

Relationship is Key to Evangelism

— Serving Mainland Students Studying in Hong Kong

© Shi Zi
Instructor in ministry for the youths



Our three-in-one God is a relational God and the creator of man, heaven and earth. Not only did He put life into the air, ocean and land, He also instilled the precious quality of “co-humanity” in man whom He created ¹. In brief, man was created to be in relationships. The author attempted to use this as a starting point to explore the subject of evangelizing among mainland students staying in Hong Kong, a ministry that began some ten years ago.

The Beginning of Evangelism Work: a “Host-Guest” Relationship

After the reunification in 1997, many churches and organizations in university campuses in Hong Kong have devoted great efforts to evangelize among mainland students and scholars studying in undergraduate or postgraduate schools in the city. Bible study classes, major evangelist gatherings, host families, Cantonese classes, English classes and extra-curricular classes were organized with clear objectives to spread the gospel and save more souls. At that time, mainland students who were mostly the post-80s and post-90s generation were curious about the city and eager to take part in various activities to understand Hong Kong’s way of living, culture and religious beliefs. Activities were thus held to facilitate their exchanges with Hong Kong people in a carefree and relaxed setting. Take learning Cantonese as an example. Students loved to learn the language as it was both trendy as well as a skill needed to live in Hong Kong. The language could also assist them in better networking with their classmates and teachers. Churches

hence offered Cantonese classes to befriend mainland students and help boost their sense of belonging to the city. Evangelism work would then follow, whereby pamphlets would be distributed and hymns and personal testimonies shared with the students. This has been proven a practical and effective way to spread the gospel among mainland students.

The above evangelism approach is also very flexible. Churches only need to grasp the timing when mainland students come to Hong Kong and when they have a need to adjust to this unfamiliar environment. If Bible classes, fellowship meetings and other church gatherings are offered to the students at the right time, it is relatively easier for them to be converted and accept Jesus as the Lord. Under this approach, there is a “host-guest” relationship. Mainland students usually spend four years or fewer on their study, and only a small proportion of them stay to work in Hong Kong afterwards. Even if they have been converted, their high mobility means that it is not easy for their beliefs to take root or to establish a group of dedicated believers. Of course, when students return to the mainland, the seed of the gospel will hopefully be spread around. However, it is difficult for mainland student believers to become a principal force locally and be turned from the role of a “guest” to a “host”. We will have to wait for God’s timing. [When will it be? How is such timing connected to “relationships”?](#)



Development of Evangelism Work: Relationships are Important

It is obvious that Hong Kong’s economy and society have experienced great changes in recent years. The Individual Visitor Scheme for mainland tourists coming to Hong Kong brings economic benefits and a large mobile population to the city. (At the same time, the number of mainland students studying undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Hong Kong has also risen rapidly) ². A lot of cultural encounters and exchanges have resulted from this. Interpersonal relationships are becoming more complicated and the media for communication are also getting more complex. In the mainland, there used to be a common saying: “Everything will be alright if you have the right relationships, but things will become problematic if you lack such relationships.” In short, cordial relationships come before everything else. In the past, Hong Kong churches tended to act as the “host” to receive mainland students. Hence, there was the impression that Cantonese was the host language, while Putonghua was just a secondary language. Gospel work was also carried out along a similar direction. However, with the increasing number of mainland students in Hong Kong as well as changes in our society, economy and political arena, the host-guest relationship on university campuses is undergoing delicate changes. Over the past ten years or so, mainland students have established their own organizations to help students

adjust to the Hong Kong society. Learning Cantonese and adjusting to Hong Kong's life patterns serve more of a functional purpose and are no longer a must. Mainland students no longer deem themselves as guests in Hong Kong, which in turn has affected evangelism work. [How will this impact local churches' ministry for mainland students? Will this be a good opportunity for them to update their ministry strategy?](#)

Let me cite some examples. Ah Guo is a graduate from a university in Hong Kong who has taken part in Putonghua campus fellowship and returned to work in China after graduation. Ah Guo later came to know Xiao Zhen, a Christian who was about to go to Hong Kong to study in a postgraduate school. Through his fellowship chat group, Ah Guo recommended Xiao Zhen to join a campus fellowship and sought assistance for her accommodation in Hong Kong. After she arrived in Hong Kong, Xiao Zhen lived with several God-loving Christians. Her outgoing personality helped her integrate well into the fellowship and she also joined the worship team. What was most valuable was that through her interpersonal networks and friendly character, five other mainland students were attracted to join Christian gatherings to learn about the Christian beliefs as well.



