perspective

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Study God's Word

The Word In The World

The Night Is Darkest Just Before The Dawn

Consider Christ: Campus, Career, Community

STUDY GOD'S WORD

Howard Peskett

Study

Lawyers study briefs; cooks study menus; auditors study accounts; engineers study plans; students study textbooks; pilots study charts; editors study reports; explorers study terrain. The whole world is full of people studying in their respective domains in order that they may know the truth and avoid error. If they don't study, their ignorance or carelessness may cost them their clients, their reputation, their jobs and even their lives.

During World War II the story of what Hitler was doing to the Jews was suppressed and disbelieved for years. The information was pouring out from reputable sources in Switzerland, Sweden, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Poland, Palestine, Germany and France. It was detailed, documented, stark, precise — and ignored. Here was a truly *lethal indifference.* It cost the lives of millions.[1]

God's

The Christian gospel has the authority of God behind it. But this doesn't mean that every opinion held by Christians has divine authority behind it! All our convictions, opinions and proposals must be brought *under* God's Word. A Christian can speak *with* authority only when he has first taken his stand *under* authority. A Christian is a person who brings his life, her problems, his plans for God's authoritative opinion to be passed on them through His Word. Thus he or she will consult God's Word when:

- contemplating marriage;
- short of money;
- guilty of insufficient filial care or hindered by parental opposition from following God's will;
- required to do military service;
- anxious about a loved one's sickness;
- facing death;
- a meeting is interrupted by a person apparently under demonic influence;
- invited to cooperate in an unethical common practice;
- afraid;
- crushed by feelings of guilt which are justified *or* unjustified; and in a thousand other circumstances.

A Christian is a person who brings his life, her problems, his plans for God's authoritative opinion to be passed on them through His Word.

Word

Christians believe in a God who speaks. Nature reveals His glory; but He has spoken more clearly through prophets and apostles and most clearly through His Son. God's Word is the expression of His mind and of His will. That word was written and has been translated; it has been preached and taught; and our responsibility is to read it, believe it, enjoy it and obey it so that our whole beings may gradually be transformed by it.

Traditionally Christians have been told that the Bible is the sword of the Spirit. The trouble with this now out-dated

1 See Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret*, Little Brown & Co., Boston, 1980

metaphor is that it conjures up antique pictures of mediaeval jousting. Perhaps today we should say the Bible is the rifle of the Spirit; the wok (sic) of the Spirit; the piledriver of the Spirit; the telephone of the Spirit; the Spirit's anti-mugging device; something indispensable to daily life – a foundation, a contract, a textbook, a love letter, food, maker's instructions, enabling us to live a life of high fidelity to God.

Study God's Word

This is our goal. It is our goal. It is one which will demand intensity, vigour, purpose. We do not worship the Bible; we study God's communication in order to come into communion with God himself. We go to the cot to find the baby. We read the love-letters to know our lover! Our goal is God himself, not words about God. The written word is the avenue to the living God.

Why? The relevance of God's Word

There are a number of further reasons why studying God's Word is important today.

Excessive media exposure has eroded people's trust in words. So many lies are told and exaggerated claims made that many people are automatically sceptical of great promises.

Many people believe that a biblical and a scientific worldview are incompatible and the former has now been shown to be false. A Christian student will have trouble making headway in studying science until he resolves this problem.

We live in a multi-religious society; thus we must learn to speak carefully about our beliefs and listen carefully to those of our fellow-citizens; exercising respect towards their freely-held views, but also courteously determined not to minimise or disregard important differences.

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We live in a world where many religious leaders (not just Christian) appeal to non-verbal, sometimes para-normal experiences as authorisation of their views. How are we to assess their claims and deal with any confusion and controversy that may result?

It is increasingly recognised that moral education cannot just be pragmatic. It must be based on principles, and these the Bible provides: "How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your word ... I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word" (Ps. 119:9, 101, NASB).

It would appear that many Christians and even churches are intellectually orthodox; their creeds are in order and their doctrine is correct. But where is the costly obedience? Where is the joy-too-deep-for-words? There is a difference between reading the Bible like a cryptic map of distant territories never visited and like a vital guide to regions of experience through which we are moving daily.

Many Christians are trapped into conformity with opinions, assumptions and values prevalent all around us in our non-Christian society. They occasionally

are able to lift verses from the Bible to help them in times of crisis or difficulty but their basic mindset remains worldly. This mindset can only be demolished and a new on-site reconstruction begun by taking the Bible not just as a talisman but as the basic constitution of our life, our basic manual, rule-book or articles of association.

True Christian freedom is a narrow corridor between a lifeless, legalistic orthodoxy on the one hand and an over-heated, unstable subjectivity on the other. Some people think this narrowness is bigoted and intolerant. But it is in fact a saving narrowness. An airline pilot has his safety corridor; his freedom lies inside it; outside it he has only the freedom to collide, to crash or to be shot down.

We need men and women whose minds are shaped by the Word of God, whose hearts are set on fire by His love and by His Spirit and whose down-to-earth everyday lives are a practical outworking of God's truth.

When? How long?

When do you take food for your body? The probable answer is "Morning, noon and night." This would be a good place to start your consideration of when to take spiritual food also! A good biblical principle is to give God the *first* and *best* parts of your time, not just to put him at the end of your queue when you have done a hundred and one other things and are already tired out.

Many people prefer to give the first moments of the day to God. After getting up and after washing their faces, but *before* switching on the radio, reading the newspaper or planning the day's schedule, they first take care of their most fundamental orientation, which is towards God.

