

PARTNERSHIP

*no
return*

2023 Sep Issue



Equipping Lay Ministers,
Cultivating Missional Pastors to
Strategically Engage Asia's Harvest

Published by
Baptist Theological Seminary
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Dear Friends of BTS:

September is missions month for many churches in Singapore, so in line with our emphasis on missions, since 2021 we have dedicated the September issue of Partnership to serve as an instrument for missions education. The hope is that it will be a useful tool for church leaders and help them mobilise their congregations for missions.

In this issue we are privileged to have Dr Sherwood Lingenfelter and two alumni to share.

Dr Lingenfelter (Senior Professor, Fuller Theological Seminary) is blessing us with the keynote article. Sherwood is a household name in the missions field through his many writings. Perhaps most noteworthy is his best-selling book, "Ministering Cross Culturally" which has become the standard training text for many career missionaries.

His article is not a typical missions mobilisation article: rather, he challenges us to reconsider our motives and strategies for developing missional church-planting programmes.

First, he issues a challenge that every missions programme should have a committed exit plan to turn the work/finances back to local leadership. Many of our mission points have become points of 'no-return': we never leave.

Second and most importantly, he issues the challenge that we are not to plant churches from a Western/Singaporean cultural angle (our default mindset) but rather we need to take on a kingdom mindset to build discipling communities. The paths of reaching these two destinations take on entirely different directions.

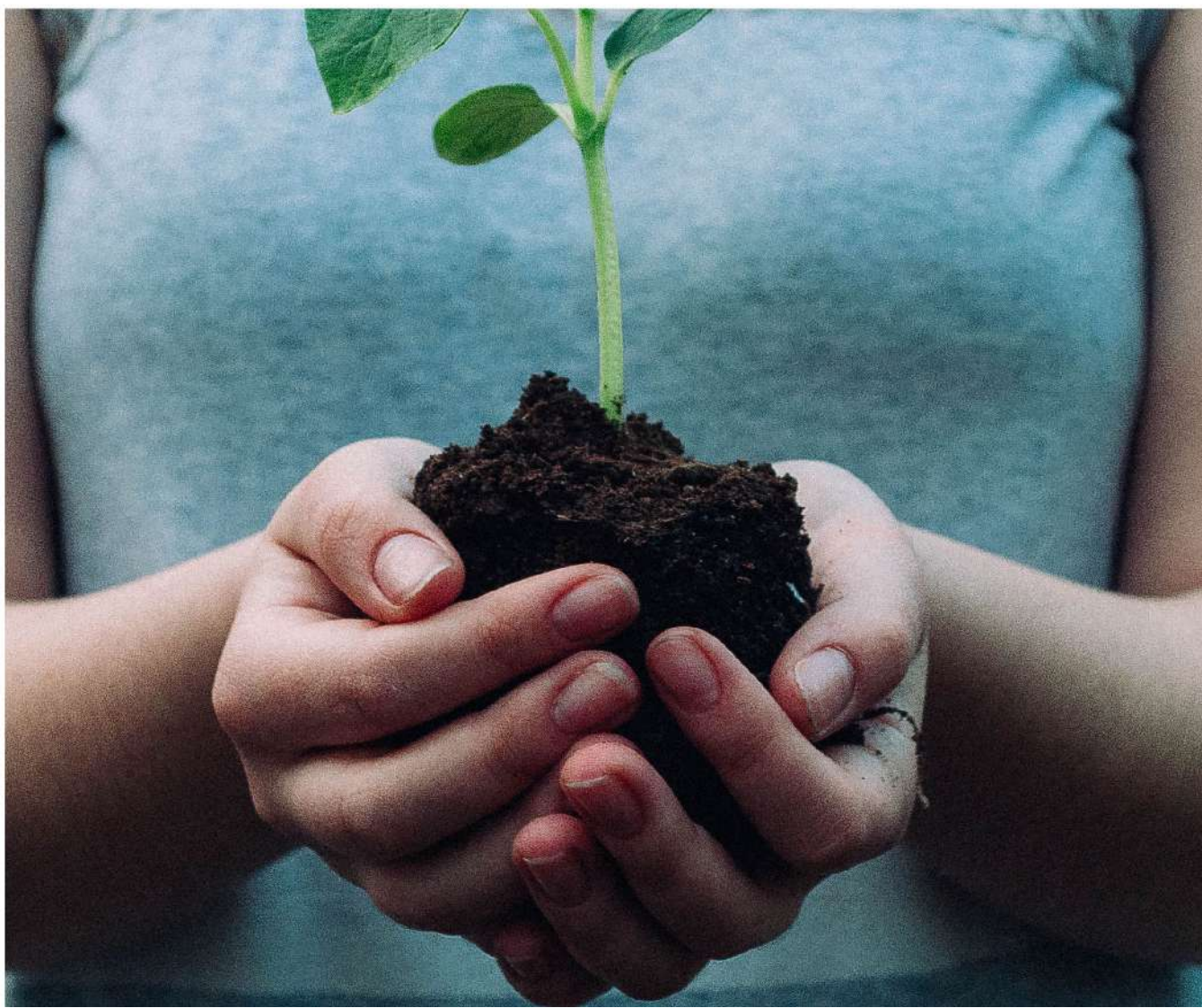
In the article, he presents a case study which your leadership teams can read and use to discern the rights and wrongs of your current mission approach. If necessary, you can then prayerfully reframe your missions strategy for the kingdom of God.