Another mainland Christian student Ah Wei came across Ah Wen in a joint university activity. Ah Wen later suspended his study for a year because he was ill both physically and mentally. When Ah Wen was in a desperate state, Ah Wei visited Ah Wen and invited him to a Christian gathering. In that gathering, a church worker led Ah Wen to turn himself to the Lord. After attending gatherings and serving the Lord regularly for half a year, Ah Wen invited his family to Hong Kong to witness his baptism.

Extension of Evangelism Work: Maintaining the Relationship Network

In fact, there are many similar cases as the above, and we wonder how this knock-on effect of spreading the gospel happens. The examples above show that there are two factors involved. First, there should be a cross-generation Putonghua fellowship serving as a platform to link up with Christian mainland students and maintain relationships with them. Second, this platform must be committed to integrating into the campus on a long term basis and join hands with mainland students to explore Christian beliefs. Mutual trust must be built between local church workers and mainland students, with local church workers serving the latter with the perspective of a mainland student. They should pay attention to what they care about and accompany them in their life on the campus. All these are essential to building a relationship network whereby those involved would have a sense of belonging and commitment. This is also crucial to evangelism work.

In chapter 5 of the Book of Luke, Jesus told Simon to take the boat to deeper waters. As a result, more fish than expected were caught, so much so that Simon needed to ask his partners to help pull the fish net up. Indeed, Jesus today is still calling upon local church workers to go to deeper waters – to serve the mainland students. They should join hands to knit the net together, create more ministry opportunities and pass on Jesus’ mission to mainland Christian students. There are reports saying that there is an increase in the number of mainland students staying in Hong Kong to work after graduation³. In other words, after studying undergraduate studies for four years, postgraduate studies for one year and working for two years, mainland students can become a Hong Kong citizen holding a Hong Kong identity card. Perhaps in the future, they would in turn bless local Hong Kong students in their evangelism work!

- 1 Studies on “Co-humanity” can be found in the following link which contains an article written by Dr. Cheng Shun Kai: <https://www.truth-light.org.hk/nt/article> “Family Education as Seen from the Christian Beliefs on Man”
- 2 Reference: https://hk.on.cc/hk/bkn/cnt/news/20180929/bkn-20180929091117284-0929_00822_001.html
- 3 Reference: <https://topick.hket.com/article/2276271>. Over 9,000 mainland graduates stayed in Hong Kong to work last year, the majority of whom joined the insurance sector. They have not blocked local graduates’ job opportunities.

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# Books are my Valuable Teachers

## — Partnering with novice ministers

© compiled by: Sheung En



Editor's note: After the graduation of 2019, graduates had been serving as full time ministers in a church for nearly half a year. Graduates do not have an adaptation period in the church. Once they take up the ministry, they would be working ceaselessly. In the midst of a busy schedule, a minister serving in the Southern Central region wrote a letter to the book gifting team. Through this letter, Pastor Liu genuinely expressed how one of

the books became the key to unlocking his preaching service on the Old Testament as well as how this book shed light on ways the preacher could remodel his own life.

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Sheung En, peace to you!

It has been several months since the book gifting ceremony took place. Church ministry has been keeping me very busy; various matters needed to be tackled. Yet I tried my best to spare some time for reading because I believe books are my nutrients along this path of ministry.

The first book I chose to read was “Sweeter than Honey”<sup>1</sup>. When I saw the name of this book, initially I thought it was a devotional book similar to “Streams in the Desert”. When I paid closer attention to its subtitle, it was about “Preaching the Old Testament”. Then I realized that the book is in fact about the Old Testament. Interesting!

