

Aliens and Strangers : Life after graduation.



A survival guide
for
international students.
By Ken Lim

Contents.

Returnees survival guide.

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Introduction : The Overseas Experience.

The experience of being an international student can be either a happy one or a sad one. For some of us, coming overseas to study exposes us to new cultures and new peoples. We also find independence from our parents and learn to take responsibility for our own lives. This is a rewarding experience for many. For others of us, coming overseas to study may have the opposite effect, we experience loneliness and homesickness sometimes even failure and isolation. Whatever the experience, we are all effected and changed in some way.

University is already a challenging place on it's own. We have deadlines to meet and exams to worry about but as international students there are added problems for us. There are problems with understanding the language, eating new foods, learning how to get around, making friends, banking and finding accommodation. Language is a major problem if English is not our first language because it effects everything else in life. For most international students, reading and writing do not pose a problem, it is mostly listening and speaking that is difficult. It effects the way we make friends, how we socialize and how we enjoy ourselves, it effects our performance in our studies and our ability to find part time work. Not being proficient in English can be very isolating. On top of that, there are other problems, the local culture can seem very strange to us and we may misunderstand some of the ways Aussies communicate. For example, Aussie sarcasm is hard for us to pick up or we cannot understand why Aussies like to tease people they like, it is strange but they just do. The worst kinds of experiences are those involving racism and discrimination. Although Australia claims to be a multicultural society and tolerant not everybody is warm or friendly towards foreigners.

Nevertheless, most international students enjoy their time in Australia and many of you will unconsciously adopt local values and culture just by staying in the country. It doesn't take long for this to happen. The more we get used to things in this country, the more we are changing inside. Sometimes we don't even realize this.



Take for example queuing up to get on the bus. In some countries people don't queue up for the bus, when the bus arrives at the bus stop everybody gets on as quickly as you can. There is a lot of pushing and shoving. But in Australia, people queue up. At first, we might find it a bit strange but after a while we learn to do what the locals do so we queue up. After a few months we get used to the new system and we just do what everybody else does. The problem occurs when we go home to our own countries, and we find people rushing up to the bus. Suddenly the thing that we once found so normal now feels very weird to us. We miss the orderly ways of Australia. Why do we feel this way? It's because we have gotten used to the way people live in Australia.

The example above is one of the many little changes taking place in us as we adapt to the foreign place in which we have come to study. We don't notice these changes until we finish our study and go home.

The purpose of this guide.

The purpose of this guide is not about how to cope with life as an international student in Australia. The main purpose of this guide is to help Christians think about how to use your precious time at university to grow and mature as disciples of Christ in a way that prepares you for your life beyond university. It does this by tackling issues relevant to international students. These issues include matters like honoring and obeying parents, work and career choices, church and worship, migration and returning home and so on. Why these issues in particular? When we come overseas to study, we experience a different way of life, the different values which we pick up overseas cause many conflicts with our former family and cultural values. It is important for us as Christians to distinguish between what is western and what is Christian because they are NOT the same thing. These issues are often stumbling blocks for Christian international students and cause many to give up their faith. We want to tackle these issues to help you prepare for situations which will test your walk with Christ. The more prepared we are the less likely we will fall away.

How to use this guide.

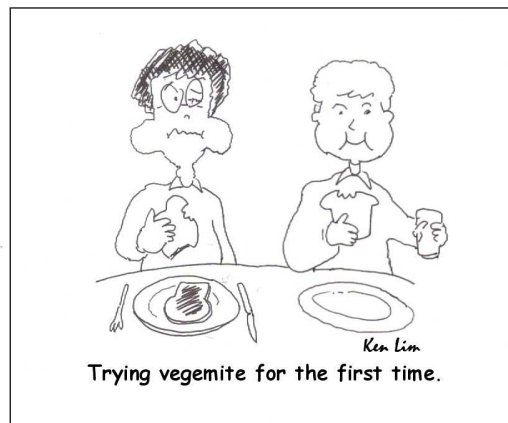
This guide is not intended to be an extensive Bible study but rather written to help raise issues related to returning home and facilitate discussion.

Here are some suggestions on how to use this guide:

1. Read it with another fellow student or staff worker and discuss the various topics.
2. Use it in group discussions.
3. Go through each topics systematically or choose the topics that are only relevant.

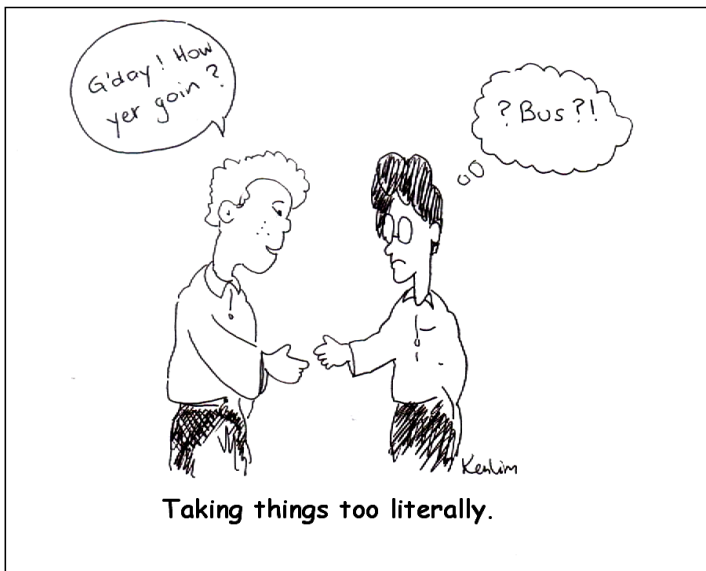
Here is a true story of three international students. Siun and Kew were from Malaysia and William was from Hong Kong. When they first started university they were all non Christians. Kew and William were agnostics and Siun was an atheist. They were good mates and they shared a flat together. In their second year of university, all three of them were introduced to Jesus by Christian friends. They were confronted by the challenging message of the Gospel and were deeply moved by the kindness of their Christian friends. Over a period of time and after some serious investigation all three friends surrendered their lives to Jesus. In fact, they were also baptized in the same year to publicly bear witness to the changes in their lives. From that time on, University was a joyful and active time for the three friends. They got involve in church and student ministry. They believed that their conversions were sincere and genuine. About 20 years after graduation, Siun (who remained a Christian) was able to meet his friends again but to his great disappointment, Kew and William had given up their faith. Kew called himself a Buddhist and William was once again an agnostic. What happened? Only one out of the three friends from university remained a Christian. What caused the other two friends to give up their faith?

