



the Johnsons in Hong Kong

Dear family, friends, and supporters,

Welcome to a long overdue prayer update! We know that many of you keep track of our family on social media and our Hong Kong church website, but we apologize for not having a proper letter out to you during this past season of ministry. It has been a busy but encouraging season, and to get you caught up on what has probably been our busiest season yet, we've decided to write a longer-than-usual letter. The first section will be an overview and update on the various ministries we're involved in here in Hong Kong and some important developments, followed by a family update.

Again, thank you for your patience in receiving this update, and as always, thank you for your faithful prayers and support of our family over the years – as Paul said of the Thessalonian Christians, “we give thanks to God always for all of you!”

1. Overview of the Past Seasons:

The past few quarters have been busy for us, both in ministry and in family life. As we'll explain on the next two pages, Jonathan's opportunities on university campuses and in wider Hong Kong circles has expanded surprisingly quickly, and we have been preparing for – and now passed through – saying 'goodbye' to having our oldest son, Steven here with us in Hong Kong. He's off to university now! We're also continuously thankful for the growing ministry of the Herbsters here with us, both at church and in their many growing outreaches as well. Here's a synopsis of the past seasons, with details on the reverse:

New Location - Settling In:

As you may recall, Hong Kong was one of the last places in the world to open up after COVID, and only last year did things begin to 'normalize.' Unsurprisingly, this led to the departure of many people from Hong Kong, and the absence of many visitors to the city. We went from being one of the world's busiest airports, to having less flights than Sudan! Against this backdrop, our church moved locations and began in-person services as soon as possible. We praise the Lord for a very gracious new landlord, who lowered the rent for the church property beyond the market price, and now wishes to sell the property to us. Please pray for wisdom for our church-, the deacons, trustees, and Pastors Matt and Jonathan as we decide if this is a wise choice (or even possible, as the price would be far over 1 million USD – Hong Kong is the world's most expensive city!)

One joy in our new church building is having a baptistry, where Pastors Matt and Jonathan had the joy to baptize two young believers – one a young man who is a second-generation Chinese Christian, whose father worked with Jonathan at HKU for a time. Pray for this dear family, as they go through a challenging season of ministry and work tensions, and the father, “K,” begins teaching in a seminary.* Pray for the other young lady that was baptized, “S,” the first Christian in her family, and who is burdened that her relatives become Christians.

The new location has room for full Sunday School sessions, and we have a faithful team that works with the children; Catherine often teaches children's church; the Herbsters often take the youth, and Jonathan often takes the adult Sunday School. It is such a blessing to have the Herbsters here with us, as we often rotate the Sunday School and preaching hours as well. We just recently restarted our afternoon services as well, where we have a bit of opportunity to let some

* As noted before, while Hong Kong is relatively 'safe' for communications, we use abbreviations because we don't wish to embarrass or compromise the trust of the local people we minister with, in this internet age!

men get practices in teaching and preaching – pray for these faithful men, from India, Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia, and Russia (quite a mix!), who are burdened to grow in their ability to teach the Bible. Pray too that our time of training them can become more regular, as we balance 7 different work schedules!

Lastly, thank the Lord that our services are well attended and growing – although summer in Hong Kong always becomes a ‘ghost town’ with holiday travellers! Pray for continued growth, not just in numbers, but in the spiritual maturity of our church members – the theme for our year.

New Opportunities - Teaching & Training:

Our family took a very quick trip in the winter to speak at a worship conference in the U.S., where Jonathan was able to share in a couple of the main sessions. It was wonderful to reconnect with many old ministry friends and former teachers, and we pray that the sessions were useful to those who attended. If you would like to receive links to those sessions, let us know via email and we’ll try and send them along. It was also a challenging season following, as we were invited to consider a couple of ministry opportunities back in the U.S. After much prayer, counsel, and consideration, we believe that the Lord still desires for us to continue ministering in Hong Kong. The hardest part – for Jonathan and Catherine especially – is being separated from our family and friends in the U.S., though we have peace about continuing to minister here now; of course we desire your prayers for these ever-present tensions in ministering overseas!

Prior to that short trip, Jonathan had been asked to increase his role at Hong Kong University, where for years he has helped with a class on world religions, that is hosted by a Christian research cluster. In the space of a few seasons, Jonathan was also invited to help run a mentoring program for university students as well. What this has meant is that Jonathan now helps in the lives of around 500 of Hong Kong’s brightest students, and is the facilitator of around 120 mentors who guide the students. These mentors are leaders from industries across Hong Kong society – former heads of banks and investment firms, judges, politicians, NGO and charity leaders, professors, and ministers – about 95% of these mentors are Christians, from a wide (and sometimes wild) variety of backgrounds. Jonathan has managed to have a number of leaders in our church, IBC, become mentors as well – including Pastor Matt! Each mentor guides around 10-12 students through their college years, and we believe it is a tremendous opportunity to impact thousands of students.

Jonathan has already had the chance to share the hope of Christ with 2 students in this program.



