perspective

fellowship of evangelical students

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From Curse to Blessing

Wake Up And Dream - The Time Is Now!
To Whom Do We Forthtell?
Discover Forgiveness

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From CURSE to Blessing

by Quek Tze Ming

Introduction

The book of Haggai is made up of four messages given within a four-month period. Haggai's message is addressed at first instance to the leaders of the community: Zerubbabel and Joshua. Other than the fact that Haggai was respected by the people as a messenger of God, we know little else of this man. Perhaps, as some commentators say, the fact that we have so little personal information about Haggai suggests that we should focus our attention upon his messages.

Haggai's third message, recorded for us in Haggai 2:10-19, presents to us a people who had a powerful touch that had disastrous consequences. Their disobedience made their sacrifices unclean and unacceptable before their God. Before we study this passage in depth, it is beneficial to view Haggai's message in context. Haggai's first message was given on the 1st day of the 6th month. In Gregorian calendar terms, he gave his first message on August 29th, 520 B.C. The first day of the month is the time where the monthly or New Moon offering is made at the altar (Num. 28:11-15). Less than a month later, on the 21st day of the 7th month (Oct. 17th, 520 B.C.), Haggai delivered a second message from the Lord, to encourage a discouraged people. The second message was given amidst celebrations for the Feast of Tabernacles.

When the third message was given, it was the third month anniversary of the Israelites starting work on the temple (December 18th, 520 B.C.). Why was a message given during this particular time? Verses 15 and 18 of the passage provide some clues:

> *Now give careful thought to this from this day on – consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the LORD's temple ... From this day on, from this twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, give careful thought to the day when the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid (Hag. 2:15, 18).*

From the two verses, we gather that Haggai's message was delivered when the foundation stone of the temple was first laid. Now, when the Jewish people first returned to Jerusalem, they made an attempt to rebuild the temple. That initial attempt was unsuccessful, although Ezra tells us they got as far as laying the foundations and building an altar. During Haggai's time, 16 years later, even those very foundations needed to be redone. The people responded to Haggai's first message and started work on the temple. Three months later, they celebrated the laying of the foundation stone.

The laying of a building's foundation stone was an important event in the Ancient World, especially when it comes to temples. According to custom, a ceremony was held whereby a royal figure would place the stone from the previous structure or temple into the new structure. Religious priests would then purify the site. This custom upheld the idea of continuity – while the people may have moved on to the future, a part of the old structure remains connected to the new one. The ceremony then ended with prayers and affirmations of blessing and abundance.

The Israelites, during Haggai's time, seemed to have adopted some of these

customs, as evident from the laying of the foundation stone of the temple. With this background, the importance of Haggai's message becomes clearer. Haggai's message is directed to the priests in Haggai 2:10–14, who would have been present at the ceremony. In verses 15–19 however, his message is directed to the Israelites. Even the royal figure is not left out in Haggai's message. Haggai also had a message for the then king of Israel, Zerubbabel, contained in verses 20–23.

Past Defilement (Hag. 2:10-14)

To the priests, Haggai raised the issue of past defilement (Hag. 2: 10–14). The first question Haggai posed to the priests is *how far holiness is transferable*. (c.f. Lev. 6:27) For example, when meat that is holy touches a garment, will the garment be made holy? If so, will food touched by that garment (now made holy) then be made holy (Hag.2:12)?

Leveticus 6:26–29 is quite clear on the transferability of holiness. If the clothes of the person carrying consecrated meat – meat set aside for God – touches the meat, the clothes are made holy. Thus, holiness is transferable to the next, immediate level. However, if the clothes (now holy) touch another piece of food, will that piece of food become holy too? The law is silent on this issue, thus the priests answered correctly: "No".

The second question Haggai posed to the priests concerns *how far uncleanness can be transferred* (Hag. 2:13). According to the Law of Moses, touching a dead body makes you an unclean person *(c.f. Lev. 22:4)*. In fact, touching a dead body is one of the most serious types of uncleanness. According to the Jewish law, uncleanness, like holiness, transfers to the second level. Nevertheless, Haggai pointed out in verse 13: if such a person, who has touched a dead a body, remains unclean and then goes on to touch something else, what will happen to that thing?

In fact, the Law is quite clear on this matter. Numbers 19:22 says that "anything that an unclean person touches becomes unclean, and anyone who touches it becomes unclean till evening." Thus, the priests again answered Haggai correctly: "That thing will be unclean."

These questions may appear strange to us but in fact, Haggai's point is straightforward enough. The two questions he posed to the priests make comparison between holiness and uncleanness. Both questions address the issue to how far holiness and uncleanness are transferable. Both holiness and uncleanness can be transferred to the next thing. However, only uncleanness can be transferred to the third thing. In short, uncleanness is more contagious than holiness – it spreads further than holiness.

What was the reason Haggai brought this issue up with the priests? He brought it up so that he can apply it to the uncleanness of the Israelites and their worship.

> *Then Haggai said, "So it is with this people and this nation in my sight," declares the LORD. "Whatever they do and whatever they defiled* ***there*** *is defiled" Hag. 2:14.*

The word "there" refers to the altar on which the people bring their offerings. The relevance of the questions Haggai asked at the start lies in verse 14. In short, there are three levels of touch. On the first level, the people's offerings are unclean and unacceptable to God. On the second level, the offerings are unclean because the altar on which they are offered is unclean. On the third level, the altar is unclean because the people and

the nation have made the altar unclean. The priests at the altar may have been holy in some sense, but their touch is not enough to overcome the uncleanness of the worship.

Haggai did not tell us why the people and the nation are unclean, but he did not have to. Given the background of the situation during Haggai's time, the people were unclean because they have neglected the rebuilding of the temple for too long. They had put themselves first before God. They had not loved God with all their hearts, souls, mind and strength (Lk. 10:27).

The main point of Haggai's message to the priests is this: for theirs and the people's worship to be acceptable to God, the rebuilding of the temple needed to go beyond an altar. Offerings cannot be made at the altar when the people are still living in disobedience.

