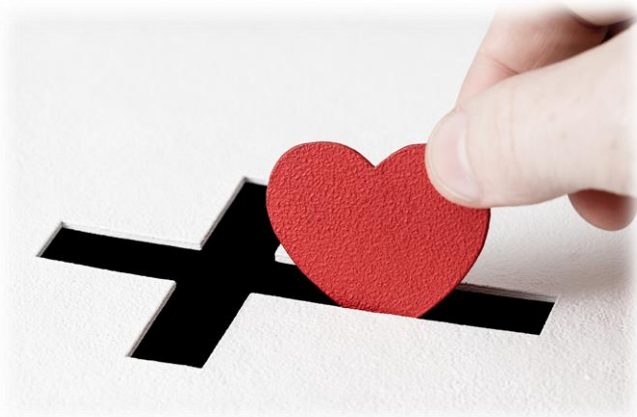


## **Living With God As Our Focus Again**

### **-- Interview with Instructor of Youth Discipleship Training**



© Interview and Compiled by: Yin Qing

*Youth discipleship training is considered as a church ministry. Is this right?*

Training up youths as disciples has always been an important ministry for the church. Pastoring young people and next-generation believers is indispensable to the sustained growth of a church. Strictly speaking, however, discipleship training should not be confined by the usual framework of a ministry since it is about grooming one's spiritual life. In discipleship training, the teacher plays a crucial role, in that he should lead by example while he walks alongside his mentee. If the teacher focuses only on the model and techniques of training and not on resource coordination and relationship building, it is like concentrating only on the hardware of a machine and not its driving force. If this is the case, the training will only become routine as time passes, and the teacher will not be able to get into the struggles and self-reflections of his mentees.

*Mainland youths are generally born and raised under the one-child policy. How can teachers provide targeted shepherding and nurture them to become committed disciples of Jesus?*

The youths in our generation are often pampered by their parents and grow up free of any financial worries and hardship. While many of them are very well-educated and knowledgeable, they lack practical experience. As such, the church needs teachers who are committed to nurturing them as if they are their parents and willing to walk with them side by side.



The teacher who leads a youth discipleship group needs to accompany the youths as they go through their different life stages and help them lead a life based on Biblical teaching. We interviewed Instructor Yang who has served in youth discipleship training in the mainland for over ten years, and pastored young people while they study in the university, further their learning overseas, start a career and even get married. In their relationship, Instructor Yang plays the role of a teacher, a mentor as well a parent.

## **A Simple Generation Full of Potential**

How does Instructor Yang see young people in China, after having served them for over ten years? He shares his observations as follows: youth discipleship ministry is an effort to guide young people in shifting their focus from the secular, materialistic and online world back to God. He strives to model after how Jesus nurtured his twelve disciples and to lead by example.

Instructor Yang said that although he could not live with his mentees like what Jesus did with his disciples for more than three years, he has put in a lot more time and effort to understand them, when compared with other age groups. In his eyes, mainland youths are simple and full of potential. Some of them however know little about their beliefs, even though their parents are believers. This is because very often, they just study individual Biblical passages without a full understanding of their background and in-depth meaning. Moreover, they have little idea on how to ask questions and are used to learning by one-way teaching from the pulpit. To them, interactions within a group is a brand-new experience. Segregating Biblical knowledge from their way of life, they find it hard to apply Biblical teaching to their daily life, and neither is it easy for them to share their inner feelings and struggles with others.

## **Worship Straddles the Past, Present and Eternity**

In discipleship training, Instructor Yang has been getting along with mainland youths for a long time, hoping to guide them to explore and understand their identity as disciples. However, Instructor Yang found that they have scarce knowledge about committed disciples and need assistance in taking on the right perspective and focus. An example is their misunderstanding of worship, which they perceive as merely part of the Sunday worship session. They are not aware that worship is something that straddles the past, the present and eternity. Worship can help them hear God's voice and should form part of their daily life.

