

Returnee Handbook

— On the Road of Homebound Journey

(Trial Version)

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Returnee Handbook (Trial Edition)

By CEF-USA co-workers

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〈海外校园事工手册〉④

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Foreword

The beginning of the 21st century marks a great leap forward for China in economic strength and in power, as well as in the return of large numbers of overseas Chinese students and scholars (returnees). Many of these returnees are born again Christians. Some return due to family needs or work opportunities, while others return with a missions-mindset, with an intention to evangelize China. No matter what factors influence their decision, they need to be properly prepared in order to re-orientate themselves to the current situation in China in the shortest possible time. Even more importantly many desire that God may work in them to fulfill their personal callings in all aspects.

This handbook is written in response to such needs. We have referenced the following books: “*Returning Times*” by Hui-Yao Wang (海归时代: 王辉耀著); “*Home Again*” by Nate Mirza; and “*Think Home*” by Lisa Espineli Chinn. In addition, we have gathered information through three channels:

1. Records of interviews of returnees by CEF-OCM co-workers in major cities in China (including those who returned from North America, England, Europe, Singapore, Philippines, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, etc.);
2. Records of Returnee Workshop discussion meetings;
3. Information collected from returnee retreats held in North America and Europe.

The target readership for this handbook is returnee Christians, particularly those Christians who are pondering the possibility of returning to China. This handbook provides them with questions to be considered, as well as essential equipping prior to their return to China. At the same time, this handbook is also intended as reference material for ministry organizations and church co-workers who care about the welfare of returnees.

Who are returnees? This is a new name that may be defined by the following guidelines:

1. General

- (1) Returned overseas students: Students who studied abroad for advanced degrees or scholastic training. The history of overseas students can be traced back to late 19th century, and can be divided into five eras. Overseas students’ countries of sojourn included the Soviet Union, the USA, Canada, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Singapore, and others.
- (2) Returned working professionals: Those who had a steady job overseas, but later were assigned by overseas companies to work in China, or perhaps recruited back to work in China; or those who made a decision themselves to return to work in China.
- (3) Those who have spent time studying or working overseas: This is in contrast to those who are raised, studied and worked in China only.
- (4) People abroad who have immigrated back to China.

2. Our Target for the Handbook: Returnee Christians

- (1) In terms of cultural background, they were raised in China and can speak Mandarin. They have a good understanding of and are familiar with conditions in China prior to their going abroad.
- (2) In terms of working or living experience, they (and their families) have studied or worked abroad before their return to China.
- (3) In terms of time spent abroad, they have spent at least one year abroad and have basically adapted to the living, working, and cultural environment abroad.
- (4) In terms of their desire to return, they may have career-oriented and practical needs, or else have clear callings from God, to settle in China for at least a year, or indefinitely.
- (5) In terms of spiritual life, they are born again Christians willing to maintain their faith and lifestyle, or they may carry with them a mission to serve God back home.

The content of this handbook includes basic material related to returnees, and questions suitable for small group discussions or self-examination. The two main objectives of this handbook are:

1. For Self- Study

Those who may be considering the possibility of returning to China can utilize the questions from the handbook to prepare themselves for re-entry. Those who have already returned can use the handbook as a reference to better adapt themselves to life in China, actively build up connections with other Christians, and find suitable pathways to serve.

2. For Group Discussion

Ministry workers overseas who care about potential returnees may use parts of this book (e.g. Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 14) as material for returnee workshops or small group discussions, to help the potential returnees get better prepared for their return to China. Returnees may use Chapters 8 through 14 as material for small group discussions, and share with one another of what they have learned.

Whether you are a returnee Christian, or a ministry worker who cares about the welfare of returnees, we hope that this handbook may provide useful help. Let us work together for the Lord to win returnees to Christ today, so that we will win China to Christ tomorrow!

I. Knowing Returnees

There is a long history of returnees in China which necessarily includes a study of their impact on the country and society. People have a variety of understandings about returnees, due in part to differing definitions of who these returnees are. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an introduction to the various categories of returnees, then examine the history of returnees while assessing the impact they have had and continue to have on China. After reading this overview, our hope is that returnees will better understand their identities and roles and know which category they belong to.

§ 1. Who are returnees?

The name “returnee” suggests that these are people who returned home from abroad. The People’s Net (Internet dictionary) defines returnee as those who have experience studying or working abroad. This is in contrast to those who studied and worked in China only.

A returnee often experiences two or more cultures and societal forms, has attained mastery of two or more languages, and has a unique and personal understanding of Chinese and overseas cultures. Returnees are open-minded and multi-perspectival about their cultural understandings, and after returning participate in working and living in China with a way of doing things that sets them apart.

§ 2. The history of returnees (Note 2)

As we analyze the history of returnees, we find that we can divide returnees into five generations:

The first generation dates from 1870 to 1900. They were children sent to the USA as part of the Overseas Learning Movement, to study abroad so that they might return to serve in China. These include such luminaries as Tian-You Zan and Fu Yan.

The second generation studied abroad in large numbers from 1900 to 1927, and included the well-known Shi Hu and Xun Lu. They were responsible for the New Culture Movement in China.

The third generation dates from 1927 through 1949. The most famous among them are Zhen-Ning Yang and Zhen-Dao Lee, both Nobel laureates.

The fourth generation dates from 1949 at the time of the establishment of the Chinese Communist government. Large numbers of students were sent to the Soviet Union to study.

The fifth generation began in 1978 after the policy of reform and opening was established. Since then, more and more students have studied abroad, their number far exceeding the sum total of the previous four generations, and their fields of specialty covering almost all scholastic fields.

The fifth generation of overseas students, who went abroad after 1978 may be further divided into four stages according to their respective times of departure:

Stage 1 spanned from the late 70s to the early 80s. China had just recovered from the Cultural Revolution and the government resumed sending students abroad; these students were mostly government sponsored.

Stage 2 spanned from the early to late 80s. The number of self-paying students began to increase. Over half of these students chose the USA as their destination, and their ages became progressively younger.

Stage 3, from the late 80s to the early 90s, witnessed an accelerating trend of young people choosing to study abroad, and the numbers of both government sponsored and self-supporting students rapidly increased.

Stage 4 goes from 1992 until today. The Chinese government has established a policy towards overseas studies that supports studying abroad, encourages return, and permits freedom of choice. The attitude of Chinese people towards studying abroad also became more rational and accepting, and the age of students further decreased.

Judging from the time of their returning home, we can divide the fifth generation returnees into three groups:

The first group comprised those who returned during the 80's. Most in this group are now in leadership positions in various management and research fields.

The second group returned in the early 90's. Most of them are active in numerous scientific research fields.

The third group returned after 1997. Many entered high technology fields such as IT, brought about the modernization of Chinese economy, formulated their peculiar work and life styles, and greatly influenced Chinese society today.

§ 3. The number of returnees and their impact

Since the reform and opening movement, various types of overseas students have become a large army that numbered over one million by 2006, distributed over more than 100 countries and regions (mostly in Europe, Americas, and Japan), and their fields of specialty included every field. At the same time, the Chinese economy's rapid growth has been accompanied by the gradual opening up of Chinese society, which has motivated more and more overseas Chinese students to choose to return home. Today, the number of returnees is approaching 300,000, in itself a sizable army.

Many returnees have received a very good education abroad, having received their masters or doctoral degrees. The advantages they have gained, which include education, resources and skills, provide them an opportunity to play a very important role in China after their return. Specifically, many returnee entrepreneurs have established new businesses that promote development in the new economy, including technology, internet, electronics, communication,

and media areas. They have brought with them a knowledge of risk-adjusted investment strategies and new marketing concepts, as well as attracting international venture capitalists to invest in China. In the process of transition from a planned economy to a market economy, returnees are becoming important movers and shakers in creating a new culture of entrepreneurship.

§ 4. The many types of returnees

- (1) From the age standpoint, they include the full range—those who are old, middle-aged and young;
- (2) From the job positions standpoint, they include those who are in top management, in middle-management, as low-level workers, and job seekers;
- (3) From the marital status standpoint, they include those who are single, married without child, and married with children;
- (4) From the standpoint of time spent in China after their return, they include those who are old-timers and recent returnees;
- (5) From the faith standpoint, they include those who are Christians and non-Christians. Among Christians, some already accepted Jesus Christ before studying abroad, and others accepted Jesus Christ during their study abroad.
- (6) From the standpoint of the host countries of their overseas studies, they have returned from North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, Japan, South Eastern Asia, etc.

§ 5. The seven life-styles of returnee living

According to the famed researcher Yao-Hui Wang in his book “*Returning Times*”, returnees basically have seven different life-styles:

The first one is the **coming home** style. This is by far the majority type. Many have very good foundations and connections before their study abroad, and the purpose of their study abroad is to expand their knowledge base and experience in order to return home to be rooted in this familiar soil, and to become key players in their respective fields.

The second is the **entrepreneurs**. Since the 90’s the rapid growth of the Chinese economy has motivated many overseas scholars to return home to found new businesses, in particular, in the internet and related high tech areas. With their unique advantages many become highly accomplished.

The third is the **assigners**. Often they have worked in international companies with world-wide presence, are acknowledged by their supervisors, are well-connected, and are assigned to their company’s Chinese branch as representatives or as top management. They often enjoy better salaries and benefits.

The forth is the **connectors**. They want to connect their advantageous conditions within and outside of China to enrich their lives. Most of these are in the education and research fields.

Often they have overseas positions, or even their own research labs, but are well connected with universities and research organizations in China and regularly return to China to teach and communicate with their peers. Some also establish laboratories or research groups in China for international co-operation.

The fifth is the **flyers**. This type of returnee spends much of his or her time crossing the ocean to discuss business or conduct research. A good portion of their time is spent on airplanes, and they even conduct business while on the plane. They are flyers, maintaining a close connection between organizations within and outside China.

The sixth is **transplanters**. This term describes the large numbers of overseas students who chose to stay behind in the countries of their study, be transplanted there, and even become citizens. Every one of them has many and myriad connections with their homeland and they connect with people back home through many different channels. Some participate in local Chinese community groups. Their bodies are overseas, but their hearts remain in China.

The seventh is the **retirees**. These are mainly students who left China earlier, have raised their families overseas, have established themselves in other countries' societies, and are now approaching or have arrived at retirement age. Based on their feelings towards their homeland, or towards their friends or relatives, they return to China and still make a contribution to their homeland.

§ 6. The trend of returnees and their influences (Note 3)

First, the number of returnees will continue to grow. This trend is facilitated by the continued growth of the Chinese economy, the gradual openness of Chinese society, and the increase in opportunities within China. More and more overseas students will choose to return.

Second, start-up of new businesses will become a major emphasis. Many returnees have gathered much experience overseas and have learned to apply new technology and management skills; the opening up of economic controls will attract more people to choose to return home.

Third, the trend is to migrate from established big cities towards the second-tier cities along the coast and inland. At the present time, most returnees chose to go to large cities as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, but other coastal cities and second-tier inland cities also have a great demand for the services of returnees. These cities will provide significant opportunities for them in the future.

Fourth, the preference for employment will shift from overseas businesses to local businesses. Nowadays many returnees choose to work for overseas businesses; however, with the gradual maturity of the inland market, as well as the growth and maturity of local enterprises, many returnees will choose to work for local businesses.

Fifth, the number of returnees working as government employees or officials will greatly increase. Nowadays some returnees are already working for the Chinese government; with further reform of the government, more and more returnees will want to enter government work.

Sixth, the presence of many returnees will speed up the pace of reform and opening up of Chinese society and democratic development. Knowledge of technology and management is not their only advantage—many also embrace democratic concepts and political principles and will become a significant force in the on-going democratic process in China.

Seventh, returnees will promote the growth of the service sector in China. According to the latest statistics, service industries in China comprise about 40% of GDP, yet in most developed countries they comprise 80% of GDP. Therefore there is a lot of room for growth, and returnees will make a significant contribution in this area.

Eighth, returnees will raise the standards of academic research. Many returnees will become leaders in a diversity of academic fields, thus providing them with the ability and opportunity to raise standards to levels comparable to foreign universities.

Ninth, returnees will contribute to artistic fields, and become pioneers in many artistic areas. Returnees receive a multifaceted education overseas, which includes the arts. Those trained in the arts will become movers in art development in China.

Tenth, more and more returnees have become entrepreneurs for social issues. Nowadays there are many non-profit organizations (NPO) and non-governmental organizations (NGO) that are involved in environmental protection, sustainable resource development, poverty relief, women and children's rights protection, AIDS prevention and public health, education and culture, workers benefits and homeless benefits, social welfare, disaster aid, basic democratic processes, citizen's rights, etc. Returnees will become an active force in these grassroots organizations.

Eleventh, returnees will speed up the pace of interconnecting Chinese society with the international community. This is the goal of the leaders among the current crop of returnees, i.e. to promote every means of uplifting Chinese society, as well as to develop the inward strength of Chinese citizens. They are beginning to transcend a concern with their own businesses and organizations to consider issues that will come up in this development process, such as people-to-people diplomacy, civilized citizenry, environmental protection, and self-induced innovation.

Twelfth, more and more returnees will become leaders, expressing their viewpoints on issues faced by China. Over the last 20 years' reform, whether in reform theory or implementation, returnees have served as an important think tank for the government.

Discussions

- (a) Maybe you are already a returnee, or may be you are now contemplating becoming a returnee. According to our divisions into generations, types, and styles, to which of the above categories do you feel you belong?
- (b) In your opinion, what influence on the development of China has each generation, each type, and each style of returnees exerted, or will exert? How about yourself?
- (c) Maybe you have never thought about returning to China. After reading this chapter, do you have any second thoughts?

II. Return or Not to Return?

As a Chinese living abroad, you will certainly have some feelings for China, which may lead you to consider returning, whether to work, to start up a business, or to retire. Many issues must be considered during this process of thinking. This chapter will help you make up your mind by viewing the decision from two perspectives. First, why return? We provide some statistics that analyze the reasons given by many people who do decide to return. Secondly, as a Christian, are you clear about the leading of God regarding your return? This chapter also provides some questions for you to contemplate as you think through this issue alone or with others in small group discussions.

§ 1. Why return to China?

(1) Reasons for return from survey results

- A. The book “Returning Times” reported that in 1999, a survey questionnaire (Note 4) was prepared and distributed to over a thousand overseas students. On the question of why they return to China, the various factors, related to overseas and to China, are as follows:

Overseas Factors	%
With the same academic degree, one can attain better position within China when compared abroad	46.5
Loneliness and homesickness	29.4
Cultural differences	28.1
Lack of job security	14.8
Racial discrimination	11.6
Life pressure and tension	10.0
Unable to obtain permanent residence	6.8
Mainland Factors	%
Feeling responsible to contribute to mother country	50.0
Family and relatives	44.8
Overseas experience helps personal growth	30.9
Like the Mainland lifestyle and pace	23.4
Fulfill contractual responsibility	21.7
Has exceptional opportunity for growth	19.1
Bound by overseas student policies	12.1

- B. In October, 2006, a large scale survey was conducted under the joint sponsorship of the European and American Student Union Business Group 2005 Committee, the United Sinonet, and “Chinese Students” Magazine (Note 5). The survey showed the different reasons for returning and their relative importance:

Reasons for returning	%
Family and relatives	66.2
Better potential for career moves	59.86
Feeling of being one’s own boss	34.51
More opportunity for start-ups	33.8
Feeling lonesome overseas	25.35

Feeling of being discriminated against	11.97
Difficulty of making a living	11.97
Great offers from Mainland employers	2.11

C. Reasons for Christians to return to China

We found, through interviews with many returnee Christians, that the reasons for their return are varied. Some felt that as a foreigner working for a living they don't belong, and wanted to return home; some were assigned to work in China; some found it difficult to find a decent job and returned. Others had good jobs overseas, but felt an urge to return in their prayers; some sensed callings from God to return, although not sure what they ought to do; some had ministry experiences in overseas churches, and their pastors encouraged them to return to preach the gospel; some might have had opportunities to stay overseas, but were instead moved by a sense of mission to evangelize China and returned; and some were touched through overseas evangelization meetings to return home as missionaries to their own people.

(2) Your personal reasons for returning

Please ask yourself for what reasons you made the decision to return to China or to consider returning to China. Returning to China is a major decision that will impact all aspects of your future life.

Questions for Thoughts or Discussions: The following questions may help you think through the issues by yourself, or with others in a discussion session, and come up with a list of the pros and cons of returning:

- (a) General reasons that motivate most people to return: According to your own observations, what are the main motivations most people claim for returning?
- (b) Your own reasons for considering returning: For yourself, someone who has spent a period of time overseas, what are the motives that have influenced your decision or consideration to return?
 - Sense of belonging
 - Assignment by company
 - Better career perspectives
 - A heart for gospel mission
 - Family needs
 - Others

§ 2. How does one discern God's leading?

When we believed in God and became a born-again Christian, we underwent a significant change in our mind-set. From 'follow the trend – a self-centered world view, value and life-style', we were transformed into 'follow Christ – a God-centered world view, value and life-style'. Therefore whenever we make decisions of any kind, a major consideration should be to seek God's guidance, in addition to practical considerations or personal preferences. On the issue of whether or not to return, the same principle applies. To seek God's will is a life-long lesson for all of us, and we would like to consider it from three perspectives.

“If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.” NIV (John 7:17)

“Who, then, is the man that fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way chosen for him.” NIV (Ps. 25:12)

“The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom” NIV (Job 28:28)

(1) Understand the general principles of God’s guidance:

In general, God’s will is already clearly written in the Bible; therefore if our behavior is consistent with the teachings of the Bible, we are walking in God’s will.