Why do people give up their faith? It is a sad reality that people do give up their faith, it is even sadder to know that it is preventable. By God's grace and by being aware of the dangers and being ready to tackle them will hopefully prevent us from falling away.



- For Discussion.
- What things do you like and don't like about Australia? Can you
- identify the things that have changed in you?

Reverse Culture Shock 1.



The thought of graduating and returning to our home countries may worry some of us. Staying in Australia has changed us and we are not really sure if we are ready to move back to our home country and begin a new stage of life there. What is in store for us ? Will we be able to settle back into life at home? Will I ever get used to it? We have so many questions but few friends to help us deal with those questions. This next section raises some of the issues you will as a Christian graduate returning to their home country.

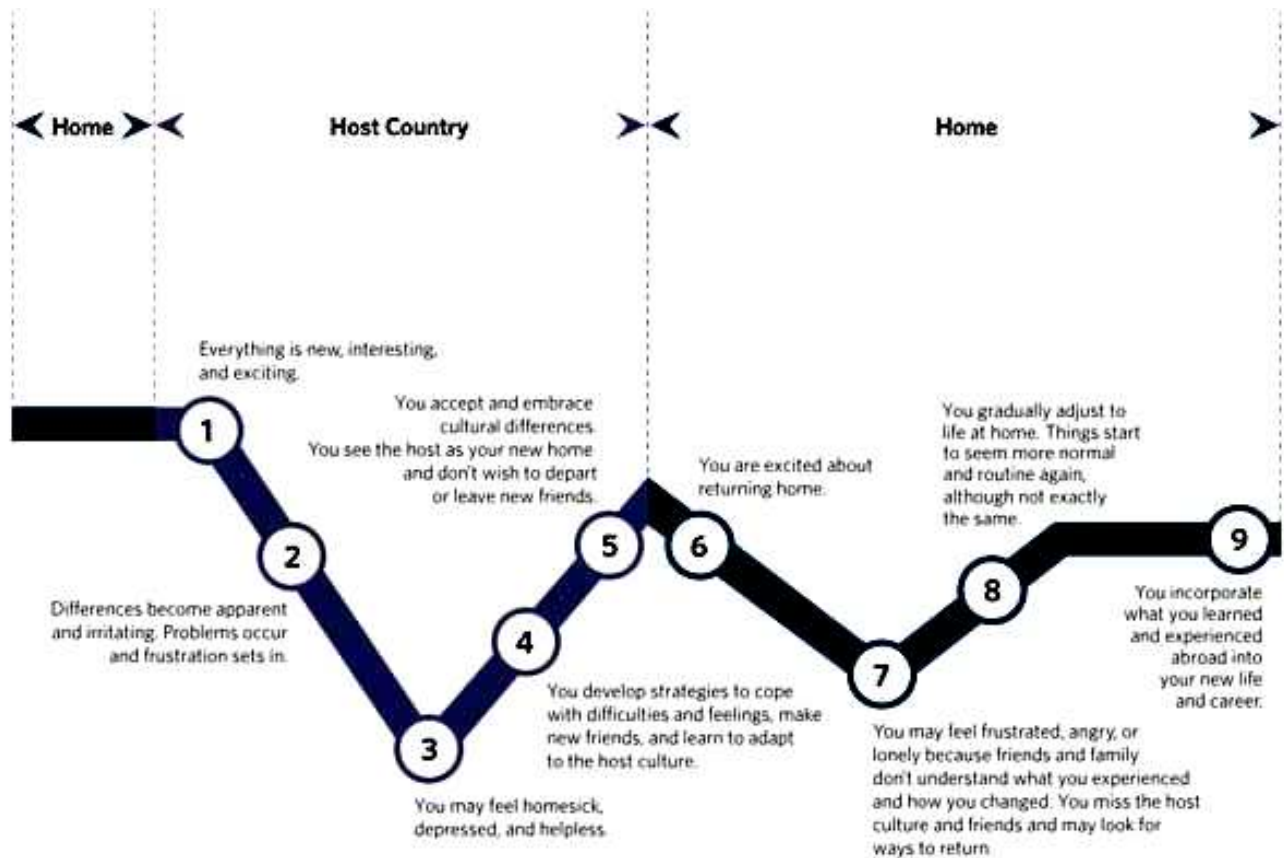
Reverse Culture Shock.

As international graduates, we will experience a “reverse culture shock” when we first return to our home country. When we first arrive in Australia we experience a culture shock because things are so different here. As we slowly adjust to our new environment, we are also slowly being changed internally. We are exposed to new cultures, new ways of behavior, speech, attitudes and thinking. Our perception of life is changed simply by being overseas. It’s only when we return home that we realize how much we have changed. We have to readjust to life at home. For example, moving back to live with our parents, using our mother tongue again, living under our country’s laws and following our customs and so on. We return to life before we went overseas to study but we are no longer the same person. All this takes time for us to adjust, we shouldn’t assume that it will be an easy thing to do. Give ourselves plenty of time to adjust and having a good attitude also helps.

Many studies have been made about the experience of the international student when they go overseas to study and return home. These researches have found that international students experience life like a “w” curve.

It is almost like a roller coaster ride of emotions. The following diagram shows what this is like.

