can we make the most of our lives? Do you find life flying by? Well, I do. Do we think about and evaluate the things we are doing? Do the things you do have eternal impact? God gave me a wake-up call. As hard as it was to go through it, I praise Him because of my strengthened faith and opportunity to urge all the brothers and sisters in Christ to wake up and live each day to the glory of God!

Amen



Window

Daniel Hu

I lost something. That was what had been on my mind for a rather long period of time. Something I knew not of, yet the feeling of emptiness consumed my then void mind. Thus I went on a desperate search:

I wander down the spiral staircase into the dark and grim basement, only to be greeted by a wall of cobwebs. A smell of decadence chills my spine as I break through the grayish web and proceed onto the darkest corner of my mind, trying to find something that I have tossed down there in a frenzy of worldliness. As I stumble my way deeper and deeper into the basement, a jingle startles me, putting a stop to my ponderings. So it seems that I have found the thing I was looking for. An ivory key, most pure and unadulterated, lies quietly on the floor, completely out of place in this grime, its usual subtle whiteness now almost blinding in the absolute darkness. Sighing with relief, I, now filled with a somewhat insecure sense of peace, the overcast of doubt still not entirely wept from my mind, place the key in my palm and tread onward.

Upon reaching the rusty door I'm looking for and finding no keyhole on the knob, I try the knob as the door yields open. "So it

has been opened all along,” thought I, wondering why I had never tried even once. A dim yellow light escapes the opening, revealing a room with a locked window glazed with dust, and a roomful of what seems like garbage. As the light from the window crawls lazily across the floor, unveiling a storm of dust in its way, I stare blankly into this room of filth. A sense of suffocation overcomes me as I choke on the semi-visible dust. The inhabitants of this room seem unwelcoming to my unexpected visit. Sweats break out and my heartbeat quickens.

As I am about to leave with an overwhelming disgust and discomfort, a gentle breeze lightly taps the window “rat tat tat.” Out of sheer curiosity, I walk to the window, using my sleeve to wipe off the filth, and look out. In my view is a crystal clear pond, set against a thick forest of regal, velvety green. Pieces of sunlight cut through the foliage and lit the undergrowth with a tint of red. Above this stretches a sky with occasional clouds, like milk spilled over a baby blue canvas. My racing heart slows with the calming scenery, yet still somewhat uneasy about opening the window.

Upon my hesitation the gentle breeze turns into a “persuasive” gale, rattling the windowpanes as if to break them. With this I take the ivory key out of my pocket in attempt to unbolt the frail rusted lock in a fluster. Struggling with the shaking lock, I finally manage to pop it open as the wind rush into the room like air into a vacuum. The windows blast open while the door bangs shut, throwing me back a few steps and sending the pieces of paper flying like panicking birds. As the strong gale enters the room it turns into a tornado that almost tears the room apart, whipping everything within into a frenzy of chaos, while I simply stand in the corner, in awe. Eventually the whirlwind, not without slapping me in the face a few times with the pieces of paper, channels the column of filth through the window in a surprisingly organized fashion. I chase them to the window and extend my head out of it in effort to see their destination, only to find trace of them to be seen in the world outside. How petty are those garbage, really?

Alas, with the feeling of suffocation and the sense of disgust gone, though through no work of my own, I lie down on the carpet, curl up, and rest, listening to the calming music lute and pipe played by the gentle wind. The refreshing breeze now blows through the window, combing through my hair, laying a gentle touch upon my face, and surrounds me with a serene whisper

“In the secret, in the quiet place, in the stillness I am there.”

A foreboding pain stabs his heart.
 He sees this metropolitan city growing darker darker

He shakes his head and dreads the outcome.
 He breathes a staggered breath.
 His thoughts return to the present!
 He plucks a shoot of grass, putting it into his mouth.
 He sits in the shadow of fear.
 His three friends, naive, are sound asleep.
 It behooves him to pray

Suddenly,
 Jesus implodes with glory.
 He is metamorphosed; a lightning radiance pours from him.
 He becomes as he was before he came.
 He is elevated above earth's horizon.
 The burden of his humanity is lifted.
 He is home again,
 Familiar sounds surround him
 Dusty trails and hard hearts are a world away
 Those who understand welcome him.
 Moses and Elijah, aflame with glory robes,
 Stand beside their King.

