

Rochester Chinese Christian Church

ECHO

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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

Minister 傳道
Peter Ho 何漢慶
pho@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
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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**

(585) 872-6708
www.rochesterccc.org

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

Minister 傳道
Peter Ho 何漢慶
pho@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





Prayer for the New Year

Pastor Mitchell Herring

"And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:9-11) .

As we come to the beginning of a new year, my fond hope is that you, I, and our church grow in what the apostle prays here. This is one of those model prayers that we would do well to memorize and emulate. Would that we would do just that, not with just the words alone but also with the fervent desire that the words express.

First of all, this passage teaches us that real Christian love has a *certain framework and objectivity that defines it, directs it, and protects it*. The prayer asks that their love may abound still more and more, within the parameters of *"real knowledge and all discernment"* (v. 9). By "knowledge and discernment" he is *not* referring to just some subjective sense or feeling, which some may even go so far as to say is "from the Holy Spirit." Rather, he is speaking of that which comes from the objective truth of the Word of God--not merely a Scripture verse here and there, but which is in accord with Scripture as a comprehensive whole. Ultimately, this is what truly reveals the heart of God.

For many of us, our knowledge of Scripture is in bits and pieces. And we will usually tend to emphasize those "pieces" that support our preconceptions or how we may feel. We will always be prone to emphasize this or that aspect of truth and lose sight of the whole. For instance, if we so emphasize "love" that we ignore or condone what is clearly unscriptural, we need to know that *this is not the love spoken of here, nor is it of the Holy Spirit*. Delighting to point out sin in others with a judgmental spirit also misses the mark in the other direction. Only love that is in

“knowledge and discernment” is love that is directed, edifying, and real. “Knowledge and discernment” is its “scaffolding,” and the Holy Spirit builds this scaffolding in us only as we seek to understand the Scripture as a comprehensive whole, and take seriously its authority, precepts and truth, so that we will submit to it no matter how we feel.

That “knowledge and discernment” here have strong ethical overtones is very clear from the context: “...that you may approve (or “distinguish,” or “discern”) the things that are excellent...be sincere and blameless...filled with the fruit of righteousness...” (v.10-11). “Righteousness” in the Bible can have either a legal sense (as in justification---“acquitted,” “declared righteous,” given a “righteous standing”) or an ethical sense. In this passage, the words “blameless” and “fruit” of righteousness clearly point to the ethical sense here.

In other words, God cares about righteousness! He wants you and me to be righteous. He wants our church to be righteous. He wants us to hunger and thirst for it, and to pursue it. “Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles...” (1 Pt. 2:12).

Love for others or enthusiasm for getting out the gospel does not give us liberty to condone sin, be undiscerning, or compromise on righteousness. To do so would only undermine the message we preach, and discredit the gospel. God does *not* say, “You are so loving, so zealous for the gospel, I am so moved, so for the sake of the gospel we can overlook righteousness...” This is man's way of thinking, not God's. God does not bless unrighteous means to proclaim the gospel. But He will honor righteous means done in faith according to the truth of His Word to accomplish His work. This applies, perhaps especially so, to closed countries. Be prudent, yes; wise, yes; careful, yes (“be prudent as serpents and innocent as doves,” Mt. 10:16). But unrighteous, no. Deceitful, no. Disrespectful, no. This is not real love, nor is it of the Holy Spirit. But righteousness is the conduit for the expression of real love, the love Paul speaks of here. This love abounds *in quality* in proportion to growth in our knowledge and discernment directing us how to live it. The result is the fruit of righteousness through Christ, to the glory of God. Notice, he says it is “*through Christ*.” That means we can't accomplish this on our own. We look to Christ, and seek it from Him. That is what this prayer is all about.

And what a beautiful prayer this is. It is balanced and comprehensive. It is of the Holy Spirit. It is the heart of God. May it also be the cry of our hearts and burden of our souls. May it be our prayer, my brother, my sister, for the new year.



