

Rochester Chinese Christian Church

ECHO

June 2011 Volume 29 No. 1



"I Know..."	<i>Pastor Mitchell R. Herring</i>	1
In Remembrance of Tony Wong	<i>Pastor Herman Tang</i>	3
A Very Special Brother	<i>Michelle Sharman</i>	4
The Tony I Know	<i>David Bartkowski</i>	6
A Thanksgiving Prayer	<i>Lawrence Tai</i>	8
Remembering Tony Wong	<i>Jack Yu</i>	9
Living under God's Grace	<i>Amy Lim</i>	11
Harvest the Field	<i>Aileen Chow</i>	13
A New City, A New Life	<i>Sam Ng</i>	15



Rochester Chinese Christian Church
羅城華人基督教會



1524 Jackson Road
Penfield, NY 14526
(585) 872-6708
www.rochesterccc.org

Pastor 牧師
Mitchell R. Herring 韓澤民
mherring@rochesterccc.org

English Sunday Worship
9:30 am

中文主日學
上午九時三十分

English Sunday School
11:15 am

中文主日崇拜
上午十一時十五分

Call the church for other
fellowship, bible study
& youth group meetings

欲知其他團契聚會
查經班，請電教會

Rochester Chinese Christian Church West
羅城西區華人基督教會

Located at

Henrietta Wesleyan Church
70 Thompson Road
Rochester, NY 14623



Pastor 牧師
Mitchell R. Herring 韓澤民
(585)872-6708
mherring@rochesterccc.org
www.rochesterccc.org

主日崇拜
Sunday Worship
下午 4:00 - 5:15 pm

主日學
Sunday School
下午 5:20 - 6:15 pm





"I Know..."

Pastor Mitchell Herring

Recently I have been thinking about the words "I know" and how often they appear in Scripture. This expression indicates that faith can grow into a conviction that is very real, personal, and clearly experienced. Let us look at a few of these.

Job 19:25---"*As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth.*" It is one thing to say that we believe Christ was raised from the dead. It is another to have such vital communion with the Lord so as to experience the reality of His presence in our own lives and consciousness. In the book of Job, this becomes a flash of great vision and hope that sustains, strengthens, and carries him in an otherwise tragic recitation of complaint and suffering.

Psalms 51:3---"*For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.*" David is expressing more just an awareness of his sin. Many people will say they know they're not perfect, and have done wrong. Psalm 51 goes far beyond this. David is expressing a *profoundly felt sense* of his iniquity before a holy God, and deep despair over it. While the occasion of the psalm is his adulterous affair with Bathsheba and killing of Uriah, yet this brings to his mind a broader reflection of his fallen nature, the deep hold that sin has on him, and his need to be purified, washed, and given a clean heart (v. 7, 10). The incident showed him how vile he must be to have even been capable of committing such evil in the first place. He was reeling in this discovery, and consumed with sorrow and contrition not only for what he did, but that he could even do it.

Isaiah 50:7---"*For the Lord helps me, therefore I am not disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed.*" In context the prophet was recounting his mistreatment and persecution as God's messenger to an unbelieving and ungodly people. In the preceding verse he speaks of being beaten, having his beard plucked, and of being

spit upon. Yet he does not feel disgrace; he stands firm, certain that he will not be ashamed. How is he so certain? Because he is deeply conscious of the reality of God's call, help and vindication. Despite his present affliction, he knows God is faithful and His Word is true, that this Word will prevail in the end, and that what he has said will be proved right after all. This "I know" becomes a source of great confidence and courage.

2 Timothy 1:12---"*For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believe, and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.*" At the time of this writing the apostle Paul was imprisoned and nearing the end of his life on earth. Immediately preceding this verse he spoke of the first coming of Christ, "who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (v. 10). It was this Jesus who called him on the road to Damascus, and to whom he had given the past thirty years of his life in the service of the gospel. Although in a sense he was serving a cause, yet more importantly he was serving the leader of that cause, Christ Himself. "I know" expresses the intensely personal testimony that goes far beyond just a creed. Doctrinal truth based on the Word of God is essential and foundational; but it is incomplete without the "I know." It is *not* just *what* I have believed, but as here, "*whom* I have believed." He *knew* Christ, who had called him, led him, stood by him and strengthened him (4:17). As Paul entrusted his life and the fruits of his ministry to Christ, he knew that Christ would guard these, keep them safe for the day of Christ's return.

