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Partnership In The Gospel

Pastor Herman Tang

“In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 1:4-6, NIV)

A Simple Chorus

*Lord, lay some soul upon my heart,
And love that soul through me.
And may I bravely do my part,
To win that soul for Thee,
To win that soul for Thee.*

This chorus can be sung with the tune of hymns #58 or #60 in the Hymns of Life. You probably cannot find this chorus in your hymnbook. It was supposedly written by B. B. McKinney a long time ago, then rearranged by Ira Sankey, an associate of evangelist D. L. Moody. It is seldom sung in churches today. At least I have never heard of it being sung in any church meetings for the last thirty-four years. That’s how long I have been a Christian. A deacon, Fook Kong Li taught me this chorus when I first started in the pastoral ministry in the church in Los Angeles. Fook Kong also told me how he used a simple method to win souls. He would ask God to help him think of a non-Christian friend whom he knew. Then he would write down the name on a piece of paper and pray regularly for the salvation of this person. Then he would find an opportunity to do something with love to reach out to this person.

Deacon Fook Kong was a successful businessman. He gave his money generously to support various ministries of the Lord. But the legacy he left behind for people to remember is his love for people and his deep desire to win souls for the Lord. To him, sharing Christ with people and helping them to know Christ was the most important business in the world. Fook Kong died suddenly in 1985. During his memorial service, for several hours people lined up to give testimonies in remembrance of him. Many of them said

that they came to know Christ through Fook Kong's efforts. Personally I remember Fook Kong as a great soul winner and I want to be like him.

Jesus' Compassion For People

Winning souls ought to be an important priority for every Christian. Let us look at our Lord's example:

"Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Matthew 9:35-38)

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." (Luke 19:10)

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45)

"But he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent." (Luke 4:43)

"Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work."" (John 4:33-34)

The work Jesus always wants to do is evangelism. Jesus wants to help people to know God. People matter to Him. He shows compassion to people. The most important thing he wants people to have is God's salvation.

Paul - A Role Model As A Soul Winner

"I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.....Therefore, I declare to you today

that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.....Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.....So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.“ (Acts 20:19-31)

We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me. (Colossians 1:28-29)

“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.” (1 Corinthians 9:19-23)

Paul imitates his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Paul, the most important task is to proclaim Christ. He will do everything he can so that people can hear the gospel and be saved.

Why We Do The Work Of Evangelism

Evangelism is the work of the Lord. Jesus commands us to preach the gospel. The church without the work of evangelism is not a true church according to the Bible. A New Testament church is made up of people who carry out the Great Commission: “Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

The year 2002 will soon be over. Let us carry out what our church theme says: “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” (2 Timothy 2:2) Evangelism is the natural outcome of discipleship. Without evangelism, there will be no

disciples and without disciples, there will be no evangelism.

Looking Toward Year 2003

RCCC will focus on our fourth SHIP--PartnerSHIP in 2003. Our theme is taken from Philippians 1:4-6, "In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Basically the ministry of "Partnership" represents the work of evangelism and missions. I am very excited about what the Lord can do through RCCC, which means you and me. I do believe that the Lord can use us to share the gospel **so that every Chinese person in Rochester will have an opportunity to hear the gospel**. Will you join our partnership?

Will You Do Your Part To Support Missions?

1. Pray for God's guidance
2. Set aside a period of time
3. Look for short-term mission opportunity
4. Join a team to go for a short-term mission trip

Will You Do Your Part To Share Christ With People?

1. Ask the Lord to lay some soul upon your heart
2. Pray for the person's salvation earnestly
3. Do whatever you can to care for that person
4. Find an opportunity to share the gospel with the person

*Lord, lay some soul upon my heart,
And love that soul through me.
And may I bravely do my part,
To win that soul for Thee,
To win that soul for Thee.*



My First Short-Term Mission Trip

Keat Kuan

I was on an airplane heading to Amsterdam. The team would arrive in another hour or so. A group of six people including my wife and I were on our way for a short-term mission trip organized by Queens Herald Church in New York City. We were going to spend the first week in Amsterdam, Holland and the second week in Madrid, Spain.

I was supposed to sleep in the plane but I could not fall asleep. I kept thinking about what was going to happen during the short two weeks of time. My wife, Soon and I had little to no idea on what to expect in the coming two weeks. We were told very little on what we were going to do. We knew that our mission was to reach out to Chinese people in Europe, and I was convinced that the team did not have a detail plan at all.

