

Leadership Training

Experiential Lessons -- Break Through Tradition

© Editing: Cheuk Yu

From Lesson Publishing to Face to Face Training

Last year, we were grateful to share the discipleship training series of four books of the “Discipleship Essentials”¹ -- “Discipleship Essentials”, “Leadership Essentials”, “The Essential Commandment”, “Witness Essential”--was officially launched in the mainland. Though the traditional Chinese version has always been very popular amongst Chinese



General Secretary Thomas Tang received the first batch of “Discipleship Essentials” series printed in Simplified Chinese at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary.

believers in North America and Hong Kong, last year CCL authorized Nanjing Union Theological Seminary to print the Simplified Chinese version. After publishing the “Discipleship Essential” series, the response received could not be more enthusiastic. We are now arranging for a second printing. Under the strict control of publishing in China, our Heavenly Father has opened a door for us to print.

Greg Ogden, one of the authors of “Discipleship Essentials”, pointed out, “Leadership is influence; a Christian leader is someone who can wield Christ-like influence [...] so those leaders who can wield a Christ-like influence must first be followers of Jesus--disciples. This is also the task that Christ left for the Church [...]” Hence this book series was designed with church small-groups in mind, for setting disciples on the path of leadership and to support churches in bridging the gap in leadership training. It also allows disciples to become leaders in the family, the church, the workplace and in society--to wield Christ-like influence. God, the author of miracles, has more riches in store for church leaders in China than we can imagine. Not only will we be able to publish this series, the author of the series will personally teach mainland pastors with these books!

In this stormy landscape of China's religious sphere, towards the later half of July last year, our Father led "Discipleship Essential" book series author Rev. Ogden and his Shanghainese wife to visit the mainland, and to personally lead the church leadership training. This helped the participants grasp the central concepts of the book. The ministry team and I assisted in teaching during the entire trip. We experienced typhoons, flight delays and other delays, but in the end we all could witness the love that God has for the churches in China, and His heart for building up the leaders there!

Breaking through ways of thinking, and modes of learning

Using "from disciple to leader" as a theme, Rev. Ogden personally taught 55 mainland pastors from 43 different churches in Jiangsu Province. He used the "Discipleship Essentials" training series as teaching materials. These pastors were mostly frontline church staff from third and fourth-tier cities, who have relatively few opportunities to receive outside training. It was not easy to gather them together. This was their annual retreat, which allowed them to set aside time from their busy pastoral work to join the training for a day and a half.

Actually, using the word "equipping" is not the most accurate description of this teaching trip. It should actually be called an experiential lesson in "breaking through traditional ways of thinking and modes of pastoring". In every session, we could see the shocked expressions on their faces. Rev. Ogden's style of lecturing and teaching stimulated them to reflect on their current situation in pastoring.

The fear of small group discipleship training: frontline workers have encountered "cell group" style discipleship training in the past. In fact, some of the pastors have tried this method before. However, some of these churches experienced splits because of the number and influence of the people in these cell groups. This broke the relationship between pastors and elders, and between different believers as well. They felt anxious about using small groups for discipleship training because they feared that it would cause church attendance to drop. Nevertheless, Rev. Ogden's goal was to help leaders teach disciples how to follow Jesus on the foundation of discipleship training through the use of the teaching materials. It would teach disciples proper church life, and in so doing build up

leaders who can lead the church to grow and expand in a healthy way. The “growth and increase” that Rev. Ogden mentioned motivated these pastors to squarely face their fears regarding small groups.

Implementing the small group experience: entering the training room, I could see the pastors sitting in rows, preparing themselves for a day and a half of lectures. Yet this was not how Rev. Ogden was going to teach. He asked the pastors to stand up on both sides, and divided them into groups. Each group had 3-4 people at most, and no group leader was appointed. Group members took turns leading group members in sharing. These pastors were extremely uncomfortable with this for the first half-day; they couldn't get used to it and felt insecure. Rev. Ogden wanted them to understand that everyone could be a resource, and that in discipleship training, each member had to participate; no one should hide. Returning to church, pastors will have to lead believers. Everyone should pursue becoming disciples and leaders based on the truth, rooted in the truth so that they can stand firm in an ever-changing religious landscape. Even without the shelter of a church building, disciples can still wield Christ-like influence.



