

iGO

THE ONE THING ⁰⁸

WHO GETS
THE BEST
BITE? ¹²

HOW DO WE HEAR
FROM GOD? ¹⁶

this issue:

FIRST THINGS FIRST



TODAY

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Ross is Island ECC’s IT whiz. He’s a new father of six months and seems completely chilled about it. He never breaks a sweat even when the church’s IT is not working. It remains to be seen whether Baby Jonathan can accomplish that feat.

from the Editors

In the 32 years since its release, the ubiquitous Post-it Note has become synonymous with the organization and prioritization of the many events and activities in our daily lives. When we came up with the theme of “First Things First,” we wondered: what would be the equivalent of this canary yellow piece of sticky paper when it came to living out our faith in God? We live in a hectic city where too many things vie for our attention and time. So on which pages of our lives is it appropriate to breeze through, and on which pages of our lives should we pause and stick a Post-it Note to remind ourselves, “This is important” and “Remember this” and “Do this”? Each article in this issue helps us answer that question.

Steven Hawthorne’s piece sets the tone for the issue and gets right to the point: What matters most? Steve’s article tells us that we’ll find that single, all-encompassing, all-inspiring priority when we discover what matters most to God. Island ECC Senior Pastor Brett Hilliard explains how the ancient idea of offering the “firstfruits” of the harvest is still relevant today in how we prioritize our lives.

Island ECC Pastor Albert Ng gives us practical, tangible ways to hear God’s voice and know His will so you can discover His priorities for your life. In fact this was the very inspiration for Florence Chiu’s piece. Our Deputy Director of Local Outreach heard God calling her to Japan and then courageously took a few months off to explore God’s will for her in the Land of the Rising Sun. Flo writes about her experiences and talks to others who have done so similarly.

Other features try to illustrate what our main concept looks like in real, everyday life. In *Parallel Lives*, we highlight several pairs of people from our church who share some common roots in their “first things,” but express and live those out in beautifully different ways. *Light Box* shows what our theme looks like through a photographer’s lens, while the piece on *Social Enterprises* showcases some businesses that are making society better by putting God’s “first things” front and centre. And finally, Ly-Ann Tan closes out the magazine with some first things you can do right after reading this issue.

Simplicity is a beautiful thing and a life centred around a few precious, essential things is a worthy aspiration. We hope that this issue of iGO can help you learn what those First Things are for your life.

LOOKING BACK AT 2012

In 2012, over 300 people from Island ECC signed up to go on one of our 21 short term overseas mission trips. Some travelled a few hours to China, Japan, Philippines, Cambodia, India, Vietnam, and Taiwan. Some took a much longer journey to Egypt, Morocco, Rwanda, Uganda and Luxembourg to bring about the good news of Jesus. Five new trips started this year to Vietnam, Taiwan, Luxembourg, Yunnan and Morocco. Here are some highlights:

01 Taiwan

Taiwan is a land where Christians represent somewhere between 5–6% of the population. In hard-to-reach ethnic groups like the Hakka and Taiwanese Aborigines, that figure is less than 1%. In July, nine families from Island ECC joined hands with local churches in Taipei, Taiwan to participate in a one-week-long outreach camp in the rural area of Taichung (the Fungyuan district). Through an English VBS camp, street evangelism and a basketball event, the team shared the good news of Jesus with 350+ people in the local community and witnessed 40 people giving their lives to Christ and 3 baptisms.

“MY TAKE-HOME LESSON... WOULD BE TO MAN UP IN ALL AREAS OF MY LIFE.”

02 Vietnam

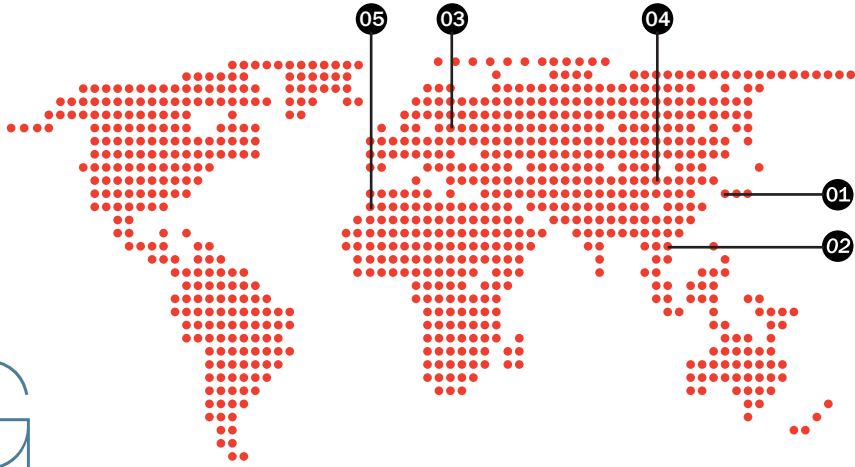
Aaron Pan, one of the 12 participants on the Men’s Fraternity Mission Trip to Vietnam, shared after he returned. The men’s team spent 5 days in Lao Cai, Hanoi and paved a

playground for a local school. Despite being one of the most tightly controlled provinces in Vietnam, the team was able to share with local Vietnamese about Jesus through songs and singing.



03 Luxembourg

God opened doors for our worship team to serve outside of the four walls of Island ECC this summer. The ReNEW band, which was led by Island ECC worship leaders Jeff and Leora Caylor along with 5 other volunteer musicians, was invited to be a part of the IMPACT Conference 2012 in Luxembourg. The week-long conference was organized by the Pentecostal European Fellowship (PEF) with 11 local churches in Luxembourg. Our team facilitated worship during the conference and participated in street evangelism through music and worship.



04 Yunnan

Our team had a very specific purpose for going to Yunnan. Our heart was to build up youth at the local churches. There was no youth work in the area. Our prayer for Yunnan is for a generation of children and youth to know and love our Father; a Spirit-inspired force to proclaim the gospel to distant cities and villages; many, many lives to be transformed by the saving grace of Jesus.



GO FACTS Xiamen

When the first medical mission team was sent out to Xiamen in April 2011, we did not know what to anticipate. Our first team consisted of a doctor, a nurse and a dentist. We have now been sending two teams to Xiamen of about a dozen people every year to work with different factories. We provide free medical consultation to factory workers, most of whom are migrants, and afterwards, they are invited to a gospel presentation and have an opportunity to receive salvation. Many have given their lives to follow Christ as a result.



05 Morocco

Our medical team entered Morocco, a country where 10% of the population are physically handicapped. Many of them live in rural areas, with minimal access to education and health services. We went into a village to provide physical dental health to the people living there. God’s beauty was reflected in each person we came across, from the determined face of a mother carrying her limp child in her arms, to the voices of hopes and fear of the young generation. In a place where less than 1% of the population are believers of Christ, we pray that more will come to know His love intimately.



2012 Trips

For 2013 trips, go to islandecc.hk/ministries/missions

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Cambodia (Children)	India (Women)	Xiamen Qinghai Philippines (Youth) Japan	Vietnam (Men)		Rwanda Taiwan	Hubei Luxembourg Cambodia Mongolia Uganda	Yunnan	Xiamen Japan Morocco		Egypt Cambodia	Philippines



I Embrace Thee (detail)

photographer **Kalina Ip**

First Things First - have faith, have a Christian perspective on life. Life has its wondrous times and, often, an equal share of challenging moments. But we know this declining phase is not the end game; an even more glorious time awaits us with the Lord and our loved ones.

