



*Special Parents Exalting Christ's Infinite Amazing Love*

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# Be Strong, Suffering Produces Endurance

Carol Cheung

I accepted Jesus Christ 15 years ago when I gave birth to my daughter. During birth, her brain was damaged due to the lack of oxygen. This affected her normal development and she had to depend on a machine to obtain daily nutrients. She could not walk independently, and had developmental delay, frequent seizures, and difficulty in breathing. She had to take a lot of medication each day. Praise God that we could obtain good medical care in Canada. By leaning on God, we can continue to live here.

Between last September and January, my daughter's health had deteriorated, and was in and out of hospital. The Hospital for Sick Children seemed like a second home to us. In the uncertainty of when she would get well to be home, I became very tired without strength. My faith had also weakened. In addition to this, my daughter's condition worsened, she was transferred to the Intensive Care Unit for intubation procedure. During that time, I almost collapsed.

A few days later, the doctor wanted to try removing the tube to see if she could breathe on her own for 20 minutes. At the end, the doctor was very disappointed and did not know why it was so hard for her to breathe on her own. I was downhearted and did not know if my daughter would live. The fear, desperation and sadness drove me to the hospital's chapel to pray, crying out to God to relieve her pain and suffering. I repented my sins and asked for God's forgiveness and committed to surrender to God's will.



I returned to her bedside when the doctor came to examine her. I prayed for her silently. At that moment, God clearly spoke to me: “Be strong, you have to fight this battle together with your daughter.” Instantly, my tears stopped, and I felt fully awake. I could not explain this miraculous encounter with God. I thank God for watching over us with His peace. This experience led our family to pray with one heart, learn to be patient, and trust in God.

Romans 5:3-5 was what I learned in my Bible study group and gave me great comfort “...*knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame...*”

Praise You Abba Father, Amen!

## **A Whole New World, A Whole New Life**

**Desmond & Maria Vong**

Justin was born in 2004, six years after we married. We wanted to have a child in 2003 but the SARS epidemic made us postpone the plan. Everything in life had been well-planned and mostly had gone as planned, in those years, until he came.

Justin was the most adorable baby in our eyes. The first two years were as good as it could be. Then, we started concerning about his poor eye contact and slow in speech development. Assessments were completed. He was diagnosed with a type of Autism known as PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified). Children with typical Autism are characterized by impaired communication, weak social interaction and repetitive patterns of behavior. Since Justin was not showing the repetitive patterns of behavior, his condition was “Not Otherwise Specified”.

Because of the peculiar classification of Justin's condition, we were not quite sure for a long time if Justin was really autistic. We had the slight hope that his condition was different from typical autism and somehow, he would grow out of it. But as he gets older, we realize that it will be a life-long condition.

As Christian parents, we spent countless hours praying for Justin. We are not sure if we should pray for his full recovery. It will take a miracle since it is a known fact that Autism is not curable. Or if we should pray for the more "pragmatic" wish that he can make the best out of his limitations and still be able to lead a meaningful life. God never gives us a clear answer. We keep doing what we can to help him, sometimes delighted in small achievements he made, but more often disappointed by the failures. Things in our lives have become uncertain, unplannable and incomprehensive.

Justin is now 15 years old, and we have moved back to Canada from Hong Kong for 5.5 years. He is studying in a class for autistic students in a public school, attending church and playing ice-hockey every Saturday. He does not have close friends, but he is very close to us. He seems content with his life and knows no worry about his future. We have, after these many years, accepted his condition, yet still worry about his future.

If you ask us what is God's purpose for giving us this special child (we all like to make sense of things happening in our lives, which appear to be ridiculous, random and arbitrary), I do not have an answer. This ordeal, however, does bring us to a world of special families that were unknown to us before. It connects us to many great parents of children with special needs, and we have been blessed tremendously in seeing their courage, immense patience and unconditional love towards their children. We are able to meet teachers, pastors, volunteers who pour out their hearts to love these special children and individuals. We used to live a middle-class, professional lives. Justin has made our world much larger, and much closer to reality, a world with hurts and sufferings.

The temporality, fullness and frailty of human life, as well the all-encompassing love of God are well described by the following words:

*“Conceived and nurtured – by women wondrously  
They come and see and listen – oblivious to illusion  
Have longings and desires – and weep their little tears  
Despise and venerate – feel danger and delight  
Believe, doubt, err, and teach – deem all and nothing true  
Are building and destroying – and struggle evermore  
Sleep, waken, grow, and wither – with brown or graying hair  
And all of this continues at most for eighty years.  
Then with their ancestors they lie down to rest and never will be back.”*  
— Matthias Claudius

*“God loves human beings. God loves the world. Not an ideal human, but human beings as they are, not an ideal world, but the real world. What we find repulsive in their opposition to God, what we shrink back from with pain and hostility, namely, real human beings, the real world, this is for God the ground of unfathomable love.”*  
— Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Let's welcome people who are different from us into our lives. Getting to know them, making friends with them, playing with them, working with them, helping them and let them help us. We will all live a fuller life.