However, the Bible does not reveal all the details of our daily life, including the issue of whether we should return. God will discern our hearts towards Him, give us wisdom and discernment and inward and outward evidences, to help us make the right decisions.

Discussions: Please share how you would discern God’s will from the following points:

- (a) Callings that come directly from God
- (b) Inward evidence based on Biblical principles
- (c) Over long periods of Bible study, praying and meditation, the Holy Spirit moves your heart with conviction
- (d) Evidence from external circumstances
- (e) Judgment or guidance from spiritual elders

(2) Looking back: our faith journey after our conversion

There are many changes in our life journey that will affect our life to varying degrees; yet the greatest change occurs when each of us becomes a believer.

Discussions: From the above perspective, please write down a 3-minute long life history that includes the following elements to share with one another:

- (a) What is your most joyful faith experience? Where did it happen? Why?
- (b) What is your most memorable church/fellowship experience?
- (c) What help have you received from your spiritual companions? How do you establish the relationship?
- (d) What changes in viewpoint on God, self, people, and things have you undergone, including your world view, value, and life-style?

(3) The conviction that God is leading you to return:

Discussions: Please share on the following points:

- (a) When did you begin to consider returning? Why?
- (b) What is the strength and continuity of this motivation?
- (c) Are you certain that returning to China is God’s will? Are you worried about violating God’s will?

(d) What are the points of conflict relative to deciding whether to return? Which areas make you hesitate?

(4) Summary

When you are making decisions, you should pray fervently and ask other members of Christ's body to intercede for you. Be patient while seeking God's leading and guidance, so that He may lead our footsteps into convicting that this important turning point in your life is consistent with His will.

If you are already convinced that returning is God's leading, then you should persist in your conviction without doubting. Stand firm no matter what difficulty comes your way – and especially so if you are already well-established in an overseas country and, from the perspective of material interest, your return will bring about great loss. In this situation, if you are convinced that it is the Lord who is leading you back to China, then, on the one hand, you must submit to the Lord's calling, and, on the other, you must commit all things unto Him, trusting Him to look after you and keep you on your way.

III. Reflection on Your Personal Journey before Returning

Parting with your life overseas, which may include a comfortable lifestyle you are very familiar with, often brings about a sense of loss. How would you describe this overseas stage of your life? What has it meant to you? Looking back on your journey along this path, what changes did it bring to your life? The purpose of this lesson is to help you to evaluate this stage of your life and sum it up, so that you can be better prepared as you start the next stage of your life journey.

§ 1. Your Living conditions while overseas

The following is a list of questions for you to contemplate before you make your return trip. We hope that they will help you to make a meaningful conclusion about your overseas experience.

Questions for Thoughts: General Living Conditions

- (a) As you look back over your life while abroad, what are some aspects (people or things) you appreciate or identify with, that gave you a positive and optimistic feeling? What are areas that caused you pain, distress, or brought you difficulty in your life? Please review the items you considered desirable or undesirable during the time you have spent overseas (values, lifestyle, life attitudes, habits, skills, material abundance or lack thereof, political system, personal relationships, working environment, studying environment, social relationships, faith environment and faith condition, etc.) Try to arrange them in the form of a table.
- (b) Among the items you identified as ‘desirable’ above, which of these do you consider are available in the current Chinese society, or potentially will become available? Which of these attributes would you like to continue to hold on to and bring back to China? Do you consider it practical to bring these habits and attributes back to China? Would they bring you inconvenience, trouble or misunderstanding? Within the list you considered “undesirable” above, which of these can you avoid after your return to China?
- (c) Please recall the original purpose of your coming overseas. Have you fulfilled your purpose? If you have not, do you consider it appropriate to return at this time? Will you, or is it even necessary, to fulfill your goals through other means?
- (d) Who did you meet while abroad? Among those you met, who had the most significant influence on you? While abroad, who are the most important people in your life? Which important friends have you made while abroad? How did their friendship with you influence you? Do they know, and do they approve of, your returning to China? Do you plan on keeping in touch with them after your return, and if so, by what means?

§ 2. Comparison between living overseas and living in China

After living abroad for a period of time, you will inevitably experience some changes. It would be very helpful to sum them up and consider them in light of your planned return trip.

Questions for Thoughts:

- (a) **On outward appearance:** Are you more conscientious now about how you dress, or just the reverse? Do you appear more ‘Westernized’? Relative to Chinese cooking, do you prefer Western cuisine more? What are your relatives’ or friends’ reactions to your changes? Are they happy, unhappy, or indifferent about it?
- (b) **On social attributes:** Are you becoming more extroverted, or more introverted? What changes have you incurred in your attitudes towards the opposite sex? Are there any changes in your attitudes towards your elders? Are you paying more attention to one’s social status and rank, or less? Do you feel that among friends there should be no secrets, that anything may be discussed; or that each person should keep a private boundary beyond which it becomes inappropriate to ask questions? Are you more insistent about maintaining personal space and personal secrecy? Do you feel that at work, interactions among co-workers should be limited to work-related topics? Can these changes in you be accepted by people living in China? How will you have to adjust your attitudes after your return?
- (c) **On scholarship:** Have you fulfilled your scholastic goals? What changes, if any, have you incurred in your attitudes towards scholastic achievement? Are you more interested now in the subject of your own profession, or just the reverse? Are there any changes in your study methods or habits? Are these changes beneficial to your plans for continuing your studies after your return?
- (d) **On feelings:** Are you more inclined to share with others your feelings, or the reverse? Can you control your own emotions? Are you more conscientious about how your emotions affect others? Is the style of expressing your feelings more direct, or more reserved? Do you think you might have to make adjustments in these behaviors after your return to China? If you are already accustomed to a more direct, or ‘exaggerated’ style of expression, would your more conservative relatives and friends in China look at you strangely?
- (e) **On politics:** Are you more politically conscious than before? What new understandings do you have concerning Chinese international and internal policies? What new understandings have you gained concerning the difference between the political system of China and other countries? What effect will such a difference have on you?
- (f) **On economy:** Is there any change in your attitude towards material wealth? Are there any changes in your spending habits and tastes? How is your economic situation? Are you more penny-pinching than before, or more generous? Do you think your friends in China would consider that you are wealthy?
- (g) **On purpose in life:** Are there any changes in your purpose in life? What do you consider now to be the most important thing in life? Has your overseas experience changed your life, and how?

§ 3. Your faith journey while abroad

Some returnee Christians believed in God before they left China, and many more became Christians while overseas. No matter what situation you are in, it is essential to summarize your

faith journey abroad before you conclude your overseas experience and take the return trip back home.

Questions for Thoughts:

- (a) First, please recollect the expressions of Christianity you witnessed while you were abroad. If you were a believer before you left China and had church experience, then what are the differences between your church experience in the overseas country of your residence and that in China before you came abroad? If you accepted Christ as your personal savior after you came abroad, then, what are the differences in your opinions and impressions of Christianity between those based on your church experience in the overseas country of your residence, and those before your journey abroad?
- (b) If you believed in the Lord while abroad, how did you accept the Christian faith? Please review your salvation experience. In what circumstances did you first get in touch with the Christian faith? What is the greatest obstacle you had at the time of accepting Christ? How did you overcome that obstacle? Is there anyone who kept on helping and encouraging you in your faith journey? What revelation did this experience give you in defining your future gospel mission?
- (c) If you lived with your family overseas, have they also believed in the Lord? What is the condition of their faith? How do they influence you?
- (d) After you received the Lord, how do you experience more of His grace? In what areas have you had urgent needs? How did the Lord guide and provide for you?
- (e) Through interviews with some returnee Christians, we discovered that, after their conversion abroad, they were reminded of their many relatives and friends who are still outside of the truth and living in sin and darkness. There was stirred in them a great urgency to return to China to preach the gospel, to tell them about the good news. Do you share the same feeling, and is the feeling persistent and ongoing? What have you done about it in practice? Or perhaps, do you find it difficult to comprehend why some Christians are so touched?
- (f) While you are living abroad, have there been turbulent times in your spiritual life? Which factors have promoted your spiritual growth during those times? Considering the Christians you have encountered while abroad, what influences have they had on your faith? Within the realm of faith, what training have you received? Do you feel that after your return home, you may help brothers and sisters in China along in their faith journeys? In what areas do you think you can meet their needs?
- (g) What attributes of overseas churches do you particularly appreciate? Which of these are, in your view, not practicable in Mainland churches? Why? Which of these you think may be brought back to China?
- (h) Compared to previous times, have you gained a better understanding of theology? What new insights have you gained on the Holy Father, Holy Son Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit the Comforter, the Bible, church, praying, Spiritual gifts, Christian witness, Christian ministry, and the mission aspects of Christian life? How does your faith influence the various practical aspects of your life (relationships, life attitudes, values, etc.)? How do you view the relationship between God and your work, family, society, politics, nature,

state, and history? How do you view the religious faith of your relatives and friends back in your hometown? How will you deal with them after your return home?

Discussions

Based on the above mentioned personal reflection, please share with one another the following questions:

- (a) Did you attend church before you left China? How was it?
- (b) What was your most pleasant faith experience? Where and why?
- (c) What was your deepest church/fellowship experience?
- (d) What help have you received from your spiritual companions? How did you build up these relationships?
- (e) Regarding your relatives and friends in China, what are their attitudes and opinions about the Christian faith?
- (f) Do you feel that your ministry experiences are related to your faith? How and why?

IV. Preparing for the Return: Spiritual Growth and Equipping in Truth

We all understand that before one's return trip, one must be adequately prepared mentally and pragmatically. The following three lessons provide some analysis and discussion along these lines. This lesson addresses spiritual growth and equipping in truth; Lesson 5 is on understanding the homeland; and Lesson 6 discusses probable difficulties one may encounter after one's return to China.

§ 1. Do your best to understand Chinese local churches

There have been many and significant changes in China. If you believed in the Lord before leaving China, and then returned from abroad, you may have had some understanding of Chinese churches before your departure, and therefore it may be easier now to adapt. If, however, you believed while overseas and are still a bit unsteady in your faith, you should not rush into a decision. You should take time to allow yourself to be edified, to equip yourself in the truth, and at the same time to learn about the faith environment back home so that you will be properly prepared. This will help you greatly after your return.

For example, some local churches may be very deficient in some areas, such as in the practice of worship, the quality of the leadership, and in Biblical knowledge; however, other churches in the same neighborhood pay more attention to a close relationship with God, have more mature spiritual lives, have experienced God's faithfulness, understand about paying a price, self-denial, and the way of the cross. So it is difficult to predict or to generalize. The newly formed urban churches are significantly different from traditional local house churches; since their membership is different, these churches may not fit the general description of house churches.

Generally speaking, overseas churches, particularly European and American churches, have enjoyed an advanced societal atmosphere and freedom of religion, and have not had the kind of conflict between society and faith that prevails in China. Therefore, in certain regions or in some churches, their faith has put on a rationalistic appearance and more and more attention is then paid to the outward forms of worship, while personal interests and secularization dominate to make the churches more club-like, salon-like, and superficial; as a consequence, they are not focused on interacting with God in spirit or on fellowship with the saints. Such trends are also affecting the urban churches of China, while the recent rise in the numbers of these churches is also threatening to make them the mainstay of the Chinese church, thus heightening the danger of following the footsteps of these European and American churches.

Some returnees have a deep appreciation of such changes; they recounted that the prayer meetings in overseas churches seem more like an opportunity to show off, while back home they are dedicated to true spiritual warfare, with the certainty of loss if the prayers are not fervent. Effective prayer must be grounded on spiritual growth. Only with a sound spiritual foundation can one walk with God, be blessed and be renewed in strength.

Yet on the other hand, some local churches in China look down on theology or are even against wisdom; slighting their faith's cultural mission and its call to social responsibility, they keep a closed-door policy and regard this attitude as being spiritual; caring then extends only to a small group of people and does not apply to the entire church or to society at large. As a result, the church management is without a set policy on social concerns, the equipping in truth is likewise weak; etc.

In a word, although all are grounded upon the same fundamental faith, there are, due to differences in environment and rapid changes, significant differences in the backgrounds of various congregations, as well as differences in development and tendencies at all of the varied stages in church growth. These factors result in a great diversity in worship styles, administrative systems, and vision in mission. Therefore we suggest to returnees to be prepared to become a positive force in encouraging unity and bridging gaps in response to the needs of God's family. At the same time, in regard to Chinese churches:

- (1) Do not apply your past church experiences as the sole standard in your subjective judgment of Chinese churches;
- (2) Become more knowledgeable about the varied conditions of Mainland churches, which include countryside, urban, registered, non-registered, international churches (for foreigners), etc. Do not form a set opinion too quickly.
- (3) The most important issue in evaluating churches is whether their faith is pure, whether they regard the Bible as inerrant, and whether the head of the church is Christ. Other issues, such as the form of their meetings, the atmosphere of the gathering, their traditions etc., should not be commented on prematurely.

§ 2. Do your best to equip yourself during this opportune time

Although recently China has enjoyed a period of rapid growth, yet the focus has been on material abundance and economics. The overall cultural environment, social systems, and societal development standards still require much improvement. Returnees will certainly face all kinds of challenges. These issues, however, will cause no problems for two types of people: those without faith who are driven by their personal interests and can adapt to all changes; those Christians who have mature spiritual lives, who are like clay pots with Christ's mighty power within, and who through the love and grace of Christ are able to resolve all difficulties and can bring with them everywhere Christ's blessing. They will become pillars to which the society may turn to find the right direction for renewal of the culture. Therefore, all of our preparations, decisions, pathways, and lifelong foundation should be deeply rooted in the rock of Christ.

Mature Christians will dwell in Christ and follow the lead of the Holy Spirit; before their return they can be certain about their goals, mission and vision; they are clear about God's calling and will not yield to the pressures of life in China.

Take full advantage of the opportunities to prepare yourself while you are in a familiar environment; value the free overseas society you are now in, gather spiritual resources and messages, and become well-grounded in truth. Over the years, Western churches have collected a wealth of resources in theology and practice, evangelical mission, faith practices, pastoral care,

organization and motivation, etc. We will need time to fully absorb, digest, and consider how to make them applicable to Chinese churches.

§ 3. Evaluate your new life and be edified

Whether you are a beginning believer or have been one many years, you must have a clear born again experience in order to enter into a normal Christian life, so that you may have spiritual growth.

Questions for Thoughts or Discussions: You may contemplate the following questions by yourself or share in small discussion groups:

- (a) What is being born again? How can I know whether I am born again (cf. John 1:12; Romans 10:9, 10)?
- (b) What is normal Christian life?
- (c) What is faith? Please describe the details of your latest experiences of the truthfulness of your faith.
- (d) Please share about your path of spiritual growth from the time when you first believed in Christ until today.
- (e) Please discuss the relationship between the Holy Spirit and you.
- (f) What is your purpose in Life? Are you self-centered or God-centered?

§ 4. Strengthen your discipleship

Jesus Christ has certainly stated the responsibilities for each believer to fulfill, which are to preach the gospel and to build up disciples: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matt. 28:19-20). Have you paid much attention to the following practices?

- (1) **Love God, thirst after God, and enjoy Him:** realize God’s abundant grace; realize how long and wide and high and deep is Christ’s love for us; know the hope to which He has called us; the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints; and His incomparably great power for us who believe. (Eph. 1:18-21; 3:16-21)
- (2) **Living by faith:** Our lives are based on faith and not on sight; led by the Holy Spirit, not by flesh. “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty.” (Zach. 4:6)
- (3) **Self-denial:** “The man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.” (John 12:25); practice self-denial to the point of giving up everything, emptying oneself, being of the same attitude as Christ (Phil. 2:5)
- (4) **Walk the way of the cross, be dealt with by the cross:** Carry your cross and follow Jesus , so that you may live with the resurrection power of Christ (Luke 14:27)
- (5) **Be filled by the Holy Spirit:** Enjoy the full blessing of the Holy Spirit, and be filled with the might of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18)

- (6) **Sanctification and overcoming:** Put on the full armor of God, overcome sin and suffering, and live out the love of Christ (Eph. 6:13-18)
- (7) **Be the Lord's faithful servant:** Walk with God (1 Peter 4:10)

Discussions: Based on the practices mentioned above, please discuss the following issues:

- (a) The requirements of being a disciple of the Lord
- (b) The signs of being a disciple of the Lord
- (c) The motivation of being a disciple of the Lord
- (d) The power to practice being a disciple of the Lord
- (e) The evidence of being a disciple of the Lord
- (f) The results of being a disciple of the Lord

§ 5. Be trained in the quality of gospel preaching

To preach the gospel is an irrefutable responsibility for each and every born again believer. No one who has received the saving grace of the Lord is unwilling to do this. So then, why is it that nowadays many churches and believers do not preach the gospel? The main reason is that we lack the necessary qualities possessed by gospel preachers.

First, a gospel messenger must have a “strong gospel mind”. Like the Lord Jesus, who crossed the racial barrier to preach the gospel to the Samaritan woman, and like Paul, who brought the gospel to the Gentiles, we must be involved in a cross-cultural gospel mission. Western missionaries such as Robert Morrison and Hudson Taylor overcame great hardship, and even risked their lives, to bring the gospel to China, just because they were motivated by a strong love of lost souls: “No matter what, we must save some souls”.

Secondly, the Samaritan woman was an unlovable, morally corrupt person living in adultery, and yet Jesus Christ overcame societal bias to love the one whom no one loved. Like Jesus, gospel preachers must possess a “gospel mentality of love”.

