

Grace is Every Page

- Witnessing the New Thing God has Done with Book Giving Ministry



- ◎ Interviewee: Thomas Tang -- General Secretary
Matthew Fung -- Associate General Secretary (Publishing)
/ Publisher (CCL Publishing House)
- ◎ Interviewer & Editing: Cheuk Yu

Foreword

With the implementation of the newly revised Religious Affairs Regulations, a government structure reform in late March, the Religious Affairs Bureau is now managed by the United Front Work Department, an organ of the Communist Party's Central Committee. Previously overseen by the State Administration for Press, Publications, Radio, Film and Television, the publishing industry is now under direct control of the Central Propaganda Department. These changes could directly affect the production of Christian literature.

Nevertheless, facing the urgent need for ministry resources that new pastors have, we dare not tarry or fail to respond. On the one hand, we are raising funds to help financially support the purchasing of books for fresh graduates from seminary; on the other hand, we pray constantly for guidance from God for new directions in this ministry. In the latter half of May, our hearts trembled as we began our journey of book gifting, during which we brought books to give to over 5000 students in over 50 seminaries, Bible schools and training centres all over the country. What did the team see, hear or experience over this journey? We invited two core members of the book giving team for an interview, including Thomas Tang, General Secretary of CCL (hereafter Tang), and Matthew Fung, Associate General

Secretary (Publishing) (hereafter Fung), and gave them the chance to discuss in detail.

In The Lord's Time: Supporting Pastors to Defend the Truth

Due to severe restrictions in the mainland regarding Christian publication, it is difficult for organizations outside of China to publish spiritual books within the mainland. The entire corporate body of CCL prays each week that the Lord will open a path, and gives thanks to the Heavenly Father for preparing partners for our collaborations. Tang shared excitedly, "The simplified Chinese version of *Sweeter than Honey: Preaching the Old Testament* (Author Christopher J. H. Wright) is one of the books on the book-giving list. I saw the grace of God in every stage of its publication and printing, and the time is just right! A few months ago, we authorized the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary to publish this book. But we didn't get all the documents and approvals until the middle of May. We were very tight for time, but we are grateful for the help of a manager from the Amity Printing Company Ltd. for putting this book into production in their busy schedule. Amity Printing Company Ltd. is the only printers in China allowed to print Bibles. The result was that we had 5000 books ready by 13th of June, and we shipped them off immediately from the factory straight to the 50 schools; just in time for graduation ceremonies at the end of the month. The students all left their schools with this book in hand. There is thankfulness and grace for each book.

Fung was at a Bible school in the south-west when he met Teacher Zhou, and could more deeply appreciate how *Sweeter than Honey* was God doing a wonderful deed for the graduates. Holding the book in hand, Teacher Zhou happily said, "In the school, I was appointed to teach Old Testament and Preaching. In the past six years, I have always sought suitable teaching material to serve as a textbook on this topic for students. I noticed *Sweeter than Honey* when it was published in 2015; I could see that this book provided guidance on the different genres of books in the Old Testament, compared various factual records and details, combined topics in a systematic way, and even provided various sermon drafts from the author himself. It was a great and practical guidebook for exegetical preaching. I never thought that this book would be published in the mainland, nor did I imagine it would be included in this year's book giving! It is sure to become a good companion for those graduates preaching from the Old Testament." The Lord has given what ministers have asked for. Please continue to pray for preaching ministry of pastors in the mainland, that this book may be helpful for pastors



and preachers working through difficult text in the Old Testament for their preaching ministry.

5000 sets of books were given in 2018. Each set contained 21 books, with a total volume exceeding 100,000. Each graduate received 11 paper books and 10 eBooks. These included books on hermeneutics, apologetics, discipleship training, family, marriage and other theological books. We could see God's guidance in the printing of paper books, and we can also see the Lord's provision in the provenance of the eBooks. As Fung shared, "The graduates cherished electronic books, because their mobile phones are their loyal companions in outbound ministry. At the beginning of this year, we invited each school and college to send two students from the graduating class to become 'eBook ambassadors', and provided remote guidance for them. These ambassadors not only continued to teach other students how to use eBooks, but also collected feedback from them as well. With the feedback we received, we will now be able to prepare better material to serve them in future."



Used by the Lord: Timely Help to Those in Need

The pace of the book giving trip was very quick. They proceeded to a different city every day. Yet in every location, they each witnessed how the Lord loves the heart of Christian workers. Tang and Fung heartily shared the same sentiment, saying, "Though the Sichuan Theological Seminary had a very old and tiny campus with little resources, they have persisted over the many years in training Christian workers in the Southwestern regions. Gifting books to them helps make up for the shortage of literary resources. Many students in Dali Bible School are from different minority ethnic groups in the Yunnan Dali region, gifting books of a pastoral nature to them helps prepare them for teaching the Bible. The number of Christians in Henan Province is the highest in the entire nation, yet heresy is rampant there. Hermeneutical and apologetical books help equip the graduates there to fight this spiritual battle against heresy."



