

Singapore: Are the Young People Any Different

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Just recently, Skip Westra from our Faith congregation in Jenison had the opportunity to visit Singapore during the young people's retreat sponsored by the E.R.C.S. My article stems from thoughts generated by Skip's experiences and impressions from his visit. I wish to compare life for young people within our churches in the United States to that in Singapore. For the sake of brevity, I will refer to our young people in the U.S. as WE, US or OUR and those in Singapore as THEY, THEM or THEIR.

First of all, let's compare general background and living conditions. WE have been brought up under Reformed teachings by OUR parents. It is almost like not having a choice in whether WE wish to follow the ways of God's children. Of course, WE believe God chooses US for His people, but at times WE feel it is OUR parents who are forcing US to believe. Whereas THEY feel the power of the Holy Spirit drawing THEM to the church against the will of THEIR parents. We rejoice with Jesus in Luke 10:21 as He says, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." Living conditions also vary quite a bit. Even though most of US may not live as extravagantly as the rest of our neighbors due to large families, high tuition costs and church budgets, and various other related reasons, WE do live extremely well compared to the majority of the world population and do have quite a number of luxuries if WE really stop to think about it. Whereas THEY are not quite as tempted with available luxuries even though THEIR living conditions are quite adequate. OUR unnecessary luxuries may include cars, boats, eating out, expensive dates or entertainment, clothes, and other such items. WE may even tell OURselves those items are necessary for our well-being even at the expense of what goes into the collection plate. In Singapore, the average lifestyle in regards to luxuries is far below that of the average citizen in the United States; and therefore when comparing THEMselves to the "Jones" what they have to envy after is far less than what WE have the opportunity to envy after. In Singapore, education is very highly regarded in a country of its small size and few natural resources. Since homes in Singapore are rather small and there are limited public facilities, going out to eat is a popular activity as a means of getting together for business or pleasure. Possibly, THEY place too much emphasis on education or maybe even going out to eat, but giving never seems to be a problem when it comes to meeting church budgets. Let US and THEM remember, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." (I John 2:16).

What does the typical lifestyle of a young person consist of who ideally has only himself or herself to look after? It is said the years prior to marriage are the best years of one's life, or rather, can be. Those years can also be the most discouraging or uncertain years of one's life. What career will I pursue? Who will I marry, or will I marry? Who will I "hang around with" or do I have anyone to "hang around with"? What do I do tonight? What is everyone else doing tonight? Are WE going out on the town looking for cute or "cool" gals or guys—Christian or non-Christian—or are WE hanging out at the coffee shops or bar discussing the latest in sports or fashions or what is wrong with everybody else? Maybe WE are making sure WE attend OUR Young People's Society so that WE can discuss what it means to live the life of a Christian or how to deal with life's difficulties and temptations. In Singapore, THEIR desire is to fellowship

with the “brothers and sisters” in the church. Being at home with THEIR mothers and fathers brings them persecution and sorrow. THEY love their earthly family and earnestly desire their salvation, but “what concord hath Christ with Belial?” Transportation and leaving the house to fellowship with believers can be a problem, but they cherish the weekly “Youth Fellowship.” “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” (II Cor. 6). And what does THEIR conversation consist of when THEY meet together? THEIR discussions generally center around Scripture, the church, THEIR parents or school. If the need arises to search Scripture, THEY have THEIR Bibles which THEY always carry with THEM—THEIR own personal Bibles with notes and highlights from past studies. THEY have a deep concern about the future of the church, due to pressure placed upon THEM by government restrictions and THEIR unbelieving parents.

How much time is spent in prayer and daily devotions? Do WE always have daily devotions? Often devotions are the last thing WE do before going to bed, when OUR senses are dull and WE are in a hurry to finish before OUR eyes fall shut. THEY devoted forty-five minutes per day to daily devotions at the retreat on top of the joint Bible studies. THEY also look forward to the participatory Wednesday night prayer meetings that last one and one-half to two hours.

So what was the retreat like? A lot of Bible study! About 30% social activity and 70% Bible study! How well attended would OUR convention be if WE spent that much time for Bible study instead of “fun” things? Well, THEY loved it! THEIR chief reason for being there was to learn more about the Bible, not to find a mate or “have a blast.” It is really sad what WE “need” to do to get young people out for fellowship! Several years back, Reverend Mahtani planned an outing to Tahquamenon Falls with a group of OUR young people. There was a sizable group that was excited about going, until they found out it consisted of a good deal of Bible study—the group dwindled to three!

“Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen.” (II Peter 3:17-18).

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