Third, gospel preachers must live a life-style that is inclined towards the gospel. While Jesus was on earth, He paid attention to God's work and lost souls; how He lived His life is a great example for His followers. Therefore, believers must live a life that gives off the fragrance of Christ; such a living witness is true and convincing.

Forth, develop “eyesight for the gospel”. Nowadays, many believers cannot see that the need for the gospel is everywhere; the fields may be ripe, yet they do not see it and do not hear it, because their minds are focused on so many other issues. Therefore, we must see with our mind's eye how much the world needs the gospel.

Fifth, we must have a tongue for the gospel. To preach the gospel one has to open one's mouth; but too often, believers are afraid, unwilling, and not wanting to open their mouths; the result is no preaching. We have to change our attitude.

Sixth, act on behalf of the gospel. After the Samaritan woman knew the Lord, she put down her water jar and ran towards her neighbors to witness to them. Seeing the rapid change on the part of the Samaritan woman, we would like to challenge every believer: “What is your water jar? Are you willing to put down everything for the Lord and go preach the gospel, just like this Samaritan woman?”

Discussions: To preach the gospel one must be motivated, courageous, skillful and sensitive; what other qualities must one possess?

Small test: Among the items listed below, which one would you consider a good way to preach the gospel after your return?

- Holding group meetings
- One-on-one meetings
- Let your relatives and friends witness how you have changed, and then preach
- Let them borrow gospel books, tapes and VCD; pass out pamphlets
- Invite them to Bible studies
- When given the opportunity, preach
- Promote your testimony in public
- By whatever means, use “Jesus Story” VCD (invite others to watch with you; rent it out; give it out as gifts; etc.)
- Others

§ 6. Raising the level of your witnessing

Gospel preaching must be based on God’s word and the power of the Holy Spirit, as well as through the witnessing by us, the unworthy vessels. Therefore, we must focus on raising the level of our witnessing.

Discussions: In what ways do you think believers can witness for God? As our spiritual life grows, in what areas can we raise the level of our witnessing? For example: transmitting the love and care of God; revealing changes in our habits; dealing with temptations from the devil; experiencing the healing of our emotional hurts; overcoming sin; overcoming the world; practicing a higher level of sanctification; practicing obedience, etc.

§ 7. Growing in spiritual devotion

Build up a family altar of prayer. Like Daniel, pray daily whenever and at set times. To eat and drink of the Lord’s word is the key to spiritual growth. Some returnees suggest that, before returning, one must establish a habit of personal devotional time, or reading through the Bible once a year. Thus, even if you cannot immediately find a spiritual companion when you return, you may still be able to stay close to Christ, our Lord.

At the same time, it would be best for a couple or some friends to remind each other weekly regarding their respective commitments, or to share freely from each person’s spiritual insights.

There are many spiritual growth, Bible study, and theology self-study materials available from the Internet.

“Streams in the Desert” by Mrs. Cowman; “Morning Dew” by Spurgeon; “The Practice of the Presence of God” by Brother Lawrence; “My Utmost for His Highest” by Oswald Chambers; “Pilgrim’s Progress” by Bunyan; “The Imitation of Christ” by Thomas à Kempis; these are all good booklet for use in devotion for spiritual growth. By collecting these booklets while abroad, one may even supply copies to believers in China whose resources are limited. Many web sites contain devotional materials, too.

§ 8. Be edified in the truth

To be edified further in the truth, one should include the following items:

- (1) Bible study. “On every word that comes from the mouth of God” implies a planned study, book by book, covering the entire Bible. Bible studies at church are often at a slower pace with in-depth study; these should be augmented by a systematic Bible study for the family.
- (2) Systematic theology of the fundamental truth. Understand major Biblical principles to prevent deviant exegesis, and to understand God’s overall revelation.
- (3) Church history. Understand the work of the Holy Spirit through the history of the church.
- (4) Bibliography of the well-know saints through the ages.
- (5) If situations permit, study in an evangelical theological seminary. One must discern and differentiate between these schools to make sure that the theological training one receives is biblical, pure and fundamental.

Questions for Thoughts: How do you progress in edifying yourself in truth? Other than becoming familiar with the Bible, what other knowledge do you need to gain?

§ 9. Ministry training and preparation

Every believer must pray for himself to be willing to participate in church ministry, to learn and practice, and to find out his or her spiritual gifts; such as (1) evangelism; (2) preaching; (3) pastoring; (4) teaching; (5) prophesying; (6) encouraging; (7) giving; (8) managing; (9) mercy; (10) healing; (11) hosting; (12) others. (Reference Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Eph. 4)

Those who are missions-minded should plan on returning on a short-term basis several times before making a decision about a long term return, so that they may become familiar with the church ministry conditions at home and be prepared mentally.

One must know one’s gift and be a faithful steward of that gift; as we are all just stewards of the many gifts of God. Pray to God that we will know how to exercise our gifts.

§ 10. Build up your spiritual support group

The entire church around the world is God's family. Once you become God's child, you are a member of His worldwide family. Maybe the first time you tasted this sense of belonging was while overseas, or may be it was in China. No matter when, you have experienced, to some degree, the worldwide fellowship of the children of God.

Questions for Thoughts: When you are preparing to return home, please consider the following questions:

- (a) After your return, when you know that overseas (in the country of your sojourn) there are many friends praying for you, how will you feel? List the names of brothers and sisters who may be praying for you. When did you specifically ask them to pray for you?
- (b) How would it be different for you if you were purposefully being sent to China by your church, by your Bible study group, or by your campus fellowship group?
- (c) If you are a member of certain church, please discuss with your pastor about the possibility of full-time ministry to serve the Lord in China. Also, discuss with your fellowship group about offering yourself to Christ for service.
- (d) After your arrival, when will you contact brothers and sisters in your hometown? Who in China do you know that are returnee Christians? If you don't know any, how will you get in touch with them?
- (e) How should you build up overseas (in the country of your sojourn) a community that shares your faith and is willing to support you? How will you direct this support towards brothers and sisters in China? How will this change come about?
- (f) Begin now to ask your church and those brothers and sisters who share the same vision to pray for you.

V. Preparing for the Return: Understand the Homeland

Once you have a desire to return, you should begin to prepare yourself mentally and to make changes to your living arrangements. If you can afford it, it would be best to return home once a year while abroad; this is because the changes at home happen so fast that you might lose touch if you do not monitor it carefully. Your relatives and friends, news media, all kinds of service agencies for Chinese people, missionaries and missions organizations, church, etc. are all good resources. The purpose of this lesson is to provide some suggestions from the perspective of understanding our homeland, Mainland China, as well as the churches there, work opportunities and related matters.

§ 1. Evaluate your understanding of your homeland and your expectation

Questions for Thoughts:

- (a) Through what channel do you obtain information about the people and events in mainland China?
- (b) Are you familiar with the conditions of the people in your hometown? Do you feel close to them? If yes, why do you think so; and, if not, why not? What major changes took place at home after you left, (such as marriage, death, childbirth, moving, etc.)?
- (c) Try to describe your neighborhood and community from your memory, and speculate on the current financial, social and psychological conditions of the people who live there.
- (d) After your departure from China, what large-scale changes have taken place in your homeland? How have these changes influenced your decision to return?
- (e) What kind of career will you focus on after your return? After you left China, what major changes happened in your field of work? How might these changes influence you and your future career?
- (f) Are there fellow countrymen among the friends you made while abroad? How has your relationship with them affected your communication with other people in China? While abroad have you been willing to interact with your countrymen? If so, why and, if not, why not?
- (g) Were you a Christian before you left China? If so, who knows about this?
- (h) How can you maintain communications with your church in China and sustain your relationship with them, even perhaps to improve it? Before your return, is there any special fellowship or understanding between you and your church leaders in China?
- (i) What relatives and friends do you have back home? After your return, do you feel that these relationships will be different from before? Have there already been changes in your relationship with them? Why, or, why not? What are their attitudes towards Christianity? How will you pray for them?
- (j) What was your church like before you left, (scale, level of comprehension, history, pastor, theology, order, worship style, openness to new concepts, etc.)?

(k) If you had not been a church member before you left China, and you are now given a chance to choose a church, what criteria will you use to make your choice?

- Scale: large or small
- Distance from home
- Worship style
- How they teach the Bible
- The way they do evangelical preaching
- Condition and general situation of the congregation
- Emphasis and strategy in gospel preaching and mission
- Level of involvement in social welfare
- Emphasis on theology
- Children's programs
- Music
- Qualities of the pastor, elders or responsible co-workers
- Management style
- Opportunities for you to exercise your gifts
- Youth programs
- Other

§2. How to get to know Mainland churches?

What is a realistic assessment of the condition of gospel preaching in China? How should one find a suitable church? What government policies on religion should one be aware of? It is best to obtain a good understanding before your departure for China.

Addresses of the registered churches in China can be found on a website: the Chinese Christian Web. To most people house churches are hard to get in touch with; it is impossible to have an address book of these churches. Some experienced pastors and missionaries overseas may have a better understanding of house churches.

There are many heresies in China; it is prudent to prepare oneself the ability to differentiate which is heresy. You may also learn more about this topic through some selected websites which cover the topics of most concern to Mainland house churches (see chapter 15 for the websites).

§ 3. How to understand and manage career opportunities in China?

Before you return, you should think carefully about what profession and career path you would like to pursue. You should consider how to take advantage of your strengths and interests, etc. You may also want to consult with family members and classmates already working in China, to pick their brains and hear their suggestions. It is best to do research on industries or companies according to the career path you have chosen.

About work opportunities, the following is a list for references.

- (1) Associations for returned students from Europe and America often hold “Returnee Scholars Business Start-up Week” near the end of the year; such events have been held annually for several years.
- (2) Well known media and web site such as “Chinese Scholars”, Sinonet, and Sohu.net etc. often distribute messages about work opportunities.
- (3) Many government agencies are beginning to emphasize attracting returnees as officials; some are even permitted to hold ranks as high as deputy leader.
- (4) Entering into areas such as environmental protection and rural development will likely be a good selection, too. These areas provide careers in the areas of education development, caring for the poor, public health, etc. The salaries may be lower, but this kind of work provides good opportunities to meet volunteers and related groups, which will supply many venues for gospel witness. Many international organizations are getting into these areas, and the local non-government organizations are rapidly developing, too. One may find opportunities on their respective websites, or you may reference our appendix.
- (5) Connect with relatives and friends for related information.
- (6) There are now many headhunters in China. You can get in touch with them through search engines to find their websites.

§ 4. How to get other information about China

Information on China’s returnee policy, childrens’ education, medical services, environmental information, traffic, housing information, etc. can be found on the appropriate websites.

VI. Preparing for the Return: Possible Difficulties after your Return

This lesson lists some of the difficulties you may encounter after your return. The following are questions related to areas such as moral, ethical, social, and faith issues where potential conflicts may exist.

Questions for Thoughts:

Faith

- (a) In your previous culture or religious practices, did it include idol worship? Under certain conditions, if you are asked to participate in idol worship, what will you do? (Exodus 20:3-5)
- (b) Did the religious practice of your hometown include ancestor worship? As a Christian, how do you regard this matter?
- (c) Among your direct relatives, are you the only Christian? When and where have you preached the gospel to them?
- (d) Will your faith in Christ bring you inconvenience or even danger? How will you deal with this?

Courtship and Marriage

- (a) Do your parents give you any pressure to get married? What are your standards for choosing a spouse? As to marriage and potential spouse, what is the Bible's teaching? (2 Cor. 6:14-15; Phi.4:8)
- (b) Do you have someone overseas (in the country of your abode) who might someday become your spouse? How does this relationship influence your decision to return? If he or she comes from a different race, with a different culture and faith, how will your relatives react?

Career Future

- (a) Do you have attractive work opportunities overseas (in the country of your abode)? What factors influence your decision to grasp or to let go of such opportunities? What influence might these work opportunities have on your Christian life, either overseas or in China?
- (b) Is bribery rampant in your hometown? If you are faced with work opportunity temptations that involve false invoices, gifting, intellectual piracy, or counterfeit branding, how will you deal with them? (Eph. 4:17-24)

Relatives and Friends

- (a) Regarding overseas families, which of their characteristics and habits win your admiration? Which views relative to family have you adopted that might make it difficult for you to re-adapt to your relatives at home?

- (b) In a tight housing situation, when you have relatives staying in your house for extended periods of time, what will you do?
- (c) If a relative or friend thinks that you are wealthy and wants to borrow from you, what will you do?

Discrimination

- (a) Are you from a minority people group? How do you regard the privileged people group? If you suffer from discrimination (racial, job, etc.) in the future, what will you do?
- (b) If you are female, will your hometown accept the fact that you are educated overseas? Will you suffer discrimination by virtue of your gender? If you find yourself being discriminated against in society and in work, what will you do? How might other women regard you?

Politics and Society

- (a) What will be the relationship between you and the government? How will being a Christian affect your position and your role?
- (b) In which social activities will you participate? How will you deal with the relationship between gospel and social concerns such as environmental protection, caring for the poor, economic backwardness and exploitation of laborers?

Spiritual Warfare

- (a) Regarding spiritual growth, which basic elements are most important to you? Are such elements available in China? If not, what will you do?
- (b) After your return, what spiritual warfare might you experience? What equipping is necessary in order for you to overcome in Christ? Can you recall some incidences when you successfully overcame? Please describe. (Eph. 6:10-18)
- (c) Are you well prepared for the potential to encounter spiritual warfare after your return? If so, why do you think you are? If you are not well prepared, what will you do? Who can help you?
- (d) What are the issues commonly found in Mainland churches? What are you prepared to do about them, and how will you go about doing it?

Others

Think about what other problems you may encounter after you return.

VII. On the Road

§ 1. Packing

Questions for Thoughts: Now that you are about to return home. Think twice! Are there any last minute things that you have to take care of?

- (a) Is there someone (such as a teacher, roommate, brother or sister, landlord, etc) who has helped you in the past, and you realize that, before your departure, you need to tell them ‘thank you’ and ‘good bye’? Does your address book contain ways to get in touch with them?
- (b) Is there anyone who needs your forgiveness? Or, do you need to ask for someone’s forgiveness? When do you plan on making peace with them?
- (c) Are there any unpaid bills? Are there any books or other items that belonged to others and need to be returned?
- (d) What do you plan to bring back as souvenirs or memorabilia to remind you of the time you spent overseas (photos, gifts, videotapes, diary, etc.)?
- (e) Items related to your study: what do you plan on bringing with you? (your diploma, thesis, books, certificates, lecture notes, etc.)
- (f) Items related to your faith: what do you plan on bringing with you? (Chinese and English Bibles, spiritual books and material, Bible dictionary, Bible handbook, videotapes, etc.)
- (g) Carry-on items: what do you plan to bring with you? (clothing, camera, address book, passport, gifts for relatives and friends, memorabilia)

Examine whether there are things you miss. The following provides a checklist for your reference:

- Interpersonal relationships
- Cleaning up or simplifying financial matters
- Maintenance of memorabilia
- Are all necessary documents prepared and brought with you?
- Selection of spiritual books and related materials
- Other carry-on items

§ 2. On the Plane

(1) Full of thanksgiving

“I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. For great is your love, reaching to the heavens, your faithfulness reaches to the skies!” (Ps. 57:9-10)

God has brought you out of China and now He is taking you back; that must be part of His sweet will. Thank you, Lord!

(2) Full of hope

“Commit your way to the Lord; trust in Him and He will do this” (Ps. 37:5)

Trust in Him that after your return, He will accomplish wonderful things through you and for you!

(3) Full of faith

“He provides food for those who fear Him, He remembers His covenant for ever.” (Ps. 111:5)

Whether one is inside or outside China, God is Lord. Trust in Him and He will strengthen you to live a victorious life! Glory to the only true God!

(4) Full of obedience and submission to God upon arrival

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – His good, pleasing, and perfect will.” (Romans 12:1-2)

“I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” (Phil. 1:20-21)

Discussions: You are now sitting in the cabin of the airplane, on your way back to China. Please share what is now in your mind.

VIII. After Your Return: General Adjustment

Generally speaking, when returnees arrive back at home they tend to become experts and leaders in their field of specialty. They provide broad international perspectives, superior skills, and more advanced viewpoints, which give them unique advantages in China.

However, a new returnee unavoidably will face conflicts and has to learn to adapt to the new environment. Often, they will compare the advantages of life overseas to the disadvantages of life in the Mainland. Such comparisons will cause them to feel a lot of pressure and stress in the process of adapting back to living in China.

Due to differences in individual situations, the process and difficulty through which one adjusts oneself to live in China also differs. In general, the longer one stays outside of China, the more adjustments are required. Furthermore, those returnees who were believers prior to their leaving China to study abroad will usually face less conflict when compared to those who accepted the faith while abroad. This is because those who were believers before their leaving to study abroad had already separated themselves from the world, lived in accordance to Biblical principles, examined and evaluated many aspects of life in China, made judgments and responses in accordance with their faith, and thus were somewhat trained by this experience in balancing their living environment with their faith. Those returnees who believed while abroad lack such experience and training, so that, after their return, they inevitably face a greater challenge in dealing with conflicts between their faith and their living environment.

No matter what, since you have decided to return, it is then necessary to rationally think through the potential differences and conflicts that may arise after your return. The most important thing is to put your trust in God to lead you. The peace and joy that comes from the Lord will bring you support, hope, strength, and satisfaction when you meet a challenge. Many brothers and sisters who have returned have testified that many seemingly impossible things happened to them in their lives and work, through God's grace that gives them success and joy.

