

Rochester Chinese Christian Church

ECHO

December 2003
Volume 21 - No. 2

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The Heart Of A Grateful Person

Pastor Herman Tang

Out of all the holidays, Thanksgiving is the one I like most because I love to hear the stories of grateful people. I am going to share six stories with you. Each of these stories came from the heart of a grateful person.

Story #1

Bible teacher Matthew Henry, after being robbed, wrote in his diary the following: "Let me be thankful. First, because I was never robbed before. Second, because although they took my wallet, they did not take my life. Third, because although they took my all, it was not much. Fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed."

Story #2 (*Thanksgiving by Cindy Chen*)

I took some time off at noon to take my mother to West Lake Foods. We wanted to buy some fish paste to make refreshment for the church on Saturday. In a rush, I got a speeding ticket. As I was feeling very bad about it, I also thought of the sharing of similar experience by John Chen, Judy Lee and Judy Tai. At that time I realized how I'd failed to learn a lesson from a previous experience when the officer let me go with a warning instead of a ticket. I really want to thank the officer this time. After giving me a ticket, he admonished me not to drive fast anymore. I also want to give thanks receiving only a ticket and an admonition instead of an accident from speeding. Lastly I want to thank God for giving me peace to accept the correction by the officer, because it was certainly my fault.

Story #3 (*Testimony of Timothy Chan at Orange Group*)

In the past year, there have been two gracious presents that make me be thankful to God.

On the first one, you may think that I'm telling a joke, but I am not. I thank God for bringing me cancer, for cancer taught me modesty

before God. Cancer bestowed me the wisdom in realizing the limitation of my life, my strength, my intelligence and my capacity. He reminded me of his generosity in granting life. I would have continued to take life for granted had I not received his kind reminder. His reminder enabled me to recognize Him, and to renew the priorities of my life.

Two days ago, my mother inquired if we have Mandarin services in church, and that she would attend one with me. She has not been enthusiastic in attending services, and we had only started our Branch Church seven months ago. Pastor Tang told me that it would take a long time to establish a new service, yet we packed our Mandarin service in less than five months. My sister started recommending Mandarin service to our mother three months ago, recalling that it is my mother's native tongue. God is so good! My mother went with me to church last Sunday for the first time. Praise the Lord!

Story #4 (*Testimony of Dr. Zhang Wenchuan in Orange Group at Thanksgiving '97*)

A verse from the Hymn we just sang reads “*Thanks for the storms that I have weathered*”. It truly speaks to my heart. Although my father was a pastor, I did not believe in Jesus. I considered myself not too good, and not too bad; not too strong and not too weak. My desire was to become a doctor to heal people. I achieved my goal later by becoming a doctor and served in Communist China with no complaints. The government sent me to serve in the rural areas. In those days, I “ate at a thousand homes and slept on a thousand beds”. I did it for neither fame nor money. I thought it was noble.

When I immigrated to the United States, I had to start from zero. I went to church and listened to the gospel. I thank God for making me realize that I am a sinner. Now my biggest desire is “how to lead my family to Christ.”

Story #5 (*Thanksgiving by Sun Tong*)

Thank God that when my faith is shaken and dry, His peace is my soul's living water, my rock and my fortress, so that I shall not sink. Thank God that when I feel lonely and helpless, His peace is like a rose of Sharon and lover of my soul, so that I shall not be sad. Thank God that when my body is weak, His peace gives me consolation so that I shall not want. Thank God that when I have conflicts at home, His peace gives me fear and humility, so that I

shall not boast. Thank God that when I don't know how to teach my children, His peace gives me wisdom, so that I shall not give up.

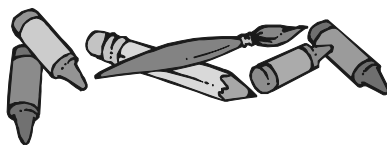
As I count God's blessings one by one, I can't help but thank Him wholeheartedly.

Story #6

Joseph was persecuted by his brothers and later sold as a slave. He suffered for thirteen years before he was brought out from the prison to meet with the King of Egypt. Later Pharaoh put Joseph in charge of the whole land of Egypt. Joseph was a grateful person. Not only has he forgiven his brothers, he also took good care of them for many years. The Bible told us how the story had ended in Genesis chapter 50:

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" ¹⁶ So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: ¹⁷ 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father. " When their message came to him, Joseph wept. ¹⁸ His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹ So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

The above stories have a common characteristic that surpasses what people normally describe as common sense. Do you know what it is? Do you have a grateful heart? If not, why not?