Sister Ada Chow gave me an article from Focus on the Family a few days before our departure. It was an article about the moral standard in Amsterdam titled "The Low Country Sinks Lower". According to the article, full nudity is common on Dutch television after 9 p.m., and one can find pornographic movies on television during weekends. Also, hard drugs are consumed openly in so-called "coffee houses." The article went on to say that even the Christian church in Holland is not immune from the evidence of moral decay, with professing Christians engaging in immoral activities in almost the same percentages as the surrounding culture. For example, divorce is accepted as normal by 60 percent of the Dutch, and that percentage is the same within Christian homes, says Rob Hondsmark, director of Focus on the Family Netherlands. One thing that I find most shocking of all is the incidence of incest in Dutch culture, even within Christian homes. In 1989 a national survey found that 1 in 7 girls and 1 in 20 boys were victims of incest. In 1999, a repeat survey found those figures to be 1 in 5 and 1 in 10 respectively. (For reference, visit <http://www.family.org/fofmag/pp/a0016298.html>). As I sat in the plane, my mind was consumed by these statistics that I learned from the article. We are going to a place where people have little regard for God and do not mind living under the consequences. I felt helpless at that moment, and I just had to commit the rest of the time to God. I thought, maybe I should have more faith in God, asking Him to lead the way, and indeed, He did.

Before the trip, I did not want to go because of many reasons. I thought I was not ready. Also, I considered my life very comfortable. Most importantly, I am shy by nature and I do not talk much.

The trip did not begin well for me. I felt depressed and inadequate shortly after we arrived. It was becoming clear that my quiet and reserved personality was hindering me from being forward and direct in sharing the gospel. However, God knew my struggles and shortcomings. He then helped me to overcome them using the scriptures. He first convicted me using 2 Timothy 1:7 which says "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."

Secondly, God used Luke 15:4-6 to let me know that I cannot let a lost sheep walk past me without being evangelized to. Luke 15:4-6 say " ⁴ Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'"

Thirdly, God used 1 Peter 3:15 to let me know that I have to be ever ready to give good reasons for my faith. 1 Peter 3:15 says "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." Armed with the scriptures that God gave me, I was then able to go out to the streets with my teammates to find Chinese people to share the gospel with them. I grabbed every opportunity that God gave me to evangelize to every Chinese that I met on the streets.

There was another problem that I encountered. Although I can speak Chinese, I soon found out that there were lots of specific terminologies that I was not well versed in Chinese. But once again, God knew exactly what I was dealing with. Soon and I stayed up late one night to talk and pray about the problem. The next day, a young man from Wen Zhou accepted Christ after hearing me and two other teammates' personal testimonies. Before the young man accepted Christ, I was struggling to read the four spiritual laws in Chinese to him. I could see the smile on his face when he saw me struggling with the Chinese words. He then told me that he had read ahead of me and he understood what it said. I could tell that he realized how hard I was trying, and he recognized my effort and

sincerity. To me, this was truly an encouragement from God.

As I look back, I am very glad that I did decide to go on this mission trip. I have experienced God's presence in an intimate way. As a result, I have learned to put God's work in the first priority. Also, I know that the trip has helped increase my spiritual maturity. Praise and glory be unto God!



The Widow's Oil

Aileen Chow

I'm writing to you another message from our pastor of City Church. I hope this story will inspire you to give to the Lord.

Read 2 Kings 4:1-7 (The New Living Translation)

One day the widow who was a friend of Elisha's fellow prophets came to Elisha and cried to him, "My husband who served you is dead, and you know how he feared the Lord. But now a creditor has come, threatening to take my two sons as slaves."

"What can I do to help you?" Elisha asked. "Tell me, what do you have in the house?"

"Nothing at all, except a flask of olive oil," she replied.

And Elisha said, "Borrow as many empty jars as you can from your friends and neighbors. Then go into your house with your sons and shut the door behind you. Pour olive oil from your flask into the jars, setting the jars aside as they are filled."

So she did as she was told. Her sons brought many jars to her, and she filled one after another. Soon every container was full to the brim!

"Bring me another jar," she said to one of her sons.

"There aren't any more!" he told her. And then the olive oil stopped flowing.

When she told the man of God what had happened, he said to her "Now sell the olive oil and pay your debts, and there will be enough money left over to support you and your sons."