§ 1. Transition period

After your return, you will experience a transition period of adjustment, just like when you first left China; this period generally lasts 6-12 months.

You may experience four different stages during this transition period:

- The first stage: excitement. This feeling comes from seeing everything new, reunion with relatives and friends, and the joy of revisiting old places.
- The second stage: routine. Your fame as a returnee gradually fades, and you are preparing yourself to face the routines of living and working.
- The third stage: frustration. Faced with all kinds of tedious matters, you encounter difficulties while making adjustments; you begin to miss your life abroad.
- The fourth stage: adaptation. After many adjustments, you are now adapted and merged into life in China.

While going through the different stages of the transition period, you may have these reactions:

- Imitating others – When faced with conflicts and differences, you consciously or subconsciously imitate others' words or deeds, in an effort to please others.
- Staying away from others – You discover that you are a stranger in your own hometown; feeling lonely, and missing your life and friends abroad, you stay away from local people and spend time instead with those who share experiences similar to yours.
- Self-integration – You gradually make changes or adjustments to habits and styles formed while studying abroad and move closer to that of your hometown. You may have new insights into the culture of your hometown and can therefore understand it from a different perspective.

It is normal to have these reactions during your transition period. However, it is important to keep your balance and do not allow yourself to behave in a non-Christian way.

Questions for Thoughts: what practical activities can help my adjustment through this transition period? The following are some suggestions:

- (a) Find several returnees who have similar experiences to be your companions;
- (b) Allow some time for you to get used to others, as well as for others to get used to you;
- (c) Keep a good sense of humor;
- (d) Try to benefit from your experience of returning, and through it expand your cross-cultural understanding;
- (e) Count the Lord's blessings and be full of thanksgiving;
- (f) Find someone familiar within the local environment to familiarize you with the local society, church, culture, country and career opportunities;
- (g) Recall in detail the changes that occurred in you while you were overseas (in the country of your abode), and meditate on the significance of these changes;
- (h) Maintain contact with overseas churches, and seek help from overseas brothers and sisters;
- (i) Maintain daily Bible reading, prayer and spiritual watchfulness, while seeking peace and strength in Christ;
- (j) Always remind yourself that God is with you for ever, and that the Lord is deeply building up your life through this experience.

§ 2. Adjustment to culture shock

(1) Identity – who am I?

While we were abroad, we may have found ourselves foreigners, unable to merge into the mainstream; but after we return, we will be surprised to find out that we are also foreigners in our own country; everything in our hometown seems unfamiliar and strange. At this time one will ask, who am I? Where do I really belong?

Question for Thoughts: How should returnee Christians identify themselves with their country, nation and culture?

When we are confused about our identification with China or with our overseas “homeland”, we must be clear that we primarily belong to the family of Christ! The whole world belongs to God; America belongs to God, Europe belongs to God, and China belongs to God; the Chinese are our brothers and sisters in China, and other nationals are our brothers and sisters in other nations. Wherever we are, our identity is very clear: we are people of the kingdom of God!

(2) Social trends and value

China is currently situated precariously in a serious values vacuum; with the economy growing rapidly and with the arrival of material abundance, there is no accepted moral code to control people’s behavior. With no fear of anything, people have made money the only standard against which everything is measured. People of faith are slighted and misunderstood in this kind of society.

Addiction to pleasure, sexual “liberation”, loss of family values, loosening of marriage vows; these are great challenges to one’s spiritual growth. Seeing the craze in material pursuits, the questioning and rejection of traditional moral codes, the confusion about basic values of right and wrong; these can certainly cause one’s faith to be shaky.

Question for Thoughts: Faced with such a social trend and confused values, how should a Christian returnee handle this situation?

In the midst of such an environment, we must maintain our fellowship with God and with fellow Christians; Bible reading, prayer, regular attendance at meetings, believing in God’s presence, submitting to His leading — all of these are needed to maintain a watchful and pure heart in Christ.

(3) Interpersonal relationships

In general, when Chinese people talk they do not get to the point, and within interpersonal relations there are suspicions and jealous; you may be quite unaccustomed to it. You may not be able to perceive some of the ‘hidden rules’ that are followed or you may feel uncomfortable with some ‘traditions’ that are prevalent. Perhaps some slang words you use, or written words you employ in trying to express yourself, are not understood by local people, and they in turn used colloquial idioms that cause you to scratch your head... For these reasons, you may be unwilling to fellowship with them and withdraw into isolation. In addition, you may secretly harbor a slight pride due to your overseas experiences, feeling that you are different because you are a returnee, and treat others with an unspoken but observable attitude of superiority, which may create obstacles when dealing with others.

Question for Thoughts:

- Faced with the above issues, how should you adjust your attitudes?
- If you are troubled with complicated interpersonal relationships, how should you make proper adjustments?

Faced with issues like these, it will help if you maintain an open and humble attitude. Indeed, the interpersonal relationships in China are more complicated than overseas, but these are not

irresolvable issues. Look through the lens of the love with which Christ loves us, and then deal with these issues. When you are filled with kindly love to look at others around you, you will discover that they are not so smooth-talking, unlikable, or hard to live with; rather you may find them lovely and understanding! At the same time, you will not look at them from a high-up, superior position; in the love of Christ, you will find that there is nothing you can be proud of.

§ 3. Politics

You may already have adapted to a relatively more liberal, democratic, and mature political environment. After your return home you will face certain political events that will feel strange and dissatisfying to you. These include the inefficiencies of government agencies, lack of transparency in government policies, corruption, ‘hidden rules’, formalism, lack of citizen’s rights, unsound laws, etc.

Therefore you should pray for those in charge so that the Lord may save them into His light, and pray that they rule the country according to God-given truthfulness, righteousness, kindness and wisdom, in order to better serve the people. Also, pray that in the public arena the Lord will raise up faithful disciples to give good testimonies on His behalf, just like Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect (Note 6) did in the past. This is a lesson for all Christians. At the same time, when faced with problems, do not make haste to escape, but instead pray for His keeping power to bring you wisdom and love to help you deal with these problems.

On the positive side, it is evident that the Chinese government is continually seeking reform, accompanied by growth in the civil society; we trust that the Lord will raise up Chinese Christians to play a role in testifying to His righteousness, thereby promoting the eventual improvement of China’s politics.

IX. After Your Return: Family Relationships and Children's Education

§ 1. Relationship with family members

(1) Husband and wife

If you are in a high-up position after your return, you will undoubtedly face strong temptations in the areas of power, sex and money.

If possible, try to go out together as a couple in every opportunity, so that you can help each other in faith and in spirit, facing the joys and hardships of life together, as well as growing together. In doing so, it will maintain the health in body, soul and spirit for you both.

In complicated interpersonal relationships or when under any pressure, you should remind each other to maintain and refresh your relationship. Currently family and marriage counseling in Mainland churches is not in a mature stage, and it is quite unlikely you will get help from the church if there is a problem in your marriage.

We have interviewed a sister who stated that after their return to China, her husband was focused on work and social entertainment, and when he returned home he would only talk with his parents and children. He did not have time to communicate with her or to care about her feelings, so, as a result, they did not have a very close relationship in their marriage, and she felt the pain of this loss and loneliness.

In addressing these problems, we suggest that before and after your return you maintain open communication with your spouse. Build a family altar to Bible study, pray, and devotion time together in order to seek God's will and guidance.

There is another Christian returnee couple that we have interviewed. The husband admitted that he held an important position at a corporation, and he was surrounded by many young, pretty and flattering girls. In a state of self-gratification, he had gradually drifted away from his wife. At that time, God disciplined him with some unnamed discomfort to his body, and his wife supported him to face the third party in a calm and steadfast manner. This sister said that the wife plays a key role in husband-wife relationships; if the husband is the one who deviates, crying and fighting are not the right approach. The wife must, on the one hand, be more attentive to create a warm welcoming family atmosphere to warm the heart of her husband, and, on the other hand, to work on her own appearance, to be properly dressed so that the husband will still find her attractive.

Of course, the Bible also teaches that the husband should love his wife. Wives need your comfort and support, husbands, in their feelings and in finding direction for their lives.

Discussions:

- (a) What are the secrets for husband and wife to maintain their communication?
- (b) Are there any practical methods by which husband and wife can be of one mind?
- (c) How can we put the Biblical teachings on the roles of husband and wife into practice in our daily lives?

(2) Relationships with our children

In our interviews, a sister mentioned that when their family returned home, their eldest daughter was 12 and she enrolled at an American school in Shanghai. At the time, her husband spent almost all his time outside of work in a hospital accompanying her father-in-law, and could not afford the time to help his daughter adapt to her new surroundings. She began to notice that her daughter became more and more isolated and quiet. She began to take the initiative to understand her difficulties in different ways, spent time with her, and tried to help her understand in this new environment which principles must be upheld and which attitudes must be transformed. With the support from her mother, she found that her new classmates began to accept her, and quickly she entered into her new surroundings and recovered her joyful attitude.

Thus as parents you have to be careful to avoid the trap of working hard to the point that you neglect your children. You must understand that children are also adapting to their new surroundings, and unlike adults, they cannot readily express their feelings, so they cannot adapt by themselves alone. They are returnees, too!

Discussions: After your return to China, amidst significant changes of surroundings

- (a) What does a child need the most?
- (b) How can parents help to resolve their children's needs?

Give your children more time and love, and pay careful attention to the questions they raise or the murmurs of their hearts that come out unconsciously. Maintain your family prayer time and family altar.

(3) Relationship with parents and relatives

After you returned to China and with your unbelieving parents, they may doubt or resist your faith, and may even ask you to worship idols and ancestors with them, or ask you to do something that is against Biblical principles. Some may be concerned about your personal safety due to your faith. If you are single and unmarried, you will not be able to avoid pressure from parents and relatives to get married.

Discussions:

- (a) How can we deal with the pressure to worship idols?

Be firm in your faith in Christ, maintain Christian principles, and worship the one and only true God. What we want to remind you of is to never fight with your parents on this issue. Put yourself in their position and think from their perspective and motives. When you honor your parents in all other aspects of life, it will be easier to win their respect for your refusal to worship idols. Maintain your normal Bible reading, praying and devotion and equip yourself properly. Take advantage of opportunities that come up to preach the gospel to them, introduce the Christian faith to them, and pray that God will reveal His beauty before them, that the Lord will draw them to Himself so that they will know the truth, and accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior. You yourself should be patient, loving, and honoring your parents, live out your Christian witness, and manifest in your life the abundance that is in Christ.

- (b) How does a single Christian deal with the pressure to get married?

Faced with this issue, you must relax and not hurry; communicate with your parents your thoughts, let them know what you think, and try to alleviate their worries and concerns.

As for yourself, seek mutual support among Christians of the same gender; be of one mind, walk, work, play, eat, drink, cry, and laugh together. You must know that you are the treasured children of the heavenly Father, the princes and princesses of the highest king, and the bride of Christ. This does not preclude prayer for the Lord to find you the right spouse. You must, however, wait for Him to open the right door.

§ 2. Children's education and continuing education

(1) Education environment

To those returnees who plan to continue their studies or do research work after their return, they should be aware that there still exists a large gap in education style and philosophy between the Chinese and overseas systems; in terms of laboratory equipment and educational resources, China is comparatively deficient. The levels of research and resources are below international standards in many areas, and, despite rapid changes, the faculties of some universities may not be up to par. Fortunately, such gaps are narrowing.

Discussions:

- (a) How will you face these deficiencies?

Before your return you should be mentally prepared for these shortcomings. After your return, utilize existing resources and maintain connection with overseas peers, to provide you with the latest information and material.

- (b) The levels of education and teaching methods are constantly being revised and elevated; is it possible for you, the returnee, to make positive contributions in these areas?

(2) Children's education

If you brought your children with you when you returned, you may face significant challenges on the issue of their education. To your children it means leaving behind familiar friends, forgoing a comfortable living and language environment and being forced into totally foreign environment. Such changes will create a heavy mental pressure on school-aged children.

Discussions:

- (a) How will you be prepared for the various challenges your children may face after your return?
- (b) How will be prepared for the positive and negative influences that China's educational concepts and system may bring? How will you deal with them?

There are significant differences between China and overseas in educational philosophy, systems, resources, and methods.

In China, the most important concept in education is for students to be knowledge-absorbing. The studies are highly competitive, and even the very young have to study difficult mathematical problems; young returnees will doubtless face very intense pressures. The purpose of education is very self-interest-driven, with a strong focus on technical aspects of the knowledge. This style of education has the advantage that, while the students are very young and before they develop abstract thinking, a large amount of information is stored up in them and basic skills are taught, such as hand-writing and memorizing multiplication tables. However, such learning is one-sided and ignores the overall development of the child, neglecting the nurturing of the student's character or his ability to do independent thinking. Some teachers may scold the student or punish him by striking, ignoring the fact that the student is an individual with self-respect.

In the 'Moral Character' teaching of public schools, the emphasis is on atheism and materialism, with appeals to 'join the Communist Pioneers Troop' or 'join the Youth Group', and becoming a party member is presented as an outward sign of being a good student. These factors tend to isolate young Christians from their peers. Private schools are outside of the government system, and their management tends to be more confused, as their sole purpose is making money for the owners.

The educational system emphasizes the percentage of students gaining entry into higher level schools, and the standards of selection and acceptance are rather stiff. For example, in high school certification exams, entry into colleges is not based on the students' average scores and performance, but only on the entrance exam results. There is also a fairness issue in the selection criteria; different regions have different standards for scoring, therefore there are many loopholes in the exam system. Thus, when the young returnees try to enter a college, they may encounter some unexpected problems, and some may even not be able to go to college.

Schooling in China tends to be more close-minded, lacking communication between teachers and parents; teaching materials lag behind international standards; teachers' qualifications may be less than desirable; there is a lack of bi-lingual schools. International schools tend to be more expensive, and there are no religious schools.

Faced with all of these issues, we suggest that you pay serious attention when selecting a school for your children. Find someone you know or can communicate directly with in the local education system, and try to understand the differences between local public versus private schools, bi-lingual versus not, international versus general schools and the general setup for classes. Do not buy into their advertisements; for example, some so-called bi-lingual kindergartens are actually sub-standard and poorly managed. You should make plans as how your children will study and how much you are to spend on education for them based on your child's personality and inclination. If you live in a large city, you should find a school that is close by. Try to understand the teachers, and communicate with them. Encourage your children, and constantly communicate with them.

Other than these practical issues, the most important point is to nurture the growth of their spiritual lives, so that they are well-grounded in truth. Pray for them often, and ask brothers and sisters in Christ to pray for them. Let them join Sunday schools, try to understand and care for their spiritual condition, and provide for their spiritual needs.

X. After your Return: Adjustment to the Work Environment

§ 1. Challenges of work environments in general

The current market environment in China is still rapidly evolving. There are different types of pressures in the workplace. There are more job seekers than positions available, yet high-level management personnel are hard to find. There is also a structural change in career development, but employment based on personal relations is still unavoidable. The administration of human resources, benefits and compensation are in the process of evolving.

In moving from an economy of state-owned enterprises to a free market, it is inevitable that the eagerness of commercialism prevails. Profit and success motivations prompt such deeds as the backdoor policy, bribery, and falsification of documents. The lack of systematic ethical constraints promotes profit justification, lack of trust, and lawlessness.

Business management is also lacking. Some business do not have clear-cut and well-defined policies for administration, and many are run by dictatorial commands from the top. Some returnee Christians who make suggestions to non-law-abiding owners end up losing their jobs.

Interpersonal relations differ remarkably between Mainland and overseas countries, and are generally more complicated in China. Some returnees suffer from becoming a target of jealousy and suspicion by their local co-workers, and it is often time-consuming to work through the complexities of such relationships.

Due to work demands, many returnees must travel both within and outside of China. Long and highly demanding work hours and heavy workloads require a constant and disciplined management of time to allow daily devotion time, ministry work, and family needs. After some time, it is possible that returnees may forget their Christian identity and responsibilities, neglecting devotional time and ministry work while becoming slaves to work and money.

The rapid growth of China's economy, as well as the increasing ties between it and world economy, have created many business opportunities and job opportunities. As a returnee, you may be faced with many choices. You should take time to meditate before God, maintain a clear mind and choose in accordance with God's will, while relying on His grace.

Questions for Thoughts: How can we confront the challenges brought on by China's work environment?

After your return, be very much aware of an attitude of subconscious 'superiority' – regarding yourself as a bit better than others, with subsequent unrealistic expectations for your success. Be mentally prepared for a fresh beginning, treating your new career in China rationally, understanding the practical work environment in China, and adapting quickly to find your right place.

§ 2. Some suggestions

(1) Maintain and refresh old relations

Through many interviews we have come to realize that it is beneficial to returnees who are seeking work to build up an interpersonal network. After all, it is not possible to understand this rapidly evolving society just by relying on your own experience. What you need to do is, through your personal relationship network, to quickly gather information and learn how to make sense of this society that is seemingly foreign to you. Therefore it is quite necessary to re-establish your old relationships and, at the same time, use every opportunity to build up new relationships. Faced with matters that violate your faith principles, you should uncompromisingly hold on to your faith. For example: decide now that you would rather suffer loss than to bribe someone or accept a bribe; make a clear statement that you do not drink, so that in social occasions people will not coerce you into drinking. In your work you will often face 'relational' issues; however, having the right relationships cannot replace professional skills, therefore you must be skillful and up-to-date in your own profession.