## Running in Obstacle Course

Elli Cheng

Ethan is a boy born in 2010. After two miscarriages, it took a lot of hard work to conceive Ethan, my husband and I were looking forward to his birth. However, he suffered multiple seizures when he was born. He stayed in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit in one of the best hospitals in Hong Kong. A team of doctors and professors had no idea what caused his seizures. Since Ethan also had extremely low muscle tone, one of the doctors told me Ethan might have Cerebral Palsy. They also informed me that he might be blind because the pupils of his eyes did not respond to light at all.

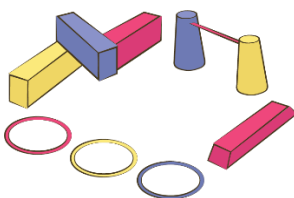
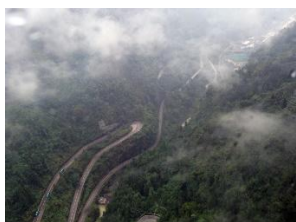
Bad news did not seem to cease. When Ethan was two years old, he was also diagnosed with global developmental delay, meaning delayed physically, mentally and intellectually.

My husband and I prayed to God every day that he could walk one day. Most children can walk even when they were ten months old, but for Ethan, his muscles were so weak that he could not stand on his own even when he was three. He fell behind on all the developmental milestones. As parents, we really wanted him to catch up and be on pace with the normal developmental milestones. Our hearts were filled with anxiety all the time. We were feeling exhausted both physically and mentally. As time went on, no matter how hard we helped Ethan working out, he did not improve as much as we expected.

There were many challenges and obstacles in Ethan's life. Nevertheless, we were very blessed that he was accepted to Grade 1 in Holland Bloorview School, which provided one of a kind school program to children and youth with physical disability. So we decided to move back to Canada for good in 2016. By then, Ethan had had some improvements in his physical strength, but at the same time, he also had some autistic symptoms, such as over-sensitivities to sounds, delay of speech and unstable emotion. I got formal diagnoses from Holland Bloorview that Ethan is autistic when he was six.

Due to the complexity of Ethan's condition, Holland Bloorview Hospital referred him to take a genetic test. After a long wait, we finally received the result, which was, unfortunately, disappointing. Ethan's gene has a variation, and it is a rare disorder. There are only 20 individuals with this condition in the existing medical literature. The genetic doctor told me Ethan is the no. 21 case. This makes me even more certain that Ethan is so unique.

### Amazing journey



To be honest, it was the biggest disappointment and darkest moment in my life at the time when Ethan was born. I was feeling ashamed that my son was not a healthy baby. I blamed myself and carried many broken dreams for not having an energetic grandson for my parents. There were many broken dreams. My spiritual mentor inspired me to write down what I wanted to do with Ethan. I said they had become meaningless and impossible because Ethan was not able to move at all. But he said to me, "You never know, HE is a surprising and amazing God". When I look back, throughout the past ten years running the obstacle course with Ethan, there were times of fatigue and disappointment. But at the same time, our family have experienced a lot of surprises and God's wonders. I still remember the "wish list" items I wrote down for Ethan and now when I reviewed them, I found that they are all accomplished. Now, Ethan can see, walk, run, jump, sing and dance, and he can speak and understand both English and Cantonese very well. This is how amazing Our Lord is.

Throughout the early years of Ethan's development, many people would say, "He is lucky to have you." Yes, as Ethan's parents we tried our very best to help him navigate the world and to make his life better. But I know the truth is, we are actually blessed to have him in our lives.



Ethan is unlike anyone I have ever met in my life. His intentions are always pure, his love is always genuine, and he always expresses his affection to others. He is never mean or selfish. He is the only person I have ever known who does not have any evil thoughts at all. Ethan has a caring heart. Ethan will kiss my forehead when I have a headache; he always checks in with me and asks me "Is everything ok out there?"; one of the sparkling moments was when I was cleaning and accidentally made a loud "Bang" sound which scared my husband and Ethan. My husband glared at me with annoyance and blamed me for scaring them. But the first response from Ethan was "Are you OK, Elli?" It really touched my heart. God blessed me with such a handsome boy with such a beautiful heart and I felt so loved. *"Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy."* Psalms 126:5.

### **Inclusive culture shows love**

Since my family came to live in Toronto in 2016, I have experienced a diversity of cultures that are very different from Hong Kong. One that I appreciated most is the inclusive culture. A culture of inclusion embraces diversity within an accepted group (e.g. different race, color, language, health or disability...). Just as Christianity teaches that all people are equal. In the ministry of Jesus Christ, He gave a special place to those who are marginalized in their community. He showed unconditional love, acceptance and compassion for them and cared for their disabilities and spiritual well-being.