Present Obedience (Hag. 2: 15–19)

From this day on ...

In verses 10–14, Haggai was referring to the past. In verse 15 however, came a dramatic shift from past defilement (uncleanness) to present obedience. Firstly, this shift is marked by a Hebrew word that means "But now..."

> *[But] now give careful thought to this from this day on – consider how things were before one stone was laid on another in the LORD's temple (Hag. 2:15).*

The shift from the past to the present is also marked by a phrase that occurs three times in verses 15, 18 and 19. The phrase *"From this day on ..."* was repeated three times, emphasising that things will be different. The people of Israel were to give careful thought and to think about how things will change from then onwards. The question is, how different will it be?

Leaving the low yield

> *"When anyone came to a heap of twenty measure, there were only ten. When anyone went to a wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were only twenty. I struck all the work of your hands with blight, mildew and hail, yet you did not turn to me," declares the LORD (Hag. 2:16, 17).*

This message is not new; in fact, it was given earlier in Haggai's first message. This was the way things were before the rebuilding, when the people were living in sin. Then, the yield from the harvest was low and below expectation. They expected to harvest 20 kilograms of grain but only harvested 10. They expected to produce 50 litres of wine but only found 20. Verse 19a describes a time of need and scarcity: "Is there yet any seed left in the barn? Until now, the vine and the fig tree, the pomegranate and the olive tree have not borne fruit." Why was Israel in such a state? Because God himself had struck them with the covenant curse.

Gaining a great blessing

Fortunately, the time of curse and adversity is past. Through verse 19, God has given a promise to the Israelites to bless them, and his blessings will now be upon their community. This is a result of their obedience, shown by their beginning work on the rebuilding of God's house, and specifically by the laying of the foundation stone. A new order, a new beginning, has begun.

Points to Ponder

The sinfulness of sin is not lessened by Christ's sacrifice (Heb. 6:4–6; Rom. 6: 1–2)

Many of us find Old Testament texts about holiness and uncleanness hard to appreciate. Scholars who have studied such texts have a name for such verses:

the 'holiness code'. While we may understand the holiness code, many, if not most, of us find it hard to apply or 'own' them, for example, verses like Numbers 19:22 – "Anything that an unclean person touches becomes unclean." This is understandable, because many of us feel a bit distant from the holiness code.

Nevertheless, I will try to make sense of these texts relating to holiness and uncleanness. First, we need to think about what the holiness code represents. Right at the foundation of the code is the idea that God is holy. God is completely different and distinct from us, His creation. And He is perfect. The problem, naturally, is that humans have fallen into sin, and consequently, brought the whole of creation down with them. Now, we have a problem. How can a holy God be present with His people in this fallen world? The answer can be found in the holiness code: Consider and carefully lay out all the things that would be allowed in His presence. Only the things or persons that had been made holy or separated for Him alone were acceptable. Because we sin, creation is now given different grades of holiness and uncleanness. With these differing levels, God, who is holy, could still interact with His fallen world. If you break the code, you break the interaction or relationship with God. In short, the holiness code is a reminder that sin and imperfection had damaged the world, and damaged the openness with which God could interact with His world. Of course, once the core issue of sin is dealt with and once the world is restored, the holiness code can be done away with.

When Jesus came, he fulfilled the laws handed down by Moses. As Paul said, "Christ is the end of the Law." (Rom. 10:4). Jesus' coming has profound effects on the holiness code. When we read the Gospels, we find that Jesus himself overturns the holiness code. When He touched the lepers, who were considered unclean by the Israelites, He was not affected by their uncleanness, and was not made unclean by them. Instead, His touch brought healing, wholeness and cleanness.

What Jesus possesses is God's holiness, because the fullness of God is in Christ. That holiness and wholeness spread from Him to the world. In Christ, we have the beginning of the end for sin. When He died on the cross, sin was dealt with decisively. Jesus' death signaled the beginning of the end of sin, and one day, sin will completely be no more. That is why in Christ, the holiness code is made obsolete. Those who are in Christ are no longer subject to absolute rules regarding what to eat, how to cook, dealing with illnesses and so on. Nevertheless, sin is still around. Although sin was dealt with decisively on the cross, it is not completely destroyed yet and can still affect a Christian's life and service.

Understanding the concept of holiness, uncleanness, sin and the power of Jesus' death, is how we as Christians can take hold of texts such as Haggai 2. Yes, the concept of cleanness and uncleanness are now changed in the light of Christ. However, loyalty to God and commitment to obey God are still of utmost importance. Our attitude towards God and sin is still at stake. That was true for the people during Haggai's time; it is still true for us today. Haggai 2:1–14 is a reminder to God's people of the seriousness of disobedience. To put it another way, it is a reminder of the sinfulness of sin. There are serious consequences if we treat the demands of God lightly or if we treat sin lightly. The consequences of sin has not changed with Christ's coming. If anything, texts such as Romans 6:1–2 warn us that we should be even more careful against sin in our lives:

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? [2] *By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? (Rom. 6:1)*

The people in Haggai's day did not neglect the required sacrifices and worshipped at the altar. They may have followed all the proper rules. In fact, they probably did. Yet, the offerings were still unclean and unacceptable because they had disobeyed God.

Structural sin

There is also another take to holiness and uncleanness, obedience and disobedience: *corporate or structural sin*. When the people of Haggai's day made their offerings, it was unclean and unacceptable because the altar was unclean, and the people were considered unclean. The people were unclean because the people as a whole neglected the rebuilding of the temple. Yet, this seems like a general oversight and an unfair judgment. Surely there were one or two, or maybe even more, who thought that the people of Israel should take the rebuilding of the temple more seriously? Why should their offerings be considered unclean and unacceptable as well? Yet, they are. And this is because they are still part of the people, part of the nation. By virtue of being part of the community, they are also caught up in the sin of the corporate bodies and structures to which they belong. They are implicated too.

The same applies to us: we can be caught up and implicated in the sin of bodies and structures to which we belong. This calls for some serious thinking. For example, if a person supports a government that is unjust, in some way, that person shares in the guilt of injustice as well. If a person participates in an economic system that is exploitative, that person shares in the guilt of exploitation to some extent as well.