About First Things First photo competition

We asked the Island ECC community for submissions of photos that conveyed the theme of “First Things First” in a creative way. Entries were judged on two factors: artistry and concept. Out of the myriad of possibilities, the winning photographer (photo published here) had focused her lens on what she deemed most important through the expression of nature: the concept of life beyond the moment.

Many thanks to all who participated in the competition.

the ONE THING

WRITER *Steven C. Hawthorne*

We’ve all experienced the clash of having too many good things to do. Even without the added pressure of expectations from family and friends, we all see many good things worth doing. Loads of projects come to our attention. They are all good causes. Each one seems worthy of our involvement and support. But it doesn’t take long to discover that despite our good intentions, there is far too little time to do them all, or to even make scattered donations to a handful of them.

Too many good things

The great challenge is not to cease doing evil things and only do morally right and good things. The real struggle seems to be how to sort out what few good things

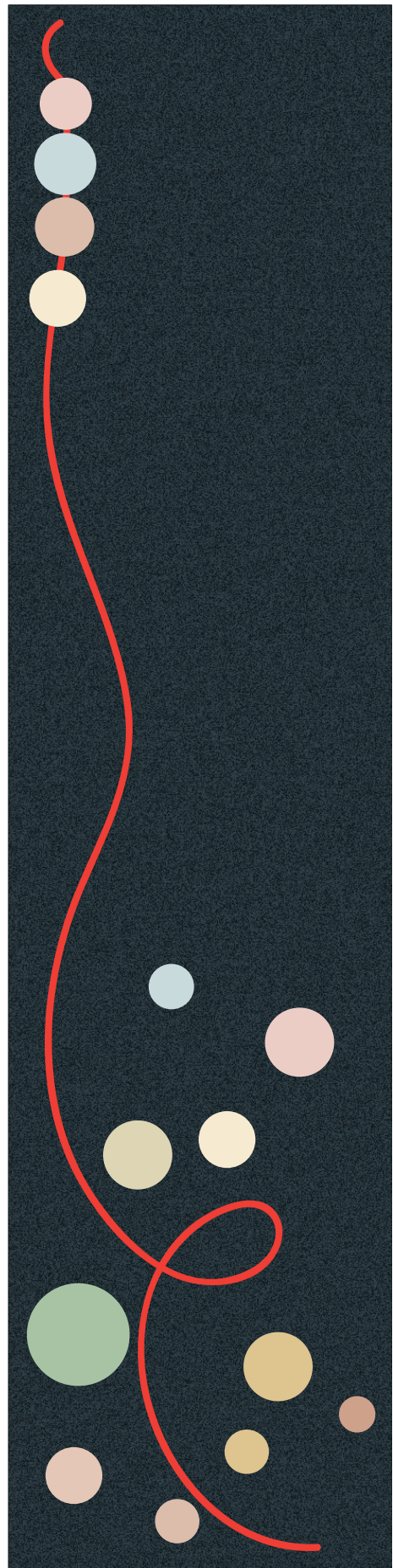
or projects we should try to do. It would appear to be a problem of priorities. Thus we find the self-help section of any bookstore overflowing with programs and strategies to work out worthy priorities. But even well-configured, thoroughly biblical priority schemes can leave us frustrated with too much to do and a lingering guilty feeling that we really should be doing more.

A clash of priorities

Jesus spoke to this conundrum in a real life setting. Many Christians are familiar with the story of Martha and Mary. Take another look. I think Jesus is offering us something more than a priority program. Martha was the senior sister, older than Mary and her brother Lazurus. She had invited Jesus, and perhaps some other guests, to her home (Luke 10:38).

She was reportedly “distracted with all the preparations” (10:40). The original language underneath our English translation of “preparations” is simply the word for “service.” So Martha was serving and that was a good thing. She had an eye for seeing “all” the good deeds of service that needed doing. Her solution for the pressures of the day was a good one: Get others to help. Take a small and temporary timeout from the important matter of hearing good teaching in order to get a few of the more mundane works of service accomplished. She reinforced her request by using an appeal to compassion: “Lord, do You not care...?” Supposedly, if Jesus really cared—if He really had compassion—then He would agree with Martha and mobilize Mary to get with the service program.





A better way to pursue the one thing necessary

No doubt Jesus’ answer surprised Martha. It should surprise and instruct us as well. He did not deny that the needs of the moment were important. In a tender way Jesus told Martha that she was “worried and bothered about so many things” (10:41). Serving just a little bit rarely seems adequate. Helping solve one problem usually exposes several more. You never know if you’ve done enough. That’s why most people understand what Jesus meant by a life shaped by the expectations and demands of urgent needs. We all know what it is to be “worried and bothered about so many things.”

What Jesus did not say was to make a list of all the demands and prioritize them. Instead Jesus said this: He said that there is one thing that matters above and beyond all others. A life lived in pursuit of that one great thing would be a life of continual choosing that would prove to be better than merely good. It would be significant and lasting.

Consider Jesus’ words: “Only one thing is necessary; for Mary has chosen the better part, which shall not be taken away from her” (10:42). What is the “one thing” that Mary was pursuing? I think the “one thing” is to live one’s life so that God is loved. That means loving Him yourself, but also labouring to see that He is loved by others. Here’s why I think the “one thing” is God being loved: The next two times that we see Mary, she is honouring and loving Jesus.

In John 11, we find Mary at His feet again, weeping in grief for and with Him. Jesus had lost His friend Lazarus, whom He loved (John 11:5). Mary and her sister had written an urgent letter to Him, saying, “Behold, he whom You love is sick” (11:3). As Mary wept in sorrow with Jesus, (11:33-35), even some of the onlooking enemies of Jesus came to the conclusion about Jesus’ love: “So the Jews

were saying, “See how He loved him!” (11:36). It became obvious that Jesus loved Lazarus. Mary joined Jesus in His grief in a way that hadn’t even occurred to Martha. To sense the broken heart of Christ is to love Him in a significant way.

A few days later as recorded in John 12, we find Mary at another dinner party. She is again at Jesus’ feet (we always find her there). She is once again showing her love for Jesus: “Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus” (12:3). She was anticipating the shame of His death, and seeking some way to give Him lasting honour. Mark’s Gospel records Jesus’ response to some who objected that resources that could have met urgent needs had been squandered: “She has done a beautiful thing to Me” (Mark 14:6). Mary had lavished costly honour on Jesus. She not only gave Him her personal honour, the lasting fragrance called the attention of others. She became the only one to give tangible, fragrant glory to Jesus in the midst of the deep shame of His death.

Jesus told the mystified dinner guests that “Wherever the gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.” Wherever Jesus Christ is glorified in the proclaiming of the gospel, it will be recalled that one of His followers managed to glorify Him even in the midst of His suffering.

The one thing: That God will be loved

You may have noticed that I have been describing the “one thing” in a passive voice. There’s something greater than loving God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and your neighbour as yourself. What could be greater you wonder? Didn’t Jesus say that this was “the great and foremost commandment” (Matthew 22:38)? How much more can you do? What could possibly be greater? It’s really quite simple. What’s greater than

your loving God is for God to be loved by many millions, or probably billions of people, all over the world.