The basic thing about this diagram is that any change will cause some sort of adjustment. The more changes we make the longer it takes for us to adjust. The best way to help us cope with change is either to limit the number of changes we make at any one time or give ourselves plenty of time to adjust.



For discussion.

Can you identify all the changes that will be taking place in your life when you graduate? Make a list.

The
Parable
Of
The
Soils

2.



Bad soils, Good soil.

In the Gospels (e.g. mark 4:14-20), Jesus uses a story about a farmer who scatters seed on soil to describe the different ways people respond to the Gospel. You can check out the story in Mark's Gospel Chapter 4. In this story, Jesus explains that only one of four types of people respond positively to the Gospel and produces abundant growth.

*14 The farmer sows the word. 15 Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. 16 Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. 17 But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. 18 Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; 19 but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. 20 Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop--thirty, sixty or even a hundred times what was sown." **Mark 4:14-20***

How is this story relevant for international students and for our life after graduation? Well it describes four different responses to the Gospel and each one of us will fall into one of those four categories. Which one will you be?

As you read the issues that follow, think of the situations you will face and examine your values and priorities and how they affect your decision and choices. This guide can be used with your mentor who can also help you think through this issues. You can be as selective as you like about which issues to cover. The guide book is organized so that you can choose the issues that are relevant.

Family And Parents **3.**



Parental Control.

Many international students come from families whose culture values strict obedience to parents. This obedience is expected even when we are adults. For some of us, major decisions in life must have our parent's approval otherwise we will be in trouble. Furthermore our culture may look down on disobedient children because it brings shame to our parents. Sometimes changing religions and becoming Christian or being involved with church or a Christian club on campus is strictly prohibited by our parents. Changing religion is frowned upon because it will break family traditions. This causes conflict with our family so we choose the easier path and just say no to the Gospel.

For Discussion.

How much freedom does your parents give you to make your own decisions?

Non Christian family opposing your new faith in Jesus

The most common opposition for international students is opposition from their families. Many students come from Non Christian families. Many families do not wish their children to become Christians because it breaks with their family traditions. For others, the matter is more serious like those who practice ancestral worship. For them, it is a matter of family loyalty, love and filial piety. Caring for their parents in the after life is of vital importance, and if their children become Christians then who would care for them? It's an entire belief system that is different, no wonder there is so much hostility towards children who become Christians because these children no longer appear to care for their parents when they pass on to the after life. It is understood as a betrayal it feels like their love is being shunned by their now ungrateful children.

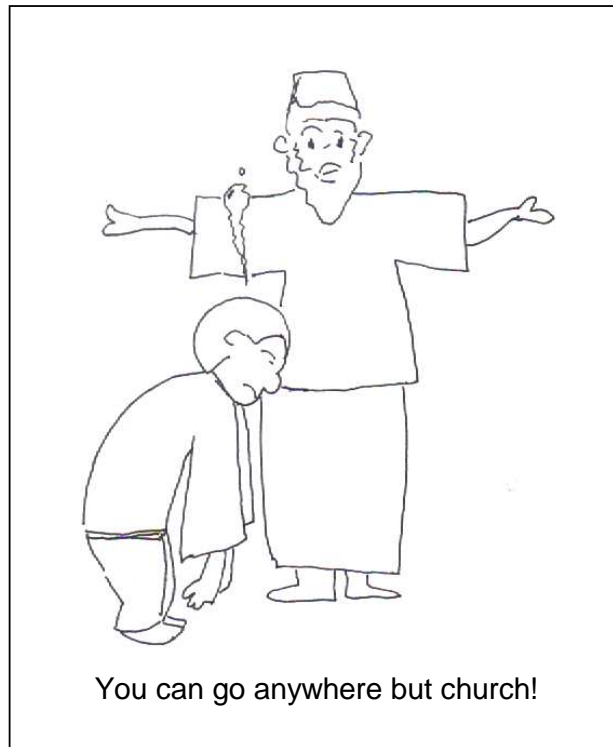
There are many other reasons why families do not like their sons or daughters becoming Christian. Whatever the reasons, many Christian students know deep in their hearts how painful this can be. Being wrongly misunderstood can make their own love for their parents even more painful. If we are not ready for such opposition then it is not surprising that some of us will give up the faith.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Counting the cost of discipleship is important for every Christian student. It's the first step towards facing hardship and lasting the distance. Being ready to make a stand for the truth and knowing how to respond appropriately when conflict occurs is very useful when it actually happens. The important thing when dealing with family conflicts is always remember how Christ dealt with opposition. Stand firm but be patient and gracious, always love your family. Do not give up praying for your family's salvation.

Here is another true story. Min's parents and family were strong Buddhists. Her father in particular did not like Christians. During her school days in Malaysia Min became a Christian. Her family found out and her father was very angry but he could not make Min give up her faith. So he banned her from going to church. Min obeyed her father but she also used the opportunity during school time to join the Christian Fellowship. There she made friends with Christians. Later, Min was able to go to the UK for her studies. Suddenly Min has gained independence from her parents and she used that opportunity to go to church and be active in ministry. There she grew and matured greatly as a disciple of Christ. The years studying overseas helped Min grow tremendously as a Christian. She took full advantage of the opportunity presented before her. When Min graduated she returned home to live with her very strict parents. They were not happy with her involvement with church and tried to stop her again. But Min quietly and in a godly way "defied" her parents wishes. Without being rude or disrespectful she disobeyed her parents and went to church faithfully and starting serving the church. Min always showed love to her parents, always obeyed them when it did not contradict her faith and always stood firm regarding her faith. Life as a Christian was not easy but Min had counted her cost and realized that it wasn't worth giving Jesus up for her parents because she loved them both. Now Min lives happily with her husband and children knowing that even though her parents do not like her being Christian they at least respect her and the choices she has made in her life.