Epiphanies from asking questions: it is still common for churches in the mainland to use unilateral lectures styles for teaching. This was also the case for this group of pastors. Rev. Ogden was not satisfied with this style and required the pastors to ask him questions and to share opinions in direct exchanges. Seeing the embarrassed looks on their faces, I could see how difficult it was for them to break through the status quo in teaching methods, let alone speak to a foreigner. Even though there was an interpreter, on the topic of discipleship training--a difficult topic to begin with-- each word was difficult to utter. Every small group discussion session became a time for the pastors to discuss which areas of the lesson they struggled with, so they could better share opinions and raise questions. Though it would take much longer than a day and half to digest Rev. Ogden's points about



discipleship training, it raised their awareness and discussion on the topic, and increased their chances of using discipleship training in their respective churches.

Conclusion

Over a decade ago, we promoted small group learning in the “Living Word” Bible Teaching Series. We also did a lot of pioneering work. Ministry in China is a long journey, and traditions cannot be changed in a day. We praise God for using us as vanguards. We hope that through the “Discipleship Essentials” discipleship training series, we can have a great influence on the churches in China. Now, when faced with increasing restrictions on church development, small group discipleship living may be the only effective method of dealing with this challenge.

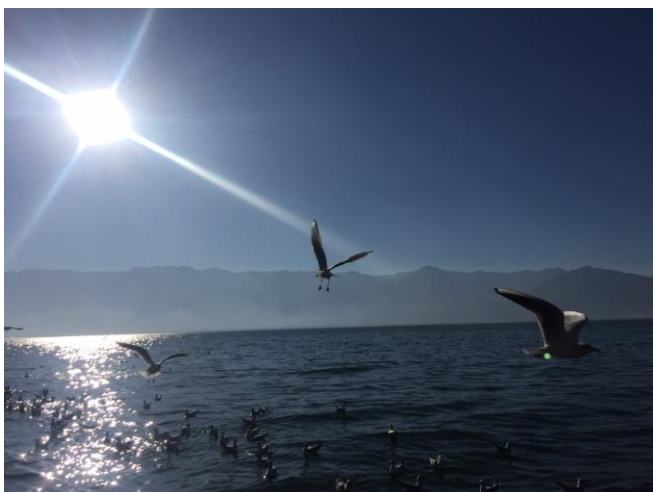
We hope that this training exercise will prompt these pastors to tackle the current situation of discipleship training, so that they can make adjustments and improvements. It is difficult to quantify the effectiveness of the training, but if through the day and half of training from Rev. Ogden these pastors are stimulated to think about how they can adapt these training materials and small group discipleship training methods to something suitable for their own context, then this will support the pastoring of their flock, and build up disciples for ministry. May the Lord himself strengthen the impression of what these pastors have seen and heard, so that they may take up the mission of training disciples, and lead the church to healthy growth and maturity!

¹*Authors: Greg Ogden, Daniel Meyer*

Book Giving

Finding Hope Amidst Difficulties – Book Giving 2019

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Associate Director (Development)



Despite the suppression of the church and restrictions on publications on the mainland getting more severe, our book giving plan has expanded during 2012-2018. God has responded to seminary graduates' needs for books in a miraculous way. We have arranged to give out 19,000 packs of pastoral materials to 19,000 new pastors!

“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair... We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.” (2 Corinthians 4: 8-10, NIV)

We keep asking ourselves - do these books really cater to the needs of pastoring in the mainland? We had discussed God's opening the door for us to conduct training, and we were given the opportunity to arrange for the author of the “Discipleship Essentials” series to train church leaders in one of the provinces in eastern China. More than 1,000 full-time pastors in that province have been shepherding several thousand churches for a prolonged period of time.