The “one thing” that can integrate your life is a worthy purpose that matters to God Himself, not just an ethical principle of trying to be one who loves others. For millennia God has been relentlessly pursuing His desire to be loved, served, glorified and enjoyed by people from every tribe, language and culture. This is why Christ died. It’s why He rose again. It can also become the joy-giving focal point of your life.

We’re not wrong at all to be amazed with God’s love that abounds toward the world. We’re right to aspire to love people as God does. But the greatest thing is not really that people get loved. What is of highest importance is that God’s love is required—that He Himself will be loved.

The goal of God’s mission: God-lovers become neighbour-lovers

Speaking of God’s love on a global scale seems out of reach to many people. But it doesn’t have to be that way. Everyone who follows Christ can be confident that their life contributes in strategic ways to the ultimate outcome: that the living God will be loved, served, glorified and enjoyed by some in every circle and setting on the planet. Your location or your vocation is secondary. What matters is your purpose.

We have often reduced God’s grand purpose to the activity of a few special envoys that we send to distant lands. We have called this project “missions.” We have often spoken as if the primary value of missions is that people are spared from eternal pain, and/or that human communities come to experience a measure of transformed life in the present day. All this is good, but the one thing that matters more than people’s eternal fate or their well-being in the present day: that God Himself is loved.

When people love God, they can grow to

obey Him in lasting ways. Those who do come to act in loving ways toward their neighbours. This is the power of the so-called Great Commandment. God-lovers become neighbour-lovers. Christians love each other and neighbours imperfectly, but at least the power of God’s love is slowly—and sometimes dramatically—working through His people.

Consider this possibility: What if every Christian on earth lived in Christ-like love toward every one of his/her neighbours? Can you imagine that? That would be wonderful, but as best we can tell, there would still be about a third of the people on earth that would have none of their neighbours showing them Christ’s love. The reason is simple: Christ is not yet served in those peoples and places. The Great Commandment cannot happen (neighbour loving neighbour) because the Great Commission is not yet fulfilled (there are no Christian neighbours). The object of Christ’s commission of Matthew 28 is that the living God would be named and celebrated openly by a people who wear His name. That’s what “baptizing them into the name” is all about in Matthew 28:19. Not only does Christ deserve to be glorified by name, He commissions us to see that He is gladly and lovingly obeyed. That’s what “teaching them to obey all that I commanded you” is all about. The goal is that Christ will be famous among all, and lovingly followed by many. That is the one thing. It can become the integrating joy and purpose of your life, wherever you live and whatever your occupation or skill.

What glorifies God matters. What delights God matters. I recently heard my Nigerian friend, Timothy Olonade, say this: “If it matters to God, it should matter to us. If it doesn’t matter to God, it doesn’t matter at all.”

Singularizing my life

I’ve actually given up trying to prioritize my life. Instead, I’m trying to singularize

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my life. By that I mean that I have set my heart on bringing about the “one thing” of God being worshipped and loved in every people group as the integrating purpose of my life. This means that life doesn’t become fragmented or dis-integrated so that there are things I do for God and the stuff I keep for myself.

From time to time I struggle when I take on more than is possible. There are always more good things to be done than God is giving me to do. But instead of my fourth priority conflicting with my third priority, and instead of number five priority competing with number two, I’m learning to align all the diverse desires, demands and ambitions. I’m learning how to live with the simple, single purpose of loving God, and loving Him so much that I do my part to see that He is loved. ■



Feature

who gets the Best bite?

WRITER Brett Hilliard

Recently I had a conversation with a friend that left me a bit unsettled. We were discussing a mutual friend who was a successful banker and was considering leaving the financial industry to become a missionary. As my friend and I talked about how radical this transition would be, he made a comment that provoked my thinking:

“Since he is so educated and successful, it seems a waste of his training and potential for him to leave all that to become a missionary”.

On some level, I resonate with this rationale. I understand that his education was expensive and he might still need to pay off school loans. I also agree that he can honour God as a banker just as much as a missionary. (I really believe that.) And true, he could make a lot more money in banking, and therefore contribute more financially to Kingdom work.

But what bothered me was that this reasoning fundamentally revealed that he felt our friend was somehow overqualified to be a missionary. Is that even possible? By implication, my friend was stating that the job of missionary should be filled by less capable, less qualified people—perhaps those who aren’t as educated or well trained.

Although my friend didn’t realize this at the time, he was in fact revealing something about his underlying priorities.

In the Old Testament, God wanted to ensure that his followers knew His priorities, and were able to line their life up with what is honouring of God. Therefore, He established a system called “firstfruits” to spell out exactly how and when the people of God were to give of their resources.

Most of us aren’t too familiar with the biblical concept of “firstfruits”. An understanding of the concept will be helpful in determining our values and instructing us in our priorities.

A look at the Old Testament will help us understand the historical significance of this practice. In the book of Exodus, God commands the entire nation of Israel to honour God by bringing the first crops of their harvest to the house of the Lord.

The choicest of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God.

EXODUS 23.19

In that agrarian culture, the awareness of God’s provision was much easier to see. Being highly dependent on weather for the success of their crops, in some ways people were privileged to realise their need for God on a daily basis. Most of us today have lost this sense of desperate dependence.

The people were forbidden to use any part of the harvest until the firstfruits were offered to the Lord. This concept is reinforced throughout the Old Testament:

We obligate ourselves to bring the firstfruits of our soil and the first fruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the Lord.

NEHEMIAH 10.35

Honour the Lord with your substance and with the firstfruits of all your produce
PROVERBS 3.9

The principle of firstfruits was instilled by God to ensure that the nation of Israel kept God as a top priority. He codified generosity. By ensuring that His people gave their first and best to God, He protected their hearts from becoming enamoured with themselves. He effectively declared, “I deserve your first and best. I hate leftovers”.

So, the question for us is, how do we apply this concept today? How does a firstfruits understanding really instruct the church in modernity? After all, we’re no longer living under Old Testament law, right?

The concept of firstfruits is mentioned in the New Testament as well, but in a completely different usage.

**The choicest of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God.
Exodus 23.19**

When the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he referred to Jesus Christ as the “firstfruits of the dead” (1 Corinthians 15.20). He likened the resurrected Jesus as a “firstfruit” since we too will one day experience the same resurrection. He was first, and we shall follow.

In the Old Testament, people were instructed to give of their firstfruits. In the New Testament, it is God who has given His firstfruit in Jesus Christ.

In our New Testament dispensation, with hearts that have been changed from stone to flesh (Ezekiel 11.19), God has removed legalistic demands such as “firstfruits” offerings. Our acceptance before a holy God has been secured by Jesus Christ alone.

But because of what Christ has done, our renewed hearts are freed from an insecure need to sacrifice. Instead, we are given the privilege of offering to God our very best, as an act of worship. Instead of trying to please God with our service, we respond to God’s acceptance with service. As John says, “we love because He first loved us”. (1 John 4.19)

So, although a firstfruits system is no longer required of us as Christ followers, it does stimulate our thinking and cause us to assess how our priorities of faith are expressed. Knowing that God deserves and desires our very best, our lifestyle and choices may be beautifully, and radically, altered. As we “seek first the kingdom of God”, it may have some far-reaching implications.

Here are some categories to help guide your thinking:

My children. A first fruit faith means that I desire my children’s spiritual success beyond all other kinds. It may mean that I release them to vocational ministry, if God should so lead in their lives. It means that I bless them

to live far away from me as they reach adulthood, laying down my personal desire to have them nearby.

