

Rochester Chinese Christian Church

ECHO

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Principles I Learned As A Teenager

Pastor Herman Tang

This last summer, there was a road construction on Plank Road in Penfield. When I first found out, I was somewhat annoyed by the detour. It was inconvenient for me and I had to take a longer route to get to the places I wanted to go in Webster. Then one day, I met some church neighbor on Jackson Road during the detour. I got a chance to talk to him and even invited him and his family to come to our church.

In life things do not always happen the way we want. Many times, things may happen just the opposite to what we plan, what we expect or what we desire. Under those circumstances, instead of complaining, we must check our own attitude.

I accepted the Lord at the age of sixteen. After I became a Christian, one of the first Bible verses I memorized is *Proverbs 4:23*, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." By God's grace, I was able to learn some basic spiritual principles to guard my own heart in my living as a child of God. I did not pretend to always succeed in keeping all these principles. However I can say that I have been trying my best to live according to these three principles.

- I. We must humble ourselves
- II. We must trust in the Lord
- III. We must do good to others

Principle # 1: We must humble ourselves

Without the grace of God, I know my life would be meaningless. In order to receive grace from the Lord, every person must learn humility. Humility speaks of an attitude that puts others first; and considers the desires, needs and ideas of others as more worthy of attention than one's own. Humility is well defined by *Philippians 2:3-4*, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

The Bible says, "He (God) mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble." (*Proverb 3:34*). The Bible also says in *1 Peter 5:5-7*, "You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders (Church leaders); and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you." (NASB)

It is really comforting to know that when we humble ourselves in the sight of

the Lord, He will give us grace and He will care for us. What more can I ask for?

Principle # 2: We must trust in the Lord.

If we are not trusting in the Lord, our sorrows will increase. *“The sorrows of those will increase who run after other gods.”* (Psalm 16:4). Christians probably would not trust in other “gods”. But there might still be the danger of trusting in our own human wisdom as it has been aptly described in Proverbs 3:5-7, *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.”* When I was young and immature, my way of facing troubles and solving problems was to use my own wisdom and methods instead of trusting in the Lord to help me. The result was disastrous. The more we trust in God, the more peace we have. Just like the promise God gives us in Isaiah 26:3-4, *“You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal.”*

Principle # 3: We must do good to others

Psalm 37 has some of the most profound philosophy for living. The Lord gives us many important lessons. Let me quote just a few:

¹ *Do not fret because of evil men, or be envious of those who do wrong; ³ Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture....*
⁸ *Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret--it leads only to evil....*
²⁷ *Turn from evil and do good; then you will dwell in the land forever.*

Believing in Jesus also means imitating Jesus and obeying Jesus. Our Lord Jesus set a wonderful example for us when He was under the most painful circumstances. He kept doing good. The Lord never did anything evil. He would even pray for all who were ultimately responsible for putting Him on the cross, including you and me.

We must follow the admonition of Romans 12:17-18 when there is conflict. *“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”*

We must learn to love beyond our own human nature. As Jesus tells us in Luke 6:32-34, *“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners,’ expecting to be repaid in full.”*

I remember when I was a young boy. I was not a Christian yet. One day I was hit by another boy in my neighborhood. It was quite painful. So I went home and found a big stick. I went to the house of this boy. I was going to hit him back. That was the only way I knew how to conduct myself. Because of Jesus, things are different now. When troubles come, I learn to

humble myself, put my trust in the Lord and do what is good in the sight of the Lord.

In the past two Lord's days (11/14/04 and 11/21/04), we have sung the prayer by Francis of Assisi in our Chinese worship service. I was reminded and touched deeply by this prayer again:

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where there is despair, hope.

Where there is darkness, light.

Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I might not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love; for it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Personal Testimony and Calling

King-Fai Choi

I was born and brought up in Hong Kong. Like many Chinese families, our family followed the tradition of burning incense and making offerings to our ancestors and various gods, practice that did not mean much to me. In contrast, I attended a Christian school during first grade. I remember a time when I prayed to the "Christian" God in a very innocent child-like way. It was short-lived, however, as my parents switched me to a Buddhist school for the next three years. As I grew older, religion seemed to me nothing more than superstition and nonsense.

When I was sixteen, the all-boys school I attended joined with an all-girls school to participate in a mixed-choir competition in the Hong Kong School Music Festival. In the course of the rehearsals, I met a few new friends who seemed to be very amicable and kind. I later found out that they were Christians. After the school year was over, they invited me to a youth fellowship. I started attending their youth fellowship and their church and was quite impressed by the people I met there.

Nonetheless, as that summer came to an end, I felt that I should not waste any more time in that religion stuff. I could not possibly believe in their "God", and all those miracles described in the Bible were just, well, unscientific and irrational. Surely, I should keep my focus on my schoolwork since the success of the new academic year will be critical to my goal of entering a good university.