They continued saying, "Shaanxi Bible School

graduates choose to return home to serve in remote village churches. These churches have very little spiritual books. Gifting books not only supports these new pastors, but also blesses their whole church. The work of training Christians in Hainan Province has been slow in its growth, and the number of books kept in the Hainan Christian Training Center is quite low, and of few genres. Graduates rarely have reference books to consult while training there. We pray that the books related to pastoral ministry will be a timely aid to them.”

Keeping Our Eyes on the Lord: Witnessing the Handing-Down of the Book Giving Mandate

There is a new book that is part of the book giving, which is the simplified Chinese version of *Ruth and Billy Graham: The Legacy of a Couple* which is published by the Jiangsu CCC. When we were on the book giving trip, the team paid a visit to Huai’an city in Jiangsu province, where Ruth Bell (That is Billy Graham’s wife Ruth Graham) was born and raised. Ruth’s father was the missionary Dr. L. Nelson Bell. He worked in evangelism in churches, medicine at hospitals, and education in schools. Tang stated earnestly, “Every time I introduce this book to graduates, I share regarding the proactive attitude that the Graham couple shared. They would not be directed by their situations, but chose to live their lives guided by the eternal values of God. Not only that, I share regarding the heart of service that missionaries in yesteryears had for China. I encourage these soon-to-be graduates to embrace that sacrificial heart as their inheritance.”



Hopeful Prayers: This Will Not be the Last Time

Ministry in the mainland is subject to many instabilities. Fung spoke with great depth of feeling, saying, “With the book giving ministry, my heart is filled with thankfulness, and yet I also feel conflicted. I am anxious that this will not be the last time we can give these book gifts. When I see the space for work in Christian publishing in the mainland grow narrower each year, that is to say that even though we had publishers and printers in the mainland to work with this year doesn’t mean that these collaborations will continue next year. Each step going forward relies solely on the grace of God!”

Tang has served in the mainland for over twenty years. He has experienced and seen how the gift books can stay beside new ministers through the highs and lows of their ministries. He cherishes every opportunity to serve. “The amount of work that pastors face

in China is shocking. They are ministering from Monday to Sunday. Not only do they pastor one church, they also minister at multiple gatherings. When they lack mentors and spiritual resources to nourish themselves, they will burn out in just a few years. Moreover, pastors face the difficult questions regarding personal growth, marriage and raising children. Because of the culture and expectations of believers in the mainland, they dare not voice out any doubts or weaknesses. They often hide away sadness in their hearts, and can only rely on the books written by their forebears to guide them through the dark valleys of the soul.”

Book giving is not icing on a cake, but help in times of need. This is the mandate given to us by our Heavenly Father. Though it is no longer as easy to implement, we must strive to testify that our Lord has prepared precious spiritual resources for His seminary graduates through written words. We hope that the book giving ministry continues, and blesses more and more Christian workers. We sincerely invite you to support this ministry and keep it in your prayers.



“Is it me?”

■ Journey to Discovering Your Calling

© Reported & Compiled by: Guo Shuo

“Is it me?” Every pastor called by God to serve must have asked himself this question at some point.

It was my first book giving trip to southwestern China where ethnic minorities abound. At a Bible school, I saw a group of youngsters in their 20s. When asked what their gravest challenge would be upon entering the workplace, they all replied, “The greatest challenge would lie in pastoring new believers... identifying the needs of the believers...” Such a challenge is understandable and real. The “pastor’s package” we donated can truly cater to the needs of pastors. However, is this the only challenge confronting pastors when they embark on their service in the Lord?

Like many graduates, a graduate surnamed Ma came from an ethnic minority in which many had converted to Christ. A majority of students planned to return to their hometown to serve upon graduation. In fact, many were asked by their parents to study theology. So was the calling to serve their own calling, or a calling imposed upon them by their parents? The challenges awaiting them were plenty: they would serve without pay, run into trouble in working with deacons, find it hard to meet the high expectations of individual believers on new pastors, shepherd believers with weak Biblical knowledge, face the threats of cults, cope with the vast needs of believers who seek the truth. They are often put under enormous pressure, stifling their commitment to serve the Lord. They would keep asking themselves this question, “Is it still me?” Some teachers in the Bible school pledged to continue caring for the graduates when the latter started serving. However, teachers’ teaching load is already extremely onerous. Do they really have the time to care for the graduates?