But other people prefer to study in the evening. Some argue that in Bible times the day began at dusk. Others suggest that reading the Bible before sleeping enables your subconscious to work on digesting the material while you sleep.

Clearly the psalmist believed in constant meditation: "O how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Ps.119:97, NASB). Each person is unique and must find his or her best time. If we can spend two hours a day eating, should we not spend an equal amount of time taking spiritual food? This is only one tenth of our time. When considering how long you should spend on Bible study, you could also honestly compare how much time you spend watching TV, listening to the radio and reading the newspaper. However, *depth* is more important than length of time, and neither is a yardstick of religious merit.

We conclude that a regular part of your best daily time should be given to Bible study, but this necessary discipline should not become a legalistic burden.

Where?

The Bible is, arguably, the world's most universal book; certainly it is the world's most translated book. Chairman Mao's thoughts circulated in huge numbers, but only for a short period in a particular part of the world. The Bible is the world's longest running bestseller. It has proved adaptable to a huge number of cultures.[2]

Corrie ten Boom studied it in one of

2 See Neville Cryer, *Bible Across the World,* Mowbrays, Oxford, 1979.

Hitler's concentration camps; Alyosha the Baptist, in Solzhenitsyn's famous story, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich,* studied it in a Siberian labour camp; John Sung studied it in a mental hospital; astronauts have studied it in their space capsule; criminals study it in death row; visitors read it to the dying; communists study it secretly.

If possible, a silent place alone is desirable, but often this is not possible. In that case, turn your face to the wall, go to a void deck, walk around outside, go to your college or your office early. Create some inner space for yourself by focussing your attention solely on the Bible. Ignore what is happening around you. Allow yourself to be transported into the biblical world: weep with Job, preach with Paul, sing with David, argue with Solomon, meditate with Jeremiah, see visions with John.

The Bible is an anvil that has worn out many hammers. Take yours off the shelf today and begin to study it with renewed vigour.

How do you behave when you are in the presence of a very important person who is also your father? Probably there is just the right mixture of respect and familiarity. We had better remember whom we are meeting when we study God's Word! In order to concentrate we should be neither too comfortable nor too uncomfortable. Slouching in a chair or lying in bed are unlikely to help us *study* God's Word. Where do you go when you want to read or study something that is *really important* to you? Go to that place regularly with your Bible and determine to meet God there.

How?

Having discussed briefly the *Why? When?* and *Where?* of studying God's Word, we now come to the most important section which will set out some guidelines on how to do it.

General considerations

John Bunyan in his preface to the reader at the beginning of Pilgrim's Progress gives the summons, *"0 then come hither, and lay my book, thy head and heart together."* It is a good programme. We must come to Bible study *with our minds.* We must listen for God's voice: "I will hear what God the LORD will say; for He will speak peace to His people, to His godly ones" (Ps.85:8, NASB). We should have the attitude of Samuel: "Speak, for Your servant is listening" (1 Sam.3:10, NASB). We must think about what we read like the Bereans who "received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11, NASB).

We need to meditate on what we read, letting the truths we read "trickle down over the structures of our inner being",[3] and reach in to our conscience, feelings and spirit. Christian meditation should be distinguished from oriental mystical techniques like fixing your eyes on a mandala, or chanting a mantra. These techniques have been used by Catholics in saying Paternosters and by Eastern Orthodox Hesychasts repeating the prayer "O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me," but it is doubtful whether Christians should use such inherently anti-rational techniques which drive the mind into passivity and then try to break through into a new state of consciousness.

3 Gordon Macdonald, *Ordering Your Private* World, Nelson, 1984, p.152

By contrast Christian meditation is the filling of the mind with all that is true, honourable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellent and worthy of praise (Phil.4:8). Memorising Scripture has a practical purpose: "Your Word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You" (Ps.119:11, NABB).

However we should also read the Bible with *our hearts.* In oriental spirituality there are the two streams of jnana (knowledge) and bhakti (love); and communion with God has these two components also. We read the Bible not just for information, but to kindle our love for the Lord, to lift up our hearts to Him, to adore and worship Him. We must not read the Bible like a solicitor, just to ascertain the sense, but like an heir as a description of our inheritance!

Hard work is needed for this quest. So also is humility; "a humble and prayerful spirit will find a thousand things in the Bible which the proud, self conceited student will utterly fail to discern."[4]

Finally we should also read the Bible *for our life.* Bible-reading has a practical purpose. Obey what you read. Apply it to your life. Rejoice in God's promises. Use what you read in witnessing. Think of the Bible as your daily pocket-book, not just like some ancient constitution which is dug out very occasionally in times of crisis.

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There is a growing disbelief in the world today; we are constantly being told: "Modern man will not accept the teachings his forebears did." "We can't accept the teaching of the Bible." The truth is that many modern people have had little chance to hear the teaching of the Bible. New theologians reconstruct Christianity, attempting to tailor it to fit evolutionism or existentialism or pluralism and to limit it to a this-worldly outlook. The result is, quite naturally, unbelievable.

We need men and women whose minds are shaped by the Word of God, whose hearts are set on fire by His love and by His Spirit and whose down-to-earth everyday lives are a practical outworking of God's truth.

The Bible is an anvil that has worn out many hammers. Take yours off the shelf today and begin to study it with renewed vigour. Some students were discussing Bible translations and expressing their preferences. Finally, after many opinions had been expressed, one of them said, "I prefer my grandmother's translation." "Which one is that?" she was asked. "Oh, my grandmother reads the Bible and translates it into her life!" was the reply.

(The above article is extracted from ***Study God's Word*** (p.1-10, 28-29), a monograph written by Rev. Howard Peskett and published by FES in 1986. To read the full text of the monograph, go to *www.fessingapore.org/resources/publications*.)