Here is a widow who is greatly distressed about what has

happened in her household. Her husband has recently died, and now she is about to lose her sons to slavery. She went to Elisha, hoping that he could help her out of this situation. Elisha asked, "What can I do to help you?" But he doesn't stop there. He then asked, "Tell me, what do you have in the house. The widow, at first says she has nothing, but then says she has a flask of oil; the only precious thing she has. Did she have the heart to give it away? At that moment, she was desperate to do just about anything to keep her sons. Elisha told her what she should do with the oil, and she did what she was told. She borrowed empty jars from people and poured her own flask of oil in them. When she ran out of jars to fill, she was then told to sell the jars to the people, so she could make a profit. This amazing miracle solved all of her troubles.

This is a simple story about giving to the Lord - that when we need God's help we have to be responsible by bringing to Him what we have. We have to do our part in order to receive God's blessings. The widow could be anyone like us, but it was her humbleness, honesty and faithfulness that made her experience the miracle of God. She was not selfish. She could easily have said that she had nothing but she did not because of the situation. She sacrificed her only precious commodity, and that was the oil she needed to survive. She gave to the Lord what she had. God in return blessed it and made it abundantly more. Just "a little oil" filled up many empty jars. What do you have to give?

Elisha told her not to get a few jars but to gather jars everywhere. When all the jars were filled the widow did not keep the jars of oil she produced. She sold all the oil. She had seen what God did to her life. If she had a hundred more jars to fill, she could fill them all. The only reason the oil stopped flowing was because she had no more jars. God gave her the unlimited resource to give as much as she can.

Each empty jar she filled up is like a person or family she wants to help out with. She knows that they have no oil in their homes, so she filled each jar if she was reaching out to them. Do you know of anyone who is like an empty vessel? Reach out to them and fulfill their needs by giving and helping them out.

This is a story in the Old Testament. It is a story that inspired my husband and I to have faith and to trust in God. And when we give to the Lord in faith we will receive immeasurably.

Blessings From Above

Michelle Sharman

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am glad to have this opportunity to share what God has done so far in James' and my life. Looking back over the year, many amazing things have happened that we are very thankful for. We would like to give glory to our Father for all these things and for His kindness.

Over the summer, I was able to go to Philadelphia with the Youth Mission team. I knew that it would be a great experience. And it was! Enough to make me seriously think about full-time ministry with children. Plus, as with any mission, God did countless amazing things. Many of these things we have shared in service. When I came back, I was renewed in Jesus, in His love for people and in His power.

But I have to say that as amazing and life-affecting that trip was, God taught me even more in the months to come.

In early September, around "Labor" Day, James and I found out we were expecting in May! Some know that we had been hoping for a child for a while...about a year. We felt many frustrations and asked many questions about "why?" as others were having children and we weren't. We did learn to have peace about God's timing after a while. Still, we were overjoyed when we found out I was pregnant.

September was going great until about halfway through when I began to get sick. By October, I was home from work and going through what seemed to be endless "morning sickness" that lasted all day. For a month, I would sleep, wake up every 2 hours to eat some saltines and drink some bland soda, and stare into space. I heard many stories of other friends' pregnancies and how they were sick. And I just began to pray that it wouldn't last throughout the 9 months, or if it did, that I would have the strength to endure it.

Another difficulty was that we were trying not to tell people that we were expecting until after our first trimester so the baby was safe from being miscarried. It was difficult to not have the prayers of the fellowship to support us. Our family knew but for everyone else, we just asked them to pray for me because I was "sick". Though I

didn't have a choice, it was hard to be apart from all the things I was used to being free to do. I was homebound and didn't know when it was going to end.

Through prayer and time, I started to get better. I was able to return to work in November and to begin to enter back into my life.

This experience humbled me first physically as I was losing weight and staying at home concentrating on eating crackers. I became extremely thankful for everything I took for granted from day-to-day...eating, getting out of the house, going to work, going to fellowship. I was thankful for James, my family and my friends who did know for their bottomless supply of care.

And, even more than the mission trip, this experience taught me how good God is. We wanted a child, and he gave one when He knew it would be right. He sustained my life and provided support. Though things were discouraging sometimes, putting hope in God never disappoints.

