

Youth Group Devotionals

February Special Devotional Series

Recent Youth Group Graduates (Ladies)

Introduction to the February Special Devotional Series

A new year is always a harbinger of all things new. It brings new mercies and graces of God, but it also brings changes. Of course, within the life of WCAC, this year will be a year of great change. We speak, of course, of Pastor Ben's new calling as the English Pastor of the St. Louis Chinese Gospel Church (SLCGC). Indeed, our loss will be to SLCGC's great gain. Yet, we must always remember that the church never revolves around certain individuals. God's church is always God-centered, not pastor-centered. WCAC will continue to move on and maintain her ministry to all people in the community with new people in leadership who will continue the story of how God continues to work through his people at the church.

Notwithstanding, Pastor Ben's departure to his new calling will not feel good to all of us. For all of us he has been such a great blessing, a faithful pastor, and awesome friend. Many college and even post-college students still come to him for advice regularly. No doubt, Pastor Ben has been an indelible participant in so many of our lives, having witnessed during his tenure as Youth Director and then as Youth Pastor the graduation of 8 high school senior classes. As a possible testament to the efficacy of his ministry, many of those who have graduated are now serving in various capacities not just in our church, but in churches across the country and, in some cases, outside the country. Thus, we think it'd be especially fitting to commission a special devotional series in thanksgiving to what God has revealed about Himself through Ben.

This month's devotional series, therefore, features many of us who have been with Pastor Ben in different seasons of his ministry life. It is important to remember, however, that the devotionals are not about Ben. They are not about how amazing Ben is – even though he is amazing. They are not about how important Ben is – even though he played important roles in our church and lives. They're not even about Ben himself, even though it is a special devotional series in thanksgiving to his service. They're about Christian truths that we read about in the Bible, which we have witnessed in Ben's life and ministry. It is our hope that when you read the Scriptures, reflect on it, and see how it has been lived out in Ben's life, you may be empowered to live the Scriptures out even more within your life, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, we commend this month's special devotional series to you.

With blessings,

The WCAC Youth Group Teaching Ministry

Trust and Faith in Him Alone

By: Ariel Fang, former Doulos member (Class of 2010)

Read: Jeremiah 17:7

This is a story on how God used Ben to teach me the importance of trust and faith in your leaders and ultimately in Him alone.

I remember feeling incredibly frustrated while my parents lectured me on how so-and-so youth group event clashed with some other group's event or how the planning of some youth group thing was atrocious and we should not be allowed to do such thing ever again. Then they would tell me to go tell Ben. And then it sucked more. I felt that I needed to "fix" the youth group program so I wouldn't have to deal with anymore uncomfortable car rides home on Sunday. And justified my frustration by agreeing with my parent's perspective.¹

So when I finally joined Doulos I knew that the perfect opportunity to subtly complain had arrived. But no matter how I phrased my (parents') discontent with how youth group was run, Ben would always stand firm with how things were going to happen. The conversations usually went something like this:

"Hey Ben, I think we should check to see whether or not we'll be in the other service's program tonight. We should work something so we don't bother them."

"Yea, but they should know that youth group always have this space every Saturday, and if they have a problem they should talk to me."

"Oh...okay..."

And that would basically settle it. Now, this is not to say that my parents suddenly were happy with how things were run in youth group. Nor is this story meant to portray my parents in a habitually angry light (because they are awesome). But through these attempts to "fix" youth group I came to see something very simple. I was putting my parent's desires above that of furthering the kingdom of God. I was taught to trust Ben; that even though youth group events may not be the most well planned that I needed to understand that he knows what to do. Most importantly though I was taught through Ben's actions that it was not a perfect youth group event that is considered a successful event. But rather youth group was most successful when the leaders trusted in God and were faithful to His will. I'm not saying that Ben is 100% like Jesus; that would be crazy-talk. But rather, we should not only trust the Lord but also trust our leaders to be in-line with the Lord as well. If we do not have confidence in the leaders that God has placed in our lives are we really faithful in God?

¹ I don't think Ben actually knows this story... well now he does ☺.

The Virtues of God's Chosen People

By: Nichole Stratton, former Doulos member (Class of 2010)

Read: Colossians 3:12

In this passage, Paul is imploring the church in Colossae to treat each other the way children of God should and exhibit the kind of love and care for one another that God shows to us. Paul served as a messenger of God for the people of Colossae, and while we can still read what he wrote today, I think that Pastor Ben has served as an excellent real-life role model for the youth at WCAC. Because even though his actions outside of work (the church) were honorable, I think we could see Ben's true commitment to being a servant of Christ through how he treated everyone in church on a daily/weekly basis. He certainly showed a great amount of patience in dealing with a group of roughly 50 kids every Saturday night. And when he asked us to leave after youth group was over so he could go home, or every time he asked us to clean something up, or write something for the youth group, he would exhibit enormous patience in receiving our cooperation.

I think oftentimes this patience was taken advantage of, but I think that ultimately, Ben gave us space in completing our tasks to teach us that we should do inconvenient things for others; that we should want to sacrifice our time to be more like the Savior who sacrificed everything for us. Pastor Ben sacrificed so much for us, but— learning from Jesus— did so humbly. In all the time, effort, and money he spent on WCAC's youth group, he never once mentioned what he was giving up. He admitted his mistakes to his students— like how at one point he was impatient to meet a future wife, and how he felt he wasn't friendly enough towards strangers— and made it so that we knew he wasn't perfect, but that he was trying to make himself the best he could be. He made himself approachable and made it clear that he cared about us— our walks with Christ, our families, and our school lives. Before I was baptized, Ben asked me if we could meet and talk about my life. I was inspired by the compassion he had for family members I told him about, the patience he had to listen to basically my whole life story, and the kindness he had to pray for me.

