

Flying High with Our Bible Teaching Ministry

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“The Living Word Curriculum Series” (“Living Word” hereafter) has been in use for 15 years. This program is not only a Biblical teaching project, but also bears testimony to God’s faithful grace and abundant provisions. It carries on the vision of the Bible teaching ministry of the past 100 years and inherits the fine tradition of Chinese believers using publications as a ministry platform.

To date, under the “Living Word”, a total of 26 titles with 120,000 volumes covering systemic courses on 64 books in the Old and New Testaments have been published in most provinces and cities in China. We are thankful not only because of the sheer volume of the publications, but also the many churches established by the Lord Himself which are dedicated to systematic Bible teaching.

Grateful - for Inheriting Traditions of Bible Teaching

Around the year 2000, CCL has received the vision from the Lord to promote Bible teaching in the Chinese church. Our vision was that by 2011 (i.e. the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Sunday School Campaign¹ and the 100th anniversary of the China Sunday School Association), in over half of the cities and counties in China where there were churches, there was at least one church which had a systematic Bible teaching ministry.² Such a church must be equipped with good teaching materials and trained instructors to enable it to be built on a solid Biblical foundation.

Vision must be followed by practical actions. In 2003, CCL set up the “Bible Teaching Ministry Committee” (“Committee” hereafter), comprising members who were Bible scholars, education experts, editors, frontline instructors and mainland church co-workers. The Committee was entrusted to take forward the publication of the “Living Word Curriculum Series”. ***In the inception period, the Committee’s first task was to identify the needs of the mainland church before deciding on the target users, editorial policies and publication model of the “Living Word”.*** The Committee made the following conclusions:

1. Situation of the church: a large number of sheep pastored by very few shepherds. There were not many pastors who had been properly trained and capable of teaching the Bible correctly. Cults were rampant.
2. Situation of teaching: pastors who were trained and had a gift for preaching were in the minority. Many pastors lacked the ability to preach or just read from a book of sermons when they preached. Some even just shared their personal feelings, without quoting much from the Bible.
3. Bible study groups: most churches had not established Bible study groups. Worship and other gatherings were mostly in the form of sermon-preaching whereby believers lacked discussions and reflections on how to apply the Word in their daily life.
4. Systematic teaching materials: the church lacked Bible study materials. Even if there were some materials from overseas, they might not be appropriate due to the differences in circumstances between the mainland and overseas countries.

Grateful - for Launching the “Living Word”

Based on the above, the Committee decided to set the targets of “Learning the Living Word” and “Living by the Living Word” for its teaching program and devised a three-pronged (three rings clasped) editorial policy as follows: (1) correct interpretation of the Bible; (2) student-centred flexible teaching; (3) applying Biblical teaching to everyday life. A “teacher’s version”

of the materials was compiled for use by pastors and group leaders whereas a “student’s version” was published for students’ use during Bible study groups. From 2006 to now, a total of 26 titles of the “Living Word” have been compiled, with 23 titles published. Funding is urgently needed for the publication of the titles on “Twelve Books of the Prophets” (Part II) and the “Revelation”, while the title on “Gospel of Luke” is being written. Two more titles will be compiled and published before we complete the whole series of 28 titles.



A three-pronged (three rings clasped) editorial approach is adopted to respond to mainland churches’s needs.

After the foundation had been laid, ***the second question arising was: in the midst of constantly changing circumstances, did we need to review the program to better meet students’ needs?*** Committee members often said that the “Living Word” has given them an opportunity to better understand mainland believers. In the past 20 years, China had great strides in building its economy and infrastructure hardware. The accession to the World Trade Organisation, hosting of the Olympic Games and construction of high-speed rail networks have enhanced the flow of goods and people and the speed of urbanization whereby farmland has been transformed into business districts with high-rises. It is not hard to imagine that a church now may comprise members who are farmers, white-collar workers or people from outside the province working in the new commercial districts. New challenges are hence posed to pastors who must change the way they teach, lead Bible studies or guide the congregation in practising the Word. In light of this, we must test our publications among users and make revisions accordingly during the editorial process. Even if the books have been published, revisions must also be made in view of students’ learning situation and the latest mainland environment. The Committee has all along paid close attention to changes in the society and the church and incorporated these latest developments into how we guide students in reflecting upon and living out the Bible. We are grateful for having a team which has walked by our side and capable of grasping the frontline situation in various provinces and cities, helping our scholars and editorial team to produce materials of good value.