In the Gospels, Jesus says that if anyone wants to follow Him, they must give up everything including their family. This seems like a very difficult thing to do. But many of us who have made this decision to follow Jesus also know that when we follow Jesus and make him the Lord of our lives, the love for our parents grows even more. This is the weird paradox of being a Christian, we will love our parents more by making Jesus first in our lives than if we made our parents first in our lives. Isn't it ironic that in order to love our parents more, we have to give them up for Jesus. But it makes perfect sense doesn't it? By making Jesus first in our lives we are following God who is perfect in love and who enables us to love sacrificially which is why we will love our parents more than if we made them first in our lives. Our parents love for us may be very great but it is not perfect like Jesus' love for us. It will be deficient in many ways.

So, whatever opposition you may potentially face from your parents, it is not worth giving Jesus up. Take the precious time you have during university to grow and mature in your faith. Count the cost of discipleship and be ready for the time when opposition comes your way.



For Discussion.

Do you have to obey your parents all your life? What is the difference between honoring and obeying parents? Is it possible to honor your parents without having to obey them in everything especially with regards to your own faith? (See also Genesis 2:22-25, Exodus 20:12; 21:17)

Read 2 Timothy 3:10-16

What is the warning that Paul gives Timothy?

How is Timothy encouraged to stand firm?

A good question to ask yourself in situations is "how can I honor my parents without Disobeying Jesus?"

Family expectations.

As International students your parents may have certain expectations on you. This could come in many forms for example, obligations to care for your parents when they grow old, to be successful in life, who you marry or to start a family of your own. How much expectation is placed on us varies from family to family and sometimes these expectations clash with our Christian beliefs. Sometimes we want to please our parents and want to make them feel proud and so we worry if we did enough or performed well enough to make them happy. This is another kind of danger which will choke out faith. In our desire to please our parents, we may be tempted to compromise our beliefs. This happens bit by bit and after a long time we find that we are no longer Christian. When we were studying overseas we enjoyed the new found freedom but we are shocked when we return home because the freedom is gone. We are back to living under our parents watchful eyes.

There is a helpful way to deal with family expectations. As students studying overseas we should start working on three things, Independence, Responsibility and Respect. For many of us, gaining independence from our parents is hard. There are many reasons, firstly we are financially dependant on them – they pay for our studies. Secondly our cultures are not like western cultures which make children independent when they turn 18. We still required to obey our parents into adulthood. While this may be true, it is important to start getting your independence – to be responsible adults who can take care of your own needs and more importantly to start caring for others. This is a sign of maturity. Taking small steps to earn your independence is easier than taking one giant step. The giant step is usually misunderstood by parents as rebellion and causes a lot of unnecessary misunderstandings. There will be a day when that big step is required but do the ground work before that. By taking small steps (this could range from finding part time work to pay for your own expenses, to being responsible for your own decisions etc) you slowly gain the confidence and respect of your parents. The purpose of gaining independence is not to be rebellious or irresponsible but to be responsible adult who has earned the respect of our parents. However, there will always be a time when a major disagreement will occur and we will have to stand for our own beliefs. It's all part of responsible adulthood.

Peter's whole family were ancestor worshippers. He knew that as a Christian it is wrong to pray to his ancestors. He also knew that his parents expected him to carry on the tradition of worshipping his ancestors because he was the eldest son in the family. There is going to be conflict when he returns home but he doesn't know what to do. So he asks for help from Christian friends who had similar experiences. They helpfully advice him to be prepared to stand firm but also to be prepared ahead of time by thinking of things that he can do to outwardly which shows his respect and love for his family (and ancestors) without actually worshipping them. Christians should not participate in these rituals but that doesn't mean they should not do anything as well because inactivity is often misunderstood by family members as defiance. There are many other practical ways to show love and honor the ancestors, Peter had to work out which ones were helpful for his family.



For Discussion.

What kind of family expectations or obligations do you have to keep? Do any of these obligations or expectations cause conflict with your Christian faith?

Life Partner 4.

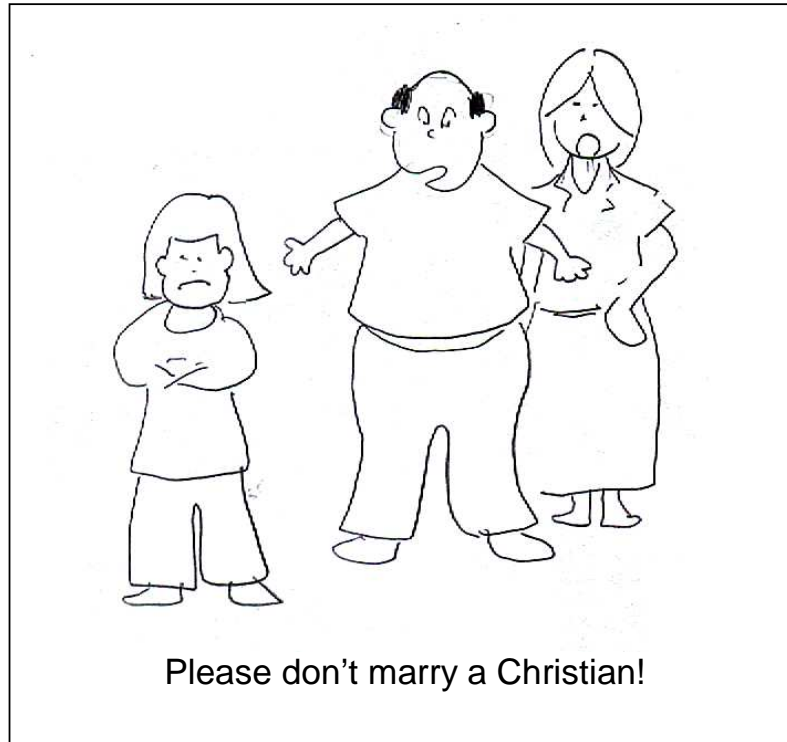


Life partner

This is another danger zone for believers. It is a problem for many international students sometimes caused by family expectations. On top of that, our own expectations also add to the tension. A tension exists between what our hearts desire and what God's will is for us. We know that God wishes us to find a believing partner but we are not willing to wait or listen or trust God. The desire to get a life partner is so strong that it causes many Christians to find non believing partners. Or we see someone we like and we fall head over heels for this person that we stop thinking clearly. This is very sad because it often results in the person giving up their faith. We fool ourselves into thinking that we can convert the person. Sure there are times when unbelieving spouses are converted to Christianity but these are rare exceptions they are not the rule. In most cases believers are converted out of Christianity. In certain situations, it may even be better to remain single than to marry a non believer.