Moses, the lawgiver, whose grave no man knows,
 Elijah, the prophet, who side-stepped death in a fiery chariot,
 The One, transfigured, who is reminded of the decease, i.e.
 'A going away from' the present humanity,
 That is about to accomplish at Jerusalem.
 Yes, like Moses and Elijah, He could exit out
 In this white, flashing and splendor raiment.
 And be escorted into the eternal presently.

Oh! Fierce is the conflict within him.
 He cannot bear it but to pray

To strengthen him for the task ahead.
 He yields himself to God the Father who holds him.

By now the apostles are awake.
 For them, the scene is bizarre.
 Dazzling white clouds wrap around the mountain.
 From the belly of the clouds, a voice thunders:
 "This is my Son, whom I love;
 With whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him."

The One who had despaired is affirmed.
 Jesus resolutely sets up for Jerusalem,
 Because he is given a glimpse of home,
 A view into yesterday and a glimpse into tomorrow.
 Though dreading the pains of childbirth,
 He steadfastly brings this new life to terms
 For there is no faith, hope and love in humanity.

April 29, 2002

Inspired from "In the Eye of the Storm" by Max Lucado



Are You Flourishing In The Courts Of The Lord?

Aileen Chow

Barry and I have been attending City Church in Batavia for eight months now. We have heard many good messages from the church. I would like to share one message and it is from Jeremiah 17:8.

"For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters, which spreads out its roots by the river, and will not fear when heat comes; but her leaf will be green, and will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will cease from yielding fruit." (NKJV)

Pastor Marty Macdonald of City Church said, "To flourish in God's house is to put God in your heart. And to be planted in the church is to give your heart to God. It is to give and to serve. You need to withstand the heat that tests you, so that you can stay green."

In my walk with the Lord today, I have to wonder if I am planted in the church. Of course I believe I am but hearing the message I had to think about it again. Ever since my husband and I came to City Church, we wanted to get involved with serving in the

church and in the community. Both of us are serving the community through Adopt-the-Block. Barry is serving the church by typing in announcements and songs for the PowerPoint presentation on Sundays.

One Sunday, the pastor asked the congregation if they are flourishing in the courts of the Lord. He asked us if we are doing more for the Lord than just attending and worshiping. He asked a young man to come down to be with him. When the man came to the front stage, Pastor Marty asked him a question. Then, the man replied back to him. Pastor Marty said, "Scott has been cleaned for seven months now." Everyone in the congregation clapped their hands. From my understanding, I think the man was an alcoholic or a drug addict. There are some people like him in the church and they all have given their lives to Jesus. Pastor Marty said that Scott is now working and serving the Lord everyday. He helps to maintain the church.

From this example, we should ask ourselves what we are doing and are we flourishing in God's courts today. Also, are we serving and giving to the Lord. And are we a blessing to others by helping them in time of need. Here are some notes from our pastor:

The pastor gave us six questions that will help us determine whether you will flourish. To "flourish" is to "thrive, prosper, to be successful" and to "grow luxuriantly or to thrive as a plant." These questions are: 1) Are you planted? 2) How easily can you be uprooted? 3) Can you take the heat? 4) Is your spiritual health a priority? 5) Are you ruled by the seasons? 6) Is giving a lifestyle? These six questions are extracted from Jeremiah 17:8.

1) Are you planted?

"For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters." Jeremiah 17:8

Not only do you attend, but are you planted? If you are not planted, you will struggle to grow. If you are not planted in the "right place" you will not produce the right fruit.

2) How easily can you be uprooted?

"Which spreads out its roots by the river." Jeremiah 17:8

When tree roots spread out and run deep, it is difficult to uproot them. We grow roots when we are 1/ Involved in church and activities within; ministries within and without; actively praying instead of complaining. 2/ Financially involved.