Graduating Night Sharing 4/18/2003

In the past few years, we experienced many ups and downs in our lives. Even though we do not know why things happened in certain ways, we trust and obey His Word, which is the lamp to our feet and the light for our path. As we look back today, we still do not fully understand it, but we acknowledged that God's will is higher than ours. May His name be glorified.

~ Philip and Joanne Chen

Joanne's Entering to Eastman

A few years ago when I applied for the DMA program at the Eastman School of Music, I did not think that I would be accepted: One of the hurdles was that my "audition recital" could not take place before the application deadline, due to the overbooking of recital halls and waiting list complications that year at Eastman. After praying and many negotiations with the concert office and other fellow students, God prepared a special way that I was able to give my audition recital in Kilbourn Hall, and it eventually took place after all the application results were announced that year. I thought there was no chance for me since school has made their decisions about whom they will take for that year. As I dwell on the thought of not being able to be accepted, God spoke to me about my application situation through His powerful Word:

2 Cor 1:19-20

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not "Yes" and "No," but in him it has always been "Yes." For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.

First, when I read these verses, I did not believe the "Yes" part wholeheartedly because I was looking at all the circumstances around me, rather than looking upon Jesus. While I was waiting for my application result after I gave my audition recital in May (usually audition takes place in February), I still had doubts about God's answer to my application previously. God saw how little faith I had. He spoke to me during my devotion through the following verse:

2 Tim 2:13

If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

Then I realized that God wanted me to learn to trust Him by taking His word, not the circumstances. In June, I got a letter from the school with a moderate thickness. I instantly knew that I was accepted without opening it. It was such an emotional moment for me – the mixed feelings of joy and sadness! I was really glad that I was accepted and able to study with the teacher I desired. On the other hand, I was very sad about my unbelief part. God continues to train and discipline me through all these years that I can grow in Him. There are many more faith lessons, which I am not able to share because of the limited time. I will save them for another time.

Philip's Entering to UR

After my study at RIT, I wanted to change my study field from traditional chemistry to other fields that are more popular. Things did not turn out the way I wanted. After many prayers, God answered me by opening another door for me at U of R in the Materials Science program. In my third year, I really wanted to finish the program in my fourth year. I was praying about this matter for a long period of time. Then one day I read:

Lev 19:23

"When you enter the land and plant any kind of fruit tree, regard its fruit as forbidden. For three years you are to consider it forbidden; it must not be eaten."

Joanne also read something in a similar tone:

II King 19:2

"This will be the sign for you, O Hezekiah: "This year (2001) you will eat what grows by itself, and the second year (2002) what springs from that. But in the third year (2003) sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit."

I could not believe the fact that the Lord is telling me that I had to wait for three years to sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit. I hold on to this verse in my heart ever since I first read it, even though I did not like what I read at that time. During these three years, my research, unfortunately, did not go as smoothly as I had planned. In year 2001 (just a few days before 9/11), I had to

give up one project I have been developing for almost one year because of some negative results and to start a brand new project from scratch. Until February this year, I still can not see how I can graduate in May, because my advisor wanted to expand my experiment for another paper, my PhD thesis was still up in the air. In the middle of February, my advisor and I agreed to start writing my thesis. At the end of February, I had a week or so to really sit down and write my thesis while my professor traveled to Japan. With no interruption, I managed to have my entire thesis written out within a month, which was a miracle to me. On March 8th, I read Leviticus 26 during my devotion, in which the passage describes that God warns the Israelites to keep His commands. In verse 13 it says: *“I am the LORD your God, ...; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high.”* I instantly knew that God will break my “yoke” and make a way for me to graduate in May, without knowing how then. Two weeks after I read that passage, I submitted my thesis one day before the deadline. One month later, I finished my oral defense (which was four days ago) and submitted my final copies today that is one day before official deadline for completing all the requirements for my doctoral degree.

