

A Learning Experience Involving Five Senses – Bible Festival Camp

In 2024, our team of instructors and co-workers received a request from church leaders in China. They said they would like to gain a deeper understanding of feasts and festivals that are mentioned in the Bible. We responded by initiating the preparation for a study camp last October, and by late February this year, a four-day-three-night "Bible Festival Camp" was held for 31 Chinese church leaders, with nearly 60% of them aged 21 to 40.

One-way didactic lecturing is not the only way to address the subject matter. If we can indulge our "five senses" (referring to the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch) in the learning process, the past experience of the Israelites can become much more vivid to the participants. In this camp, the instructors deliberately chose Passover and the Succoth (Feast of Tabernacles) as the main focus to help the Chinese church leaders gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of each feast.

SEEING AND HEARING: The camp enabled participants to understand the feasts and God's plan of salvation in the context of Jewish culture. Through the guidance of the instructors, the participants had a deeper reflection on the meaning of the festivals, they could then extend the learning by teaching and passing it onto their families and church service teams when they are back home.



SMELL AND TASTE: Through baking the bread, roasting the meat, consuming the Passover meal, etc., participants gained a deeper understanding of the Israelites' feelings in the Exodus experience and the observance of the feasts.



TOUCH: The hands-on activities, such as scaffolding, slave labor (weeding, sweeping, etc.), food preparation, consuming meals, and worship etc., enabled participants to get glimpses of how the Israelites observed the Feast of Tabernacles and Passover in the past. The mental and physical involvement evoked strongly different sentiments within the participants, who also experienced unity as a group, the warmth as one family, and the joy of helping each other.



HEART: Through the immersive experience of the feasts, participants had a deepened understanding of how the feasts closely connect with personal faith and daily living. They also had a keen contemplation on their attitudes towards ministry and interaction with others in day-to-day settings. From the perspective of religious education, the activities allowed participants to learn the significance of respecting and fearing God, feel God's provision and grace, and have a more thorough understanding and reflection on why it is so important to the Israelites to observe and uphold the feast practice traditions.



May the Lord guide this group of young Chinese church leaders, after having undergone the "Bible Festival Camp", that they would take the knowledge and hands-on experience back to their respective churches and initiate religious education in families or small groups. May their ministry strengthen faith among believers in this generation and pass it on to the next generation!

The "Bible Festival Camp" can be considered an "Experiential Bible Study Camp". The camp enabled participants to learn the theme through an interplay of exegesis, history and cultural introduction, group activities, personal reflection, and situational application. Activities were scheduled at appropriate time slots throughout the program, they included simulating the ceremonial sacrifices described in the Pentateuch and Jewish festivals, and even some Bible stories were employed to facilitate conducting related activities. Participants are mostly "Living Word" users and understand the importance of "actively learning" and "actively living out" the Bible. The nature of the activities can also be applied to leadership training. The role-playing of Moses demonstrated the difficulty of being a leader.

The New Generation, Challenges for Urban Pastors

© Otto Lui
Associate General Secretary (Ministry)

Our companionship with the young generation of church leaders allows the author and our team of co-workers to see glimpses of their real life, and we would like to share them with readers in this article.¹ On a snowy day in 2024, the author visited a church in a small, hidden neighborhood in Beijing. Upon entering the church through the front door, an interior of modern American church décor appears. Next to the main hall is the staff office, and further ahead is the cafe, which is open to the public on weekdays and used for socializing and welcoming newcomers on church service days.

Pastor Li is a post-80s generation with a son in college overseas; he and his wife returned to China to serve after obtaining a doctorate in theology abroad. For more than a decade, he has been leading this urban church, which now has hundreds of people in its weekly online and in-person meetings. After living abroad for so many years and then returning to China, many people look forward to hearing about his sacrificial dedication to serve the Lord, or want to hear him talk about the turbulences that the church has gone through over the years.

Finding a meeting place is a challenge!