The Heart Is Deceitful

Minister Peter Ho

In the month of November 2011, Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) has enjoyed free publicity, except that it is not in a positive way. The reputation of this esteemed institution has been tainted by an assistant football coach who is alleged to have sexually assaulted teenage boys. Other than ruining the reputation of the institution, this scandal caused by Jerry Sandusky has brought down the university president and the legendary eighty-four year old head coach who has been with the team for forty six years, as well as caused the arrest of two university administrators. These four individuals were blamed for not reporting to the authority what was brought to their attention for the first time in 2002 by a graduate assistant.

In his blog (AlbertMohler.com), Dr. R. Albert Mohler Jr., the president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) in Louisville, Kentucky, writes a commentary entitled *The Tragic Lessons of Penn State – A Call to Action* with a subtitle: *What would prevent this scandal at your school or church?* Mohler's main point is that, because of this scandal, "the whole world changed today" into a new moral awareness. For this reason, he provides a remedy to prevent this scandal in schools or churches. Curiously, however, his call to action is that "church

leaders and pastors must decide now – not later – that we will respond to any report of sexual abuse with immediate action and an immediate call to law enforcement officials.” It is *after* notifying law enforcement authorities that the church conduct its own work of pastoral ministry, care, and church discipline.

While I do not disagree that every violation of the law, especially sexual abuses toward minors, be reported to the authority – let every person be subject to the governing authorities (Rom. 13:1), and that the essential Christian ministries and responsibilities of caring and disciplining are not substitutes for the proper function of law enforcement authorities and the legal system – I am curious how this reporting could be considered prevention rather than damage control. What is done certainly cannot be undone. Once an abuse has transpired, what can be prevented are only further abuses by bringing the perpetrator to justice. A true prevention, however, is the prevention of the first offense, that is, even before the desire gives birth to sin by being cognizant and careful of the deceitfulness of the heart: our own heart, our fellow co-workers’, as well as the hearts of those we minister to.

In 1977, Sandusky, who adopted six children and took in foster children with his wife, founded *The Second Mile*, a non-profit organization for underprivileged youths. For his work with this charity to provide care for foster children, in 2002 then U.S. Senator Rick Santorum nominated him for *Angels in Adoption* award, presented by the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, a non-profit adoption awareness organization. This award was rescinded after his arrest.

In light of this scandal, a legitimate question one may now ask is whether Sandusky founded this organization with a true motivation to help underprivileged youth, or to cover up his perverted desire? However, we may never get a truthful answer to this question. Sandusky may be right when he said in a nationally televised phone interview, “I didn’t go around seeking out every young person for sexual needs that I’ve helped.” In other words, these kids were right there in his backyard! Incidentally, Sandusky’s house is very close to an elementary school.

On matters like this, and there are two other similar stories coming to the surface as I am writing this article (the Citadel and

Syracuse University), I believe the perpetrators do not turn into child predators overnight. They don't wake up in the morning and suddenly become child molesters. The most common explanation circulating today is that child molesters are usually people who were abused in their childhood. This suggestion in and of itself is not without truth, but being abused as a child is not a determining and necessary factor, as if the individual has no choice. It does not automatically make one a child molester in adulthood. Between then and now, lots of life-changing events may have happened. One such event is one's encounter with the gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ.

Some may understand that the gospel is only meant for those who have not believed in Christ, but the truth of the matter is, one does not stop with believing in the gospel. Rather, every believer needs to receive the gospel repeatedly, and our lives need to be saturated with the gospel on a daily basis in order to lead a gospel-driven life. The apostle Paul says to the Philippian church, "Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1:27). It could be paraphrased as, "Let your life show that you are continuously changed by God's grace."

What would then be a gospel-centered approach to the matter at hand in terms of true prevention? I would suggest three courses of action, in no particular order:

1. *Do you love the person?* Ed Welch, author of several helpful books on personal ministry, often reminds the counseling classes he teaches, "Do you love your counselee?" In this regard, we do well to ask ourselves, "Do I love the person I help or minister to?" It is important to point out that "love" here is not the kind of love we find in romantic novels or Hollywood movies, but rather the kind of love defined in 1 Cor. 13:1-8 ("Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant...") and exemplified by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.
2. If we do love the person, we do not take advantage of him and abuse the trust given to us. Instead, in love we seek her well-being rather than what we desire (recognition, respect, love, sex, etc.). Our deceitful heart may try to convince us that we do love the person, but it helps to always bring it to

the all-knowing God to have it checked and to be cleansed by His Word and Spirit.