The Lord promised His disciples, "*Ask and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be open to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened.*" (Lk. 11:9-10). Similarly, in Jeremiah 29:13 God says, "*You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart*" (Jer. 29:13). Let us likewise thirst and seek to come to the point of "I know," and that God, as J.I. Packer puts it, would give us just such "a deepened awareness of His inescapable presence as the Holy One, mighty and majestic, dwelling among His people" and of "the intimacy of the supernatural and the closeness of the living God." So that "I believe" may ripen and grow into the certainty of "I know."

In Remembrance of Tony Wong

Pastor Herman Tang

I received a call from a friend in Rochester on that Saturday morning. He said Tony just had a heart attack and he was gone. I was totally shocked and deeply saddened by the news of his sudden departure. A few months ago, Tony and his family came to the worship service at CBCOC. It was a pleasant surprise to me. I told him that I would have invited him to preach if I had known ahead of time of his coming to Orange County. He humorously remarked that that was exactly the reason why he did not want to tell me ahead of time. After his graduation from the University of Southern California, Tony went to Rochester, New York to complete his postdoctoral study in neuropsychology at the University of Rochester. My relationship with Tony started here in Los Angeles. It went all the way back to 1980, the year when I was invited to preach at FCBC-LA. Tony was one of the persons who drove me back and forth between speaking engagements. He was still studying in USC at that time. I remember asking him how he could afford to spend so much time serving in the church. He said, *"I believe if I take care of God's business, God will take care of me."* Such clear conviction in a 24-year-old Christian was quite impressive to me. What Tony said to me in his car on that day will remain with me forever.

Knowing Tony as born and raised in America, I often wondered how he could speak Toisanese so fluently. Then I got to know his parents and I got the answer. His parents came from Toisan. Tony honored his parents and he was also proud of his Toisanese heritage. No wonder he liked to converse with me in Toisanese. I have to say, Tony's Toisanese is far better than mine. It doesn't matter. We had a lot of fun. Tony was instrumental in leading his parents to the Lord. I can still remember how Tony had arranged for Dr. Lum and me to go visit and witness to his parents at their home. In 1997, my family also moved to Rochester, and we served the Lord together for the next 10 years, during which the Lord taught me many life-transforming lessons. I am so thankful that the Lord had put Tony by my side when I started my ministry in this new city. People who know Tony respect him for his personal integrity, spiritual wisdom and interpersonal skills. In addition, I admire Tony in many other ways. He had spiritual

discernment. He was an eloquent preacher. He was a loving husband and father. Above all, I thank the Lord for his godly character. Tony, I miss you. I will see you when I get to heaven.

A Very Special Brother In memory of Tony Wong

Michelle Sharman

It is always interesting how God brings people together at a certain time and place. It is even more interesting how those same people may find themselves together again many years later.

The story began when I was in high school. My parents were not Christian and my family didn't have anything to do with the church. When I was invited to the Rochester Chinese Christian Church (RCCC) youth group by a Chinese classmate, my parents thought it would be a good opportunity for me to meet more Chinese kids. I had no idea what to expect.

Though a lot of things from those years are fuzzy, I remember hearing Tony at a youth group mini-retreat at Letchworth State park. I don't know what caused Tony to be so bold to share the Gospel that day, but I do remember myself and many others answering the call when we were asked if we wanted to accept Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Little did I know that Tony was only in Rochester for a short time and he would go back to California soon after.

I have thought often about that day at Letchworth. We have all heard how important it is to share the Gospel and yet many are timid to do it. Maybe it will offend someone, maybe it will be embarrassing, maybe they will think of me as "one of those religious people". But if Tony did not share that day, I don't know where I would be. I have been through so many things since

that day that I could only face with God's help. Because of his boldness and his heart to share the Gospel, Tony brought many to know Jesus and pointed people to God. I was so thankful and it was through Tony I saw that one should never be ashamed of the Gospel.

