

Dear WCAC Youth Class of 2010

Let me begin, first of all, with two apologies. Yes, I feel like I'm in a Roman Catholic confessional, and you guys are the priests. That means I must've sinned like kingdom-come, 'cause there's like 13 of you.

Firstly, I apologize for somehow skipping your year! I remember that Doulos Retreat in the summer of 2008. We were at a park near Jon Mann's house, and we were sharing something in a circle. It was a little chilly. It was there that I told everyone it'll be my last year. Ryan Shyu, if I'm correct, went, "Sweet! He graduates with us!" But Prissy went, "WHAT ABOUT US?!!" So, I'm sorry if you feel short-changed that I "skipped" your year. In a way, I feel somewhat bad because I spent quite a bit of time with you all, just as I did with the Class of 2009. Unfortunately, as many of you will learn, when God calls you to do something, you just have to suck it up and do it.

Secondly, let me apologize for not being able to be there in person for your senior celebration. If I skipped your year, the least I could do is be there for Senior Celebration, right? First of all, I was told it's on a Wednesday, but that could change. Thus, I have no idea when it really is Senior Celebration. So, I couldn't buy reasonably-priced airline tickets. But secondly, as you enjoy the food and, more importantly, the encouragement of your brothers and sisters, I'm here at the seminary struggling with biblical Greek. Because it's an intensive Greek class, there's an exam every Friday and a quiz every day. So, my hands are unfortunately tied, since I don't want my first seminary class grade to be a C (or worse). On top of that, the only time I can actually visit is Nov. 2-3, but that's when you guys are all at school. All I can say is that if you ever are in the Philadelphia or New York City area, please send me an email! It would be great to meet up with you all and catch up!

Like I've said earlier, I've been with quite a few of you for about six years or so now, having spent some time with you since your junior high days, the least I could do is to continue my usual tradition of writing an encouragement letter to every graduating senior class. It's a tradition that I borrowed from my youth director when I was in youth group a few eons ago. Every time I write these letters, I would have a verse and share my thoughts on it.

This year is a little bit special, because I can read some Koine Greek! If any of you get the chance in college, you should take Koine (not Ancient) Greek. You will never read the New Testament the same way again. If you're suicidal, take Biblical (not Modern) Hebrew. I know some of you are required to take it... like Josh. Enjoy!

On this special day, I take you all to a passage you all (should) know. Matthew 6:9-13 contains the famous Lord's Prayer, but I'd like to use the Anglican version of the prayer which goes as such:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.
Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are Yours, now and forever!
Amen!**

I want to draw your attention to the word “trespasses”, which in your NIV, is translated as “debts”. Actually, both are not very accurate. The Greek word is ὀφειλήματος, (pronounced: aw-phay-LAY-ma-toss). Unfortunately, this word doesn’t have an English equivalent. The best description I can give is “relational debt”. Here’s what I mean.

All of you right now are here because your parents have trained you well. When you were young, your parents taught you the importance of doing homework, doing well in school, getting involved in sports, and as you entered high school, they tried to get you to perform even better, do well on the SATs, and get into good schools. Aside from the fact that it’s good for you, why else might your (Chinese) parents do all that?

The answer is ὀφειλήματος. Your parents, both biological (i.e. your father and mother) and spiritual (Rev. Ben, Jon Mann, Dr. Gallagher) all have set the foundations so that you all can be great people - and hopefully - great Christians. Now, notice that you have incurred an immeasurable amount of debt to your parents. There is absolutely no way you can pay back your parents for what they’ve done. You all will most likely thank Rev. Ben and Jon Mann for your spiritual formation, but even a youth group gift falls short of the time and energy they’ve spent on your behalf.

I can’t speak for your biological parents, but for your spiritual parents, what do they (and I) expect from you? Well, we hope you don’t pay us back with something, but to pass it on. We want you to go forth into the academic world, and do to others the good things we’ve taught you, to pass it forward.

And that was what Jesus meant by ὀφειλήματος. God has done immeasurably so much for all of us. He even gives us our daily bread before we even ask! As a result, we’ve incurred a “relational debt” to God, which we can never pay back. But God doesn’t want our offerings or what not - they’re nothing in comparison to what He deserves. When Israel lived in grave disobedience to God in the Old Testament, God furiously responded that burnt offerings and incense are useless! Thus, Jesus says in Mark 12:33 that “to love [God] with all your heart with all your understanding and with all your strength; and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

So in the Lord’s prayer, we ask Jesus to forgive us our [relational debts] as we do the same to others. Instead of demanding comeuppance for our goodwill, encourage others to pass it forward. What’s the temptation, then? As the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18: 21-35) shows us, it is to take this grace and mercy,

and use it as a license to do anything we want. “Oh, God is so loving and gracious to us. If we sin, he forgives us! So we can sin however many times we want, because if God is so loving and gracious, he *has* to forgive us!” St. Paul responds to this line of thought in Romans 6: “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? **HELL NO!**” Why? Because our ὀφειλόμενος to God obligates us to pass it forward, not to keep grace for ourselves and use it over and over again as a get-out-of-jail-free card!