3. *See the “Sandusky” in all of us.* We tend to think that what Sandusky has done is unthinkable and outrageous, but in actuality, we are more like him than not. We differ from him only in degree (quantitatively), but not in kind (qualitatively). Let me explain. The Bible clearly says that “all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23), so in this respect we are all sinners without exception. Being sinners, we all are prone to sin. It is only by God’s grace that we are restrained from committing a particular abhorrent sin, not because we have a better family or education or cultural background. The “little” sins that we have committed daily remind us of our neediness for God’s grace, which grants us forgiveness in Christ, although our deceitful heart tries to convince us that we are “good” people who make mistakes occasionally. We need to keep any degree of indwelling sin within us in check by constantly fighting it with the power of the gospel (confessions, repentance, obedience, etc.).
4. *Build up our “Penn State” community.* The adage “no man is an island” is particularly true in Christian life. To grow into Christ-likeness and to face stormy weather, Christians need to belong to a godly community for support and accountability. If the church is too big to be effective, then a smaller “care group” may function better. In order to keep deceitful hearts in check, people in this community ask and answer truthfully what David Powlison, a counselor at CCEF (www.ccef.org), calls “X-Ray Questions,” such as “What do you love/fear?” “What do you want/seek?” “What/who do you trust?” “What would bring you the greatest pleasure/pain?” and others of this sort.

If you agree with what the Bible says, that “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick” (Jer. 17:9), you will find hope to deal with it by immersing ourselves in the abounding grace of Christ and resting in Him.

What a Relationship!

A. Sojourner

In the latter part of Isaiah 65 from v. 17 to 25, the prophet describes a wonderful scenario of the end time when God creates the new heavens and a new earth and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. There will be no more sorrow, sadness and pain but real joy, gladness, peace and abundance forever. Of the nine verses that depict this God designed, ultimate scenario, one verse stands out poignantly and it describes the relationship between God and his children--- *"Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear."* (Isa. 65:24)

When we think of a close relationship, the picture that enters our minds is usually physical, such as handholding, hugging, or looking at each other with affection. There is nothing wrong with that picture, except it is only the outward expression; things we can see. What really connects two individuals goes much deeper than the physical. It is the communication, particularly the verbal communication that binds the two together.

Years ago, my college friend invited me to his parents' home for a dinner. It was the first time I met his mother and stepfather, both in their sixties. They were very nice and treated me like one of the family, so much so that during the dinner they even argued about certain things several times in front of me, their first time guest. My friend told me that this happened quite often. I asked him if he was worried about his parents' arguments and whether it would lead to another divorce for his mother. His answer surprised me. He said the key reason for his biological parents' divorce was the lack of communication between them, and because of that, they grew apart and ended up in divorce. He added the arguments were actually a good sign that they were communicating openly with each other. He was right, for his parents stayed together until death did them part.

While regular arguments may or may not be a good sign of a normal and healthy marriage, a lack of communication is definitely not indicative of a healthy relationship. That is why God inspired Isaiah to make a point about communication being a key element of a close relationship. We may have constant

communication with our loved ones such as our spouse, our parents, our children and our siblings, but how much communication do we have with God? How often do we communicate with Him through prayers, Bible reading, and meditating on His Word? And when we pray, how often do we feel that God is not listening because our prayers have not been answered? Actually, God answers all prayers---Yes, No or Wait. We just don't like the 'No' or 'Wait' answer, so we either keep nagging God for the 'Yes' answer or give up praying all together.