Fast forward, I went to college, came back, started working in Rochester and came back to RCCC. Over the next 15 years, I would know Tony as a preacher, a Sunday school teacher, a Board member and a really smart man. He loved good food, his sports teams and his family. He shared about them freely in his sermons. I served alongside his wife Lois in children's ministry and took absolute joy in watching his kids Erin and Colin grow up. They were really cute kids.

So many years had passed since the first time I had heard Tony speak, but Tony hadn't changed. He was still the brother who taught straightforwardly. He was a leader who was given discernment from the Lord and he wasn't afraid to speak up.

It was good to see, a brother who truly loved the Lord and wanted what was best for the church. He served because he needed to be doing things for God: ministering to people, teaching them what God had taught him. I was still learning so much from him. I was learning not only through his sermons and teachings, but also by his example.

Tony pointed people to God. Isn't that what we all want to be able to do? To be such examples of a faith-filled walk with God that others see that in our lives and want that for themselves?

I am so thankful for what Tony taught me. I learned that to be a disciple of Jesus, you can be yourself, like how Tony loved to talk about food and USC, but God can use that to draw people to Him. I should never be afraid to tell about God because that may be that one time, that one day that makes a difference. I should always seek discernment from the Lord and not be afraid to say what needs to be said once I have heard His Word.

Finally, I must always walk in faith with the Lord, be in people's lives, use what gifts God has given because each day cannot be taken for granted. We don't know the number of our days, so we must make the most of each one and, like Tony, point people to God

The Tony I Know

David Bartkowski

I have known Tony for almost 20 years now and we grew very close as we served together in the pulpit ministry and on the church board here at RCCC. I have always had a tremendous amount of respect for him and, through those years, he became one of my closest friends and, in many ways, a mentor.

Tony had the gift of always knowing what to say no matter how difficult the situation was. Through my years I have learned that many people like to talk. But Tony didn't talk just to share his opinion. He talked with wisdom and spiritual insight. He relied not only on his professional training in psychology, but more importantly, on his high regard for the Word of God and the leading of the Holy Spirit. He not only studied the Word on a regular basis, but he taught it and lived out what he learned in his life.

While Tony enjoyed talking and was gifted at teaching and preaching, his greatest gift was his ability to listen. On the church board he was never afraid to share his point of view, but he was always more than willing to listen to others as well. God blessed him with the ability to listen to people, understand situations and apply biblical principles to the given situation. He didn't just apply this gift of listening to people; he also used it in his relationship with God. He never wanted to move forward based on human reasoning, but wanted to pray, wait and listen for the Lord's leading.

We all know how much Tony enjoyed food and Tony and I often found ourselves enjoying a meal together at a local restaurant. But, our time together wasn't all about eating. It was about two great friends sharing about the joys and trials of life and encouraging one another. We shared a lot about our faith, about our ministries, about our families and about our dreams and plans for the future.

Over the countless meals we shared with each other, it was clear to me how much he loved the Lord and how he cared for his wife and children. There is nothing he wouldn't have done for his family, and his friends. We shared a lot and he always had

sincere and helpful advice for me as a father and husband. In life it is very special to come across people that we feel comfortable being open and transparent with. Tony was one of those people for me. I miss the times we had together, talking, sharing, listening and praying for each other and our families.

I cannot come up with the words to express what Tony meant to me and how much I miss him. There is a part of my life that is missing right now and that is going to take some time to get used to. However, I am comforted to know that he is home with Christ, experiencing the best future and the best retirement possible. I know that he is in a much better place than he could be here and I know I will get to see him again in heaven. When the day does come for the Lord to call me home, I look forward to sitting down with Brother Tony and catching up over a great meal. I am sure he has the best places all picked out already. 😊



A Thanksgiving Prayer

Lawrence Tai

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for bringing Uncle Tony in our lives. His love and dedication to You through his serving on the pulpit, Sunday School teaching, and just the way he lived his life out for You has been an example to many.

