

Rochester Chinese Christian Church

# ECHO

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## “LORD, MAKE US A COMMUNITY-FRIENDLY CHURCH!”

Pastor Herman Tang

In his best-selling book “How to Win Friends and Influence People”, Dale Carnegie said, “You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.” And I agree with him.

If our church wants to reach out to people effectively, we must become interested in people outside of our church circle. I pray that God will give us the heart to become more Community-friendly.

On May 1 this year, our Church Board had a retreat at Salmon Creek. We have sensed the presence, guidance and goodness of the Lord with us. During the discussion time, one of the important issue raised was our desire to have our church be more community-friendly as part of our church outreach effort. I am excited to see the harmony among our Board members.

After ministering to people for thirty years, I have learnt this one thing. If I want people to like me, I have to like them.

I believe that if we want people to come to our church, our church must ask God to give us the sensitivity and love toward our seeker friends. We want our church to be a place like a family that promotes friendship, understanding, acceptance and mutual support. Other than doing the traditional things we always do and will continue to do (like worship, Sunday School or prayer meeting), we want to intentionally organize other activities that will be of interest to the non-Christians (like sports, cultural events and family nights). Sometimes these other activities might be viewed as “not spiritual enough”. Yet for the sake of the Lord, we must do our best to win our friends and to influence them spiritually. How can we build bridges instead of walls? How can we attract our seeker friends to come closer to our God?

I cried more than once when I read the words of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:

<sup>19</sup> Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

I want God to give me that kind of attitude so that I can be a channel of His blessings.

Our Lord Jesus is interested in people. He took initiative to reach out to the lost. Jesus said, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." (Luke 19:10)

- Jesus took interest in Zacchaeus. (Luke 19)
- Jesus took interest in the Samaritan woman. (John 4)
- Jesus took interest in all His disciples. (Mark 3)
- Jesus took interest in the man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. (John 5)

Jesus is our example in reaching out to people. He is interested in people and reaches out to people to show them that He cares for them. He meets them where they are and bring them to where they ought to be.

The gospel does not change. God's Word does not change. Truth does not change. We cannot and should not change them. Yet the culture of our society keeps on changing. We should learn to be sensitive to the people of our present generation. Unwilling to change our traditional ways of evangelism might hinder us from accomplishing the task and goal of reaching out to the world. In order to reach out to people effectively, we must be willing to understand them and accept them. Before we proclaim the Good news of God's Kingdom to them, we must reach out to needy people with compassion.

John Kramp, in his article "24 Ways to Help the Spiritually Lost", gave us many insights. Allow me to quote some of them here for your reference:

### **Keep Learning How To Give Good Spiritual Directions**

- Your seeker friends hate to feel vulnerable. Be sensitive. Don't push. If you push them, they get scared and run.

- ❑ Don't ever make seekers feel stupid just because they are lost. Don't flaunt your Bible knowledge or spiritual insights.
- ❑ Remember people's reluctance to trust strangers. Give your seeker friends time to trust you. They may find it hard to think about trusting Christ until they decide if they can trust you and what you are telling them about Christ.
- ❑ Never underestimate the significance of a spiritual question. Pay attention. When a seeker asks anything, listen. It's important.
- ❑ Be patient if your non-Christian friends struggle to understand the spiritual directions you are giving. Directions are inherently confusing. Go slow. Keep it simple. Assume your friends know nothing.
- ❑ Don't give your seeker friends too much spiritual information. In an attempt to share all you know, you will confuse rather than help.

### **Pay the Cost of Searching for the Lost**

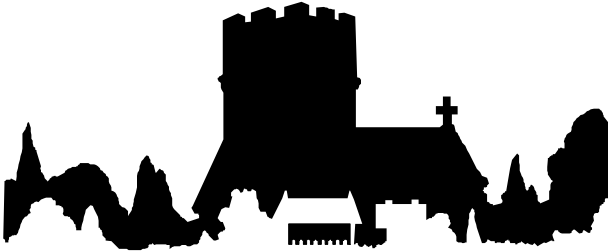
- ❑ Make time to search for those who are lost spiritually. Participating in the search is the only way you show that you really value lost people. Anything else is just cheap talk.
- ❑ Be prepared to pay the price in time and money to reach lost people. Spiritual search and rescue are inherently costly. Don't expect any discounts.
- ❑ A spiritual search always begins with your heart and the love you feel for spiritually lost people. If you don't love the lost, ask the Lord to change your heart.
- ❑ Make time in your schedule for reaching out to non-Christians. Don't allow other priorities to crowd this top priority off your list.
- ❑ Take initiative to go to spiritually lost people and adapt to them. Don't expect them to adapt to you. Be willing to enter their world and tell them about Christ, rather than bringing them into your world before you talk to them about Christ.
- ❑ Let the reality of hell create an appropriate sense of urgency in your heart as you seek to share Christ the lost people. They are in danger in spending eternity without God. Your search is a race against time.