In choosing to marry believers, we are not saying that Christians are superior to unbelievers. We choose not to date a non believer because we want to please God and because we trust in His ways. We want to be obedient to God. So if you have a choice, choose a believing partner.

In some cultures we do not have a choice of partners. Our parents make that decision for us. What happens if our parents make us marry an unbeliever ? Should we disobey or obey our parents? This is a more difficult problem and the way we handle the problem depends on the situation. If this happens to you, then try to make every effort to reason with your family. Help them understand why you can't marry the person they have chosen for you. Of course you have to realise the great embarrassment and cost this may cause your family. Talk with your family about your faith and explain why it is important for you to marry a believer, initiate this conversation as early as possible. This requires that you let your parents know that you have become a Christian.



For Discussion.

What kind of expectations do you have on marriage and a life partner? How important that the person is a believer?

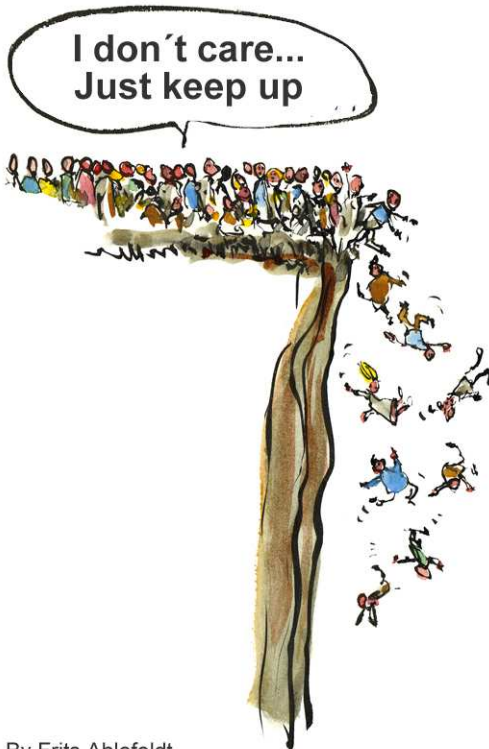
What potential problems do you foresee this will bring for your family?

What can you do to solve these problems?

Read 1 Corinthians 7. What principles lie behind Christian marriage and singleness?

Career,
Lifestyle
And
money

5.

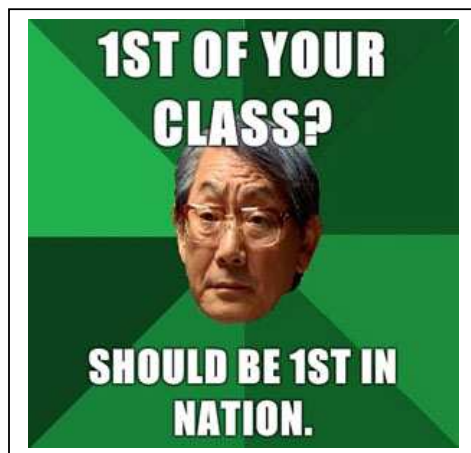


By Frits Ahlefeldt

Studies are too important.

We all acknowledge that our studies are important. Not only that, it is also expensive to study overseas and it costs our parents heaps of money. We would feel bad if we did not perform well because so much money has been invested in us. That is true, but for some of us studies are so important that they are the only thing that matters. Nothing else matters, we have very high expectations to meet, some of which could be our own expectations or some could be our family's expectations. Those expectations are so high that everything else fades into irrelevance. We have little time for anything else. Our time in University is primarily for us to do well in our studies. When our Christian friends speak to us about God and Jesus or invite us along to fellowship or church our immediate response is to say "no thank you" because we don't have the time or we are just not interested.

This is a great pity because we fail to recognize that life consists more than just our studies. As university students we need to learn to juggle different responsibilities in life. Our study is one of many responsibilities that we have. Sometimes our parents make us feel that doing well in our studies is our only responsibility as students but that not setting up the right kind of expectations for life after university.



For Discussion.
How important are your studies? How much time do you spend on it?

The busy demands of life.

There is a danger which everyone faces, life in the 21st century is fast and very demanding. There will be pressures and expectations coming from work, family and society and the university graduate will have many expectations to fulfil. If people cannot manage these demands then life for them will be hectic and busy. They will be reacting to things rather than being able to manage them properly. The easiest thing to drop out of their lives will be their faith, they will be too busy to attend church or keep their relationship with God. Part of the solution to this problem begins at University. As students we need to learn to manage all our responsibilities, learn to prioritise things in our lives, learning to choose things wisely and learn to accept our limitations and say no to things that are too much for us to handle. We also need to build good habits and learn to organise ourselves, learn to fulfil our commitments and promises. University is not just a place to get a degree but a place to prepare us to become responsible adults. We find this really hard. We are given so many choices and we want to take them all but the reality is that we can't handle all of them so we start dropping them when it gets too much for us. Learn to make good choices, know your own limitations, learn to manage different responsibilities and commitments, follow through in what we say 'yes' to and learn to say 'no' to things which you know you can't follow through.

