

Journeying Together, Choosing Deep Ploughing and Careful Cultivation!
— **Cultivating Fourth Generation Leaders**

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Times Have Changed!

Since the Chinese economic reform, countless support has poured in from overseas communities to mainland churches. To the authorities, these “missionaries” were never welcome in China. Regardless of their work or reason for entry, in the eyes of the authorities, all this was seen as infiltration! Too many of them couldn’t stay beyond a short period of time in China to serve. Faced with endless needs of church ministry training and having little time, short-term and intensive courses were the only options available.



Since the 80s, most expatriate workers have operated large-scale training using models similar to “knowledge factory”. These intensive courses could run for four weeks long, seven days a week, with fourteen hours of training per day. Even if it could be guaranteed that the trainer would be able to finish the course, there was no guarantee that the students would be able to absorb much, let alone apply what they have learned. Thankfully, that generation of ministry workers still have enthusiasm in serving the Lord. What they lack is mainly Biblical and theological knowledge. At the same time, they expect the next generation to study hard for knowledge. As for church leadership, it is both a calling and a gift; it cannot be taught. There are many ministry workers who form mentor-mentee relationships with the new generation, and often remind them of the proper attitude and heart towards ministry. The younger generation of ministry workers learn as they work, and work as they learn.

The times are changing. As social trends tend to independence, mainland pastors gain knowledge and broaden their horizons through internet resources, studying abroad and reading Christian literature. Passing on experiences through mentoring has gradually come to be disregarded. The fourth generation leaders (those aged thirty and under) have a higher educational level than the older generation, yet the quality of their spiritual life has not increased accordingly. They need holistic cultivation before they are well-prepared to accept the baton of church leadership. They must learn not only to be “competent” at ministry, but also to “communicate well with others”. They need “life mentors” to walk with them, provide pastoral care for them and pass on experience to them. These “life mentors” will become their examples in daily life.

What is the Next Step?



Pastor Xu is one of our trainees. During mealtime and after class, she would chat with the training team. Along with online communication, we gradually started to know about her and her serving experiences. She is a fourth generation leader who came to have faith in Christ in her university life. She responded to her calling after graduation and received informal theological training in the mainland

without hesitation. After a year of learning, she participated in university ministry. She had entered into full-time ministry, yet no church gave her a wage. She could only rely on brothers and sisters for financial support. When she first started to serve, she met a good mentor who cared for and guided her frequently. However, this pastor went to another city to serve three years later. The new pastor was only focused on ministry development. They only talked about topics related to ministries, and the pastor seldom showed any care for her needs.

Having served a few years, she felt that there were insufficiencies in her ministry, so she started to apply for theological courses in Hong Kong. She applied the theories and knowledge to real work, and started to see fruits in university ministry. Moreover, her efforts were appreciated by a worker in an overseas poverty relief organization, who invited her for further collaboration. From an objective perspective, her path of ministry had a steady progress. Unexpectedly, she had to debate between choosing to continue in the university

ministry, leaving church ministry by accepting the post offered by the poverty relief organization, or studying theology full-time.

She said frankly, “Even though the ministry was going well, there were some personal difficulties that I could not wave off. My parents still cannot understand why my salary remains low and unsteady even though I graduated from university. Moreover, my ministry field is far from my hometown, so I cannot look after my aging parents and I feel guilty for it. Those childhood friends of mine in the village already got married and had children. I’m almost thirty but I’m still single and anxious about this. I long for a companion to share the ups and downs of life with.”

Perhaps we feel that these anxieties are trivial matters. How can they affect our calling of ministry? Pastor Xu is like many youths, who don’t have enough experience in life. Theological training didn’t teach her how to soothe her troubling emotions, nor how to make life decisions. She couldn’t discuss with her sheep that she was



pasturing, and she received little care from the church pastor. In this lonely situation, she asked herself, “What is my next step? Should I persist in staying in this city to serve the university students? Should I return to my hometown and start a family? Should I accept the job offer from the overseas poverty relief organization? Or should I further my education and start a new life?” She had one wish in her heart, “I wish I could have a spiritual mentor who can guide me as we seek God’s will and lead together. I wish I could be cared for and encouraged. I don’t need to be taught how to do my job, but I wish that this mentor could listen to my thanksgiving and struggles, and give me some responses and encouragement when I am in difficult times, so that I wouldn’t struggle blindly in my troubles.”