Kramp's advice helps me a lot. I hope it will help you too. The Lord willing, we will talk more about this subject in our next edition of ECHO. I trust you still remember the chorus we have learnt a year ago at our missions Conference.

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

“Lord, Make Us a Community-Friendly Church!”

Hear our prayer, Lord!



## REFLECTION

Allen Lee

As I look back for the last forty years, I am really amazed that how God has blessed the Christian brothers and sisters in Rochester. For those who are young or new to the area, they may not appreciate God’s provision as those who have experienced the early days in Rochester. I hope that the following story will give you a glimpse of His love to us.

RCCC was born in December 1983. For the first six years, we met in Browncroft Community Church (BCC). As we grew to a point, the ministry was affected because we did not have our own facility. We actively searched for a new location for over two years without success. But God miraculously provided us with the current facility. We paid a small fraction of the actual worth and had the first service here in June 1989.

We outgrew the facility shortly after we had moved in. We did not have enough rooms for service, Sunday school, nursery and other activities. We were desperate. A building committee was formed to plan the first expansion. The whole church united in one spirit. We went through many obstacles, but God led us to the completion in mid-1994 with debt free.

In May 1999, the church leaders adopted a vision of expanding the facility to include a family life center and classrooms. A committee was formed to start the planning. After we discussed this plan with the local town official, we were told that there was not enough land to build the addition. We are required to have 100 feet set back between the building and the boundary line.

This was a great disappointment to us. But God told us *“Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, my thoughts and my ways are higher than yours”* in Isaiah 55:9. Just about a week later, we received a letter from our neighbor. They were building a lakeside new house and asked us whether we were interested in buying their house. Of course we purchased the house right away. The expansion plan resumed at once with great joy and thanksgiving.

After the architect completed the design, the initial cost estimate exceeded our budget. We started the cost reduction exercise and at the same time worked with Town officials to satisfy their requirement. Through many months of brainstorming and negotiation, God led us to a path that would satisfy the Town and meet the budget. In the summer of 2003, the construction finally started.

God provided the financial need and Phase I construction was completed just before the harsh Rochester winter. Many brothers and sisters responded to the challenge of participating in the interior painting. Soon the building will be ready for various ministries. This is the time that we not only need to count the blessings, but we need to think about how we can make the best use of the facility that God has provided.

Though the building is complete, our job is not done. The building needs to be filled with God’s people. It is easy to build a physical structure, but it is difficult to build His body. God has given us a good start. Now we need all brothers and sisters to work together to fulfill His will.

## GRADUATION TESTIMONY

Shiuen-Huang Tzeng

Before I came to the Untied States, I prayed to God for three things: A church where I can grow, a good teacher from whom I can learn, and friends whom I can trust. After six years of studying for the master's and doctoral degrees, God not only answered my prayer but also provided me with much more than I expected.

Quickly after two years of master's study, it was time to decide what to do and where to go next. I decided to go to Belgium for one semester, learning with a wonderful female guitar teacher who I met in a master's class. My family, teacher and friends encouraged and supported my decision and I prayed about it. After collecting all the documents, I went to New York City applying for the visa. Unexpectedly, the officer told me that it would take three months to issue the visa. When I heard that, I think my face turned pale and my brain did not work for five minutes. How can it be? The whole process of preparation of going to Belgium seemed real and positive, but God closed the door completely. I can't wait for three months! What am I going to do next? During that time, I didn't have much choice. Eastman was the only school I applied for my DMA. I asked the school to have permission to start my DMA program two days after the semester began. I spent one semester to figure out why God closed the door. Why did I have to stay here? Another fear I had was the comprehensive exam at the end of program. It seemed a mission impossible to me. Will I be able to finish my studies? Although I didn't get a clear answer, God showed me his gracious love and provided me with what I needed in my life, physically and mentally. I started to believe God had a better plan than I did.

