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BULGARIA ON MY MIND

By Pastor John Tung

Four
Reasons
which
made
my trip
so
memorable

I have been back from Sofia – the capital of Bulgaria – for several weeks now and almost every day I still think about my experience. I did not expect it to make such a deep impression on me. I want share with you why I think it still impacts my thinking and my life.

First of all, it was my first time in Europe.

I had never been to Europe before. I had landed in a European airport before on a layover to the Middle East, but I never actually spent time in a European country until Bulgaria. While there I learned that Bulgaria is a very ancient country – some call it “The Cradle of European Civilization” – which made the trip that much more special.

Secondly, I had people who knew the local area spend time with me.

I went to Sofia with SEND, a US missions agency with extensive experience in Europe and other parts of the world. I stayed with Dick Walton, who served as the former US Director of SEND. Later on in 1994, he and his wife relocated to Bulgaria to head up SEND’s missions work in the Balkans. Being able to stay with Dick was a great learning experience as each day we would have several long conversations about missions and Bulgaria.

Besides Dick, other local Bulgarian Christians also spent time with me and showed me around. Hearing their perspectives and stories about themselves and their country was very enlightening.

A Chinese couple studying in Sofia led us to the Sofia Chinese Church, a church started by a Maryland pastor in 2000. We joined them in their worship. This was another unforgettable experience that was due to connecting with local people.

Thirdly, I had never taught in a theological institute.

I went to teach at St. Trivelius Theological Institute. It is a school Dick Walton helped to start when he saw the need for training local church leaders. For one week, every night from 6:00 – 9:00 PM, I taught “New Testament Survey” to Bulgarian students (although some were African, Armenian, and Russian). I found that I enjoyed teaching at this level (bachelors and masters) and interacting with the students. Of course I do not speak Bulgarian, but there was a translator who spoke English and Bulgarian, who translated everything I said into Bulgarian and who translated back to me in English the questions from the class.

This leads me to the fourth and final reason which made this trip so memorable.

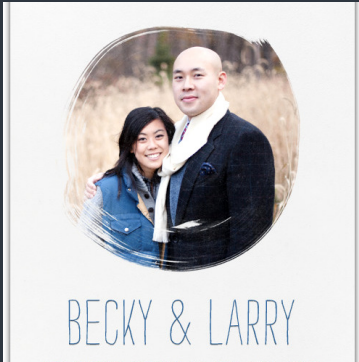
I had personal encounters with the Bulgarian students.

Hearing the questions that were on their mind, recognizing the biblical knowledge they already possessed, and then seeing their faces light up when a response made sense, made the interaction highly satisfying to me. After all, when you are teaching, you want to see engaged students who genuinely want to learn. This motivated me further to make the lessons interesting and meaningful.

So, for all these reasons, this was a trip that I will never forget.

Bulgarian Students





After dating for 12 ½ months, Teens Group Counselors Becky Lu and Larry Xu will be married in June 2013. Larry's in-depth knowledge of the Bible and reflective nature coupled with Becky's sweet and kind manner are perfectly matched and have been inspiring to many. I and many others in Teens Group (TG) are thrilled to see two counselors committing their lives to each other. I was glad to have had this opportunity to interview Becky and Larry. I found our conversation refreshing, insightful, and hope that it will be helpful to those who are either in a relationship or searching for one.

“A LOVE TRIANGLE: CONNECTING LARRY, GOD, AND BECKY”

By Jessica Leung

Cross Talk: What was your first impression of each other?

Larry: I first saw Becky at a Teens retreat 4-5 years ago. I was friends with her mom, Auntie Susan, and when I was introduced to her, I was like “Oh, hi.” I didn’t pay much attention at that time.

Becky: We didn’t start talking until we were both asked to lead a dating workshop for TG two years ago. It’s ironic how we started dating four months later after talking through planning meetings for our dating workshop, Camp Hope, and 30 hour famine.

Larry: I got to know her better through serving at church, you know, you observe other people.

CT: What did you observe?

Larry: I observed how she talked to and interacted with the kids at Camp Hope and how available she was to serve God. I would always see her volunteering for TG events, every year at Camp Hope, and teaching Sunday school...and I was like, she has a good heart. That’s how I became interested.

CT: How does God play a central role in your relationship?

Becky: Dating is just like anything else in our Christian lives, we seek to glorify God. While it has been difficult, it’s because of our relationships with God that we are able to sort through our issues in a loving way. He’s definitely grown us in the course of our relationship and revealed to me how imperfect I am.

Larry: Her relationship with God is why I became interested in her in the first place and that’s the reason I’ll stay interested in her. As she grows in God, I get to see God transforming her and that just makes her more beautiful to me. It’s powerful, too, because that means God is able to strip away the sins that I cling to and reveal the things that hurt my own relationship with God. But with that said, it’s not easy or magical. It’s not like you meet someone who loves God and you love God too, and things are just so easy. Rather, it reveals the hard things you have to do to have a healthy, God-centered relationship with God. If you don’t take the hard path and don’t choose God, you can have an “easy” relationship, but that will lead to more pain and eventually to failure.

Becky: While we have gone through struggles in our relationship, I can see how God uses them to make us more Christ-like. You don’t realize it at the time but you become thankful for those struggles and how God used them to grow you.

CT: Do you have any tips for people who are dating to help God become more central in their relationship?

Becky: First and foremost, your relationship with God has to take priority over your relationship with that other person. I quickly realize that when my relationship with God is suffering, our relationship suffers.