Grateful - for Entering the Next Stage of Mixed Mode Learning

In recent years, the churches in China has been subject to different constraints. In addition, the pandemic has dealt a blow to the church, whereby many ministries have been suspended or transformed. But those small groups which are in earnest pursuit of the Truth and willing to live by the Word remain steadfast in their faith and have turned to the Internet and various tools to learn and share. The group members’ healthy spiritual life and close relationship with God and others mean that they can withstand any adversities. ***The third question then arises: the “Living Word” needs to be adjusted under this new environment as we head towards the next mile in our journey.***

After having compiled 26 titles covering 64 books in the Old and New Testaments and gained experience from the three-pronged (three rings clasped) editorial approach, we have received a new vision for us to expand our target groups to a much wider audience among Chinese believers. Under the pandemic, both mainland and overseas believers had to adjust, as worships, fellowships and Bible study groups have gone online. While enjoying the convenience of such a gathering mode, many believers cherish all the more the opportunity to be together face-to-face. The “Living Word” places emphasis on one’s pre-study before one meets other group members to discuss and listen to the Word from the Lord. In view of the new situation, the “LW ePlatform” will be launched to encourage one to study by oneself and strengthen guidance for exchanges within the group.



To implement the three-pronged (three rings clasped) approach, a brand-new mode of Bible study will be rolled out on the online platform to help individuals correctly grasp the meaning of Biblical passages. Students can choose the Bible passages they wish to study and based on the recommended steps, read the exegesis materials and guide on Bible study techniques as well as watch videos of the relevant sermons and clips for meditation. On this online platform, videos and interactive Q&As are added to complement printed publications to enable students to improve their pre-study. Meanwhile, the entire learning process is a time to listen to God. After handling a large quantity of information, students are encouraged to remain still in front of the Lord to listen to what He says. Yet, learning must also take place within the group where there are interactions led by the pastor or group leader. Much emphasis is placed on living out the Word. Sharing in the group can be conducted in a physical setting or online, and what matters most is how to guide good interactions among group members. The new platform will also provide flexible and convenient coaching services to church leaders, aiming to walk by their side and assisting them in building effective teaching groups.



“LW ePlatform”: enhancing individuals’ Bible study capability and promoting online and offline interactive learning.

Conclusion

Bible teaching lays the foundation on which disciples can practise the Truth, and action is an effective way to give testimony to the gospel. Through the process of compiling and publishing Bible study materials to connecting different study groups and providing self-learning videos, we aim to empower those who yearn for the Word to learn and revise the teaching materials at any time and place and at their own convenience, as well as share with others and apply the Word in their daily life. Glory be to the Lord for leading us in

producing and publishing the teaching materials and grooming church leaders. We wait with a humble heart for the Lord to guide us in developing the brand-new learning platform. With 15 years of history behind us, at this juncture, we pray for the early completion of the remaining books of the “Living Word”. Plans are also in the pipeline to produce an electronic version of all the 28 titles of the “Living Word” which will be used in a mixed learning platform to enable pastors and believers to continue with the mission of Bible teaching in this day and age!

- 1 [https://chinachristianedu.com/2017/04/05/ Sunday school and the Chinese church/](https://chinachristianedu.com/2017/04/05/Sunday%20school%20and%20the%20Chinese%20church/)
- 2 In 2011 when the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Sunday School Campaign was commemorated, the Sunday school ministry in churches in the coastal regions had reached a certain scale and greater emphasis was placed on teacher training. Some of them even offered support to the teaching ministries in inland and remote areas. God nurtures in believers a heart longing for the Truth. As believers’ education attainment level rises, the teaching team’s priority is to guide more pastors and believer leaders to make the best use of the “Living Word” to study Biblical passages. A flexible study mode is also encouraged for facilitating honest sharing among small groups members and help them live out their faith.

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## Support Bible Teaching on the Savannah

© Teacher Yang

A young mainland instructor on the “Living Word”



*Editor’s remarks: mainland pastors in general face internal challenges while shepherding their congregations and at the same time they have to counteract external threats emerging from various heresy. This situation makes the needs for solid and empowering bible teaching even more inevitable. Some young members in the mainland bible instructors’ team are making good use of the “Living Word” resources as their teaching aids to respond to the challenging needs of pastors in various regions. In the first half of this year, while visiting churches in the Eastern and Northern regions respectively, the instructors made use of the opportunities to introduce “The Living Word Curriculum Series” to local pastors. One of the instructors, Teacher Yang, visited churches in the Northern region and provided the required support to pastors there. Teacher Yang shared her experience below.*

In the north, the month of May eventually brings the arrival of gradually warmer weather to the Northern region even for those churches located in its farthest outskirts. While riding in the same vehicle with a local pastor who also served as driver, we visited two relatively larger churches situated in two different cities. On our way there, we saw unending savannah, clear sky, herds of cattle and sheep feeding leisurely on green pastures. Despite amid such a vast and “frigid” savannah, the pastors possess a “burning heart” eager to serve the Lord. The believers are ingenuously compassionate. Their love for the Lord is like a hot stove in winter giving warmth to all that surrounds it. I could not help but say to myself how much I wished the churches here, being Christ’s flocks, could all advance in biblical truth and flourish in their spiritual life!