Yet on the other hand, I was reluctant to give up all these new friends. I debated. They claimed that their love came from God. I thought to myself, "if God is so abstract, how can their love be so real?" Being a pragmatist, I prayed to God one evening: "If you do exist, I will believe in you." The hidden thought behind that prayer was that if God didn't exist, I was just talking to the air and would have nothing to lose. I also quickly sized up Christianity against Buddhism, the two major religions known to me at the time. Perhaps one of these two religions is true, I supposed. But which one? During that evening, my utilitarian logic was in motion. Scenario one: I believe in Buddhism and practice that religion accordingly, but Christianity turns out to be true. Even though I do all the good works, I will not enter heaven because I have not believed in Jesus. Scenario two: I believe in Christianity and practice that religion, but Buddhism turns out to be true. Although I choose the wrong religion, I will still enter nirvana since I do all the good works. So, Christianity seemed to be a safer choice. It was under such circumstances and twisted logic that I first made my decision to becoming a Christian. In reality, I was totally confused. However, God was merciful to me, and He delivered me even when I acted out of ignorance.

My Christian friends were exuberant about my becoming a Christian. One sister, who was a few years older, suggested to me to read the Bible and pray everyday. Determining to practice Christianity, I did accordingly. As

days turned into weeks and weeks into months, I came to appreciate the teachings of the Bible. Even though I first turned to God in a rather selfish and naive way, He helped me develop a deeper understanding of Himself. Most significantly, I realized that Jesus died for me so that I might have peace with God; and I am to live a life reflecting who God is, and share this peace with others.

A number of people were instrumental to my spiritual growth during my formative years as a Christian. Most notably, the brothers and sisters in the youth fellowship modeled Christian love that attracted me to the Lord and motivated me to continue drawing close to Him. My Sunday School teacher, who later became a pastor, was most influential in helping me build up a strong foundation in the Bible. In December 1971, I attended a winter retreat organized by the youth fellowship. The theme of that retreat was "Fishers of Men". During the altar call on the last day, I stood up and dedicated my life to God to serve Him wherever He wanted me to be.

In 1974, I came to the United States to study at the University of Rochester. During the next six years, I attended the Browncroft (formerly Brighton) Community Church and the Rochester Christian Fellowship. I actively participated in the church and the fellowship, and was given opportunity to grow through teaching the children, leading Bible studies, conducting the choir, working with the youth, coordinating the fellowship group, translating in Sunday worship, and preaching.

In 1976, I attended the Urbana Student Mission Conference sponsored by InterVarsity. In a workshop given by the Hong Kong Breakthrough Magazine, the speaker challenged us to consider giving up the American dream to go and serve in a lowly humble place like Hong Kong. In a closing slide show, an image of a spiral staircase was projected. Along with it, the words "how low can you go" were repeated. These words still ring in my ears even today. I received a yellow pledge card at the end of the conference. I took it home and prayed about it for three months before I sent my response back to InterVarsity. I still keep in my Bible the other half of that response card indicating my desire to serve Him wherever He wants me to be.

In 1977, I applied to a 10-week Student Summer Missions program sponsored by the Southern Baptist Convention. I was accepted and had the privilege to work under an experienced pastor who was starting a new church (perhaps the first Chinese church) in Fremont, California. I learned the hard labor of beginning a new church through looking up Chinese names in a phone book, writing and sending out announcements and invitations, and going out with the pastor for door-to-door canvassing. Towards the end of the ten weeks, I was delighted to witness the dedication of this new church and to preach on one Sunday before I returned to Rochester.

My wife Anna and I were married in 1978, and we went back to Hong Kong in 1980. During that time, I started my part-time seminary study at the China Graduate School of Theology. I did not complete any program at

CGST. To my envy, Anna took a year off from her work and completed a Diploma of Christian Studies at CGST in 1982. During that year, Anna and I took the summer off and went to the Philippines to work with the Summer Institute of Linguistics, a sister organization of the Wycliffe Bible Translators. It was an eye opening experience for us when we flew into a jungle area and attended a dedication service for the completion of translating the New Testament into the Balangao language. We met the Bible translators who invested the best years of their life to bring the good news to the Balangao people in a remote tribal area in Northern Philippines. I deeply admired their commitment for Christian service.

We returned to Rochester in 1983 and witnessed the formation of the Rochester Chinese Christian Church at the end of that year. During the next fifteen years in Rochester, we saw the church grew from seventy or so people to more than two hundred. I had the privilege to grow in servanthood leadership as I served as a deacon for twelve years with seven of those years as chairman of the board. At the beginning of 1998, I was excited to hear about the inception of a new evangelical seminary in Rochester. I requested for information and was planning to enroll in a part-time study. However, it was not to be, as the Lord re-directed our family to the Boston area that summer.

His way is always higher than our ways. In 1998, we started attending the Chinese Bible Church of Greater Boston (CBCGB), and in 1999, I enrolled in the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary to a part-time study in the Master of Divinity degree program. By the Lord's provision, I was able to transfer the credits from CGST and eventually completed my degree at the end of 2002.

