

The smallest enemy

by Ian Robinson, Captain –

Western officers Captains Ian and Isobel Robinson serve in Singapore at the Peacehaven Nursing Home for the Aged as director and assistant director. Stationed there since March 2004, they send regular reports home on their life and ministry overseas.

Here is an excerpt from recent correspondence, “Survivor Island #18.”

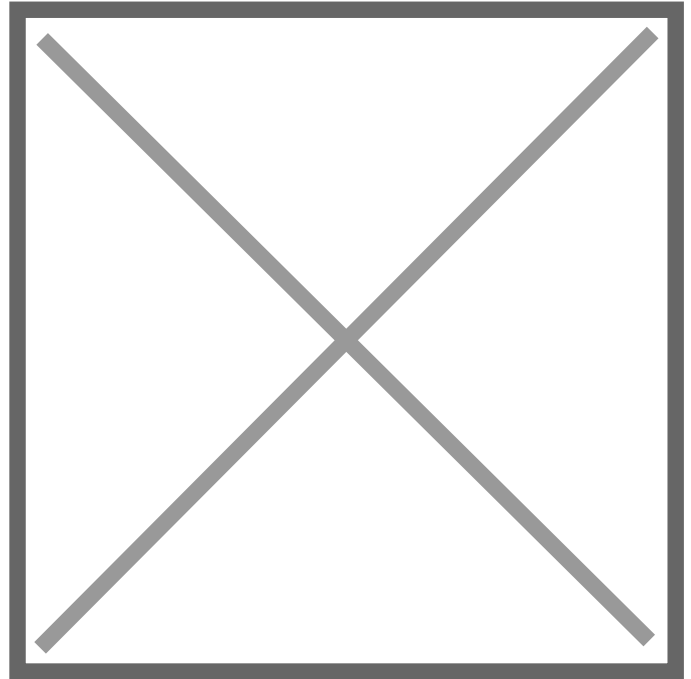
We are at the end of the southwest monsoon season in Singapore, so thunderstorms are *derigueur* and no cause for alarm. We did take note, however, when the TV news channel flashed on the screen, not “Storm Watch,” but “Dengue Watch!”

Dengue, pronounced den-gee, is a vector-borne infectious disease (VBID), spread by the *Aedes* mosquito. In Singapore we have no fear of nature’s fury unleashed in howling monsoons, blazing lightning and torrential rain, but we are paralyzed with fear by an itsy-bitsy-teeny-weeny mozzie!

Actually, it is no laughing matter. For the past several weeks, the infection rate in Singapore has topped one hundred every day—and those are the reported cases. By the middle of September there had been over 10,200 cases of dengue, more than in the whole of 2004. Compare this with 824 confirmed cases in the USA from 1977-2004 and you have some idea of the endemic nature of this disease.

Added to the paranoia is the threat of bird flu. In the past eighteen months there have been 112 reported cases of avian flu, with 57 deaths. Most of those occurred in Vietnam and Thailand, but reports of recent cases in Malaysia and Indonesia are cause for concern. Birds fly! And they don’t observe international borders. What’s even more frightening is that mosquitoes have to bite you to infect you; birds just have to be fried, roasted or boiled. We eat chicken every other day!

Singaporeans, still tender from the memory of SARS, are determined not to repeat that episode. I see a spiritual application in all of this. We have no fear of the huge storms. Lightning and thunder are commonplace, even expected, on a weekly and sometimes daily basis. Just grab your umbrella and it’s business as usual. But dengue and bird flu are different. They are unseen killers that sneak up on us when we are taking care of the basics of life, such as sleeping and eating. The mosquitoes strike at



any time: while you are waiting at the bus stop, walking along the road, eating at the outdoor hawker center, or just lying in bed. Bird flu is even more insidious. All you need to do is eat the wrong piece of chicken or duck – the most common meat in this part of the world. They are like Solomon’s *“little foxes that ruin the vineyards”* (Song of Songs 2:15). They are like sin. We can see the big sins coming, long before they hit. Of course, we often choose to let them hit anyway, but we are not taken by surprise. Big sins like murder, committing adultery, robbing a bank, do not sneak up on us. There are warnings everywhere, for a long time before they are committed. But little sins, things like lying, gossiping, stealing something that is lying around, getting angry over nothing—these are the ones that catch us unaware, especially when our guard is down.

What should we do? Emulate Singapore, of course! Comb your heart and mind, searching out all the little inconsistencies, grudges, and areas of discontent that could be the “little foxes” in your vineyard, and clear them out. Get rid of them. The government instructs us to empty our watering cans of all water, *and then turn them upside down so no more can gather*. Do the same in your heart. *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”* (1 John 1:9)

You can find the complete text of “Survivor Island #18,” along with the captains’ testimonies, on the Western Territory’s website, www.salvationarmy.usawest.org, under “Western Territory officers and personnel serving overseas.”