Thank You too, for the teaching You provided through Uncle Tony. You have truly gifted Uncle Tony with the ability to preach messages that are encouraging and help us push forward in our daily walk with You. I remember him being the speaker at one of the first youth group retreats that I went to. Through his use of humor, his given ability to understand people, Uncle Tony really preached your Word fervently and we all benefited from his messages. Through Your use of Uncle Tony, I have been able to learn about living life as a Christian and just the importance of standing firm in our faith; having the conviction to call out the inadequacies in our lives, yet gently encouraging us to do what the Bible called us to do.

Thank You also, for the time you gave us with Uncle Tony. I will remember his love of USC. A few years back both our alma maters, Illinois and USC, were set to play each other in the Rose Bowl. Uncle Tony and his family were even planning on going to watch the game as I believe Erin was playing in the band. Before the game, we joked back and forth about who would win, with good-natured talk about how our respective teams were better. Unfortunately for me, Illinois was no match that day for USC which soundly beat Illinois, which I'm sure Uncle Tony enjoyed while watching the game in person.

Lord, in your Word, you tell us in Romans 8:18: *"...I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us..."* We know that Uncle Tony is in the comfort of your glorious presence. It is our prayer that we may press on to continue the good work You have done through Uncle Tony's life until we are all reunited again.

Amen.

Remembering Tony Wong

Jack Yu

I had the honor of serving with Tony Wong for a few years on the Board of Rochester Chinese Christian Church. During that time I made an observation about Tony: he wrote very long email messages. I have to admit that when I read some of these messages, I wondered why Tony took so much care to communicate in such detail. It seemed to me that sometimes Tony focused on issues that most other folks (including myself) would have brushed aside, or overlooked altogether. On one or two occasions I was curious enough to follow up with Tony, in order to better understand his perspective. But for the most part, I started to think of long, detailed email messages as just part of Tony's style, and I didn't think too much more about it.

After Tony left the Board, I met with him a couple of times over lunch and once over dinner. Among other things, we talked about our hopes and concerns for the church. We shared a common desire for the church: that brothers and sisters would be open and transparent with each other, and thus better able to encourage each other, bear each other's burdens, and when necessary, admonish each other. Tony had a phrase for it: he wanted people to "be real" with each other. But he also said something about our church that I didn't fully understand: "We don't listen to each other". To him, this was an acute issue in our church. I asked him to describe what a church would look like where people do listen to each other. He replied that such a church would be like the one we both envisioned: one in which people would "be real" with each other.

But I still didn't quite understand how he saw the issue, specifically, at our church. Who did he think wasn't listening to whom? In what way? In the last sermon Tony preached, I heard him say it again: "We don't listen to each other". I decided to follow up with Tony to ask him to help me better understand his perspective. We made plans to get together for lunch again. But before we could do so, Tony was gone.

After Tony's death, I decided to go back and reread the email messages he had written. As I did so, I discovered that Tony did write short messages as well as long. And as I read through the long messages more carefully, I saw consistent themes that emerged from them. It may have partly been Tony's style to be very detailed in his communication, but it was also clear that the

long messages came around issues he cared deeply about.

First, Tony put a lot of focus on the Board acting in unity. "It is very, very, important as leaders that we work together in one accord, trusting the Lord will guide us if only we trust Him more than our own opinions or feelings", he wrote. When the Board needed to decide on an issue, Tony put a high priority on having everyone contribute their input. He expressed concern when any Board members did not participate in the discussion or express what they really thought. "No fair crossing your fingers behind your back", he wrote. Once the Board reached a decision, it was very important to him that we all consistently supported the decision.

Second, it was very important to Tony that each of us paid very close attention to each other's words. It was clear that he read everyone else's messages very carefully, and if there was a concern raised by any Board member on any issue, he made sure that the concern was acknowledged and addressed. He also wrote that it is "very important that we listen to each other carefully and be accurate in our communications ... we should not put words in other people's mouths." That reminded me of instances in which I thought Tony focused on things I or others may have brushed aside: if one Board member took liberties interpreting or making assumptions based on the words of another -- even with good intentions -- Tony took care to point out what was actually said versus what was assumed. I realized that most of us, myself included, did not have the degree of sensitivity Tony had on this, and "We don't listen to each other" started to take on new meaning for me.