Lastly, I want to thank everyone who prayed and who involved themselves in our trial. It's wonderful to know that as one part of the body suffers, the whole suffers. That love is overwhelming and "thank you" doesn't seem to cover how grateful we are. Lord willing, we will be welcoming a healthy baby into the world in May who can learn to love God and His ways. Thank you, brothers and sisters.



My Savior Came to Me

Ron Auty

Trapped in the mire, the murky deep,
My sin-sick soul there lay asleep.
In Hell's iron grasp, in Satan's keep
My Saviour came to me.

I spied Him coming from afar,
His raiment gleaming as a star.
His hands, His feet, His side: the scars
Received upon the Tree.

I hung my head, cast down, ashamed
Of countless sins, and more unnamed.
Tho 'twas His right, He never blamed,
But came to set me free.

His face, which shone with endless light,
Rebuked the darkness, slew the night.
"I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,"
My heart was finally free!

O joy! Then heaven's bells did ring
In homage, paid unto the King;
And cherubim began to sing
Salvation's sweet reprise.

My life I pledge unto the One
Whose dying breath spoke, "It is done."
Henceforth to death, I'll overcome,
That others' eyes may see

The tender mercy of His love,
Which bade Him leave His throne above
To spare this dying world of
Sin's awful penalty.

Trapped in the mire, the murky deep,
My sin-sick soul there lay asleep.
In Hell's iron grasp, in Satan's keep
My Saviour came to me.



That Night When The Tornado Touched Down

Larry Chen

In April of 1996, a tornado touched down in southeast Urbana, Illinois and destroyed our house. It's been several years now, and we've since sold the house that was rebuilt after the storm. However, the lessons I learned are unforgettable.

That night when the storm struck, I had gone to the fellowship meeting at church. Earlier in the afternoon we worked in the yard, placing pine nuggets around the bases of trees around our house. It was unusually windy, and storms were in the forecast as was typical for early spring in central Illinois. Halfway through the worship time, the tornado siren went off, and we all went to the basement of the church. Shortly after, the power went out. Nobody knew what was happening outside; we simply gathered in the central room and prayed. Some people went near the windows to look at the evening sky, quite the opposite of what one should do under a tornado warning.

Sometime later the warning was lifted, so I went to my car to listen to the radio. The news report said a tornado had touched down in southeast Urbana, leaving many houses without roofs. "Southeast Urbana, that's where I live!" I had to go home. As I drove near our house, the power was still out in the area. I saw uprooted trees and branches scattered about. A block from the house, the road was closed due to a downed power line. I could see flashing lights from fire trucks and ambulances; it looked like a war zone. From a distance I saw the front of the house still standing, and I had hoped that our house was spared.

As I got closer, a fireman had just finished painting a fluorescent orange "X" by the front door, indicating that the house was unsafe to be occupied. The middle of the roof of our ranch-style house was missing, and all the windows were broken, as if a bomb had exploded inside. "Sir, you can't go in," the fireman told me. "But my cat might be in there still," I said. He agreed to accompany me in for a quick look before I had to leave. It was dark inside the house. I called out the name of our cat, but no sign of the furry four-legged friend. The only light I had was the fireman's flashlight. The wall in my room had collapsed, and other interior doors split down the middle. The carpet was soaking wet, and mud and pink insulation material everywhere. Besides the cat, I only thought of my violin. Underneath the collapsed wall, I saw the case

still intact, but the fireman would not let me near it. Nothing else seemed important, not the furniture, not the TV or stereo equipment. The cat and the violin were the only things that came to mind. My two brothers who were living with me at the time were not home; what a relief!

In the afternoon on the next day we were allowed to go back to survey the damage. It was devastating. There were mud, broken glass and other debris everywhere. One of our pillows was found in the shrub near the opposite end of the house. Almost all the furniture were broken or damaged by water. The house was destroyed beyond repair, and we had but a few days to salvage personal belongings before the house was to be demolished. Fortunately we found the cat, frightened but unharmed. (She's been afraid of thunderstorms ever since.) We were also able to salvage most of our personal things. Eventually the insurance paid for the replacement of the house and personal properties, but not without some fights with the insurance company. Some eight stressful months later we moved in to a brand new house built at the same location.