Meeting the needs of marriage counselling

In addition to the “Discipleship Essentials” series, the books proposed to be given in 2019 include “Integral Pre-marital Counseling” (Teacher's version and Workbook) in simplified Chinese characters. According to a survey in recent years, some



3.8 million couples in the mainland are in the process of getting a divorce, double the number ten years ago. The two authors of the book possess over 20 years' of experience in pre-marital counselling, and wrote the book specifically to meet the needs of city believers. The book aims to equip mainland pastors and church leaders to support believers who are in a relationship or married. Under the "one-child" policy, many in our new generation have been spoiled by their parents, and thus lack the skills to get along with siblings or build interpersonal relationships. As a result, friction is often seen in their marriage.

Pastor Chen from a seminary in a coastal city told us that graduates often talked about the difficulties in handling marriage and family problems in their ministry. Most would agree that "prevention is better than cure". This book helps believers who are dating to establish a spiritual relationship with their partner through learning Biblical teachings and self-reflection. The book is exactly the kind of materials the church needs. Many pastors opined that after the students learned the teachings in the Bible and reflected upon themselves, it became much easier to assess their situation and provide pre-marital counselling.

Providing comprehensive pastoral support

The difficulties faced by new pastors are manifold. To provide comprehensive support, the proposed books to be given include "Ruth and Billy Graham: The Legacy of a Couple" (for leadership development and disciple training), "Sweeter than Honey" and "Listening: The Beginning of Theology" (for Biblical study and theology study) and the "Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible", etc.

Looking ahead into 2019, if God is willing, we hope to continue to provide appropriate materials for graduates, teachers and pastors to support their growth and service. Although mainland churches are under pressure from all sides, CCL insists on responding to God's call and walking hand in hand with mainland churches to bless the 5,000 graduates in mainland seminaries this year. We invite you to join us in our service and rise to the challenges ahead. Let us witness together how wonderful our almighty God is!

Please support the 2019 Mainland Seminary Graduates Book Giving Plan

Fund Required: US\$320,500

We want to serve 50 seminaries, Bible schools and training centres, each with an average of 100 graduates. Every graduate would be given a package of pastoring resources (US\$64 is the subsidy for each package). Please pray and offer your support to the ministry and walk alongside the new pastors. Thank you!

Prayers

1. A re-think of ministry modes

Over the past decades, various mainland ministries have developed in response to changing needs and circumstances. Hong Kong churches began exchanges and ministries with their mainland counterparts through a “root-finding journey”, which involves evangelism, preaching, Bible study, worship etc. But now is the time to devise new modes of ministry due to changes in the religious environment.



May the Lord give wisdom to church leaders from outside China, help them come up with ministries that are low-key, localized, flexible and with the right partners.

2. Marriage and family education



A recent survey showed that 3.8 million couples in China were involved in divorce proceedings, doubling the number a decade ago. Even congregants of urban churches are faced with marital, family issues. Many pastors lacking training in marriage counselling and family education are not able to offer much help.

May the Lord equip more mainland pastors with Christian education courses and Christian literature to support married or dating Christians.

3. Evangelising during the Chinese New Year

The annual nationwide migration during the Spring Festival lasts from January 21 to March 1. Last year, 300 million passenger trips via the rail network were made during the period. Families are



busy for preparing various things for new year. But, for the preachers serving in mountainous regions, their meagre pay makes it difficult for them to afford extra expenses like buying new clothes for their kids during the New Year.

May the Lord move brothers and sisters in Christ to share what they have with others, so frail or cash-strapped preachers can enjoy the festive season.

May He also help believers share the gospel and heavenly joy with their friends and relatives in villages!

4. Physical and spiritual exercises



In response to the growing trend of university students paying excessive attention to the Internet at the expense of their physical health, a university in northern China has launched a 21-day course, covering aerobic exercises, healthy diet and psychological counselling, to help youngsters develop a habit of personal training. Students who

pass the course can get 2 credits.

It is equally important to remind the general public of the importance of physical training. There are many young believers in churches are also paying excessive attention to the Internet. May the Lord lead believers to allocate time for both physical and spiritual exercises.

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