(Joanne) Our Years In Rochester

I remember uncle King-Fai (who is now living in Boston) used to say that there are two most important decisions that we have to make in our life: One is to follow Christ; the other is to the marriage. Rochester has been a special place for us. I made the decision to accept the Lord here, and was baptized at RCCC. I met Philip in 1995 in Rochester. With the blessing of the Lord, the blessings from the family and many brothers and sisters, we got married at RCCC in 1999. In this very year, 2003, we both will be walking on the same commencement to mark another memorable moment in our lives in Rochester. What a wonderful blessing from the Lord!

Throughout all these years of our studies here, we both have gone through some good times and some bad times. We thank the Lord for his guidance and providence all these years. If I would describe our study years in one short sentence: I would say our time in Rochester is a roller coaster ride with God’s presence all the time. Many brothers and sisters pray for us in our prayer group and in church. We can not accomplish all these things without God, the support of each other, the support our loving families, and brothers and sisters in Christ.

(PHILIP)

In *Proverbs 3: 6-10*, the Scripture says, *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones. Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine."* Our graduation this year is our firstfruits that we offer to the Lord tonight. We may not have wealth, but we offer what we do have now. May it be pleasing to the Lord.

Now Joanne will be playing a song that she learned many years ago when she sang in the Choir. This song is based on Psalm 8, which is one of her favorite Psalms that led Joanne to accept Jesus Christ as her personal savior. The piece title is called "The Majesty and Glory of Your Name" by Tom Fettke. She adapted this choral version for piano solo.

Psalm 8

- 1 O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
- 2 From the lips of children and infants you have ordained
praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the
avenger.
- 3 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the
moon and the stars, which you have set in place,
- 4 what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that
you care for him?
- 5 You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and
crowned him with glory and honor.
- 6 You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put
everything under his feet:
- 7 all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field,
- 8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the
paths of the seas.
- 9 O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

God Is Sovereign

Alan Chon

Within the past couple of years, I have experienced both the grief of death and the joy of birth. I remember the former like it was yesterday. Two years ago, my grandfather was hospitalized for some heartbeat irregularities. A pacemaker was put in and all seemed well for his hospital release. However, the doctors recommended that while he was there, why not take care of a thyroid condition through surgery. After many consultations that the risk to "go-ahead" vs. delaying was better, we convinced grandpa to do so. A week later, grandpa passed away due to complications from the surgery. I do not recall ever feeling so much grief in my life. This time accentuated with the surprise of the passing and the fact that I helped to convince grandpa to go forward with the surgery. I felt responsible and questioned why this would happen. I lost focus on God and His Sovereignty over everything that happens in life.

However, I was reminded of His faithfulness and help in times of need through discussions with brother Jonathon Fong, who used to live here in Rochester and now is a cardio-thoracic surgeon in Florida. He wrote, "From my own perspective, as a believer, God is sovereign and in charge. His good, pleasing and perfect will will be done. As I tell my own patients, we are only instruments in His hands. As the apostle Paul put it, 'For me to live is Christ, but for me to die is gain!' I've been in this profession long enough that I've seen patients who have no human reason to recover come flying through the surgery. In a similar fashion I have seen patients that have no reason not to get better die suddenly. Again, God is sovereign".

The pain of loss was quite contrasted by the joy of birth that Sue and I experienced this year. As we near the Thanksgiving holiday, we are especially thankful to God for the birth of our daughter, Sarah. If anyone ever had doubts about God's presence in one's life, they need only to experience the miracle of birth. I remember reflecting on how awesome that we could be a part of a new life, seemingly perfect in each little feature - fingers, eyes, and mouth.

So as we start our journey into parenthood, I look forward to the lessons that God will reveal through our daughter. I am equally excited about her future and all the wonderful opportunities and experiences that she will have to glorify the Lord.

Grace

Keat Kuan

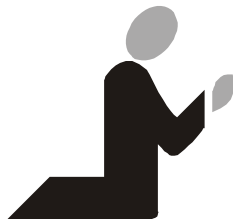
The title of my sharing is grace. There are many reasons why I chose this title. I would like to share with you a few evidences in my life that suggest what is stated in *John 1:16*, “*From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.*” I pray that we will be sensitive to the needs of people, especially those who are close to us, and that we will continue to pray for them.