Rev. Howard Peskett worked in Singapore for 20 years, initially at Discipleship Traning Centre where he was Dean from 1976-1986, and later at Overseas Missionary Fellowship International. He co-authored the book, 'The Message of Mission' (IVP 2003), with Dr Vinoth Ramachandra. Rev. Peskett currently resides in the United Kingdom.

4 J.C.Ryle, quoted in Geoffrey Thomas, *Reading the Bible,* Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1980, p.25.

Engaging Scripture: Asking Good Questions

Good questions are the most basic and essential tool for small group Bible studies.

In a question-based Bible study, it is helpful to have a mixture of questions which together accomplish all of the following:

- encourage group members to look carefully at the passage and grasp major insights (not questions which just point to some correct details);
- motivate group members together to think deeply about the meaning of a passage;
- build bridges between the message of Scripture and our reality today – connecting God's Word with our personal lives and with the world around us (university, church, society, culture, etc.);
- help group members to respond in prayer and with practical steps in their lives.

Questions should be open for more than one possible point of view or answer. Questions whose answers are too obvious or which can be answered with a yes or no can kill a conversation and lead to the Bible study becoming a "question answer time."

Getting to know some standard questions can help students in their personal Bible reading. In small group Bible studies this approach should not be used too often since tailor-made questions are usually more helpful in drawing out the essence of a passage.

Different sets of "standard" questions have been developed such as:

- What does this passage teach about God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?
- Is there a promise I can claim?
- Is there a warning I should heed?
- Is there a command I should obey?

- Where and when does the incident take place?
- Who are the main characters in the passage?
- What are the difficult words or phrases?
- What are the main ideas of the passage?
- What did the passage mean to those to whom it was addressed originally?
- What does the passage say to people today?

- What about the text catches your attention most today? Why?
- What is the number one question you want to ask of the text today? If you were the one to have to answer it what would you say at this time?
- How is this text structured?
- What is the "main point" being made in the text?
- How is the rest of the passage related to this "main point"?
- So what is this text calling us to do today? And does the text give us any help in doing it?
- How can we pray for you in light of this text?

- From a paper compiled by Sabine Kalthoff, IFES Secretary for Scripture Engagement, March 2013

THE WORD IN THE WORLD

From 26 to 31 December 2012, NUS Varsity Christian Fellowship (VCF) held their Annual Teach-In Conference (AnnTIC) at Majodi Centre, Johor, Malaysia. 214 people, comprising students, speakers and facilitators, attended the conference. While the theme talks were centered on the book of Colossians, the conference also offered other programmes, such as Inductive Bible Study (IBS) training and topical workshops such as Christians and Wealth; Gender, Sexuality and the Church; and 21st Century Influences on the Church.. Shanna, one of the first-time participants in the conference, reflected on the impact she received from AnnTIC:

I'm now in my third year of studying in NUS and this was my first time attending AnnTIC despite being in a VCF Contact Group (CG) since I was a freshman. What I've learnt and experienced during the conference truly made me regret not coming earlier. Then again, I'm so grateful to have been able to go this time and soak in what God had in store for me.

Rev. Dr Paul Woods

Inductive Bible Study training

Having heard that this conference was going to be 'intense' and 'delves deep into the Word', I was already mentally prepared for some sessions of brain churning and biblical knowledge absorbing. However, I felt that I've gained so much more. I went to AnnTIC expecting to be able to grow deeper in the Word and to understand it somewhat better, because that was an area of my spiritual walk that I felt I lacked. I guess I'm the more 'faith-based, prayerful, worship-y' Christian, so when it came to my knowledge and thorough understanding of the Bible, it was weak. Nonetheless, this did not mean I was not open to the intellectual discussions and in-depth study of the Word; I just lacked the know-how. When the conference provided me this, through IBS101 and the group discussions after each theme talk by Rev. Dr Paul Woods, a faculty member of Singapore Bible College. I was delighted and inspired. Delighted, because I found a great starting point, a guide in which I was to start my quest in understanding the Word better. IBS101 really helped and challenged me to take the Word more seriously and somehow stirred a passion

Learning through thought-provoking workshiops

and hunger within me to want to know more about what God is truly telling us today through the Bible. Inspired, because of my group mates, many of whom are peers I've never interacted with before, who shared so openly and encouraged each other so genuinely. I am so blessed to have been in a group of God-fearing and God-loving young adults who, I can tell just after six days of being with them, each has a great passion for Him. It was by seeing them shine as great testimonies and yet being able to relate my life with theirs so well, that I left feeling greatly inspired to be as Christ-like as them.

As a student who has lived in a hall of residence for her whole university experience, I've been surrounded with many close non-Christian friends. This role of being Kent Ridge Hall Christian Fellowship's (KRCF) chair has really been a great blessing and testimony for me to share (but that's another story). AnnTIC had not only blessed me by firing a deeper passion for His Word, or providing more intellect and guidance on how to embark on this journey to know Him better through studying the Bible more, but also by giving me a great company of Christian friends. AnnTIC really made me appreciate the significance of having Christian support and peers alongside to pray with you, to challenge you with their own walk, and to encourage you with their Christ-likeness.

I was also deeply blessed by the turnout of KRCF CG leaders and members in this year's AnnTIC. Although it may only be less than 10 people, the hunger I see in each one of them for more of God in the conference really encouraged me. It heartened me to know that the hall ministry of VCF is not one that is stagnant or passive, but one which is growing to step out of their comfort zone to come to seek and find God for themselves.