In the face of fluctuating policies, the availability of physical meeting points is a major issue. A church that is faithful to God's Word will naturally grow, and it is very important to have adequate space for the congregation to meet. Having the congregation gathered as small groups is one way to tackle the space issue. This means whenever the number of people in a group exceeds several dozen, a new church will need to be planted. Groups that serve different functions gather at different places, including believers' homes or offices. When choosing meeting places, not only are convenience of access and size important factors, but disturbance to neighbours also needs to be considered; complaints due to noise coming out of meetings must be avoided. It is not difficult to find a new place, but it is not easy to find a place that is suitable and comfortable for meetings.

Leaders and members having diverse backgrounds are also a challenge!

Leading a new congregation is challenging. A church with several dozen members needs a pastor to shepherd it. The ratio of pastors to believers has greatly improved from 1:10,000 in the 1990s to 1:3,000 after the turn of the millennium. It is, of course, still not possible for churches in China to have a ratio of 1:100; therefore, multiple locations (meeting points) are often served by a single travelling pastor.

Shepherding church members of diverse backgrounds also presents a challenge. The urban population is complex, and while there are professionals in urban churches who are fluent in foreign languages, there are also more “rural” and grassroots members who, as one can imagine, have very different needs for pastoral teaching and care.

Sending co-workers overseas for further studies is another challenge!

As head of a church, Pastor Li has to take care of community relations, human resources allocation, and Christian leadership training. When the author asked about the most imminent need of the church, Pastor Li said it is to arrange for the co-workers to go overseas for further study, such as which country to go to and what degree to pursue. At present, China can provide basic theology training, and most of the co-workers in Pastor Li's church have already obtained theology degrees from overseas, so they will only consider further studies offered by institutions abroad. As many members in his church possess post-graduate qualifications, it is only natural that they expect the pastoral staff to also attain post-graduate qualifications.

Summary

Although Pastor Li's situation is not a common phenomenon countrywide, he is certainly not the only case in large and medium-sized cities in China. Is this transforming the images many outsiders have held towards churches in China? How can “established” organizations like CCL continue to serve them effectively? How can we hold tight to our initial vision and mission yet embrace a free and open spirit to meet new challenges in this ministry?

¹ All the stories in the Feature Column are real, but the names and some of the contents are not presented exactly as the original. The characters age between 30 and 50, they mainly come from major cities in China, with some from second- and third-tier cities.

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Contemporary Church leaders in China can be grouped into the following generations  
(Simple Classification)

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|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><u>First Generation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They started serving at the church in China when it was reopened and was in need of a major overhaul</li> <li>• They became Christians before the Cultural Revolution</li> <li>• They received basic training (provided by western mission organizations)</li> <li>• At the beginning of China's reform and opening up, they led the church, tried their best to spread the gospel and plant churches</li> <li>• Now these leaders have either retired or rested in their heavenly home</li> </ul> | <p><u>Second generation (over 60 years old)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They grew up during the Cultural Revolution, had minimal education, and attended churches in rural areas</li> <li>• They started serving at the church in the 1980's</li> <li>• They learned how to preach and nurture the congregation through apprenticeship with older pastors</li> <li>• They witnessed the rapid growth of the church</li> <li>• Most of them have now retired</li> </ul>                           |
| <p><u>Third generation (41-60 years old)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They were born in the 1970's and grew up in the city</li> <li>• Most of them have a college degree, some even have a Master of Divinity degree or higher</li> <li>• They have difficulty adapting to the traditional (apprenticeship) mode of training</li> <li>• They are often busy juggling work and academic advancement</li> <li>• They are the current church leaders</li> </ul>                                                                                           | <p><u>Fourth generation (30-40 years old)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most of them were born in the 1990s and are mostly the only child in the family</li> <li>• Many of them have travelled or lived abroad or have exposure to foreign churches and access to theological information through social media</li> <li>• They have no experience facing major political campaigns against the church of any kind</li> <li>• They have a strong desire for role models and peer support</li> </ul> |



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***Thank you!***

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~ The above is part of the content of PFC issue384, if you would like to read the full newsletter, please contact us at [ffc@ccl.org.hk](mailto:ffc@ccl.org.hk), thank you! ~

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