First, I would like to talk about a significant change in my life since year 2002. As many of you know, I received my second Involuntarily Reduction in Force from Xerox on January of 2002. I was forced to close a chapter of my book that I just started writing. Not knowing what the next step was, I was shown by God that it was by His grace that I had what I had. Again I was reminded that what I have and what I had, were the free gifts from God and not my own merits. With that knowledge, Soon and I prayed that I would be able to fully submit to God’s will. Feeling no sense of control in my life, I started to seek a new direction for my future, and I prayed that God would close all doors that were not pleasing to Him. I waited helplessly and patiently for God’s plan in my life. Even though I was in a state of suspense, I did not doubt that God would provide a good path for my life. Later, God showed me that my being laid off, a seemingly unintended event, which I initially thought of as a defeat in my life, is actually a better representation of what I really want. I was wrong to think of the layoff as a setback. God used what appeared to be the unintended for His own good purpose. For example, I have always wanted to obtain a master’s degree in engineering. In His own way and timing, God made this pursuit possible for me. God opened the door for me to attend RIT and also provided me with the right amount of financial resources and time for me to accomplish my master’s program. To this day, I truly believe that my receiving of the specific amount of money that was needed to complete my master’s degree was not a coincidence at all. I have just recently obtained my master’s degree in mechanical engineering and I am also happy to have started the Microsystems / Mechanical engineering PhD program. Soon and I are continuing to pray for God’s guidance, and I am willing to go where He leads me. And to be honest, I do not think that I can go far if I am against His will.

Secondly, I would like to share about my parents. I came to the United States slightly more than 10 years ago. Before I left home

for my college education in America, my mother gave me two orders. The first was that I must not believe in the religion of the West, meaning Christianity. I prefer not to share the second one, but I will give you a hint. This hint is that my mother did not want to have an English teacher. I did not break the second rule, but I did disobey her on the first one. I was so broken down by God and I accepted Him in June of 1996. My family has been worshiping ancestors and idols for generations. It was obvious that my parents had wanted me to continue on believing what they have believed for so many generations. Therefore I guess the fact that I have already become a Christian created a sense of betrayal and fear in their hearts, and me being the eldest son of the eldest sons for four generations or more did not help either. They were disappointed at my conversion to Christianity but remained patient and loved me very much nonetheless. They tried to persuade me to remain faithful in worshiping my ancestors, but I did not submit to their request. It was also difficult for me to help them understand my relationship with the Lord. As a result, I could only continue to pray for my family. After a few years of prayers, and by the grace and truth that came through Jesus Christ, both my siblings were saved at different times. In addition to that, Pastor Tang led my parents to the Lord in January of this year during their visit in Rochester. Praise the Lord!

In closing, as the examples that I have just shared suggest, it is by God's grace that we are here today. The book of *Acts 15:11* says, "...it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved." So, may the Lord help us to help others to understand that the Spirit who is from God that has been given to us freely can be freely given to them. Also, may the Lord continue to guide us in our prayers. May the Lord help us to believe in our prayers as *Mark 11:24* states that "...whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours". Thank you for listening.



Work In Progress

Cathy Yu

We moved so my husband could attend business school and so I could become a stay-at-home Mom. In addition, we wanted to become a better witness to my parents. While we were living in Rochester, New York, they visited us often to help us around the house and to care for our kids. “You are always so busy with church...” they commented. Though it was our choice and desire to be busy serving Jesus, we knew that our work for the Lord was not bringing them closer to God; all they could see was the busyness and not love overflowing from a relationship with Christ. God laid upon our hearts the desire to do more to reach them.

Before we moved, we prayed and discussed ways to reach them. Direct conversations about Christianity and their beliefs did not seem to work. Whenever we tried to talk to them about it, they changed the subject. We thought that church attendance would open up more possibilities of conversations about Christianity. We considered attending a Taiwanese church in a neighboring town (since their preferred language is Taiwanese) with the hopes that they would go with us, but the service is only in Taiwanese. Although we were willing to sit through a Taiwanese service without understanding much, I knew my parents would not allow it. They would view our attendance there as a complete waste of time. We considered attending the nearby Chinese church, but the service is in Mandarin only. Again, my parents would not want us to attend a service that we could not fully understand. It seemed that we would have to look for an American church where they may feel comfortable learning about God. We went to different churches in the area without my parents, considering whether the church would be a place where my parents would feel comfortable and may want to go to regularly with us. Finally, we settled on a church that started a “campus” at a nearby school.