The culture of inclusiveness derives care for people who are underprivileged. During the pandemic, I had experienced the consideration for people with disabilities in the community. There were communities and medical care who had organized vaccinations for people with developmental disabilities. I signed up for Ethan immediately and knew he had a great fear for injections. With his current body size and physical strength, it was impossible to ask him to submit. On the day of injection, it was snowing slightly. We were driving a car, and there were already 3-4 volunteers waiting in the outdoor parking lot. After registering Ethan, another 3-4 paramedics

came to us in the cold wind. Next to the car, one of them was Spider-Man, he was just wearing a thin Spider-Man shirt to distract Ethan, another was holding a gift for Ethan, and another gave Ethan the injection. We just stayed in the car the whole time and Ethan managed to get his vaccinations done in total calmness. On the way home, I was constantly grateful for everything we had experienced. I saw not only unconditional giving, but also sacrifice.

At the beginning of May, the weather started to be warm; I chose to walk over to Ethan's school, I could then take a slow walk home with him and enjoyed the pleasant weather in spring. However, on the way, a community worker from the city government was mowing grass at the side of the road with a lawn mower making a loud noise, which made Ethan very uneasy. At that time, Ethan covered his ears with his hands, but he still greeted the staff happily. We were going to rush away, but I noticed the staff who was driving the lawn mower had already stopped. And I looked back, only to find that he even made sure we had gone far enough to restart the engine and continue mowing. I gave him a distant nod to thank him, and he responded with a nod back. This was such a beautiful moment, such a routine, such a subtle, such a thoughtful gesture, that warmed my heart!

The culture of inclusion I have experienced is a group (whether it is a society/community/school/church/individual) that is willing to make appropriate cooperation for the needs of the disadvantaged, which may sacrifice some convenience, some time, and some resources and comfortability. Christians are also a group called to practice a culture of communion. From the parable of the "Good Samaritan", the Lord Jesus pointed out that being a "good neighbor" means being willing to pay for the needs of others, regardless of race, religion, identity. ***"Whoever gives a glass of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple, I tell you the truth, he will not lose his reward."*** Matthew 10:42.

Thank you Lord for testifying His grace and love through Ethan's life!

May His Kingdom come!  
Amen!

# **Keeping Our Faith Alive in a World with Autism**

**Fiona & Henry Liu**

We are the parents of two exceptional boys: 10-year-old Elijah and 9-year-old Ezekiel who has autism spectrum disorder.

When Ezekiel was 18 months old, he did not babble like the other children, so we got him assessed and he was diagnosed with autism at about 2 years old. Stunned, we grieved over the diagnosis – we cried for the baby we did not have: one who would rather play by himself than with his brother or us. A child who mostly had a blank stare or talked gibberish to himself all day.

The first couple of years after the diagnosis were very gloomy. After a hard day's work, we would come home to a child who was a picky eater, who did not sleep well and who was not interested to interact with the rest of the family. When we were out in the community, we had to keep an eye on him at all times because he would run away when something caught his eyes, and because he would put inedible objects in his mouth: things he finds on the floor: dirt, hair, rubber bands. Once he almost ate a staple. We were exhausted physically and mentally. Out of desperation, we clung onto God. We cried out to Him for patience and strength and sought His comfort especially when the challenges became overwhelming.

Looking back to the time when we were picking names of our boys, we chose to name them after two prophets in the Bible, in the hope that they will grow up to serve the Lord as messengers of the Good News. It was a huge irony to see our child struggles with communicating his basic needs and at the beginning, it was hard not to feel like this was one big cruel joke. Though it was difficult at times to understand why God's plan for us included autism, on hindsight we can see that God has used it to draw us closer to Him and to equip us with a greater measure of humility, patience and empathy, among other things. Without autism in our lives, we would not be the stronger Christians we are today.

Autism changed our priorities and the way we lived our lives. By faith, Fiona gave up her career to care for and teach the kids. We made a commitment to God: for the rest of our lives, we will do our best and we will trust Him to do the rest. Because we constantly need direction from the Lord, we are too busy NOT to pray. In our prayers we commit to the Lord all that we do for our two boys, from major issues like school advocacy to minor matters like introducing new foods. And we are thankful for our community of brothers & sisters who support us in prayer.

God has been more than gracious to us – He answered a lot of our prayers and blessed us with so much. Here are some highlights of the years past:



- At about 4 years old, Ezekiel allowed Fiona into his world. It meant so much to us when he pulled her hand to ask her to play with him.
- When he turned 5, he stopped putting non-edible objects into his mouth.
- At around 6 years old, we fully toilet-trained him.
- At 7 years old, he was able to go to public washrooms by himself, using headphones to reduce his anxiety around loud flushes and hand dryers.
- When he was almost 8, he finally learned to fall asleep by himself without Fiona by his side – and slept through the night.

These are just some of the big milestones but there is so much God has blessed us with, it is not possible to name them all.

Some people ask us: How do you know it is God, because you guys did a lot of work yourself! We know it is God because for everything we do, there are things outside our control and God takes care of those things. Sometimes God shows us it is really Him behind the scenes when He gives us wonderful outcomes that are totally unexpected, even impossible. For example, the year Fiona quit her job and we could not afford much, we received “free therapy” for a year as part of a York University research project. That alone was pretty awesome. But here is the kicker: Ezekiel responded to this free therapy even more than the evidence-based therapy we paid for before joining the project. That is the amazing God I am talking about – with God, all things are possible!