How wonderful will it be if God answers before we even call, and listens intently while we are speaking. We don't have to wait for the end time to have such a close relationship. If we spend more time with God, we will get close to Him and know Him better. We will have a better sense of His likes and dislikes, and grow to be more obedient to His commands and submissive to His sovereignty. Our prayers will be more and more in line with His purpose and plans for our lives, and we will get more 'Yes' answers to our supplications. That's what David was saying in Ps. 37:4 *"Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart."* And that's why James wrote in Jas. 4:3 *"When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures."* It's all a matter of relationship---that is, our relationship with God.



To Re-live

Ann Leung Lee

Translator: This is my mother's testimony about her experience of God's Great Power, Grace and Healing. If you read Chinese, please see the original Chinese text. This English translation may not capture the robust, literal and intricate nuances (Lily Lee).

While I was unconscious, God used water to wake up my husband. When he was taking his shower, our ever-Omnipresent and Almighty God revealed Himself by giving him clarity and wisdom in directing my family to take me to the hospital. This past February 9, 2011, I was rushed to the emergency, "trauma" unit of the hospital in a comatose state. During the rush of emergency procedures, and after being set up with a life respirator, the medical team diagnosed me with low sodium and electrolytes and pneumonia.

I was unaware of the extensive activities that took place in the trauma and intensive care units until later when I realized what an Almighty and Loving God we have. He was with me all along, watching, protecting and making it possible for me to pull through peacefully with each critical moment episode by episode. My body weakened and was stricken by abnormal blood pressure; the doctors were at times uncertain of what the multiple issues were at hand. As treatments and remedies, they recommended sedatives, morphine, blood transfusion and injection procedures, etc. These proposed treatments were risky with unknown consequences. For instance, wouldn't it be risky to further sedate an already semi-conscious patient? Before the doctors can administer the proposed sedatives and morphine, the Holy Spirit enabled me to open my eyes and to utter my first two spoken words; they were "overturned stomach" and that stopped the administration of sedatives and morphine. The timing was perfect; not one second earlier or later. Only our "Almighty Father can precision such an occurrence; praise the Lord!

Based on the "overturned stomach" event above, Pastor Herring, who was present and witnessed the situation, later expressed that "our Lord had indeed brought a miraculous healing upon

Mrs. Lee.” Although my husband is of a more reserved and traditional mind that readily deferred to the doctors’ recommendations regarding medications and procedures, all four of my grown children had their own minds and did not agree. Throughout much deliberation and prayer asking for wisdom and discernment, my children asked God to intercede. Today, we know that through God my children made all the right decisions. Thank you, God for guiding them through those difficult times.

Getting out of intensive care and while waiting for a single room, I ended up in a regular room where two shared a room. Amidst the abundant noise and patients; surprisingly, I rested quietly, slept well and felt spiritually at peace. This was clearly the work of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord Jesus Christ, after His resurrection and ascension to heaven became a protector of His disciples and His Spirit lived in our hearts. Even though I walked through the valley of darkness, I feared no evil, because God was with me (Psalm 23:4).

On March 1, 2011, I left the hospital to go home with follow-up instructions to see a specialist. On March 14th, the first specialist recommended either an injection procedure or surgery to remove the hematoma in my thigh that resulted from an IV insertion. That same day we scheduled March 18th for the injection procedure. However, when my daughter asked for clarification because of the risks involved, the specialist felt we were not ready for the procedure and cancelled it.

Afterwards, we learned that God was at work. On March 24, 2011, a second specialist recommended three options: injection, surgery or self healing (this was the safest method recommended by the specialist, and after much prayer, decided to follow his recommendation). On a follow-up visit on April 21st with the second specialist, the hematoma was gone. There is a Chinese saying that man can do all things, but God has the final say. In spite of the complications and the condition I was left with, God protects and is in control. He allowed me to recover completely. God does not promise forever sunny days with no illness or pain in Christians’ lives, but He watches, cares and reveals His Will.

Thank you, God for this life-changing experience; it particularly brought together some of my infrequent contacts with family and

fellowship members. It brought forth a reunion with my three siblings and their families who traveled from New York City to visit me in Rochester. Throughout their visit and travel, we prayed for their safety and God indeed chased the storms away. To love and be loved; as God promised, I felt loved and He loved those whom I love.