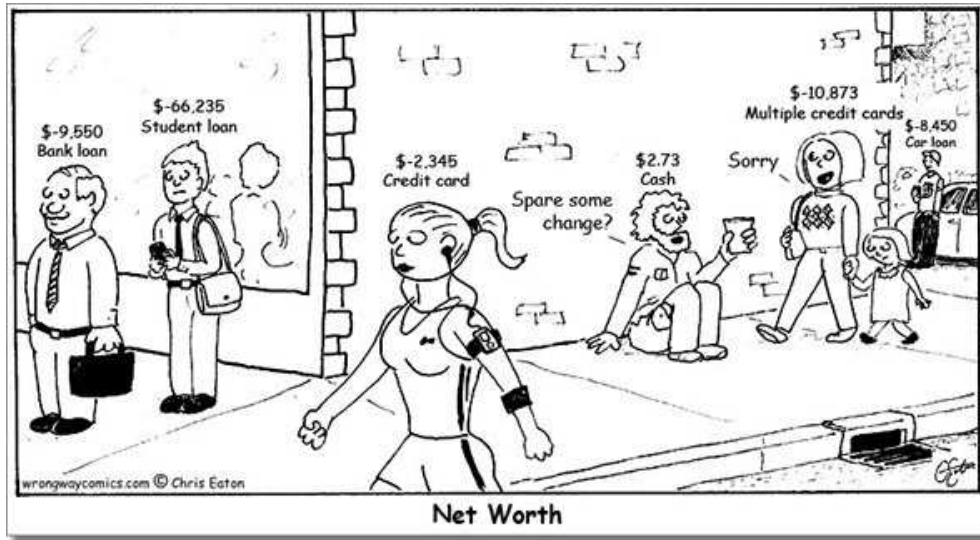
Nina studied medicine in Australia. She became a Christian at university and as a student was incredibly active in church and student ministry. Despite a very busy study schedule, Nina still found time to be involved in many activities. Her studies were important but she did not let it rule her life as a student. Now Nina works as a doctor in Malaysia which means many long hours and no day off during the week. Even though it is a struggle, Nina still makes herself attend church and fellowship knowing that it is important for her walk with Jesus and ongoing discipleship.

It is easy to underestimate the demands of 21st century lifestyle. It would be foolish to be under prepared for life after graduation and think we will be safe from all its pressures. A good way to start is by learning to manage your life and form good habits while studying in university.

Lifestyle Expectations

Lifestyle choice is one of the biggest killer for Christians. It is silent and subtle and it sneaks up on us when we are least aware of it. Having an overseas university degree now no longer puts us on the top of society because everybody has one. The competition is tough and everybody wants to be better than the other person. The greatest trap for a new graduate is credit cards. It makes funds available for a lifestyle which we cannot afford. It puts us into immediate debt and we will spend the rest of our lives paying it off. The Banks know this very well and target this group of people because they are young and they have a high earning capacity. Be careful of this trap. It can easily choke out our faith. Learn to live within our means, plan a budget and allow for things like savings and responsible spending and be generous in giving to others and supporting God's work (e.g. church, missionary organizations or AFES etc) – budgeting allows us to be realistic with our money and also helps us to be in control of our spending. Learn to budget your finances while you are at uni – you may feel that you don't have much or that the money is not yours – but isn't that more reason to budget than not to budget your spending? Budgeting becomes necessary when you start working full time.

Here is another true story but the details have been slightly changed. Kevin was a young graduate from Queensland, Australia. Upon returning home to Malaysia from his studies, Kevin discovered that jobs were not easy to find. Kevin got a credit card as a way to get easy money. After a number of large purchases like a car and other luxury items Kevin soon found himself deep in debt. His credit card has been maxed out and he still doesn't have a job. Thankfully, Kevin eventually found a job but it wasn't enough to pay off his debts and he needed to find a second job just to keep up with interest payments. Kevin was always stressed and under pressure because he couldn't meet his repayments. Kevin wanted to be in ministry but felt hampered because of the foolish lifestyle choices he had made.



For Discussion.

What does it mean to be contented and why is it important? See 1 Timothy 6:6-10. What does it mean for you to live within your means? Do know how to prepare a budget and how to follow it?

Church 6.



Looking for a Church.

Looking for a new church as a returnee can be a tricky exercise. It is important to remember that every church is different and we will always need time to adjust to new relationships and new styles of worship etc. It also requires effort and commitment to settle into a new church. It takes initiative to build new relationships, commitment to keep attending services and effort to get involved in activities.

So, what should we be looking for in a church? Please remember that there is no perfect church. Wherever possible look for a church which build all 3 aspects of maturity i.e. Good teaching, love and service. The sad reality is that it will be hard to find a church like that. Practical suggestions will include things like looking for churches that are closest to where you live, churches which believe in the authority of scripture, teaches the scriptures well, or where members don't only follow rules or traditions but who genuinely love the Lord (i.e. Understand the grace of God and live it), members who have hearts to serve the community. You will most likely not experience church the same way you have experienced church in Australia, (i.e. like the style of music, formal or informal worship, contemporary or traditional services, hierarchical or flat church structure, whether Bible groups are open bible discussions or not, small or big congregation). Don't let these things put us off. Ultimately, it's people's hearts and attitudes that matter and it requires time and patience to get to know people and to know people.

The best way to prepare yourself for this is to visit some churches when you go home for holidays. Learn about the church as much as possible. Do this while you are still studying overseas.

Another Story – When Ting studied in Sydney, she joined a university church which was very different to her home church in Malaysia. The university church consisted mainly of university students, met in a university lecture hall and had very little in terms of ceremony or rituals. The main activity at university church was the sermon which usually lasted for about 50 minutes. Ting loved going to university church because she grew immensely in her understanding and love for the Lord during those few years. Upon returning to Malaysia Ting felt that she couldn't return to her home church because it was too far to be practical. So Ting decided to go to a

friend's church nearer to where she lived. The new church was very different to what she had grown to love at university. It was very traditional, people sang a lot of old hymns, had communion every week, had shorter and simpler sermons and other things which needed getting used to. But the church was faithful to the Bible and believed in it's authority. Although it took a bit of time getting to know people, Ting found the members warm and friendly. So Ting did not let the different things deter her from persisting with that church. It took Ting a long time to settle in that church but with persistence she eventually got used to things and began serving the people there.