And why should we pass it all forward? Because “the kingdom, the power, and the glory are [God’s] now and forever.” Why should we withhold God’s grace and blessings to ourselves, when they are for everyone in this world to share? Thus, the central objective of evangelism is to pass God’s blessings forward so others may see how good God is.

What does all this have to do with you?

All of you are heading to new places. You will have new friends, new acquaintances, and maybe a few of you will get married before you graduate (always a possibility). There will be tons of new chapters for you to flip to. But I encourage you all to remember that with every new chapter you open up in your life, you remember to pass the grace and peace of God forward to the people you know. May others come to know Jesus, because they see you as the bringer of that grace and peace. No wonder the prophet Isaiah wrote “how beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’”

And of course with every page of life that you turn, you will inevitably run into mountain highs and valley lows. We don’t mind mountain highs. Some of you might end up going to prestigious graduate schools. Some of you might land that job at a Fortune 500 company. But at the same time, some of you will run into difficulties. Maybe, like me, two mountain highs will be punctuated with a valley low. When you run into those valley lows, do not despair. We are often tempted to think that when we run into those valley lows, we are useless and have no worth. But that’s the way you view yourself. If you view yourself from God’s perspective, you have many mountain highs to look forward to! So when you are on mountain highs or valley lows, continue passing forward the grace and peace of the Lord to others, so that others may see this hope that you have.

Thus I send all of you out with that blessing and encouragement, that the grace and peace of the Lord be with you, but also that you will pass them on to those you know. I’ve been blessed to see how all of you have done that during your junior high and high school years, and in all honesty I miss hanging out with you all, because I’ve been on the receiving end of your mercies and graces many a time. I don’t know when our paths will cross, but if not anytime soon, I hope these last (and personal) notes of encouragement would do... for now (in mostly alphabetical order by last name):

To my dear brothers **Jeff and Josh**, what can I say? When both of you were in 7th grade - 7th GRADE!!! - I remember praying to God and asking, "Where, O Lord, are you going to take them?" And then, as I lay in my bed at Wheaton College, I joked to myself: one's gonna be a professor, and the other's gonna be a pastor... a-ha-ha-ha. And, what do you know? I never would've guessed that you, Jeff, would be studying economics; and you, Josh, would have a calling to the ministry! I thought both of you would just do the Asian thing and study engineering, or something like that! The Lord has taken both of you through ups and downs, but in the end, you both emerged stronger. You both have grown up in the course of the five years I've known you, so I count all those years (including the junior high ones) as a blessing and privilege to have spent them with you. Those were the years you've taught me patience, but also to count my blessings as well. Jeff, I still want to thank you for drumming in my worship team two years ago. I've always appreciated your talents and abilities, and before I plan for the worship sets, my first question was, "Is Jeff going to be there? 'Cause if not, it'll be harder... (nothing to keep me from rushing)." Josh, along with my best wishes, I also send the same best wishes from your brother and discipleship mentor Ryan Shyu. We both wish you well at Moody, and we pray that you will grow stronger in Christ. And Jeff, I am honored to be one of the influences of your life, and I pray (but I also know) that you will be the influences of many people both at your new school and church!

To my dear sister **Stephanie**, who comes to church all the time beaming so positively! I don't ever recall having seen you anything less than really happy. On Facebook you make everybody's day, and everyone just loves Facebook-chatting with you! I know that you will pass this great joyfulness to everyone around you in college. I wish nothing but the best for you as you pursue God's calling for you. May the joy that you find in Him always radiate outwards from you, as it has been during your time in youth group!

To my dear sister **Ariel**, who is blessed with artistic talent beyond compare. You've always had so many gifts that are typically "non-Asian", and that's good! So may God bless you for breaking the mold! I've also been so impressed with how you take care of Ester and Jake, even though Jake has amazingly high expectations for you. LOL!!!! (that letter of disappointment). Hands down, I'm not even half the older sibling than you are. Then again, my brothers never had high expectations of me. I'll confess I was mixed when I heard you were going to the SAIC. I'm overjoyed because you're going to a ridiculously good school, and that you are on your way to something amazingly creative and all. But I'm disappointed because now, we don't get to go to places like Brasserie Les Halles and Salumeria Rosi Parmacotto together! I was hoping you'll go to NYC so we can enjoy the good food and all! Now, what am I to do? But seriously, I'm so excited to see that you will be honing your artistic skills at a wonderful school, and am definitely looking forward to (hopefully) attending a gallery show featuring your work in the (near) future! Make sure you invite me!

To my dear brother **Steven**, whom I realize to be really busy! No kidding, on top of college applications and your service as a doulos person, you have a job with some

ridiculous schedule! I hope that before you head off to Butler, you will be able to have some rest. I was not there when it happened, but I recall being so amazed that it was on a relatively random walk through the park that you decided to become baptized! How unexpectedly blessed experience that was for everybody present! As a dancer, talented musician, and artist in general, you know how to manage the unexpected. And so I pray that when the unexpected comes, others can find you to be a solid rock of encouragement.