As I reflect on my hospitalization, I am deeply touched by the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, the concern, love and prayers from many fellowship brothers and sisters, friends and family -- especially from all four of my own children who rotated their time staying with me at the hospital around the clock. I also appreciated the many visits from sisters and brothers who came to pray with me at my bedside, especially Pastor Mitchell Herring and Dr. Ming Yan Chow. Out of their very busy schedules, they visited, consoled and prayed with me on multiple visits. One cannot ever feel lonely, or alone within such a warm and loving family of God.

The giving of fresh fruits, fruit baskets, get-well cards, nutritional products, emails, phone calls and even an ionic blanket that I could not accept were all loving gestures of our caring fellowship. One sister who moved away more than ten years ago sent an ionic head band to help me recover. Thanks, too, for the sister who offered to take care of me at the hospital. Prayers came from other churches as well, and I want to thank Pastor Wei Fung and Reverends Gordon Webster and Sandra Hasenhauer for their fruit basket, prayers and sharing of worship songs. There are so many others to thank that I cannot name all of them here -- a heartfelt thank-you to everyone. See what a wonderful, godly family we have; may God bless you all abundantly.

Jesus says, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations..." (Matthew 28:19). How do I obey this great command? I received Christ late during my mature years. One of the limited ways I can comply is to help build up fellowship and to scatter the seeds. So for more than 20 years, I mailed, delivered, placed and distributed Christian literature to anyone who wanted to know Christ. I want to thank the two publishers: Chinese Christian Mission and Chinese Christian Herald Crusaders, Inc. for all their support and years of jointly serving the Lord. I pray that I can continue to do God's work. For all those readers who stand

outside the gospel door I pray that you will quickly make a decision of faith.

Thank you again, God for a second chance, to live again; Amen.



The Power of Prayer

Sam Chen

“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Recently an interesting thought came into my mind several times – if one day I go to heaven and review with God my prayers, will I find more of them answered or, the other way, turned into silence without response? I guess I won’t find out the exact answer unless I have a complete track of record and their outcomes when I see His face in heaven. But with years of experiences in prayer, I can’t emphasize enough His faithfulness, grace and mercy shown to me through my conversation with Him. He is always there ready to draw His ears to listen to what we have to say and make things happen according to His will.

Prayer for me is a channel that connects my heart with God’s. When I am in distress, it reminds me of His full control over my situations. When I am in anguish, it allows me to wait upon Him

regardless of the circumstances might be. When I am weak in many aspects, it provides me with a way to the spring of living water, the source of wisdom and strengths. When I can't see the future, it helps me to hold on to His Word when things do not make sense. When I lost my way, it found me back the purpose of my living for Him. When I sinned against Him, it expressed my grief to tell Him how sorry I am. Prayer is where I can meet Him without distance and have the intimacy in His presence. Prayer is a way that Holy Spirit leads and guides me as my daily life is before me. Prayer is how I cast my burden to Him when I remember I should always count on Him instead of myself. Prayer is one important way of my thanksgiving for what He has accomplished in my life. Prayer is how I remember people in needs and lift them up to His presence. Prayer is how I can praise Him for His greatness, unfailing love, or simply for who is. Prayer is how I ask to make sure my heart is in the right place when I serve Him. It acts as a heart-to-heart bond between Him and me, so I can constantly surrender myself to Him and be sure I'm in Him and He is in me. Most importantly, prayer is His will for us in His son Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)



Over years of experience in praying, I have found two things that are essential to an effective prayer - faith and obedience. Without faith, praying does not mean much more than just an item we check off from our daily Christian to-do-list. To discover the power of prayer, I have learned to put my trust in God's goodness and almightiness when I bring up my requests to Him. This faith comes from our knowledge of Him and will transcend all human understanding. It is natural for us to judge our

surroundings and their outcomes based on what we see with our eyes. But praying with faith relies on our constant walk with Him and close abiding in His Word. In addition to faith, obedience is critical to an effective prayer. Best example is Jesus' prayers. Every time He prayed, He always prayed for His Father's will and the coming of His kingdom. He surrendered the whole being of Himself to fulfilling the Father's purpose. When we pray our prayer, God is pleased if we have a God-centered prayer acknowledging His sovereignty and let His will be our will and His way our way.