My time. I will choose to prioritize the amount of time I volunteer. And I will give God my best. I will come to church on time. I will get good rest on Saturday night, so I’m an attentive worshipper on Sunday. I will be a regular attendee at my care group, Bible study, or service team. I will treat meeting with God as important as I would a meeting with my boss.

My money. I will give first, and spend second. By recognizing that my resources are from the hand of a generous God, I will worship God with my money. I will resist the idea that my giving is any sort of noble deed, but rather an act of worship to the One who is the giver of all good things.

My priorities. I will be diligent to ensure that God is my first priority. I will make sure that I spend quality time with Christian friends. I will value singing in worship, and will focus on the lyrics that are full of good theology.

My speech. I will speak of God often. I will let encouragement be on my lips. I will seek to be a blessing to others with the words I say. I will guard against gossip and deceit.

God has provided for us his firstfruit in Jesus Christ. And this demonstration of love compels us to think in generous terms of how we may respond. What used to be a biblical mandate for Old Testament followers to bring their “first fruits” is now an invitation to give God our first and our best as an expression of love and worship.

And to set the record straight, it is impossible to be overqualified to be a missionary. ■

Fruit for thought:

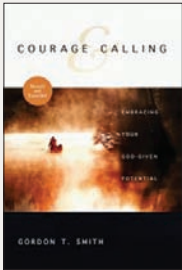
- What would you consider to be some examples of firstfruits in your life you would like to give to God?
- Looking at the categories that were listed in the article, which area of your life do you consider it hardest to give God your firstfruit? Why?
- What is one thing you would like to intentionally choose to change or do after reading this article as an application to your life?

To Sink Your Teeth into...



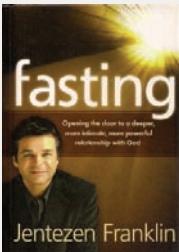
READ

Courage and Calling by Gordon T. Smith
One way to give the firstfruits of our lives to God is to find and follow our true vocation or true calling. Gordon T. Smith’s *Courage and Calling* helps us find that sweet spot where ability, passion and purpose all come together.



READ

Fasting Journal: Your 21-Day Guide to a Successful Fast by Jentezen Franklin
Fasting helps us draw closer to God and to hear His voice more clearly. This is a clear explanation of the various kinds of fasts and lengths of fasts and also provides devotions, prayer points and reflections for each day of your fast.



USE APPS

Fighter Verses
If you have a hard time memorizing Bible verses, this app is a great tool to make it interactive and fun. With more than 520 verses preloaded, the ability to add your own verses, quizzes and study tools, it is everything you need to commit the Word to heart.



Prayer Notebook
Have you ever told someone you would pray for them, and then forgot about it? This app can help you record your prayer requests, schedule reminders, mark prayer requests as answered, password-protect your prayers, and group prayers into categories.



Got Questions?
Do you get asked questions about God and your faith and you don’t know how to answer them? This app has over 1800 of the most frequently asked questions about the Bible organized by topic, with built in search, podcasts, “Ask A Question” and blogs to help you.



BROWSE

Relevant Magazine
Relevant is a magazine on faith, culture and intentional living. It offers truthful thoughts and ideas on how to put God at the centre of all aspects of your life.
relevantmagazine.com

Operation World
Wars could be ended, ethnic hatreds tamed, politicians become honest, economic justice achieved if only we knew how to pray. *Operation World* is the key tool to that kind of prayer.
operationworld.org

Issachar Initiative
One of the best sites for global evangelization stats and a high quality presentation of the Great Commission.
issacharinitiative.org



RETREAT

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The Salvation Army Ma Wan Youth Camp
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tfssu.org/pilgrim.html

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HOW Do We HEAR From GOD?

Dawn Lau TALKS TO Albert Ng

In 2012 one of the sermon series that received the most hits on the Island ECC website was the “Can You Hear Him Now?” series. We all want to know how to hear from God. We think: “If only I could hear clearly from Him, I’ll do whatever He tells me to.” So how does God speak to us? Practically, how can we discern His will for our lives? How can we obey His call?

Let me begin by asking this question: “What is the difference between the traffic lights of Tokyo and Shenzhen?” Answer: One is meant to be obeyed. The other is for reference only.

01 Cultivate a habit of obeying God's known will

The key obstacle for us to understand God’s will is not that God does not reveal His will, but our unwillingness to obey. We tend to treat God’s will as “for reference only.” If we are unwilling to obey God in small issues, God may not reveal His will to us in big issues. Even if he does, we may not be able to discern it because we are so used to ignoring Him.

Can we know God’s will? Of course we can. In fact, we already know quite a bit of God’s will. God has already revealed much of His will through the Bible. This covers a great variety of our practical daily living. Training ourselves to act on God’s known will enables us to be more sensitive and receptive to God’s whisper when the situation becomes confusing and the stakes are high.

02 My will versus God's will

There are two opposites that are both wrong and deadly. On the one hand, some Christians believe that whatever is in their mind must be God’s will. On the other hand, for reasons that I don’t quite grasp, there are Christians who believe that whatever is in their mind must NOT be God’s will.

I believe God desires that our will collaborate with His will. However, our will must firstly be submitted to, and then be aligned with, God’s will.

In our daily lives, I believe God has given us great freedom of choice. One topic that comes up often is “How do I know which girl is God’s will for me?” Following the tradition of Socrates, I always reply with a question: “Do you believe that there is one and only one girl that God has prepared for you and you

want to seek out that girl?” The answer is mostly yes. Then, I will ask, “If you end up not dating and marrying that girl, are you sinning and is your marriage with another girl doomed to fail?” Surprisingly, the answer is always “I don’t think so!” Deep down in our hearts, most of us believe that God has given us freedom of choice, including who to date and choice of career. (I will talk about God’s specific will later.)

So, how does God unfold His will?

Firstly, God unfolds His will by guiding our circumstances. God guides your marriage by leading you to live in a certain city, worship in a certain church, relate to friends in a certain social circle, and thus “guides your choices.”

Secondly, God also unfolds His will by uniquely forming you in such a way that you are attracted to specific types of girls. These two criteria alone will significantly “narrow down your choices.”

Finally, God’s will is unfolded through biblical principles. There are biblical principles which will help you date in a way that is God-honouring and satisfying. For example, the first principle is that we will only date believers who have a similar life mission as us. Other principles include the commitment to honour God and one another, and to spur one another to become more like Jesus through the course of courtship.

In this example of dating, we see both God’s will and our will working together.

03 How do I practically know God's will?

In our daily encounter with different issues, there are times when the choice is clear. The problem is whether or not we will obey. There are times, however, when the choice is confusing and we wish to have more guidelines. Pastor Bill Hybels’ book, *The Power of a Whisper*, offers great insights in this area. I have a simpler version. Here are several guidelines that I often use:

Is it biblical?

Is this particular course of action consistent with biblical teaching? Are there biblical precedents that I can learn from? Will my conscious be clear before God if I act this way?

Is it wise?

Sometimes the Bible is silent about the particular situation. In this case, you need to exercise your wisdom to discern the pros and cons of such an option.

What would my true friends say about this?

Here “true friends” means those who will look for your long term well being, those who will say tough things or disagree with you because they love you, and those whom you can trust. Seek counsel also from mature believers who can provide you with spiritual perspectives.

Pray and pray and pray.

Humble yourself before God. Weigh all the options. Ask God for wisdom. Then by faith make a decision before God and act on it.