I see that both of these priorities are very much in line with the vision of "being real". I also realize that I was not listening carefully enough to pick up the first time what I was only able to detect upon rereading. I am grateful for that deeper understanding now.

I miss Tony. I miss his encouragement and challenges to me as a brother in Christ. His long email messages, now even after his death, have given me greater insight into the things that mattered deeply to him, that were close to his heart. Now that he is gone, it is even more important to me that the church progress towards what he hoped for and what I (and others, I know) continue to hope for -- a community where brothers and sisters would "be real" with one another. I am thankful to the Lord that He saw fit to have Tony in our midst, if even for too short of a time, and to influence us through him as He did.

Living under God's Grace

Amy Lim

Recently God has been asking me, "Am I enough for you? Do you believe that my grace is sufficient?" Perhaps it's because I'm in between chapters of life, having completed my education at Eastman, and not knowing where I will be next. However, these questions caused me to reflect on a period of my life when my answers would have been different. I would like to share this briefly with you.

"He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus..." (2 Tim. 1:9)

There was a stage in my spiritual journey when I struggled with God's grace. For many years I didn't grasp this truth in its entirety. I knew in my mind that Christ had died for me on the cross and that I was forgiven. I knew intellectually that God loved me unconditionally, and that I was His child. The missing piece, and consequently the root of my insecurity throughout those years, was my lack of application of this truth. As the common saying goes, it's one thing to know it in your head and another to know it in your heart. For a long time I lived as though my thoughts and actions affected the magnitude of His love for me. I felt that I needed to earn it and as a result put my own limitations on God.

This unhealthy thinking trapped me in many ways and stole my self-confidence. My motivation for being obedient and doing good works stemmed from my desire to be loved more and accepted by God. My relationship with people also reflected this mindset as I constantly sought approval from others. If my good works could make God love me more, then what happened when I sinned? Exactly the opposite (I thought to myself) – God's love decreased and perhaps my sin was too much to forgive. Thinking back, several factors in my life may have influenced me to think this way, even though I was constantly reminded at home of God's unconditional love. However, this imprisoning misconception that God's love for me changed depending on my actions, and that His forgiveness was limited, was ultimately a lie

used by Satan to prevent me from growing in my relationship with the Lord.

“And if by grace, then it cannot be based on works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.” (Romans 11:6)

A turning point occurred when I finally *believed* the simple yet profound truth that God loves me and accepts me as I am, in spite of all my flaws and many past mistakes. I’m saved by His grace alone, and my actions cannot influence His love. He knows me intimately and loves imperfect me, more than I could ever imagine. All I have to do is accept this grace, surrender myself to God, and allow Him to work through me as I live out my faith.

Internalizing this truth changed my relationship with God and who I am today. It also enabled me to accept myself because the Creator of the universe does. I found freedom in God’s love and grace, which is more than enough for me.

To quote a book that I recently read, God’s grace “demands nothing from us but that we shall await it with confidence and acknowledge it with gratitude”.



Harvest the Field

Aileen Chow

On Easter Sunday, April 24th, members of the Grapes Fellowship gathered in the sanctuary to witness our friends getting baptized. It was a joy to see them take the step in becoming Christians. Members of the group threw a barbecue party the day before to celebrate the occasion. This was the first time we had an event like this and it marked a new beginning not only for the new believers, but for our group. It is an encouragement from God. As we continue planting seeds of God's words in people's lives, we begin to see God's mercy and grace in the harvest. We should not give up hope in harvesting the field, to spread the gospel, even though at times it seems like we don't see the fruits of our labor.

I will flashback two decades ago. Way back in 1990, our fellowship group had many members who were single and working professionals. Most of us were Christians. We met regularly for Bible studies at church, and we also had many activities together. We enjoyed each other's company like a bunch of grapes. Back then, Barry and I had a blessed time fellowshiping with the Grapes, but we did not serve in any significant way. We were in it for the ride. Then, starting in 2002, the dynamics of the group began to change. Some members started to have children, so they could no longer serve in the group. And with the changing economy and businesses, some of the Grapees lost their jobs and had to move away.