And we know it is God when we are still able to find time & energy to volunteer at church when things are so incredibly busy in a life touched by autism. It is our service to God’s people, to teach Sunday school and help in the Special Needs Ministry to serve other families who are touched by autism or other disabilities.

We still have challenges today: Ezekiel is still learning how to interact and play with friends, and new problem behaviors emerge. But we believe our Heavenly Father knows about these challenges and we continue to lean on Him and rest in Him as we work through the difficulties. Philippians 4:6-7 is a verse we hold on to: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

We believe that God is almighty and in control. And if He can make the birds sing, He can empower our son share his testimony one day, in his own special way.

(Above published in ACEM Monthly, August 2014, Issue #270)

## Forever Grace

Kitty Ng

I am the mother of two sons: Philip is 37 years old and suffers from cerebral palsy; Jason is 32 years old and is now working in Sweden. I accepted Jesus Christ 28 years ago. By God's grace, our family of four (including my husband Albert) is living happily. Our lives are filled with thanksgiving and praises!

The biggest challenge of my life came in July 2005. That was when Philip reached 21 years of age. He had completed all the courses for children with special needs. This meant he was an adult able to live independently; and had to leave the school. Even though he is an adult, he is incapable of self-care and needs other people to care for him.

At that time, there was no government grant nor support, no transitional service was provided. Private daycare was very expensive. For a regular household like ours, the financial pressure would have been heavy. That was why I had to stay home 24 hours a day to take care of Philip. Due to the change in routines and lack of social contact, Philip got very moody. I tried my best to take care of him. I had to stay at home and did not know what the next day would bring. I was depressed and could only prayed to God unceasingly.

Thanks be to our God! He comforted me with His Word during my devotions. ***“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.”*** His Word woke me up, realizing that my previous focus was wrong. Taking care of my child is serving God! Instantly, my worries were gone, and I was willing to bring everything to God wholeheartedly and happily faced all difficulties in life with a positive attitude.

Miraculously, one day I met a good friend at a supermarket. She inquired about my needs. As a result, she came once a week to take care of my child, so I could rest. A year later, the government rolled out “passport funding”. We were one of the first beneficiaries. With the money, we could put Philip in day care twice per week, leaving us some time to rest or go shopping.

In the summer of 2019, we went on a road trip to Newfoundland. We ordered three big meals at a restaurant. When we were about to pay the bill, the server said someone had already paid for us. She said she had never seen that person before. We were so thankful; we were surrounded by angels. God had given us a great surprise and encouragement!



Currently, we are facing another big challenge. My husband and I are at retirement age, facing the decline in our physical strength and health. Our parents are in their 90s and in need of care. Philip is full of energy but cannot take care of himself. Being sandwiched between two generations is very tough. Thankfully, my husband and I are in one accord, knowing that with the help of God, we can take care of both our child and parents. We follow God's direction through prayer, while believing He will take care of us all.

May we encourage one another and press on together.



# Testimony and Life Story

**Lawrence Luk**

This is not only a true testimony, but also a real-life story.

I am Lawrence Luk, a blessed man with our merciful God's blessings in my life journey. I accepted Jesus Christ 30 years ago. However, I truly returned to Jesus 20 years ago when I lost a wonderful job and I was disappointed, not to respond to our God's calling to follow Him.

After I truly returned to our God and asked God to develop myself in Him, our God prepared me to return to my professional job and then linked me up with my life partner, my wife, Karen. Our God gave us two precious gifts in our family. The two boys were the two precious gifts from our gracious God. They let us learn and experience our God more through the daily provision and care. They also led us to learn about ourselves more on our limitations because we did not know how to take care of kids initially.



Joseph is 12 years old, and Joshua is 9 years old now. Both of them made me praise our God as they were the response of our God for what I prayed 20 years ago. I thought they represented God with me.

Joshua was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Hong Kong when he was 5 years old. This diagnosed result made me and my wife frustrated for a few months as we were not prepared for it. It seemed it was contradicting to God's gift, which should be perfect gift. While we were disappointed, we sought all possible treatments and supports for Joshua, and try to learn what ASD truly meant to Joshua.



After Joshua was diagnosed with ASD, he could receive all related treatments before 6 years old from Hong Kong government supported organizations. I was the one to bring Joshua to all these 1-on-1 or group treatments for one year. I was the observer and learner while Joshua received treatments. Our gracious God, who knew my limitations, provided me with these opportunities. Moreover, I learnt about the special needs and characteristics of my son, Joshua, more while he received treatments. Our God was with us going through all these difficulties and challenging moments. I learnt and experienced God was God, not me.

As Joshua was preparing to Grade 1, which had fewer special needs supports in the Education System of Hong Kong, we decided to return to Canada in August 2017. Our gracious God let me know I was walking with Him through our smooth settlement in GTA, including finding affordable rental home, engaging to public school principal and teachers who truly care for special needs students, getting job opportunities, joining in the special needs group at RHCCC..., etc. Our merciful God provided all our family needs. I know our God is real and true because I have experienced Him through our real needs in our daily life.

