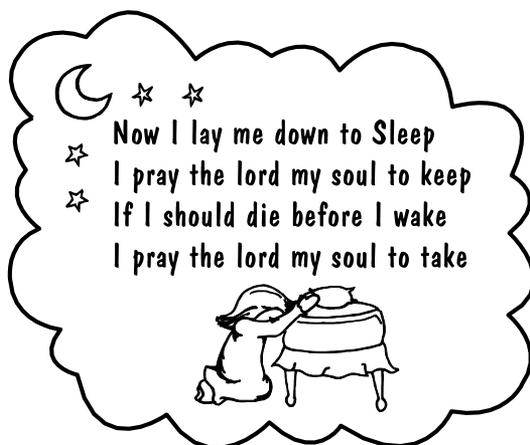


Rochester Chinese Christian Church

ECHO

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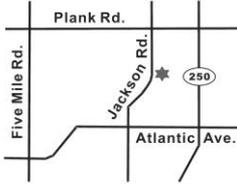


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Rochester Chinese Christian Church
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English Sunday Worship
9:30 am

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
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Rochester Chinese Christian Church West
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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





What Kind of Church?

Pastor Mitchell Herring

"If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you...Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation..." John 15:19; 1 Peter. 2:11-12 (NASB)

✞ Our new church vision statement is, *Exalting Christ in proclaiming the Word, renewing of life, and sharing His love.* A couple days before Christmas we were visiting a friend. During our visit, she related to us how an elder of her church, trying to explain a perceived lack of care in the church, told her that it was because "we are a teaching church." In other words, their focus is on teaching, not caring. I was incredulous, because although churches may be stronger in one area than another, and there is nothing wrong with that, it sounded like he was trying to justify their seeming lack of care. That night lying in bed I was thinking about that. Of course I didn't agree with that logic, but at the same time I had to admire at least---whether right or wrong, this elder had a *clear idea of how to define his church, of what kind of church they were.* I was thinking, "Can we do that? What kind of church are we? Can I express it as clearly and simply?" And then, "what kind of church would we *like to be*, say, in one year, three years, or five years?" The answer came to my mind fairly quickly, that we should seek to be *everything* a church should be in this world. I wanted to try to cover all the bases (魚和熊掌兼得), both the objective foundation as well as subjective life. A firm stand on doctrinal truth; a dynamic and growing inner life; and genuine, fervent love. Yet I needed to try to express this as simply as possible. That is the background of this vision statement.

First and above all, is a fellowship that exalts Christ. This is the essential foundation. You may think, "Isn't this a given? Do we need a special vision for that?" The answer is a resounding "Yes we do!"

First, many churches today are straying from this very thing. In an attempt to attract the crowds, provide easy answers to life's complex and deepest problems, and be more appealing to the surrounding culture, many are surrendering to the surrounding culture. They are losing Christ in a sea of programs, entertainment, and seminars. So for us, to remain faithful, *exalting Christ has to be at the center of all we do and who we are*---our faith, our polity, our ministries, our preaching. All we are saying here is that we don't take it for granted, but pursue it consciously. Without such *intentionality*, we lose the focus.

Exalting Christ *defines who we are*. We hear it said that we should not *define ourselves* by our jobs or social positions, or by *anything else we do*. This is true. But we define ourselves by *who we are*---Christians. He has chosen us out of this world to belong to Him, to be a people for His name---so we exalt that name. He has made us aliens and strangers in this world, and citizens of a better country, the heavenly one (Hebrew 11:16). We exalt Christ because of who He is---the Lord, our Savior, our family head, and our life. So to exalt Christ is to glorify Him, live His life, reflect His image, and show the reality that our church is His.

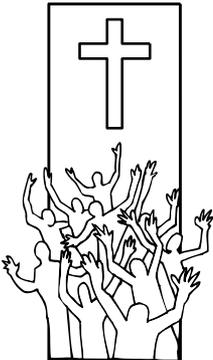
1. We do that first by *proclaiming the Word*. This is the objective foundation, the doctrinal base on which we stand, so that we can withstand the storms of life. By it we proclaim the gospel and point others to Christ. We build up His church by proclaiming the propositional truths He has revealed to us. It is this Word that provides teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). It is the basis for "*teaching* them to observe all that I commanded you" in the Great Commission (Matthew. 28:18-20). But even more, someone has pointed out that preaching "is the mediation of God's presence to His people. In the Word proclaimed, God presses His gospel upon our hearts by His Spirit. Martin Luther put it dramatically when He declared that God, by His Word, kills us, resurrects us, and constitutes us once again as His risen people. We should not underestimate the power of the preached word to strengthen our identity and give us the power to stand firm. Society and the civil magistrate may have power over the body, but God has power over the soul." This Word is what we long for like newborn babes, the pure spiritual milk by which we *grow up* to salvation (1 Peter. 2:2-3).