3) Can you take the heat?

"And will not fear when the heat comes." Jeremiah 17:8

Life is not without tests or challenges, but He does promise that we will emerge victorious. If you are planted in the House of the Lord, you will have times of testing but you will not fail!

4) Is your spiritual health a priority?

"But her leaf will be green." Jeremiah 17:8

1/ Never take your spiritual life for granted! Are you receiving regular nourishment in the Word and refreshing from the Holy Spirit?

2/ The older you get, the harder it is to maintain health and fitness. The same applies to your spiritual life.

3/ Is prayer and Bible study a priority? Do you have your Bible now?

4/ Green leaves need daily feeding!

5) Are you ruled by the season?

"And will not be anxious in the year of drought." Jeremiah 17:8

Dry seasons will not affect those who are planted. They will continue to put God first in every area of their lives. Seasons are a specific time in life, but these will never last. We will stand firm.

6) Is giving a lifestyle?

"Nor will cease from yielding fruit." Jeremiah 17:8

Fruit that just hangs on the tree and is not harvested rots. Sadly there are fruit-bearing people, but never surrender their fruit to bless others. The reality is that we are blessed to be a blessing.

Lastly, the pastor remarked, that we have every opportunity to flourish in the House of God if we choose to be planted and allow our roots to go down deep. Psalms 92:13-15 says, "Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; They shall be fresh and flourishing, To declare that the Lord is upright; He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him." (NKJV)

Let us "flourish" in the courts of the Lord today!

Missions Trip To Toronto

Mitchell Tai

The date was August 19th, 2001. In the wake of some heavy storms that had forced the Church Ground-Breaking ceremony inside, I, along with seven fellow members of the youth group – Jack, Brian, Jeremy, David, Sheau-Yan, Aileen, Joyce – departed for Toronto for the Summer Missions trip. We confidently exchanged good-byes to all the Music Camp workers and headed off.

We arrived in Toronto at 6:00 pm. At the Riverside Church, which was a church for Christians as well as Sikhs (an Indian religion similar to that of Hinduism), we were introduced to Proz, first name Mike, assistant coordinator of CSM Toronto, and later Amy, who would host our group as we worked in Toronto – one of the world's most ethnically diverse and safest cities with only 47 murders last year – a good day down in NYC.

Proz spelled out a goal statement for our group and one of the other two groups that would be here that week. He told us that we would be Learners, Servers, and lastly Storytellers. He explained that we would learn what life as a homeless person was truly like; how we could serve these people as Jesus did; and what we should tell people after we returned to Rochester. His goal was dead accurate and as you will see, with the Storyteller phase being revealed right in front of you.

After dinner, we began the Prayer Tour, where we would silently drive around the city to pray for areas of conflict, poverty, corruption, and struggle. We passed through one of the five Chinatowns of Toronto, hearing about the 350,000 Chinese that inhabit the region.

Our first shock was that right across the street from Riverside Church, a rock-throwing distance of about 100 yards, was a bridge. This bridge, we learned, was called the Low-Track – an area for low-grade prostitution. Every morning, as we left, we could see a few women waiting there to be picked up. This was, however, one of the least of the shocks that we would receive this week.

Next we drove through Rosedale, one of the most upscale, richest neighborhoods in all of Toronto. It was probably only about a mile away from the previous area. If you ever want to talk of stark contrast and juxtaposition, here it is. These homes are all appraised

from \$1 to \$5 million. This is quite a lot of money, albeit Canadian. At the current exchange rate, these houses would be from \$675,000 to \$3.3 million U.S. Every household has a beamer or an SUV.

Later we passed St. Jamestown, the second largest Project in Toronto, next to Regent Park. These two projects both have about 20,000-30,000 residents, even though their capacity is classified at about 10,000-15,000. People here are so poor, that they live with up to three other families in single room apartments, and many of the families speak different languages, including Chinese.