In 2005, Barry and I started our own ministry reaching out to students and bringing them to Bible studies.

Through the years, we had seen some ups and downs in our fellowship's attendance. By 2007, we saw a decline in our fellowship. Our core group was down to four people. By that summer, four became two. Only Barry and I remained in the core group. We were the only Grapees left from the 90's. Somehow, we did not move on. We became concerned, so we prayed. Our prayers were answered, God brought a faithful couple to the Grapes and they were a great help in continuing the group. We saw a growth in our group gradually. Things

were looking up. By 2008, Barry and I took the step forward in becoming Grapes coordinators.

It was at this time, we began to see non-believers coming to our group. We saw the need to reach out to them. We saw the harvest was plentiful, but we only had a few workers. The Grapes no longer consists of mostly Christian. It was almost half non-Christians or new Christians. The need for workers was greater than ever. We prayed that God would send workers to the Grapes. And He did. Each time when we had a coordinator leaving the group, another would show up. In the last three years, we had three coordinators left their post and each time the void was filled. We were thankful that they were able to pitch in.

Last year when we had issues with meeting locations, we were down to a single location. But we were not deterred. And God is faithful. Now we have five locations to meet for Bible Study!

So, what did we learn from this experience? So many things, God will provide our needs. *“And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:19); God is faithful, *“The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made”* (Psalm 145: 13); God wants us to become mature Christian *“Solid food is for the mature”* (Hebrews 5:14), and most of all, through the last 15 years growing in Grapes, we have finally understand what it means and what it takes in Matthew 28:19, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.”*

God’s work is unlike any work in this world. The “reward” is immeasurable. The joy we received from sowing the seed to harvesting the field was more than we could imagine. We urge you to consider becoming God’s faithful workers. It might seem difficult to take the first step. And at times you might feel discouraged, but if you persevere, you will come out a stronger Christian, we did.

Well, got to go now. Students are waiting for us to pick them up to go grocery shopping! 😊

A New City, A New Life

Sam Ng

Summer 2008 was for us a memorable season. Entering the final year of our first decade in the United States, Wendy and I had just moved to our third city (and state) after an 880-mile road trip with a toddler and a baby. Elias was not a stranger to long road trips; he had an even longer one from Rochester NY, his birthplace, to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where Charis was to be born. We practically knew no one in the deep South when we ventured down there, and we found ourselves in the same situation this time as we arrived in the queen city of the Midwest on that warm August summer night. The view of I-275 from the Sharonville Holiday Inn was at once beautiful and daunting: the flickering lights below may seem enchanting, but would our new journey here be as brightly illumined? Or will our new adventure be as rocky as last time when that tropical monster with a beautiful name devastated our region during only our third week there and dragged us into a state of depression?

The key, both Wendy and I thought, was to find a spiritual home to worship and fellowship as quickly as we could. The next day, our very first full one in town, happened to be the Lord's Day, so we wasted no time to take on the formidable task of church hunting. Having done our homework and located several churches that interested us, we decided to first visit a Baptist church—a denomination with which I was at home—that had a rather substantial international ministry. Long story short, I felt strongly that it was not meant to be after the worship service. Wendy wanted to give it another try; I was sure that we had to go somewhere else.

Meanwhile, CCC had in fact contacted us several times. Affected by the kindness and sincerity of those who called us, I decided we would visit the next week. We went early to investigate the nursery and see how Charis would handle it. While we were there, we met an amiable couple with two adorable children. I felt a tinge of uneasiness having to initiate a conversation with strangers, but the friendliness of the couple made the formality much more pleasant than it would have been. (Before long I realized that the “couple” in fact had their own individual spouses.) After taking Elias to his Sunday school and

meeting briefly his teacher (who had, and still has, an infectious smile), I went upstairs to the ANC Sunday worship. A quick glance at the congregation promptly alleviated some of the fears I had about going to the “English congregation” of a Chinese church—mainly that Wendy and I would look like seriously overage members of a colossal youth group. I was most impressed at the end of the service that quite a few people came up to greet me and showed genuine sincerity and interest. Their hospitality made me feel right at home. I stayed for the Chinese worship, and felt equally at home with the opening traditional hymn, the Bible-saturated expository preaching, and more friendly faces and greetings. We returned the next week and attended the Cantonese Sunday school and found the teaching to completely bible-based, relevant, and applicable that I came out of it full of excitement about our future in Cincinnati. I told Wendy that we were staying.