Instructor Yang noted that disciples must learn how to worship God so that their life focus will not deviate from God. In discipleship training, the instructor will impress upon young disciples that worship is neither a course nor an activity, but a commitment to each other to live under God's will! Worship helps young disciples listen to God's voice. When they have learned to do so, they will then try to live out the Word and dedicate themselves to the great mission. Moreover, worship is not a ritual in a specified time, but cuts across every aspect

of our everyday life and enables us to meet God every moment. Young disciples should not seek God only when major decisions are to be made. Instead, they should live and follow the Lord on a daily basis and abide by His words in whatever they speak and do. In addition, worship is both an individual and a group exercise, which can help foster the overall growth of young disciples' spiritual life. Disciples would not only grow in their relationship with God and others but would also better understand the meaning of "one God" and "God in trinity".



## Teachers Walking Side by Side with Their Group Members

Committed to serving in youth discipleship training, Instructor Yang has witnessed over the years how young believers have grown in the Lord. The experience of two of them is as follows. The first one is Xiao Qiu whom Instructor Yang has acquainted for seven to eight years. Instructor Yang has all along been his instructor from the days when Xiao Qiu came to Hong Kong to study, to the time when he studied abroad and returned to Hong Kong to work. While they first met each other in a fellowship, Instructor Yang has been walking alongside Xiao Qiu all the time when he attended a Baptism course, fell in love and prepared to get married. Instructor Yang is grateful that he has built mutual trust with Xiao Qiu and played a part in his life. He has witnessed how Xiao Qiu has changed: from getting interested in the Bible to depending on God, from learning the Bible one-way to asking questions in small groups, and from counting on one's knowledge to solve problems to learning to listen to God's will in making decisions. Instructor Yang is thankful that he has the chance to witness how Xiao Qiu has opened up his life to the Father, his instructor and group members and matured spiritually.

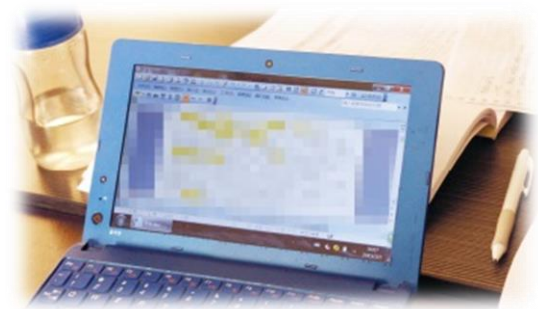
Another group member is Xiao Yuan whose parents are Christians. Although she started learning the Bible at a young age, Biblical knowledge was segregated from her life. She craved for the Word and so when she studied in Hong Kong, she attended gatherings in the church and discipleship training. Upon graduation, she decided to work in Hong Kong. In one group gathering which was led by Xiao Yuan, Instructor Yang found that she behaved strangely and suspected that something unusual had happened to her. When Instructor Yang asked about her recent situation, Xiao Yuan had a sudden burst of emotions. When she calmed down, she said, *"I have not cried for a long time, and can finally cry in front of people whom I trust."* Xiao Yuan had been tremendous pressure in light of her long work hours, relationship with colleagues, parents' urge for her to get married as well as busy church activities. While crying was her first step of getting relief, she also started doing some soul-searching before God and waited for His guidance. Later, she sent a message to Instructor Yang: *"Today, I feel that my eyes have brightened up and are seeing things differently. Instructor Yang, do you know that after that cry, I was still blaming myself, a grown-up, for crying. But thank the Father, I did cry! I felt that all my suppressed emotions have been unleashed and I started facing up to my challenges. I am grateful that the Father*

*has been taking care of me all along ... the challenges are still grave, but I would not flinch. This is God's work! I feel at peace!*" She once again placed her focus on God and has mustered up the courage to confront the challenges ahead!

## Youth Discipleship Training Under the Pandemic

Lastly, I was interested to know whether the pandemic has any impact on youth discipleship training. Instructor Yang said that the impact is minimal, since being in different geographic locations has never been a problem as many group members have all along been studying or working in different places.