The “campus” was an extension of a large, growing church that had almost reached their maximum capacity. They decided to duplicate services and reach people in our part of town. We had already been church-hopping for several weeks when we saw the signs advertising their Sunday services at the school. After going once, we knew we wanted to bring my parents. We believe God directed us to the church for the following reasons:

1. The church is especially aimed toward seekers. It is a safe place for unchurched people to investigate Christianity. A typical service includes a drama and lively music. My parents have commented how different this service is than other services they have attended. They seem to enjoy the service.
2. The church is nearby which makes it easier to convince my parents to attend regularly. It only takes about 5 minutes to drive to the church or 15 minutes to walk to the church.
3. The church service starts and ends at a convenient time for our family.
4. The church has an excellent children's program. My son gets excited about going to church, which makes it more appealing for my parents to go with us.

After we decided to attend this church regularly, we invited my parents to attend. They agreed to go with us the first time we asked. Surprisingly, they also went with us the second time we asked. We were stunned, but elated when they went with us for the third consecutive week. In my 12 years as a Christian, they have never gone to church with me two weeks in a row. This is our first praise to God – finding a church that my parents willingly attend. Recently, they have not been going with us, but we continue to go to that church as long as there is a possibility that they will go with us again.

Our second praise to God is the new friends that have entered my parents' lives. During a cruise with their classmates, my Mom met a Christian woman from California. A few months after the trip, my Mom and her started to correspond to each other by talking on the phone and sending each other gifts in the mail. One of the gifts from the California woman was a collection of Chinese praise songs (unfortunately, my parents have not listened to it yet). It's comforting to know that my Mom has a Christian friend that she gets along well with.

Our third praise is being able to see some progress in my parents' lives. One of my friends told me that my Dad was asking her Dad a lot of questions about Christianity and seemed very interested in learning about it. Furthermore, my son has been a good witness to them. At mealtime, my parents wait to pray before we eat and they look forward to listening to my son's prayers. Another time, I overheard my parents agreeing to each other that they would attend church with us one more time and then stop going. The following

week, our family went to church without my Mom and Dad, but when we got home, my Mom told me that my Dad was not home because he went to the Taiwanese church service! Many people minister for a long time without seeing any progress yet they remain faithful in ministering. Even if we saw absolutely no progress in my parents' lives, we hope that we will remain patient and faithful.

We continue to hope and pray that my parents will receive the blessing of knowing Jesus. We don't know the ending, but we cannot lose hope! We continue to seek different ways to reach them and discuss how we can change in order to be a better witness. It's not easy to live with the people to whom you are witnessing. They see everything from the moment you wake up until you go to sleep. They see how you spend your time and how you interact with others. We hope that we will continue to change the way Paul wrote in *1 Corinthians 9:22-23* "*I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.*"

My Salvation Testimony

Soon Kuan

I was born and raised in Malaysia, a country that embraces a multicultural, multiracial, and multi-faith environment. Therefore, it was only natural that I thought all religions led to God, and that all religions were good, and that one could pick and choose any religions or combine them in a mixture form that best suits one's interest.

For example, our family regarded ourselves as Buddhists. But were we, really? Buddhism really does not say much about worshipping gods, but rather how to enlighten oneself to become the enlightened one, which is Buddha. But guess how many different gods we had in our house? There was a "door god" at the entrance to protect our coming and going; inside the house, there was a goddess for peace, another god for prosperity, another god in the kitchen, another god outside our back door, and more. And none of them was Buddha. Most of them were characters from Chinese legends; some of them were real heroes in ancient China.

So how did we decide whom to worship? Depending on what needs we had, we chose gods with specific powers in the respected areas.

And the selection was quite unlimited. By the time I was 16, I have worshipped not only at numerous Chinese temples, but also a Siamese temple, a Burmese temple, and even a Hindu temple. At one point, I worshipped a man from India because of his supernatural power. I kept a framed picture of his and nearly everyday, fresh powder would ooze from the frame magically. Did I know who he was? What did he stand for? Where did he get his power? Not a clue! But he seemed powerful, and I wanted him to give me what I want.