We stayed with the Cantonese Sunday school/Chinese worship combo for a while, but our services in various capacities would later convince us to “leave” for the ANC. All the while, God spoke clearly to us through brothers and sisters from both congregations that we ought to have a deeper love and stronger passion for God’s word. We had been Christians for many years, but reading the Bible had always felt like a chore before God transformed our attitude and heart in the past two years. Through our study of 1 and 2 Peter during Sunday worship, the study of John in the family fellowship, and the study of systematic theology in Sunday school, Wendy and I felt that the Spirit was stirring in us a hunger for God’s word and sound doctrine. And what a difference this has proved to be.

Monday, April 13, 2009. Wendy was still a month from her due date. She went to her book study group with several sisters, one of whom spotted something wrong about Wendy’s complexion: she was looking extremely jaundiced. The Spirit must have instilled a sense of urgency in Wendy’s heart that she immediately called her doctor. They took her in for a blood test on the same day. Wednesday, while I was in the middle of a class, my cell phone rang. Wendy knew I was teaching at that time, so I knew right then that something was wrong. “Dear, I have to be admitted to the hospital right now.” She went on to explain that the blood test had revealed a serious malfunctioning of the liver. About an hour later, we found ourselves at Bethesda

North. A nurse came in, followed by a high-risk OB/GYN. The best they could do was to explain to us the several possibilities of what the condition could be and the complications each one entailed. The liver specialist, as they told us, was on his way to see us.

He did finally show up—on Thursday morning. He had come to the hospital on Wednesday night, but, as he said, could not locate our room and decided to go home. His presence proved equally uncomfoting. All he could tell us was that they were still waiting for the results of some tests, and until then, they would not recommend having a delivery because some of the possible conditions they suspected could involve hemorrhage.

Time felt frozen.

Many moments later, I was at home watching the clocks tick while the kids were taking their nap. Wendy called. “My contractions are becoming very regular; I think I might go into labor very soon.” From the lethargic hands of the clock, my mind drifted to the frantic pounding of my heart. Didn’t the doctors just tell us in the morning that she was not supposed to deliver before they could figure out what the condition was? About half an hour later I was in the delivery room with Wendy waiting for the doctor to come. Her contractions were stronger and more regular by the minute, and the pressure on her cervix (and on my hands) was getting unbearable. The doctor had just barely made it to the delivery suite when we saw Evangelyn’s crown. As soon as the whole head emerged, I noticed that the cord was around her neck. I later understood that this was not a major complication, but the sight of the doctor hastily cutting the cord was a bit unnerving at that time, especially when I was still waiting in suspense whether the hemorrhage they mentioned would occur. Once the cord was severed, Evangelyn popped out all right, but the following scene still sends chills right down my spine even today. When the placenta came out, even my layman eye noticed that it did not look normal: it appeared as if either someone had torn it up inside or it had gone past its expiry date and rotted. The doctor said with a rather alarmed look on his face, “Ah, so that’s what happened.” He would then go on to explain that Wendy had a placenta abruption, which probably contributed to the sudden and violent contractions and lightning speed of delivery. Before he finished explaining this to me,

blood was gushing out so profusely like Moses had just hit Wendy's belly with his staff. I stood there thinking, "Is this it? Am I losing her?" Deep inside me, though, I felt a sense of peace and quietness that could not have come from myself. The Spirit must have been reminding me while I was confronted with all this distress that everything that was to happen could only come to pass by God's sovereignty and grace. Although witnessing the whole situation unfold was extremely stressful, God was there the whole time to reassure us of His love and faithfulness. All the while Jesus' great promise was lurking at the back of my head: "*In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*" (John 16:33)

