

Youth Group Devotionals

February Special Devotional Series

Recent Youth Group Graduates (Gentlemen)

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

Light of the World, Salt of the Earth

By: Alex Wang, former YG member (Class of 2010)

Read: Matthew 25:31-46

So Ben's leaving. Obviously this is hard to grasp. What Ben has done for this Youth Group can't really be summed up in one devotional. And I have to be honest here. By not being a full-time member of WCAC and not being able to go to YG on I have not been able to hear a lot of his messages. But despite that there is one thing about Ben that I have seen, and that is simply his love and willingness to serve one another. And that is what Christ has called us to do. He has called us to reach out to the broken, the lost, the lonely in this world. What comes to mind is the song "God of Justice" by Tim Hughes. The chorus goes along something like this:

*We must go live to feed the hungry, stand beside the broken!
We must go!
Stepping forward, keep us from just singing. Move us into action!
We must go!*

God has called us to be salt of this earth. This doesn't mean that we live entirely within our own cliques and bubbles; when someone is in need, God calls us to help. It goes along with the passage from Matthew 25:31-46. This passage ultimately sums it up. In verse 40 it says, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me" (ESV). We glorify God by reaching out to those who might not have been as fortunate as us in Naperville, Wheaton or wherever we live. We can also bring up James 2:17, which states that "...faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (ESV). Despite not being able to really talk with Ben that much or hear him speak many times, but what I have seen in him is just a loving heart and such a willingness to help others who are in need. I pray that we would follow in his footsteps.

Some people may say to themselves, "Man, this is tough! It's tough to reach out to the newcomers. I'd much rather just hang out with people that I already know." But this compassion and helping out that we talk about isn't directed only at those who we don't know. Christ showed unconditional love for EVERYONE, not just those who are strangers. When we think about it, sometimes the hardest people to love are those who we take for granted, like our parents. Personally, there are times where people close to me are not feeling their best, yet I choose to ignore them. I encourage you guys to truly love those who are close to you, who care about you through all times. Be an example, be a witness. Let your life speak out how much Christ has loved us, to those that we know and those that we have never met.

*Heal my heart and make me clean, open up my eyes to the things unseen!
Show me how to love like You have loved me!
Break my heart for what breaks Yours; everything I am for Your kingdom's cause
As I go from earth into eternity!*

- "Hosanna", Hillsong United

Diverting Our Eyes from the Past to the Future

By: Darren Kwee, former YG Doulos (Class of 2008)

Read: 1 Samuel 16

My time during Youth Group could be described with a single word: Sports. Upon my arrival to WCAC, I would always encounter youth playing basketball or badminton. When it was time to hang out or play in the field, we would set our teams and play football. During the Summer or Winter BDG Olympics, we would have a sense of pride in our Bible Discussion Groups as we competed against others. Like any team-selection protocol, it would involve assigning two captains for each team followed by taking turns choosing players for their respective teams.

Now, how do these captains choose the players for their team? Did they choose the players who were the looked as good as Stephen Norregaard? Did they choose the ones who dressed stylishly like Dustin Kwée? Did they choose the ones who were most popular with other kids in their class at school? No. They chose players with skill. Do they stack skilled players like Jonathan Mann? Sometimes. They chose players who could think quickly and make good decisions. They chose players that could get the job done when the game was on the line. None of the others mattered.

Yet, as assuring as the player-selection criteria may sound to you, they could potentially exclude participants like myself. I'll admit – I wasn't the best at football or basketball. I didn't really fit in with the "popular" clique who would always stand in a circle during conversations, enjoying each other and laughing with one another. During sports competitions, I still vividly remember standing there and being afraid that I would be the last to be chosen – or that I would not be chosen at all. You see, I wasn't the strongest. I wasn't the fastest. I wasn't the best. But I had a lot of heart, and I knew I would *always* try my hardest if someone had chosen me.

Now God had decided to choose a new king for Israel. He told Samuel to go to Bethlehem to the house of Jesse, because He had chosen one of Jesse's sons to be the next king of Israel. When Samuel arrived in Jerusalem, he went to Jesse's house and told him to bring his sons so that God could tell him which one He had chosen. As each of Jesse's sons passed by, God told Samuel that he was not the one. Samuel could not understand it. They were all such handsome men and very strong. Surely one of them must be the one. But God said to Samuel, *"Don't consider his looks. I have rejected him. Man looks at outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."* (1 Samuel 16:7).

Has the Youth Group upheld that command of God? Not always. Yet amongst our failures, we are not alone. A flock is not without its leader. **The WCAC Youth group is not without Benjamin Tzeng.** During team selections, Ben would be one of the first to notice when the timid are tossed around from team to team. He was often among the people to call out uneven teams. In football games, when one team is lacking in skill, he would aid them with his presence. On Sunday services, he would aid the congregation in setting our true goals and remind us to stick to them even during the fog of distractions.