04 How about God calling me to do something special?

I believe that in many cases God reveals His will by providing us with a framework by which to live. Our job is to exercise our free will in a way that is God-honouring and responsible. There are situations, however, when we feel strongly that God may be guiding us to a special direction. This happens often when He calls us for a specific purpose, guiding our path into serving Him and serving others. Here are my observations of a typical pattern:

Firstly, we will feel a “calling,” in the sense of a special feeling or a nudge from God. Normally it starts with an act of obedience — you go to some place for a mission trip, or you join a project to serve a particular cause. Then, what you see strikes a chord in your heart. The more you see, the more you are drawn to that cause. Then, you start wondering if this is what God is leading you to do.

When you are in this stage, the Bible becomes alive to you in a different way. Suddenly some Bible verses pertaining to that ministry jump out at you in a way that you have never encountered before. You almost feel like “God is speaking to me through the Bible.”

Secondly, you will start doing the ministry on a more consistent basis. You feel joy and satisfaction. You feel like you are doing exactly what you are supposed to be doing. You sense that you are making a real contribution and want to do it even more.

Thirdly, for some of us, the passion keeps growing to such a point where we find ourselves doing the ministry in all our non-work hours. We want to devote all our resources in order to champion the cause. Some of us would even consider leaving our career to “serve God full time.”

If you are experiencing this, I have some advice for you.

Firstly, keep a journal. Record every conversation between you and God. Record how God speaks to you through the Bible. Record also “the journey of your heart.” This will help you review your life and discern how God is leading you.

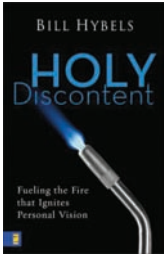
Secondly, take time to pray and ask God for confirmation. If this is a real calling from God, the burden inside you will keep nudging you until you act on it. At the same time, do not try to explain away your inner nudge. Be open to God.

Thirdly, seek counsel. Remember, the Apostle Paul did not go on his journey by himself. He and other church leaders were praying when the Holy Spirit asked the church to send Paul and Barnabas out. I agree that calling is personal, but it is not individual. God places you in a spiritual community for a reason. Seek counsel and confirmation from those who are more mature than you. ■

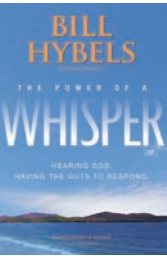
Pastor Albert's Book Recommendations on this topic:



The Call by Oz Guinness



Holy Discontent by Bill Hybels



The Power of a Whisper by Bill Hybels

People Profile

PARALLEL LIVES

WRITER

Dawn Lau

PHOTOGRAPHER

Ross Li

An outward sign of change in our lives begins with a heart change, a change initiated by God's whisper to us. What happens next, how our relationship with Jesus will develop, what our life will look like, what kind of eternal impact we will have, will depend on how we choose to respond, not just to the call of God, but first and foremost, to the personal love of Christ.

The following pages feature four parallel lives — two lawyers, two mothers, two corporate professionals, two graduates of theological studies — who have made the conscious decision to give God their firstfruits. You will see how each person's firstfruits look very different, and how God has called them uniquely. As we declare to God "There is none like you," how much more does He tell us that He lovingly created our inmost being.



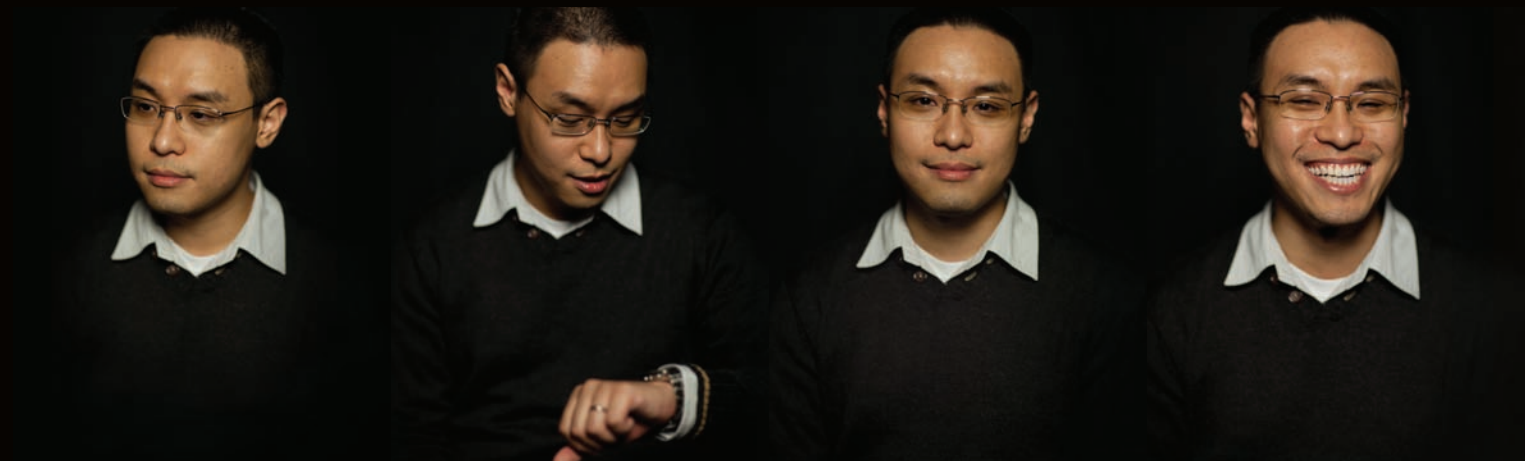


Ange

It was after a beautiful encounter with God in Uganda on my first mission trip, that I heard his powerful yet gentle whisper to leave my corporate job. Leaving a great job where I was happy would be going in the opposite direction of what the world, including my loved ones, was telling me. But the overwhelming peace from God enabled me to take that step of faith. On the same night I turned in my resignation, I got down on my knees and tears of joy flowed freely. I remember rejoicing: “This is what it’s like to follow God!”

After that, Jesus took me on a “honeymoon,” when I went to the Discipleship Training School in Paris and Vietnam for six months. Coming back, I thought following God meant becoming a missionary or working for NGOs. It took over 10 months of waiting with patience and trusting in God before His plan for my career began to unfold. To my surprise, He brought me back to the corporate world and put in my heart the idea of “building people up.”

The journey thus far is challenging yet joyous because I know God has placed me where I am for a purpose, and I feel honoured to give him my first fruits.



Kin

When I was 11 years old, I was struck by a serious disease that left me in hospital for two years. My sister asked a pastor to come and pray for me, and thirty tumours became 20, then 10. In nine months, I had no more tumours. The doctor said it was a miracle. From then on I believed God saved my life.

One Sunday, I remember the pastor asked who would be willing to dedicate their lives to be a full-time minister. Without thinking, my hand went up. I said to God: “As long as you saved me, I’ll let you decide my life. My life is no longer mine.” But after I took my engineering degree in university, I didn’t want my parents to have to support me financially. So I took a stable engineering job. After a few years, I was reminded that I was doing this job to save up for seminary. To really confirm that God was calling me, I made my life empty. I quit my job and I waited on God for three months. One day my wife encouraged me: “Everything is ready now: finances, you’ve quit your job, you’re passionate about pastoring people, I support you, your parents support you, what are you waiting for? Seems like you’re the only one stopping yourself.” That was when I submitted my seminary application.