2. And so “*renewing of life*” logically follows, so that our congregation is one in which our inner lives are ever-growing, not static or locked in, but in a state of continual renewal (2 Corinthians 4:16). As God’s mercies are new every morning, He also grants us renewal day by day, year by year. We don’t want to be like the Dead Sea, or like a polluted, stagnant, and oppressive air mass, but like an invigorating, clean early autumn breeze. A healthy life is a growing and renewing life. Whether faster, or more slowly, perhaps with some setbacks along the way, the general direction and goal of renewal is upward toward the image of Christ more, and more is to live in Christ (Galatians 2:20, 2 Corinthians 3:18).

3. Finally, a church claiming to be a “teaching church” or even a “mission’s church” still falls short. We would seek to “have it all” by “*sharing His love.*” In such a church no one is left out, but all who desire it feel a belonging. We need to do our part to make sure everyone feels loved and is cared for. Gossip, rudeness, or bad-mouthing others belongs to the past. From now on we seek to edify and build up, to notice the needs of brothers and sisters, in kindness and gentleness, soft-hearted and forgiving (Ephesians 4:31-32; 2 Timothy 2:24-26). This gives *genuineness* to our lives and to our church and its ministries. It actualizes the gospel experientially. As someone once said, love is the visible “mark of the Christian” (John 13:34-35). Without this, everything else is compromised and degraded.

We hope we can categorize our various ministries under these goals, to give them an intentional focus and sense of direction, to drive them forward while seeking to approach these goals. For instance, *proclaiming the Word* would entail pulpit ministry, Sunday school, and outreach;

renewing of life, prayer meeting, personal Bible study, and prayer; and *sharing His love*, fellowship groups, the contact and caring ministry, and looking after each other’s needs. Certainly there will be overlap, and there are different ways to classify these. But however it is done; my prayer is that if someone asks you what our church is like, you can say, with thankfulness and humility, that it is one that exalts Christ---in His Word being proclaimed, in lives being renewed, and in His love being shared. ☩



Weekday Pastor



☞ Although the question comes up only once in a blue moon, it often lurks in the background of many a conversation. That question is, “What do pastors do during weekdays?” On the other hand, on certain occasions people find it necessary to lay it bare before me, “You know that a pastor’s job is not only preparing sermons, do you?” as though sermon preparation is all

I care to do on weekdays. Notwithstanding, it has been made clear to me what is *expected* of pastors on weekdays, and in this brief reflection, I would like to make a few notes of what I am *called* to do in being a pastor of the church. Before going into that, though, I would like to paint two pictures of two distinct congregations I have observed in the past. Please note that they are snapshots of past situations, which may have evolved somewhat in the present. Nevertheless, they serve as useful illustrations.

The congregation I grew up with had the ingrained idea that every fellowship group needed a pastoral staff member as counselor to oversee the group. No fellowship group could ever be established without a pastoral staff as an overseer. The philosophy behind this idea was that the average believers could not discern what was right from what was wrong. Therefore, they needed a shepherd to lead and guide them on the right path. As a result, the church had a fat pastoral staff team. The pastoral staff in charge of a fellowship group met regularly with the fellowship co-worker team to plan for everything that was happening in the fellowship, ranging from sermon topics to outing activities. On the one hand, the reliance on the pastoral staff was tremendous, yet on the other hand, the equipping and training of co-workers in the fellowship groups was happening constantly.

The other congregation was one I had never had the occasion to be a part of. During the time I was looking for a ministry opportunity, a seminary friend encouraged me to apply for a ministry position in this congregation. Upon visiting its website, I was struck by how well-organized this congregation was. Every ministry was led by a non-pastoral leader with his or her contact listed, and there were quite a few of them. When I

initiated a contact with this congregation with my friend as the reference, I was informed that this congregation did not need a (full time) pastor.