My friend, prayer is a genuine conversation with God our Father. It doesn't need packaging or decorating, but the true heart that often times comes alongside humility. It doesn't require a time or place set aside, but our desire for seeking His face. May we all have opportunities to witness the power of praying and enjoy every prayer moment in our lives.

If Only You Can Imagine -The Story of the River of Life

Aileen Chow

☞ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy dwelling place. It is a golden glass river of life that flows through the Holy City in Heaven. A group of excited children come running and laughing to the river. They were all kinds of children from different ethnics, time periods and ages. They stop by the water's edge to view the awesome crystal river dance in rhythms. The children smile and sigh at the beautiful sight...until one child, a twelve-year-old boy, Armoni, jostles nine-year-old Simon, into the river. Simon plunges into the water deep and swims up from beneath the surface to breath. He cries. Armoni feels horrible for pushing Simon.

But Simon stops crying and shouts, "Jump into the river!" The children instantly remembered how the river dance and swallows them up with infatuation. Armoni gladly responds. "I will go in with you." Armoni jumps into the river and swims quickly back

up to the surface. He joins Simon. They both look at each other and their eyes open, waiting for the feeling to rise and engulf them. The water current scoops them up; pushing their small bodies out above the surface, yet another current from above them pushes them down. The two boys yell with glee. Then the currents swirl around them, tickling them and making them feel this power of love from a source known to them. The children at the water's edge look on with interest. Then one-by-one they all jump into the river with Armoni and Simon. And they all laugh, feeling that weird sensation, the love bubbling in the river...

Until, a known presence appears before them. The children see Him and shout. They hurry out of the water, dripping wet. Armoni climbs up the bank quickly. He wants to be the first ones to meet Jesus. Jesus sees all his precious children and smiles.

"King Jesus!" shouts Armoni. He runs to Jesus and wraps his arms around him. Jesus bends down and gives Armoni a hug.

Jesus speaks to Armoni in a kind voice. "My child, Armoni, do you know what you have done? Do you have kindness for Simon?"

Just then Simon weaves through the crowd of children and stands besides Armoni. Armoni looks sideways at Simon, then head down and feeling sorry, he says, "Simon, I'm sorry for pushing you into the river."

Simon is silent, but then giggles. He says back to Armoni, "I forgive you. Anyway, the river is so cool."

Jesus smiles and pats Simon on the head. Then he turns to Armoni and cups his hand around his cheeks. Jesus looks into the eyes of this young Israeli boy who never had a chance to grow into full manhood. He begins to feel such strong compassion for him and he feels a connection with him.

Armoni loved life, but he died quite young. Armoni was one the seven fallen victims, the atoning sacrifice to appease His Father during a famine in King David's reign. The story goes that a remnant of the tribe, the Gibeonites, came to King David because King Saul had broken a peace treaty by executing the Gibeonites. In order to end the drought and to appease God, the Gibeonites wanted pay back and requested seven of King Saul's

descendents to be put to death for the bloodguilt on Saul's house. And they specifically commanded that their bodies be hung on the mountain in the open air to decay for eight months at the beginning of harvest until the rains fall. King David chose Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons of Saul's concubine, Rizpah, and five other sons from Saul's daughter, Merab.

Jesus looks around and also sees Armoni's younger brother, a curious child, Mephibosheth, who was also sacrificed or accursed to judgment. Mephibosheth approaches. Jesus stretches out his hand to touch little Mephibosheth gently on the head. The boy's eyes awake. He stares wonderingly at the king. Jesus draws him close and kisses him on the cheek. Then Jesus looks into Armoni's eyes and remembers the day of Armoni's execution. He could see it now. The poor boy was very frightened of death as if there was no hope left. Armoni shivered in fear and tears stream down his face. Armoni held onto Rizpah, his mother's arm tightly. Rizpah was weeping and she could not tear her eyes away from her sons, Armoni and Methphibosheth. She gazed upon them with love for the last time. They were her babies and her precious jewels. She could not sacrifice their innocence for a bloody crime that happened so long ago.