The two examples presented above illustrate the meaning of corporate or structural wickedness or uncleanness. Compared to individual sin, structural sin is much more difficult to recognise because it is very easy for us to have a 'everyone-is-doing-it' mindset. Structural sin is much more difficult to change because often, it has become a way of life. The following are a couple of areas where structural sin exists.

The culture of waste

East Asia is, in some sense, the mobile phone centre of the world. Many of us own a mobile phone. Some of us even own two or more mobile phones. Furthermore, we replace them with a new one every year. But have you wondered where your old phones go? Where do your old electronic products go to when they are discarded?

They are dumped at places like Guiyu in Guangdong, China. In 2001, reporters brought the world's attention to the piles of discarded electronics in Guiyu. Workers earn about US$8.00 a day picking apart plastics and metals from TVs, computers, mobile phones, and other electronic products. The work is dangerous, and in some cases illegal, but they do it because they need the money. The air becomes poisonous because the cheapest way to extract the metals from the products is to use fire and acid, and that releases poison into the air, the ground, and the water. According to studies, people living in that city have high levels of lead in their blood and increased cases of cancer and miscarriages.

Guiyu is thus often referred to as the 'e-waste capital of China' (and possibly the world). Every year, thousands of such

products are dumped there. And we, as the consumers, participate in this culture of acquisition and waste.

The exploitation of creation

The dangers of global warming, and of man-made climate change, are not new to many of us. Science has served to not only make discoveries, but also to reiterate an urgency that the Scriptures have been saying all this while. We are to be responsible stewards of creation, both the living and non-living parts of creation. Since we are made in God's image, we are to have dominion of creation the way God Himself would rule over creation. Christian scholars call this kind of rule 'stewardship'. We rule over, and take care of God's creation on His behalf, in the way that God Himself would rule – not for self-gain or exploitation but with justice and care.

The problem is that we now live at the close of what is known as the hydrocarbon era. The hydrocarbon era is an age where most of our energy source comes from fossil fuels. And the use of fossil fuels for energy contributes to greenhouse gases. Experts warn us that whatever we do today that produces greenhouse gases may have (and in some cases, will have) consequences for people living elsewhere. This includes generations of people to come. The consequences could mean anything from increased weather extremes, to warmer temperatures, to rising sea levels. All of these will potentially threaten the lives and livelihood of people who rely greatly on natural resources, and who generally live in in low-income areas of the world.

In September this year, Singapore will once again play host to a fourth Formula 1 night race. I enjoy watching F1 races. However, every time the race comes around in Singapore, I feel conflicted. On the one hand, I would love to buy a ticket and be on the grounds to soak up the atmosphere. On the other hand, I have my misgivings about the race. In a race, one litre of fossil fuel for every kilometer is burned up. In addition, because the race is held at night, all 3,180,000 watts of bright, powerful lights are turned on so that the beautiful Marina Bay area and its surroundings are illuminated. There are also the flights taken by the racing teams and tourists from all over the world to Singapore, just for the race. There is great excitement, and the event is great for tourism. But just think: how many tons of carbon have we spewed into the atmosphere from the fuel, the lights and the flights? This is important because carbon released into the atmosphere remains for 100 years.

I do not mean that we should never drive, or refrain from turning on the lights or air-conditioner. It is also not my intention to make you feel guilty, especially if you are also a fan of Formula 1 or other like events. Frankly, it's an issue that I am still thinking through and struggling with. Nonetheless, it is my opinion that we need to think through and be conscious of the decisions we make. We need to do so because otherwise, we may be caught up and be implicated in this form of structural sin. A country or a community may decide to live their lives in such a way that exploits the good world that God has given us. One might argue that everyone is doing it. But is it right? *Does the fact that everyone does it means that we have to follow along?*

The culture of waste and the exploitation of creation are just two examples of structural sins. There are other forms. Unfortunately, such social wrongdoings

all too often go unchallenged among God's people. The people in Haggai's day thought the sacrifices they offered to God on the altar were holy and acceptable. Yet, God rejected the sacrifices as unclean because the community as a whole was tainted by disobedience.

Sometimes, it occurred to me that it is possible that now, God views the worship and work the church offers and does in the same way He viewed the sacrifices made by the Israelites. Is it possible that our offered sacrifices are similarly tainted, because we have kept silent and went along with some structural evil? Are our sacrifices of praise and services similarly unclean and unacceptable before God? This is a sobering thought.

Fortunately, we can take heart from Haggai's message. From Haggai, we know that this does not have to be the case. Things can change, and people can be called to repentance and obedience. We can turn from past uncleanness to present and future obedience. We can shift from receiving a curse to enjoying a blessing.

Like Haggai, we too can be prophetic voices against prevalent structural sin and wickedness. As prophets, we speak out against structural sin, in the hope that the larger body – the nation, the economic system, the society – may change. For some of us, being prophetic may mean that we apply our training and education to solve some of these problems of structural sin. Some of us are economists, some of us are scientists, some of us are artists and writers, and many more. Regardless of our profession, we all can use our training to change the system. With our influence, we could change the way our economic system encourages waste, or change the way we interact with creation.

Nevertheless, sometimes systems are so bad and corrupt, that they have to be rejected outright. In those kinds of systems, cooperation or a compromise is not possible. When that happens, being prophetic means we have to remove the people out of such fallen systems.

We should not let the impossibility of changing such entrenched systems discourage us. In fact, I would like to invite you, the reader, to dream big. It is my hope and prayer that we will have the wisdom to live prophetic lives, so that all our offerings before God are holy and acceptable, and thus we are able to receive the fullness of His blessings.

(The above was the third in a series of four Bible expositions on the book of Haggai delivered at the IFES East Asia Regional Conference held in Singapore from 25-31 May 2011.)

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Wake Up and Dream – the Time is Now!

