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*Taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.
Psalm 34:8*

I must surely begin by giving thanks to God for all of you, for your commitment to pray for the ministry work of Urban Christian Outreach and for your generosity of spirit in sharing your wealth with God's poor. Your love in action has enabled us to continue to be a Christian presence on the sidewalks of downtown Ottawa and in the coffee shops, parks, shelters and hidden places where our clients find refuge. Thank you most sincerely. Thank you for listening to the heart of God. Thank you for your obedience to Him. Thank you for sharing your gifts. You have encouraged the UCO Board members and me and have helped us to grow in faith. May God be glorified by your faithfulness, and may he bless you and those whom you love.

I have the privilege of hearing "thank you," both verbally and written, from those whom we serve, and I often tell of the army of supporters and prayer warriors behind me, making the ministry work of UCO possible. Our clients are often surprised and moved to hear that total strangers are praying for them, and enabling me to spend time with them. I would like to share a few of their comments with you. John, (not his real name) wrote a letter of appreciation to me, as follows: "Jill, I want you to know that I really Appreciated Your Help, support, Encouragement in helping I. Someone like you make a Difference. Keep Good work up." John then quoted from memory, Romans 3:23 "All Have sinne come To short Glory of God" and John 3:16: "For God so Love The world That Who Ever Believe in Him Shall Have Ever Lasting life." What a treasure this letter is to me, and what a beautiful expression of God's love. We all do fall so short of God's glory and I was humbled to receive this beautiful letter. Is our God not for everyone: for the poor and for the rich, for the literate and the illiterate, for those who need help and for those who give help? Is this not our challenge as Christians to see all others as our equals? In God's eyes we are all equal. God doesn't care which one of us paid for the coffee, or who bought whom lunch because in truth, God paid for it. God the son, our Lord and saviour Jesus paid for it with his life. All good things come from Him and so when God puts one of his sheep before us, and asks us to serve Him, it is so very important to me that before we part, a conversation about God ultimately takes place, whether to acknowledge the perfect timing of our meeting, to give thanks for his grace and his mercy, to give thanks for the coffees, or to give thanks for another day. Jesus, hope of the nations, ministering to his hurting children. How great is our God!

God often puts you, our supporters, on my heart as I go about my day and so I lift you in prayer, giving thanks. Sometimes I am very much aware of your prayers for me as I feel the Holy Spirit fall afresh upon me; God's grace affirming our work. We are partners

in serving God's poor and I wish that all of you could join me on a walkabout, to see for yourselves first-hand how our Father is using our ministry to be a blessing to Him. I would like to offer you an invitation to join me for a morning or an afternoon on the sidewalks. Please prayerfully consider this; I know that God will bless you in a special way.

Last Sunday, while waiting to pick someone up, I was sitting in my car singing to worship music on my favourite radio station - CHRI, and two parking spaces away I noticed a young girl about the age of 8 or 9, sitting in the driver's seat of a parked car singing her little heart out. She noticed me looking at her but unbothered, continued to sing with passion. I smiled and wondered if she was listening to the same radio station as I, and if she was also worshipping. I thought about this little girl and wondered if she knew how much God loves her and about what her life might be like when she gets older. Will she still be singing or will she be a woman that I encounter on the sidewalks, pan-handling while drug dealers stand by ready to pounce? Will she be housebound, suffering from depression and anxiety? My eyes filled with tears at the thought, and I prayed for her right then and there: "Lord protect her; keep her safe; help her to seek you and to know you. Surround her with angels to guard her and fill her with your Holy Spirit".

My thoughts returned to the lonely men and women on the sidewalks, and I thought about them as little children, in the way that God might think of them, and I was filled with compassion for them and began to rant aloud: "What makes it okay for us to offer mats to the homeless and to make them line up for handouts? Why are people waiting years for treatment of addictions? When we arrive in Heaven we will all be equal and so why can we not be equal here on earth? In the words of the Lord's Prayer, we recite 'thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven'. Yes, Jesus says that we will always have the poor. Could this be simply because we do not respond in the way that we are called to? Do we have a spirit of entitlement whereby we believe that because we worked for what we have, we are entitled to live the good life? What will it take before we treat one another as equals? Did the disciples struggle when Jesus asked them to give up everything and follow him? Some had to leave their wives and families and businesses. What makes it so hard for us to move out of our comfort zones? How the poor challenge us to examine ourselves and our relationships with one another and with Christ! Perhaps this is why we will always have the poor: so that we can have an opportunity to learn about who we are and learn to stretch and grow? Jesus invites us into a relationship with him and we struggle with this because we are already struggling with being in a relationship with ourselves and with those around us – especially those who don't think, look or act in the same way that we do. We can be quick to judge one another – quick to judge the poor. Our society makes it so easy to pass judgment on our neighbours. Social networking sights such as Facebook, etc. are often dumping grounds for slanderous, hurtful comments: hurting people hurting people. What makes this okay? What motivates us to hurt one another- to inflict our woundedness, like a virus? Where is God in all of this? We seemingly live in a society of tolerance in which we tolerate inappropriate behaviour. In a society bent on competing with one another, is it any wonder that we have produced broken homes, and broken people with broken relationships. Many of those whom we serve downtown are broken and struggle in their relationships with others who are similarly broken. They often long for closeness with another human being and yet, through reactive sin, simultaneously sabotage their efforts at achieving this. While ministering to an isolated woman last week, she shared that we were her last resort! This is why we need to bring our message of hope to the broken: the hope that we have in Christ Jesus, the one and only one who not only knows the way, but who IS the way! The only one who loves us unconditionally, who will never leave us or forsake us – the one who has our backs. Jesus is calling us into a relationship with him. Jesus is also