By God's grace, I was able to handle all the classes. I did not think DMA was that difficult until I did the comprehensive exam. During the two days of the exam, God never stopped guiding me to the answer of the questions. For instance, some of the questions in the theory part were exactly what I practiced with Sam a couple days before. For the essay part, God also reminded me something that I wrote about. In Philippians: 4:6-7, *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* For the whole process, I felt God's presence. Unfortunately, I failed. But with God's grace and blessing, I learned

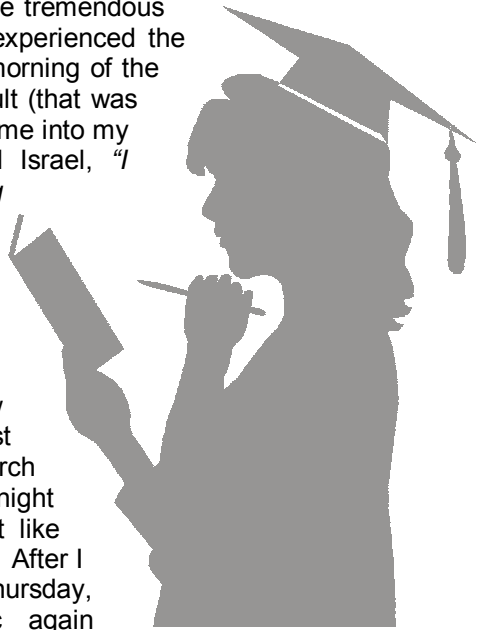
the lesson that God was going to teach me. My plan seemed perfect in my eyes, but I didn't know that God has already prepared a much better one for me. If I passed the exam for the first time, I wouldn't have experienced the wonderful walk with God later on. First of all, I was surrounded by a group of Christians who prayed with me, encouraged me, cooked for me and gave me all the support you can imagine. It's such a blessing and privilege to be a Christian! We can rely on God for everything and have Christian friends to walk with. During the difficult time, God also encouraged me through Joshua 1:8-9, *"Do not let this Book of the law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."*

Secondly, God gave me two friends to form a study group and we met every week. We always joked around that we were torturing each other. But actually, they motivated me to work on my weak area. There is a Christian among us and we always encourage each other through God's words and prayers. I also had a chance to share the gospel with the other friend.

Another big blessing from God is the teaching job in the Grace Covenant School where Wendy teaches. After five months of studying for the first exam, I was exhausted and desperately needed some fresh air instead of sitting all day long with little chance to interact with other people. Wendy told me that they needed a music teacher and asked me if I wanted to try. Sure! In August, I had an interview and felt peaceful about it. I didn't know if I had enough time to work since I had to prepare for the exam, so I prayed to God to give me a clear answer whether to do it or not. Guess what? The school decided to hire me for the job and I decided to take it. This job is a challenge for me because teaching children is definitely not what I learned at school. However, I was able to get the help from Chun-Pei and other teachers at the school. I learned to pray before the class and sometimes even pray with the children when they have difficulties in learning. I see how God amazingly leads the kids and me in the class. I am very thankful to work with those kids and my colleagues. The students are like angels to me and I can't resist loving them. Of course if they don't behave well, I get upset too, then I ask God for wisdom. This job brings me a balancing life and a desire to give.



When I took the second comprehensive exam in February, I had enough preparation but I messed up on the exam. I was extremely nervous since that was supposed to be my last chance in order to get the DMA. The waiting period for the result drove me crazy. That was also the time I prayed the longest, the hardest, and the most intense as a Christian for 7 years. Finally, I heard other people received the result but I didn't, so I called the secretary. She told me that "the committee was still deciding on some of the exams." Right after I hanged up the phone, I cried out to God: "have mercy, have mercy. I really can't do anything, but by your grace". At first I sensed the tremendous urge for prayer! I really experienced the power of prayer. In the morning of the day before I knew the result (that was Wednesday), one verse came into my mind "Samuel said to all Israel, *"I have listened to everything you said to me..."*" (1 Samuel 12:1). I asked God, "Is it real?" Immediately, I felt the joy and peace in my heart. I felt that I had the strength to face the future and know God has provided the best for me. There was a church prayer meeting on that night and the prayers were just like incense offered up to God. After I finished my teaching on Thursday, I started to feel panic again because I predicted the result should be announced soon. I went to Wendy and asked her to pray with me until I had peace. Shortly after I got home, my teacher called me. He said "Shiuen-Huang, I know you have been waiting for this and I can't wait to tell you. You passed". I couldn't think of any other words, but "Thank the Lord!"



God is faithful, gracious and merciful. I thank him for leading me through the valleys of high and low. It's a miracle for me being able to finish DMA. I also thank all the brothers and sisters praying for me from the beginning of preparation to the day of knowing the result. I prayed that I keep on trusting Him for my future and I also invite you to continue to walk with God wherever you go.

