



Dear Friends & Family, Brothers & Sisters in Christ,

We pray that this letter finds you well in spirit and in body during this unusual season around the world. Thank you for your patience with us in receiving our quarterly letter, as our family and ministry have had a full season of busyness, burdens, and blessings. We'll give you an update under these three headings, below. We're so thankful for your continued prayers and support. We hope that this letter will give you a fresh glimpse of how the last season has been, and – in our new age of 'online meetings – let us know if we can call, videoconference, or Zoom with you and your fellowships there. Since it has been a while, this is a full letter – the third and fourth pages will be some pictures.

### **Busyness – Occupied with service:**

As those of you in North America may remember, Hong Kong found out about the effects of COVID19 much sooner than many other parts of the world, and our church (Island Baptist Church on Hong Kong island) was affected early in the spring. Closed because of cases in our community, we also had to terminate our rental agreement at the same time. In the interim, we have adjusted to rounds of online services (you can visit our YouTube channel, which was created during COVID shutdowns), and alternated renting a temporary venue near our old location. Praise the Lord, we were able to rent a new venue nearby for nearly half the price (around 3,500.00 USD less per month!). Jonathan's recent months have been spent managing the ongoing renovation, decoration, and opening up of the new facility. Pray for the Lord to use this new space when we resume full services.

Our services, though most have switched online, have continued. Our Wednesday nights have actually increased (since more can attend from home), and we're thankful that one of Jonathan's university students has started attending, and a handful of new faces. Sundays we have two services, and currently Jonathan is teaching the Wisdom and Poetry books of the Old Testament for a local seminary here. Last semester he taught a course on Christianity and Culture.

We are so thankful for the arrival of the Herbster family to minister alongside of us here in Hong Kong. Pastor Matt and Tiffany have been a tremendous help in reviving our teen fellowship, and along with their children in Hong Kong – Annie and Jonathan – they have been a great encouragement in their music ministry at our church. Pray for them as they travel for family celebrations during this challenging season. The people at IBC are already encouraged by the work of this ministering family!

Catherine has enjoyed teaching at a local Christian school, where she serves as a lead teacher and where the children all attend as well. Steven (15), Lucy (12), and Nicholas (8) have all made good friends and like their teachers. They all take Mandarin Chinese but Lucy is thinking of switching to French. Lucy also has started a Bible study with her school friends – one from Hong Kong, one from Canada, and one from Africa. Pray for Catherine as she teaches and shares the Gospel with her kids, and for our own kids to grow in the Lord. One good connection in the Christian school has also been Catherine introducing the Herbsters to the administration for camp ministries. They've asked Pastor Matt to take care of their camps, and we pray this may flourish into greater opportunities in the years ahead.

Jonathan also has been able to continue his apologetics and university ministries. He helps to teach classes both at HKBU and HKU on worldviews and religions, and this allows great opportunities to reach out to the hurting and needy university students of HK and the Mainland of China. People here are still reeling from the social unrest in 2019, COVID and law changes in 2020, and the same turmoil that has caused unrest makes sharing our Christian hope much easier in this difficult time. More on this below...



### **Burdens – Prayers and expectations:**

For those of you who have followed Hong Kong news closely, you'll know that we have really seen a lot of changes in society over the last few years. We were here for the mass protests in 2014, but 2019 was a 'sea change' in society in which the parties of support and opposition to the government became increasingly divided. This hasn't changed over the last year, but COVID has dampened the unrest that shook our city for months on end. With the addition of a new security law that was recently enacted, society is much quieter – though no less broken and embittered – and the consequences for being outspoken are much higher. We are so thankful that the Lord allowed our church family to navigate these waters without any schisms or splits, as many churches lost members due to highly charged political feelings. But do pray for us in all the ways that such a tense environment affects, or may affect us and our ministries.

Related to the above, many are asking us if we feel that the freedom to minister in Hong Kong is closing, or if there will be the kinds of restrictions on Christianity that can be seen nearby. While it is a complex topic (Jonathan recently edited a book on these issues, due to come out later this year), our simple answer is: 'No' – or at least, 'not yet'. The Lord knows the details of the future, and we are trusting in Him no matter what tomorrow brings, but we currently do not foresee an immediate crackdown on our religious freedoms and practices here. Of course, politically and societally we must be careful, but actually our ministry opportunities have only increased over the last 3 years, to where it isn't a question of 'can we do anything?', to 'which of these many opportunities should we do?' Perhaps the Lord may yet call one of you to 'come over and help us'! In any case, pray for us to have wisdom and to adapt to whatever changes come.

While we are confident in our continuing ministry here, many local Hong Kongers and expatriates who are able are planning to leave the city. Not all who wish to will be able to, but perhaps around 10% of the people we know have expressed a desire or plan to leave. Pray for these people as they make their decisions, and for peace and direction for the Christians among them. There is no shortage of people poised to move to Hong Kong (especially from the adjoining countries), but this may mean a shift in the culture of Hong Kong in the days ahead.

### **Blessings – Grateful for God's work:**

We have already shared many of the tremendous blessings which we are thankful for during this restive season, but just to 'count our blessings' along with you:

- The joy of knowing Christ and sharing Him with the people of Hong Kong and Island Baptist Church;
- The faithfulness of God in providing a new church facility;
- The encouragement of new ministry partners in the Herbsters, dedicated church members, and three men desiring training for ministry;
- The opportunities for Catherine and the kids to teach, learn, and serve at a Christian school;
- The contacts with hundreds of university students in need of hope and love;
- The responsibility of training Christians in our local bible institute;
- The sustaining of Island Baptist Church members rich and poor, from around the world, in a challenging season;
- The health of our immediate family and our families back in America;
- The support of friends and family, churches and individuals back in America;
- The confidence of knowing our Lord walks with us through the strange and straining seasons of life, and that 'faithful is He that' called us, 'who also will do it'. (1 Thess.5:24)

**God bless you – Love in Christ, Jonathan, Catherine, Steven, Lucy and Nicholas**

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# Johnson Family in Hong Kong - Winter Update



New location, halfway between Sheung Wan & Sai Ying Pun



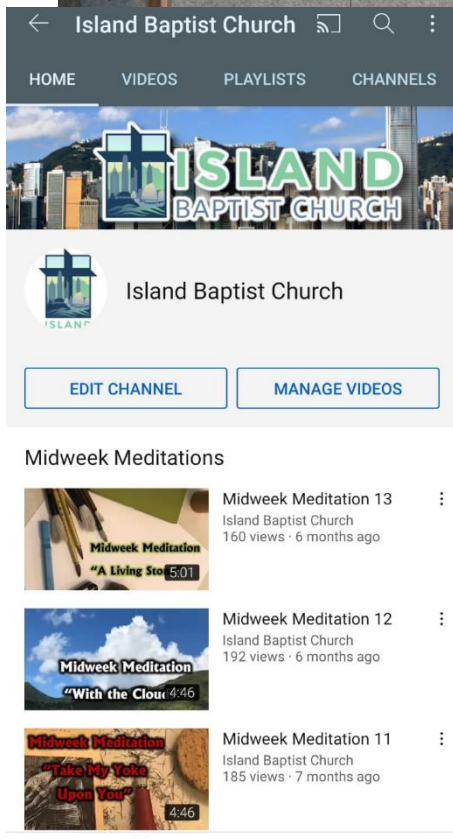
Before and after pictures of church



Jonathan & Matt with local high-schoolers



Hymnals brought by Herbster family



YouTube channel



Services in temporary venue