During the past six years in CBCGB, I have the opportunity to serve as advisor to the young professional fellowship, Sunday School teacher, deacon, and after my seminary study, part-time minister. It has always been my desire to serve Him wherever He wants me to be, whether it be a tent-maker or full-time worker. During the past eighteen months serving as a part-time minister, my desire and burden to switch to full-time ministry grew. The church has also affirmed my ministry and invited me to consider serving full-time there. In May 2004, it appeared that the Lord had opened up an opportunity for me to take the next step. I gladly followed.

My conversion experience has been quite abrupt and distinct. I remember clearly the date and occasion I prayed to invite Jesus to be my Lord and Savior. I also have vivid recollection of some of the changes that are clear indication of the work of the Holy Spirit in me. The calling into full-time ministry, however, has been more gradual. On the one hand, I tend to accentuate the importance of being a faithful servant, and make less of a distinction between tent-making and full-time ministry. On the other hand, it has always been my desire to serve Him in full-time ministry if He wills. The seed of that calling was sown in 1971 during the winter retreat. It gradually grew through the years, and came into fruition in 2004.

Love Is Blind

Michael Olugbile

We Christians believe with faith the tenet that God sent His only begotten son to this sinful world to shed His blood for our redemption. Have you ever asked yourself why? So it's true that love must be blind. My experience induces me to implore you to either get yourself a guide dog companion the fastest you can or the latest surgery to repair your sight, because it's better to look before you leap. The bible tells us that heaven helps those who help themselves (*Isaiah 64:5*); and I will add that prevention is better than cure. If I wasn't born and raised with Christian background and values, I am convinced that I will not be here sharing these testimonies and witnessing God's gracious mercies upon Michael Chyang, Eunice Mei-Chi, LiuYen and I as a family. Praise God Almighty.

My life is full of unbelievable circumstances we Christians would refer to as miracles that make us believe God is alive and reigns over the earth through Jesus Christ our savior.

Miraculous life started at age 4, when my right leg severed from my hip joint and dangled from my pelvis, while playing soccer with my father and uncle on our balcony that was a little wet from rain drops. My grandmother and I spent the next 6 months in the hospital. This first sign of "love is blind" from my grandmother, coupled with countless selfless sacrifices from Eunice, my grandmother's name, made it inevitable to name my only daughter Eunice even before I could think of marriage and having children.

At age 9, I cheated death from a plane that caught fire on landing at Douala in French Cameroon. I lost my father just as I was finalizing arrangements to further my studies here in America from Africa. Graduated in 1981 but did not see my Master degree transcripts until 1984, during which time I went as much as 5 days without food. Currently I am witnessing a very unique, maybe unbelievable, miracle. To me, it's a miracle that I got married - check this "love is blind" out - to a Non Christian that the bible warns us against (*2 Cor 6:14-16*). Unconsciously, I did it with my eyes, heart, brain and all my religious convictions closed, locked away and reluctant to consult and utilize them for a structured and well planned jocund matrimonial future under the divine auspices of God Almighty.

The very next day LiuYen and I got married when romance ought to be blooming with holding hands, kissing and hugging like newlyweds, we had a very nasty argument in a public market place in Taiwan. A year after that, we lost our first child through miscarriage. We went through a month and 2 days of daily visits to Strong Memorial Hospital after Michael's open-heart surgery when he was only 15 days old. Shortly after, I lost my job for 3 years that made life not worth living. I attempted suicide twice but was saved by my wife who I thought was the cause of my misfortune at that time because she was not a Christian.

We attended marriage-counseling sessions during which my wife complained of English language barrier. So our Pastor Rev. Michael

McDonalds at New Covenant Fellowship found Pastor Wei Feng from Rochester Chinese Christian Church who kindly translated in one of our sessions, after which he suggested it might be beneficial to visit his church. Hence the birth of RCCC in our lives.

Before we met RCCC, the Bible passage that warns against marrying a non-believer made me think of divorce or running away many times. Ergo, I always ask for forgiveness and often times desperately ask my creator that if everybody is a Christian, to whom do we practice discipleship, which was the main topic of the 2002 RCCC retreat bible study. My epitaph at that 2002 retreat was tears of joy. Tears of joy because RCCC woke me up spiritually and reminded me that when bad things happen not only to good people, it creates tougher people to last more than tough times.

The main irony here is that, when we think God doesn't care and ask him where were His footsteps when we needed Him; we need to be careful about our faith in Him. That could be the time when He tried to teach us a lesson, rebuke us from our sins or if want, call it test our faith in Him.

As I ask for forgiveness, I prayed for signs that will make my wife see the beauty in Christianity. Alas! Not only does she love to come to church, she believes that God loves and does so many good things for her that opened her heart to believe in Him with faith through baptism Easter last year. Even though she is a baby Christian yet, life with her and our children is more manageable now. Please keep us in your prayers that the Lord continues to show us how to relate to and raise our children with love, respect and adoration for God through Jesus Christ.

Thanks to prayers from all our friends and relatives especially from RCCC, we moved to Ohio because of a fantastic teaching job that I believe is God's gift. Even though we left Rochester, we are happy that we could extend the wonderful invitation for divine blessings with which RCCC nourishes us to the Kwok family. Our prayer is that they'll partake in the gift of Jesus birth to the world and realize how precious His blood on the cross truly protects, heals and saves us all endlessly.