**A SAVED SOUL, A NEW BABY, AND A REAL JOB**

Sam Ng

*Jesus never mentioned unanswered prayer;  
He had boundless certainty that prayer is always answered.  
"Every one that asketh receiveth."*

*We say – "But..., but...,"*

*God answers prayer in the best way,  
not sometimes, but every time,  
although the manifestation of the answer in the domain in which we want it  
may not always follow.*

*The danger with us is that we want to water down the things that Jesus says  
and make them mean something in accordance to common sense...*

Oswald Chambers

Wendy and I have earnestly prayed for these three things – one of them for almost a decade, another for two years or so, and the remaining one since only fairly recently. We have maintained hope in these to be answered at God's own time. Little did we know at the beginning of this year that in a matter of months, these three things would become intertwined in an amazing story that sees all three of them realized in ways far beyond what we first asked for.

Growing up in a traditional Chinese ancestor worshipping family, Wendy's dad never had much appetite for a "foreign" God who is jealous of idols in any form. Like any traditional Chinese dad, he is also a rather stern figure – not as extreme as those who would always put on an immalleably long face and never utter a word except during the Chinese New Year, but he cannot be characterized as very approachable either. His wife had no particular religious background before she became Mrs. Mak. In fact, in her youth she had had opportunities to study the Bible because of some Christian relatives. Unfortunately, she would one day come to epitomize the submissiveness of a traditional Chinese housewife, practicing with utmost fervor her husband's value system and religious beliefs. Year after year we prayed that God would bestow on them the spiritual insight that we once received – the insight that makes us realize how sinful we all are, and how much we need to repent and accept Jesus Christ to be our Lord and Savior. Between them, Wendy's mom was the one whom we always had more courage to confront just because she seemed a bit more approachable. On every occasion, however, she turned down the invitation of Jesus, arguing that as a wife, she could only stand by her husband's values and family traditions. Ever since Wendy and I came to the US, being physically so far away from them hasn't made it easier either. It is discouraging at times, but we know that

we must not stop praying for their salvation.

Two years ago during our church retreat, Wendy and I decided that it was about time to start praying for guidance for the next stage of our life journey – i.e. parenthood. We didn't exactly think it was the right time for us to plunge into it at that point, but we just hoped to commit our plans and our future child(ren) into God's hands, and so we asked Him to help us make wise decisions on when exactly we should proceed into this exciting phase of our lives. Last September, we both felt that time was ripe to bring a new member to our family. Deep down we had such a strong conviction that the Lord would let this happen whenever He saw fit; yet, influenced by worldly wisdom, we also diligently did our calculations, marked our calendars, and acted accordingly. One, two, three, four months had slipped by – nothing happened. Even though we knew it was normal to go for six months without the expected outcome, we just began to develop this unfathomable fear of why our situation should be like that too. How can this whole business be so difficult? After all, shouldn't something that happens often by surprise have a much higher chance of occurring when it is purposefully and carefully planned out?

At around the same time when we were first learning about the practical complexities in the perpetuation of species, I also began to look for a full-time job (as an assistant professor in music theory). By then, my status at school had just turned to what they call "ABD" ("all but dissertation," – meaning that I had finished all my course requirements and exams, and the dissertation was the only thing that stood between me and a doctoral degree). In fact, I still had quite a long way to go before my graduation (for a dissertation in music theory takes on average two years to complete, at least that's the norm at Eastman), but there were good reasons to begin my job hunt at that point. First, while most universities only hire actual PhDs, some schools do consider ABDs as potential candidates. In a lot of cases, if an ABD is hired, he/she will be required to finish the dissertation before a certain deadline amidst the heavy teaching and researching load – no easy feat, needless to say. Second, if we really did have a baby at some point down the road, I simply needed a full time job so we could stock up some diapers and other things! With the stipend I was getting as a part-time instructor at Eastman, I probably had enough money to buy just a basket for floating the baby down Genesee River so that some princess bathing in the river would pick him up and raise him in our

stead.<sup>1</sup> From September '03 to January '04, I responded to almost every single ad on music theory jobs I came across from various sources, and in the end, I sent out over forty letters altogether. We prayed each day that God would give us the job He had in store for us at His own time. For some reasons (in retrospect, mostly because of my naïveté about the job situation in the real world) I was in fact quite confident that I would get at least three or four interviews, and two of these might lead to an actual job offer. Fearing that I might end up being trapped between two equally desirable offers, I also prayed specifically to God that I would not have to face such a dilemma, for I have had first-hand experiences in how troubling it can be when one has to, as the Chinese saying goes, “pick between the fish and bear paw.” How wrong my hopeful assumption proved to be in the following months! As of May 2004, my report card reads “1 interview, 0 job offers” – looks more like the score line of a boring baseball game than that of an exciting soccer match I had anticipated!

So here I was at the door of 2004: No Christian parent-in-laws, no pregnant wife, and no job.