Fun and Fellowship

This conference was more than just a Christian fellowship and a get-together-and-learn-the-Word affair; it truly sparked in me a greater passion for knowing God more. The encouragements, friendships, prayers, devotions, discussions, worship and learning points I've taken away from the conference has etched in me a devotion to keep striving forward in discipline and hunger for God in my life.

Shanna Ng
NUS, Sociology Year 3

THE NIGHT IS DARKEST JUST BEFORE THE DAWN

From 7 to 10 January 2013, NTU CF had its annual Bible Camp. The theme for the camp, 'The Night Is Darkest Just Before the Dawn', was based on the Book of Lamentations. Around 30 to 35 students attended the camp, which was held at Majodi Retreat Centre, Johor, Malaysia.

With Majodi Retreat Centre a mere 45 minutes away from Singapore, we arrived at the camp site looking to get away from the hustle and bustle of city life, yet still feeling close to home. We were also relieved when the camp speaker, Pastor Simon, was especially assuring in his introduction that the theme talks on Lamentations would not be on all tears! I found Pastor Simon particularly warm and earnest in his delivery of the theme talks. He referred to his family frequently in his bite-sized sermons and came across

A Group Discussion

Theme talk

as being personal and diligent. He even joined us in some of the other camp activities, which really let us warm up to him as he showed his youthful and energetic side to us.

Besides the theme talks, different workshops were available on the second night of the camp. The workshops touched on various topics, including topics such as race relations, food, and information technology. Inductive Bible Study (IBS) sessions were also held during the camp. As a freshman attending IBS for the first time, I signed up for the

IBS 101 course. It opened my eyes to the Bible being not only faith-inspired but intellectually accessible too. Questioning and analysis during those sessions brought to light many contexts in the text that I have not been aware of before. IBS also offered a course on Poetry, mainly attended by the senior students. In that course, the students learnt to appreciate the finer nuances of poetry in the Bible, an area which hitherto many may not had given much thought. Through the study sessions and from the excerpts provided, the students discovered much beauty in age-old works of scripture, which should be given their due artistic and spiritual value.

The camp also had a mix of outdoor and indoor games scheduled in the programme. We had opportunities to play games such as soccer, Captain's ball and Frisbee. We also discovered that this group of CFers in the camp has a penchant for board games. Following the day's Bible Study sessions in the main hall, contemplative silence gave way to boisterous shrieks during the board games night. We certainly did not get 'bored' over board games as it was an enjoyable night of good laughter and making new friends over games such as Nanuk, Game of Thrones, Saboteur, Ugly Ugly, and more.

Bonding time through board games and outdoor activities

The bonding among the students was, in a sense, inevitable. This was likely in part due to the fact that the camp was not held in Singapore and we were staying for a few nights at a new place away from home. We were also told that the area outside the camp was not safe at night. Overall, the Bible Study sessions and games were good opportunities for the CFers to get to know each other better, in addition to an increased understanding of the Bible.

Luke Chan
NTU, Business Year 1

THE HOPE OF CHRIST

On 7 January 2013, NUS CVCF (Chinese Varsity Christian Fellowship) and NTU CCF (Chinese Christian Fellowship) took part in an annual Bible camp. This year's title is "基督的盼望", or "The Hope of Christ", when translated into English.

During the camp, we learnt many valuable lessons on topics such as the New Testament Canon, Overview of the New Testament, reading the Gospels, parables and wisdom literature. We also watched a movie together and played many challenging games that helped us know more about each other. Through these activities, the bond between NUS CVCF and NTU CCF was strengthened.

One of the teaching sessions

A small group

At the camp, students discovered the use of the Inductive Bible Study method to delve deeper into the Scriptures. There are three parts to it: Observation, Interpretation and Application. We can use seven common questions to help us achieve these three parts, mainly "who," "what," "where," "when," "why," "how," and "so." Using these techniques, we discussed a selected passage every morning during Quiet Time, and gained many valuable points from the discussions.

On the first lesson, one of the staffworkers, Lim Chee Tat, shared with us the background behind the New Testament. We found out that there were actually many other gospels besides the four main Gospels in the Bible: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. For example, the gospel according to Thomas, the gospel according to the Hebrews, the gospel according to the Egyptians and so on, all of which were not canonised into the New Testament. During the time the Gospels were written, there were also many other dominant occult ideologies, such as Gnosticism and Montanism. On the surface, these theories and gospels appear reasonable and logical, but after much inspection we discovered that they are actually rather occultic. For example, Gnosticism believes that the material world is evil, and thus Gnostics do not

Group activities

NUS CVCFers and NTU CCFers at the Bible camp

acknowledge that Jesus came to Earth. They even suggested that His physical body on Earth was merely an illusion, since material and physical objects are evil. This theory is in contrast with the doctrine of Christianity, which believes that Jesus came down to Earth to save us, and that He is a true and living God. In that lesson, we understood the importance of recognising the true Gospels to defend ourselves against other occult ideologies and attain the truth.

At the second lesson we had an overview of the New Testament where we learnt how to read and appreciate the maps usually included in our Bibles. Knowing these skills helped us to view the Bible from many different angles. We also learnt the importance of understanding the historical and cultural background of the people mentioned in the Bible as this would help us view the Bible from the perspective of the people at that time.

The camp programme included watching a documentary entitled "飞行少年" ("Flying Youths"), which depicted how a group of juvenile delinquents managed to find confidence and courage in life, and also how they overcame various hurdles to form better relationships with their parents and friends. All these were achieved through a seemingly impossible mission: riding a uni-bicycle for 40km around Taiwan. Through their mission, we could see their weaknesses, innocence, care and love. Most of them persevered even though it was physically and mentally demanding. They also cared for each other and ultimately, relied on God. I was inspired by them and learnt the importance of relying on God even when things seem humanly impossible. Because in Him, everything is possible.