Sylvia

I was always driven and focused. When I was younger, having children was not on my radar. Now I am a mother of two young children and amazed at how God has transformed my outlook on life. I struggled with whether to stay at home full-time. However, I found peace when I accepted that I am built uniquely by God and that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to being a mom or serving our Lord.

Giving God my firstfruits means using all the skills He has given me to the fullest. At this life stage, it means being a mom while working full time in a corporate setting. My husband continually affirms me and reminds me that I don't have to do it all. Maximizing the gifts God has given me, in the environments He has placed me, helps me become more like the One who created me. And this ultimately makes me a better mom.

Giving God my firstfruits is a state of the heart: it's about God — not me, nor even my children nor my job. I ask myself daily, do my family and colleagues see me living and serving with joy? That is how I measure my spiritual pulse.



June

At the kindergarten where I was a teacher we have dads' nights and moms' nights where kids bring their parents in. I was so touched to see that the children really treasured the time they had with their parents. That's when I started thinking about whether I'd continue working after I had children.

During premarital counselling my husband and I received some good advice: even before having children we should try to live off only the husband's salary, so that we would have more freedom in choosing whether I should stay home or not once we had a baby.

God calls people differently in different periods in their lives. Now, the firstfruits of my time and energy are to rear the child that the Lord has entrusted us with. Part of parenting is to be whole in yourself and firm in your identity in Christ; then you will teach your children by example to be all that they can be in Jesus.



Ka

Six months ago, I was a business executive in the corporate world, but I always had this nagging feeling I was supposed to be doing something else. God had placed a dream in me for a very specific ministry many years ago, but I never did much about it, until recently when this dream really intensified. I asked myself, “As with firstfruits, was I offering the prime of my life to God? Am I going to wait until I retire to serve God?” I received confirmation after confirmation from God that I was to quit my job and pursue this ministry wholeheartedly. His voice was so clear. However, I was worried about whether it would be feasible, how to implement such a wild idea and of course, the financial challenges involved.

Quitting my job without a firm plan and a well thought-out idea was unthinkable. I always worked like a monkey swinging, with its hand firmly planted on each vine before moving forward. But God was asking me to move like a trapeze artist: letting him tell me when to let go, and knowing in faith that the next bar was going to be there. There was a terrifying moment when I’d be in the air holding on to nothing. That was what I felt like when I quit my job.

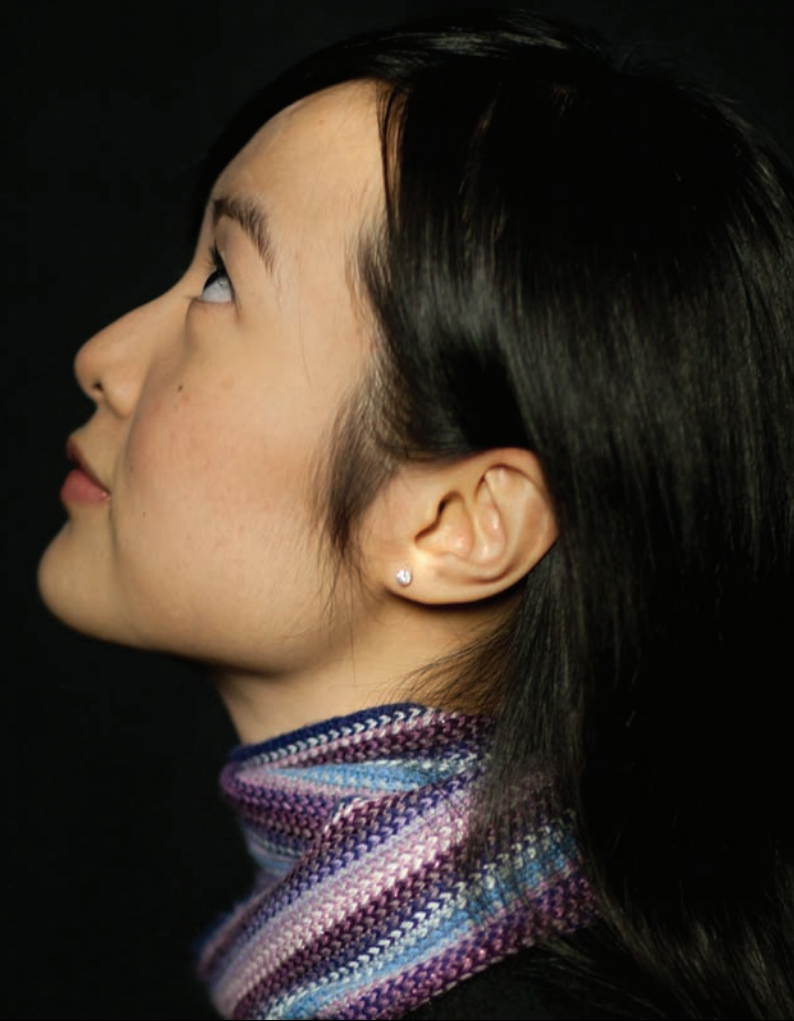
Since I have begun pursuing this new path, God has opened doors, putting me in touch with the right people to guide me and collaborate with. There’s not been a single regret.

Kai

Six years ago, my wife Jessie and myself went on a mission trip to Cambodia right after our honeymoon. On the last day, I almost died. I mysteriously got very sick: I couldn’t breathe, had high fever and excruciating chest pains. At 2am the insurance company approved a private plane to evacuate me to Singapore. Throughout that day, the whole team and the local church were praying for me, and at 4am I suddenly woke up and was miraculously healed! The hospital in Singapore did two days of testing, but they still didn’t know why I had gotten sick. I believe God had healed me and gave me back my life.

After that episode, Jessie and I decided to dedicate ourselves to missions in Cambodia. With a few others, we founded a non-profit organisation called Kairos Fellowship, a platform to carry out educational projects and social enterprises. More members from Island ECC got involved and long-term projects and relationships developed.

How do I juggle this with my corporate job? Giving God my firstfruits is placing my personal career ambitions into His hands. When I started doing that, I gained such a sense of freedom. And God has blessed me with great bosses, flexibility in my job and the ability to dedicate my time to Cambodia. It has never been more fulfilling.



Cynthia

I went to Rwanda for a mission trip in June 2011. Unbeknown to me, it was also a youth mission trip. During the trip, I fell in love with the youth. When I came back, I became a youth volunteer and I found myself constantly thinking about the youth during the week. Regardless of how busy or tired I was, I would always feel so refreshed when I saw them.

The night after all the Island Youth staff announced their resignations in April 2012, I had a dream where the youth were asking if I was going to be their next youth leader. I was then awakened by my laptop which had suddenly started to play the Christian song “Come away”. The worship band played that same song during youth service the next day. Struck by the absurdity of this incident and knowing my heart for the youth, I started praying and asking God if He was indeed asking me to “come away” with Him.

I eventually received various confirmations from God that I should move away from corporate law and do full time ministry. My new job also allows me to do things that are close to my heart which further confirms that my career change is part of God’s plan for me.



Anita

I came back from a mission trip wanting to serve God on a day-to-day basis. I wanted missions to be a lifestyle rather than an annual week-long affair. Having to work gruelling 70-80 hours per week at a corporate law firm, I asked God how I could serve Him when I wasn’t surrounded by the poor, the needy and the marginalized. That was when God showed me that marketplace is a mission field. He gave me His heart to intercede for people, places, businesses, schools, governments, and even nations. He showed me that by dedicating deals and projects to him, by blessing colleagues, clients and opposing counsels, and even by saying a prayer while riding the elevator, I could invite Jesus into the workplace and serve Him there.