Early January, we got a phone call from Wendy's family in Hong Kong. They were seriously considering the prospect of coming to spend the Chinese New Year with us. Wendy's dad and youngest sister, Karen, had never been in Rochester before, and since he was just recently laid off, and Karen was going to have a week off from school, they thought it might be a good time to make a visit, albeit the cruel winters of Rochester. But Chinese New Year was approaching in a little more than two weeks, and even though it wasn't exactly high season, availability of plane tickets may not be guaranteed. On top of this, there was the visa problem, especially so after 9/11. Even a single-entry 6-month visa stamp could be difficult to get. Wendy and I hoped so much that this family reunion could be actualized, and so we prayed fervently about it. Within a week, the plane tickets came through, but the visa was stuck. Karen was denied at her first try. In some sense, it was not all that surprising because the US embassy in Hong Kong (or US embassies anywhere, I suppose) is always skeptical about single

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<sup>1</sup> At this point, you may wonder why we impose on ourselves this urgency in job-hunting, since it can simply be alleviated if we were just smart enough to have a baby later when I have secured a job first! Yes, it makes complete sense to think this way, and I don't really know how to respond to that, except to say that Wendy and I are just channels through which God's wonderful plans, which do not always make common sense to us, can be revealed. Read on!

young ladies applying for a traveler's visa to the US. On her second try, she went together with Wendy's dad on a Wednesday morning when we, here on the Rochester side, were having our regular college group prayer meeting on a Tuesday night in our apartment. The whole group prayed together for the visa to go through. It did for both of them. It was kind of surreal to realize at that moment that they, and Wendy's elder sister, Jennie, who had been working in Indiana, were going to swamp our place in exactly two weeks.

They arrived in Rochester on a bitter cold Thursday night - the perfect time to have traditional Chinese hotpot together. It was so much fun to sit around the table with family. But the most wonderful thing about that particular dinner was this: we prayed together at the table before we ate, and it was - as far as I could remember - the first time ever that Wendy's dad prayed together with us. I had the courage to ask him to pray with us because he was "in our territory." The fact that he was now captive in this dark and cold apartment somehow made him seem more vulnerable than ever on the one hand, and made us more ambitious on the other. Quietly, he just went along with our prayer. After all, he must be hungry.

Friday night, Chunlun and Melissa had us over to their house for dinner. As football fans panteth for the superbowl (it was January), so Wendy and I longeth for this dinner, not only because of Melissa's cooking, but also because we were so sure that Chunlun was going to accomplish the very task which we never had the courage to perform for ten years - i.e. to tell Wendy's dad the whole and complete gospel right in his face, including the reality that he was going straight down to hell if he still didn't believe. Dinner was exquisite, as expected, but Chunlun's delivery of God's truth was more pressing than I had imagined. It became clear that the dinner was only the prologue to the drama proper about to unfold. The first enunciation of God's procurator was nothing short of a bombshell: "Mr. Mak, what stands between you and faith in God?" Caught completely off-handed, poor Mr. Mak had no choice but to fumble upon a string of incoherent utterances. Meanwhile, the audience was witnessing this direct confrontation between the protagonists in awe. I don't know what was going through the mind of the others, but I mainly had two things in my head; on one side was some degree of restlessness because the word "death" had popped up so many times in the confrontation (you have to understand that this has never happened to Wendy's dad), and on the other side was an ardent hope for the truth to cut through his heart and make him realize he needs Jesus. As I was watching

closely his facial expression while Chunlun meticulously explained to him God's salvation with Bible verses printed on one of his fancy-looking laminated cardboards, I saw a face of relative humility, softness, and openness that I had seldom seen on him. Despite all the "death threats," it was an evening where love, joy, and sweetness were bestowed on us through Chunlun's genuine care for Mr. Mak's salvation, his laborious effort to plant the seed in Mr. Mak's heart, and, last but not least, Melissa's desserts.

Saturday night, we had dinner at a rather mediocre restaurant. What a contrast to Friday night – the food was horrible. As we were cherishing the feast just the night before, Wendy tactfully geared the conversation back to the topics that Chunlun had opened up. "What do you think of what Uncle Chunlun said to you last night?" The seconds leading up to his response were some of the most intense moments I'd ever had – in that restaurant, that is. "Well, what he said made a lot of sense." Did I hear him correctly? I was still frozen by this unexpected answer when Wendy promptly followed up, "Then do you believe?" No one could have guessed what he was going to say next. "If this one thing that I have been hoping for becomes reality, then I will believe." "What thing?" We all asked. "If I have a grandchild."

"What!? What does a grandchild have to do with him believing in God? This is not right! Does he really know what he's saying? Does he understand what it means to repent and accept Christ? Plus Wendy and I have been trying so hard for the past four months to no avail, and this month we've sort of given up trying so hard anyway. I just hope that Chunlun's effort hasn't gone completely down the drain..."