RCCC, you are a sanctuary of hope, courage, motivation and a family of highly spirited brothers and sisters that accentuate and emulate the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ. You saw our pain, sorrow and weakened hearts and you responded with prayers, kindness and generosity that brought tears to my eyes. I remember answering the doorbell to see Sam and Wendy with bags upon bags of groceries. Pastor Tang came through with a beautiful car when we were stranded at home and other exemplification of Christian attributes with which RCCC nourished my family. Hence, the thank you phrase is an understatement in appreciation of RCCC in our lives. On behalf of Michael III, Eunice, LiuYen and Michael II, we just have to say THANK YOU and hope you'd know how deep it came from the bottom of our hearts.

DIVINE PEACE, LOVE AND APPRECIATION FROM THE OLUGBILES

Raking leaves

Michelle Sharman

Ecclesiastes 3:1 “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.”

Cate and I went for a ride to my parents' house in Webster while they were away on vacation. It was sunny and warm, so several people in the neighborhood were outside raking leaves. I have always enjoyed raking leaves. It's one chore I don't mind doing. There's something about getting outdoors and exercising on a cool autumn day that is, well, relaxing to me. So I decided to take Cate outside and rake up some of my parents' leaves.

I started raking and Cate busied herself by running from pile to pile and looking at what was left of my mother's garden. I had about half of the leaves done when Cate came and wanted to try. So I put the rake down and she tried to pick it up by the handle to start raking. Of course, it was too heavy for her to actually move very far, but she did her best and was happy trying. She put the rake back down on the ground, I cheered her efforts and I picked up the rake to finish up.

However, Cate decided that she wanted to go back inside to play with her toys. So she started saying “mommy, mommy, up....inside”. OK. I put the rake away and brought her back inside where she hurried to her toys. I sat in my parents' sunroom looking out at the backyard. I had raked about three piles of leaves and gotten halfway through the yard. I began to think, maybe I could take Cate out again after she had played a little while, or maybe she could play by herself inside while I finished up outside. I was trying to think of how I could get all those leaves raked up when....plunk! “mommy, open”. OK. Open the box for more toys.

I stopped my thoughts. Cate wanted me to play. I looked outside again and could see my retired neighbor outside in her lawn raking leaves. I realized that there may come a day when I may have a whole afternoon by myself to rake leaves or do whatever I want to do, but not today. The leaves could wait. Today I was blessed to have time to play with Cate. With renewed vision, I gave Cate a big hug and played with her.

There is a time for everything. At this point of my life, I have time to spend with Cate and just play. Later, things may change and my time will be spent doing other things. At this time, some dear brothers and sisters are dealing with some very serious pain. But this season will pass and we can rejoice that one day we will all dance again.

No matter what our circumstances, let us remember Romans 12:1 and worship our Lord in every season.

“Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.”

Resolutions You Can Live By

Aileen Chow

Do you remember your 2004 New Year's resolution? Sometimes, it is difficult to think about resolutions for the New Year because it's like fixed rules you have to live by. You have to be honest and do what you believe is necessary for yourselves. The truth is – you can't keep promises because it's difficult to actually do it than saying that you'll do it. Are you like me? Have you set a goal to do something but end up not doing it? Well, don't fret over your failures or shortcomings. You cannot be perfect. Moreover, you cannot do everything that you've set out to do.

So, this is where God can help you. Instead of focusing on goals for yourselves, let God set these values in your heart. Here are the resolutions or values that you can live by. These values may actually help you focus on your personal goals. The first resolution is to leave the past behind. Isaiah 43:18 – 19, *"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!"* This is the first thing God let's us know. Forget what happened three months ago. Start now to do what you need to do. Start building new things in your life. Don't let the disappointments or failures control your life. Apostle Paul says, *"Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."* (Philip: 2:13-14). The past has no significance now. What is now has value. What is your focus now as you press on toward your goal?

When you have focused on your goals, and decided what to do in your life, your next step is to instill prayer in your lives. Become a people of prayer, like David, he lifted his eyes to the hills from which his help come from. John says (John 16: 24), *"...Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."* Never forget to pray and ask God what you need. However, be careful of what you pray since in the book of James (James 4:3) *"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives..."* BUT do not stop praying if you don't receive. You must picture yourself like that persistent widow in the parable in Luke. (Luke 18) Jesus told his disciples to always pray and not give up or become faint! You must not give up praying like the widow who pleaded for justice. After the judge became tired of hearing her plea, the widow was granted justice against her adversary. God will give to you what you ask. We can be certain of this through this scripture, *"Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours."* (Mark 11:24).

If you ask God for anything in your prayers you must not forget to ask God for wisdom. In the case of Solomon, he asked God for wisdom and not riches. Therefore, wisdom and knowledge were granted to him. *"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God,"* (James 1:5). Trust in God to provide you wisdom. You would need wisdom to help you get through your difficulties. Become like the wise man who built his house on the rock. Don't build it on anything or anywhere. It has to be built to withstand anything (the rain, the floods and the wind) or the house will fall. A wise

man hears the Word of God and does it.