Intercessory prayer has enabled me to catch a glimpse of people’s *real* needs and interests from God’s perspective, which helps me to serve my clients. Discouragement can come when the enemy plants doubts, causing me to question whether my prayers really matter, and whether God sees what I’m going through. God has reassured me again and again that He is well pleased with me and my labour in the Lord is not in vain.

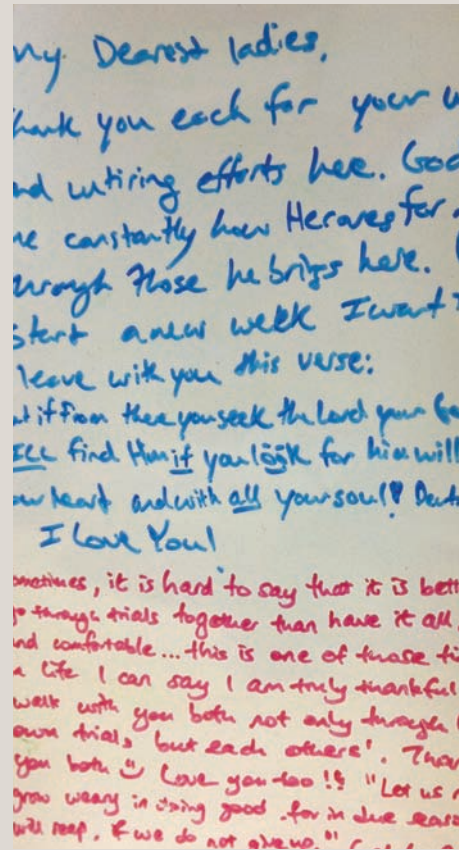
I’m part of a regular Monday morning prayer team in Central. We pray for Hong Kong, Central and Island ECC, for His will to be done in the marketplace, and for the unity of churches. Even though I am not an early riser, I am blessed to seek Him first thing on a Monday morning, and receive the reassurance that the rest of the week is in His hands.



This is no ordinary chair. It’s God’s chair prepared just for you and it represents an agreement between you and Him. If you sit in the seat God has prepared for you, He’ll take you on an amazing ride through life. The people who we profiled in this story are ordinary people who have seen and done and experienced amazing things because they trusted God and took a seat in His chair for them. This chair is yours, just waiting for you. Have a seat, let God take control and get ready for a great journey!



01



02

Case Study

PUSHING PAUSE

This year, I took a break from my life and my job in Hong Kong to spend three months in Japan. “Taking a break” can come in many forms. For some, the answer to wanting to take a break may be a “no” or “not yet.” Or in the case of losing a job or for health reasons, we may feel like we don’t have a choice but to take a break.

WRITER
Flo Chiu



03



04



05

01
Balloons released as prayers to God for healing over the land and people of Japan.

02
Our beloved board of encouragement to each other as volunteers serving in the disaster area.

Of course, by “break” I don’t mean your summer holidays or your annual leave, but I mean something that is an intentional “time out” from your normal routine.

Being a long term missionary was an idea that had lodged in my mind over a long time. But prior to the March 2011 tsunami that hit Japan, the possibility of going had never occurred to me as a reality. It wasn’t until a scouting trip to Japan in May, when I was sitting in front of a television watching some random program, that this thought entered my mind and never left.

But why did I need a break? In fact, I had never thought of “taking a break”. All I

wanted to do was to use three months (the longest time I could get a tourist visa for), to ask God whether this was for real, because this idea of moving to Japan was so far-fetched. I wanted to serve in ministries there, to learn more about the culture and language, to meet people — I had a whole list of objectives. But simply put, I really wanted to find out God’s answer. In the end, even though all of those objectives were fulfilled, what I learnt was not how God met those objectives or answered me with a definitive yes or no, but I learned more about who God is. I saw the depth of His love towards even just one lost person. I understood that He wanted me to learn that showing mercy is about more than just “doing”.

My 3 months off was a part of my journey of faith and that journey is still ongoing. I do not know when I will be able to return to Japan yet but as I wait expectantly and patiently, I know that God will only answer in His perfect timing. After returning to Hong Kong, I spoke with others who have similarly taken a break in the past few years — Chloe Lo, who took time off to do a DTS (Discipleship Training School) program for 6 months; Patrick Rath, who went to Oxford to study a 6-week program in apologetics with RZIM (Ravi Zacharias International Ministries); and Beth Uy, who took a year off to travel, rest and volunteer.



06



07

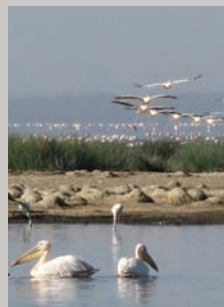
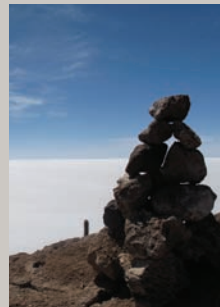
03
The word for prayer made from paper cranes....strange that the words “prayer” and “God” are used so much in the Japanese culture and yet they don’t know that they really can speak to a living God.

04
Bought a “normal” train ticket that ended up to be a very unusual train (last stop was apparently the zoo) so the whole train was decorated with zoo animal seats....it was an experience that would bring back a smile.

05
A smiling face cannot be taken for granted.

06
A grandma at the temporary housing delighting in the paper flower we made with her.

07
Bible study with high school girls.



Beth

Beth (bottom left) never imagined or thought of asking God for time off to rest and travel. But God surprised her and she learnt that even if it is for rest and leisure, it can be all about God and from God. It is not about her service or what she can do for God. By the end of her one year, God had led her to her current job at Sowers Exchange, at that time a small start-up social enterprise that she would not have thought she would be interested in working for. God not only gave her time off, Beth found that she could trust in His plans for her life.



Chloe

Chloe (top right) took time off to do a DTS (Discipleship Training School) program for 6 months. What she learned most from her time off was how much God loved her. She said, “God wants me, all of me, not my work. I had so much intimate conversation with God, where He told me that I actually had no idea how much He loved me. In the past, I knew that He loved me, but I thought He loved me because I wanted to devote myself to mission. Now I know that He loves me, with no condition or prerequisite.”

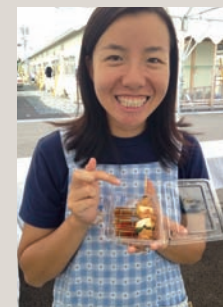


Patrick

For Patrick (above, back row left), apologetics had been an integral part of his journey in coming to know Christ. It was through a Ravi Zacharias seminar that he first felt his questions were addressed and the answers made sense. He finally surrendered his life to Christ when he realized his objections did not hold up under the apologetic arguments and defenses lovingly put forward by the RZIM team. This eventually led him to want to become better equipped in reaching out to sceptics like he himself had once been. He found himself asking for a two-month leave from his boss to attend the RZIM six-week business course. What he took away from the course at Oxford was not so much additional head-knowledge, but he returned better equipped to raise the right questions to show the limitations of sceptics’ objections. More importantly, he also learned that apologetics is by no means only a tool to respond to intellectual objections, but equally to learn more about the God that we believe in and worship.