Sunday morning, I was still in my dreams when I felt someone grabbing my arm. I opened my weary eyes, and hazily in front of me was a white strip, with something like a square window on one end, a hand holding the strip on the other. I gradually focused on the window – there were two pink lines in it. Was it some kind of contemporary art? No, but it certainly looked familiar. I'd seen this white strip before, just not with the two pink lines. Could it be... Eyes wide open; the next thing I saw was the smile of a pregnant woman.

A week from Sunday, we were in New York City visiting relatives. Pregnancy had been confirmed on Wednesday, relatives had been visited just the day before, it was now the perfect time to break the news to Wendy's dad. Nevertheless, the whole night Wendy was

experiencing some extended spells of cramps in her lower abdomen. It was as if Satan tried to lure us into thinking that something was seriously wrong (e.g. an ectopic pregnancy) so we would keep our mouth shut for the time being. No, we decided to tell anyway. That morning we had planned to go to Sunday service with Andy (Lau) in Queens. Believe it or not, because of a stalled car, we were stranded in Chinatown in Manhattan. Apparently, Satan wanted us to give up Sunday service too, but God helped us find a church in the area anyway. It was 11:31am when we walked in. The second service in that church had just begun a minute ago.

The news was finally broken at lunch.

“Do you believe now? It’s obviously a miracle.”

“I said I would believe, so now I do.”

Monday night at Che-Chung and Betty’s house, after praying with Pastor Tang, Wendy’s dad invited Jesus to enter his heart. Since returning to Hong Kong, he’s been attending church with my parents. A brother at church is also doing discipleship training with him. Recently, he even took up a new catchphrase. “The Lord will provide,” he would always say whenever I update him with news of my job hunt. The only sad thing in this part of the story is that the formerly submissive wife has somehow turned into a submissive-in-all-but-one-things wife. Who knows? It may take another ten years, but we have hope.

Now that the baby is coming, and the Genesee River option is definitely out of the question, what should we do? By April, it had become obvious that my job hunt was a failure. Seeing that I was in deep water financially, my dissertation advisor came up with a brilliant idea. He told me the theory department at Eastman was going to nominate me for a fellowship, which is granted annually by the University of Rochester to two students working on their dissertations. I never quite believed that I would get the fellowship, which I knew was highly competitive; but in these desperate times, I just had to try anything. Unfortunately, this final gleam of hope also went astray when we later realized an official condition accompanying the fellowship is that the recipient is not permitted to work in any capacity for extra money outside of the fellowship, and the amount offered by the fellowship itself was even less than my stipend. The fellowship, it had become clear, was not the solution. Panicking, I immediately emailed my professors to bargain for more teaching – and therefore more stipend – in the next academic year. At the same time I frantically mailed out my CV to schools around the area, hoping to get one or two part-time teaching gigs. By late

April, I had confirmed nothing with Eastman, and had heard nothing from schools in the vicinity.

Several weeks ago, my dissertation advisor saw me in the library, and walked up to me with this piece of news: “You got the fellowship.” “Yeah!!... Oh, No!! I can’t accept it; it doesn’t pay enough, and they don’t let me work for extra money...” “No, I talked to them about your situation, and they have officially allowed you to continue to teach next year.” I stared at him in amazement. Who could have imagined this to be possible? I didn’t get a full-time job, but our expenses next year are now taken care of regardless. What’s more important is that we don’t have to go through the uncertainties and stress of moving while Wendy is very pregnant in the summer. On top of that, I get to stay at Eastman to finish my dissertation instead of having to juggle full-time teaching with dissertating. It is the most perfect solution – completely out of reach of the common sense.

So here we are, at the close of the first half of 2004, God has given me

a saved in-law,  
a baby due in September,  
and something far better than a real job in the present  
circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

“Everyone that asketh receiveth.”



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<sup>2</sup> Stay tuned for my next article, “Another saved in-law, Another baby, and A Real Job,” hopefully to be printed in *Echo* some time within the next ten years.



## WHERE DO YOU WANT TO LIVE

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The story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt and into the Promised Land has many implications, such as historical, political and perhaps most importantly spiritual. God raised Moses to lead His people out of the bondage of Egypt to the Promised Land, which is today's state of Israel and the area surrounding it. You only have to read the newspapers or watch the news in TV to know the impact of that ancient journey. It's still unfolding and it's going to get more dramatic until the end time, as predicted in the bible. Let us leave the historical and political interpretation of the Exodus to the scholars and analysts and focus on it instead from a spiritual angle.