From 25-31 May, FES Singapore was the host movement for the triennial IFES East Asia Regional Conference. The Varsity Christian Fellowship (VCF) hosted all the participants on the National University of Singapore (NUS) campus. We were also thankful to have the support of St John's St Margaret's church in allowing us to use their premises for two of the meetings.

All in all, about 150 local and 450 overseas student and staff delegates from 21 countries were present at EARC 2011, making this the largest EARC organised by any East Asian movement. Besides countries in East Asia, we also had guests from the movements in New Zealand and Middle East/North Africa.

Specifically, the purpose of EARC is to allow student leaders to gather once every three years to discuss issues facing students in the Asian context. The conference itself included these various components: Bible expositions, plenary sessions, workshops, small group discussions, activities and a local tour.

The theme for EARC 2011 is "WAKE UP AND DREAM – THE TIME IS NOW", with the prophetic book of Haggai being the main text for the Conference. Through the EARC, the participants were challenged to:

- be a counter-cultural and prophetic voice;
- dare to dream dreams and work them out (beyond their disillusionment);
- be anchored to the Word of God (and its relevance to all aspects of life);
- remain faithful in God's calling as an individual and community.

For the 150 participants from Singapore, most of them were attending EARC for the first time. In the following pages we present to you some 'snapshots' of EARC.

From top left, clockwise: Demonstrating 'The Great Singapore Workout' at the opening ceremony; A small group meeting; Plenary session on 'The Challenge to be a Prophetic Community'; the EARC 2011 family

I found the Bible expositions on Haggai very clear and inspiring. The text was presented in its context and allowed us to see how Haggai's message to Israel then is linked to the past, then-and-now present and the far future of God's plan. Overall, I think the sessions have encouraged and spurred my EARC group on, with the assurance that despite His mysterious ways, He knows what He is doing and that essentially He demands right hearts and attitudes while constantly "giving careful thought" to our ways.

Mary-Ruth Low (VCF)
NUS, Life Sciences, Year 3

Mary-Ruth (bottom row, extreme right) with her small group at the Closing Ceremony

The plenary sessions reminded me to take a step back and re-evaluate my priorities. Instead of studying to simply get good grades and find a decent job, I learnt that there is a lot more to think about beyond these. One of the speakers, Mr Benjamin Pwee, put it succinctly when he challenged us to think about whether the value we are adding and the process of adding value to any job that we have is pleasing to God. Furthermore, we were challenged to think beyond the security of finding a decently paid job and to remember how Jesus also spoke out against social injustices and reached out to the marginalised.

An important application that I took away was about being a hermeneutical community. I think a challenge for VCF and for Christians in the wider body of Christ is to be sensitive to the times that we live in and apply the knowledge that we have of God's Word to spread His good news.

Kevin Chung Ka Wing (VCF)
NUS, Arts and Social Sciences, Year 3

Kevin (seated, extreme right) with his group at Lau Pa Sat during the **Food Hunt**

I have learned that God's work across the universities is bigger than I could imagine – not to mention those who did not join EARC and other student movements beyond East Asia. This conference has opened my mind to see that student movements throughout different universities are a truly strategic ministry that grooms future leaders who will speak for Christ in the society and the world at large.

Annesha Shonata (NTU ISCF)
NTU, Psychology, Year 3

One aspect of the **Urban Hunt** required some members in Annesha's (standing first from left) small group to use wheelchairs to move around so as to have a better understanding of what people with disabilities go through.

Some of the Japanese delegates sharing about the needs and challenges of student work in Japan especially in the wake of the earthquake crisis

Movement sharing was a poignant time. As various representatives came up to the front to present as accurate a snapshot of the social climate that their student movements were operating in, their challenges, and dreams, there was a sense of joy and hope. The perseverance of these brothers and sisters in keeping the faith and spreading the gospel in spite of the circumstances they are in, I believe, is built on this joy that comes from hope in God. To witness such joy and hope was a humbling experience, and I thank the Lord that in Him we have a reason to hope and be joyful.

Rebecca Yong Jia Hui (CVCF)
NUS, Sociology, Year 2

Rebecca, standing fourth from left. with her group

Alan, second from left, with friends from Korea and Cambodia

EARC was a great opportunity to interact with Christian students from around the world. Even though it was over just a few days, I managed to converse with several students of different nationalities and find out what the Christian faith means to them personally. It was this experience of exchanging life stories that reminded me that God loves each of us deeply on a personal level, and He works in ways beyond cultural and national boundaries. I hope to be able to bring this fresh sense of perspective into my personal ministry, be it in school or in church, and make a difference through God's love in my life.

Alan Yong (SMU Diaspora)
SMU, Business Management, Year 3

Fiona (front row in the middle) with her group mates

One conversation I had with a Japanese group mate during EARC left a deep impression. She expressed remorse after learning of Japan's true involvement in World War II. The urgency in her voice as she spoke of reconciliation and the need for us to work together in building the kingdom of God made me reflect on my own discipleship. I questioned the lack of urgency and passiveness of my faith, and how it has been primarily focused on my personal reconciliation with God. I then reflected on my tendency to stay out of conflicts, finally acknowledging that as a disciple, I will definitely be called into such situations – to be a mediator, just like my friend was.

God's plan for reconciliation is extensive and I thank my Japanese friend and group mates for inspiring me to dream big. For the time is now – to lay pragmatism (so tightly ingrained in Singapore) aside, dream and work towards a world where God is King.

Fiona Yeo Hui Juan (NTU CF)
NTU, Economics, just graduated

Through the presentations and interactions with participants from other countries, I learnt of the social, political and economic challenges they face in their countries. Some risked their lives just to come to EARC, without knowing what is going to happen when they return home. Others were really *just* joyful to be able to meet up with other Christians as there are not many Christians in their countries. I must admit that I have never imagined or heard of these things before. It made me realise how comfortable my life is in Singapore where I can go to church or CF meetings without worrying about ANYTHING. I have also not done much to build His kingdom. Individually and collectively, we need to ask Him what He wants us to do and focus on it such that we are building His kingdom, not ours.

Irene Saksono (NUS ISCF)
NUS, Food Science & Technology, Year 4.