Soldiers snatched her boys from her bosom and positioned them and five of Merab's sons on horses under the gallows. Seven tied up ropes, secured on wooden beams hung above them. The soldiers placed the one end of the rope, the noose around their tiny necks. Armoni and Methphibosheth whimpered and cried, but Rizpah silenced them with her eyes of endearment - a final message: *Be strong, my darlings. I will be with you always.* The boys became quiet. Prayers were offered to God and then, the unimaginable happened. As the horses rode away, their bodies were yanked down and became suspended. Armoni's body swung and he could not free himself because both of his wrists were tied behind his back. He choked until his face turned blue.

Jesus looks once more into Armoni's chestnut brown eyes and saw all the horrible experience he went through...it reminded Him of His own death on Calvary. *Armoni died for the sake of the sins of their father. And I for died for the sake of sinners.* His eyes begin to tear at the thought.

Armoni lifts his gaze to Jesus and he sees a glint of tears in his eyes. Jesus' eyes turn into pools of liquid love for him. Armoni accepts Jesus' merciful love. He remembers that day as well...when his spirit left his body he saw a kind face, an ethereal angel gazing upon him. Then he saw six other angels waiting to greet the other six when they became spirits. The beautiful angels were seven-foot-tall with huge fluttering wings. One angel spoke to them: *Fear not! You offered your lives to God. Come into Eternity!* The angels held the children and the young men in their arms and carried them off into Heaven. The angels became their guardian. Armoni's and Methphibosheth's angels took them to this spot in the river. They held the boy's hands as they swam and wade in the nude through the currents. Armoni felt so much love here. The angels would sing to them and embrace them next to their bosoms. It gave Armoni peace, hope and comfort in this new life. The river would heal him from his sadness because he felt God's hand in the waves cradling him. It was beyond anything he experienced. Armoni returned to play like nothing bad had happened to him. All of those dark scary thoughts of dying had left him. Here is where he felt like where he belonged.

Jesus draws Armoni close to him and kisses his forehead. Armoni feels the love of Jesus flow through him. Jesus moves on and continues to pat and embrace the other children dying for his attention and individual love. As Jesus goes to each child, a sudden voice – His Father calls to him: *My beloved Son, Nick Schafer is entering the realms.* Jesus becomes alert and he tells the children that he is off to do his Father's business.☺

☺Nick Schafer could not believe what his eyes were seeing. His spirit had peeled away from his dead body and now he sees a glorious light in front of him. Nick thought: *I'm too young to die.* At age twenty-two, he did not want to know God and thought it was all history and a joke. *I don't believe in God. God is dead.* Throughout his entire college life, Nick gave into indulgence: attending wild parties, drinking, going into the virtual reality world on the internet and idolizing women. He was never interested in going to church. So, his life was great, but actually he was a burden to his mother. He still lived with his mum because he could not pass college or keep a stable job. So, this night he nearly died. This night he drank heavily (because he had a stupid argument with a friend) and while driving his car, he crashed into a tree. The steering wheel crushed his chest.

Nick gaze into the light far away from him. Suddenly, his spirit elevates and then the light tows him in. He feels a sense of peace flowing out from it. It feels inviting and he did not fear the light. Nick's eyes become wide open as he comes nearer to the light. Nick looks away, and without warning he sees a dark shadow traveling at full speed behind him...and he knew it would swallow the light! Nick panics as he sees the darkness zooming nearer and growing larger. *This is horrifying! I cannot go there!* The darkness passes him. Nick panics again. The darkness nearly eclipses the light. Knowing that the light would be forever lost to him and that he would be in total darkness, Nick begins to scream in the inside. He tries to find his voice and finally he screams, "No! God *please!* I don't want to go to hell. God, I'm sorry, I want to live. Give me another chance!"