calling the poor into a relationship with him. If it is only in our suffering that we call on Jesus, better to suffer and call on Him than not to suffer and have less need of him. Perhaps suffering, as difficult and trying as it is, can be a gift in disguise. We were created to worship God, even during our times of suffering, perhaps especially during these times: let this be our liturgy, our act of worship. Pray that we might have the wisdom to invite Christ into our suffering. Jesus is the only one who can restore and redeem the broken and if we sit at his feet long enough to listen, as Mary (sister of Martha) once did, we will hear him speak words of healing into our brokenness. Oh that we would have these wonderful moments of solitude with our Lord. Please pray that those whom we serve at UCO will have hearts to receive God's Word, and ears to hear. Please pray that our people will come into a relationship with Christ that is everlasting, and be healed. Please pray for God's saving grace and his mercy. Please pray for quiet moments of solitude with Him.

I must leave you with a brief story of God's grace on the sidewalks. I had the privilege of meeting a gentleman downtown one day this past summer, who was walking with a Bible. He followed me for awhile and I invited him to have a cup of coffee and talk about his Bible. He declined the coffee, but agreed to talk about the Bible. We sat down in a restaurant and while I sipped my tea, we sat quietly, not speaking a word for sometime. Then, he spoke one word: Jesus. I smiled and nodded, understanding what he was saying. He repeated: "Jesus". Again I nodded and smiled. "He is all we need" said the gentleman, and I nodded in agreement. He spoke very eloquently and I knew that God was with us. One Word: Jesus. So simple, and here I was, ready to complicate things with my Bible wisdom. He was the teacher that I needed that day: I was the student. There was beauty in the simplicity of his words. When it came time to leave, I thanked him for blessing me and asked him if there was anything that I could do for him. He said that he would like a cigarette, to which I replied that I was sorry, but didn't have any cigarettes. He said that perhaps he might like a cup of juice later in the day, and so I bought a \$5.00 gift card from the restaurant in which we sat. As we were leaving, I handed him the gift card, and he smiled, thanked me and tucked it away in his pocket. Just outside the restaurant doors, and sitting on the sidewalk, was a young woman panhandling. The gentleman squatted down opposite her, so that they were face to face and he said one word: "Jesus". She smiled and looked at him, then at me, and again back at him. He repeated himself, again saying one word: "Jesus". The pain behind her smile was becoming more obvious as she struggled to hold back tears. "Do you know Jesus?" he asked. "Well, not really...well, I used to." she replied. Quietly, he reached into his pocket, took out the gift card that I had just purchased for him, and dropped it into her panhandling cup. She smiled and offered him a cigarette.

This Thanksgiving, as we celebrate God's unselfish love and provision, it is my prayer that you will grow in your relationship with Christ Jesus and that you will know how deep our Father's love for you truly is. This Thanksgiving, as we continue our family tradition of taking turns at the dinner table expressing our gratitude, I will be thanking God for the blessings and for the suffering, for in our suffering we cry out more often, and the more we cry out, the closer he comes. Jesus said:" Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven", and so as our Father has blessed the poor, I thank God that by your faithfulness, you have continued to bless what God is blessing. I will be thanking God for each one of you: for our members of the Board of Directors, for all who support us prayerfully and financially, and for our clients, who invite us to come alongside them in their time of need. As I remember the old man sleeping alone under a bridge tonight, and the young girl sleeping in the doorway of an office building I will be thanking God for sending his son to die for us, for sending his Holy Spirit to comfort and counsel us, for my

family, church family and friends, for a home, for the simple pleasure of curling up on the couch with a warm cup of tea, and a good book, for turkey leftovers, for a warm blanket and warm jammies; for a hot bath and a warm bed, for rest at the end of the day: the blessings that so many live without. For all these things, my heart cries out with prayers of thanksgiving to our Father, 'Abba', 'Daddy', that in our hour of provision, he would draw ever so near to those who are without, that he would supply all their needs, that they would be filled to overflowing with God's *'peace that passes all understanding'* and that his grace would be sufficient.

I am so grateful to be able to continue the wonderful work that Katrine began, serving the poor and marginalized of downtown Ottawa, and teaching adult education in the UCO/ROMHC classroom at the Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre.

I thank God for our wonderful artist "MC" for sharing her beautiful artwork with us, a drawing of Jesus sitting among the poor and the birds, providing for all of their needs.

Matt 6:26-27

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?