For Discussion.

Did you have a home church before coming to Australia to study? If not, have you visited any churches in your home country? Do you know which churches you can join when you return home after your studies?

What plans are you making to know the churches in your home country?

Ministry 7.



Service and Ministry.

As Christians we love to serve others, it is a natural outflow of receiving Christ's salvation for us. But where and how should we serve? What does service look like? The primary place to serve God is at church and we can be involved in many ways. When we join a new church we may spend the first few months settling into things. We may not want to immediately rush into serving the church. When we give ourselves time to settle in a new church, we do it with a view to serve the church in the long term. We may begin in small ways and then later progress to more important responsibilities. Serving your new church has a side benefit of helping us settle in more quickly.

However, Church is not the only place we can serve God. You may also like to consider serving outside your church like missionary organizations or Christian organizations. These are specialized ministries which often rely on lay people to work for them. You can be a volunteer worker or a committee member etc. There are many ways a person can contribute to these ministries. These are also well worth looking into.

When Siun graduated from university, he returned to his home country to work as a computer programmer. Life as a programmer meant lots of long hours and lots of travel. Siun did not let this deter him from getting involved in his new church. Even though there were many late nights at work, he joined a home fellowship group and regularly attended church. Siun's friend who was a staff worker at a Christian Organization which ministered to high school students also asked Siun to join the organization as a board member. This added extra commitment to his already busy life because it involved monthly board meetings and occasional interstate trips. But Siun loved to meet the students so he joined the organization as a board member. Somehow Siun managed to juggle work, church and the organization without feeling completely swamped by the load, in fact he enjoyed it immensely. A key factor that allowed Siun to do this was his attitude towards work. Siun loved and enjoyed his work very much but he did not allow it to overtake his entire life.

Others of us may be thinking about full time ministry. Perhaps you have been challenged by God to consider giving up your career and serve God. It is good and right to be thinking of these things. Consult wise and able leaders in your church or even your mentors about this. Find wise counsel from people who are already in ministry. Find out what is involved and if you are really serious then make some plans towards a goal. The best way to prepare yourself for full time service is asking yourself how you are serving now in church or elsewhere. It is pointless to think about full time ministry if you are not involved in church or any ministries.

For Discussion.

How will you be involved in other ministries apart from church? Have you ever considered ministry as a fulltime paid job? Is there someone who is encouraging you to think about ministry?

Migration. 8.



Thinking about migration.

As international students studying in Australia, two things will happen to you, firstly your visa will expire and secondly (and hopefully) you will complete your degree before your visa expires. In other words you will finish your course and graduate. That means you have to think about going home sometime. With immigration policies changing all the time, international students may or may not have the option to apply for permanent residency in Australia when you finish your studies. Depending on what options you have you may decide to stay or to return home. If you have no option to stay on then the decision is simple just go home but it becomes more complicated when you have the option to stay.

Many Christian students base their decision to go home or stay on factors like career opportunities and lifestyle. And depending which is better then they will decide to go home or to stay back in Australia. Ultimately the decision is based on practical and worldly reasons. This is rather sad because too many Christians fall into this group. It is better to make our decisions based on Kingdom values because Jesus calls us to put first the Kingdom God. Very often these kingdom values make us choose the harder options because it is better for God's kingdom. Some of these decisions can be costly, for example instead of choosing to apply for a PR which is an option available to us, many of us should decide to return to our home countries because it is better for Gospel work in God's Kingdom. That decision may cause conflict with our families or even disadvantage our careers. That is a small price many of us should be willing to pay to share the wonderful news of Jesus to others. Each person should decide for themselves what they should be doing with regard to migration. We should not assume that PR is the normal path just because the option is available to us, we should carefully consider whether returning home might be a better option. Think in Kingdom values not worldly values.

For Discussion.

Do you have the option to migrate after your studies? Which is better for the Kingdom of God, if you applied to PR or if you returned home to your country?

If you do choose to migrate, how will you serve God in Australia?

Appendix.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?

It is a good idea to clarify what it means to be a Christian and not assume what it is. Not everybody mean the same thing when they say the word “Christian”. It is good for those of us who grew up in Christian families because we need to understand it from the Bible’s point of view not just assume we know what it means. For the rest of us who grew up as non believers – there are many profound changes taking place in our lives when we gave up our lives to Jesus. It is important to understand what these changes are because having the right understanding helps us stay Christian for the long term (Of course God has a big part in keeping us Christian as well). So what is a Christian? Why did we surrender our lives to Jesus. Ephesians 2:8-10 describes a Christian perfectly.

Ephesians 2:8 (NIV)

“ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

The key ideas in this passage are the words ‘grace’ and ‘saved’. The word ‘saved’ refers to the fact that all of humanity is under God’s judgment and needed saving. We have failed to love God with all our hearts, mind, soul and strength and we have also failed to love our neighbors. This failure constitutes rebellion (doesn’t matter if it is done consciously or unconsciously). Our natural instinct is self centeredness. This is the root of all our troubles and it is right for God to be angry. Self centeredness destroys everything. Look in our own hearts and we know this to be true.