(2) Be humble

Many of returnees we interviewed suggest that, in the process of adjusting to your new environment, you should first be a listener, be humble and low-key, and learn to get along with local workers. These attitudes will certainly help speed up your acceptance by your new company and co-workers. Jesus Christ also worked in different styles under different circumstances. Do not come with a 'savior' attitude, thinking that as a returnee you have all the advantages; on the contrary, many of the perceived advantages may in fact be disadvantages, as they are not applicable here. Learn to conserve your effort and find out where your true strength lies.

(3) Follow God's leading

Our interviewees noted that, when faced with all kinds of difficulties, you have to think that perhaps God wants you to learn the lessons of humility and submission through these circumstances, so that you may learn to look up to Him and rely on Him in your struggles. Through Bible reading and prayer, you will seek God's will and submit to His leading; the Lord will give you peace in your heart and you will learn how to deal with various issues in practice. Furthermore, God is with you always so that you can look up to Him, trust Him, and not rely only on your craftiness. In your work dealing with complicated affairs, the guiding principle should be to 'glorify God and benefit man'.

(4) Evaluate yourself through stages

Understand how you have changed, knowing your mission and the challenges you have encountered at various stages of your life, and be prepared to act to the extent of your ability. Evaluate yourself in retrospection, set the right priorities, and step forward to the next stage with certainty.

(5) Be a witness in your work

Be serious, responsible, positive, pro-active, passionate, obedient, focused, highly efficient, and always improve yourself, leave no loose ends, and be fully committed.

(6) Build business culture

Try to replace the ‘wolf culture’ with a ‘lamb culture’; nurture high-quality teamwork, build up moral character, establish a good reputation, enhance capability and co-operation, in order to elevate your team’s competitive advantage.

(7) Balance work, family and faith

While job seeking, make a statement that you are a Christian. Prioritize your worship and fellowship time. Maintain your faith principles and live a witnessing life. While working, do not neglect the importance of communication with your own family and your individual spiritual growth. The book ‘Balance of Wisdom’ written by Pat Huizenga, an Intel VP and Technical Chief, is a good reference book available in all Christian bookstores; in it Huizenga discussed issues on finding balance among work, family and faith for a Christian.

Furthermore, Christian bookstores have opened up in most large cities in China, some with several stores. These stores will become your database after your return. Books available from these stores can provide guidance in children’s education, marriage counseling, career planning, personal spiritual growth, theological training etc. These stores have their own web sites, and you can easily find their addresses and phone numbers through the internet. You may also order books through the internet.

Questions for Thoughts:

- (a) Modern China is in great need of entrepreneurs with business ethics, modern management concepts, advanced enterprise culture, high technology and a broad international viewpoint. Is that you?
- (b) What is God’s burden upon you as He brings you from overseas back to China? Are you ‘missions-oriented’?

XI. After Your Return: Adjustments in Daily Living

§ 1. Public Infrastructure

(1) Transportation

Congested traffic and overcrowded subway systems are common in China's metropolitan areas. Traffic rules and guidelines are often for references only as many people bluntly ignore them. Drivers are more aggressive and pedestrians usually had to yield to them or be even more aggressive. Road and parking expansions are outpaced by the explosion in the number of cars. These conditions are in huge contrast to overseas countries and may take sometime for returnees to get used to.

The government has offered tax incentives for returnees who wish to purchase cars. The Customs department loosened the restrictions on duty-free car purchases. Returnees who returned home within two years after completing their studies can request a duty-free car purchase within one year from the date of entry. For more information, please refer to the Customs returnee car purchase procedures via this link http://211.151.90.1/newchisa/web/0/2005-01-05/news_56067.asp.

Before your return, an automobile is indeed a necessity. However, in view of current conditions within China, a private car may not necessarily be required. You should be careful not to compare yourself with others, or treat the automobile as a status symbol to glorify yourself.

Questions for Thoughts:

- (a) How will you deal with confused and congested traffic?
- (b) How do you deal with people cutting lines?
- (c) Are you planning to get a car right after you return back home? Is it necessary?

Returnees need to face these issues with a calm mindset and face the reality, rather than feeling self-pity and comparing their living standards to life overseas. When you are on the road, driving or on foot, be sure to follow the rules and be extra careful. Pay attention to the cars around you when crossing the streets. The rule to stop on red and go on green must be followed at all times. Many Christian returnees point out that daily life overseas is easier to blend in with Christian beliefs. Back home, there is a major conflict between the two. You face struggles, see people cutting lines or having arguments, and see traffic violations day in and day out. Anger and frustration can accumulate inside of you. Christians in these situations must stand firmly on their principles and follow the rules, regardless of the violations from people around. Never think only ignorant people abide by the rules. You must stand firm with patience and love and be a testimony to everyone around you.

(2) Public Services

While overseas, you usually receive satisfactory services from the government agencies and expect to be treated with dignity and respect. Back home, you may encounter poor service or no service at all. In addition, these government agencies are highly unproductive as they

may take a long time to do something that could be done overseas right away, not to mention the chance that a “special request” may pop up along the way. You may feel helpless, frustrated and unfairly treated in these matters.

You must be patient when facing these issues. You can use appropriate methods to state your rights, thereby putting some pressure on them. China is gradually reforming all government sectors and agencies, and service quality continues to improve. You need to learn to ask again, to restate your request. Sometimes, the rules may have some flexibility depending on the person. But if the matter is against your faith or unreasonable, you must turn it down at all cost. This might not set you back entirely. After all is said and done, by communicating your ideas clearly and establishing your position, things may actually go more quickly and smoothly.

Being Christians, we have the obligation to pray for government workers and ask God to guide them to do the right thing. We need to ask God to give blessings to them with His gospel and comfort the entire nation with His truth.

(3) The Environment

In contrast to overseas cities, many cities in China, due to the large population and a long history of neglecting the environment, suffer from a lack of trees or grassland. This causes significant air pollution. Some cities also suffer from annual sandstorms. These pollution problems and the persistent noise in cities often make it hard for the fresh returnees to adjust.

Questions for Thoughts:

- (a) Can you relate to any of the phenomena described above? If so, which area causes the most anxiety or concern for you?
- (b) How will you resolve the areas you may not be able to adjust to?

One Christian returnee we interviewed mentioned that after years of living overseas, at first it was difficult to get used to the environment back home. During this time he continued his daily devotionals by reading the Bible and he prayed frequently. As a result, he felt closer to God than ever before and really experienced the genuine meaning of “Being thankful for everything and remaining joyful in life”. With this attitude, he was no longer as sensitive to the environment around him, and he soon got used to everything, just like the life he lived before he traveled overseas. As a word of advice, be confident about the future of China’s environment. Slowly but surely, many cities will continue to make great progress in creating a more livable environment.

On the other hand, keep in mind that resources are limited and your standard of living should be adjusted accordingly. Consider how to live a simple life (Note 7) and remember that conservation of water, energy and other resources, including disposable goods, should be a priority.

(4) Food safety

Due to the lack of regulations and people’s awareness in this area, food safety is a major cause of concern. Food poisoning cases occur frequently. Therefore, we suggest you to shop at legitimate grocers who stand behind the quality of their products. Also, try to buy in-

season fruits and vegetables locally grown whenever possible. Pray before each meal and ask God to cleanse your food and protect your health.

§ 2. Medical care and health insurance

China is undergoing systematic healthcare reform in recent years. Both urban and rural areas have seen noticeable improvements. Compared with the conditions overseas, however, there are still significant deficiencies, especially in the health insurance area. Healthcare procedures and costs also differ. For instance, medicine accounts as much as half of the total cost of care in China, while it only accounts about 20% overseas. One returnee from several years ago shared his healthcare experiences below.

(1) Hospitals.

There are locally established hospitals and those established by foreign funds along with out-patient clinics; locally established hospitals have general out-patient and special (international) out-patient clinics.

A. General out-patients at locally established hospitals:

- a. Conditions are much improved compared with 10 years ago; however, relative to the cleanliness, tidiness and management of overseas hospitals there is still a gap;
- b. Hospitals are ranked according to their size and reputation. Treatment by specialists in first class hospitals is more difficult to book. Once you have an appointment, the specialist has to see many patients and consequently the time spent on each patient is short.
- c. Medical expenses (out-patient or hospitalization) are low compared to overseas, and most returnees can easily afford it.
- d. If you know or are familiar with the doctor, you will receive better service and save money. For example, there will be no unnecessary exams or prescriptions; the doctor's attitude will be much better and the wait time will be shortened.

B. Foreign funded hospitals or special out-patient clinics in locally established hospitals

- a. Conditions are similar to or even better than overseas hospitals.
- b. Can make out-patient appointments with specialists; there is a better attitude on the part of the hospital staff, as in, for example, being more patient.
- c. Medical expenses (out-patient or hospitalization) are double or even higher compared to locally established hospitals.
- d. You will be notified of exam results through a phone call or text message, and often do not have to return to the hospital for them.

(2) Health insurance and costs.

Health insurance in China is still in the developmental stage. Companies in cities will participate in local basic social insurance. But it only covers the employee, with limited coverage of illnesses, and may only permit use of locally established hospitals. Many companies therefore provide additional coverage, particularly to senior level staff. As for benefits given to staff from overseas assigned to China, each company has its own policy.

- A. Foreign companies and expatriates: most of them enjoy full coverage for the entire family, but for most of their local Chinese workers they will not have the special out-patient clinic benefit. Health insurance generally includes co-pay, not full coverage, but employees have the choice of going to a locally established hospital, a foreign-funded hospital out-patient clinic, or a locally established hospital special out-patient clinic for treatment.
- B. Local company or non-expatriates: the company may only provide for the employee and his offsprings' medical insurance (not including the spouse), and is limited to treatment at local hospitals.
- C. Start-up companies: may purchase medical insurance from overseas or local insurance firms.

Judging from the above, the cost of medical care is a rather heavy load for most Chinese people. Currently, many doctors in China focus only on getting money, offer low-quality service, and often prescribe unnecessary drugs; before a major operation it is often safer to give the doctor a monetary gift to ensure quality service; the quality of care in international hospitals is higher, but the high expense cannot be afforded by the average person.

Questions for Thoughts: How to deal with such a reality?

Faced with these issues, we should understand that many of these shortcomings have deep-rooted systemic and structural causes, and are not something that can be resolved overnight. One should first observe the local environment and understand the way things work, and be well-prepared to adapt; never use a confrontational attitude. If you have friends or relatives who know the doctor, you can ask for help on the condition that your Christian principles are not violated. Further, Christians should understand the sinful nature that is behind these abuses: some doctors and hospitals are so driven by profit they ignore righteousness. Therefore, if you are a Christian returnee working in the medical profession, you should try to use every opportunity to promote improvement in the administration of medical services and patient care concepts. Pray for the hospitals, doctors, and the Chinese people, that God will guide them with righteousness and love, reconciled in truth, so that our hospitals and doctors can be merciful in their treatment of the sick, to the benefit of man and with glory to God.

(3) A certain returnee gave the following valuable suggestions:

- A. Pray that God will grant health and peace to the whole family. Although God has the sovereignty to allow sickness to happen or not happen, we should be courageous and ask boldly. Many times, we are like what is said in James 4:2 “You do not have, because you do not ask God”
- B. If you work in a Chinese-funded company, or are not treated as an expatriate, and if your spouse does not work full-time outside the home, you can consider buying health insurance from insurance companies (such as AIA, Tai-Kong insurance company, etc).
- C. Pray that God will grant you a suitable church or fellowship. When we obey God’s will and continue to worship and fellowship, God will often send a cloud of witnesses to

surround us, to pray for us when we are sick and weak, provide good suggestions, caring and help.

D. Before you go to see a doctor, pray to God earnestly:

- a. That God will grant wisdom to the medical staff to make accurate diagnostics, and prescribe the right medicine.
- b. That you may trust Him completely, and that His peace fills your heart
- c. That God will help you to not complain. If we are certain it is His will that brought us back to China, then give thanks in everything that happens to us. Romans 8:28 “All things work together for the benefit of him who loves God, who has been called according to His will.”
- d. That God will add to your faith to trust completely in Him, and not rely on a monetary gift to the doctor. When we commit all things to God, He knows we are His and is capable of accomplishing things that seem impossible to man.

§ 3. Housing

China’s real estate market really took off in recent years, and prices have outpaced the affordability level for the average households. Many have suffered as a result. I suggest that, if you are in a good financial situation, take your time in making the home purchase decision, because the purchase of a house in China is more complicated than purchasing one overseas. The floor plan design, the standard features, upgrades and associated costs are likely your responsibility. For returnees who are not financially secure, purchase of a house may become an enormous burden. Consider staying with friends or relatives. Renting is an option as well. If you are planning to buy a house, first do extensive research and thoroughly understand the market and related matters. After evaluating all aspects, including mortgages and residency issues, then make a rational decision.

XII. After Your Return: Spiritual Growth and Serving

§ 1. How to adapting to the Christian faith environment in China ?

(1) Policies Environment

A. Overall Environment

You don't have to be overly worried about persecution because of your faith; overall, religious freedom is gaining pace. There are many touching testimonies of individuals committing to missionary work, and the gospel has been spreading rapidly. The trend appears to be one of relaxation of the controls on traditional house churches, as some officials have noticed that churches serve to raise the local moral standards and promote public charity; however, it is still forbidden to openly preach the gospel.

If you would like to go to places with better environment for the Christian faith, you can choose the southern coastal cities. Church persecution happens more often among inland areas and in northern cities. Recently, the focus has been on heretical sects and cults.

B. Safety tips for meetings at home

In general the government does not interfere with meetings at home. However, one must pay attention to a few things: the neighbors must not be disturbed when getting in and out of meeting places and when singing hymns. Collection of monetary offerings will depend on individual circumstances. When monetary transactions are involved, it is more likely that local police may interfere. Safety considerations dictate that the number of attendees in a meeting must be limited.

(2) Current church conditions

The Chinese church spreads widely and broadly; it continues to progress and evolve, and one should look at it with an objective view and cautious attitude. Do not generalize, and do not accept hearsay. Look at it from a kingdom perspective to observe God's amazing work.

A. General conditions

The house churches in China generally fall into the categories of simple fundamentalists or evangelicals. There are some that fall into the categories of devotees (i.e. rejecting cultural and social missions) and charismatic churches, which also have some influence. There is very little attention paid to church idioms and there is no strict theological doctrine.

House churches in urban areas are generally younger. Some have been established for only a few years and are less influenced by traditions, denominations, or other systemic constrains. They tend to be more moldable and can exercise a lively faith. Over the last few years, the quality and the quantity of the ministry work in evangelical churches and urban churches with intellectuals have improved noticeably. There are Christians in every profession and in every line of work in society.

B. Quantity and quality

According to the forum in the second issue of 'Church' magazine, the official number of believers in China is 14,000,000 (the latest figure is 16,000,000). Optimistic estimates among believers put the number at over 80 million, with some saying it is over 100 million.

Conservative estimates keep the number at about 40 million, or no more than 1% of the total population, with those who regularly attend meetings at 14 million. If one subtracts from this number those who have deviant knowledge of the truth, are heretical, superstitious, and hypocritical, there are indeed not too many true believers. Of these, the majority have stayed at the baby stage, and the body of Christ has indeed not grown up. This supplies an answer to the question some people have: if Christianity is so 'revived' in China, why is it that there has been no evidence of overall influence in the moral values of Chinese society as a whole?

C. Several potential dangers

The big picture is that the number of believers is growing quickly in China, but they are a mixture of sheep and goats; the danger lies in the quality of their faith. This has to do with the nature of Chinese people; over the years they have become accustomed to worshipping in exchange for benefits, just as when they worship idols. In particular, some grass-roots level people regard Jesus as a foreign Buddha. The other danger is that without being taught Biblical truth, their new faith turns out to be a hotbed for heresies. These deviant behaviors arise due to a severe lack of pastoral staff and biblical teaching.

Many churches in the countryside have become superstitious and practice idolatry. In general, rural churches have the problems of low-quality preachers, lack of financial support for preachers, and a lack of systematic accounting for donations received (Note 9). Insufficient training in fundamental truth has caused many believers to stay at the superficial level of 'believe in the Lord for blessing', without ever attaining to true faith or life renewal experiences. One of the consequences is that, with the speeding up of urbanization in China, many countryside churches that were once very 'prosperous' quickly diminished, and many believers who went into the cities could not withstand the onrush of new changes and drifted apart, rescinding their belief.

On the other hand, some urban house churches have become more and more club-like. The characteristics of urban churches are that their meetings are small-scale and scattered all over, like small groups. Many people left the Three-Self churches and began to meet in their own homes, and they gradually came to regard themselves as independent churches. Yet, such churches do not have spiritual leaders or full-time ministers, and are generally weak in Biblical teaching. Some urban intellectual and white-collar churches are similar to some European and American churches, and have the same tendency towards secularization and a club-like loss of fervency.

D. Important points on adapting to Mainland churches

Most mainland churches are very complex in many respects. Returnees will stand out in the crowd. No matter which church you go to, you must allow three to six months' time for adaptation. During that period, you should be low-key to avoid making wrong

decisions. Listen more and talk less; observe whether their faith is pure, and whether it is the church for you.

How does one find a suitable church? After your return, you should actively find prayer partners or fellowships, churches. If you cannot find a fellowship right away, you can invite relatives, friends, co-workers, or other returnees to your home for Bible study, prayer, and to start a small family worship. Currently many middle-class meeting places are being organized in China, which offer some possibilities. Big cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou have International churches/fellowships (ICF) for those with overseas passports.