All at once, the darkness slips away and Nick discovers himself in the presence of God. All around him is the light of God. Then Nick looks down and sees that his feet are submerged in strange water. He looks around and notices that he is standing knee deep in a river. He feels a sense of peace once again. As he stands in the golden clear river of radiation, he could see how the river moves beneath him in different directions. He thought: *This River is alive.* At this moment, Nick could feel that there was a presence beside him, but he could not see who it was.

Jesus walks to the shallow end of the River of Life. The river flows from the Throne of God and of the Lamb. Near one bank of the river, he sees Nick, the young dark-haired man standing in the river. He gazes at Nick, the lost soul who had just entered the holy realms. He could have gone into darkness, but he heard his soul cry out to Him. And God has not forgotten any prayers. It was the prayer of Nick's mother who had one day gone to church to pray for her lost son. Jesus remembers her prayer...how she sat in the pew and prayed: *Dear Heavenly Father, please save Nick's soul. He is my dear son whom I love very much. But he is lost in this world and he needs a miracle, so he can see you are a Living God. Help him Lord to see your glorious presence.* Jesus recalls the prayer. He lets His Father know that it is time to give this young man a good dose of shock waves to show their love to him.

Nick still stands knee deep in the river. He strokes the water and feels a delight sensation. *How could I be blind and not see God.*

This is real. There is a God...in the light and water... At that moment, the water current grows stronger around him until a wave of God's love splashes him in the knee. The power of the Almighty God flows through him and Nick cries out. "No God, how can you love me? I've cursed you. I've sinned." Another wave of God's love splashes him in the knee. "Do you really love me?" Then God speaks to him in a language through the light around him. Jesus speaks fervently: *Nick, I love you for eternity. You belong to me.*

Nick thinks to himself: *He knows my name.* He looks around him and he sees the source of the light above him. As he looks up he could feel a wave of radiant love touching him. He feels a love of God's warmth absorb him. One more time, the light above him sends out love to him over and over again. Nick becomes crush by the Divine love that it sparks guilt in him. He begins to weep. He says, "Enough...I am so ashamed. I am so messed-up." Another deep surge of light shot through Nick and he trembles at the feeling. Overcome with emotions, tears spill down his cheek, he responds, "I – I am so awed by your love for me."

Jesus sees all that is happening and changes into his glorified body of radiant light. He moves closer to Nick and walks on the water. Nick becomes startled as he sees a glowing figure walking in the rippling, glittering river. He could make it out as a figure of a man. He becomes so awestruck at it he knew he must be looking at God. Nick falls on his knees in shock. The light emanating from Jesus' face pours out to him in love. Nick could not see the feature of his face because the light was so bright. Jesus shines his light to him again and strikes his body – healing his internal injuries. The strike causes him to fall back into the river, becoming engulf and baptize in God's love. The love from God ignites a thought in him, that God gave him a small slit of light to call out to Him – to have a second chance. Nick stands up and stares into the face of God. Love flows through him and he starts shaking like a vibrating tuning fork. He cries, "I see you. I feel your love for me. This is Eternity." And he knew that God would take care of him for eternity.

Nick feels the supremacy of God's love and authority stir through him. He feels more alive than ever. This is the height of his experience. Love is the very essence of God's nature. In the river, Nick sees God emanate with so much love again, that

another surge of God's passionate power beams out to him. Nick sighs and trembles at the pleasurable sensation...stimulating his soul. He hears God again. Jesus speaks in a command voice: *I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. Take the free gift of the water of life.* Nick sees God draw back. And the light begins to fade and the river close around him.

Nick's spirit went back into his body. He slowly opens his eyes...everything so blurry. He could feel tubes in his nostrils. He sense he came back into the world...a place – hospital place. And then he could make out a figure...it was his grieving mother at his bedside. She was praying. His mother opens her eyes, turns to look at him and gasps. "Nick! You're alive!" She sobs and grasps Nick's hand. Nick feels weak and could not talk just yet. He stares into his mother's blue-gray teary eyes and tries to communicate a message to her. Nick remembers the power of God's love that went through him and it remains with him. A new life and hope springs within him like the rising waves of God's hand touching him. He utters something, but could not talk. In his mind, he says to her over and over again....*Mother, if only you can imagine. If only you can imagine...*☺