God’s anger is very real and we rightfully deserve it. Anger is the right response to self centeredness. In any relationship, it is right for us to feel angry when someone acts selfishly. Imagine how God feels about us but amazingly God patiently holds back judgment in order to forgive us. He sends His own son Jesus to die for us. It is a free gift from God and is an amazing act of love. Why? Because He did it even when we rejected Him. This truly sets the Christian God apart from all other religious teachings. He is a God who initiates forgiveness and paid the high cost of

forgiveness himself. God's relationship between Father and Son suffered in order to fix our relationship with Him. What an amazing God we have !! Our God does not live in His ivory tower but broke into our space and time to suffer on our behalf. Why? Because it was the only way to save us from His own anger. It is a gift which we cannot earn but something which we receive in humility and joy and thanks giving. That is why the passage speaks of God's forgiveness as a gift. We cannot boast about it. It requires from us an admission of our guilt, humility to understand our own helplessness and desperation to call on God for help. This is so important especially when life as a Christian becomes difficult, when we face persecution or even temptations or even when life generally is hard, it is good to know that our forgiveness is not based on our performance but on God's grace. This helps us to come back to Him time and time again when we are low or feel down.

When we entrust ourselves to him and accept his forgiveness a number of important changes take place in our lives. Whether we grew up in a Christian family or not, this applies to all who call upon the name of Jesus Christ.

1. We no longer live self centered lives. Our priorities have changed. Our lives now belong to Jesus Christ and lived for God.
2. We are always relying on Jesus death and resurrection to save us.
3. Our lives are used by God to serve others and look forward to the eternal Kingdom when Jesus returns.
4. Our good works are the result of our salvation not the reason for our salvation. (Ephesians 2:10)

The other amazing thing is that we serve a living God and King. Jesus is alive and will return again. And so we live our lives looking forward to the day when Jesus will return to establish his eternal kingdom. So our values and priorities are every different to the world's values and priorities because our destination is God's kingdom. This affects every aspect of our lives. Our hopes , our dreams , how we spend our money and time and so on.

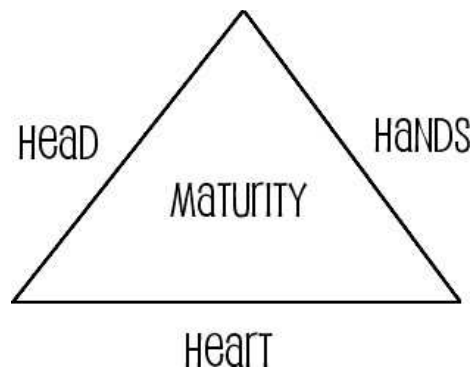
In a very simple and basic way, I hope that this clarifies what a Christian is. This will go a long way towards helping us stay Christian for the long term.

WHAT IS A MATURE CHRISTIAN?

How we should continue growing in our faith. What things are important to a growing Christian ?

There are basically three things that are important for maturity. The first is our knowledge and understanding of God. This knowledge should be grounded in Scripture. This growing understanding of God should direct our hearts and will so will love the Lord and obey His will. This in turn should result in acts of service towards others. We will call these 3 things Heads, Heart and Hands.

All three things are essential for growth and if ever one is missing our growth will be incomplete.



Head. (Colossian 2:2, 6-8 Romans 12:1-2)

It is important for every Christian continue to grow in our understanding of scripture. There are many false teaching and heresies out there as well as traps and distractions. A good way to keep ourselves from falling away is to keep feeding ourselves with God's word. This may involve a regular reading of God's word, listening to good sermons or going to a church which faithfully teaches the scripture. Even when we are too tired from work or if we are not in the mood it is good to keep reading scriptures and praying. Do not detach ourselves from the word of God. If life gets hard or busy, maybe finding someone to read and pray with you can help during the difficult times. This way you have someone to keep accountable to. There are also many resources online for talks – pick the good ones, get recommendations before you graduate, develop good but realistic bible reading habits to prepare yourself. Get an older Christian to mentor you in this if necessary.

If you cannot find a church in your area which has good teaching try to find one elsewhere. But if there are none anywhere join the one that upholds the authority of scripture, that way at least the scripture is highly valued. Keep feeding yourself by reading books or listening to talks. Growing our understand is very important to our own growth and maturity as disciples of Jesus but be realistic about how much you can do. Sometimes life can be very busy so, at least have some scriptural input happening on a regular basis. The busier we the more important our quiet time is.

Heart (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

The next thing that is important is our hearts. While our minds are important in our growth and development as disciples it cannot be the only thing. By 'heart' we actually mean 'love', not feelings or emotions. Knowledge by its own only make us proud and arrogant. It puffs us up but when knowledge is applied in love, it builds up other people. Our knowledge of God through scripture should affect our attitudes towards others. We are not talking about emotions (the way we feel about God) but rather how we are to treat others. Our hearts conforms itself to the will of Jesus. We submit ourselves to the rule of Christ. We love the Lord by obeying Him and loving others.

Hands (James 2:14-19)

This is the third and last important element in our maturity. If our minds and hearts are genuinely transformed by the Spirit of God then it will be evidenced by works of service. If we do not serve others then we should really wonder if our faith is genuine. A Christian person always looks out for the needs of other people.

Christian maturity requires all three aspects mentioned above. If knowledge (head) is missing then we may have very loving and caring people but people who can be sincerely wrong. Many cult groups are like that – they can appear kind and friendly but their doctrines and teachings are very wrong.

On the other hand, if love (heart) is missing then all we have are knowledgeable people who are very strict in their practices. They tend to be legalists and can be very overbearing or controlling. There is little love or compassion and require people to follow lots of rules.

Lastly, if service (hands) is missing then all we have are very kind and friendly people but whose words are empty. They may make promises to do things but nothing much really happens. They are sentimental Christians who don't appear to be doing very much by way of service.

So in summary, to bear fruit as disciples of Jesus we need to continue progressing and growing in all three areas of our lives, Do not leave any one aspect out of the picture otherwise our growth as disciples of Christ will be deficient.

For discussion.
Look up these passages
Colossians 2:2,6-8 and Romans 12:1-2, 1Corinthians 13:1-3, James 2:14-19.
What do these passages say about knowledge, love and service?



Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7