The congregation of mainland churches differs from overseas churches in many areas, such as in age, education, and experience. Overseas Chinese churches have many students and professionals; their ages, education and financial situations are somewhat similar, thus they mix together easily and build up friendships; and church members tend to be very close. However, Mainland churches are limited by their circumstances, and in this respect are different from overseas churches. Those planning to return, or who have already returned, must have an attitude of ‘forget the past and strive towards the future’ without judging their current situation by their past overseas church experience. The decision to return implies a full-hearted adaptation to Mainland churches, and a decision to take part in it.

One must be fully mentally prepared. Overseas, most churches have large open spaces and church attendance is welcomed; the church atmosphere is peaceful and worshipful. The local Chinese churches are vastly different. The space is very tight, and they may at best have a piano; Christians are marginalized, and going to church must be secretive; their worship styles may be very different from overseas, and the preachers may not have been trained; in Holy Communion, it could be the same bread but each person breaks his own piece, and there may be the same cup that everyone drinks from it; some churches may have immature faith and doctrine; internal conflicts prevail, offering sparse; poor administration; etc. Some churches emphasize that sisters must not speak on pulpits; some house churches are very alert to the threat from heresies, and, as they do not know the faith of returnees, will not show their welcome at first but instead just coolly observe. In fact, you may not necessarily have a stronger spiritual life compared to your Mainland counterparts, just more knowledge and information; so be humble, be accepting to their attitudes, and avoid becoming a stumbling block or become stumbled yourself.

A major issue with Mainland churches is that they are closed off, dictatorial, and elder-ruled. However, with your humility and good testimony, their eyes may be opened to the abundance that is God’s kingdom.

If you have a denominational background overseas, you must understand that Chinese churches are basically non-denominational. Put down your denominational tradition and experience and go back to fundamental Biblical truth; don’t let yourself be caught up in arguments that are not fundamental truth.

For the current status of house churches in China, you can reference these two articles:

- Jian-Rong Yu: The Christian Development and the Security of Chinese Society; conversations with the preachers of two Christian house churches.
- Xun-Dao Zu: A first investigation of China’s new urban churches

(3) Prevention of heresies

In Mainland China, all kinds of heresies spread broadly, quickly, deeply, and reach far. We should stand firm against heresies and strive to block their influence. It is important to differentiate among heresies, cults, and extremism. Treating our brothers as wolves, or regarding the devil as loving, are both hurtful to ourselves and sins against God.

Many underground churches are in fact cults; they stayed underground because they cannot survive the light of day. Taking advantage of people's ignorance of fundamental Christian doctrines, as well as their sympathy towards house churches, they call themselves churches of Christ to hide their true identity, and then cheat their believers into giving money and sexual favors. Certain cults do not evangelize but rather infiltrate existing churches, kidnap preachers and believers, disrupting the churches and corrupting them in the process. Since many outsiders and government officials do not have the ability to differentiate falsehood from truth, these cults cause significant damage to Christianity's image among non-believers.

The damage caused by heresies includes: deviation from the truth; unreasonable antagonism toward the government; entrapment of sheep resulting in church splitting; damage to the Christian church's image; coercing people into giving money and sexual favors; etc.

The more prevalent heretical cults in Mainland China are: Lightning from the East, The Ling-Ling cult, The Disciples (Men-Tu-Hui), etc. Recently there are individuals claiming to be the mother of Jesus, the son of Jesus, and so on. It has gone to the extent that anyone can start a new denomination.

We have to emphasize here that the leadership of these heretical cults may be ill-intentioned to use them for their own gain in reputation, money or sex; they have intentionally offended the Holy Spirit and may not be forgiven. However, those who are confused by heresies deserve our sympathy; they should be looked upon more mercifully, and the churches should recognize their deficiencies in evangelization and gospel preaching.

There are some commonalities in all heresies. First, they deny the personality of Jesus Christ; second, the completeness of Christ's salvation; third, the absolute authority and inerrancy of the Bible, changing or adding to God's words. Some other common characteristics prevail, such as: (1) strong rejection of other groups, claiming that their belief is the most accurate, and their doctrine the purest; all other teachings are heresies; (2) their leaders have absolute authority; (3) an emphasis that the end times has arrived, or about to arrive on a certain date; (4) isolation from outside world, trying to keep their believers within their confines; (5) always changing what they teach.

Christians must remember firmly that the Lord says, "The devil is a liar and father of liars" (John 8:44)

To prevent corruption by heresies, the key is in one's own spiritual growth and grounding in the truth. Base your beliefs on the Bible, rely on the Holy Spirit, remember and hold on to fundamental truths, such as: the Bible is the highest authority; the Trinity theology of the Godhead; Christology and Holy Spirit; what is salvation; what the end time is; what is church; etc.

Spend some time under the counsel of your pastor or your elder, and carefully read materials about heresies, such as "Heresies in China" by Rev. Lu Wen, <http://book.edzx.com/HTML40/403/403/403/403/index.html>, or "Handbook on Fundamental Truth" by Rev. Thomas Wang.

In English, one can access the website “Heresies and Cults in China Today” by Tony Lambert.

If you have an address to contact the church you are considering, it would be advisable to talk privately with their members and observe how they practice their faith first, before making a decision to join; check out whether their faith might be contaminated by heresy.

§ 2. Spiritual growth after your return

- (1) It is reasonable to assume that the pastoring you will receive after returning may be less than desirable. However, nowadays messages may be obtained via Internet and from other multimedia sources; many overseas churches place sermon messages directly on the Internet to share with others openly. Many messages by well-known servants of God are available from the Internet free of charge.
- (2) Bibles, hymns and some spiritual books are available from bookstores operated by Three-self churches (discernment is necessary, of course, when buying spiritual material).
- (3) Under the condition of not being able to find a suitable church, one should be reminded that having some meeting is better than not to have any meeting at all. The Bible teaches us to not stop going to meetings; attending meetings is beneficial to us. If indeed you cannot find a church, you should insist on worshipping and Bible reading at home, and ask your mother church overseas with which you are affiliated, and those brothers and sisters you know, to pray for you. A difficult circumstance may be the beginning of the Lord’s calling for you to walk the way of the cross; you will learn about humility, longsuffering, faith, love, and ministry. To walk the way of the cross one must pay a price, but escaping from it will cost even more; it seems hard to submit to the Lord, but a life that does not submit is harder.
- (4) Your personal daily Bible reading, prayer, devotional time, hymn singing, even listening to sermon messages and reading spiritual books, are all necessary.
- (5) Reminisce on the suggestions from the chapters on “Preparing for your return.”
- (6) Even though you may be a pastor, do not only focus only on your work, because you yourself must also be fed. Keep an attitude of ‘in humility consider others as better than yourself’ (Phil. 2:3). Be open to criticisms and suggestions.
- (7) If you have been feeling for a long time that you are spiritually weak and cannot overcome sin and suffering, you should seek counseling from well-respected pastors who are spiritually strong.
- (8) No matter what, hold on to your faith, live a witnessing life and be mindful of evangelism, so that you may be a channel for God’s grace and blessing. This is how believers gain strength and become blessed, so let us trust in our Father to keep and bless His children to the very end.

§ 3. Serving in ministry after your return

(1) How do you participate in local ministry?

First, make proper arrangements for your own life, work, and children's education, etc. before beginning to seek ministry opportunities, to avoid not able to handle your own life properly.

You need much prayer and need to be fully prepared before participating in ministry service. If it is not God's time yet, it is better to wait than to hurry into serving as a way of showing off. Go to the church for over half a year, and then join in a ministry in accordance with your spiritual gift. Learn with humility, live a life of good testimony, love others with the love of Christ; in due course, the Holy Spirit will guide you.

Returnees must not have a proud or boastful attitude. Do not keep talking about overseas Chinese or Western churches and their glorious history. Mainland churches may have different facilities or may be different in ways of doing things, but their messages, wisdom and life strength are strong points missing in many overseas churches. Be humble and learn with brothers and sisters.

If returnees can merge themselves into the local churches, that's great. If they naturally come together to form a returnee church, they can become a bridge for new returnees to attract people with a similar background to believe and grow.

Learn from Paul, who made tents to support his ministry; it is better this way. Offerings from Chinese churches are insufficient to support their preachers; furthermore, the government forbids house churches to collect offerings, and most churches have financial difficulties.

(2) How would you preach the gospel?

The returnee's culture and position are generally more prominent in China, and their speech and deeds more noticed. Therefore the testimonies reflected from their lives have a stronger influence in society. Your testimony will serve to break up many stereotyped opinions about Christianity. They think that Christianity serves only to comfort people who need to be comforted. In spite of this prevailing view, many have undeniably started their own faith journey with an admiration of the personality or life of a certain Christian. Your testimony will overcome their preconceived ideas and opinions.

Some people have said that Christians should preach at all times, and not just through words. Indeed, the book of Acts informs us that the name 'Christian' began when we were called by outsiders by that name (Acts 11:26). It is obvious that we are separated from the world by our words and our deeds. Although China is quite open now and there are people who purposefully act new and different, yet acting differently in daily lives when one is in public, such as giving thanks to God before meal, is still regarded as unusual by the surrounding people. In China where spaces are tight and privacy scarce, there will be pressure if one insists on being 'sanctified' from the rest; one will be regarded by neighbors and co-workers as aliens and stared at with cold eyes. Some Christians have been shamed by such a treatment and hide their Christian identity, gradually becoming the same as others, like the salt that has lost its taste.

However, on the other hand, this can be an opportunity to spread the gospel because we are noticed or become the object of others' curiosity. If we persevere against the pressure and insist on living a Christian life, giving thanks before meal, having devotional time regularly, resisting temptation when it ought to be resisted, the people who initially regarded us as strange or stared at us with cold eyes will gradually turn around and be drawn in by our insistence, trying to understand what makes us live differently from them. When this happens we can talk to them about our faith and the heavenly strength it has brought us, as well as our internal transformation. When we become an influence on them and they start to change, we will begin to appreciate what it means to be the salt and light of this world.

When preaching the gospel, one should not be too elaborate or open. One-on-one evangelization is preferred; make sure your object feels your sincerity and warmth, and they can be edified readily.

You have to be aware that many people who made the decision-making prayer may not be born again. Putting too much emphasis on decision-making prayers without follow-up pastoring and counseling will only lead many of them to drift away. Therefore you should not put too much emphasis on the decision-making prayer, but observe the person's response to Christ and truth both from rational and non-rational viewpoints. This is a process with many twists and turns. There are also many challenges to overcome in real life and in society.

In the past 200 years, the Western church has put too much emphasis on decision-making prayers; such an emphasis did not bring about the wide propagation of the gospel or the deep-rooted building up of believers as true disciples. Daily evangelization must be combined with pastoral care and training. The early church had a system called 'catechumen' that referred to the one to two years' learning time in a church before a new believer was permitted to receive baptism. The catechumen attended church meetings, and the deacon board prayed for them before holy communion, but they would leave without participating in the communion shared by baptized church members. Such a system should be revived and applied even now to seekers of truth, including children, and those under chastisement by the church.

Baptism is a testimony of believers to openly testify for the Lord. The believer declares that he has shed the old man for the new man. Baptism for those who are not clearly born again or those who do not live a life with a clear testimony of God's grace will bring shame to the name of the Lord and create an obstacle for seekers.

(3) How to get more involved serving in ministry?

A. Leading a Bible study

"Inductive Bible Study method" is widely used. Step 1 of the method is to 'Read the Scriptural Passage' thoroughly. Step 2 is "Observations," to observe in detail what the Scripture Says," based on the context, including the scriptures before and after the passage to be studied. Step 3 is "Interpretation," to interpret the doctrines and teachings that the passage brings, including an understanding of the background of the passage. Step 4 is "Application," to summarize the principles learned and to apply these principles to our daily lives.

Encourage your group members to study the passage before the small group Bible study meeting.

For more details on Inductive Bible Study, please read the book “How to lead small group Bible Study” by Edwin Su (Note 10).

B. How to lead a small group Bible study?

In a small group meeting, everyone can participate and therefore the meeting becomes livelier. In China, there is not much difference between a small group meeting and a church worship meeting; sometimes there is no church, just a small group acting as a church.

A small group meeting may end up in two types of negative situations:

- There is no leader, and since everyone therefore may freely express their thoughts according to their perceived guidance by the Holy Spirit, the meeting ends without any conclusion. As a result, some new believers become boastful after attending a few meetings, become unwilling to accept others’ counsel and finally cannot grow, and thus the growth of the small group is hindered.
- There is a group leader and there is a person preaching. In this situation, if the leader has an incorrect view, his mistake will prevail and the truth is hard to arrive at.

How do we sort out such a conflicting situation? It does not matter whether the church is large or small; we still need to follow the teaching of the Bible and to choose the appropriate individuals to serve. Before a small group is established, church co-workers (or burdened brothers and sisters) should pray fervently and make sure that there is clear confirmation from God – a clear need, availability of a suitable leader, and the right environment, before starting a small group meeting. Then the above mentioned problems may be avoided.

Please refer to “Design of church worship and activities”, Chapter 4, design of small group activities (Note 11)

C. How to Biblically counsel spiritually weak members?

Biblical counseling is part of pastoral care. Charity and caring are ministries of co-workers responsible in these areas. Caring led by a responsible co-worker, when supplemented by a normal fellowship life, proper teaching, and loving supervision, will lead to a stable and strong church. A good counselor needs special gifts, equipping and training.

The 4th issue of ‘Church’ magazine is a special issue on ‘Biblical counseling’ (Note 12), In this issue there is a call to churches to deal with the fact that nowadays urban Christians have weak spiritual lives, confused priorities, and worrisome mental conditions. There is therefore a need for more individualized pastoring and small group care. As to the many existing Christian psychological counseling activities, co-workers should know how to differentiate between those based on Biblical teachings and those that are pure psychology, containing secular ideologies, and those that promote the ‘New Age’ movement.

Of course, this does not imply that Christians should be negligent of effectiveness or the outcomes of counseling. But we think true effectiveness must lead in the right direction. Secular psychology is based on an atheist standpoint, and its views of ‘man’, ‘health’, and ‘normal’ differ significantly from the Biblical views. To Christians, we need direction from the Bible for whatever endeavors we wish to pursue.

D. How to establish a new church?

A true servant of God will be very careful about starting any new ministry, making sure that it is indeed in God's will before putting it in motion; this applies to anything, not just to building up a church.

The building up of a church must be confirmed by the granting of many spiritual gifts, evidence of the leading of the Holy Spirit, and the presence of God's true servant – not determined so much by how long the person has been a believer, but by his fear of the Lord, humility and submission; preaching and following the truth; correct application of sacraments; and a faithful execution of discipline. (See Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 5)

XIII. Case Studies

§ Case Study 1: Testimony of a returnee single mom

Background: This single mother has been divorced for 10 years. She is a college professor and a painter. In May 1989 she watched the movie 'The Jesus Story' and believed in Christ. From June 1999 till March 2003, she studied in Manila for her Master's Degree in Education Management, and finally returned home on April 14, 2003. What she didn't expect was that it would take time to rebuild her interpersonal relationships, as well as to gain acceptance again by her local church. When she was not immediately welcomed and lacked sufficient mental, cultural, and spiritual preparation for such cold reception, some problems showed up. How did she get through all this by trusting in the Lord?

Article written by Lu Lin

1. Early stage after my returning

(1) The issue of acceptance by the former fellowship she belonged to.

The April of 2003 was at the peak of the SARS scare; people tended to conscientiously reduce social interactions and social life was mostly shut down. My personality is such that I derive joy and pleasure from human interactions, and this caused great distress that affected my mental and emotional well-being.

I believed in the Lord in May 1989; I attended a fellowship consisting of mostly people of my own age, all of whom believed at around the same time and then grew up spiritually together. We were very close. I was active and influential in my fellowship. After I left China, our interactions were reduced to sending occasional greeting cards in holidays. After four years in the Philippines, I became accustomed to their enthusiastic way of expressing passion and friendship, and gradually forgot that the Chinese culture is more reserved. So, after my return, I found that the expressions of welcome I received fell far short of my expectations, and soon I found myself shrinking back from my previously much-expanded self-confidence. How could one easily bridge the distance that results from four years of separation? In reality, a feeling of distance is inevitable after such a long separation; yet I was not mentally prepared for it and looked at the distance with a negative attitude, thinking that I was no longer welcomed and accepted.

I was like a mistreated younger sister seeking comfort, and one suffering from prolonged hunger who wanted food, and right away. The many years' of lacking friendship and feeling dissatisfaction while away from home resulted in my urgency in relating to them, expecting unrealistically to receive love. While I was in my state of self-pity, I ignored the fact that perhaps they needed something back from me. There are all kinds of pressures and challenges while away from home; I forgot the fact that to survive and make a living in China was also not easy.

I was hurt and disappointed and, to protect my hurt feelings, I subconsciously started to judge and criticize. How come they were still like their old selves; why have their lives stayed at the same place; have they gone backwards since there is no progress; is their faith so superficial; etc? I was asked to share before the meeting ended. With a victim mentality, my words conveyed judgment and pressure, which was obvious to all. I mentioned further that I was going

to another fellowship, and announced that today is my farewell. It was such an abrupt departure; I didn't care if they could take it, I didn't know the hurt I caused. It was only after my departure that God worked among us, letting me see the injury I had caused. God provided me opportunities to explain and amend my behavior. His love cured both sides; finally, it was back to normal again.

(2) Mother-son relationship

At that time I focused solely on one role: my role as a mother.