Another thing dawned on me: what is our view, our perception of what truly Jesus is to us? Is He a friend? A companion? A comforter and confidant? Or is He our Savior - the Almighty God incarnate who gave us an opportunity to leave this world of corruption and sin? I found myself complacent with this world and thinking Jesus as the former. I realized that these poor and homeless people on the other hand saw Jesus as a true Savior, one who would eventually take them up out of this hell. I also realized that we, both the poor and the well-to-do, live in the same world and in the same position. This was quite a humbling experience.

Monday: Our first morning devotion – on having no fear. Hebrews 13:1-6. Jack gave a very powerful little anecdote to go along with it. There was an urban missionary who once would go into the toughest, most dangerous parts of the city to evangelize. When asked how he could go with no protection day in and day out, he replied, “As long as I am in accordance with God’s will, I am immortal.” Jack explained that if God didn’t want him to die, he would in no way be harmed. This supreme level of faith was also shown in our first real service activity.

The Scott Mission, the largest Mission in Toronto, feeds hundreds daily and provide food for many more. Their logo is the depiction of the story of the Good Samaritan who helped those that others ignored – the beaten, the poor. There, we met Trevor, one of the most joyous blue-eyed brown-haired Canadians I’ve ever seen. Perhaps the most joyous I’ve ever met period. He runs the Scott Mission for the summer season. Never disheartened, he gave us a little “inspirational speech” before we got our tasks. He said that we’d got to see God Jesus in all the things we do, as the bible says: “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” Matthew 25:40.

Now, the struggles and hardships of volunteer work for only a

limited period of time pales in comparison. He encouraged us to focus “beyond the ‘hurt’ of discipline, and enjoy the benefits of God’s discipline, which we can learn from.” Then he went on, “Here at the Scott Mission, I don’t pass a day when I don’t see a miracle.” I was intrigued. He elaborated, “There are some people who don’t believe in miracles, or stuff like demon possession. And they will never see it. But if you believe in these, you will see them... It will only happen if you believe it will happen.” He explained that if you believe and even expect it will happen, God will make it happen. This extreme level of faith was truly awe inspiring, as Trevor was so strong in faith that he would expect God to do things. Of course not in the wrong way, like “I want a new car”, but perhaps in a way like “I will see a miracle today”. And he does. Miracles that perhaps even other Christians cannot see. Jack later attributed this to Trevor’s spiritual gift of Faith. I’m just glad that I was able to meet such a man, and that it is a fact that Faith is contagious.

After lunch we headed over to Daily Bread Food Bank – Canada’s largest food distributor. There we met up with the British Columbia group to do some Food Reclamation. Food Reclamation is basically sorting cans and boxes and determining which ones are acceptable for actual use. We developed a big assembly line of people to sort the items.

After that we went to a nearby youth mission, where we would start the highly acclaimed Street Walk. We were split into three groups, led by Proz, JT and Amy. Jack, David and I were with Proz. We headed out with five questions in mind: What would we eat? Where would we sleep? How would we find toiletries? How could we pass time? How could we earn money? This was the eye-opening experience into the world of being a 14 year old homeless runaway.

We walked the city streets, seeing massive buildings. Buildings so high that if you stood at the base and looked up, the building would curve over you. Quite an experience if you’ve never seen it. While we walked among these buildings, we found numerous places that a homeless person or a pseudo-homeless person like ourselves could sleep. Proz prodded us with questions and potential scenarios that we might face while on the streets.

As I sat in the common area that night, a thought crossed my mind: Does the thought ever cross your mind when you do activities such as volunteering, ‘Oh lucky this is only temporary, only x more hours.’ This thought crossed mine. But then I thought of those that worked at these places everyday full-time, doing the same

seemingly menial jobs day in and day out. I found a true appreciation for such grunt work. But I also thought of a somewhat mentally undeveloped man at the Scott Mission. He worked there in the corner all day, without talking, without breaks. All he did was putting hangers onto the sorted clothes.

I realized that being well-to-do and all affords me the ability to take on a temp job without any qualms or fears. But for many poor and lower class people, getting one job is a feat in and of itself. They perhaps might find honest work in what we find as tedious, and stability in what we see as ennui.