Many Christians don't read the Old Testament as much as they do the New Testament. One of the reasons is that they don't think the Old Testament is as relevant to their modern day lives. As for me, I love to read the Old Testament. It's not just because I like history, you can learn a lot from history by the way, but because when you look at it from both a historical and a spiritual angle, you will discover a wealth of learning and blessings that you can apply to your day-to-day life in the 21st century.

As believers, we are like the Israelites of old. We used to live in the bondage of sin – that is, the land of Egypt. We were slaves to the dark authority of Satan. The problem was, for a long time we didn't know until one day the Holy Spirit convicted us. Then we realized the horrible condition we were in, and the only way out of eternal death was by repenting of our sins, and believing and accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Just as God raised Moses to lead the Israelites out of the land of Egypt to the Promised Land, God sent His only Son Jesus to save us from the land of eternal death to the land of eternal life.

The Israelites' journey wasn't a smooth one. For forty years they wandered in the wilderness. There were doubts, sufferings, rebellions and deaths. But there were also miracles, guidance and providence. In many ways, the Exodus was a reflection of our own lives prior to and after our salvation.

Deuteronomy 11:10 – *“The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden.”*  
From the description of Egypt in this verse, you'd wonder why they

would ever want to leave the land. It seems like the land of Egypt is like the land of freedom where you plant your own seed, do your own irrigation like a vegetable garden.

Here God gives an interesting but real description of the land of Egypt. He doesn't dwell on the slavery, the bondage and the suffering. Why? It's because once the Israelites were out of Egypt, that part of their history was gone forever. Just like our salvation today; once saved, always saved. There is no way we would go back to our previous bondage state. Not even Satan can lure us back because the power of salvation is absolute and forever.

If you truly repented of your sins, believed and accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you are born again; you are saved. It's God who gave you this gift of salvation based on your free will decision, and no one or nothing can reverse that. Having said that, it doesn't mean that once we are saved, we are totally free from the temptations of sin and will never sin again. But God's grace is sufficient for us. As long as we live in this world, we will sin, and there will be consequences of our sins, but the status of our salvation is sealed.

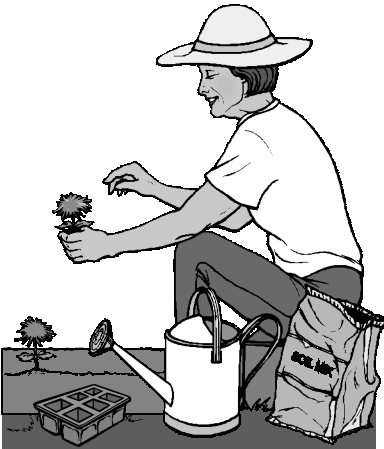
The best example is King David, a man after God's own heart. He committed adultery with Bathsheba, a married woman, and planned to have her husband Uriah murdered. While David didn't lose his eternal life because of these sins, the consequences were severe. Through prophet Nathan, God pronounced that *"the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own."* (2 Sam 12:10)

Notice that God didn't say he would bring sword into David's house – i.e. enemies from the outside attacking his family. That would have been bad enough, but no. David's sins were so great that God's justice demanded more severe punishments. The sword was not to come from the outside but from inside his own family, from his own flesh and blood. *"This is what the LORD says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'"* (2 Sam 12:11-12)

Little did David know that the sword came from his own sons. Amnon, his eldest son, raped his half sister Tamar, and for that was murdered by his younger brother Absalom two years after. Absalom

later tried to usurp his father's throne and openly slept with his concubines. He was later killed, actually murdered, by David's own army chief Joab despite David's urging him not to harm his beloved son.

What's the moral of David's sins? Don't think you have a free pass of sinning because you have salvation, for salvation gives you immunity of eternal death, but not immunity of the consequences of sinning. Satan never stops tempting us after we became a believer. He would continue to remind us of the "good old days". And let's face it; the good old days can be very appealing.



When the Israelites left Egypt and lived a nomadic life in the wilderness, what they focused on was the inconveniences and the physical challenges on their road to freedom. They forgot the harsh life of slavery in Egypt. They forgot the oppression, the hard labor, the lack of freedom, the life as a lowest class in the society. Instead, they remembered the easy part of life in Egypt -- The stable and predictable living; the relatively good food they could enjoy.

God knew that. He's not going to sugarcoat the Promised Land and paint a totally negative picture of the old land. He knew people would be thinking about the good old days. He knew they would miss their vegetable gardens. Perception is reality, even though the perception is partial and biased. The Israelites missed their vegetable garden life style in Egypt.