There was a couple named Chan among the graduates. Earlier, the couple were both diagnosed with end-stage cancer within two years. They spent all their savings earned from doing business previously on treatment. The doctor ultimately ceased their treatment, and asked them to do quickly whatever they wished to do. In great desperation, the couple turned to the Lord and were cured miraculously. The miracle they went through spurred the whole family to turn to the Lord and give up the idols they used to worship. Their experience also encouraged their local church. The couple were willing to dedicate themselves to the Lord, but lacked the financial means to study in a Bible school. They also asked themselves

this question, “Is it us?” Thanks to the Lord, through their class teacher’s ties with a church in Shenzhen, a Bible study group in the Shenzhen church decided to fully fund their 3-year study in the Bible school! Several days before the book giving group arrived, with the assistance of a Shenzhen pastor, the whole graduate class went to this church to meet the Bible study group. This was the first time that the couple met their supporters. Such kinds of cross-region support and ministry were so touching, and were an exemplary testimony of God’s wonderful grace on the couple!

We visited another seminary in southwestern China. Among the 40 graduates, one of them was a mother, sister Ho from Yunnan. Her mother was a believer, but sister Ho did not go to the church when she was a kid. Under her mother’s perseverance and influence, sister Ho was finally converted after she had grown up. She was even called upon by God six years ago to become a pastor. She also asked herself this question, “Is it really me?”



As soon as she received the donated books, sister Ho eagerly wrote the English initials of her name on the books, showing how much she cherished these resources.

Sister Ho had a 9-year-old daughter and 2-year-old son. She left behind her family to equip herself in a seminary. In the first year of study, a student would be observed by teachers and assessed on whether he was deemed suitable to continue his study. Sister Ho said that in her class, several students were advised not to continue with their study after the first-year assessment. As such, those remaining to complete the several years of study were even more dedicated to God’s calling for them to serve as pastors.

Please Support 2018 Mainland Seminary Graduates Book Giving Plan

Thanks to supporters’ generous donations, the Book Giving Team supported in May and June this year 50 seminaries, Bible schools and training centres, each with an average of 100 graduates. Every graduate would be given a package of pastoring resources (HK\$500 is the subsidy for each package). As of mid-July, we raised US\$180,000 and were running short of US\$141,000.

Individual institutions will hold their graduation ceremony in the second half of the year. Please continue to remember their needs in your prayers and support the book giving plan to bless the service of new pastors. You are invited to take action without delay -- contribute to the Mainland Seminary Graduate Book Giving Plan 2018.

Prayers

1 Pray for the churches in China

Recently, bad news concerning the churches in China comes almost every day. Crosses have been demolished, churches were forced to close, leaders were arrested, Bible and hymns were burnt. The government-approved Three Self Churches, registered churches and traditional house churches shared the same fate.



Some church leaders told us that about two-thirds of the churches were closed in their counties. The church members have to sign a letter declaring that they have denied their faith, so that their children can enter university. Similar news came from the provinces Henan, Jiangxi, Qinghai and Guangdong.

Let's lift up our holy hands to pray for the churches in China. Pray that the Lord will have mercy on His people, have peace from God in hard times, and have wisdom to know how to face the current situation. Let our great King in heaven manifest His righteousness, strengthen His faithful servants, and believe firmly that our God is the ruler of the Heaven and Earth. Rely on our Lord to face the adversity.

2 Continuation of book-giving ministry



Our book-giving teams have visited and delivered book sets to 30 book-giving points by the end of June. They also had exchanges with graduates and teachers. Book-giving hasn't finished yet, some Seminary students will be graduated in the second half of the year, please keep on praying for them. Due to the limited range of Christian titles(around 1,500) on the mainland and tight official control on the publishing industry, it is difficult for seminaries to find appropriate Bible commentaries, and books on Bible study, discipleship and leadership etc.

May God have mercy for the "Mainland Seminary Graduates Book-giving Plan", that it

will not be disrupted by policy changes. Please also pray for its budget.

3 Real-life ministry

Most theological seminary, Bible school and training centre graduates have gone to their places of ministry after graduating in June and begun to face real-life challenges.



May the Lord guide the novice preachers, help them deepen their knowledge, apply what they have learned from years of Bible study and knowledge in different situations, and achieve breakthroughs in their work. Even a small gesture or some words uttered casually can have a positive impact on the church and the society. May the Lord keep them humble, firm in faith, willing to listen to others and help them strive to be leaders fulfilling the Lord's will.

4 Making good use of rest days



Since the launch of its economic reform, China's number of statutory holidays and weekend days off have risen from 60 to 115. With more rest days, an improved holiday system and rising income, the quality of leisure life has also improved. But this is mainly enjoyed by employees of government departments and large enterprises. Many junior staff in the service industry are denied the same holidays and quality of leisure life, but they dare not fight for them for fear of losing their job.

May the Lord prevent employers' exploitation of low-level staff and give workers proper holidays and protection of their rights. May He also teach believers to make good use of their days off, to spend them with Him and their family, to serve others besides going out for fun.

~ THE END ~