

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
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Civil Disobedience

17-Year-Old Christian Takes on China

By Paul Asay

What Happened:

For the past several weeks, people in Hong Kong—a semi-independent city in China—have been protesting a move by the Chinese government to limit who can run for elected office. China, a Communist country, wants to make sure that anyone who is voted into government already is pre-approved by the government.

The most visible leader of these protests (known as the Umbrella Revolution) is Joshua Wong, a 17-year-old political activist who began leading demonstrations when most teens are trying to figure out basic algebra. He's also a Christian.

Wong led his first demonstration (against a high-speed rail system) when he was 13 years old. At 15, he led 120,000 people in a hunger strike to protest China's efforts to introduce a program of patriotic education into Hong Kong, in which his efforts were successful. He has founded a movement called scholarism and is proving to be a major thorn in Communist China's side.

“Compromising before you even begin fighting is illogical,” Wong told *HK Magazine*. “Grown-ups like to talk about political realities and the broader context, but the broader context is that Beijing won't give you what you want. If you don't persist, then it's only more likely that they won't listen to you.” He added, “I have no problems with negotiating, but before doing that you better have some bargaining chips.”

Some believe the protests have a religious undercurrent. Wong's parents are fervent Lutherans, and he went to a prominent Protestant primary school and was attending Hong Kong's United Christian College when he led the drive against patriotic education. Many of the Umbrella Revolution's other leaders are Christian, as well. Demonstrators form prayer groups and read their Bibles during protests.

As Christianity has grown in China, the Chinese government—officially atheist—has been increasingly concerned with the faith's growing influence. Some are worried that Wong and his fellow protesters could be heading into dangerous territory. In 1989, when pro-democracy protesters camped out in Tiananmen Square, the Chinese military cracked down and killed perhaps thousands of protesters.

Talk About It

Sometimes, teens feel as if they can't make an impact in their schools, churches or neighborhoods, but Wong proves you can make a difference. Are there issues you feel passionate about to which you could lend a voice of support?

You don't need to lead protests or hunger strikes to make a difference, of course. What are some things you could do to help impact the world around you in a positive way? Handing out pamphlets? Volunteering at a soup kitchen? Participating in a worthy program at your youth group?

Wong isn't the first Christian to protest what is thought to be an injustice. Christians have a long history of pushing for reform, from American abolitionists in the 19th century to leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. Can you think of some Christians who have made a difference? Do you think Christians feel a particular calling to make the world better or more fair? Why or why not?

What the Bible Says

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:10-12).

“Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause” (Isa. 1:17).

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21).

“Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Prov. 31:8-9).

Paul Asay has written for *The Washington Post*, *Christianity Today*, *Beliefnet.com*, and *The (Colorado Springs) Gazette*. He writes about culture for *PluggedIn* and wrote the Batman book *God on the Streets of Gotham* (Tyndale). He recently collaborated with Jim Daly, president of Focus on the Family, on his book *The Good Dad*. He lives in Colorado Springs with wife, Wendy, and his two children. Follow him on Twitter @AsayPaul.