Instructor Yang cited one example, whereby group members are studying overseas, studying in Hong Kong or working in the mainland. Online gatherings are held every two weeks at 7 am because of the time difference. In recent months, they have been using *"Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ"*<sup>1</sup> as the study materials. Instructor Yang requires group members to do pre-reading on the relevant Biblical passages and articles before the gatherings to facilitate group discussions during the gatherings. Instructor Yang opined that on top of helping them acquire Biblical knowledge, it is more important for them to reflect on and apply the Word in their daily life. To go deeper, the materials of one lesson may be discussed over two to three gatherings. The group continues to learn through intensive interactions, letting God work gradually among them.



## Afterword

During the interview, I asked Instructor Yang for how long he plans to serve these young believers. He responded: *"I have not thought about this. I'll see how long God lets me live!"* I was immensely touched. Instructor Yang does not see youth discipleship training as a ministry, but the promise of a lifetime and vows to serve as long as he lives. Instructor Yang carries a lot of young disciples' lives on his shoulders. I was concerned whether he had over-exerted himself. He replied in the negative, saying that he would soon be leading a group comprising young mainland pastors. May the Lord bless Instructor Yang and be pleased by his faithful service! Amen!

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<sup>1</sup> "Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ" in simplified Chinese edition; author: Greg Ogden; no. of pages:270; mainland publisher: Nanjing Union Theological Seminary; 2017.

# Counteracting the Pandemic Adverse Effects on the Church

© Xiaodong  
China Church Ministry Frontline Worker

Churches were under severe pressure during the pandemic. Although in-person gatherings have resumed by now, they are still suffering from the dire aftermath of the pandemic which include dwindling of Christian faith, dropping out, frequent attacks by heretical beliefs, etc. The spiritual wellbeing of believers is at stake. A church in the southern central region is encountering such circumstance. Minister Hu<sup>1</sup> is working hard to combat the after-effects of the pandemic and trying her best to protect her sheep.

## Praying three times a day, safeguarding the spiritual threshold

Looking back at the pandemic days, Minister Hu has seen God's gracious guidance throughout. Yet at the same time she is worried by the way believers' faith and their dependence on God became frail. Furthermore, the frequent cultic attacks have shattered the faith of many believers. Minister Hu painfully said, *"I need to be extremely vigilant in order to face the overwhelming challenge and continue shepherding the believers. I insisted on praying to God three times a day. No matter how busy I am with church affairs, I continue spending five hours a day praying to safeguard my spiritual threshold. Prayer enables me to connect with God individually and allows God to be in the centre of my daily living and affairs. Prayer gives me power from God to protect my sheep."* The way Minister Hu earnestly prays to God sets herself as an example to the believers. Also, she actively helps believers distinguish heretical beliefs. She always uses the church's WeChat group to disseminate information on how her congregation can defend themselves against cultic influence. She also uses telecommunication and WeChat to strengthen the key leaders at different gathering points. She tries her best to cover all areas eliminating vulnerable spots for potential invasion.

## Venture into the highlands, never disheartened by rejections

Minister Hu understands that in order to strengthen believers' spiritual life, it is not only necessary to shepherd them, it is also vital if the believers can be involved in ministry so that they can experience the guidance and power of the Heavenly Father. Since about a year ago, Minister Hu and several believers started to pray for visiting and sharing the gospel with the villagers of a remote village in the highland. Up till the first half of this year, they feel that the time is now ripe.