On hindsight, God's amazing power was truly revealed in man's weakness. At the hospital, patients find themselves at the mercy of the health care providers. As much as Wendy and I had tremendous respect for our doctors, they were not able to do much to help. When they were still waiting for test results to come so they could decide accordingly the course of action, God mightily intervened through a placenta abruption and a lightning fast delivery. He closed up Wendy's wound, stopped the profuse bleeding, and with the delivery initiated the process of healing the malfunctioning liver. He preserved Evangelyn's and Wendy's life, and by doing so, probably also preserved my sanity. In this, we experienced the Lord's great promise in 2 Corinthians 12:9: "*But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'*" The assurance in Romans 8:28 also hits home: "*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*" The book study group, the sister who spotted Wendy's jaundice, Wendy's sense of urgency in getting the blood test, the doctor's indecisiveness and helplessness, and the placenta abruption; they all worked together to preserve Wendy's life and give God all the glory. But I also kept wondering: What if Wendy and Evangelyn did die? Would Romans 8:28 still resonate with me? I believe that it would, for a couple verses later, Paul reminds us that nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from the love of the Father: "*For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" (Romans 8:38-39) The

Father has already given us Christ. Not even death can lure us into believing that God doesn't care.

Through this trial, we are convicted again that God's word ought to be our deepest passion above everything. It is the map that shows us the right direction of our journey, the light that illumines our path, the water that quenches our thirst, the food that gives us strength, and the air that sustains our life and faith to journey on. Growing up, I had lived for a long time a life where the Bible was a mere ornament that made no real differences in our daily lives. Now I see how I was deceived. Without God's word, how do we even conceive of living a life of hope and power that glorifies His name and brings people to Him? How do we fend off the attacks of Satan? How do we abide in Him when we don't know His will for us as revealed in the Bible? No wonder I was a weak husband for a long time who only knew winning physical bread for my family and cared not to be the spiritual leader—the authentic role of man in the household instituted by God. No wonder Wendy had for so long found it difficult to practice submissiveness. By God's grace, our lives and our relationship have been radically transformed through abiding in His word and discovering the sweetness of the relationship between a servant-leader and a submissive helper (as opposed to that between a world conqueror and a husband controller).

Recently I read in John Piper's *Desiring God* his retelling of a story originally told by Richard Wurmbrand. It impressed me so much because it made me realize what it really means to lead a radical Christian life. Wurmbrand's story tells of a Cistercian abbot being interviewed on television about his faith. The interviewer asked the abbot, "And what if you were to realize at the end of your life that atheism is true—that there is no God? Tell me, what if that were true?" The abbot replied, "Holiness, silence, and sacrifice are beautiful in themselves, even without the promise of the reward. I still will have used my life well." From my human perspective, I thought it was a beautiful and, to some extent, a "Christian" answer. And how wrong I was! Imagine the shame I felt when I continued to read what Piper wrote:

The first impact of the abbot's response was a superficial, romantic surge of glory. But then something stuck. It did not sit well. Something was

wrong. At first I could not figure it out. Then I turned to the great Christian sufferer, the apostle Paul, and was stunned by the gulf between him and the abbot ... Paul gave his answer in 1 Corinthians 15:19: *"If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied."* This is the exact opposite of the abbot's answer (p. 254).

A radical Christian life is a life when everything in the universe falls apart, we can still say "We have Jesus, and that is enough." The Spirit has reminded us in this past year that only through abiding in His word every day that we can live an abundant and God-glorifying life like Paul had. Indeed, if only in this life we have lived out those "beautiful" virtues or even prospered in ways that would make the world envy by believing in a God that turns out to have no eternal reality, we are truly the most pitiful.

That Thursday when I took Elias home from the hospital, I asked him a question that I guess Chinese parents in their right minds would never ask their children: "Elias, would you be very sad if mommy dies?" Elias's reply still touches me deeply today: "No, because I know that I'll see her in heaven." To have this simple faith in an eternal relationship with God through Christ and to be able to live a joyful and God-glorifying life in this world based on that hope is what I pray that we all experience every day.

Now and again, when I happen to drive by that Sharonville overlook at night, my mind wanders back to that first night when we arrived in the queen city wondering what the King has in store for us. So far, it could not have been any better.