Around the same time Jonathan began to help direct this outreach, he *HKU Mentoring Program* was also asked to take the leadership of HKU’s most popular courses, on world religions. He now teaches over 240 students each school year, and has two weeks in which to teach Christianity – including the Gospel – at Hong Kong’s most ‘secular’ university! Praise the Lord for these opportunities, and those that are connected to these roles in academics and apologetics. Recently another of Jonathan’s writings was published in a collection

defending a conservative, practical reading of the Bible and other texts.[†] He would like to finish two more writings on apologetics, for general use in the upcoming year. Please pray for the Lord to prosper these works, if He sees fit. We do not know if this season of favour in Hong Kong society and universities will last, but as we believe the Lord has opened these doors and given these opportunities, please pray that we will use them wisely, for His glory and the salvation of souls, for however long they last.

We thank the Lord as well for Catherine's continuing role in teaching at a Christian school here in Hong Kong. While it isn't a perfect school (which we haven't found yet!), it is full of Christians who love the Lord and seek to serve the students. Please pray for Catherine as she takes up the role of team leader next year, guiding all the teachers in her grade level as they coordinate their teaching and work. Pray too for the salvation of the students in her classes; she often has opportunity to share Bible stories and the Gospel with them. Also, please remember her in prayer as she often receives a few special needs children due to her background in special ed. Finally, pray for the new head of school (the HK way to say 'principal') who is a devoted Christian, but new to the job this coming year.

New Arrangements - IBC Leadership:

As the above opportunities in apologetics and academics came very quickly, and continue to grow and grow, Jonathan asked Pastor Matt Herbster to take over the main leadership role at Island Baptist Church. Among the many things we joke about with the Herbsters is that, many years ago, Matt was our boss at camp (Catherine and Jonathan met at the Wilds), and now we've managed to get him back into that role! We are beyond thrilled to have Matt and Tiffany (and Jonathan, who will soon join Steven at college!) with us here to serve together in ministry, and we have total confidence in their leadership for the church. Already they have been such a blessing in helping with IBC's youth, elderly ministries, and various camp outreaches. Pray especially for these camp outreaches, as the Herbsters and various IBC members will be leading a VBS next week, followed by two sessions of youth camp. Pray too for the visiting teams from the U.S. that will be helping them.

As for the ministries of IBC, Jonathan will continue in pastoring, teaching, and counselling, but he has asked Matt to take up the senior or leading role in leading the church. Although it is rare, sadly, for these sorts of 'hand offs' to go



IBC Potluck - over 12 nationalities attending!

[†] "Original Intentionalism: A Comparison of Textual and Visual Hermeneutics", in Boone and Eckel, *Originalism in Theology and Law: Comparing Perspectives in Constitutional Law and Biblical Theology*. London: Lexington Books, 2024.

well with both ministers still present, we have had a number of people who know us both very well say that its probably one of the few combos that can do so – we believe we make a good balance! Pray for the Herbsters as they continue in this new role, and for the many ministries we work in together here in Hong Kong. One of the greatest strengths in serving together that we have found, is that having gone through a season where many ministries and ministers have been discouraged by the events here since 2019, we are still excited and eager to see what the Lord will do here in East Asia – the fields are truly “white unto harvest,” and our families both know that there is more to do than there are people to do it! Perhaps you might consider coming to join us?

2. Family Updates:

Time is passing much too quickly with our children growing up so very fast! After graduating from high school in 2023, Steven spent the past year here in Hong Kong taking some online courses from Maranatha Baptist University, helping coach the basketball team from the school where he graduated from, and helping out with the audio-visual ministry of Island Baptist Church. This past June he travelled back to the US to work on getting his driver’s license and spend time with Jonathan’s side of the family in North Carolina. In August, he will be moving up to Wisconsin to be a full-time student at Maranatha. Jonathan will take a quick trip back to the US to help get him moved and settled into his dorm. Although we are sad to see him “leave the nest”, we are excited to see him take these next steps in life.

Lucy is 15 and going into tenth grade in the fall. She is spending her time this summer taking an online math class, which will help get her tenth-grade math out of the way. She has also been enjoying spending time with our youth group, and helping with basketball camp and VBS this summer. This past year Lucy was involved in several sports teams - volleyball, basketball, touch rugby, soccer, and was able to travel to Malaysia for a school sports tournament, where she competed in soccer and volleyball. While there, she had the opportunity to minister in a day camp to some refugee children. She has also begun playing her flute in our small orchestra at church!

Nicholas is 11 and going into the sixth grade. So far, he has been the most outgoing of our three children. Last month he was the MC at his class’s awards ceremony and was at ease speaking in front of around a 200 plus audience. He has mentioned to Jonathan that he is looking forward to preaching someday. 😊 He is also very active in sports - playing soccer, basketball, and track and field. He is excited about attending our church camp coming up in a few weeks that the Herbsters have organized.

Catherine just returned from a short visit to see her parents and siblings in Washington state. Please pray especially for her parents as they have some ongoing health issues. Her mom, Mrs. Reese, recently had a couple of strokes and is continuing to recover. We would appreciate your prayers as the family is navigates caring for her parents.

Looking ahead...

As you can see, it has been a busy season for us in Hong Kong, with continued growth in our long-term ministries here, new growth in areas of opportunity, and new changes as our family grows. Thank you for continuing to support us materially and in prayer – we pray that this letter finds you well and growing in God’s grace.

If you, your family, or your church would ever like to arrange a video call with us, please do let us know, and we can try and set up a Zoom or WhatsApp call to be able to see one another and catch up.

May the Lord richly bless you – Love in Christ,

Jonathan, Catherine, Steven, Lucy, and Nicholas