Regarding the outreach, Minister Hu shared, *“This village is very remote. There are some believers there, yet they cannot attend Sunday worship due to lack of public transportation. Thus, they lack shepherding chronically. Although our church suffers from shortage of manpower, we insist on visiting that village monthly to proclaim the gospel. We thank God that during a visit in April, five villagers prayed with us and made their commitment to accept Christ. This visit can be said the most fruitful of our outreach evangelism attempts. On the other hand, at times when certain individuals gave up their faith because of some difficulties they faced, we could also be very disappointed. They returned the bibles and the hymnals to us and even refused to see us saying that they no longer believe in Christ. We feel extremely sad. Perhaps this is a typical phenomenon. Overall, my colleagues and I find the experience invaluable. We will continue trying our best!”*



Minister Hu and believers are praying for the highland villagers

## A brief conclusion

We trust that the Heavenly Father listens to Minister Hu’s earnest prayers. We pray that He will strengthen the believers’ faith, grant them the wisdom to discern truth and reject heresy. Minister Hu shared with me recently that the church has established a gathering point in that remote highland village and the number of baptized Christians has increased. May the Heavenly Father have all the glory! We pray for the Lord’s continued guidance of Minister Hu’s service and minimize the post-pandemic adverse impact on the church. Amen!



Minister Hu is preaching to believers in the highland village

<sup>1</sup> Minister Hu has been receiving the Living Subsidy for Mainland Evangelists since March 2020.  
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## Please Support the Living Subsidy for Mainland Evangelists

By prayer and by partnering with fellow Christians, Minister Hu strengthens the spiritual life of her congregation. Are you willing to support these mainland evangelists so that they can serve with undivided attention in the frontline?

In 2021, CCL is supporting 30 mainland evangelists who come from the southwestern, northwestern, eastern and southern central regions. They are given living subsidy according to their actual needs and the living standards of their respective residential region. The annual budget is USD115,385. As of end July, USD51,282 has been raised. We are still USD64,103 short. We sincerely invite your donation support. Thank you!

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## Prayers

### 1. Young believers' spiritual pursuit

Many of today's young generation are well-educated but lack practical experience. In terms of spiritual pursuit, they lack comprehensive understanding of the Scripture and their real-life applications. Also, being used to one-way teaching mode, they are not used to asking questions, or interacting with teachers and peers .



May the Lord give wisdom to pastors and instructors in helping young people combine practical living with Biblical knowledge, so they can follow the Heavenly Father's will in their daily lives. May He also guide young believers to share their struggles and experiences with small group members.

### 2. Seminary graduates joining church ministry



A new batch of theological seminary graduates has begun their ministries in churches. The novice preachers are responsible for independent pastoral work and church management.

May the Lord lead and keep the new preachers, help them adjust to their changed roles, the pressure from work, and communicating with church elders. May the Lord also bless graduates in Henan province and eastern region, which has experienced rainstorms and floods. May He show His mercy on other regions affected by Covid19 where church gatherings

have once again halted.

### 3. Challenges facing mainland Christian publishing

Aspiring for maturity and seeking to follow the Lord at the level of family, work, personal lives and society, mainland church congregations have fuelled demand for systematic discipleship training materials. Yet challenges abound in the publication of such materials in mainland due to the complex application procedures and the need to partner



with literature units experienced in curriculum making and publishing.

Please pray for God's grace and guidance for Christian publishing, so publishers can go through the procedures smoothly, find a partner, receive official approval and successfully publish discipleship training materials nurturing believers' spiritual lives.

#### 4. Preventing destruction of autumn harvest by pests



Autumn harvest time is the most important time for harvesting food crops in a year. But experts have warned that the risk posed by pests reaches a medium-high level. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs has taken action to reduce the rate of crops destroyed by pests.

May the Lord show mercy on the crops. The ecological system has been affected by industrial development, causing pests to pose a rising threat to food supplies. May the Lord awaken land owners and developers, so they do not just go after economic profits but also exercise the responsibility of environmental protection. May the Lord move affluent Christian businessmen to share resources when food supplies are undermined by the harm caused by pests.

~ THE END ~

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#### 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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*Editor-in- Chief*    Otto Lui

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*Editorial*            Jurita Lui  
                             Eddy Leung

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*Publisher*            Thomas Tang

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*Subscriptions*      pfc@ccl.org.hk

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