That seems to be the general theme in most Chinese households in South East Asia. People exchange worship for favor. It is a barter system. Since there are so many wants and needs, the more gods, the merrier. Sometimes I felt that these gods were more like puppets while we human were more like gods, because we were the ones who give commands. However, I was afraid to entertain these thoughts too often.

I have heard of the story of Jesus at a young age. I remember crying when I read about him in my children books of great historical figures. What an honorable man! Why don't we worship him as well, as another god in our house? I asked. No, my mom replied. It is a lot of trouble. We can't have all other gods if we worship him. Too much restriction. Too risky. Too narrow-minded. Too "ma fun" (troublesome)!

When I was in middle school, a friend invited me to a church retreat. Not knowing what a church retreat was, I gladly went, thinking that it was a vacation trip. And I liked what I saw. I saw how Christians cared about and loved each other. How they sang aloud in public praising God. How they prayed at every occasion and for everything. I read the Bible for the first time. I studied almost the entire book of Mark and I memorized Psalm 121. I had a lot of fun.

When I came home, I asked my dad if I could go to church the following Sunday. I was stunned when dad said no. My siblings and I were sensible and responsible children. Most of our requests were reasonable and were usually granted. My parents seldom said no to us. My dad explained that it was not in our custom as Chinese to go to church. If I went, he would lose face. Our ancestors would not like that.

So I went to my mom. Mom said I could go if I really wanted to and dad did not need to know about it. So mom and I lied a couple of times and I attended a couple of youth group meetings. But it

seemed wrong. I prayed that if Jesus were real, surely He would make a way for me to go to church without having to lie. Well, it did not happen at that time. Little did I know that this prayer was not granted until many years later. As a result, I put Jesus behind me.

When I was in college, I had a Christian roommate. We often took some classes together. Because of my upbringing, I had a totally different value system from hers. As a student, I measured personal success by school grades, and I measured the “realness” of God by how well my roommate did in our classes. I found out that times and again I would do so much better than her. I concluded that her God was not effective enough. There was no need to believe in God anymore since I could do so much better without God’s help.

It was not too long before my pride and self-reliance were shattered. During my senior year, I became ill. I was diagnosed with hyperthyroid. I lost 20 lbs. in a few months. I was so physically weak that I could hardly get out of bed every morning. I also had to claim an incomplete grade for one of my classes. To make the matter worse, I had no health insurance and I had very little money. I was determined to save myself from the situation. I did not even inform my family. I went to the International Student Office on campus to ask for financial aid. The lady who worked there, Charlene, was a kind Christian lady. She did not only try to find ways to help me, but also pray for me. With her help, I got some scholarship. She also found me an anonymous donor who volunteered to pay for my prescribed medicine, and she talked the specialist at the hospital into seeing me for free. When all these helps arrived, Charlene was so happy. She praised and thanked God in tears. I was thankful, but not enough to give all the credits to God. I thought surely a poor, unfortunate, hardworking, 4.0 student like me must deserve all the help I could get. Whether it came from God was solely dependant on one’s interpretation. Nonetheless, for the first time, I realized that I could not accomplish everything by myself.

When I started working at Xerox, I have transformed from an underprivileged student to an independent, good income-earning adult. I was free to do anything I desired. I did not realize that God was granting me the prayer that I made so many years ago to let me go to church freely. I somehow felt that I owed it to myself to find out more about Jesus. Who is He? Is He real? How is He different from all the gods I have worshipped in my family? And is He relevant to my life?

At the same time I had a lot of concerns. I was afraid that if I found out that Jesus was real, I would have to accept Him and become a Christian. My first worry was my family and loved ones. What would my dad say? Surely my siblings were going to laugh at me! And my boyfriend, how would he feel?

My next worry was my pride. Would people think that I go to church because I wanted more friends? Furthermore, I was also afraid that it was uncool to hang out with a bunch of Jesus freaks.

Therefore when I came to RCCC, I asked not to be introduced in public. I sat in the last row and observed. However, I did want to join a fellowship group because I have tasted the goodness of it from my limited youth group experience. But I had to make sure that there would be no strings attached. I made a point of leaving as soon as church services and Bible Study meetings were over. Nonetheless, I did get to know some people better gradually. Lily, Mimi, and Sandy Yan went out of their ways to try to befriend me. For that, I thank them. The more I learned about God, the less I could resist Him. Jesus is not someone who was fabricated by men; everything about Him is well recorded in the Bible. Christianity is not a religion that men can change or tailor to meet their own fancies, but the Bible serves as the authority of truth. At that point, I have pretty much understood that God is real. But I still could not accept him as my own God.