What about you? You have been a believer for one, five, ten, thirty years. Do you miss your vegetable garden? The fact that you miss it is an indication that you now live in a different land. The worse is that you don't miss it because you continue to have your own vegetable garden in the new land – the Promised Land, the Land of Salvation. It means you continue to embrace the life style of old. It means that your Promised Land exists for less than two hours a week – the time you come to the Sunday service. It means you continue to rely on your own strength and ability instead of looking

to God for His providence.

The road to the Promised Land is not a straight eight-lane highway, and the land itself is not necessarily a sun-soaked wine country. Deuteronomy 11:11-12 – *“But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.”*

The road to the Promised Land involves crossing the Jordan River and taking possession of a land with hostile inhabitants. Crossing the river signifies a decision of no return. It's not like taking the high-speed ferry where you can go back and forth at will between Rochester and Toronto. Once you made that decision to cross over, it is not going to be a parade into the Promised Land with marching bands and people lining on both sides of the road to cheer you. Satan is not going to take it lying down. He would continue to oppose you, to tempt you, and try to get you to continue to live the life you once did on the other side of the Jordan River.

It's also a land of mountains and valleys, not a beautiful garden. Human nature is such that we all want to live a comfortable life with little toil and drudgery. Cultivating a vegetable garden at your backyard is quite different from living in a land of mountains and valleys that depend on rains from heaven.

These days we are getting so good and proficient with our yards and gardens. We can have automatic irrigation system that waters our land at whatever time intervals we set regardless of the weather. We can buy the best seeds and have the best fertilizers for growth and yield. There are TV shows and books on the subject. There is nothing wrong with these things in themselves. But the more we do these things, the more we come to rely on ourselves as opposed to relying on God for His providence. The mountains and valleys in the Promised Land don't have automatic irrigation system. Instead they drink rain from heaven. It is a land God Himself cares for and His eyes are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.

O how often we forget that. How often we think our security is in our own hands. We study, we work, we plan, we build, whether it's our family or our career or both, we lose sight of the fact that we are living our life just like we did back in the land of Egypt, focusing all our energy and efforts on tending a little vegetable garden, thinking

the small yield from that little vegetable garden would provide for and sustain our living.

Often times we are so spiritually myopic that we miss out on the great blessings of God. Would you like to live on the fruit of your little vegetable garden, or prefer the bountiful harvest of the land that God cares for? Yes, the mountains and valleys may not have sun shine all the time. There will even be rains. Life is not always smooth sail. There are setbacks, pains, sufferings and tears. You may look at these bad things as rains, and yet these may just be the rains that irrigate the land and make it produce fruits. The important thing is, this is the land that God is continually watching, from the beginning to its end. I don't know about you, but that's the security I want.

How can we have this security? If we leave everything to God, isn't there anything I should do? You bet! Deuteronomy 11:13-15 – *“So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today--to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul--then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.”*

What God wants from us is obedience. Not forced compliance, but truehearted obedience out of our love for Him and acting out our love by serving Him with all our heart and all our soul. Then God will supply all our needs according to His perfect plan.

God's rain has its seasons. In our lives, if all we have is sunshine, soon our land will turn into desert. A smooth life, an easy life, doesn't produce great things. There is a saying that adversity builds character. But that still is relying on our own strength. Without looking to God for help, comfort and protection, there is only so much adversity a person can take. As Christians, our resources are limitless in God. We may be climbing the steepest mountains or walking in the lowest valleys of life and feeling totally helpless, but when we turn our eyes upon Jesus, we have the assurance that He is watching over us. He knows how much we can bear. He sends rain in its seasons, both autumn and spring rains, so that we will eventually gather our harvest. Not only that, the rich grass produced by the rain will feed our cattle and we will be satisfied.

Whether we are now living on the mountaintop or at valley's depth, we need to *“be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and*

*worship other gods and bow down to them. Then the Lord's anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you.”* (Deuteronomy 11:16-17) We need to be careful lest we fall in the same sin trap that David did 3,000 years ago and suffered the consequences. We can't afford to have God shut the heavens. Our whole livelihood is dependent upon God's opening the windows of heaven and pouring his rich blessings on us.

Where do you want to live? Do you want to live in a land with your little vegetable garden or do you want to live in land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. Don't think for a moment that by your own efforts you can sustain your livelihood by cultivating your little vegetable garden. You need to live in a land of mountains and valleys and rely on God's providence. Yes, it may not be a land of comfort and easy living. Often times you may have to endure rains or even lightning. But they are all part of God's grand plan to irrigate the land so that it can produce great harvest to sustain you and your household.

Be obedient. No matter what position you are in, love God and serve Him with all your heart and all your soul, He will take care of you. As Christians, our Promised Land is not a physical land. We can live anywhere and find our Promised Land when we repent of our sins, believe and accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, and live a life that is in total obedience to Him.