I believe every one of the ministry leaders had a full time job, yet together they co-pastored the congregation as a team. The responsibility of a full time pastor was divided among the leaders. It was different from a congregation of which the pastor had left. After the pastor had left, the congregation was put under the leadership of a pastoral transition team, the main task of which was to search for a new pastor. To divide the pastoral tasks among church leaders who are employed full time outside the church, or tent-makers as they are usually called, has the advantage of sharing the ministry burdens together and thus not being overwhelmed, as well as shepherding the congregation by means of collective wisdom and diversity of spiritual gifts. It seems that the congregation was in a good shape even without a full time pastor. Otherwise the need would naturally emerge and a full time pastor would be called to serve the congregation.

Why then would a congregation need a full time pastor? The answer to this question naturally leads to the subject of my reflection, which is what a pastor does during weekdays. This subject assumes that what a pastor does on Sundays is obvious to all, and might be able to be handled by others. Yet, are pastors' tasks on weekdays replaceable? To answer this question, it is probably instructive to look back on two particular events, which shaped my call to the pastoral ministry. First, during the time I was a deacon in my home church, I remember attending a retreat for deacons of Chinese churches throughout Indonesia in the 90's. The main issue being discussed then was how deacons could relieve pastors of other church tasks so that they could "devote [themselves] to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). I took away from this retreat a very deep impression that the calling of a pastor is to be devoted to prayer and the ministry of the word. Anything else is probably a distraction which tends to weaken the main focus.

Secondly, the period of time before I went to seminary was the time I ran a business with a partner with the understanding that my time would be divided equally between business and ministry. Eventually I felt the call to do more in ministry than my

time allowed. After much meditation on the Word and a lot of prayers to seek God's guidance, the path was amazingly opened up for me to relinquish the business and to step into full time ministry. Coming out of seminary, the initial plan for full time ministry was that my time would be divided evenly between serving my home church and the regional churches. This is because the short term mission trips to regional churches made me see the needs for the ministry of the Word. Yet, after seminary, it was obvious to me that my ministry to these regional churches could in no way supplant the ministries of their pastors, because these pastors lived among their congregations and knew best their conditions, whether physically or spiritually.

Having considered these two events, I would like to return to my original question, and attempt to answer it by way of sharing my take on what it means to "devote myself to prayer and to the ministry of the word." I used to see in these words the picture of a pastor sitting at his desk, either praying or studying the Word. It may well be partially true, but this is a picture of a detached pastor, or one confined in the "ivory tower," so to speak.

The reality is that as he prays, the pastor serves as a priest who brings the incense of prayer before the throne of grace. For his suffering people, he brings their petitions to the only One who could grant true deliverance, and he doesn't do it dispassionately. He is very much a part of them as they go through suffering and neediness. For his wandering people, he brings his pastoral concerns to the Chief Shepherd, of whom he is under-shepherd, seeking wisdom to provide them with gentle guidance and bring them back to the fold. For the rest, he is constantly after their healthy growth, both physically and spiritually. All this could be accomplished by praying through the directory, for the purpose of which either the pastor has to be knowledgeable about what is going on in the church family, or the congregation needs to update him on what is going on in their lives.

In terms of the ministry of the word, there is a distinction between public and private ministries. In the public preaching of the word, the pastor seeks to feed the flock with the gospel message, which is buttressed by his knowledge of the flock. Not

surprisingly, the gospel messages from the pulpit are often tailored to the spiritual needs of the congregation. In the private ministry of the word, which is probably more challenging than the former; the pastor has to be more adept at bringing the word to bear in varying life situation, sometimes without the luxury of opening up the Bible in hallway conversations.

In all these ministry situations, who is adequate to do them well? Not to mention the fact that pastors also need to care for their families. It is thus not uncommon for pastors to find their plates full from week to week, but the priority remains: they are sent to walk alongside God's people, whether in the nucleus family or the wider family of God, with supplications and exhortations. Only by God's grace can they overcome the distractions and remain faithful to their callings. ☞

Recognize God's Voice

Snow 白雪



"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand." – John 10:27 (NASB)

☞ When I was a young Christian, I always wondered, "Should I be hearing God's voice, but how?"