In this book, the author raised the discussion of “why it is necessary to preach the Old Testament”. This already triggered my interest. Other discussions like “the Old Testament is not easily comprehensible” and “the Old Testament cannot easily be used in preaching” were also issues that I have had difficulties



dealing with. But the author reiterated the importance of the Old Testament in the entire Bible and how God spoke to us through the Old Testament. It reminded me that I too need to teach the same to believers; the Old Testament is where we begin to get to know God. From the Old Testament we learn how heaven and earth were created, the sin of men, God's redemptive plan, and how all these ultimately direct human beings towards Christ. Even though I have received training in the seminary for several years, such message is a prompt reminder.

Moving on to the practice aspect, I read about teaching on "How to preach the Old Testament". The author reminded us that when preaching the Old Testament narratives, we should not just talk about individual stories and overlook the progression of the pivotal theme. Each story needs to be read together with its context, what precedes it and what comes after it. This is similar to what I learned in the hermeneutics course. It is like giving me a refresher lesson on Bible interpretation principles. The most practical principle I have learned is that the author taught me how to preach effectively by using Bible narratives as well as what I need to pay attention to while preaching the Old Testament narrative stories.

Apart from the preaching ministry, the book has also helped me reshape my life. In the past I have had a misunderstanding on the concept of "submission". I thought that if only I were submissive to God, I would have his blessing. Now I realized that "submission is a natural response to God's redemptive grace". My focus changes from "aiming to receive God's blessing" to "responding to God's redemptive grace". This has triggered a much deeper reflection on my part regarding my relationship with God. In addition, during the reading process, I became interested in thinking more about "the role of the laws". The Old Testament laws helped people know what constitutes sin, they also guide how God's people should live their lives so as to become channels through which God blesses all nations. My perspectives have indeed been enriched by such comprehension.

I am very thankful for having this book while commencing full time ministry. The author is like a great teacher to me. Once again, I would like to thank all your efforts in arranging the book gifting. May God Himself reward you. I will earnestly remember your book gifting ministry in the upcoming year and sincerely wish that future fellow seminary graduates will reap the benefits of such precious literature resources.

In Christ,  
Yiwen

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<sup>1</sup> *Sweeter than Honey (Simplified Chinese edition), Author: Christopher J. H. Wright, Translator: Ruth Butler, Page: 238, Publisher: Nanjing Union Theological Seminary*

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Prayers

1. Targets for Evangelism

Evangelism in the mainland are fraught with constraints under an increasingly tight religious policy. But in Hong Kong, there are many opportunities for evangelism, such as mainland students taking courses here, or new arrivals from China. Through peer preaching, public evangelical events, or social activities, there are various channels to share the gospel with them.



Pray for God's grace and guidance that despite the tense social atmosphere in recent months, Hong Kong churches can seize opportunities to evangelise among people from China.

2. Parental Education



As mainland churches can no longer run children's Sunday School, Christian parents now play a key role in shaping their children's spiritual lives. A prime task for mainland churches now is to help parents develop their children's Christian values. Besides living out Biblical truths, more important is to help them develop a personal relationship with our Heavenly Father, so they will follow Him firmly regardless of the external circumstances.

May the Lord bless parental education in the mainland, help pastors raise parents' awareness of the importance of Christian education from a small age, so they can guide their kids onto the right path.

3. Churches' Internal Strife

While the Chinese government imposes tight control over churches, churches face problems from within as well. A preacher from Southern Central region said, "There are conflicts among preachers and church leaders; church management is not catching up with the times, with leaders seeing power as the most important. This situation is very common in counties and village churches." Internal strife



could ruin the relationship among pastors and believers.

May the Lord bless mainland churches, so that pastors and believers will stay united despite the unfavorable external environment; May He give pastors and lay leaders humble hearts, so that they can understand and respect each other's stance and remove obstacles to church growth.

4. Avoiding Pushing kids too Hard



In hopes of getting their children into elite schools, many mainland parents pay excessive attention to grades. Besides enrolling their kids in multiple tutorial classes, they also scramble to find an AI product claiming to have the effect of enhancing kids' concentration power. The product worn on the head is available for sale online.

Although it has been certified, it's worth noting the potential negative psychological effects owing to overly focusing on obtaining high marks could have on students.

Please pray for God's mercy to help parents see that each child is unique, and respect their differing degrees of concentration power and learning ability, instead of pushing them too hard.

~ THE END ~

Pray for China

Published since 1974

~ Pray for China publications can be served as a platform to express the latest situations and needs of churches and leaders in the mainland.

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