A Life Mentor is Necessary

Pastor Xu wants a spiritual mentor. More specifically, she needs the exchange of experiences that comes from a mentor-mentee relationship. She hopes that this “life mentor” can encourage her to seek the resources from God based on her personality, and guide her to develop her potential. The mentor-mentee relationship is not new—“The first model of Christian mentor-mentee relationship was in Jesus and His disciples. They lived together

for three years. They ate and slept together in the same place, journeying around different towns and cities, and they lived under the teaching of Jesus. In this process, Jesus often used what was at hand to teach the disciples about the Truth of the Kingdom of Heaven, and the proper attitude and methods of ministry. The emphasis was on changing values, not the transmission of knowledge.” (See Footnote)



A “life mentor” could be just one single person. But at different stages of life, more often there will be many “life mentors” pasturing the same person. Each mentor has different talents, and young leaders have different needs at different stages of their growth. These mentor-mentee relationships are broad, not given to

factionalism or monopoly of learners. The common principle of these mentors is to inspire young leaders in different levels so that not only are they “competent”, but also “able to communicate well with others”. Being a “life mentor” of mainland leaders also means being able to grasp the implication of public opinion and religious policies in the mainland. Mentors can only understand the pressures in ministry that these young leaders are facing, and walk with them appropriately in this way.

Conclusion

In conclusion, “life mentor” is a good relief to the needs of fourth generation leaders in personal growth. Leadership training cannot stop at the stage of functional training. This training should focus on the cultivation of “people” and cannot be accelerated too much, as it is not a matter of mechanical moulding. There should be deep ploughing and careful cultivation. Teaching should be done by setting an example, and in accordance with the personalities of these young leaders. They need someone with whom to walk through the trials of life, so that they can be well-prepared to carry out greater missions in their life. Leadership training must counteract tendencies towards materialism, and cannot be focused on instant material effects. Rather, the emphasis must be placed on the future, with a focus on emotional, spiritual and moral cultivation.

This is precisely the meaning of “deep ploughing and careful cultivation”. Life is not a tool. It

cannot be produced in a factory. It must be built through one-to-one relationships, through lives impacting lives. In training one hundred people who have no influence on the church and society, wouldn't it be better to train one teacher who could nurture and teach one hundred disciples instead?

Footnote: An abstract from "Pastoral Intern?" by Otto Lui, from Six Leadership Essentials Blog (<https://sixleadershipessentials.org/>)

Breaking the 100,000 Mark with Your Support!

Matthew Fung

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Achieving Breakthroughs amidst Challenges



The year 2017 marks a major milestone in the publication of "The Living Word Curriculum Series". Thanks to the Lord's guidance and your support, we expect that our publication volume would top the 100,000 mark this year, with over ten years' efforts in promoting the curriculum among churches. Not only does this signify that small Bible study groups have become

part and parcel of churches' ministries, but more importantly, church leaders and workers have been nurtured to live out the Truth and realize their faith in daily life. Today, we are confronted with a new challenge as more and more churches and small groups have enquired about our progress of publishing more materials, and expressed their wish for these to be made available as early as possible.

Apart from the publication volume, there has also been a breakthrough in the groups that use our publications. A focus of the "Living Word" is the approach of "student-oriented" small-group study. It does not only build the spiritual life of participants or disciples, but also helps a church shepherd its believers based on age and via small groups. In the process of teaching and learning, group leaders are also nurtured to become mature church leaders.

In the “Living Word” camps in the past, once the pastors, elders and deacons had grasped the main concepts, they would pass them on to the group leaders. A pastoral team could hence be built. As small group pasturing has developed in leaps and bounds, the “Living Word” has been taught for the first time to students in mainland Bible schools this year. This can help students apply the Truth to their daily lives. Upon graduation, they will be equipped to nurture the new generation of believers. However, this breakthrough development is still at an early stage, and we hope to accumulate more experience so that it can be applied more extensively in the future.

Matching of Resources for Continuous Development



In response to the needs of our target group, we are constantly adjusting our writing, publication and re-printing arrangements. From the feedback of the target group and the increasing usage of our curriculum, we know that the “Living Word” has built a good reputation. Thanks to the Lord for

listening to our prayers, new authors have joined us. We are now concurrently producing five sets of curriculum (see the table below), and making preparations for publication of some more. We hope that you can support the production costs of these publications, while mainland students can pay for the re-printing costs so that more can benefit from the curriculum. *John & John's Letters* with over 6,000 volumes published, are good examples of how your offering matches with the needs of mainland students to make it possible for the books to be supplied continuously on a non-profit-making basis.

As the ministry has been developing rapidly, new plans have to be made for fund raising. Given that production and re-printing costs are ever rising, cost control is crucial. Yet, maintaining the quality of the publications remains to be our topmost concern. While we are abundantly blessed by the Lord, we also seek a stable funding to execute our plans. Therefore, the attached table has been updated to provide the latest information on our publication schedule and funding requirement so that we can raise the resources needed and make more flexible arrangements. We invite you to pray for us and learn more about our ministry and resource requirements. Let's witness together the Lord's work in various parts of the world.