After walking with God for many years with ups and downs, success and failure, and looking back, I feel so blessed that I have worked on this matter to start with when I was a very young Christian.

I have not heard any audible voice from God. God communicates with me through my thoughts during prayer, scripture reading and other situations. But, how do we recognize our thoughts as the thoughts from God? It could also come from the devil or our own fleshly desire. The simplest way to recognize God's voice, is from the conviction when I do something wrong. I wouldn't be able to find the rest from this conviction and have to repent and reconcile with God.

From my experience, I identify thoughts from God if it aligns with the Bible teaching, and gives me peace. Sometimes, I just knew it was from God, because I couldn't come up with such an idea with authority. Sometimes, I recognized it was from God because his love moved me to tears. Sometimes, I recognized it through the confirmation from brothers and sisters. When I was very serious trying to find God's will for me, I would combine fasting, worshiping and praying until I got an answer from God. It is like God called Samuel three times, not until his teacher advised him that God was calling him that he realized it was God. So many times, we ignore our own thoughts that may come from God. Once I was praying and asked God whether to perform Lasik surgery or not; Nina, one of my friend's name came to my mind, I brushed it off, thought it was my random thought. The next day, when I asked God the same question, Nina came to my mind again. I picked up the phone and called her right away, and she was there! After she heard that I was prompted to call her after the prayer, she told me the truth about her unsuccessful Lasik surgery. One of her eyes had double vision after the surgery. Instantly, I knew this thought of calling my friend was actually from God.

Like Gideon trying to confirm God's command for him, he asked God to make wool wet and dry twice, and God granted that. I too, use the Gideon's method for my job selection. I asked God, "If this job in Rochester is where you want me to be, stop the rain for half of the day so that I can see the area better". God did that despite the forecast of heavy rain for the whole week when I was there. After I changed my return flight, I had only one hour to get to the airport, refuel the rental car and drop it off, and get to the boarding gate, I made it just in time prior to the closure of the gate. God granted my request of being able to catch the flight.

Once, when I had so much doubt of a Charismatic Christian leader, I packed up a bag for a night in the log cabin to exercise one of the spiritual trainings called solitude. On the way there, I had my radio on with worship music and was singing along for 2 hours. After I got to my destination, and walked along the lakeshore, answers poured out so quickly that I had to grab my

notebook to write it all down. God revealed the truth that I was idol worshipping him.

Have you ever wondered where you should be moving to, which school you should be attending and whom you should be marrying? You WILL find the answer from God if you seek HIM with all your heart! It may not be the answer you like to hear, but it is the best one for you. John 10: 10 – *“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”* ☞

Flower City Work Camp

From Youth Group members



☞ Flower City Work Camp is a one week overnight volunteer camp, where fellow Christians from the Rochester area can come to grow in their faith, fellowship, relax, and help people that need to see the love of God together. This event consists of four main parts: sidewalk club, worksite, basketball club, and soccer club. This year’s message was “SENT,” which represents how God has sent us to teach the world about His will.

Daniel Ye

This was my second year attending Flower City, and it was a great experience. Generally, I look forward to FCWC as one of my favorite weeks of the year. The camp comes as a welcome break from school, sports and other activities. For me, it is extremely comforting to know that, for at least one week per year, I am granted a week outside of the normal world, with no distractions from God. This year, I was assigned to a worksite, where my team and I worked on fixing up a house in the city. Our homeowner was named Rose, and she had her daughter and her nephew staying with her. They were very grateful, and the kids got involved in some of the less dirty work, such as painting. It is always a blessing to see how touched and thankful the people we help are, as well as knowing that through us, God can reveal himself to others. This year, it was especially evident. On our last day, as we were getting ready to leave, Rose’s nephew Anon opened up to us after we said our final prayers for his family. He confessed that he was being bullied at school because he stuttered occasionally and wasn’t very good at reading. In the end, after talking to him, he made the best decision that can be made: he accepted Jesus into his life. The fact that I

had an impact on this decision is amazing, and shows how God can work through everyone. Flower City was an incredible experience, and I will miss it a great deal next year.