I used to suspect that Joshua was not a gift from our God. I struggled and was depressed. After my family and I went through difficulties, we learnt God was with us in our daily life, and I was changed. Right now, I know Joshua is leading me to know more and experience more our God. Our God is the true and real God, who creates me and gives Joshua as a precious gift to our family.

Praise our Lord Christ Jesus.  
Amen.

## Refocusing on God

York Lee

As I grew up in a Catholic family, God was no stranger to me. I used to pray frequently when I was young; however, my faith was not deeply rooted. After I left Hong Kong to come to study in Canada, my beliefs and values started to be challenged. I became more materialistic and paid more attention to money and external values. I was arrogant, selfish, impulsive, and impatient. My lifestyle was contrary to the teaching of God's Word, and I gradually drifted away from Him. Although God had been trying to give me guidance through different channels, I ignored Him, built up my own wall, and shut Him out.

I thank God that He did not give up on me. It was through my son Adin that He let me know how limited we are. At an early age, Adin had difficulty with verbal communication and diagnosed with autism. My wife and I were very worried and often had conflicts regarding how to take care of him. Those were the darkest days of my life. I felt the uncertainty of life and helplessness in leading my family. All these gave me more time and space to reconsider my faith and relationship with God.

During that time, the Holy Spirit began to work inside me. He led me to repent of my sins and to seek God's forgiveness. Through prayer, God gave me power, strengthened my will, and protected me from easily falling into temptation. Since my reconciliation with God, I can turn away from my selfishness, learn to be patient, forgiving, and considerate, and have more self-control. Through God's Word, our family's relationship was re-established, becoming stronger, closer, and filled with warmth. From then on, happiness and peace have filled our family members' hearts.



Thank you GOD, You never give up any chance for us to reconnect with You. The feeling of being lost and found is so precious. It is a great testimony of your amazing salvation.

## **Serving Young Adults with Special Needs**

### **‘Abundance Club’ Day Program Serving Team**

After praying and waiting for a period, we thank God that under the guidance of Pastor Irene, ‘Abundance Club’ was established in January of 2019 at RHCCC. Every Thursday, we come to church to minister to some young adults with special needs. Through mutual care and support, everybody can enjoy the abundance of God.

In the beginning, the young adults were very reserved, and their participation was very low. When they were restless or encountered worries, they did not know how to express their feelings. Before knowing each other in depth, we always initiated to open up ourselves in order to win their trust, and hence developed a mutual relationship. This process took a long time but once the young people were willing to open up themselves, a much better understanding was achieved. Today, when we meet, everyone is so happy and talking just like good old friends.

These young adults have left school for some time. In order for them to experience new things continually, we set up curriculum with different themes and methods associated with their daily lives. Since their concentration span and reception power are quite weak, we have to use different methods to stimulate their interest. Seeing their progress from being just passive to having positive response, we are thankful for everyone’s efforts. There was one time when they were finding information associated with their favorite food such as location, menu, price, etc., they managed to use PowerPoint including pictures to present to others. We appreciated so much of their efforts and confident achievement.

Making lunch is also a good chance to communicate. After we have given simple explanation and instruction, they will diligently help to prepare lunch like washing vegetables, cooking rice and preparing food. Having lunch together and enjoying the fruit of co-operation from everyone makes us happy. One time we visited one member, who under the guidance of her father, prepared pancake for us. She also

helped to do the cleaning up afterwards. She really put into practice what she has learnt.



Members of ‘Abundance Club’ may be very sensitive to certain things and can react violently. We have to be very careful. For example, some cannot accept certain food, or do not want to participate in certain activity. We would not force them, accept as it is and co-operate accordingly. The whole process is a good opportunity for us to learn how to respond and serve as a test and exercise of their own spiritual life.

This group of young adults in their late 20s are often misunderstood by others, thinking they are self-isolated and do not know how to communicate. After a year of staying together with them in ‘Abundance Club’, we can sense their change. They have good communication with their peers as well as with us. If God is not working in our midst, we believe we would not have such results. We firmly believe that every person with special needs is uniquely created by God and loved by God. We should not look at them differently as we are all members in God’s family. As the Bible says: ***‘For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.’*** (Ephesians 2: 10)

The past year had been a journey of faith. We learned how to tend to the will of our heavenly Father. We gradually understand that we must work, not according to our timing and method, but must listen to God’s guidance and follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Looking back, we are thankful to see the progress in these young adults as they mature. Through different activities like exercising, cooking, topical learning, interest group, we gradually know each person’s

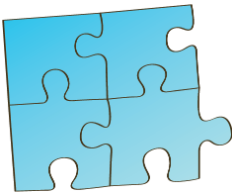
strength and help them develop their given potentials and build up their self-esteem. Very often, we try to let them know God by sharing life stories and help them depend on God through prayers. We firmly believe that being together with them is not accidental, but by the divine arrangements of our Heavenly Father.

Working with brothers and sisters in ‘Abundance Club’ have benefited each one of us with mutual encouragement and support and in using our spiritual gifts to complement each other. This is surely a teamwork, letting us know the joy of serving together and the blessing of walking with God. This also demonstrates the promise of Jesus: ***‘I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.’*** (John 10: 10b).