A Story of Thankfulness

A church in South China has used “The Living Word Curriculum Series” for a number of years. The believers have tried to apply the Truth to their daily lives and incorporated the “Living Word” into the church’s pasturing system. Believers first learn and later teach the Bible, and many volumes of the “Living Word” have been taught over the years. As soon as a new book is published, it will be incorporated into the church’s Bible study classes. Brothers and sisters wait with much eagerness for a full-fledged curriculum which covers all books of the New and Old Testaments so that they can study the whole Bible.

Book	Target this year	Completion date	Fund raising target this year
<i>Genesis (Revised edition)</i>	publication and distribution	3 rd quarter 2017	US\$96,000
<i>Acts</i>	publication and distribution	3 rd quarter 2017	
<i>Corinthians</i>	drafting of the content	4 th quarter 2017	
<i>Romans/ Galatians</i>	compilation of materials	4 th quarter 2017	
<i>Isaiah</i>	compilation of materials	4 th quarter 2017	

Prayers

1. Good Mentors for Children

With deep ploughing and careful cultivation, lives impact lives. Hundreds of children will grow healthily in the Lord if nurtured by well-trained children Sunday school teachers. The third stage of training started in April for participants in the first Professional Diploma in Christian Education course. May the Lord help them build on what they have learned in the previous sessions and be ready for the mission of being children



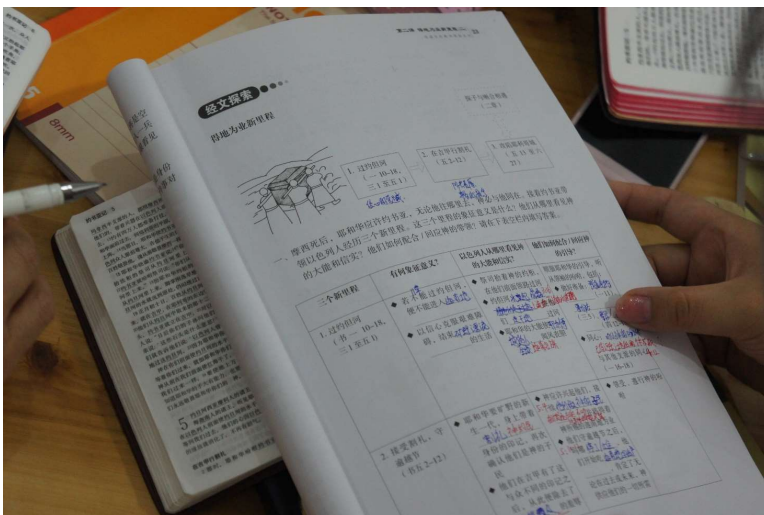
Sunday school teachers. Please remember the next batch of participants of the diploma course, that they can commit two years to finishing the course.

2. Searching the Mission of Work

The recruitment activities for college graduates in the mainland this year are already underway. According to the Ministry of Education, there will be 7.95 million college graduates this year. Owing to the difficulties of seeking a job, more and more graduates go to second-tier cities in West Central China for work. Recruiters expect difficulties for many in seeking jobs, pointing to a mismatch between graduates' training and job requirements. They claim that would-be graduates lack professional skills and overrate their abilities. May the Lord help the graduates set goals that suit their abilities. Pray that He will guide churches to care for them, help them identify their mission of work and their life value clearly.



3. A Good Tool for Learning, Applying the Truth and Teaching



Christian literature and Bible teaching materials play an important role in helping mainland Christian workers learn, apply the Truth, and teach others. “The Living Word Curriculum Series” were designed to achieve such goals while nurturing leaders. May the Lord bless the Living Word’s editorial team, help them generate meaningful, easy-to-follow content

that helps increase learners’ understanding of the Bible; promote “people-oriented” small group learning in mainland churches. Also, may the Lord help publishers meet churches’ needs through their platforms despite growing official restrictions on Christian publications over the past 2 years.

4. Appreciate the Value of Elderly

The latest report of World Health Organization shows an average life expectancy of 76.1 in China. From 2030 onwards, the proportion of Chinese aged 65 or above will surpass that of Japan, becoming the country which has the highest level of aging. According to the *12th Five-Year Plan on the Development of Chinese Senior Care*, there are currently only 30 beds for every 1,000 elderly. The task of caring for the elderly is very much left to single children and their families, many of whom are busy making a living. May the Lord help people see the value of the elderly, respecting them rather than seeing them as a burden. May the Lord lead churches in developing caring ministries for the elderly.



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