Jonathan Saysamone

Flower City to me personally is one of my favorite events to attend for the whole year. This was my second year at Flower City and as usual it was an amazing experience. It is a great way for me personally to have a much closer relationship to God and get away from the outside world, where all the stress and worries overwhelm me. This year I signed up for worksite and I was assigned to Worksite 6 with my new partners. We were sent to a house that was in the city to start fixing up. The owner of the house we were working at was an elderly woman that already knew Christ. She was an Ethiopian Christian. We had a lot to do: we needed to paint all the walls, tile their bathroom floor, remove cabinets, and replace a kitchen sink. It was a busy week but we managed to get it all done with some help from our house owner and her relatives. During the week we went on prayer walks where we went into the city and would ask the people we saw if they had any prayer requests. During these prayer walks there were many people that were willing to let us pray for them, which to me was the most heartening thing that encouraged me to witness to people even after Flower City was over. One thing that really stuck with me was when my worksite leader told us: "The things that we are doing in Flower City is not to glorify ourselves. It's to glorify God and show his love to everyone around us." Overall Flower City has been a great way to meet fellow Christians and it showed me how God has worked through everyone through our deeds. I will miss Flower City and I cannot wait until next year!

Brian Kwok

This was my second year attending Flower City Work Camp, and it has been as fulfilling and religiously gratifying as the year prior. I volunteered that week in Worksite 7, where we helped a boarding house refurnish their two kitchens, bathroom, and chapel. Flower City helps the students in the camp as much as the people who are seeing and witnessing God's works throughout the week. Personally, I had experienced a boost in my faith during worship and the lessons, where my friends and I joined together to sing praises and learn more about God, and I am sure that they had experienced the same as well. Doing so, I also enjoyed fellowship with them. I am excited for next year, and hope to see many other fellow Christians as well! ☺



A Series of Questions

(From My Graduation Speech)

Brian Lim

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing." – 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (ESV)

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love." – 1 John 4:7-8 (ESV)

✞ One thing I've learned in my time at RCCC is to remind myself of why I come to church. Despite whatever flaws or imperfections each church contains, there must be a greater reason than just learning theology or just finding community. Is God going to be my reason for whatever I do, not just in church, but also in my daily life?

I want to offer an encouragement and a series of questions to you: CHURCH! What is our purpose? Why do we sit in these very pews every Sunday? Young people, do you come solely because your parents tell you to? Older people, do you come solely because you have responsibilities to fulfill within the church? What is your purpose? Is our purpose here to solely learn theology or to solely find a community? Or is our purpose here in this church to worship God? CHURCH! Who is God to you? Is He just an answer you give during a Sunday school question? Or is He someone you have a genuine relationship with because HE loves you? Do we remember that Christ paid too high of a cost for us to forget our purpose of worshiping? What is a church without love? What is a church without God? 1 Corinthians 13: It is nothing. Do we recognize that if we do what we do, but do not do it with the purpose for God, it becomes meaningless?

1 John 4- God is love. Are you displaying God's love towards the people here? Are you displaying God's love in your services, actions, and leadership? So church, I ask again, why do you do what you do here? Is God receiving the glory in whatever you do? Will you worship God through songs and praise? Will you worship God through learning Scripture? Will you worship God through serving lunches on Sundays? Will you worship God through

fellowship? Will you worship God through leading, guiding, and discipline? Church, will you make God your purpose? Thus, I want to impart and implore this church to remember why it is here. It is a place to give God all honor, glory and praise. Men and women of God, will you remember to keep God in the forefront of your minds? Will you remember what Christ has done for you on the cross? Will you remember to love in the church because God loved you first? And will you, Rochester Chinese Christian Church, remember your purpose to worship God? ☞

I Don't Deserve It

Tom Liu

☞ I don't deserve my name. When I first introduced myself to the youth group as "Tom," I lied. That's not my name. I didn't even give myself that name; the credit goes to my landlady. The story goes like this: when I first moved to Rochester, I was supposed to meet with the landlady from whom we rented our apartment. When she asked me what my name was, I said "Tongtian." She then attempted to repeat it back to mean. She didn't. At least not my name. So, I said she could call me "Tong," since people sometimes called me that back in Canada. She repeated back to me, "Tom." And I was like, "uh, sure yeah, Tom, that works." Thus, that is why I am called Tom to this day.

I also do not deserve to be here in Rochester to begin with. When my mom told me and my brother that we were going to move away from Canada, we were... let's say, not very pleased. I even had a really bad fever in the weeks leading up to the move from Vancouver to Rochester (definitely not because I was trying to stay in Canada for a few more days), but God managed to drag me all the way to Rochester.