May all glory and praise be to our gracious Heavenly Father!

## **A Beautiful Puzzle**

**Mom Angel**



Those who know I serve in Special Needs Ministry would ask, “Is this your profession?” I would say, “no”. I have volunteered for almost 14 years, but I often feel that I am not careful, inconsiderate, and clumsy. Indeed, I thank all the children and parents who tolerated and accepted my inadequacies.

As we grow older, we are aware that everyone is born with various degrees of physical and emotional flaws. Despite our individual imperfections, we are connected to complete the beautiful puzzle for our heavenly Father.

The Bible illustrates a story of four men carrying their paralyzed friend to Jesus for healing. Not only did this describe a relationship full of true love and commitment, it also taught us that it was not just the paralyzed friend who was cared for, everyone was blessed! It is the grace of God that makes everyone racked his or her brains to seek God. It would be a wonderful picture if everyone were willing to walk together in humility to seek God's will.

***" From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."***  
***Ephesian 4: 16***

All because of God's grace and guidance, my family and I were saved and understood what an abundant life truly is. It is in our incompetence that the power of God is manifested.

RHCCC is a church that revolves around prayer. It is only through prayer that we attain real revival and true freedom. Every day, we live in a battlefield between heaven and the world, and only when we rely on our heavenly Father that we can win this spiritual battle. Let us stand in between heaven and earth, rely on God together, and live a joyful life with continuous prayer and worship. Emmanuel!



## **Real-Life Blessings**

### **Daughter Chloe**

When I was young, I never noticed difference between Special Needs Kids and kids without Special Needs. To me, they were always just one more playmate to play with or to have fun with. My Mom would often assist with the Sparrows program, so I grew up with special needs kids and their families and treated them just like other kids my age. However, as time passed by, like most other kids, we started to segregate ourselves from others who are different by how we look, dress, interests and personalities.

This year, I started my first year in high school, I was reviewing resources that my school offers. From school's announcement, I found out about a club called Best Buddies. Best Buddies is a club where you can become friends with a teen with special needs. I found it very difficult to build new relationship as it is my first year in high school, I felt lonesome. When I am free during my lunch hour, I would go to my assigned special needs classroom. With the hours I spent with them regularly, I learned that each teen had their own routine, like and dislikes, things they could do by themselves, and things others had to do for them. I also learnt stories from teachers about the joy and struggles as caregivers.

The children I was working with were highly dependent on their parents and caregivers, they could only do limited things on their own. I started to wonder why God created them, and what were their purposes. A few weeks after I was pondering about this question, I came across a Bible passage from John 9:1-3 in my Sunday school. It says

*“As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.”*



God really put special need kids here on earth, to change other people's lives, and really become blessings of my life. The people with the purest, kindest hearts I have ever met are those with special needs. They have never said a mean word or judge me for the way I look or act, instead they accept me with all my flaws. Special needs children don't care if you are African-American, Asian, Latino or European, they don't care if you drive an expensive or a rusty old car, all they need from you is a little love in return for their friendship.

It is amazing how God wires and connects our lives with other people. If my Mom never joined RHCCC Special Needs Ministry, I would not have known so many amazing families with each of their own stories. If I never joined Best Buddies Club, I would have never understood why it is so important to include them in our daily activities. It has really been a blessing to consider them my friends and families through Christ, and I hope all of us can have the blessings walking together with special needs families in our lifetime.

## **Serving in Sparrows Sunday Service**

**Godfrey Lo**

How I started serving in RHCCC Special Needs Ministry is a long story.

At one time, I was helping in a Sunday pre-kin class and took care of a little boy who could not concentrate in class. My sister suggested that I helped her in this class to improve my own communication skills, not just relying on actions to express myself, but also learning to communicate with words, which were my weaknesses.

At first, I did not want to do this. I am the youngest child in my family, I do not want to take care of anyone, I just want to be taken care of. I prayed to God at night before going to bed, thinking that maybe I should get out of my comfort zone and this was a good way to help others.

That was it, after I watched this little boy for over a year, Pastor Irene encouraged me to help in the Sparrow Sunday Service. When I got home, I asked my family for their opinion. In fact, my father was already serving in this class. It was hard for me to decide, because I had to take care of children with special behaviors, and I knew I was not used to it. I thought about it again, prayed to God and asked Him what I should do.



I remember when I was a child, I also behaved like these children, and I got a lot of help from my parents and volunteers. They loved me so much that even when I got into trouble, they still helped me become who I am today. The next morning, I told Pastor Irene that I would visit the class first to see how things were going. I wanted to pass on the love I received from parents and volunteers to these Sparrow children who are blessed by our Heavenly Father.

A week later, I chose to stay at Sparrow Sunday Service because we had lessons together and played with them and the kids were so happy.

What a wonderful smile they have, they just want to have a friend and someone who loves them. I am happy to have been able to work with other uncles, aunts and pastor; some of them were known to me even before I joined this class.