Another resolution for you to live by is to have “diligent love for God and one another.” *“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God: but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”* 1 John 4:11 I found this “One Another” list published in the Church Bulletin Bits. This list may help us deal with relationships with one another.

God’s “One Another” Plan

The Bible has a long list of “one anothers.” As Christians, we should heed especially the following “one anothers” in our relationships with our fellow Christians.

Love one another. (John 13:34).
 Rejoice with one another (Rom. 12:15).
 Don’t judge one another (Rom. 14:13).
 Admonish one another (Rom. 15:14).
 Care for one another (1Cor. 12:25).
 Serve one another (Gal. 5:13).
 Forgive one another (Eph. 4:32).
 Encourage one another (1 Thess. 5:11).
 Pray for one another (James 5:16).
 Bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2)”

The last resolution to live by is to have a “thirsty soul” toward God. Matthew 5:6 says, *“Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be filled.”* Are you thirsty to know God more? This is a common resolution that we all yearn to do and to have. We all want to grow in Christ and to experience a spiritual relationship with Him. Again, I found this acronym poem in the Church Bulletin Bits. It shares a message how we should grow as Christians. I encourage you to cut this out or write this in your Bible. Hopefully, this will help us grow to “Pray”, “Work” and “Give” as a Christian. It will help remind us to always have a thirsty soul to know God. Lastly, that is all the resolutions that you can live by. They are great values that will help you get through the rest of the year.

How To Grow As A Christian

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17).
 Rejoice in the Lord always (Phil. 4:4).
 Add to you faith, virtue (2 Peter 1:5).
 You have not because you ask not (James 4:2).
 Whatsoever he said unto you, do (John 2:5).
 Only fear the Lord and serve Him (1 Sam. 12:24).
 Remember the words of the Lord Jesus (Acts 20: 20-35).
 Keep thyself pure (1 Tim. 5:22).
 Go into all the world and preach (Mark 16:15).
 In all your ways acknowledge Him (Prov. 3:6).
 Vow and pray unto the Lord your God (Ps. 76:11).
 Endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ (2 Tim. 2:3).

What The Ninth Chair Taught Me

Amy Yeh

A caring friend once told me that I seem to over exert myself in everything that I do. I must admit that when he said that, I was very upset. I was upset because most of my life, I have been striving to be that perfect “A” student; the girl who never makes mistakes. *And now someone was telling me that I shouldn't exert myself to the fullest in order to reach this goal of perfection?* The idea sounded completely ludicrous to me! *What does this friend know anything about all the pressures and expectations I had to meet?* I eventually brushed it off and returned to stressing over more “important” issues.

Before I go on, I must confess something else: I'm spoiled. God has blessed me with a wonderful family, opportunities to explore my interests, and a rich and warm environment of supportive friends. I have been very carefully sheltered from most pains of life. My work ethic equation was: working hard begets successful results. *No exceptions.* Therefore, since I generally always work hard, I should never have to experience the pain of failure.

Let me jump back to my junior year at Susquehannock high school. Since the first day I received the orchestra excerpts, I practiced my violin everyday in hopes that I could make it within the top six chairs of the first violin section. During the first rounds of auditions a few months prior, I was placed first chair in the district. Now my goal was to retain my chair so that I could move on to the regional rounds, and hopefully reach to the state orchestra level. I practiced the music for hours, and if I had to, I think I could have played the music while I was sleeping. I, Amy Yeh, wanted to be first.

On the day of the audition, they grouped everyone in fours to audition together. I walked down the long hallway with three other fellow violinists. My heart was pounding... this was the moment I had been waiting for. I, Amy Yeh, was going to make my long hours of practicing and lessons pay off in the ultimate reward of moving on to the next level! The four of us stood outside the door where the judges were and waited to be called on. The first girl went in. She did well despite her D string going haywire in the middle of the excerpt. Next, a boy went in. He also did well.

The third person to audition was my friend, a senior. She had never been able to go on to the next level, and this was her last year. Taking a deep breath, she mustered up all her courage and went in. However, her nerves overtook her playing and she stumbled through the passage. The girl at the door in charge of opening the door even made a face as a result of the performance. Offended for my friend, I said, “Don't do that! She's my friend!” When my friend came out of the room, she was on the verge of tears and ran to the bathroom. I didn't know what to do. Before I could do anything, I was pushed along into the room for my turn.

I remember praying before I played. I had prayed for peace and confidence. With that, I finished my audition smoothly. Inside, I knew I had

played an almost perfect performance. I knew that I had to be in the top six. But God had other plans...