One of Ben's best qualities, though, is his ability to forgive— he always maintained a caring relationship with every student, no matter if they had turned something in way past a deadline, were sleeping during Sunday School, or didn't clean what he had asked them to clean. Just as Paul instructed, Ben forgave whatever grievances he had against us, and I think there's something to be learned from that. And over all these virtues, I see Ben's capacity for love as the greatest, and the love he shows for Annie, Emmaus, his parents, and the rest of the congregation is a great example for all of us. Let us not forget what a huge blessing Ben Tzeng has been for us, and let us pray for his successful continuation of God's work in St. Louis.

The Art of Rebuking

By: Priscilla Liu, former Doulos member (Class of 2010)

Read: 2 Timothy 4:1-2

While I was in youth group, I was (in)famous for three major things: invading people's personal space, being super touchy all the time and being the one always cracking down on people to make sure they were getting work done. If you need a clearer idea, go to [youtube.com/watch?v=HHrc_2osX5E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHrc_2osX5E). Some underclassmen made a video about it this past summer for Senior Celebration. Even though people love to make fun of me because of it, at the moment, it was not that pleasant...for me or for the people I was trying to keep "in line."

When I called people out on wasting time, not being productive and not taking initiative to do their jobs, I knew that I was doing what was necessary to make sure Youth Group events were planned and logistics were figured out. But most of the time, I was not communicating it in a way that was encouraging and loving toward my brothers and sisters in Christ. In these verses, Paul calls Timothy to "correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction," something I started to learn after Pastor Ben continually encouraged me to continue rebuking (because it is valuable and needed in the church) but *in love*. He always emphasized the last two words because that is the most important part.

In the years I was in youth group, Pastor Ben has shown me what it looks like to minister, encourage, teach, have fun and discipline *in love*. His gentleness and patience toward everyone in the youth group through all circumstances has been a phenomenal example for me, and I hope that it will continue to impact the youth group and leadership even after he leaves.

Loving the Downtrodden

By: Stephanie Cheng, former Doulos member (Class of 2010)

Read: Luke 19: 1-9

As I begin to write this devotional, I'm finding it very hard to choose what to write about. Ben was the one who was leading prayer when I realized that Jesus had died on the cross for me and made the decision to give my life for Him. Ben was the one who encouraged my involvement in the youth group and outreach to my friends and families. Ben was also the one who baptized me last year. But, the one thing about Ben that sticks out to me the most is his compassion. During his time at WCAC, he would invest his time and prayers for each and everyone one of us. Ben realized the potential in all of us and would become involved in our lives not simply because he is called to but because he cares.

I remember last year on a ridiculously cold day, a few of us went to Chicago to hand out sandwiches to homeless people. After giving someone a sandwich, we would ask them if there was anything they would like us to pray for. We would then pray for them. But Ben took it one step further. With each person, he would talk to them, getting to know them. Ben's compassion carries over from the people he has formed relationships with to these strangers that he probably will never see again.

This reminds me of the parable in Luke 19: 1-9. Similarly, to how Jesus sought out Zacchaeus who everyone else viewed as an outcast, Ben sought to form relationships with these downtrodden people. Ben too, saw beyond the superficial and societal labels, and saw these people through God's eyes. We should follow this example that Ben has set for us. I encourage you to try this out next time you see someone. Don't start judging them by worldly standards and their appearances. But, instead see them for the person that God sees them as and loves.

On Being A Biological Tour-de-Freak

By: Victoria Han, former Doulos member (Class of 2010)

Read: Matthew 6:25-34

Technically I'm a biological failure. Oh, I've had a bit of success in school. I've managed to worm my way into college. I don't drink or do drugs. I don't face severe depression nor am I on any medication for any reason. I've never gotten a ticket for driving which is more than most licensed people can say. I suppose one of the worst things I've done in my life is the occasional failure to pay my library fines. However, in the unfeeling eyes of biology, I am a failure because I have not reproduced and have thus failed to secure any future bloodlines. Suffice to say that as of now, I will soon cease to exist entirely.

The drive to reproduce is so ingrained into us that society's expectation for many of us is to marry and have children. The "happily ever after" is the white strapless dress, the tiered cake, and the beautiful moment of "I do." Of course the next logical step is the baby (or babies as the case may be). Some couples may wait for a few years while some may get to it right away. However in our society, a childless couple is either pitied or held as an anomaly. After all, isn't the "American Dream" the quaint house and the white picket fence holding children playing on the lawn?

As I've slowly grown up and gone through youth group, I've seen the pressure put onto Ben in his BA ("before Annie") days by the numerous adults in the church. From the hinting jokes to the outright questions of "Ben, when are you getting married?" there was always an underlying pressure for Ben to find a wife. While Ben has found one of the most incredible woman in the world and has successfully made her his wife, his journey of faith to get there was a long one.

Faith is defined as "*being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*" (Heb 11:1). I feel faith is one of the hardest things to have, especially in such a self-reliant society. Raised by parents who wanted me to major in something that would earn me money, I often wondered why I couldn't simply major in something that didn't guarantee a comfortable salary and instead rely on God to provide for me. After all, didn't God promise that he would look after us in the passage we've read for today?

Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. While I was arguing semantics with my parents for the sake of being a rebellious child, I often lost my focus on what mattered. People often say that "God has a plan for us" and for awhile, I thought it meant that God has planned my life for me and that I would eventually meander my way into where He wanted me to be when He wanted me to be there. However, I don't think this is the case. God has provided us with free will and choice. I think as long as we seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, all else by default will fall into place, no matter which path we choose. "Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld." (2 Chr. 20:20)