After my divorce, my child's official guardian was his father and his step-mother. Before I left China, I was only allowed to spend weekends from Friday through Sunday with him.

After my return I found that my son was studying at a boarding school in a small town nearby. It so happened that my job appointment had not yet started. So I went over to his town and rented an apartment, decorated it into a cozy home, and took him in to live with me. I had romantic thoughts about my role as a mother accompanying my student son; I served him willingly, trying to reduce my guilt towards him for neglecting his needs all these years, without realizing that it was once again my self-generated attempt at justification.

The fact is that in my relationship with my teenage son, there were more defeats than satisfactions. I thought that he needed the company and care of his mother, yet at his age what he really needed was to be more independent from his parents.

My son kept asking to reduce the number of times he had to come home for meals. He skipped lunch, and then dinner. I went to the market and spent the entire morning or afternoon to carefully prepare some nice dishes; they sat on the dinner table, getting cold, and became leftovers.

Three months later, I was no longer my old optimistic and open self. I wept a lot and cried while calling old friends. I blamed it on the weather; being away for four years, I was accustomed to bright sunshine, and the grayish weather back home made me feel down. The truth was that I need to adjust myself mentally. Upon the first day of my son's summer vacation in July, I bought a train ticket to go from the Southwest to Beijing.

I wanted to go to Beijing to see lots of sunshine, to change my surroundings. It was, however, only an excuse for my escape.

2. Intermediate stage: cultural and mental adjustment

By the end of August 2003, and after two months of sojourning, I should have returned home to start teaching. But my Alma Mater in Tientsin asked me to hold an art exhibit, and the publisher who agreed to publish my painting collection needed for me to stay there for consultation. I asked my college to extend my leave of absence for another two months.

I worked at the publisher's office in Beijing, was well-paid, and rented a two-bedroom apartment, and began my North-drifting life. It was an extension of my overseas life after returning to China – an adjustment period.

(1) Falling into the temptation of passion of love

My old friends persuaded me to return home to teach. They said, women at your age would have been laid-off in our departments. In a big city, a North-drifter like me would not get any attention. Freedom comes with a price—of dryness in social life, like a desert.

A good friend introduced to me a handsome young man, saying that he enjoyed my painting and my writing; he invited me to dinner. At the dinner table, he recited to me some songs and poems he wrote. I found that he thinks independently, is gifted and has character.

Soon I received a phone call from this young man; he was coming to Beijing and would like to discuss with me some issues about faith. I agreed. After work I met him outside a subway station and we went to dinner together. I talked about how I believed; I found out that he is married and much younger than I am. At that time I had been divorced for 8 years and always involved myself in fellowship activities, so I had not been exposed to situations of temptation by the opposite sex. I thought I was immune and would not fall victim to such a temptation. But when I talked with this young man, the Lord reminded me to be careful. I heard but did not pay attention; I did not put up a defense or a barrier, and in my dizziness I was drawn into the river of passion. Thank God, He did not let go of me and watched over me; His gracious hand pulled me up from the water. I knew that if I did not submit and allow myself to be pulled up, I would lose my inward peace. A few days later, I withdrew myself from this net of passion.

I was ashamed by that experience; I saw my real self and admitted my weakness. While I belonged to the Lord, I felt unworthy to serve Him again. What could I do? The future looked bleak. Yes, my failure came from five months' of missing out on normal fellowship life. My spiritual strength was too weak to resist temptation, and I was unable to submit to the reminding of the Holy Spirit.

(2) Return to fellowship

After this incident, I unexpectedly received a phone call from a pastor couple who had come back to Beijing to visit friends. Upon meeting with them, I told them I had not been attending fellowship meetings and could not find a fellowship in Beijing; I was looking for a spiritual home. The pastor gave me two phone numbers. Finally, I could return to fellowship meetings. On the way there I sang loudly, "Lord, I want to return to your side, I want to return to your side..." During prayers in the meeting, the Lord told me, "My choice is without regret." A brother taught this song: "Forever, you are my child; never changing is my love to you." He knows my weakness. I sang this song back and forth for a week; the Lord is comforting me and providing me support.

With my church life returning to normal, my health also recovered.

In the 10 months I drifted northward, God answered my prayer to testify for Him using my paintings, and I held art shows at two universities in Tientsin, and two of my painting collections were published by the art publishers, Peoples Art Publishing in Tientsin and Peoples Art Publishing in Beijing. I also published articles in magazines, and gotten to know many treasured brothers and sisters; their fellowship nourished my dryness. Help also from many non-Christians made me aware of God's grace surrounding me; the seal of the Holy Spirit's presence rejuvenated me.

3. Rebuilding of my self-image: return home

After 10 months passed, a couple in Christ shared with me while in Beijing and made me see what I owed my son. In love, they sincerely told me: while your book mentioned the testimonies of many Christian mothers, yet as a mother yourself, you have not lived out a life of testimony. I submitted. In June, 2004, my college called me to go back for a meeting; right away I bought a ticket and returned. I wept as I departed, missing the new friends I made in Beijing; and yet, after 10 months of adjustment, I felt adequately mentally prepared, knowing the difficulties I will face, and knowing that I should depend on God to solve my problems. I need to adapt to new surroundings and accept new challenges.

(1) Change of meeting attitude

As I returned from Beijing, God led me to go to a fellowship in the home of an old sister. I only knew two persons there before I left China, and just superficially; I did not know the others. I had no expectations, no point of comparison, and thus there was no feeling of hurt or loss. Calmly I accepted their traditional and conservative meeting style. Their meeting style appeared boring, but I sensed holiness there, feeling that it characterized Chinese style meetings, and then I could enjoy myself. The brother who preached did not have theological training; he only exegeted verse by verse with the help of concordance, but I didn't criticize. They have an agreement not to allow sisters to speak on the pulpit, but sit and listen. I treated it as a way to learn humility, and benefited much from it.

House churches in China are very alert to influences by heresies, thus are carefully wary of newcomers. Having been away for many years, they do not know your spiritual condition, and thus they will watch you for a while. Indeed, they have experienced first hand the attacks from the 'Eastern Lightning' cult; I feel, too, that a period of observation is necessary. Even though you have ministered outside of China or perhaps studied in theological seminaries, you should not immediately pour out everything about yourself, but be appropriately reserved. However spiritual you were, that was yesterday; everything begins anew today. I changed; from negative to positive, from passive to proactive, from judgmental to understanding. In fact, nothing had changed, but I had a different perspective.

Once again I lived with my son, and there were many issues. Every Sunday, after morning service, the old sister of the fellowship kept me there for lunch and gave me her time in the afternoon. Her loving kindness in listening to me, and her abundant experience, made her my mentor. This is God's wise and gracious preparation that continued for two years, until finally, once again, I left my hometown.

(2) Overcoming extraordinary pressure by relying on the Lord

Since my return from Beijing, my school gave me a very heavy teaching load; in addition, by also accepting an invitation from another college, I had to teach five different courses in one semester. I am somewhat familiar with two of these courses, but Asian Art History and Sociology were brand new subjects. Such a teaching arrangement had interesting twists; it may have indicated that the leadership had a high regard for my capability, or it may have been a test of what I had learned from studying abroad. Yet it is also possible that they simply wanted to save expenses, being unwilling to hire another teacher.

To say it more colloquially, such arrangement was like killing the chicken to get the eggs. It was just too much; but I felt obliged, and accepted it in my confusion.

Just teaching these five courses was enough to require my full attention, not to mention my attempt to rebuild my relationship with my son. But I felt I had to succeed in my teaching tasks, and that failure was unacceptable. I felt fully alert, ready for a fight.

Would my self-image be rebuilt or destroyed?

God gave me wisdom not to pay attention to the ensuing irritations, and as I focused on the main battle, I survived the first semester through God's grace. I made no mistakes in my teaching, was welcomed by my students, and held fast in my school.

(3) Financial pressure

During this period I had to face a practical issue, which was to have enough for a down-payment for a flat. Can anyone believe that I, a returnee, did not have enough cash? The word "money" brings up a sensitive issue, but my time was tight and the issue real. My school wanted to collect money from the staff to build new housing, but the bank would not lend; but where could I go to borrow money? Who would lend to me? I prayed: "God, I don't know who has money, and who is willing to lend to me; I don't even know how to open my mouth and ask. If you let me buy this flat, please move someone to take the initiative and ask me, to offer to lend to me."

And so it was done. I met my old friend, a couple, who said: if you have any need, you must tell us! I told them. My old friends went to the bank right away, took out some money and sent it to my school. Afterwards I did not hear from them again, nor could I even find them.

God revealed to me in this way His presence and help.

The remaining funding needs were also met in installments; different people loaned money to me at different times. They were always timely, not too late and not too early. God makes no mistakes.

To borrow is to experience humility, and I have to be thankful; but borrowing also affected my self-image. Most people my age have housing and a car and can afford to lend to me without any problem. However, sometimes they would ask some unnecessary questions, which caused me to feel self-pity. A divorcee, a single mom, with no house nor car, living at a subsistence level, taking public transportation to work; all these presented an image of failure eliciting sympathy. Often my emotions were depressed. My conflicts with my son often came from his asking for money from me; I became hysterical whenever the subject of money came up. Yet every time I yielded after negotiating with him. Everyday I had to face the extraordinary pressures that come from work, from having to borrow, and from a tense relationship with my son.

4. Spiritual support that comes from my new ministry

At this time, God used an opportunity for me to serve others to give me strength. My pressures were not diminished, but serving Him added to me a new strength to resist the pressure. It was wonderful and effective. Before God used me to build up the lives of others, He first built me up.

Before the Lunar New Year of 2005, some brothers and sisters from Beijing came to my hometown and introduced a seeker couple to me. The wife began as a seeker and became a believer, and started a fellowship meeting at her house. The result was the ‘Blessings of Autumn Rain’ Fellowship.

In order to share with these spiritual babies, I first had to receive from the Lord. A missions-oriented life gets its supply from God. Some said that I was their spiritual nanny; the existence of new lives and their thirst prompted me to grow, to cling tightly to God’s supply and not to depend on myself. This fellowship was the best spiritual gas station I could have; through it God supported and supplied me and let me appreciate how He had changed me from having nothing to abundance. I am just a vessel being used by God; His power flowed through my life, and all who came to be fed received nourishment.

Then it came to 2006. My goal was to pay back all the money I owed before the Chinese New Year. I sold an old house, and was able to pay back all my loans.

I learned from real life lessons. Through them I realized my weakness, experienced His grace, and grew by grace under my day-to-day pressure.

Members of our fellowship are mostly college professors, lawyers, intellectuals, and writers. Some of them are in politically sensitive positions, but I have no fear as I depend on God. I was given an opportunity to serve and His grace flowed through me, so that I can praise and give thanks any time. Three groups of new believers have been baptized. In the couples’ fellowship, many couples have been counseled and saw changes in their relationship; their new lives bear fruit that is beautiful and sweet. On October 21, three couples held a ceremony to renew their marriage vows, accompanied by their open testimonies.

In July and August of 2005, I held an art show at my hometown. Many media came to report on the show, including CCTV, which made a 30 minute documentary for their ‘2005 women’s documentary’ series, entitled “My Toys are Colorful”.

In August 2006, God provided an opportunity for me to travel abroad to the University of Nevada as a visiting scholar. A new page in my life started to unfold.

In this new land, I have new challenges, new lessons to learn, and new experiences. I am the Lord’s child; wherever I am I must experience Him, testify to Him, praise Him, and give thanks to Him.

(Note: This article was originally published in “Behold” magazine, March 2007)

Discussions:

- (a) What kinds of difficulties did this sister experience after her return?
- (b) How did the Lord lead her step by step? How did God reveal His presence?
- (c) In this sister’s experience, how did God break down and then rebuild her life?
- (d) How did her experience inspire and help you?

§ Case Study 2: A returnee brother's experience

Background: In the beginning of 1999, a businessman went to the United States to study for the MBA (Master's in Business Administration) degree. He returned to China in 2004. Before he left China he had worked at both state-owned and foreign-funded import-export companies. While studying in the USA, he worked as a summer intern in three different companies.

He turned to Christ and became a believer in 2003. After that, while still abroad, he has attended two churches and joined their fellowships, served in their choirs, and has attended their morning Sunday schools.

1. Why I return to China

The main reason for my return to China was that, at that time, the American economy was very bad and it was difficult to find a job. I also missed my family; after all, I had left home for five years, and my father's health was deteriorating.

My wife was still working in America at the time; we considered the possibility of returning home and went back and forth on that decision for a long time. We talked it over many times and told each other our feelings, as it was an important decision for us if we decide to live separately. Finally, we came to the conclusion that a short-term separation was for the benefit of our long-term togetherness. Both of us could not accept the fact of my not finding a job for such a long period of time after graduation, which did not advance my career or our family life. Because we didn't have children yet, the decision for me to return by myself was relatively easier to make.

At that time we prayed to God; our church and brothers and sisters in the fellowship group also prayed for us. Yet He seemed to be silent. I did not know why He did not respond, and was worried that perhaps He did not care for us any more. But now, I think that His silence was His answer, as the work He asked me to do is not yet finished.

Another concern I had then was whether I could find a suitable fellowship or church, or have a normal spiritual life after returning to China. Thank God that through a brother I knew before, I was able to find and attend a house church. I felt after that that He had prepared the way before me to return.

Thinking back on that time, I believe that God had been present all the time, but since I only focused on my own needs I could not hear His voice.

2. Preparation before my return

Before I was ready to return, I spent nearly a year to investigate what direction I should take. This proved helpful for me to deal with the confusion that came after my return, because I was clear as to what I wanted, what I could offer, and what I liked. My strategy while facing millions of changes I make no change; and instead aiming at my chosen target, I focused on finding the right job for myself.

While busy with this, I also communicated with my family and other classmates who were already working in China. With my career direction already decided, I investigated many

different opportunities, and prepared my resumé well. Your resumé is your image; good resumé's can win you opportunities for an interview. The results also bear out this fact, as 75% of the resumé's I sent out received responses.

I built a network of schoolmates, classmates and friends, trying to find out if they knew any company that was hiring. Through their introductions I received some useful tips on potential job offers before my return, which is always beneficial for any job seeker looking for work immediately after returning.

It is also important to time your return carefully. I chose to return right after the conclusion of the Chinese New Year, as that is the time when most companies hire new people to replace those who have left. The annual Beijing Recruiting Exhibit for overseas talents is also held at that time. This is an excellent opportunity to send your resume to tens, even hundreds, of foreign companies within a day or two, and then get a chance to meet with their human resource directors or hiring department heads. It is much more efficient than mailing out your resume. In fact, I gained three interviews through that exhibit and from those I won employment offers from two companies.

It was also important to me to communicate with my family, letting them know what I was thinking, getting their help with evaluating my course of action, and listening to their helpful suggestions. Such communications also helped to eliminate some of their worries and concerns. With good communications, my wife and I were able to walk through the process of my job search and subsequent work together unscathed.

3. Challenges after my return

After my return home, my wife stayed behind in the States, and our church and fellowship gave her a lot of support so that I had no cause for worry. In addition, we kept in touch through phone calls to encourage each other, which was effective in helping us to overcome some of the difficulties that arise from living separately.

There are certainly great differences between the United States and China. Just to mention the environment: China is dirty, congested, and less desirable. After living for a few years abroad, I found myself unaccustomed to it. The congested traffic and noisiness of the community added to my uneasiness; but I quickly adapted. While I believe that my mental preparation and ready adaptability were contributing factors, the most significant reason was God's leading. At that time I insisted on reading the Bible daily at a regular hour and praying at all times, and I felt His presence as never before. I deeply appreciated the feeling of 'give thanks in all things, and be joyful always'. With such an attitude I was not as sensitive to the changes in my surroundings, and I recovered the feeling of familiarity that I had when I was living in China before my departure.

The brothers and sisters in my church in the States often called on me to ask about my condition; their caring was a great help and encouragement for me. I also insisted on finding time for physical exercise, so that I could have the advantages of good health when dealing with the challenges of work and daily life. With such a strong foundation I have not experienced a great gap between my expectations beforehand and my real life in China; I was at ease, my job search was going very smoothly, and I found that adapting to my new position and my new surroundings was also not too difficult.

However, the challenges from my work far exceeded those I faced during my job hunt. I worked for an automobile company that was a joint venture by foreign and Chinese concerns. Its employees came from all kinds of backgrounds; the management style was a combination of American and Chinese state-owned management styles, so that underneath the seemingly calm surface there were all kinds of conflicts and struggles. In the beginning I was quite confused, and I struggled inwardly against some company practices that were improper. I could not change these practices; but I did not want to be an executor of such practices. Maybe by putting me in this situation, God wanted me to learn to be humble and obedient, to learn to look up to Him and rely on Him when I was under such pressure. Gradually I learned to seek His will through Bible reading and praying, and found peace in my heart. My peace guided me in learning how to deal with undesirable people and things.

Returning to China is a great challenge to one's spiritual growth, because you are surrounded by challenges to your belief, such as the naked search for material gain, the suspicion of and departure from traditional values and morals, and the confused state of understanding basic right and wrong. To prevent your faith from being shaken, you must read the Bible and pray, attend fellowship, take part in Sunday worship, believe in God's presence, and submit to His leading. All these may be difficult at first; but as long as you let God lead you forward, you will gain the faith to face your challenges.

It is beneficial to your returning to build up an active personal network of relationships and contacts. After all, it is impossible for you to fully understand this rapidly changing Chinese society through your own experience alone; you have to learn about this new and somewhat unfamiliar society in a short time through your relationship network. Thus it is essential to connect with old friends and find new ones.