Then came the Church Retreat 1996. Pastor Tang was the invited speaker, and Brother Tony Wong had a workshop on stress management.

I remember Pastor Tang preaching from 1 Peter, all five chapters on suffering for God. I was deeply touched. It changed my perspective on believing in God entirely. I had thought that people would believe in anything, anybody, or any god in order to become prosperous. Pastor Tang's preaching taught me that there was so much more to just a barter system between men and God. For the first time, I understood the meaning of having a relationship with God.

Then there was the workshop. Brother Tony helped us evaluate our stress level. Most people who know me must think that I have a low stress level, because I am just a happy person. The truth is that I am quite stress free now, but was not quite exactly so before I became a Christian. I was always in want of something, fearing that

if I did not fight and work hard enough I would lose my share of gain. So the evaluation came out that my stress level was quite high. I wrote at the corner of my paper, that I thought I was going crazy soon with this much stress. Michelle, who sat next to me, grabbed my paper and wrote, "God can help you!" Brother Tony began talking about surrendering our cares and burdens to God, trusting in God and not leaning on our own understanding. That was the point when I realized that yes, not only there is a God, and I knew who He is, but I needed to accept Him as my own Lord and Savior.

But could I confess my faith in public? No, I still had many struggles to work through. That night, in my own antisocial way, I sat by myself reading in a corner while people were mingling. Uncle King Fai came to talk to me. He asked me where I stood in terms of my relationship with God. I told him that I believe in Jesus now but I did not want to be known as a Christian. I did not want people to know how I felt. But Uncle King Fai looked me straight in the eyes and told me, "Because you believe in Jesus, so you are a Christian now". It scared me to hear that. Great, now what was I going to do? My parents, my siblings, my boyfriend, what was I going to tell them?

But God continued to work in me, and I finally realized that if Jesus could die for me for my sins because He loves me, why couldn't I put down my pride for Him? I finally confessed my sins and acknowledged Him as my God and Savior.

There were actually many things that happened later: I wrote to my mom to tell her about Jesus. But because I was afraid that my dad might see the letters before mom did, I sent the letter to my sister instead. After reading the letter, my sister began going to church and accepted Christ shortly after. My boy friend at that time, Keat, became a Christian as well. My mom became a Christian some time later and my dad said the sinner's prayer before he passed away.

God continues to do many miraculous things in my life; I have so much to thank Him. For every good and perfect thing comes from Him. May glory and honor belong to Him!

In This Place Dreams Are Made

Aileen Chow

“You lead me here to Your courts, Surround me with Your love, I walk with You, I do not fear. You carry me, You are my strength, I’ve learned to trust in You. And once again, I’m reaching out. In this place, Dreams are made. In this place, Where you are. Carry me here, In Your arms of love, Draw me close to You, I want to be where You are.”

- A praise song by Marty Sampson

This praise song, “Carry Me” by Marty Sampson touches my heart. It is a song about us wanting to feel close to God. It tells us how God is present in the church and how God will lead his children into the courts and, “in that place, dreams are made.”

And what are these dreams? It could mean almost anything.

When you attend services at RCCC, do you feel the presence of God? Do you feel close to God as like in this song? Do you trust in him? Do you reach out to Him? Do you feel like He is carrying you into His arms of love? And lastly, is the church a place where dreams are made? These questions I find are very personal and even I had to think about it. But I know that when I enter His courts, I want to feel welcomed. I want to feel God’s presence in me and within the people worshipping around me. When I enter His courts, I know that the church has big dreams and goals that they will announce, and want you to experience God working through the needs of the church and the society. The dream of the church is also to reach out to people and hopefully they’ll find God’s love and love God sincerely.

Earlier, I asked what these dreams are. Dreams are like outreaching to people who need help, giving away Bibles to the community, setting up a clothing connection for people who need clothes, or raising money to build a Youth Center for the youths in the church. Like Jacob, he had a dream (Genesis 28) and saw heaven. It was that place which started a dream for his family. And the place he slept and dreamt at became a pillar or the building foundation of the church. RCCC has dreams too. You can just see it right before your eyes. Soon the church will have a gymnasium and many classrooms. These rooms will be utilized to reach out to people to join the church in church activities and to teach people about the Bible.