To my dear sister **Vicky**, who has always been the cheery counterpart to funny Josiah. You always brighten my week! But yet there is a deeper side of you. I remember that one time we were having a prayer night, and you were in charge of the display about praying for the world. People kept talking about that display, not because it had music and lots of pictures and all, but because it was thoughtfully put together that people wanted to draw near to what you wanted them to pray for. Thank you very much for doing the WCAC Code this year, and for keeping me involved even though I was half a world away! I hope that as you continue to find God's calling for you in life, that you will never lose that cheery thoughtfulness.

To my dear brother **Ben Hui**, who I hope will one day referee the World Cup and do a better job than that one from Ghana! Anyways, soccer soccer soccer is what I remember you for. You love soccer, nothing short of that. I wish you the best as you continue to play soccer for Olivet Nazarene, but always remember to love God first. I hope that on the field you can be a witness to others in showing grace and excellent sportsmanship. You have shown that in high school, and I know you will do so in college as well.

To my dear brother **Garrison**, who I've known as a very compassionate man of God. You are exceedingly welcoming and indeed care about others. I remember that night before I left for Singapore you, Garrick, and Mia invited me to Mia's house where we just chilled out and all as a final goodbye. How sweet of you! The next time we're together, we should meet up again like that! I wish you the best at Augustana. You have many gifts and talents that God will use to the extreme, so I wish you the best in preparing for that, because the ride will be hard, but exciting at the same time!

To my dear sister **Prissy**. The book of Ecclesiastes begins with "There is a time for this, and a time for that." Well, if I had to say what strikes me when I think of you, it's this: that you know when it's time to be serious, when it's time to be fun, and what to do when it's time to be serious, and what to do when it's time to be fun! Did you follow all that? If you were involved with praise ministry the entire time in doulos, I'd say you'd be the "music person", but if I'm correct, even though you were involved with praise ministry, you led other ministries, and that's why you come across to me as a person who just has an impeccable sense of what to do at what times. This leadership will be important in the kingdom of God, and I know the Lord will place you in positions where this will come into play, whether it be through journalism, or other venues. So my blessings to you as you equip yourself for such a calling!

To my dear sister **Nichole**, in the times you've hung out with Katie Nori, you've caught on to some of her spontaneity and overflowing bubblyness. But at the same time, you also have the kindness that flows from that joy. You've been such blessing to all of us, and we wish you the best as you continue your studies at Madison. I pray that your infectious joy and kindness will continue to impact friends, colleagues, and those you meet at Madison, because it has impacted all of us here at WCAC.

To my dear brother **Adam Sun**, who despite being in IMSA still managed to come to church Sundays and all. You've been always willing to chat with me about random stuff, although I have to say I am (pleasantly) surprised that you will be studying economics! In any case, I appreciate how you've managed to break the "IMSA Wormhole". In the past, anyone who went to IMSA never came back to church again. So I thank you that we still see you regularly every Sunday! You are a man of deep thoughts, and I've appreciated you asking the hard questions in Sunday school. So I hope that your time at the University of Chicago will only encourage you to ask even deeper questions, and even harder questions that will only draw you closer to Jesus.

To my dear brother **David Unciano**, I don't think I know you as well as the others, because you weren't around as long. But in times I've met you, you strike me as a really friendly and chill person. As in, not uptight. Not the kind of person that wears suits to church on Sunday (unlike someone I know...). This chillax-ity (I made that word up) is such a gift, and I hope that you will bring that gift to college and pass it forward to all your new friends and acquaintances.

To my dear brother **A-wang!** I think you joined youth group, like, not at the beginning in junior high, but somehow it felt like you did. Then again, maybe I'm just senile. You're a man of many gifts and talents. Your facebook pictures either show you doing something, whether it be playing basketball, helping out at church, or playing an instrument. If I'm correct - you helped out with one of my worship praise teams because one of the guitarists couldn't make it? I think... I might be senile. Anyways, it's been a great honor and joy to know you, and I pray that you use those many gifts and talents in your witness at school. I also send best wishes from Ryan Shyu as well, and we both wish you only the best as you equip yourself for God's work in college.

Unfortunately, the Lord has called all of you to stay in the Midwest for your college years. Which means that my chances of visiting are not going to be frequent at least for the next 3 years. I will, however, be in town on Nov. 2-3 for Ben Lowe's election night thing. I promised him this past April that I'll be there. The next time I will get to stop by is POSSIBLY during my 4-hour layover in Chicago when I return to Princeton from my Christmas visit to Singapore. MAYBE. But you guys won't be in school! In any case, I do hope to stop by the Chicago/Wheaton area as often as I can. Of course, like I said earlier, if any of you are in the NYC/Philly area, please let me know (send me an email)! We'll get together with Ray Low and Ryan Shyu, as well as the GFC people (for those of you who know them) and catch up. How great would it be to hear where God has taken us over the years!

So I close with this benediction to you all from St. Francis:

May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships so that we may live deep within our hearts.

May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation, and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done.

With love and every blessing,
Henry