4. What I learned about faith

When I had just returned I attended a house church and its fellowship. Later my work took me away from my familiar city to work elsewhere, and then I got involved in the local 'Three-self' church.

What role did my faith play in my decision-making and my life? The following is what I learned:

- Look up to Him and trust in Him; pray in all things and seek His kingdom and His righteousness. God will provide you with everything He knows you need. Be joyful always, give thanks in everything. The peace of His kingdom will let you rely on Him, be hopeful, and be fed. In my job-seeking journey I have experienced all of these graces.
- Be humble on the inside as God requires of us. In practice this attitude helps you to adapt to new surroundings, and to be accepted by your new company and new co-workers.
- Put your trust in God and His sovereignty, because He is present with us always, and don't rely on yourself. In your work glorify God and benefit others, and use this attitude to face complicated situations. When I keep this principle, God's blessings are abundant; but when I am boastful and self-indulgent, God's discipline also comes and lets me experience setbacks and failures.
- Be a good listener, be humble, and be low-keyed. God will open up new paths for you, help you make new friends in your new surroundings, and support you as you deal with complicated human interactions and fierce competition in your work environment.

— If you keep thinking that, as a returnee, you are different from others, and place yourself on a platform high above others, you will soon find yourself isolated and lonely.

Discussions:

- (a) What kinds of struggle did this brother face? How did he resolve them?
- (b) What issues did he encounter after his return? What role did his faith play in them?
- (c) What experiences did he have that inspire you?
- (d) Do you have any suggestions for this brother?

XIV. Bible Study: Returnees from the Perspective of Bible Characters

§ 1. Moses: A Reluctant Returnee (Exodus 3:1- 4:17)

- (1) Before the story in this passage began, what are the two significant turning points Moses had already experienced in his life? Please ask a Christian to elaborate according to Exodus Chapter 2.
- (2) Before the day Moses went to Mount Horeb, what do you think was Moses' feeling regarding his 40 years' living as a foreigner in the desert (3:1)?
- (3) In what setting did God choose to reveal Himself to Moses (3:2)? In what setting did you encounter God's calling? What special meaning did these experiences have for you?
- (4) What is the significance to Moses when God called his name (3:4)? What does this verse reveal to you?
- (5) What is the meaning of God's command to Moses to take off his sandals in verse 3:5?
- (6) Why did God introduce Himself to Moses the way He did in 3:6?
- (7) What is the inspiration to us from God's saying in 3:7?
- (8) In verse 3:8 God says, "So I have come down to rescue them." And then in 3:10 God says on the other hand, "So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people... out of Egypt." What inspiration can you derive from these two verses?
- (9) What concerns did Moses raise (see 3:11, 13; 4:1, 10, 13)? What was the basic underlying problem? How did God answer Moses about his concerns?

Practical Applications

- (1) The martyr Stephen discussed the life history of Moses in Acts 7:17-45: As an abandoned infant he went into the palace of Egypt to learn and become a scholar; from an Egyptian prince he fell into a life of hardship as a shepherd in the desert; and from the burning bush event he accepted God's calling to become a great spiritual leader. In the life of Moses there were 3 different stages, each lasting 40 years. How does his life inspire you?
- (2) What tasks is God commanding you to do as a returnee? How do you feel about them?
- (3) Have there been certain points in time when you found it hard to trust in God? Why? What experiences have you had in overcoming these difficulties?

§ 2. Naomi: A bitter returnee with a happy ending (Ruth 1-4)

(1) Chapter 1

- A. Why did Elimelech's family leave their home country (v. 1)? Do you think it was a wise decision on the part of the head of the household?
- B. What happened to them in a foreign land? (vv. 2-5)
- C. What events caused Naomi to return to her home country (v. 6)? What is the significance of her decision to return home?
- D. What more practical options did Naomi present to her daughters-in-law before her return to Bethlehem (vv. 7-14)?
- E. Please discuss the meaning and significance of Ruth's decision. What are the different results brought about by the decisions of the two daughters-in-law (vv. 15-18)?
- F. What kind of reception did Naomi receive when she arrived home? What was her feeling at that time (vv. 19-21)?

(2) Chapter 2

- A. What is the nature of the first job that Ruth got as an alien in foreign land (v. 3)?
- B. In what ways was God watching over Naomi and Ruth's welfare (vv. 3-21)? Why did they receive such kind treatment?
- C. Do you believe that, after your return to your homeland, God will watch over your welfare in your living and your work? Why or why not?

(3) Chapter 3

- A. What did Naomi ask Ruth to do (vv. 1-5)? Why did Naomi do that? (For reference, see Lev. 25:47-49 and Ruth 4:3-5 on the tradition of land redemption by close relatives by marrying the widow of the deceased. See Deut. 27:20 and Ezekiel 16:8; 'cover with your garment' implies marriage proposal)
- B. After 10 years living abroad, Naomi still understood and re-entered into her home country's customs. How does this story touch your heart?
- C. Judged by how Boaz dealt with Ruth, what kind of person was he, in your opinion (vv. 9-15)?

(4) Chapter 4

- A. What can we learn from the way Boaz redeemed Naomi's land and married the widow Ruth? How can this be an example for us in today's world (vv. 1-13)?
- B. What blessings did Naomi and Ruth receive (vv. 12-17; also read Matt. 1:1, 5, 16)?
- C. From an overview of the entire book of Ruth, please summarize the reason for the happy ending of a bitter returnee (Naomi). (1:6, 16-17; 2:3, 11-12; 3:1-5, 6, 10, 11, 18; 4:14)

Practical Applications

- (1) While you are living abroad, how do you discern God's hand in your life (include times of both success and failure)?
- (2) What role do you think you will play after you return home (in society, the church or in your family)?
- (3) Of all the events that happened to Naomi, which particular one touched your heart the most? Let each person share on an event.
- (4) In what areas can you help the aliens who live in your city?

§ 3. Ezra, Nehemiah: Returnees called to Rebuild the Spiritual Life at Home (Ezra 7-10, Nehemiah 1-9)

When the second group of Israelites returned from their land of captivity (Persia), Ezra was a priest, the leader of spiritual revival. Nehemiah was the governor, the leader in administration.

(1) How did they become God's trusted servants?

- A. They placed high emphasis on the law of God. For Ezra had devoted himself to the _____ and _____ of the Law of the LORD, and to _____ its decree and laws in Israel (Ezra 7:10). Nehemiah did not just pay attention to rebuilding the city walls, but also _____ to all the people. (Nehemiah 8:1-3)
- B. Both Ezra and Nehemiah were men of prayer: They _____ their own and the people's sins (Ezra 9:6-7); knew the God of heaven who keeps His _____ of love (Nehemiah 1:5); based on God's promise to ask God for mercy and salvation (Nehemiah 1:8-11)
- C. They were men of faith. They trusted the hand of the Lord _____ (Ezra 7:28; Nehemiah 2:8); were not afraid of difficulties or the _____ (Nehemiah 4:1) and attack from the enemy. (Nehemiah 4:8), steadfastly accomplished their missions.
- D. They were planners before they took action. They readied the _____ for the temple (Ezra 8:30) and _____ for the holy city (Nehemiah 2:8); _____ the walls of Jerusalem. (Nehemiah 2:13-14). They reasonably asked every household to make repairs opposite to their _____ (Nehemiah 3:10), and mobilized everyone to participate in the work and be responsible for their tasks.
- E. They were very certain of the purpose and mission for their return: to rebuild the temple and the city, and also to rebuild society and people's spiritual lives.

(2) How did they lead the spiritual revival of the people?

- A. Dealing with sin: stop _____ with Gentiles (Ezra 10:10-12), to prevent _____; chastise the rich for _____ from the poor (Nehemiah 5:7-13); narrow the gap between the rich and the poor, and promote societal harmony.
- B. About 50 years before Ezra's return, the first group of Israelite returnees, led and encouraged by leaders such as Zerubbabel, Haggai and Zachariah, had rebuilt the _____ of the God (Ezra 3:1-2), the _____ of God, (Ezra 3:10-13, 6:14-16), offered _____ offering (Ezra 6:17), installed priests and the Levites (Ezra 6:18), and observed the _____ (Ezra 6:19). The spiritual lives of the people in worship, prayers and redemption were restored.
- C. Read and teach God's _____, so that the people _____ the law (Nehemiah 8:1-4, 8).
- D. Gathered the people together _____ and wore sackcloth and put dust on their heads (repentance), _____ their sins and the wickedness of their fathers; (Nehemiah 9:1-4); and _____ Jehovah (9:5), reviewed the history of their salvation (9:7-30). Told the people that our God is _____ and _____, is great, _____ and _____, keeps His covenant of _____ (9:31-32); led the people to _____ before God (9:38); taught the people to give _____ for the duties of the house of the Lord.(10:32-39).

Practical Applications

- (1) In today's Chinese society and church, what areas do you think have the greatest need for rebuilding?
- (2) What are the most desirable attributes of Ezra and Nehemiah you would like to learn from?

Note: Bible verses came from New International Version.

§ 4. The Prodigal Son: A Returnee with Homeward Timidity (Luke 15:11-31)

- (1) The prodigal son asked his father to give him his share of the estate before his father passed away (v. 12). Judging from this incident, what kind of person do you think he was?
- (2) What do you think was in his mind when he gathered together all he had and set off (v. 13)?
- (3) What is the reason he began to be in need in a distant country (vv. 13-14)?
- (4) From the fact that he longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything, what conclusion can you draw on the status of his life at that time (vv. 15-16)?
- (5) What caused him to come to his senses after all of his troubles (vv. 17-19)?
 - A. My father has many _____, and has _____ to spare (v. 17)
 - B. I will _____ and go back to my father; I will confess that I have sinned against my father, and against _____ (v. 18)
 - C. I am no longer worthy to be called your _____, make me like one of your _____ to make up for my wrongdoing (v. 19).
- (6) What was the father's attitude towards the prodigal son (vv. 20-24)?
 - A. While he was _____, his father saw him (v. 20); clearly he was watching out for his son from his doorstep.
 - B. He was filled with _____, _____ his neck, and _____ him (v. 20). These actions showed the true feeling of the father – kind and merciful.
 - C. He put on _____, wore a _____, put _____ on his feet, and killed a _____ (v. 23). All these showed that the father acknowledged that the prodigal son was a _____. This is total acceptance, forgiveness, and grace; not repayment of debts by man's _____ (v. 22).
 - D. (2) Angry; refused to share happiness with _____ (v. 28)
 - E. He considered himself a faithful servant without disobeying his father, living in a wealthy family, but was not _____ (v. 29).
 - F. He could not appreciate his father's feeling about the dead son becoming _____, being lost and then _____ (v. 31).
- (7) The return of a prodigal son; the repentance of a sinner; the recovery of a lost sheep; the discovery of a lost dollar; what is the common feeling shared by the returnee and the Heavenly Father? (vv. 7, 10, 32)

Practical Applications

- (1) Have you experienced something like the prodigal son, with a great rise and fall, going from self-confidence to humiliation, before and after your going abroad and returning? How did you get out of your desperate state?
- (2) In your faith journey, have you ever experienced spiritual drifting and returning? How do you ascertain that you have indeed returned to your Father's house? If you have not yet returned, what is the reason? Please lead the entire group to pray for him/her who is seeking to return to our Heavenly Father.

§ 5. Paul: A Returnee Called to Mission (Acts 22:3-21)

- (1) Paul was a Jewish man born abroad (Tarsus is located in the northeast corner of Mediterranean Sea, current Turkey, the capital of the Roman province Galatia). He was raised under the influence of Greek culture and language from birth. After he grew up he returned to his homeland to receive strict education in Jewish laws and tradition (v. 3). How would Paul's life goals be influenced by such education background in dual culture and languages? What is the similarity between Paul with such an educational background and today's Chinese returnees and their children?
- (2) What was the greatest turning point in Paul's life (vv. 6-11)?
- (3) What was the calling Paul received from God (vv. 14-21)?
 - A. God is the God of _____ and is everlasting and unchanging (v. 14).
 - B. Although you have rebelled against God and persecuted His children, yet God already _____ your name (v. 14).
 - C. The God of our fathers has chosen you to know _____, and to see the _____, and to hear God's _____ (v. 14).
 - D. You will be his _____ to all men of what you _____ and _____ (v. 15)
 - E. The prerequisite for serving God is to wash away your _____ (v. 16).
 - F. The most important ministry in your life is to evangelize _____ (v. 21).

Note: the church of Paul's time expanded from Jerusalem to the whole of Judea and the shores of the Mediterranean; the church also shifted in ethnicity from being Jewish to having a multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-regional international constituency.

Practical Applications

- (1) Many returnees and their children are like Paul, who possessed training and experience in two cultures. What do you think are the special callings God has towards Chinese returnees and their children?
- (2) Please meditate: before I serve God, is there sin in me that is not yet cleansed? Ask now for God's forgiveness and cleansing.

§ 6. Jesus Christ: the Returnee's Model (Phil. 2:5-11)

- (1) Please meditate on the mind and attitude of Jesus Christ (see Luke 2:49; Matt. 11:29, 20:34, 26:38)
- (2) Who is Jesus Christ, namely, what is His true identity (v. 6)? What are the attributes of this identity (see Rev. 4:8, 11).
- (3) What was He willing to go through? What kind of person was He willing to become (vv. 7, 8)?
- (4) In what areas can we imitate Christ's example of being willing to be a servant? For example: in the church, in society, at work, in the family, etc.
- (5) After humiliation came exaltation. What honor and authority came with Christ's exaltation? (vv. 9-11)?

Practical Applications

- (1) In what areas will you be tempted to be proud as a returnee?
- (2) In spite of your academic achievement and international experience abroad, how are the people back home better than you?
- (3) Jesus Christ, Who is God Himself, was willing to be humble. How does His example inspire you? What attitude should returnees have when dealing with people back home?

XV. References and Resources

1. Common websites used by most Chinese Christians

- (1) A collection of common web site addresses <http://www.is777.com/>
- (2) Bible Study Resources <http://www.ed2x.com/chajing/index.htm>, 2005 edition
- (3) Faith Q & A – Christian living <http://cclw.net/gospel/asking.html>
- (4) Christian Gospel Videotape Library <http://www.gtl.org/>
- (5) Chinese Christianity Network TV www.ccn-tv.org
- (6) Chinese Christians websites <http://www.god123.cn/>
- (7) Chinese Christians Blog Net www.ccblog.net
- (8) Home of Jonas <http://www.jonahome.net/>
- (9) Kingdom Net – general Christian Forum <http://forum.guodu.org>
- (10) Door to faith www.godoor.net
- (11) Chinese Scholars Training Center www.chinapeixun.org
- (12) Central Book Store www.centrihall.org
- (13) Internet Christian Mission <http://www.ccim.org>
- (14) Overseas Campus Magazines <http://www.oc.org>
- (15) Family Chinese web site <http://www.familychina.org/>

2. General Internet web site for Chinese Scholars Abroad

<http://chisa.edu.cn/chisa/column/index/index.xml>

3. Chinese Public Interest and Non-government organizations messages

NGO development and interaction <http://www.ngocn.org/>

Cotton Open Flower: <http://www.ngocn/?action-mygroup-gid-59>

4. Chinese government policies of interest to returnees

- Temporary policies on assisting returnees to short-term work at non-educational institutions
- Some rules from the City of Beijing for assisting returning scholars to found businesses
- Politburo proposal: it is getting easier to obtain a Chinese ‘green card’
- The city of Shanghai actively seeking returnees to work at Shanghai
- How does one calculate the seniority of self-paid overseas student returnees?
- What is the prevailing Chinese policy on studying abroad?
- How do returning overseas students apply for work in China?
- How does one make connections and apply for post-doctoral positions in China?
- Government certification of returnee resumes

For details, please read <http://goabroad.sohu.com/33/95/blank205239533.shtml>. 16 departments including Human Resources combined announcement: open up the green lane for overseas highly educated human resources to return home http://www.gov.cn/gzdt/2007-03/29/content_565529.htm

Notes and References

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2. "Returning Times" by Hui-Yao Wang; Central Publishing/Translation Co. 2005
Electronic Ed. http://book.sina.com.cn/nzt/fin/1101865811_haigui/index.shtml
3. Hui-Yao Wang's Blog <http://blog.sina.com.cn/u/46ebb5ba010002x4>
4. "Latest Overseas Students' Survey" and "Shen Zhou (China) Scholars" by Pi-Zhang Wang
5. <http://finance.sina.com.cn/focus/06oumeibjltlxk/index.shtml>
6. "Amazing Grace - Wilberforce and Clairborn Brothers" by Wen-Liang Zhang; Dun-Huang Publisher, 1st Ed., Dec. 2006; "New Lily Biographies". "One Less Slave, One more Brother—In memory of Wilferforce" and " ' Abolition of Slave Trade ' 199 Anniversary" by Yi Wang; The article is in "Olive Branch" Fall Ed. 2006 <http://www.tianya.cn/New/PublicForum/Content.asp?flag=1&idArticle=86066&strItem=books>
7. "Simple Essence of Life" Published by Campus Press (校園書房出版社)
8. <http://www.guodu.org/forumdisplay.php?fid=6&page=2>
9. "Church" magazine first edition: "Discussion on The Existing Styles of Chinese Churches" by Zhen Kao
10. Electronic Edition: <http://www.oc.org/web/modules/wfdo3wnloads/viewcat.php?cid=3>
11. Electronic Edition: <http://cclw.net/other/jhhdjcbjsj/>
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