In this place I want to be welcomed. There is a saying, "Come, just as you are." I like the song "Matthew 11" when it says that it is here in the Lord's family that we share the greatest love the world has ever seen. The Lord's family is the people who greet you at church or the people who sit next to you in the pew. At City Church, I am always greeted by smiling ushers at the door who will shake your hand as they give you the church bulletin. Our pastor encourages us to greet three or four people who sit next to you. It is a very warm feeling to shake their hands as well and to greet them personally.

The Lord's family is also the people who lead the worship. They are the instruments of God, and their purpose is to get people to feel close to God. If I want to feel like God is carrying me into this place and being in his arms of love, I believe that music draws us to be close to Him. I would like to invite you all to attend City Church in Batavia. Let me describe to you what worship is like: The worship team sometimes likes to play one traditional song in the beginning and then play it up with lively contemporary songs. The worship is very lively. It is so loud I can't hear myself sing sometimes. It's not harsh sounding but that everyone is worshipping together. This church has a lot of spirit. People are raising their hands and closing their eyes in worship. The musicians and choir get into the music too. The musicians play in a very fervent and very upbeat way. The choir sways to the music. The worship leader is full of spirit. He's out jumping up and down, twirling around in circles and raising his hands in worship. The pastor is upfront too, his hands reaching out to touch God, and he sings with intense emotion. Barry and I feel uplifted when we sing and worship. After each song, the congregation claps and shouts "Yes God!" and "Amen!" We sing another cheerful praise song. Near the ending of the song, the worship leader repeats the chorus again and we sing it again and again and again until we're filled with spirit. More clapping and cheering follow after we finish singing the song. The shouting and clapping becomes louder and louder and louder. The congregation shouts "Amen!" "Praise God!" or they just shout anything that makes them feel good because they feel God's presence. Let me ask you, do you feel close to God when you worship? Does the Holy Spirit stir you when you sing? The next time you sing or lead worship it's important to have that inspiration.

In this place I want to hear the Lord speak to me. When there are times of quiet meditation, do you feel God move your heart? Are you surrounded by His love that you hear Him speak to you? Sometimes, a church service needs to have a spontaneous moment

to allow God to take over the whole service. It is not a common thing that happens during a service. It happened a few times at City Church when the program didn't go according to plan, and it ended there wasn't enough time for the pastor's sermon. You must wonder if the pastor was disappointed for not having enough time to share his message, but he was not disappointed at all because (1) He did not want to interrupt the worship. He kept it flowing so that we felt the Lord's presence. 2) God moved him to bring people to him to pray. Everyone and including me felt very renewed because God spoke to each one of us. In a normal service, we sing, we pray, we hear special music, we listen to announcements, we give offering and lastly we hear the pastor's sermon. When the service is done, we head out the door and head home. We're led to do the same things over and over. I asked myself if there was ever a time when I heard the Lord spoke to me in any of these services. God has spoken to me through messages, but this was very special because I had to confess. I felt very humble and I needed God to know how I felt. During the worship, the pastor led the congregation in a half-hour long prayer. A lot of people were hurting and wanted prayer so they joined the pastor upfront near the podium. Prayer counselors were there on hand to pray for the women and men who needed help. Throughout this time, people who were still standing at their seats like me, were feeling God's love being poured out. Sometimes, we just need to stop the normal routine and allow a moment of silence and prayer so that we can reflect and hear the Lord speak to us. A small change in the program is always a good thing when we know in our hearts that we need to have the Lord's presence in that place.

In the song, "Carry Me," God is our strength and our protector. He will always be in the courts and His promises are that He will always love and protect us from danger. We need to trust in Him completely. God will keep His promise to never leave you. In Genesis 28:15, He promised Jacob that he would never leave him. He also promised to protect and care for Jacob. So you know, He would never leave us too! Because of this promise He wants us to dream to make the church a better place for people and for the community. He wants us to fully adore Him in worship and to listen to His voice. Have you ever thought of these things before? Hopefully, next time when you enter the courts, you will worship Him wholeheartedly and like a father He will carry you into His arms of love.