Sheep that needs systematic biblical teaching are all over the place. The number of believers attending Sunday worships in these two churches is nearly 1500. One of the churches has 4 to 5 full-time staff, all are seminary graduates and most of them are couples. The church has three sessions of Sunday services in one day. Shepherding is provided primarily by means of sermons. Small group bible studies and group learning have not been

initiated. The pastors wish to use small group bible studies to strengthen shepherding in their churches. Not only are small group bible studies effective in guiding believers understand biblical truth, they also help believers apply what they learn in daily life.

I prepared two sets of teaching materials for this trip to give to the pastors. One of the pastors said his church is currently being attacked by certain heretical beliefs. He plans to prepare his exegetical Sunday sermons based on passages from the Book of Romans. Upon hearing this, I immediately shared with him the “Living Words – Romans and Galatians”. The pastor responded positively and utilized the materials to prepare his sermons. In addition, I also demonstrated to the pastors how they could use “The Living Word Curriculum Series” in a livelier way. I illustrated it by using the “Living Words – James” as an example. All of them found the presentation and content design very agreeable. As these churches are situated in remote areas, they lack resources on bible teaching. To them, “The Living Word Curriculum Series” is innovative and they are willing to study it in depth. We thank our Heavenly Father for bringing us to them. I tried to make full use of the limited time there and shared the content of the curriculum as well as showed them how to set up small group to facilitate learning. Although I have left them now, I am still in touch with them through telecommunications and responding to their enquiries on issues related to leading small groups.

Geographically we are far apart, yet we understand how important it is to maintain telephone follow-ups with and to encourage these beginner leaders of small group bible study. I thank our Heavenly Father for enabling me to give support to these local pastors. I wish they could become more effective in discussing with other group members what they discover during bible studies and listen to what the Lord has to say to them. We trust what the Lord prepares is always the best and He will bring appropriate resources to where they are needed. May the Lord’s sheep on the vast savannah be well nourished with biblical truth! Amen!



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### **Please support Living Word Bible Teaching Ministry**

Mainland churches face many challenges while defending the truth. They constantly desire deeper understanding of the truth. We wish to expediate the editing and publication of the remaining volumes of the “Living Word” series. We have also planned to prepare the electronic version of the entire “Living Word” curriculum series, 28 volumes in total. The electronic version enhances widespread access as it can be used on “LW ePlatform”, for self-learning and small group learning modes. Please remember our operation expenditure of USD 384,615 and support the ministry by submitting your donations. Thank you!

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Prayers

1. Believers' Self-Study of the Bible

The various constraints posed on the churches in mainland and the pandemic have led to changes in believers' mode of studying the Bible: studying online or through various tools. A mainland pastor shared: "Apart from leading Bible study online, our preachers are looking for online resources to help believers study the scripture on their own, apply teachings to their own experiences rather than waiting for one-way instruction by preachers."



May the Lord prepare systematic online Bible teaching resources and give believers the heart for learning about the Word in pursuit of spiritual growth.

2. Protection for believers in the Southwest



Churches in the Southwest region are faced with challenges from local customs. A preacher said: "Some villagers affected by superstitious beliefs and who know nothing about Christianity have rejected, harassed believers, even threatened some to give up on their faith. Yet, thank God! Brothers and sisters are bonded in love and supporting each other."

May the Lord protect believers being sidelined or harassed, give them true peace physically and internally. May He also show compassion to villagers who don't know the true God; may they know the God of Life soon, and not be blinded by superstition.

3. Small group learning in remote churches

Compared to churches in coastal regions, churches in remote locations rarely have small group Bible study or gathering. A pastor in the Northern region shared: "They rely on sermons given during Sunday services. Their preachers seldom lead small group study for them and believers lack opportunities for small group interactions. Neither have they supported each other in applying Biblical truths in lives."



May the Lord prepare resources (coaches and small group learning materials) for the remote churches, guide believers to have more interactions, sharing among themselves and live out the truth in lives.

4. Youth's obsession with idols



To clean up the entertainment industry, the Central Propaganda Department recently issued a notice banning minors becoming members of pop idol groups or attending offline support activities of idols, etc. In China, the craze for pop idols in recent years has turned materialistic. Many youngsters put in or raised much money in support of their idols.

May the Lord help youngsters be more discerning, refrain from chasing after idols at the expense of their studies or contributing too much money in support of their idols. May the Lord guide parents and teachers to patiently explore the pop idol culture with youngsters and help them develop proper values.

~ 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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