When my name was finally called out, I couldn't believe it. *Ninth?! Ninth chair?! How could that be? I played so well?! Wait! How did my friend, who was so upset at her own playing, get to be seated third? Wait! How is it possible that she did better than the two other people we heard audition? This isn't right?! There must be some mistake! I should be sitting where she's sitting! That's MY chair! I'm only worth ninth chair...*

I was humiliated. I could not accept this failure. I replayed my own audition over and over again. *Where did I go wrong?* I cried all night after I had called my mom and cried to her about it. That had been one of the hardest times I cried in a long time. My mom told me that God had a reason for this to happen, as unfair as I thought it was. At that time, I didn't understand how my hard work did not work along with God's blessing to give me what I thought I deserved. Eventually, the whole event passed and I moved on to my next proving-myself-the-best-project.

It's a wonder how patient God is. It's a wonder how slow I learn God's lessons. I think I only began to understand this struggle I had with finding approval in accomplishments and praises when Bill came to speak at RCCC last school year. He spoke about giving up what we think are our rights. From that sermon, I began to realize how much I had been depending on my own abilities to rightfully claim as my accomplishments.

Over the summer, I played in my church's worship band every week. I learned a new song, Blessed be His Name. The bridge's lyrics were: *He gives and takes away, He gives and takes away, He gives and takes away; Blessed be his name.* This line really struck me as I played the chords on the keyboard. *Everything belongs to Him---- He has the right and power to give and take away anything that I have. And for that, blessed be his name! I need to allow him to take control of my life!*

Now, in my junior year in college, I am once again, battling face to face with this struggle. I am constantly faced with the pressures of learning piles of music along with academics week after week. I've even gotten yelled at by two teachers this semester for making needless mistakes in my playing. Both times, I was very upset and I felt as if I was the most horrible and irresponsible student in the entire world. *Oh! I should have practiced more! I'm such a moron! I'm such a slow learner! That teacher hates me!* But upon reflection, I was reminded of Galatians 1:10: *Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

Am I over exerting myself for Christ? Or for my own approval and the approval of others? I want to be a servant of Christ. I want to please Him and Him only. It is still very hard for me at times to "let go and let God," but through the ups and downs, I now accept that only He has control of my life. *He gives and takes away; Blessed be his name!*

The Last Samurai Eats Chips

Simien Lin

What kind of title is that? It has absolutely nothing to do with what I am going to share in this article... just kidding. Actually, the title represents two very important lessons that I have learned throughout the past six months here in Poughkeepsie, and I wish to share it with my church family here in Rochester

In a few weeks, my co-op here in Poughkeepsie will end. It's hard to imagine that not only will I be leaving Poughkeepsie but also the East coast. I am planning to move back to Kansas City and continue my job search there. My heart is filled with sadness for I know I will miss this place greatly. I lived in New York for fourteen years of my life, and now it is time to say goodbye to it all: goodbye to the friends I made along the way, goodbye to the memories created, and goodbye to the church families that I grew to love. I realized that leaving co-op this time will be different from the previous times. In the past co-ops, I was sad to leave the new friendships behind, but I found comfort in knowing that I would come back to Rochester and be embraced by the church family here. This time however, things are different. Not only am I just leaving Poughkeepsie (a place I've grown to love), but I will also be leaving Rochester (a place I would call home). I will be leaving behind the new friendships here in Poughkeepsie as well as the old friendships in Rochester.

To be quite honest, I was not at all okay with this. In fact I was quite upset with God, and I held a grudge against Him. In my heart, I felt that He was just toying with my desires. I asked myself, how is it that a loving God like Him would show me all the possible greatness in life, introduce me to things that I would grow to love, only to take those pleasures away from me. It's like dangling a piece of chip in front of a little baby who desires for that chip, only to stuff it in your mouth and eat the chip right in front of her longing eyes (I'm referring to the time when I did exactly that to Cate Sherman, and boy did she cry... she wouldn't even let me hold her for the next few weeks).

I felt that God was doing the same thing to me. First it was a relationship that I longed for (didn't quite work out), then it was a sales job with Keyence which was something I really wanted to do (gave me an offer then retracted it), and now it's Poughkeepsie. I was frustrated that He gave me this great opportunity to meet the brothers and sisters here in Poughkeepsie, develop intimate friendship with them, gave me hope for a potential job with IBM, but now taking all that away. Isn't that similar to what I did to Cate? Show her something that she wanted, then taking it away from her. The question of desires burned in my mind. I kept on asking God, "Why do you give me all these desires, show me things that whet my appetite, and yet never fulfill the longing of my heart?" I knew in the back of my mind that God has the best intention in mind and I shouldn't be angry with Him, but caught in the situation, it was easier said than done. Anger and frustration mixed with sorrow seized me and I cried out to God, questioning and complaining to Him. After much complaint, it finally clicked. God made me the way that I

am. He was the one that gave me these desires and these passions. Everything that I am, He knows, He created, and He granted to me. So if He ever wanted to take it away from me, who am I to argue with the Almighty God. But praise Him for His infinite grace and mercy that He was patient enough to put up with my whining. The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. When I was able to assess the situation with a clear mind, I realized that just as I knew it was bad to give a piece of chip to a baby who had no teeth to chew it, indeed God must also know that granting those desires of mine at that time would not be beneficial to me.