That is why we should humble ourselves into a similar situation, with everything being an uncertainty. We should look upon Christ as the Rock of our Salvation (Psalm 95:1), a cornerstone that never waivers or gives in, and on which we can stand firm.

On Wednesday, we did the Sandwich Run. The Sandwich Run program is run by Ecclesia. Based in the Toronto city area, this group ventures various ministries to the poor and homeless. The “trademark” program is the Sandwich Run. This group is run by Joe and his wife Patricia. That night we also had Bill, who was a former homeless person helped by Ecclesia. Joe gave us a small introductory sermon, which was very powerful and compelling. The sandwich run program started on a Saturday morning in 1991 with only 15 sandwiches. But it grew, and eventually it averages 100 sandwiches a night. He also noted various other ministries he has started.

I was particularly intrigued by his ministry strategy: Convince a local church to “give him their keys”, in effect allowing him to use their property for his ministry. Next, work at that ministry for about two years until the church congregation compels itself to take over Joe’s job. He has done this to about four other churches, starting programs and then leaving them in the hands of the congregation. Sometimes it starts out as a “you can use our basement, but don’t involve us in any of it” and blossoms into, “Joe I think its time for you to leave and for us to take over.” This truly is a prime example of how the faith of one infects others. It’s simply amazing.

Joe went on with his personal beliefs. “At first, you think feeding the homeless and giving them blankets is something that you should do: a socially righteous thing to do. It is a good thing to feed these people and keep them alive. But then it eventually

changes to: I am serving God as I feed these people. This is my spiritual act of worship. This is how I give praise and glory to God. I worship Him everyday like this. Everyday.” He then referred to Matthew 25:40 - “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” Funny how things keep popping up again and again, isn’t it?

Thursday, we set out to Dover Court, to make up for our past idleness. Dover Court is a church run by the Salvation Army. This might seem a little strange to some of you. Here in Canada, the Salvation Army is not a social institution that is devoid of God, but a religious institution with side programs aimed at helping the poor. Really different from the American version eh?

When we arrived, we began working almost immediately. Everyone was sent to clean-up duty in preparation for the on-coming people for meals. However, me and Brian were saved from this labor in order that we can don our Salvation Army costumes and greet people walking by.

Next stop: Fudger House, home for the elderly. This nursing home is a quaint institution where many old people live. The facilities are top-notch, so are the care these people receive. The only problem is that many of the patients lack interaction all day. Many of them have been forgotten and ignored by the people that put them there, which is a very sad thing. So our job was to simply interact with these people, talk with them, laugh at their jokes, and listen to their stories. We were scheduled to work at their ice cream social, where many of the patients would sit outside to enjoy the sun and some ice cream.

On Friday, we headed to Regent Park, the city’s largest housing project, for an hour of garbage clean-up. This is similar to Washington, DC, except it’s in the middle of the day and lots of people are out and about. We were given pikes, garbage bags, gloves, and set out to clean up a small portion of the grounds. We worked for the full hour, meeting some Chinese and black children. We also came upon a big arguing match between what seemed like gang members. Their shouts rang through the whole park. It was pretty scary.

The last morning, we all set out to clean up the church in Toronto, which we did in about an hour. We arrived back at the RCCC at about 4:00 on Saturday, August 25th. Back from a trip that surely affected our perception of the world around us, as well as

brought us closer together as a single unit under God.



Retreat 2002

Boaz Tang

The Retreat is awesome and yes it rocks,
I could feel myself dancing in my socks,

We would play “Bop It” jam, jam, jam
And the kids would build a big huge dam

Hawaii was very very far away,
But I was dancing happily all that day,

The story of “The Three Trees” was our skit
I personally think it was a big hit

All the kids love getting dirty
Especially Stayin’ up until Ten Thirty

We felt so bad having to leave
But knowing there’s something we’ve achieved

We learned Satan will put you to the test
But look to God who’ll do the rest!