The following is an interview with Joshua Ahn, junior biology major. This interview was conducted by Andrei Defino and originally published in The Student Movement, Volume 100, Issue 01.

What did you do over the summer? I volunteered at several leper colonies in different parts of China for about seven weeks.

Wow. How did you end up getting all the way there? Haha, that's a long story.

Hit me with your best shot. I first heard about China from a testimony that a Korean American volunteer, Grace, gave at East Coast Korean Campmeeting and again at my home church. At the time, the testimony didn't have a very profound effect on me. I was intrigued, yet indifferent. Although the thought of going the following summer crossed my mind, it didn't really appeal to me.

But summer mission trips have always been a thing for you. What inhibited you this time? There were other plans and ambitions that I had in mind, and after making that first contact with Grace, I kind of just forgot about it for a while. Nathan (Lee - a Junior music major at Andrews University) and I had also originally planned to go together, but throughout the school year, the decision was on and off.

Fast forward to second semester and my dad and I both decided that it would be better for me to just stay in the States for the summer to participate in research and start studying for the MCAT. However, I started to look into different research programs and internships around January and realized I started way too late. But it's funny how God can use our shortcomings to point us in the right direction.

To make a long story short, I missed a lot of deadlines and there were no opportunities or programs that really stuck out to me. Basically, all of the doors closed for me and all I was left with was, well, China. When I decided to stay in the States for the summer, my dad had told me to contact Grace and let her know that I wasn't going but being the procrastinator that I am I didn't contact her. Actually, I hadn't talked to her for months. In short, I didn't want this summer to end up like last summer where I did nothing.

So you just got up and went? Initially, I took the opportunity because it was the only thing I had left, but it became so much more than that.

How was your experience there, being out of your comfort zone and obtaining the chance to help leper communities? It was surprising, most definitely not what I expected. I went there predominantly worried about the physical conditions. I was expecting hard, unpleasant manual labor and difficult living conditions. I was preparing my body, but when I look back, I now realize how little attention I gave to the preparation of my heart.

Sure, there was still work. I cleaned a lot of windows and took care of several grandmas and grandpas, but what truly struck me was the nature of these people. Lepers and volunteers alike were not only so focused on others, but they were so focused on God. As a result, they were happy, they were at peace.

To see myself juxtaposed against these people who were in many cases less fortunate than I truly magnified the selfishness that I never really knew I had. Not only did it make me question what I was doing and why I was there, but it struck deeper. It made me ask myself, "Why am I even a Christian?" It's a question that I soon came to realize I never had to really answer for myself. And it hit me pretty hard. You see from birth, Seventh-day Adventist had been a title that I was simply given and honestly, I think it was a title I wore because it was all I knew.

Wow, this just got really deep. It sounds like your time there really tested your faith. What was the hardest part and the best part? The hardest part was definitely my struggle with myself. Overall, it was a very humbling experience and through many different experiences, I felt exposed and ashamed. I realized how truly self-centered I was and how powerless I was to change that.

That's where the best part comes in. The best part of the trip was the chance to experience what it truly means to fully depend on God and to walk with Him from day to day. Moreover, to see Him working, not just in other people's lives, but in my own life was incredible. Not to sound selfish but I realized that Jesus loves me and that He died for me and that He wants to save me. That's something that I now realize I had never truly grasped before.

I thought God was bringing me to China to save others, but little did I realize that God was bringing me to China to save me as well. Finally understanding that was powerful and humbling.

If you could do it all over again, would you? Although at times, I wish certain things hadn't been revealed to me, I realize that God only wants the best for me. So the answer would be absolutely.

Joshua Ahn is currently taking a year off from school to continue his volunteer work within the leper colonies of China.

Others going abroad

The past two years have seen a number of biology students take time from their studies and careers to serve as short-term missionaries, including

Joelle Acre (Nile Union Academy, Egypt)
Kyunge Sung (Adventist International Mission School in Bangladesh)
Gabe Stanier (Bharatpur, Nepal)
Dylan Milam (Philippines)
Philip Stanier (AMOR projects, Campo Verde, Peru)
Daniel Cho (Chad)
Johnny Ahn (Chad)