I also do video operations or supervise a student. As an AV operator, I assisted with PowerPoint, singing, and AV playback of Bible stories. Now because of the pandemic, we have other methods of contact, which all seemed to be fine. I continue to serve God and express my care to all the children of Sparrow Sunday Service. I am still an AV operator, in charge of playing videos to be sung by students during online classes.

Sparrow Sunday Service puts me in the company of children who need more attention and whose smile can warm your heart. I am delighted to have this opportunity to serve in this ministry, worshipping God with these children and showing them the love they deserve.

After serving in this ministry, I am more certain that I am a part of this big church family and know more about these students than I did before. I hope one day I can share these experiences with the younger generation and help them become friends with these children also.

# Every Child is Precious

**Julia Chan**

I first began serving in the Special Needs Ministry about a little over a year ago, when I felt God compelling me to serve at this ministry. I have always had a passion for helping people with special needs as I grew up with learning disabilities. I believe that God gave me this passion to help others and lead them to a personal relationship with Jesus.

By the grace of God, I completed a diploma in Developmental Services and now working towards a degree in Disability Studies.

As part of the Special Needs Ministry, it is clear that God is working in all of the caregivers, teachers, families, and children. I can see that God is allowing us to bear fruit of love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control as said in Galatians 5:22-23.

Being a caregiver taught me how to look past the child's behavioral challenges and see them as God's children. He sees each child as dear and precious to Him no matter what he or she does and what their individual needs are. This reminds me of the verse "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus", Galatians 3:26.

We are all God's children, and He loves us with an everlasting and unfailing love that is enough for each of us in every circumstance. Through serving in the Special Needs Ministry, God has taught me that He can do amazing things through those who trust and obey Him, and His promises for us never fail.



# All by God's Grace

Stephen Wan

There is no doubt that God's grace is a very common topic, but no Christian can deny this truth. The content of every article is unique and serves to magnify God's glory!

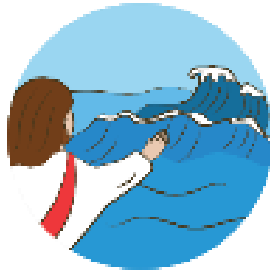
In a recent Special Needs Ministry Christmas Celebration, a long-time brother asked me how long I have served in this ministry. I replied, "About 10 years or so." He said that it is fairly hard to serve in this ministry for that long. Counting the days, it has actually been more than 13 years. Looking back at all these years, I can witness changes in every family.

For example, some children have reached the age of 21 and no longer go to a special school; others who were classified as "a danger to family" were accepted into a group home; some children lost their father to cancer. I can see how God led them through and provided for their needs while they faced all these challenges. All of this is by God's grace!

I still remember that in my sharing in 2008 I asked God why He allows autism to exist. During my writing, I remembered Job's words in the Bible, "Why do righteous men have to suffer?" God did not answer Job directly; instead, He asked Job many questions about nature. These led Job to say, ***"I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you"*** (Job 42: 5).

God has led me to see His compassion, care, and provision for these special needs families during these 13 years. They are closer to Him because of His grace. Through this, I understand that ***"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love"*** (Psalm 103: 8). This is the grace that God gave me.

The title of the January 17, 2020 issue of *Our Daily Bread* was “The Storm”. It reminded us that God can calm the storm, whether it is a storm outside or a storm in our hearts. God’s power is greater than all storms. Let us lean on His power and continue to experience His grace every day.



## **Vincent’s Disarrangement**

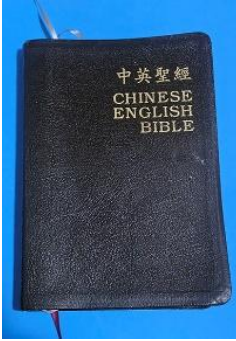
**Vincent Wang**

Around five years ago, my wife Sonia decided to join the caregiver team of Sparrow class. I had the options of waiting for her at Tim Hortons and enjoy my coffee or follow her too to the Sparrow class. Our gracious God sent me to the Sparrow class.

Five years later I am still serving at Sparrow class, not because Sonia is still there, it is because the children in the Sparrow class have disarranged me.

Since serving in the Sparrow class, I have become more joyful because there is great pleasure and happiness among the children. I have become more emotional because the children are affectionate and loving. My hardliner type 1 personality became softy and tenderly.

My main attraction for the weekend now is not where to have a great dinner but how should I prepare the Bible story and crafts for the Sparrow class, what kind of snacks the children would like.



Every child in the Sparrow class is special. Each one of them is gifted specifically by God. God has a special purpose for each child. I firmly believe that the work and power of God will be displayed in their lives.

God uses the children in Sparrow class to disarrange me and accomplish His purpose in my life. I am gracefully thankful to our Lord that He did not send me to Tim Hortons, instead He uses my disarranged joy, emotion, and softy tenderly personality to love the children of Sparrow class.

***“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God – If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.”***

1Peter4:10-11.

# **Our Gracious LORD Walking Alongside with us during the COVID Pandemic**

**Pastor Irene Cheung**

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*

James 1:2-4

Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic more than two years ago, COVID had brought enormous social disruption to the society. Lockdown and confinement-related stress were devastating; isolation was not easy to bear!