This brings me to my next point... the Last Samurai · See the connection? No? Allow me to explain. The Last Samurai is a movie about this American officer who was hired to teach Japanese soldiers how to use guns. Japan at the time was split into two groups. One group hoped for modernization while the other group tried to preserve the traditions of the old. The latter group was known as the samurai and they fought against the modernizing Japan. So the American captain, Captain Algren, was captured by the samurai warriors and held captive at their village. During that time, he questioned why they held him captive yet treated him with much respect and nothing like an enemy. During his stay, Captain Algren spent much time talking with the head samurai. What started out as a hostile relationship turned into a loving friendship.

Watching the movie this time around helped me answer some of the questions floating around in my mind. I can relate to how Captain Algren felt – confused as to the purpose of my stay here in Poughkeepsie. Then when I finally realized that I had fallen in love with the people and the place, it seems like they're about to be taken away from me. Once again, the question about desire surfaced. This time however, I dealt with my desires with a different perspective. Although saddened by the thought that I may very well be moving out of Poughkeepsie, I know that God put me here for a reason whether or not I know what that reason might be. I have learned to embrace and enjoy the time that I have spent here and hope to cherish the remainder of the that time. Many lessons were learned here and I feel that throughout these short six months I have grown tremendously.

At the beginning of this co-op, I truly felt that it would be my days of Moses

in the wilderness, similar to Captain Algren's environment. I was away from the comfort of Rochester, brought to a place that was very secluded. If it weren't for the fellowship here in Poughkeepsie town, I think I would have gone nuts. A few weekends ago, I took a trip down to the city and visited a church in Flushing. The sermon was about Moses. I smiled. How fitting it was, that near the end of my co-op God reminded me of Moses' story. The sermon talked about the two forty years of Moses. The first was during his time in the desert, and the second was his leading the Israelites. Moses might have felt that his time in the wilderness was a waste, but to God, it was not. It was very much needed to refine Moses and mold him into someone that God could use. Applying it to my situation now, I feel that God has used these six months to refine me and to develop a deeper faith in Him. I sincerely hope that it is His plan to end my "forty years in the wilderness" (more like 6 months) and begin my next forty years in doing His work. Perhaps He will provide me with a job and begin work, serving the church there, or maybe He'll have me go home and continue my next training session. Whatever it may be, I can honestly say that I am at peace with it all. His will be done!



The LORD is my Shepherd

Phay Ho

Thanksgiving is coming! But, when you read my sharing, Christmas might just be around the corner. Even though Thanksgiving has passed, we still need to count the blessings we received from God and look forward to the promises from God that are yet to come. In this season of Thanksgiving, we particularly need to thank our LORD for leading, loving and protecting us this far. I want to take this opportunity to share with you what I have learned from Him and what He has done in the college group in the past six months. Due to the limitation of space, I can only list out a few things.

The college group has one or two co-worker meetings per semester. During a co-worker meeting held at the end of the spring semester, we were looking for a person to serve as the coordinator for next year. (As far as I know, the college group changes its coordinator every year). To keep the story short, I was asked to consider. At that time, I was hesitating because, first, I have only been in the college fellowship for less than two years and, second and most importantly, I didn't think I was capable of leading this group of young Christians to spiritual growth. Thus, I didn't take up this role. However, I left the door open and agreed to coordinate the summer Bible study, which was usually attended by those who lived in Rochester and were more mature spiritually.

The planning of the summer Bible study was not that bad because Auntie Shirley gave me two different bible study materials to choose from and suggested a tentative schedule for me to make adjustments. All I had to do was to look for people to lead the singspiration and bible study. Thank the Lord that many brothers and sisters were willing to serve. The final schedule for the summer was up in no time. However, printing out the schedule and distributing the study material were not the things that the Lord wanted me to learn. He wanted me to care for and be sensitive to others, and to spend times to think about the needs, interests and burdens of others.

Since I was the coordinator, I had a lot of opportunities to interact with different people, especially the new friends who were brought into our midst. I was touched by those, like Henry Xiao and Fion Choi, who came to Rochester for their summer internship. Their duration of stay was short. In the midst of their busy schedule, they were eager to abide by Christ continuously and enjoyed the fellowship with the Brothers and Sisters. They even brought new friends to our bible study. They shared with us their needs and struggles openly. Through the fellowship with them, I deeply felt and was convinced of the importance of Christian fellowship. Before I only knew its importance from an intellectual level.

The summer was near the end. I agreed to coordinate the college group after Auntie Shirley listed me as the coordinator in one of the weekly prayer request sheets. Just to clarify, she didn't appoint or force me. I really didn't know why I didn't raise any objection. After all, I was still a very immature Christian and not capable of the task. Somehow I got this feeling (I am hesitating to call it faith) that God would be the leader. One thing for sure was that I was looking forward to have fellowship with the students, and I was willing to offer my time if it was needed. After I accepted the challenge, God began to show me who He is through the annual activities of our fellowship, like the orientation.