I had an abundant harvest from this year's Bible camp in terms of biblical knowledge, spiritual nourishment and inspiration to lead a Christian life that honours God. I wish to place God in the center of my daily decisions this year. Hopefully, you will find my sharing informative and perhaps join Bible Camp 2014!

Jeremy Teng Jun Wei
NUS, Medicine Year 1

The Law Christian Students' Conference (LCSC) was held on 23 February 2013 with the theme *Consider Christ: Campus, Career, Community*. Held annually since 2011, LCSC is mainly organised by the NUS Law Varsity Christian Fellowship (VCF) and seeks to bring Christian law students and lawyers together to spend time in heartfelt discussion, sharing and prayer on the issues that often affect Christians in the legal profession.

Around 120 participants arose bright and early on Saturday morning to make our way down to NUS Bukit Timah Campus where the day's activities kicked off with a time of praise and worship.

Mr Adriel Loh, a former Law VCF Chairperson, then gave the exhortation, reminding us not to let our identities be tied up with and defined by what we do – whether in school or at the workplace – but rather, to surrender our ambitions to God. As Mr Loh rightfully pointed out, we each must decrease so that He may increase (Jn. 3:30)!

The panel discussion during the "Campus" segment

The remainder of the day was broken up into three segments – namely, "Campus", "Career" and "Community". For the "Campus" segment, participants engaged in a panel discussion with current undergraduates Ms Jeanette Justin and Ms Angeline Chua and recently graduated Mr Jason Leong. The speakers shared their testimonies and also touched on how we could seek to glorify God on campus, as well as identify our priorities as Christian law students.

After lunch, each participant attended one of either four workshops – criminal litigation, civil/commercial litigation, family litigation and corporate/in-house counsel – for the day's "Career" segment. For each workshop, two or three lawyers working in the respective practice area shared their experiences and discussed faith-related struggles they commonly faced at work. Through these, we were able to gain invaluable Christian advice and insights on the very career paths we would be embarking on in the near future.

The day ended off with another panel discussion, this time on "Community". Assoc. Prof. Ho Peng Kee, former Law lecturer (1979-1993) and politician (1991-2011), exhorted us to remain sensitive to the needs of the society around us through engaging in pro bono and other community work. Next, Ms

Audrey Wong, shared a personal testimony about her time working for *aidha*, a non-profit organisation. It concluded with her realisation that serving God and others by our own efforts would never be enough but that instead, service must come from our love and utter dependence on God! Mr Jonathan Cho and Mr Ronald Wong from *Micah 6:8 Intersections*, then shared about the different conceptions of justice and how the Bible ultimately calls each and every one of us to exemplify justice in our daily lives.

Having attended LCSC for the first time this year, I was very encouraged by the fellowship that took place throughout the conference and came away with a much better idea of how God can work through His people in all aspects – be it on campus, through a career or in the community. I was also grateful for the seniors and lawyers who spoke and for their deep and personal testimonies. Kudos to the organising committee who worked tirelessly to put together this very edifying conference! I believe that I speak on behalf of all participants when I say that we are already looking forward to next year's LCSC. To God be the glory!

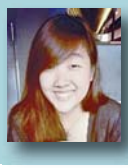
Daniel Yeang
NUS, Law Year 2

NAFA CF

The Christian Fellowship (CF) at Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA) started a few years ago with a few men and women after God's heart. The CF gradually grew to the current membership of about 20 students. This is considered a great achievement – to have so many people gathering together to pray and worship God, and most importantly, to serve Him in the place God has placed us in, which is NAFA. Under the guidance and love of our staffworkers Fuji and Gabriel, the CF gathers every Wednesday afternoon for an hour or two to soak in His presence. We thank God for the great fellowship and blessings He has poured on us. It has been very encouraging to see more and more students coming to join us at the CF meetings.

At the beginning of this year, I personally felt God placing this upon my heart the desire 'to wait upon Him, to serve Him and to love Him'. I believe that this is the theme for NAFA CF this year, to really learn to serve Him and be a 'missionary' in NAFA. Although we may be considered small in size compared to other CFs out there, we thank the Lord for His faithfulness and unfailing love for this CF.

Praise the Lord!



Joanne Ler
NAFA, Music Department
Year 2

SMU ISCF

Singapore Management University Indonesian Students' Christian Fellowship (SMU ISCF) is a group of Indonesian students from SMU who gather regularly to have fellowship, worship God and learn more about Christian values. We (re) started our fellowship six months ago on 7 September 2012 to be exact. It was literally *re-started* because SMU ISCF was established by our seniors long before we entered SMU. However, between 2011 to mid-2012, there was a 'break' period when no meetings were held. Though we are not clear about the reason why this happened, we are sure that God has a greater plan for our community.

At the first meeting, there were only seven of us gathered in a small study room in SMU. During that session, FES staffworker Michael Senjaya Kang shared with us the history of IFES, which was initiated by a small group of seven students from Cambridge University. That sharing indeed encouraged us, as we had previously doubted whether our ministry in SMU ISCF can be an effective channel for doing God's work especially when we face various challenges such as the hectic schedule and competitive culture in SMU. We praise the Lord that gradually, our small community grew into a larger group of 15-20 students attending our regular meetings. Our emphasis is not on the number of people attending, but more on the spiritual transformation of every single person to become more like Christ.