I don't even deserve my academic success. Right now, my strongest academic area is probably in physics, but that is only because of that article I published with my teacher. However, the only reason I was an author on that article was because my physics teacher liked me and asked me to write it with him. He could have asked anyone else to do it, and any of those people could have done it, but instead he chose me.

In the same way, I don't deserve this youth group and all the wonderful people. When I first came to the youth group, I was scared. I had just recently moved to Rochester, and those in the

youth group were one of the first people I had met. I didn't know how I would be received, if I could make any friends, and if I could ever fit in. I especially remembered the awkward moment during sharing time as one of the most intimidating experiences in my life. I kept wondering if I was supposed to say something, whether I would be judged for not saying anything, or whether I would be judged for saying the wrong thing. But I passed that terrifying ordeal and became an official youth grouper.

But I don't deserve the youth group because Eric Hui, who is in Portland as of 2015, was the one who really brought me into the youth group. Every week, he would check up to see how I was doing, invite me to events, offer me rides to youth group. He always made me feel included, which made me want to go to youth group every week. Eventually, he became my discipleship partner, and we would chat about our weeks and struggles. One of the things I complained to him about a lot was that when I read the Bible, I would have very little idea what it was saying, so he suggested that I look the verses up online. I never did. Eric must have gotten tired of the complaining, because he eventually bought me a study bible that still wins me all the bible trivia contests. Overall, Eric, by being so welcoming and devoting so much time on me, time that I never deserved, allowed me to still be here, in youth group today.

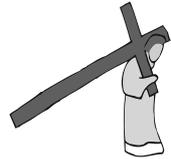
Then, as it logically follows, I don't deserve all the friends I made at youth group either. I can say with confidence that I made closer friends in our youth group than I could've made anywhere else. All that time at church retreats, small groups, flower cities, 30 hour famines, and the sleepovers let me bond with so many of them. We've biked together, we've swam (and LARPed) together, we've shared the same food and utensils, we've killed each other in League of Legends, Super Smash Bros, and Minecraft, we've drawn each other, we've danced together, we've slept with each other; during the night, we'd whisper secrets, tell each other stories, share our fears and worries, and truly understand each other. I like to think of our youth group as a family, a place with no secrets between any of us, and a place where we can share our deepest thoughts without judgement. I never deserved such good friends that are close and dear to my heart.

But out of everything I don't deserve, the one thing I don't deserve the most is Christ. I did believe in Jesus and was baptized before I came to the youth group. I understood the gospel that Jesus died for our sins so that we could be saved, that we had to confess our sins and he would forgive us. I understood what it meant to be a Christian, but I never really *understood* it. I told myself that I was a Christian, and I did everything Christians do. I prayed, I

confessed my sins, I genuinely paid attention in Sunday school and youth group, I tried my best to follow all the commandments, and I read the Bible when I had the chance. I did everything a good Christian would do; however, I was often told that simply going to church and doing church things didn't make me a Christian, that I need to believe and have faith. Yet even that I did; I believed in Jesus. But I thought that my head knowledge, my belief, in Christ was enough, and that because I believed, I deserved to be saved. Unfortunately, as James 2:19 says, even the demons believe that, and shudder.

During my time at youth group, in our lessons on doctrine, during our various retreats, and with the time we spent at Flower City Work Camp, I slowly realized I was doing it all wrong. Unfortunately, mere belief is not enough. God doesn't want us to simply "believe" in him; he wants *us*. God wanted me to fully devote my life to him, to let him take over my life.

I do not deserve Christ. I do not deserve to be saved by his death and resurrection. I do not deserve a close and personal relationship with God. I was headed down the path to eternal separation from him. And yet I am saved, not because of anything I have done or could possibly do, but because of God's love, mercy, and grace. So, I should fully surrender my life to him and live my life for him. After all, he gave me my life to begin with! That is why I should read the bible, go to church, pray, and all those Christian things. Not because they will give me salvation, but because I already have it.