Yet, despite his capability to serve as a people's advocate, he does not sit contently – he listens daily to God's calling for his future. **Should we, as friends and family of Ben Tzeng, dwell on his seemingly fitting role as the WCAC Youth Pastor?** Just as God clearly sees David's heart to serve as the King, He sees Ben Tzeng's heart to serve as the English Pastor of the St. Louis Chinese Gospel Church. Let us not become like Samuel and set our eyes on what position our flesh deems to be fitting for our brother in Christ. Let us learn from Samuel's mistake and clear our vision to see His ultimate plans. Let us "*take the horn of oil* and anoint him in the presence of his brothers" so that the Spirit of the Lord will come powerfully upon Ben Tzeng (1 Samuel 16:13). Pray that God will divert our tendency to look back at Ben's seemingly fitting past as our Youth Pastor and set our eyes solely on encouraging Ben for his new chapter as God's humble servant. Pray for Ben's ministry, that it will be fruitful and a pleasant offering to Him. I encourage you to keep Ben in your prayers, just as you have been in his for many years.

A Life of Humble Submission

By: Jeffrey Huang, former YG Doulos member (Class of 2010)

For the past seven years, Benjamin Tzeng has served as my youth group director, youth pastor, counselor, discipler, mentor, Bible study teacher, Bible Quizzing coach, friend, tennis hitting buddy, love guru, and much more. However, what I have concluded to be one of the most important lessons Ben has taught me was not one that was learned directly. If you ever had the honor of hearing Pastor Ben's testimony, you would know that it is one of great submission to God.

I first found myself hearing Ben's testimony at Teen Camp. Long story short, this is a guy who had it all and gave it all away to Jesus Christ. He had a prestigious electrical engineering degree from the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), and a lucrative consulting career at Accenture. But he left both to pursue God's calling for him to serve in youth ministry. He trusted the health of his family, both the spiritual and physical aspects, into God's hands, praying fervently that his sisters would come to Christ and that his dad would recover from his stroke. And while all of this was going on, he prayed patiently for nearly a decade after college for God to provide him with the right spouse, when ironically his friends thought he would be amongst the first to get married.

Read: James 4:1-12.

In high school, like many of my peers, I wanted to fit in. This desire to conform was publicly manifested in the clothes I wore, the catch phrases I threw around, and especially in having a girlfriend. I also found pride in my academic and athletic achievements. Those were the things that I based found my identity on. James warns us specifically against these mundane "needs" and their potential dangers. If you stop to think about it, James is absolutely right in the first verse. Why is there so much violence, jealousy, hatred, anger, etc. in the world? It all stems from worldly desires that we possess and that we quarrel over to an unfortunate extent.

I'm sure that you've at least once in your lifetime asked God for something you desperately wanted - perhaps an Xbox 360, a boy/girl friend, an A on a test, a car, you name it - and didn't receive what you asked for. James says in v.3 that a reason God may not have given us these things is because we asked for them with the wrong intentions. When we try to satisfy our worldly needs by asking God to help, we are essentially treating him like a vending machine and we are taking our relationship with Him for granted. It's pretty clear to God that when we selfishly request Him, who is supposed to be first in our lives, to give us what we want, we are putting our wants, our desires, and our plans before His.

What we cannot forget is that, as Christians, we are not of this world, nor do we have a place in it. Our home is with God in His heavenly kingdom. Our job here is merely to be ambassadors of God's kingdom and to be a light to this world. James goes as far to say that if we embrace the values of this world, then we are showing hatred towards God and becoming His enemy. However, our God is a merciful god that never

fails to show us grace. If we choose to submit ourselves to Him, however, we will find that He has more in store for us than we could have ever imagined. Our God loves us very dearly, and I'm sure He finds great joy in seeing us happy. However, He also knows and wants what's best for each one of us. It's difficult for us to surrender our individual needs for His ultimate plan, but if we choose to submit, it shows that we not only trust and have faith in Him, but also that we love Him. On top of that, if what we ask for aligns with his purpose for us and is not for our own personal pleasure, He has no problem in answering our prayers.

Knowing that we must submit ourselves to Christ, what does that look like in our lives? James says in v.8-9 that we must first do two things. First, we must purify ourselves from sin. This means that we must come before God, knowing that we are sinners and are completely helpless without Jesus, and repent. Remember, repenting doesn't mean just saying sorry and then continuing on with our normal lifestyles. There must be a change from within – a change responsible by only the Holy Spirit, who gives us discernment in reading God's word and directs us daily to live more fruitfully. Next, we must humble ourselves before God. We are lost and helpless sheep with Christ and so we must be willing to hand over 100% of our lives to Him, not just certain parts of it. To do this, we have to swallow our pride and accept that His way will always be better than ours.