Larry: Something that I see has benefitted Becky a lot is her continued involvement with an accountability group of trusted friends that she can share and read the Bible with.

CT: Do you believe God provides and prepares a life partner for everyone?

Larry: No, I don’t think there is the concept of “soulmate” in Christianity. As we are lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ, he reveals to us people we can love. For some, it will be a wife or a husband.

CT: What is your advice for those who are currently dating or seeking a relationship?

Larry: I would tell people not to look so hard for a girlfriend or a boyfriend. Don’t make it an idol where you feel like you’re only complete and joyful if you have him/her. Don’t look at the relationships people around you seem to be enjoying and make it a question of whether or not God has great

plans for you because you don’t have that relationship. It’s an easy trap to fall into that can lead to bitterness or resentment towards God. Worst of all, it can lead to people trying to assert their will over God’s will.

CT: Would you say that dating a non-Christian, a person is asserting his or her own will? Or do you think it can somehow eventually become God’s will?

Larry: As Christians, we believe that we make mistakes but God ends up using those mistakes for good, but that doesn’t justify a mistake as being a good choice. I would argue that what’s best for us is to be with a Christian person because that relationship can be God-centered whereas dating a non-Christian can’t be because God isn’t at the center of that other person’s own life.

Becky: Dating a non-Christian is you going one way and the non-Christian going the other way; your purposes aren’t the same and you can’t make progress in that sort of relationship.

Larry: There are always opportunities to date people in this world. You meet so many people that you could date. A lot of people think “I don’t want to waste this opportunity since this person likes me. Maybe this could be great. Maybe God can use this for something awesome.” I don’t want people to think that God’s plans for them aren’t going to be wonderful. I want people to trust God’s plans for us, to trust that they will be far beyond imagination. When we try to plan for what will be best for us that’s when things can go wrong.

Becky: This is an issue for Christians dating Christians too. It’s a topic close to my heart. Girls, especially, both teenagers and adults, put a lot of their self-worth into whether or not they’re in a relationship. They think that being in a relationship could fulfill them somehow. Looking to another person to fill that void, first of all won’t work because they’re human, but will manifest itself when you look and burden that other person to satisfy your needs – it becomes a selfish relationship. We all are selfish, which is why God is so important in our relationship. He opens our eyes to be humble.

CT: How would someone know if the person he/she is dating is the one God has provided for him/her?

Becky: It helps to ask questions like, “Has this relationship grown each of us closer to God? Are we able to point others to Christ through our relationship?”

Larry: As you date, you see if that person has a heart for God. Is He at the center of his/her life? How does He direct that person through obstacles? Does that person really make God his/her god? As that’s revealed, that’s when you realize if you want to be with that person for the rest of his/her life. In some ways, it is a calling from God because God reveals that to you and teaches you how to love that person. It’s not a kind of “eureka” moment, it’s gradual. It comes to a point where you realize that you want to worship God with that person and you want to continue to know that person better as they know God better. It’s also an element of faith. You have faith that God will continue to change that person and use you to change that person – not to make it more comfortable for you to be with him/her, but to change that person to be more like Jesus. And God will use that person to change you, too. There’s the element of faith that God will help you commit to that person for the rest of life.

Becky: It almost gets harder the more you get to know somebody because you see more and more of how sinful you are and how sinful that other person is. Faith is a huge part of it, trusting that God will change both of you through that relationship.

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.”

I John 4:7

**“When my relationship with God is suffering,
our relationship suffers.”**

CT: What do you like about each other?

Becky: He’s always so giving of his time and resources! He is always investing himself to serve the teens. And I thought, “Oh wow, what a cool guy.” What I like most about him is that he is as weird, if not weirder, than me.

Larry: I’m not that weird!

Larry: Whenever I see her reading, talking...God is always somewhere in Becky’s thoughts and conversations. I like that so much because it’s very refreshing. Also, she is herself and does what’s comfortable to her and what God challenges her to do.

Becky: Larry always encourages me to talk out my feelings over our issues. He is never impatient with me. He is always very loving in his approach.



Meet Your Deacon:

Worship Deacon, Julie Liu

By Nicole Huang

Julie was born in Taiwan and moved to the US when she was 8. She grew up in this area and graduated from Wootton HS. After four years of college in St. Louis and 3 years of working in Japan, Julie returned to the area for graduate studies. Since 2009, Julie has been teaching Japanese in a high school, and this year, she also started teaching Chinese at a middle school.

You might have seen her on the stage on Sundays pouring out her heart and soul into the piano and leading worship at the same time. You might have seen her around church – it is Julie Liu our Worship Deacon! Julie has been involved in the worship team for two years before she was approached about becoming a deacon. At the time, she was only working part time; she thought there must be a reason God gave her so much time on her hands, so Julie chose to accept the deaconship and has learned many things since. She has been learning on a weekly basis just how much goes on behind the scenes for each week's service. She is sure that she will continue to learn more about working with other people and about how to serve God and not people. She's learned that no matter what condition she is in, God will be glorified and His name will be blessed. She is so thankful for worship because worship and music is one outlet in which she can experience God.

As a Worship Deacon, Julie is in charge of many things. Leading worship is just one of many things this talented young lady brings to CBCM. She is also responsible for coordinating the worship team schedule, managing any issues that may come up within a particular worship team, coordinating with other departments to ensure a smooth operation of worship in every service, and a ton of other behind-the-scenes things. Her fellow English worship deacons also take care of a lot.

Julie would love to hear your feedback about the music, or just the worship service in general. Advice, suggestions, or criticisms are all welcomed.

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