When disaster strikes, one realizes what's most important. God owns everything, even our lives. He's at liberty to take anything away at any time. I was beginning to understand when Job said, "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, may the name of the Lord be praised." Further, Jesus is our insurance policy. One day after our earthly bodies are destroyed, He will replace them with new and everlasting ones. Lastly, we need to take God's warnings seriously. Too often we do the opposite of the warnings, like those who go near the windows to look outside instead of staying away from them. Tornadoes are rare in this area, but images of devastation are seen each year in the news. From time to time I look at the pictures we took after the storm, and thank God that nobody was hurt, including our little cow cat Ushi.



My Way Or Yahweh?

Sam Ng

Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live safely in the land. Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live there in safety. You may ask, “What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?” I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in.

Leviticus 25: 18-22

Nine months ago Wendy and I made a very important decision. In the eyes of the world, it was probably a decision that was confounding to the “common sense”. But once we realized that as Christians our “common sense” should always lie within the domain of what is pleasing to God, the decision was in fact a no-brainer: it was an unequivocal choice if we carefully considered the question popularized as the acronym WWJD (What would Jesus do?).

One direct consequence of our decision was that our already scanty income sources were trimmed down even further. After going through a period of struggle and prayer, we finally had the courage to accept the consequence because we firmly believed that our decision was what God desired us to do. The situation, hard to explain in detail here, basically had to do with a man-made rule that most of my friends, even Christian ones, regarded as simply so ridiculous and nonsensical that we can “justly” ignore it. Flowing with the current, that’s also what I had believed all along.

Nevertheless, the question is this: do I really have to authority from God to judge whether the rule is just or unjust? If the Bible has not made any explicit judgment about the rule, who am I to say “This rule makes sense, so I’ll abide by it” and “That rule doesn’t make sense to me, so I’ll ignore it”? Doesn’t the Bible say in 1 Peter, 2:19, “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right”?

As I pointed out in my ECHO article last year¹, a marriage is often a balancing act between two people that God binds together as one. My blindness in justifying my contempt for the rule was held in check by Wendy's sensitivity to the issue at hand and her willingness to sacrifice superficial advantages for the sake of walking in the righteous path in God's eyes. It was her insistent confrontation that not only urged me to seriously reflect upon the issue, but also encouraged me to give up my own way and submit to God's.

So indeed, our financial stability was threatened because we made that decision, and we could only trust in the Lord our God to continue to supply all our needs. Has God then really provided our needs? "Yes," you're probably thinking, "God of course has provided your needs, Sam, or else why would you be writing this article?" The catchphrase "God will provide" often seems to be such a truism in the Christian jargon; and yet, brothers and sisters, don't ever underestimate these three powerful words. It has been about nine months since Wendy and I made that very difficult decision, and yet it has also been about nine months since God started to provide us with all our needs in the most miraculous ways that we would have never conceived of with our limited human minds. Those of us who remember and have experienced what the Lord has promised in Leviticus 25:18-22 understand why the decision would turn out to be the most blessed one. Episodes from the past three months will elucidate what I mean.

Grocery shopping can be a chore when you constantly have to flip from cover to cover those shopping guides at the entrance of supermarkets to familiarize yourself with the discounted items. The disappointment can be quite overwhelming when you realize that the items you need are not on sale this week, and that it will be another week, or two, or three, or even more, before you get your hands on them. Of course, Wendy and I have never aspired to any kind of luxurious lifestyle; we never use any of those expensive and fancy brands, and usually think more than twice or thrice before we decide to make a major purchase. Yet, with both of us enjoying an occasional indulging of our taste buds, we used to buy food we liked from time to time even when it was not on sale. Not any more after we made that decision! One week we walked into the supermarket, we saw asparagus – one of my favorite vegetables – at the entrance. On sale, in fact it was, but still priced on the expensive side. Well, man does not live on asparagus alone, and so peacefully we bid

¹ See Sam Ng, "Balancing Act", ECHO – 2001 Vol. 19 – No. 2

farewell to this not really indispensable item. On another shopping trip we saw that frozen shrimp was on sale, and we remembered that our big pack of shrimp in our freezer had just been completely consumed. Shrimp-fanatics though we were, we decided from that day on to say adieu to our little marine friends, as we didn't really need them to maintain our lives. Last but not least, another day in the same week we also had to part with our favorite fruit in the world – mangoes – for they were just consistently costing too much for us to bring them home.