08



09



10

08
*View of Ishinomaki now
(the city with most deaths
from the tsunami). There
were once many homes in
the empty patches.*

09
*My favourite yakitori!
What a bonus to have
a chance to make them
for temporary housing
residents.*

10
*I pray that these will not
only be origami models in
a museum, but that God
will become real in the
lives of people.*

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Matthew 7:7

After taking such breaks, some people expect drastic changes. For most of us the changes are much more internal than external. It could mean a deeper understanding of God, a closer look at ourselves, a firmer conviction of truths and our own weaknesses, and hearts that have been moulded by God in the time He allowed us to learn, think, experience, seek and ask. Can we only learn this in breaks? The answer is obviously no. Like Beth, I would never have thought of asking for an extended time off before this year. But this was certainly one of those times when I experienced what it means to ask and receive from a Father who is the giver of all good gifts. I was given the blessing of seeking God without the usual combination of busyness, responsibilities, work and family.

When I began my journey, I wanted to find God’s answers more than God. I ended my journey realizing He had given me the freedom to choose my own answer. He chose to walk with me and in His grace and love, allowed me to find Him, which is so much more than the answers I thought I wanted. ■

SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

PRAYER, PURPOSE & PROFIT

WRITER
Eva Lam

Neither non-profit nor for-profit, social enterprises straddle the two worlds of business and community service and are therefore frequently known as “for-purpose.” Starting any social enterprise is not easy, but it’s even harder for a Christian one. That’s why the mission must be clear from the beginning and central to everything the company does. The Christian social enterprise’s “first thing,” therefore, must necessarily be God — His kingdom, His voice, His people, His resources. By putting first things first, the process of establishing, operating, and growing a social enterprise can become a beautiful unfolding of God’s vision for His people. A Christian social enterprise stands as a light in the business world, and can show other companies by example what it looks like to create real, eternal value for things that truly matter.

iGO interviewed different social entrepreneurs in the Island ECC community regarding how they dedicate their business to God.

Eva’s full article is available at islandecc.hk/ministries/missions



01



02

01 Island Christian Academy, ensuring the sound delivery of Christian education

We begin every board meeting with prayer and a devotional. We also infuse the Bible into the curriculum and into everything at the school, like our Core Values, which come from scripture verses.

Jaqueline Ronan
Island ECC Children’s Director and board member of a non-profit that helped open Island Christian Academy



03



04

02 Sowers Exchange, providing solutions for social impact initiatives

Monday mornings are scheduled for weekly prayer, and we have a day to fast and pray every quarter. We started this two years ago when we wanted to seek direction on how to move forward, and we’ve continued ever since.

Beth Uy
Partner and Director of Operations

03 Ups A Daisy, empowering women in India through business

I took some time writing a business plan and ‘guiding principles’, which are the Christian values on which Ups A Daisy is grounded: mutual respect, humility, faithfulness, honesty, integrity, generosity, thankfulness, equality, inclusiveness, service and stewardship.

Jenny Lo
Founder

04 Taste of Grace, a catering school training South Asian migrants

It’s the testimonies about personal transformation that keep us going, and not so much the number and the breadth of those but the depth of change in each individual who comes here. It’s manifestly obvious that only God could bring about this transformation in people.

Martin Radford
Executive Director

05 Bonham Strand, restoring Hong Kong’s legacy of bespoke suit-making

Being honest and sincere and running our business in a Christian way is the best way to do business. Even when we feel taken advantage of, we try to first be patient, respectful and give people an opportunity because that’s how God has treated us.

Jong Lee
Founder



06

06 The Mustard Seed Workshop, training the poor to make handicrafts and marketing their products

Prayer is the fuel of running our business. All of our partner workshops and clients were provided as a result of prayers. We try to create an environment that allows our staff to share what God is teaching them on a personal level through His word.

Charlene Kotewall
Founder

05

bite-size MISSION MENU

WRITER *Ly-ann Tan*

Here are 6 ideas to making Christ's mission your own.

Have you ever felt like there's a higher calling for your life? Something more than the mundane weekly routine of work, eat, sleep, play and church? Do you yearn for significance in what you do? More and more of us are waking up to the contradiction of a cosy Christian life. If you understand what it means to "comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable," then you will be interested in perusing the following menu of options. Whether you can afford one day a week or your next summer break, we've found six practical experiences that will give you a taste of God's heart for the unreached and a life of Kingdom significance. Try them out... then tell others about it.

MENU

* Serve in Church

Get your feet wet by serving in different ministries. You can sing and play instruments with the Worship Arts team, join in prayer, assist with the Children, Youth and Young Adults ministries or just be a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on in the mercy ministries. As we receive the gift of eternal life with God from the nail-scarred hands of Jesus, our hearts should overflow with thankfulness and desire to participate in joyful service.

islandecc.hk/ministries

* Engage in Short Term Outreach Trips

Love to visit new places? Check out one of the 10 countries that we conduct Short Term Outreach Trips to annually. Radically different than your generic tour group, STO trips are a first class opportunity for God to birth compassion in you through exposure to the less fortunate and those who have yet to hear about Him. You'll meet natives, work with locals and come away with a new perspective. And bonus: you'll get to visit a new place.

islandecc.hk/ministries/missions

* Volunteer with Hope of The City

Looking for a different way to serve the larger Hong Kong church? Use your talents, resources and expertise to transform the lives of the disadvantaged and disenfranchised in your own society. Hope of The City is committed to finding ways to meet the needs of the under-resourced by well-run programs with manpower, knowledge and financial resources and they're using volunteers to do it: In the last 12 months, over 300 volunteers have donated more than 2590 hours to sow into other people's lives.

hopeofthecity.com

* Learn more about the World Christian Movement at the perspectives course

Take a closer look at the biblical, historical and cultural impact of the global Christian movement. The online course focuses on the strategies and imperatives to bringing the gospel message to unreached people groups. You'll study under biblical scholars and cultural experts from all over the world. At the end, you'll embark on a project that will culminate in an opportunity to serve on a mission trip in your particular and personal areas of expertise and interest.

perspectives.org

* Attend Discipleship Training School

How do you lead a missional lifestyle? A 20-week training course, this program focuses on helping you live more like Jesus and identifying your unique gifts and purpose to lead a life that points to Jesus. It emphasizes cross-cultural exposure and global awareness to help you answer the call to "Go into all the world and make disciples of all nations". You can choose a program based on your burden for a region, expertise or a cause. Are you passionate about justice, a talented artist or have a heart for the Middle East? There might be a DTS that specializes in that.

ywam.org

* Study at Seminary

If you want to take things really seriously, most seminaries offer tracks in cross-cultural ministries which will equip you with skills to analyse, preach, counsel and mobilize for the Great Commission. Alliance Bible Seminary and China Graduate School of Theology offer courses in Hong Kong; Singapore Bible College has an English and Chinese track. Other reputable institutes include Regent College in Canada, Dallas Theological Seminary in Texas and Fuller Theological Seminary in California.

Check respective websites for more information.

ENJOY IN BITE-SIZE

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Word Search



GLOBAL OUTREACH CONFERENCE

FIRST THINGS FIRST



25-26 January 2013
Keynote Speaker: Steven Hawthorne

Register at The Connect Counter at 1/F Island ECC,
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ISLAND
EVANGELICAL COMMUNITY CHURCH