However, surrendering my life is hard. Even though I understand that my life was once lost, I am often still ungrateful for God's love. I often tell him that I want to do things my way, that what I want is what's important, like doing well in school, getting into college, being popular among my friends. I would totally ignore God to pursue my own goals, and never did it ever work out. I still struggle with this every day and require constant reminders that what I want is not necessarily what God wants. Fortunately, God's grace has always allowed me to return to his love that I deserve less and less. ☞

A Boy Named Lucas

burninglamp4jc

☞ God may not be everything to some people for some they may not see the need for Jesus. To them is Jesus someone off in the distance in their lives or is he near? Is he all they want or is he not at all?

Let me tell you a story many years ago about a young boy named Lucas who one day received a love letter from Jesus. Well, exactly how did he get this letter? It was a message to him written in the sky. Jesus is the light that shined down on Lucas. Jesus wrote: *Dear Lucas, "You are my precious child. I am your invisible love every day. You may not see me, but at night, I shined the moonlight onto your face as you slept and sent a warm breeze to love you. I am next to you and shared your thoughts, but you were unaware that I was close to you. I looked upon you and said, "This one is mine." I hope you will talk to me soon. Until then I will remain near.....Jesus."* Lucas felt the breeze and saw the moonlight. In his young lifetime, he did not know God, so Jesus remained near him.

Lucas grew up in a troubled home. At a young age his parents divorced because his father had an affair and so Lucas' mother divorced the father and left with Lucas. When Lucas grew up with his mother she had bad parenting skills, so he developed a bad behavior. Throughout his neighborhood he was truly this bad bully kid who intimidated and taunted smaller kids. He wore his hair long like an unkempt mop down to his shoulders. When he spoke he talked like a bigshot. Lucas had a few friends, followers and when they became young teenagers, Satan lured them on a ride toward the wild side. They drank and smoked pot. Lucas had a jealous feeling growing inside of him. He hated the good kids because they had what he didn't have. He was hurting in the inside so he teased them and they would run away from him. He laughed and showed off. By high school, he became quite a loner and flunked high school. He didn't care about his studies. He didn't care about having friends. He became miserable and was in and out of trouble most of his life. He did things in his life, things he was never caught for. His mom never knew he did drugs. No one knew he stole money from his mom. No one knew he pretended to be friendly to neighbors so he could break into their homes to find money to buy drugs.

Finally, at age nineteen Lucas tried everything from drugs and crime, but nothing ever helped him. He was lost. He felt empty and his mother couldn't even talk to him. But, she told him to find a job.

So he sought a good paying job at a hospital laundry plant washing hospital sheets. It was a miserable hard job. He had to wake up around 2:00 am for his 3:00 am shift in the morning. His job was to sort the soiled sheets from the hospital. Lucas was shocked what he had to do, but, for the money earned he thought he could use it to buy drugs. At work, he became so nauseated and sick that he puked in the toilet when he saw the soiled sheets from the hospitals. The smell in the Soil Sort department wasn't pleasant that he quit the job in two weeks. With the money that he earned, he could not resist his own physical urges to buy pot. When that money was spent buying pot he became broke. So, what happened next?

He did what he was good at and that was returning back to being a fake friend, breaking into a home and stealing money. However, he got caught this time and was arrested. And it was on his birthday.

What a miserable day to get busted on his birthday. At age twenty, Lucas sat in his six by nine jail cell away from home, from his mother who couldn't help him, away from drugs and money and all the evil desires. For months he could hear Satan whispering, laughing and telling him, "Now, you are mine." Satan sent him a clear thought what he should do to himself. Lucas tossed in his sleep. He was having nightmares and was starting to fidget. He was losing his mind for being isolated in his cell. At this point, Lucas felt completely destroyed in his life. He felt his life was over! He was at the lowest point in his life and contemplated suicide.

However, someone outside his cell walked by and told him, "Lucas, can you hear me? I think it's time for you to read the Bible." Lucas looked at the old woman who could be like his grandma. She stared kindly at his sallow face through the bars. She wore a cross, but he didn't want to listen to her. The strange woman who spoke to him didn't come back to visit him again; however, her words echoed in his mind over and over again. *The Bible. Time to read the Bible?* He didn't know what the Bible was and he thought he didn't deserve anything. He kept thinking about dying, how ashamed and guilty he was. He was a broken boy and he was looking thinner each day. One day, the book – the Bible was slipped through the door slot where he received his meals. It just appeared and he got down on his knees to look at the leather bound thick book. He was hungry to read a book so he picked it up and flipped through the pages. He saw lots of notes and interesting stories. It was like a guide book. It was fascinating and the Bible was nothing like he expected. He began reading the first chapter of Genesis and he was deeply impacted by the story of Joseph and he felt like he was one of the

bad older brothers who bullied Joseph. He also read how Joseph forgave his brothers and made peace with them in the end. It brought tears to his eyes because he yearned for that love. He yearned to be normal like everyone else.