One morning in the next week, one of my theory students, who was also a close friend, came to me after class and asked me to go with him to his apartment. I had no idea what he was up to, but went with him anyway. He opened the fridge, gave me a huge bag of shrimps, which he received from a friend of his who worked in the downtown public market. I thanked him, of course. And as I was about to leave, out of nowhere he handed me a bag of asparagus that he bought the weekend before. He said he bought a lot because it was very cheap. I am usually tired after teaching, so I was not in a particularly joyful mood on my way home even with both hands full of edible gifts. But wait. Shrimp and asparagus? These certainly sounded familiar. I suddenly realized the eerie connection.

Four days later, Wendy said that we had to drive to a church sister's home to pick up something. Somehow I wasn't too interested in what it was, and I didn't even ask. We arrived, Wendy went in while I was waiting in the car, and she came out with a bag of mangoes in her hand. The sister received them from a friend who visited from Maryland. Typically slow in connecting the dots, I didn't realize the eerie connection until almost a week later.²

And now these three have been given to us: shrimp, asparagus, and mango. But the most interesting of these is shrimp – for since then we have already received three more bags of shrimps from three different sisters, none of them knowing anything about our fascinating story.

Coincidence? I think not. (The math whizzes out there might want to calculate the probability of the occurrence of the events described in the preceding paragraphs.) The message? I don't

² *It took me another eight months to realize that shrimp, asparagus, and mango form an eerie acronym: SAM. No, I don't think there's any meaningful implication here.*

believe it's this: Wish for anything you want and everything will be granted. But I believe it's this: God encourages those who choose to walk in His path by showing them how He can bless them in ways they can never imagine.

Since August our financial problem has been compounded by Wendy's immigration status. She finished her one year of student practical training, during which she was allowed to work for money under the U.S. law. From September on, because the practical training period had expired, she must then obtain an H-1 work permit to continue to work and get paid. As of today, after a lapse of almost five months since Wendy mailed in the application, the permit has still not come through. Meanwhile, she has been working in the same position, but only as a volunteer because getting paid in this period will be unlawful. We have prayed and prayed for the permit to come through, but the process just keeps bumping into roadblocks. In this spiritual battle, we constantly feel the attack of Satan, who tries so hard to crush our faith in God and stifle our patience in waiting for His time.

Praise and thank the Lord that His blessings and provisions continue to be beyond our imagination, and Satan's work is of no avail. While Wendy and I keep praying and waiting patiently upon God's timing, brothers and sisters have not only continued to pray for us, but they also generously and lovingly share with us various supplies – from tissue paper to farm produce. Though some past sources of "income" have been shut down, other sources have been opened. Since September the Lord has granted me a teaching position in the Community Education Division of the Eastman School of Music, which is of some help during these difficult times. Also, three weeks ago, out of some modifications in the sources of my teaching assistant award at Eastman (for really obscure reasons), I was suddenly granted an increase in my scholarship totally out of the blue! Joyful and astounded as I was when I took that refund check to the bank to be deposited, I even stood in awe in front of the ATM machine when I realized that we wouldn't have enough money to pay the rent next month if we hadn't had that check on that day. This whole thing is only explicable when we believe it is indeed a miraculous intervention from God. His timing is so precise, so accurate, and so beyond our imagination and comprehension that we can't help but recognize how limited and myopic we really are.

I realize that so often we miss God's blessings because we've opted to live our own ways. We disregard his decrees and foolishly

believe that our own methods will bring us more blessings than what God will give. Big and small things we do to get advantages from people; the saddest part of it all is that we always have ways to justify ourselves. We are always so “clever” as it comes to working around the rules to achieve what we want, but not what God desires. Brothers and sisters, let us encourage one another to do what is righteous in God’s eyes. God has taught me, in the past nine months, that when we live according to our own decrees in the belief that it will do us any good, the only victim is going to be ourselves. A victim indeed – because we have tragically missed the most abundant blessings that God has already prepared for us.



“Sundae” School

Cathy Yu

One day, Justin (2 ½ years old), Charissa (6 months old), and I were shopping at Eastview Mall. It was close to lunchtime and we did not have anything to eat at home so we stopped by Friendly’s Restaurant. There was a special price of 99 cents for a kids’ meal.