Orientation is an annual outreach event to introduce the college fellowship to the students of Eastman School of Music (ESM), Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) and University of Rochester (UR), particularly the new students, and to invite them to join our fellowship. In the past years, flyers were put out on corners of the three campuses and pamphlets were handed out by us at our own time to friends and new students that we met at the

beginning of the semester. This year we did it a little bit differently. We did a mini outreach activity on the campuses. We went to the dining halls and residential halls in RIT and UR together on the night of September 3 (Friday) to tell people, mostly students that we never met, about our fellowship and invite them to come to our orientation and the church picnic. ESM was not included in our plan because the Brothers and Sisters in ESM can take care of it at their own time.

The idea evolved from a conversation with Brother Bill OuYang. He told Tom and I separately about his ministry in Ithaca and how he reached out to new students in an occasion prepared by God. He went to the campus originally to chalk out information about the Sunday service, and saw a long line of students and their parents waiting to get food in the dining hall. Due to the nature of the line, the students were somewhat immobilized. Bill saw this opportunity to reach out to these students who were trapped and “waiting” for Bill. He went to them one by one down the line, focusing on the Chinese, and asked, “Are you Chinese?” “Are you interested in coming to church?” He handed out information about the church that he was serving. He told us that about 20 new students came to the Sunday service!

We were inspired by Bill’s testimony. After some discussions between Amy, Daniel, Tom and I, we decided to do something similar to reach out the students on the night of September 3. So I just sent out an e-mail to announce our plan and ask them to gather in my apartment at 6pm if they were interested. None of us has done this before, but I think we were ignorant and naive enough to try it. The only thing I knew was that we needed to pray before we went out. Since we didn’t require everyone to participate, I had no idea how many people would show up. In fact, I was worried that no one, except Daniel, Amy, Tom and I would be there, because not everyone is comfortable in telling people that he or she is a Christian.

At around 3pm, I received a call from Amy that five people from ESM needed a ride. I went to the Eastman dorm, and found that one car was not enough. I had to find another car to pick up the remaining people. When I drove back to my apartment, I saw that more than five people were already waiting in the playground in front of my apartment. The number of people didn’t stop there. People kept coming. At about 6pm, there were more than 20 people. Now I began to worry that my apartment wouldn’t be able to fit everyone. I stuffed all the people into my apartment to go over some basic guidelines and our goals and distributed the handout about our fellowship and upcoming events. Before we went out, we prayed together and asked God to guide us and give us the courage and wisdom to reach out to people.

Everyone had a blessed time and we shared some experiences and stories (some of them were funny) after we concluded this outreach activity. The next day when we were in the gym of UR playing badminton, some of the students even recognized us and said, “They are from the RCCCF.” After the game, Amy walked up to the two students who were playing next to us to invite them to come to our fellowship. God indeed prepared and touched people’s heart to join this ministry. His provision was more than

what I expected. Through this outreach activity, I witnessed that the LORD is our leader and only His love can attract people with very different backgrounds to work together.

After all the planning and preparations, the orientation was finally here. Daniel and I went to church to pick up some stuff in the afternoon. On the way back to UR, we got a phone call from Frank that he no longer needed the van to pick up the new RIT students because only one student was planning to come and the rest were not able to make it. When I heard this, my heart sank. "Only a few new comers will be there tonight. This is not good. The orientation is supposed to be for the new students. We failed. We have wasted all our efforts in planning. What did we do wrong?" These were the things that flashed through my mind. I immediately closed my eyes and prayed (Daniel was driving). "Lord, I just lift this orientation into your hands. You have guided us in planning and provided us with an alternate and better venue for the orientation when we didn't have our intended venue. I pray that you will bless this orientation, especially those new students even though there are not many of them."

When we arrived at U of R, many brothers and sisters were already there to help setting up. At about 7pm, many brothers and sisters from church began to arrive to show support for this event. Not only that, many of them brought at least one or two new friends. Just when I thought there wouldn't be any more new students from RIT, they began to show up. These were not the students that we invited during our outreach event. Some of these students were invited by "Ms. AAA" (I was asked not to mention her name) after the outreach event. She went to the library in RIT to "hunt" for the Asian students. When I saw that the registration table was crowded with new faces, I was speechless. After the orientation, I found out from the registration form that there were 25 new faces. His ways and provisions were beyond our imagination. I thought that the burden to invite new people rested on our shoulders. But God showed me that this was His job and He had His way to accomplish it.

I'm glad that God gave me this opportunity to serve in the college ministry. Sometimes I don't think that I'm even serving because God has done the works and prepared the ways long ago. But I believe that He wants to teach me about Him. He lets me experience the comfort of knowing He is in control. This experience is beyond what words can describe. To me this resembles the peace of God that "... transcends all understanding." (Philippians 4:7) So let's strive to live a life with the understanding and the faith that God is in total control.

Before I close, I want to ask all of you to pray for us in the college group. Some of us haven't known Him; some of us have just accepted Him, and some of us have been in Him for a while. Pray that we will recognize that none of us will ever be perfect, but we have a perfect God. He is our shepherd and He is the only one that is capable of leading and guiding every one of us to spiritual growth.