The 'love story' session

We have fortnightly sessions where we invite staff from FES, our alumni or other speakers to share the Word of God with us. This is done either through sermons or panel discussions on topics that are relevant to Indonesian students in SMU. The topics are not just on our daily struggles as students in SMU, but also on the challenges we will face when we enter the workforce after graduation. Some areas that we have discussed include learning to control our bad habits, responding to God's grace, 'Love & Dating', and 'Christian Ethics in Business Life'. We also held an outing-cum-BBQ session where we were able to get to know more about our Indonesian friends in SMU.

Serving as committee members in the ministry has been a blessing for us. We are grateful for this privilege to be able to provide an avenue for Indonesian students to be refreshed by the presence of God on our campus. It has been very encouraging for us to see our friends taking time out of their busy schedules, to come and listen to God's Word.

At our Outing-cum-BBQ

We would like to share a miracle that we experienced in SMU ISCF. A few days before the outing-cum-BBQ session was to be held, we checked the weather forecast and learnt that it would rain on that day. On the day itself, it started drizzling while we were in the middle of grilling the food. However, God answered our prayers. The drizzles stopped, the clouds seemed to move away and it did not rain anymore. We are excited to see God's hand at work in this ministry. This is what that keeps us going in this ministry as we know we are serving a living, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God.

In closing, we would like to request prayer for SMU ISCF in the following areas:

- Pray that we will have a spirit of servanthood and a continuing passion for the ministry.
- Pray for more Indonesian students in SMU to know Jesus.
- The SMU ISCF retreat will be held from 26-28 April 2013. Pray for many of our friends to participate in this retreat.

Edwin Eduardo Kalisaran, SMU, Accountancy & Economics, Year 4

Florencia Tiffany Wijaya, SMU, Accountancy (Alumni)

Coming Event with Dr Chris Wright

Public Seminar: "The Mission of God and the Task of the Church"
25 & 26 September 2013, 7.00pm-9.30pm
The New Sanctuary, St Andrew's Cathedral

Theological Consultation: "Towards the Jubilee – Theological and Sociological Perspective
25 September 2013, 2.30pm-5.00pm
Prayer Halls A-C, St Andrew's Cathedral

Mission Consultation: "Salvation Belongs to Our God"
26 September 2013, 2.30pm-5.00pm
Prayer Halls A-C, St Andrew's Cathedral

Keep the dates free and watch out for more details in the coming months @ www.fessingapore.org

Rev. Dr Christopher J.H. Wright has a doctorate in Old Testament Ethics. He has taught Old Testament at Union Biblical Seminary, India and at All Nations Christian College, England where he served as Academic Dean and later as Principal. Dr Wright is now the International Director of the Langham Partnership. He also serves as chair of the Lausanne Committee's Theology Working Group and the Theological Resource Panel of TEAR Fund. Dr Wright has written several books such as, Old Testament Ethics for the People of God, The God I Don't Understand, Salvation Belongs To Our God and The Mission of God.

Lisman Komaladi *joined FES in Janury 2008 after having served as an Associate Staffworker for a number of years prior to that. In Januray 2011, Lisman was appointed General Secretary of FES.*

When I started my journey as a full-time FES staffworker, I asked God for two things. First, I prayed for courage and boldness to bring about changes, initiatives or breakthroughs in ministry, as much as necessary, according to the contemporary calling that God has put upon FES. Second, I also begged for wisdom to discern what to do and what not to do; to pace the timing; and to bring along all components of FES to move along together.

Lisman (bottow row first from left) at the 2012 FES Staff Retreat

Indeed God answers prayers. I praise God for giving to us the **FES Vision 2020** that sets the ministry direction for the next decade and in which many new bold initiatives have been determined. I praise God as well for the more cohesive unity and single-mindedness among FES staff, student leaders and board members.

Nevertheless, not all initiatives that were started come to fruition as fast as I expected. Some pioneering campuses are struggling. There are student leaders who do not indicate the biblical way of thinking as hoped. Lingering awkwardness among staff from different sections is sometimes still felt. Many ministry initiatives seem to move in just incremental measure.

. . . in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving

Hence, now I have come to realise that I need to plead to God for one more thing, that is *endurance*. I need much divine endurance and perseverance, echoing what the Apostle Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders:

> *"But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24, ESV).*

Speaking at a JCUS CF meeting

In short, here are my prayer points for this year:

- Praise God for the **FES Vision 2020**; for the increased unity among staffworkers, student leaders, and board members; and sufficient financial support thus far.
- Pray for me that I could continue joyfully and endure this worthy calling dutifully till God's apportioned calling for me is fulfilled and comes to fruition.
- Pray for my aged parents (they are in their late 70s) who I stay together with, that I could also continuously make time to care and attend to them and their needs.

let your requests be made known to God.

Joyce Sune Lee Qin *joined FES in September 2012. She currently works with students from Ngee Ann Polytehcnic Chinese CF (NP CCF) as well as Nanyang Polytchnic Chinese CF (NYP CCF).*

Although I have never been to theological college, I feel blessed and enjoy my journey of walking with the students in their spiritual growth. I thank God for letting me experience His love, grace and kindness in different ways. I have encountered many uncertainties and disappointments in student work; for example, students not appreciating their lives, students who do want to commit to their roles in the CF and so on. However, our Almighty God always encourages me and renews my strength through His Word, especially through Psalm 62. He has taught me how to walk with the students with His abundant love and endurance. Besides, God is the only one I can rely on and I rest in Him because my hope comes from Him. God is great!