From left: Kim, Irene, Chandra (standing at the back), Dominique and Abel Benjamin

I have learned so much through EARC and it has definitely been a life-changing experience for me. All the experiences and views exchanged with the other delegates has enriched me in so many ways. It is time I rearrange the priorities in my life and place God constantly first. The thing that really struck me was how blessed we really are in Singapore and we have been taking the freedom to praise GOD for granted. Seeing how many different countries that have different culture and language yet we can all come together as one tribe, one voice for GOD. It was indeed amazing and words cannot express how great this conference was. THE TIME IS NOW, WAKE UP AND DREAM.

Kim Carter Marie
SIM, Banking and Finance (UOL), Year 3

From the workshop on "Modesty or Low Self-Esteem: Knowing How I See Myself", I was taught to view "self" from a biblical perspective. Amazingly, this workshop, as well as the plenary session on "Global Competition and Uncertainties", prepared me for the subsequent workshop on "Choosing a Job: The One Who is Unwilling to Work Shall Not Eat". All this while, I viewed my choice of career as a personal matter that is up to me. The workshop changed my perception thoroughly. Through watching some thought-provoking video clips, taking part in small group discussions and looking back to the Word of God, the speaker reminded us that our jobs are not about ourselves and they do not define our identity; but rather, they are about the community. According to the Bible, God is calling us to carry each other's burden. Instead of worrying which career path to choose, the motivation and value behind the choice we make is in fact, of utmost importance.

Priscillia Koe Jie Xin (CVCF)
NUS, Life Sciences, Year 4

Priscilla (first from left) with some of her group members

From left, Elijah (Malaysia), Daniel, Franco (Hong Kong) and Kaitlyn (New Zealand)

I attended the workshop "Developing an Asian Faith", led by Mrs Karin Ramachandra, which helped me clarify the concept of an 'Asian faith'. We stereotype the Singaporean context as 'Asian', and then assign it characteristics that do not accurately depict it. We should instead embrace the complexity of the issues in our unique context, see how the Bible addresses similar issues and then think of potential modern-day applications. This thought process has to do justice to the Biblical context too.

One application brought up during the workshop is to contribute to the local Christian resource pool, for example composing songs that address Singaporean issues. CF could also actively explore Asian perspectives of the Christian faith, so that members would know that Christianity is a global and diverse faith.

Daniel Lau Jun Ming (NTU CF)
NTU, Mechanical Engineering, just graduated

Being called to dream with a fully awakened spirit – this twist in EARC's theme touched my heart. Dreams seem to be an unaffordable luxury for my realistic mind. Still EARC inspired in me another kind of dream, a God-oriented rather than a self-centred dream.

A bigger dream ...

After EARC ended, a friend from my home country shared with me, "(I dream that) God will use me so that one day, there is no need to name us 'CB' anymore." Sometimes, as an insignificant individual in a minority group facing increasing persecution and social challenges, she did not dream that she can step forward to help bring about a church revival, a prophetic community or a more influential student ministry. Dispiriting voices were echoing in her head, that staying in the comfort zone would be enough. EARC reminded her of a calling to take up the challenge of being a 'leading dreamer'.

Dream about the little things ...

I dream that God will use me to make a change in my family, to reconcile with my parents…

I dream that God will make me an influential student leader in my cell group through my service …

I enjoy doing translation very much, so I will practice hard so that God will use me to translate Christian books to our native language…

I am learning…

Deeply encouraged by my friend's dream, I am learning to discern the dream God has in mind for me. I wonder what the God-centred dream for me would be like. I will thus start with seeking God first before dreaming on. I pray that God will bless me with a holy magnificent passion and a dream-chasing heart purified through His precious Word.

"… and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you …" (Hag. 2:23, NIV)

As the promise was told, I humbly submit myself to the dream God desires for me.

So, here comes the dreamer!

'Dreamer' is a post-graduate student from an East Asian country (referred to as 'CB' in the above reflection)

To Whom Do We Forthtell?

On 29 June, FES held its annual National Student Leaders' Consultation. The speaker, Dr Daniel Bourdanné, IFES General Secretary, addressed approximately 100 student leaders from the various CFs. The theme for this consultation was *What does being a prophetic community mean? To whom do we forthtell? How do we do so?*

Summary of talk

Dr Bourdanné began his talk by stating the need for the community to dream for God. He commented that our world today is a corrupted and hopeless one, citing examples such as the past two world wars that occurred in the last century, low attendance of youth in Western churches, decadent values promoted in society today such as prostitution, as well as increasing income inequality and unemployment rates. However, we, as students, should not be discouraged as there is hope for this world because God makes use of young people to transform and rediscover the good values of society.

There is also a need for us to think critically and have a good understanding of the Word while dreaming big dreams for God. These skills are necessary today in a society that often confines us to an intellectual box. Dr Bourdanné then challenged the students to reflect on God's purpose for them and how else they can contribute to the community as students.

Finally, he concluded his talk by saying that in today's individualistic society, we need to learn to be open with God. We also have to be engaged in society, questioning ourselves as well as our community through platforms such as group or community dialogues.

Question & Answer Session

As this consultation was also a follow-up to the plenary session, *The Challenge to be a Prophetic Community*, at the recent IFES East Asia Regional Conference, the questions raised were related to what is happening in some East Asian countries.

In countries where corruption and unlawful conduct by politicians are common, how do Christians respond if they are the minority?
Thinking is not doing **nothing**. We need to first engage with realities and get a proper understanding before suggesting a solution." Dr Bourdanné termed our generation as a 'microwave' generation - one that seeks immediate solutions. Instead, we should take our time to critically think about these issues before addressing them prophetically.

How far should Christian students be involved in politics?
We need to pray, train, and disciple people to enter into politics, so that God's light shines everywhere through his people. As students, we should learn to draw links between our studies and our faith, and not dichotomise them. By doing so, we can shape our society from a biblical point of view.