A couple months after receiving his Bible, the elderly woman who wore the cross named Evelyn invited Lucas to her Bible study group with other young juvenile inmates. Her soft kind voice carried a tone of love for the young men as she talked about the Savior Jesus in her life. She prayed for them to receive His love and grace. The five young inmates, including Lucas were filled with wonder and delight to learn about who Jesus was and just how their sins was already wiped clean by Jesus' blood through his death on the cross. One young inmate said in awe, "You mean he just paid His life for our crimes?"

"Yes," said Evelyn. "He died for your crimes because He loves you, so that you can have life abundantly, filled with joy. Jesus took your crimes and nailed it on that cross with Him. Your sins give you an eternal death sentence. Jesus paid for your penalty. If you believe in Him and accept his pardon, then you will be free from sin and have eternal life in Him."

Jesus' death and sins forgiven were beautiful sounds to Lucas' ears. He wanted to taste it. He wanted to feel loved and Jesus' sacrifice was a love he never heard of, but, he was sad because he never knew about Jesus from his childhood days. All these years he felt empty and now his life was wasting away living in a jailhouse and he wished he would have known about Jesus before he did those awful things. But, Evelyn stopped his arguments. She had Lucas read a story, "You're all I want."

Lucas learned a story about a young man like him. There was another man in the white suit who is Jesus and He created the young man and gave him breath and life and his friendship from the start. Jesus said to the man, "*Can you find me? I am speaking to you. But, you don't know I am here.*" So, Jesus showed him He was the light where he could find peace. As Lucas listened to the story he recalled the light that spilled onto his face when he was young and sleeping. The man in the story becomes tempted by Satan and like Lucas he is driven away from Jesus by jealousy, lust, vanity, drugs, alcohol and then suicide. Lucas realized that this was himself. Jesus was never far from him, but watched him fall away from His invisible love. When the man in the story realized he needed love and found Jesus, the evil temptations kept him from getting to Jesus. He becomes helpless, and finally he realized he

needed to stop sinning and call upon Jesus to accept him as his Savior. Evelyn told Lucas that Jesus searches our hearts for any lethal infections and rescues us. He destroys all the sins that would make us depress, that would destroy us to become suicidal.

Jesus said to the man at the end, *"I am the hope that will keep you trusting in me. I'll be the light for your soul."* The young man finally said to Jesus, *"I was lost, but now I am found. You're all I want."* At the end he was a child of God saved in Jesus' loving arms. Evelyn said to Lucas, "Jesus was always near you. He chose you to be His. All you have to do is just talk to Him."

So later that day, Lucas, remorse in his heart, was pacing back and forth in his cell. Suddenly, he lay on a wall-mounted bed in prison, and his eyes glistened with tears. He cried and although no sunlight outside could break through the prison gray walls, there was an ethereal glow that shined down lightly onto his face. It gave him peace from hurting himself. "Jesus..." he called. He folded his hands in prayer and said a tearful prayer and he asked Jesus to forgive him. He had such regret over his actions and for his crimes. He felt so bad about himself and he said, "I wish I could start over," he told Jesus. "I wish I was normal. I wish I could just change." He yearned to be loved because he was hated by others. He wanted Christ to fulfill him.

And he did change. A sorrowful guilt in his heart was washed away knowing Christ had taken his guilt and nailed it on the cross. Christ opened the gate and his chains fell. Lucas was redeemed from his old, dark ways to a new self. He spent six years behind bars to pay for his crime. But, Lucas has never forgotten how Jesus' letter would be a sign of God's love and how the darkest days of his life finally turned him around to seek peace, love and forgiveness and to accept His grace. He learned that Jesus will not fail to love him for who he is. God always loved Lucas and said, "This one is mine." For this very thought, Lucas was thankful that he did not lose his life over Satan. That his purpose in life was in Jesus and He was everything he wanted. ✠ - A. Chow ;-)