Pray for:

- me to have the wisdom of God in managing my schedule, to be a disciplined disciple and to be able to balance my time between my family and serving in student work.
- courage and strength to stand firm in the faith always.
- the student members in NYP CCF who are gradually taking up leadership roles - pray for them to be able to see the vision of student ministry; and to have the courage and faith to serve the Lord in CF. Also, pray for them to get sufficient student members so that they can be registered in NYP as an official CCA.
- the new committee members of NP CCF to have a humble heart to commit and serve in CF together.

Joyce (fron row, second from left) with some NP CCF students

At an outing at Marina Barage with NYP CCF students

- the upcoming combined polytechnic CCF event, *Freshmen Orientation Camp,* which will be held on 3 to 5 April. Pray for the planning committee to be united and committed throughout the planning process and also for the students to have the courage to invite their friends.
- the Poly Welcome Tea which will be held after the new academic year begins in mid-April. Pray that God will attract His people and non-Christians to gather. Pray for the CF to be the salt and light of the campus and to train its members to practice the great commission on campus!

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding

Lilian Tan *joined FES in October 2007 as an Administrator.*

It has been almost six years since I started working in FES. God gives different gifts to His children and I believe God's calling for me was to do administrative work in support of our ministry staff. In relation to this, I would like to share the following quote by the late Dr Richard Teo:

> *"And most importantly, I think true joy comes from knowing God. Not knowing about God – I mean, you can read the Bible and know about God – but knowing God personally; getting a relationship with God. I think that's the most important. That's what I've learnt. Instead of worshipping God, we worship wealth. It's just a human instinct. It's just so difficult to get out of it. So my thought is, when you start to build up wealth and when the opportunity comes, do remember that all these things don't belong to us. We don't really own it nor have rights to this wealth. It's actually God's gift to us. Remember that it's more important to further His Kingdom rather than to further ourselves."*

The abovementioned quote is a great reminder to me that my gifts, talents, wealth or health belong to God. I believe that seeking God's wisdom is to have a personal relationship with Him, listen to His clear voice, continue to trust Him and live a life pleasing unto Him. The following verses are a great reminder to me in this respect:

> *God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord" (1 Cor. 1:28-31, NIV).*

Kong Ling Fang *has been serving as Senior Administrative Assistant with FES (Chinese Work) since January 2011.*

I thank God for His guidance the past two years while serving with FES Chinese Work (FES CW).

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters" (Col. 3:23, NIV).

This verse serves as a constant reminder to me that the real master is God Himself. In these two years, I have been learning to handle various "small" tasks like mailing, accounts, data entries, writing minutes, filing etc. However, at times I would lose sight of the purpose of doing these routine tasks and start to question God. The answer unexpectedly came from a sister whom I met at a conference. She encouraged me by telling me that administration is a form of support to the main staffworkers, so that they can serve the students in the campus without worries. Hearing this encouraged me and spured me on to fulfil God's purpose of putting me here in FES .

Please pray for me to have stronger physical and spiritual health to serve God in any area He puts me. Please also pray for CW that its financial status can be stabilised and that more brothers and sisters will consider joining the FES staff team.

Jackson Lum Guan Ting *joined FES as staffworker to the Chinese Varsity Christian Fellowship (CVCF) at NUS in mid-September 2012.*

Stepping into full-time ministry at a relatively young age has been a "faith-stretching" journey for Grace (my wife) and I. As a family, we have experienced God's providence in many aspects. Here are some of my reflections on my budding journey as a campus ministry staff:

- My main calling into ministry is through the conviction that Christian students need a clear understanding of the Bible for healthy spiritual growth. Working amongst them, I am more certain of this conviction; I especially enjoy expounding the Word and witnessing them grow in Christ.
- In the past few months, I have had the opportunity to interact with students having difficulties coping with their studies and interpersonal relationships. As such, it vividly dawned upon me the importance of being competent in counselling.

The above-mentioned experiences impressed upon me the need to continue to improve on these two essential pillars in working with students: my understanding of Scripture and the ability to counsel.

will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus

Philippians 4:6,7

Prayer Points:

- Grace and I have just become parents to our first child, Josiah. Pray that we can have the wisdom and strength to teach our child to walk in the delight of the Lord. Also pray that I can properly manage the needs in the ministry and that of raising a family.
- As a campus ministry staff, there is a need for continuous improvement. I have the intention to do part-time courses at a seminary during the second half of 2013. Pray for wisdom in finding a suitable seminary and time to manage my studies.
- CVCF is expecting new seekers after the recent Evangelistic Rally held on 21 February. The shortage of student leaders to conduct Evangelistic Bible Studies remain a challenge. Do pray that more students will be willing to step up in this ministry and that the Holy Spirit will work mightily in the seekers' hearts.
- Students constantly face the process of internalizing and being convicted of his or her identity as a redeemed Christian. For some, their life goals and actions can be at odds with what Christ wants His disciples to aspire to. Pray that they will continue to conform to the image and likeness of God and to please Him in every way.
- We thank God for providing CVCF with a sizable number of committed freshmen. However, the number of committed seniors has been rather lacking. The possible reasons for this can be misplaced priorities in life, feeling not cared for in CVCF, not being spiritually built-up in CVCF, heavy study workload and the list can go on – pray that the seniors will value the importance of fellowshipping.

Jackson (back row, third from left) with CVCF contact group leaders after a Bible study session

Farewell

Between December 2012 and January 2013, we bade farewell to several staffworkers.

Chu Tseng Nan, Senior Staffworker with FES Chinese Work, left at the end of December 2012. Tseng Nan had been serving with the NTU Chinese CF and alumni ministry since 2002. He is currently working as a counsellor with One Hope Center.

At the end of January 2013, ***Yong Lee Fong,*** staffworker with the FES Chinese Work, left to spend more time with her family. Lee Fong was working with students and alumni from Ngee Ann Polytechnic Chinese CF for the past three years.