East Asia is in a state of reconstruction. As Christians are struggling with their faith, what strategy can be used to motivate others on campus to dream and think?
God makes use of the following principles to change society: relationships, intentionality, perseverance and prayer. Hearts can only be changed through God. To be good instruments of His, we have to be faithful, patient and dare to dream big, for transformation always begins with a small group of people.

Personal reflection

Dr Bourdanné's challenge to us to discover God's purpose for us as students came at a right timing and made me reflect on my campus life. I have often taken what God has given me for granted, being too comfortable in society's way of living to question it. As university students, God has blessed us with knowledge and resources and I believe that as much as we have received, we should give. Thus, it is our duty to dream big and think critically now. Furthermore, VCF is looking towards being an engaging community this academic year, thus Dr Bourdanné's message strongly resonates in me. Many students today are becoming slaves to good grades. I believe it is more important for us to stay rooted to the Word of God. When each of us begin reflecting on our calling as Christian students, we may be able to bring hope to the world that we live in.

Jazreen Chua
NUS, Applied Maths, Year 2

To engage the school with a loving culture around campus, the *Discover Series* was started two years ago. Our flagship event was "Discover Love", based on the book *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman. It aimed to share the five different love languages and to pledge to commit an act of love to a loved one. Many were touched by the event and the school favoured it as well. Thus in February this year, in continuation with the series, we had "Discover Forgiveness", an event to consider forgiveness as part of love.

Using the sequel, *The Five Languages of Apology*, tests were prepared for participants to identify their main language of apology and about 500 people were reached. Knowing the five languages of apology (Expressing Regret, Accepting Responsibility, Making Restitution, Genuinely Repenting and Requesting Forgiveness), participants were able to find out their main language of forgiveness. Being aware of this paves the way for them to accept and forgive someone else. Apart from the tests, *Breakthrough Missions, Yellow Ribbon Project* and *Prison Fellowship Singapore* set up exhibitions to raise awareness of the Prison Ministry, where forgiveness has a great impact in rehabilitation and reconstruction of new lives. There was also the sharing of testimonies by two ex-prisoners, each from the Yellow Ribbon Project and Breakthrough Missions, and God's hand was mentioned in the rehabilitation process!

We want to thank God for the successful running of this three-day event which has been used by God to touch the lives of others. To God be all the Glory!

Gabriel Ting Wee Teong
SIM, Banking and Finance (UOL), just graduated

Eat, Love, Pray

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. - Ecclesiastes 3:1

In the movie, "Eat, Love, Pray", the character played by Julia Roberts was looking for these three vacuums in her life, especially love. In this season of pioneering work, these three aspects - *Eat, Love, Pray* - have shaped both my life and the workings of my ministry in many ways. Let me share from my experience in FES pioneering ministry.

Eat

Delicious food contains amazing power. Being a creative God, He made delicacies of different kinds of texture and fragrance. Many of us can testify of instances when we met with loved ones, friends and even made new friends over a meal.

A Chinese New Year gathering at Fuji's house

Mealtimes are also great places to minister. Jesus himself enjoyed eating and ministering over a meal. I recall many great Bible discussions that took place over a meal and later developed into a regular Bible study group.

Love

We are all created to love and to be loved. Having been in ministry for a few years, I have encountered countless people of all ages seeking love. In John 4:10, Jesus indirectly referred to himself as 'living water'. I believe that Jesus' meaning of 'living water' in the modern context is 'love and security'. True love and security in life can only be found in Jesus – our 'living water'.

An English conversational skills class

It has been an enriching experience being involved in pioneering work at EASB (East Asia Institute of Management). We sit in the classes, helping overseas students, not only in their English Language skills, but also sharing our lives and embracing our cultural differences. We recently worked in a joint project with Mustard Seed Christian Church. It was an excellent collaboration organising an amazing race at Fort Canning Park followed by a time of fellowship over dinner. We had a good turnout of around 20 EASB students. The students enjoyed themselves having fun as much as we did.

Many people have asked me what the differences are between working in pioneering and in established campuses. There are definitely differences, but yet, I believe the key is not in emphasising the differences but bridging these differences with the love of Christ.

Pray

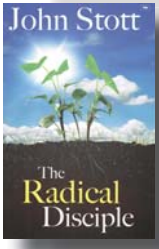
Prayer is revolutionary - it has changed my life's perspective and worldview. When I think of prayer, I have always been directed to Mark 1:35 (ESV): "And

rising very early in the morning, while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed." A senior CFer from ICF (Informatics Christian Fellowship) commented that "prayer is work, and ministry is fun". Truly, I agree with him! Personally, I have learnt so much by learning how to pray and consistently praying with passion through being involved in pioneering work. When I first stepped into the campus prayer meeting at ICF, it changed the lenses in which I viewed the world. It was in a non-air-conditioned environment, a deserted open space that was filled with dust. Nevertheless, praise, prayer and worship were vibrant and active. And so, every Wednesday from 1.00 to 2.00 pm, it is a time set aside for us to pray and with the anticipation of meeting God.

Fuji with some of the ICFers

Fuji Yew
Head of FES Pioneering Ministry

resources for growth



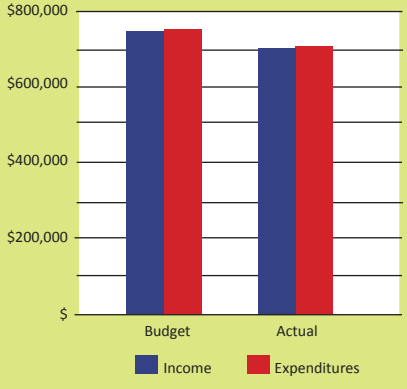
In John Stott's final book, ***The Radical Disciple*** (IVP, 2010) he outlined eight characteristics of Christian discipleship – *Non-conformity, Christlikeness, Maturity, Creation-care, Simplicity, Balance, Dependence* and *Death*. At a glance, these may seem to be very basic themes of discipleship which many of us are familiar with. But like all humans, we often neglect what is familiar or choose only those areas we are comfortable with. It is for this purpose that the author wrote this book – to help us consider what should be taken seriously.