The kids’ meal comes with a drink, main meal, and ice cream sundae. Justin is a picky eater, but he typically likes hamburgers, so I ordered a hamburger with fries for him. I looked forward to seeing his eyes light up after finishing his main meal because he had never eaten a sundae before. He loves ice cream and I knew he would get excited over the M&M topping and whipped cream. However, Justin did not eat much. He ate most of his fries, but left his hamburger untouched. I tried to convince him that the hamburger was good. I tried feeding him. I made the hamburger dance on his plate so it would be more appealing. I decorated it with ketchup. I repeatedly told him that he would get blessings from

me if he was obedient, but he refused to eat any of the hamburger. I was frustrated because I knew he understood what I was saying, he just didn't see any tangible benefit in being obedient to me.

My meal also came with a sundae so I asked the waitress to bring me my sundae. When she set it on the table in front of me, Justin's eyes got wide and he stared at the sundae without a word. I immediately began to put spoonfuls of ice cream into my mouth and said "mmm" after each bite. After watching me eat a few bites, he looked around for the waitress to see if she was going to bring him a sundae. He didn't see her so he looked back at me and my sundae and said, "I want some." I told him, "you have to eat your hamburger and then you can get a sundae too." A few moments later, he eagerly started to eat his hamburger in anticipation of an ice cream treat. It was amazing to see how quickly he could eat the hamburger when he knew how I would bless him when he finished his meal.

Aren't we a little bit like Justin? God taught me a lesson through Justin that day. Just as parents long to see the delight on their child's face from a given blessing, the Lord longs to give us His blessings when we are obedient to Him. Justin never knows what he may be missing -- yogurt covered raisins, a trip to the store to play with trains, or a blanket ride -- when he doesn't do what I ask. I am ready and willing to fill his day with all kinds of blessings if he listens and obeys! Likewise, we do not know what blessings we are missing from God when we are not obedient to Him.

From now on, I pray that I am not so fixed on doing what is easy or gaining pleasure out of my current circumstances that I do not realize that I am making the wrong choices. I don't want to miss out on the many blessings God has promised to those who live in obedience to His will! We may not see the immediate benefit of obedience to God, but we can be confident that God desires good for His children.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future..." - Jeremiah 29:11

The Tree

Simien Lin

“A tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season (Ps. 1:4).” The birds of the air find rest on its sturdy branches and the beasts of the wilderness find shade under its ample leaves on hot sunny days. The tree stands in the mist of its companions with pride, stretching forth its limbs to the heavens, providing rest and comfort to those who are seeking.

In time, the sun no longer brings heat to the earth. The air changes to a cold dry breeze. The beasts no longer need its shade and the birds have flown away to find a warmer place. The leaves start to change colors and soon enough, one by one, they fall to the ground. “No, no. Please stay on me,” it pleads earnestly, clinging on tightly to the last of its adornments. Just then a gust of cold wind blows, sending a shiver through the tree. At last, all the leaves are gone. What is left is just a stark, naked, tree! The season of winter has come!

In my four years of college here in Rochester, I have encountered this change of season every year. Not only just in the environmental sense, but also in my spiritual life. Each year of college, God has taught me valuable lessons on top of the daily grind RIT puts me through. These lessons were the cause of the winter seasons in my spiritual life.

During these winter seasons, God seemed so far away. All hope is lost, all his blessings seem to have been stripped away, fallen away from me like the leaves. Many times, at my weakest hours, it seemed like there were no birds to keep me company and no beasts to comfort me. I felt so alone.

Something was going on though; something must have been happening. God doesn't just stop working. Indeed, He was molding me inwardly, changing me, chipping away and smoothing out the rough edges, teaching me to depend on Him even if I couldn't feel His presence.

If you were to see me as the tree, you'd see this pathetic, dry, cold, and dying tree, buried under the burdens of this world. Don't look away just yet! Look deeper, look towards the inside. Underneath the frost and the tree barks, much reviving was going on. My insides were working to sustain my hope, to get me through

this season. By the grace of God, there was so much life going on inside contrary to what the outside looked like. Outwardly, I felt what the tree looked like, but inwardly, I was being made anew.

In the midst of the cold, God hammers down on the chisel. The pain, the suffering, is not surreal. As He sands away the rough edges, discomfort is noticeable. But the end result will make it worthwhile. The renewed man is so much of greater value than what I once was. Praise be to God for there comes spring time after winter. How much more will I be able to give Him praise in spring after going through the bitter torment of winter.

“Consider it pure joy my brothers (and sisters), whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

~ James 1:2-4 ~