Hilda Ng, staffworker with the Polytechnic ministry (English), left at the end of January to pursue further studies in counselling at Singapore Bible College. Hilda had been serving with FES since 2008.

We thank Tseng Nan, Lee Fong and Hilda for their faithful service in FES and we pray for God's blessings upon them as He leads them to new paths of service.

Congratulations

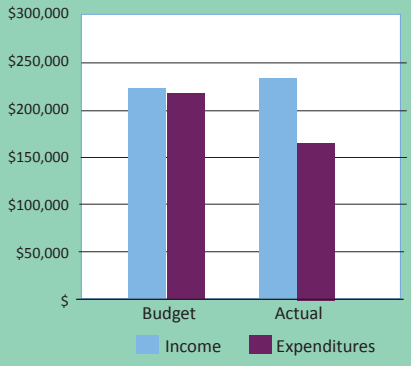
Just in the past three months this year, three of our staffworkers have been blessed with new additions to their family. Pray with our young parents as they adjust to this new phase of life, and manage their responsibilities at home and at work.

Victor Wibowo, Senior Staffworker with the Indonesian Ministry, his wife Dewi and his son Lemuel welcomed baby Levitia Lucie Leann on 22 January.

On 4 March, baby Asher was born to Jeremiah Goh, staffworker with NTU CF and previously with NUS VCF, and his wife Shu Hui.

Jackson Lum, staffworker assigned to Chinese VCF, and his wife Grace welcomed baby Josiah on 9 March.

FES Income and Expenditures 2013 (Jan-Feb)



	Budget	Actual
Income	$223,256.00	$236,862.50
Expenditures	$221,002.51	$162,699.28
Surplus/(Deficit)	$2,253.49	$74,163.22

Notes:

- In 2012, FES experienced a consolidated deficit of S$36K.
- FES 2013 budget is at S$1.326M with a targeted surplus of S$13K.
- The first two month of this year has been rather encouraging. While expenditure was well controlled, we experienced a higher than expected income in most of the three sections.

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The example described only shows that the way we perceive and engage Scripture will influence the way we live out our lives. Understanding Scripture will never be a stand-alone exercise of mere intellectual knowledge or spiritual experience.

This is where the late John Stott's proposition is considerably relevant. He suggested that Christians must engage in *double listening* – listening to the Word (Scripture) and listening to the world. Similarly, FES will do a *double engagement* – faithfully engaging Scripture and engaging the society in all aspects of life. This will be the focus of FES in 2013. We long to see our students engage deeply with Scripture such that all spheres of life (including the society or community they live in) will similarly become engaged deeply with Scripture.

Several programmes and initiatives have been planned, such as invigorating and deepening some Bible Study best practices from various FES sections, conducting a survey on how deep our students engage Scripture and how scriptural their living is, organising a national student leaders' consultation, and many others in the pipeline. Then, at the latter part of this year, we will challenge our students to think through what a deep and sound Scripture engagement should signify in their life and in the way they engage in their daily activities, campus life, work and vocation, social issues, etc.

Let me conclude by quoting what Miroslav Volf wrote in his excellent book *"Captive to the Word of God – Engaging the Scriptures for Contemporary Theological Reflection"* (Eerdmans, 2010):

> *These, then, are my interpretive commitments. I read the Bible as:*
> *a sacred text and a witness to Jesus Christ;*
> *a site of God's self-revelation;*
> *a text from the past through which God addresses all humanity and each human being today;*
> *a text that has an overarching unity yet is internally teeming with rich diversity;*
> *a text that encodes meanings and refract them in multiple ways;*
> *a text we should approach with trust and critical judgment as well as engage with receptivity and imagination;*
> *a text that defines Christian identity yet speaks to people beyond the boundaries of Christian communities.*

Lisman Komaladi
General Secretary

DOUBLE ENGAGEMENT
Engaging Scripture and Society

The Lunar New Year celebrations were just over last month. In many of the festive songs and greetings that we have heard during this period, words like "prosperity", "blessings", and "fortune" were overwhelmingly broadcasted. Many discussions and debates have been carried out among Bible scholars whether it is truly biblical for a Christian to expect, demand or to realise prosperity, blessings and fortune in his or her life. One can argue that God's intended plan for His people is blessings and prosperity (quoting mainly from Jer. 29:11). The other polar opposite believes that it is only through sufferings and the cross that God's plan and glory are fully manifested in the life of a true disciple (quoting mainly from Jesus' command to deny ourselves, carry the cross and follow Him in Mt. 16:24).

In our Lord Jesus' revolutionary Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5–7) He defines clearly what it means to be blessed.

> *3 Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*
> *4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*
> *5 Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*
> *6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. (Mt.5:3-6, ESV)*

What a stark contrast this is to the state of blessedness that our world promotes. Those who are blessed are not the wealthy, but the poor. They are not those who are merry, but in sorrow. It is not the strong, but the meek who will inherit the earth. Those who hunger and thirst will be given satisfaction, not the full and complacent. Jesus' sermon offers an 'upside-down' look of the Christian life that goes against the stream the world usually gives.

Consequently, if we would like to stay true to Scripture, we must live it out accordingly. The verses from Matthew 5: 3–6 can be interpreted to suggest that blessings are for those who are aware of their spiritual bankruptcy, who cry out for spiritual consolation in Christ, and who are eager to see a 'spiritually' righteous living established in their own life. Nevertheless, I am inclined to suggest that the state of blessedness should also be understood holistically – combining the spiritual, physical, social, and all other aspects of human life.

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