In explaining the eighth characteristic – death – he reiterates the 'paradoxical principle of life through death'. Some 'deaths' that we face are: *"... a death to sin through identification with Christ, a death to self as we follow Christ, a death to ambition in cross-cultural mission, a death to security in the experience of persecution and one of martyrdom, and a death to this world as we prepare for our final destiny ... yet in every situation, death is the way to life."* (p.135)

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." - Philippians 1:21

$ & Sense

FES Income and Expenditures 2011 (as at 30 June)



	Budget	Actual
Income	$754,351.96	$703,157.70
Expenditures	$756,197.00	$707,431.70
Surplus/Deficit	$(1,845.04)	$(4,274.00)

- The figures presented above exclude the accounts of the Military Christian Fellowship.
- As at June 2011, by God's grace, FES' finances is at a break-even point. God has provided sufficient funds for our needs, especially for the recent East Asia Regional Conference.
- The challenge ahead is to find ways to increase contributions to FES in a more sustainable way.

Victor Wibowo *is Acting Head of FES Indonesian ministry. He also oversees the work at SMU ISCF and NTU ISCF. Recently, Victor was in the East Asia Regional Conference (EARC) Local Committee which handled the matters relating to Singapore participants at EARC.*

"Would it be possible ....?" Just fill in the blanks and you can get various responses testing the boundaries that had been previously set. I encountered this question many times when I was a Local Committee member of EARC. As I got frustrated with these various requests, I was challenged to remember that these are the students that God has entrusted under my care. While I can understand their particular situations, I cannot always accommodate their requests because there were boundaries that had been agreed on by the committee for the benefit of both the conference and the participants. In the process, I learnt in a deeper way, what it means to have a heart like a shepherd. I am still on the learning journey. God has been gracious as He continues to grant me patience and endurance, and in the process He has opened my eyes to witness His work.

Victor (bottom row, extreme left) with students and staff of the Indonesian ministry

. . . in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving

Prayer Items

- Pray for my wife, Dewi and I as we juggle family and ministry responsibilities especially as our son, Lemuel, is growing fast. As I am also doing part-time studies at Biblical Graduate School of Theology, pray for good time management and that this will equip me better for the ministry in FES.
- In July, I will be assigned to work with NTU ISCF in addition to the work in SMU and among Indonesian graduates. Pray for a good relationship with the student leaders.
- Pray for students to exercise initiative and creativity as they plan programmes for the coming academic year.
- Pray for the continuation of the ministry in SMU as the number has continued to decline.

let your requests be made known to God.

***Siah May Lan** is Senior Staffworker overseeing the ministry at Singapore Institute of Management Students' Christian Fellowship (SIM SCF) and FES Missions.*

On 2 May 2011, I was awakened from my morning slumber by a phone call with the shocking news that Ms Paulina Ong, a former SIM SCF student leader who graduated a year ago, had gone home to be with the Lord earlier that same morning. Apparently she had died of pneumonia, which developed from the flu she had previously. She did not seek immediate medical attention until it was too late and coupled with her congenital heart problem, her condition worsened further. She was only 23 years old. Many of her peers and fellow CFers were equally shocked and saddened by her demise as she was such a 'live wire' when she was alive. This brought to my mind the fragility of the life that God has given us, His Sovereign will over our lives and how we ought to live our lives to the fullest for His Glory and namesake. I thank Paulina for having lived her life to the fullest and given it to our Lord!

May Lan (back row, second from left) and Paulina (back row, extreme right), in a 2008 photo taken with SIM SCFers at a Christmas event

Prayer Items

- Pray for the new SIMSCF Exco and CGLs – that their lives will be Christ-centred and focused on achieving the theme and goals set for the CF in the new academic year.
- Pray for a good working relationship with the school authorities especially in view of the more intense collaboration between the IFG ministry and the school's initiatives for the welfare and care of the international students.
- Pray for the CFers to be grounded in God's Word, live their lives according to the biblical truths and be a good Christian witness on campus and in society.
- Pray for the integration of the G Cube missions programme across the three sections of FES ministry, i.e. English, Chinese and Indonesian. Pray for the continued effectiveness of the programme to shape and impact the students' understanding on God's missional mandate for His people.

The Associate Staffworkers who currently work together with May Lan in running the G Cube missions programme

Joni Wong *is staffworker overseeing the International Friendship Group (IFG) and postgraduate ministry for the FES English section.*

I thank the Lord for my first year of learning experience at FES. It is a joy to see the formation of the Postgraduate Small Group in July 2010. Dean volunteered to be the leader of the group, and Allan and U-Liang took the initiative to serve in whatever capacity that was required then. Xiao Qian and Alan have also joined us. Dean's selfless sacrifice never ceased to amaze me when he informed us of his decision to go to Japan for crisis relief work at a crucial time.

Joni (second from right) with the postgraduate small group, from left to right: Xiao Qian, Dean, Allan and Alan

I also thank the Lord for the VCF International Friendship Group (IFG). The committee at that time consisted of Zhi Han, Dominique, Shermaine, Mary-Ruth, Gladys and Sheryl. It is evident to me that the love of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14) compels them to serve among the international students on campus. Zhi Han seized the opportunities to work with the Office of Student Affairs (OSA) and expanded outreach efforts through the mobilisation of VCFers as befrienders. As the international students are also paired up with a host family, the Lord indeed has been *Jehovah Jireh* and has provided us with over 100 host family participants this past year.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,

Prayer Items

- Pray that by the power of the Holy Spirit, my life will be transformed to be more like Christ (Rom. 12:2) and that He will equip me with communication and adaptation skills for campus work.
- Pray for the Postgraduate Small Group as they juggle various responsibilities. Pray for more Christian postgraduate students to join us.
- Pray that the VCF IFG Committee will continue to have favour with the OSA and have new ideas for IFG work.
- Pray that God will bless the efforts of the host family participants and that in time to come, the field will be ripe for harvest.