Pastor Ben's life is a clear reflection of this humble submission. It is truly amazing to see how God works in each person's life, and I am positive that God has a plan that is just as awesome in store for you. All you have to do is submit and surrender control of your life over to God. Take your hand off the wheel and let him do the steering for you. After all, He knows the route better than you do.

Biblical Relationships

By: Joshua Chang, former YG Doulos member (Class of 2010)

Read: 2 Corinthians 6: 13-15

We were guys and we were stupid. Girls are so complicated and hard to figure out. We had questions for our discipleship leader such as how we should be gentlemen or if we should even date. Of course, Ben did not always have the answers we were looking for. But we still received some great wisdom from him.

What is dating? Dating in my eyes is intentionally spending time with somebody. The general consensus of what dating means is something that happens between a boyfriend and a girlfriend. So let's broaden our view of dating. We can date our parents and we can date our friends. We can also be dating by spending time with a group of friends. Then you would say, that's just spending time with a group of friends. I would say yes, but there was the intention of growing closer together. Friends cannot grow closer together without spending significant time together. So, the basis of a boyfriend-girlfriend relationship should have a basis of a friendship first. That is me saying don't go through to the advanced stuff before you have covered the basics. It is the same for anything such as learning an instrument or a sport. You learn the basics first before going on to advanced techniques. In the sense of advice, do not become boyfriend-girlfriend unless you have already spent enough time in group settings as well as private settings.

All that stuff was like, "Yeah, I knew that." But I want to emphasize the most important part of having a relationship with the opposite gender. This is the focus of your relationship. First of all, I'm safely assuming that all of are planning to or are in a serious relationship with a Christian. It's not wise if you aren't or weren't planning on it. Ask Ben or Jon. The best explanation that I can give you is that a believer and a non-believer are not supposed to be yoked together. More times than not, we end up compromising our beliefs and morals. If you are in a relationship with a Christian, that's great. The only thing I would make sure is that God is in the center of your relationship. Well, God should be the center of everything we do and think. But God should most importantly be in the center of all the relationships that we have and make. If he isn't your sole focus while you are in the relationship, you are making that person more important than God.

My point is this: being in a relationship is not for everybody. People become ready at different times, and both sides of the relationship must be ready when the relationship begins. Your expectations should be the same. Most importantly, your relationship should not distract you from worshipping God. This was one of many important things that Ben had taught me (Meaning he taught me a lot more than just about dating). He was a great example of a normal guy living a godly life, which has inspired me.

Being Emo and Keeping it Real

By Peter Huang, former Doulos (Class 2008)

Read: Psalm 27 (then read it again)

I never realized how amazing the psalms were until I thought about them in terms of music. For me, music is not simply aural pitches arranged in an organized manner. Rather, it can be a corridor into someone's soul or liberation from one's mind. I find the greatest music ever written to be drawn out of a composer's heart; from the very depths of his/her emotions.

In this psalm, King David cries out to God from his very core. His feelings involve: a confidence in God (v. 1-3), delighted meditation (v. 4-6), fearful desire for God (v. 7-12), and renewed confidence in God (v. 13-14). It is through this journey of realization that David comes to the ultimate conclusion of "...*seeing the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.*"

But how does this relate to us? Hopefully, you do not have evil men trying to devour your flesh and I never heard anyone say, "My enemies and foes will stumble and fall." What I have gained from this passage is an understanding that being real with God involves being true to our emotions. This idea was hard for me to grasp especially growing up in the Asian culture where I always thought it was normal to hide my emotions. I sometimes thought it was a weakness if someone was depressed, agitated, or even joyous. But God did not make us robots. He did not intend for us to put on a fake image. He wants all of us in our entirety; the good, the bad, and the ugly. How are we to really know God's goodness if we hide our true feelings from God?

I find Pastor Ben a good example of keeping it real. He has been in a position where being a *good leader* can be mixed up with *looking good*; where emotions are sometimes judged as weaknesses, Pastor Ben has always been genuine with the Youth Group. I remember going with a group to Taiwan for a short term mission trip summer 2008. We were going to teach English and hold a Vacation Bible School for children. Prior to leaving, we all felt prepared and we expected to have a great time. However, our first day teaching did not go as planned for a lot of us including Pastor Ben. As we gathered to meet at the end of the day, Ben did not hide anything from the group. He did not pretend that the day went well and that he was "happy". Instead, he brought himself before God with all his emotions and sought His goodness. Observing Ben's example, the rest of the group did the same. I believe that this is one of the most important aspects of a holy leader: that he/she can humble themselves and "*wait for the Lord.*"

Friends, being real with God involves being true to our emotions. At the same time we must not let our emotions control us. Rather, we must lay them before God and be confident in his goodness.

Take some time to reflect on your emotional state. What are you feeling? Exhausted? Agitated? Worried? Are there any feelings you are hiding from God? An exercise that may be helpful is writing a letter God. Honestly tell Him how you are feeling and why you are feeling this way.