It had been a challenging journey for our special needs community.

## **Difficult Days with Frequent Changes**

Apart from heavy daily burden, our families with children with special needs must face frequent changes, elevated levels of uncertainty and unpredictability of COVID policies. Thereby increasing emotional outburst at home was threatening the well-being of the whole family.

The psychosocial impact and consequences could be long lasting. Due to impairments in social interaction and reciprocal communication, our children, youth, and young adults suffered more than their typical peers did. Changes in daily activities and routines would affect them immensely as they were incapable to adapt to changes and new situations. Their weaker cognitive ability prevented them from understanding fully the reasoning for COVID restrictions. Hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity in autism was challenging, wearing masks was unbearable for many of them. Whereas those who craved touching would be upset when prevented from hugging or shaking hands.

Those in school were affected by recurring closure, creating pressure and inconvenience to parents who were working but had to supervise their online classes. Technology knowledge was also challenging to some parents. It was extra difficult for children with special needs to focus on online classes, resulting in academic achievement decline and decreased credit attainment.

On the other hand, some were frustrated with not meeting in school and missed their friends. Loss of volunteering opportunities such as cleaning the white board or shredding paper. Summer activities including swimming were cancelled as well as many social programs. Even walking in the neighborhood was difficult in wintertime. Sleep disturbances and increase in junk food consumption were happening. Too much screen time throughout the day. Some turned to violence when unable to express anxiety or to communicate their wants, indicating greater irritability, mood dysregulation, even worsened mental health.

While managing work commitments, fulfilling care responsibilities inside and outside of the home, unplanned and increased demands including financial stressors caused extreme distress and mental health-related symptoms to parents. It is hard to keep their children “busy” due to weakening support system. There were reductions in community-based services. Therapies and trainings were hugely and adversely disrupted, it was extremely difficult to find support worker to establish routines. Children were sent home even with mild and unrelated COVID symptoms. When being sick, they were unable to see doctors. Extreme situations like rotten or wisdom teeth problems, or even getting vaccinations, were challenging to manage. Ongoing fear of contracting COVID despite extra care to follow all the restrictions.

We are sad that children of two families passed away from chronic illness not related to COVID in the past year. We mourned with the families for their great loss but are comforted that their children are now with our Lord, enjoying peace and joy in eternity.

## **Thanksgiving for Weathering the Storm**

Despite this period of drastic social, economic, and environmental changes, parents managed to weather the storm by God's grace. Following adaptation to changes in routines, habits, and life experiences, there were both negative and positive parent-child interaction. Nevertheless, parents seemed to have conversation with their children more often than before the lockdown began. Younger kids felt happier than older teens and managed to acquire new skills such as riding a bike or a scooter. Teens could be motivated to do housework or chores, developed some interest and independent life skills, learned to research and watch YouTube under supervision, and to memorize Bible verses. There were drive-by graduation celebration and a couple of young adults managed to maintain a part-time job.

Even a few families contracted COVID, most of our families were maintaining sound physical and mental health. One parent mentioned "we lack nothing" and another said, "We are alive, praise the LORD!"

## **RHCCC Special Needs Ministry**

Even our church building was closed for an extended period during the pandemic, praise God for over thirty brothers and sisters in various serving teams caring for the parents and their children, breaking the isolation barrier.

We continue to provide Sparrow Sunday Service every Sunday to our students by zoom, connecting them to God and His Word. Eleven brothers and sisters shared various duties such as leading singspiration, teach Bible stories and crafts, guided activities like Bibleaire, AV operation, co-host for security control, etc. Working with parents, even students who were non-verbal could participate with their hand signal, nodding heads, talking pads and their smile.





Blessed by RHCCC one church one system purpose direction, our parent support groups were included in the church fellowship base, getting more support of manpower and resources. Bible study resources and training for some parents to be nurtured with God's Word and be strengthened in their faith to endure hardship. We were "Sparrow Fellowship", and it was so wonderful to be included in the community as the 17<sup>th</sup> Cantonese fellowship - BELONG!

Abundance club could still be provided to a few members aiming to connect with each other, working on communication and social skills, motivation to be independent by doing house chores with parents' support creating quality family time.

Connect as body of Christ through online platforms for groups of children and parents with caregivers, students with students, moms with moms, special friendship was built up. We treasured more the time back in church meeting face to face.

Our serving teams were also prayer warriors to keep the families in prayer and made home visits in the front-yard, back-yard, driveway outside garage. Even with masks on, the joy of seeing each other in person was memorable.



Despite the COVID challenges, praise God that most families in our Special Needs community are healthy and safe. We can keep counting blessings, waiting patiently for God's best timing for the pandemic to pass, while welcoming new families to join our community.

***"All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."***

*2 Corinthians 4:15-16*

你們看那天上的飛鳥，也不種，也不收，也不積蓄在倉裏，你們的天父尚且養活牠。你們不比飛鳥貴重得多嗎？（太6:26）

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? (Matthew 6:26)



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