Yong Lee Fong *is currently staffworker overseeing the Ngee Ann Polytechnic Chinese Christian Fellowship (NP CCF). Besides working with students, she is also involved with the graduates ministry and editor of the Chinese Work newsletter, 'Follower'. Lee Fong used to be a staffworker with FES in the nineties for about six years. By God' grace and faithfulness, God has led her to re-join the FES Chinese ministry a year and a half ago.*

It has been a delightful and an exciting experience to serve in NP CCF. The fellowship has grown tremendously in number and various aspects. I have seen students who went through life transforming experiences when the Lord touched their lives. The committee members also display initiative and commitment in their service. I thank the Lord for them. I have learnt a lot from them as well.

will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus

Philippians 4:6,7

A NP CCF fellowship meeting

Prayer Items

- Thank God for His grace and faithfulness, that He has given me strength to serve Him in the FES Chinese Work. Pray that I will continue to stay focused on Him, and serve Him faithfully among the students and graduates.

Lee Fong (back row, second from right) with the NP CCF committee

- Thank God for His guidance for leading a number of nursing students to attend the weekly fellowship meeting. Many of them are non-believers or young Christians. Pray for the follow-up that will be carried out in the next few months by the students and me.

- Pray for wisdom to juggle between my responsibilities in FES, my family and church.

Staff Retreat

The staff team had their annual *Staff Retreat* from 27-29 June at the National Service Resort & Country Club, Changi. The retreat began with two sessions on Team Dynamics conducted by staff of the Centre for Affective Management, Experiential Learning and Outdoor Training (C.A.M.E.L.O.T). Later that evening, we held a welcome dinner for Dr Daniel Bourdanné, the IFES General Secretary, who was passing through Singapore on his way to Indonesia. On the second day of the retreat, Dr Bourdanné led the staff team to reflect on some of the priorities in our life and ministry.

The FES staff team

Welcome dinner for Dr Bourdanné with FES Vice-President Dr Choong Chee Pang, some student leaders and graduates in attendance.

A team building game at the retreat

One of the sessions with Dr Bourdanné at the retreat

Farewell

Melinda Loe, formerly staffworker with the Indonesian Ministry left FES in July. Melinda has decided to return to Indonesia to work and at the same time, complete her Doctorate in Ministry programme at the South-East Asia Bible College. We thank Melinda for her ministry with students, especially in the area of training, and pray for God's presence to be with her in her new role and responsibilities.

Melinda (in blue) with some of the SP ISCF students whom she worked with while in FES

Welcome

Adrian Nurogho graduated from NUS in 2008 in Chemical Engineering and then pursued further studies in the Singapore-MIT Alliance programme, obtaining a Double Masters' degree in 2010. After graduation, he worked with Siemens as a Research Engineer.

Adrian was the chairperson of NUS Indonesian Students' Christian Fellowship (NUS ISCF) from 2006-2007 and has served as an Associate Staffworker since 2009. He worships at Reformed Evangelical Church (Singapore) and is part of the church's Sunday School team. Adrian is soccer-mad, a movie buff and an avid music lover.

At FES, Adrian is assigned to NUS ISCF.

Reuben Ang is a recent graduate from NUS with a degree in Business. Ever-cheerful and witty, he was also a former VCF Exco member (2010-2011) where he held the position of Faculty Vice-Chairperson.

Reuben worships at Zion Serangoon Bible Presbyterian Church and actively serves there in the Children and Youth service. During his free time, he also helps out as a business/marketing consultant at his family catering business.

Reuben joined FES in June and has been assigned to NTU CF and the Hall Ministry of NUS VCF.

To readers of *Perspective* who are currently receiving hard-copies of our newsletter: If you would like to receive an e-copy instead, please drop us an email (fes@fessingapore.org) to let us know. Thank you for your cooperataion!

FES Serving God amongst Students and Graduates in Singapore

perspective July/August 2011

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AGAINST APATHY AND DEFEATISM

In the main article Tze-Ming has written a profound exposition on the book of Haggai. Now, allow me to suggest two reflections related to that: on apathy and defeatism.

The people in Haggai's time kept on working and living their life without realising how their priorities have been misplaced. Their disillusionment with their living conditions had desensitised them to any desire to make improvements. Many people in our time also experience the same symptom. It is the symptom of **apathy**. We may still be breathing and kicking, but we are losing our sight on right priorities and passion. This is frightening. Victor Hugo ever warned us: "It's nothing to die; it's frightful not to live."

Being faced with overwhelming problems and countless issues could lead to apathy. Each day, whether we like it or not, we are bombarded with domestic headaches like economic volatility and unpredictable recession; increasing cost of housing and health care; and the constant threat from religious extremists or global problems (like global warming, widening gap between the rich and the poor, etc). To make it worse, thanks to the advancement of internet technology, we are updated and exposed to this information constantly and instantly!

Apathy could creep in at a very early stage of life. Students are historically known to be idealists and often act as agents of change in many circumstances. However, the situation is hardly like this anymore. In recent conversations with some students, I discovered that they (even Christian students) are losing the passion for pursuing biblical ideals. The idea of transforming the world for the glory of God seems beyond their reach and comprehension. Their world has been reduced to merely finding a stable job with a good income; starting a family, and leading a comfortable life. More often than not, they have made up their minds and set their life goals without even looking seriously at what is really happening at "the ruins of the house of the Lord".

The twin brother of apathy is **defeatism**. It is a state of mind saying that no matter what we do or efforts we attempt, it does not make any difference. The economy will still be volatile, the social issues will still persist, the wars and conflicts will remain. We either blame it on "divine sovereignty" or we become a practical deist, claiming that God exists and created the world, but He has now left it to mere fate. This is another subtle danger lurking in many young people's mind nowadays.

Rubbing salt into the wound, the ever popular "kiasu" mentality also brings further aroma into the feast of defeatism. The more we are afraid to lose or fail, the less courageous we are to venture on to new challenges or opportunities. This will likely lead us to succumb to this lethargic mentality – "just play safe" or "don't rock the boat".

In the face of these two threats, how should the FES ministry be positioned in order to counter them? (to be continued in the next issue of *Perspective*)

Lisman Komaladi
General Secretary