Also in this issue, two alumni who are serving in frontier work in East Asia share their challenges. They are both reaching out to major Unreached People Groups (UPGs).

One alumnus must cover a distance of 200 km to connect with his members, while the other must surmount major cultural resistance to make friends with her targeted audience. As you read their accounts, you will realise that the key to their work is perseverance, and the key to their staying power is their faithfulness to the Lord.

It is fitting that I end this introduction by quoting one of the alumni. As he looks back at his good old times of growth in BTS, God gave him a key reflection – that the future fruits will taste just as good as his time of growth in BTS. In that hope, he will persevere for the kingdom of God.

Rev Peter Lin
President





LEADING FROM 'DEFAULT' CULTURAL VALUES?

Sherwood G. Lingenfelter

Senior Professor of Anthropology and Provost Emeritus
Fuller Theological Seminary
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Church Planting / Member Care
Mobilization/Recruitment / Training

In the history of mission in the era of colonialism, the default pattern for missionaries was to spend their lives in a field of service, plant churches, set up schools, translate scripture, and then very carefully select national leaders to take responsibility for the work, under missionary leadership. For too many years, missionaries stayed too long and reluctantly turned over ministry to nationals. In the last decade of the 20th century, mission strategy shifted, and young people set out to plant churches, to equip national leaders, and to quickly release ministries to them.

The case study that follows illustrates how an exceptional group of young people tried to implement this new direction in mission. Yet we will see from this case that the results of a 'new' mission strategy also failed to achieve the hopes of those creating and implementing it. The question in this essay is: Why do we continue to be frustrated with national leaders (and they with us), even with the best thinking and strategies for equipping them?

A Story of Misplaced Priorities

Galen and Kate graduated from Midwest Bible Seminary in the United States where God gave them a vision for multiplication church planting in Eurasia. Henry, a Chinese from Singapore, caught his passion for mission while preparing for ministry in Singapore and married Myra, a Filipina accountant who attended his local church. They joined an international mission where they met Galen and Kate, and together decided to form a church-planting team to Eurasia.

After spending a year in language school together, they moved to a large city in Eurasia. Henry, gifted in evangelism, soon had gathered together a group of young people who wanted to know more about Jesus. Myra, with her gift of hospitality, and Kate, with her gifts of evangelism and music, made these gatherings times of great fun and fellowship. Within months Kate led several young women to pray to receive Christ, and Henry had led three young men. As Henry continued evangelistic outreach, Galen began to teach the men the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith, essential to their growth and maturity.

As the team developed more intimate friendships with these new believers, they discovered that faith in Christ came with significant costs. Several were excluded from their families for their new faith. Galen asked church members in the U.S. to help provide food and shelter for these young men in their crises. Taking a longer-term view, Henry proposed that they start an Internet café, where the young men could work and make a living. Together they raised funds to lease a shop in the market area, and within a few months they had an Internet café up and running. Hiring several new believers, Myra, with her business background, served as the financial manager and accountant.

The café proved very appealing to urban youth and also solved a number of ministry problems. The men who needed support now had a regular job and could afford their own food and lodging. Several of the women also worked in the café, where Kate then held regular Bible studies to help them mature in their faith. For the next three years the café business created many new contacts, and Henry and Kate guided the local believers working there to lead many local youths to make decisions for Christ.

From the time he had gained his vision for church planting in seminary, Galen had as his goal “to move as quickly as possible to turn over the responsibilities of a church plant to local leaders.” In their fourth year, after a season of prayer and fasting, they encouraged men and women alike to lead worship and to teach, and they rotated the responsibility for preaching among the men. But, once or twice a month, Galen had to step in at the last minute and preach, when the man assigned for that week called to say he was sick and could not come. Kate also found herself helping more than she wanted to in the weekly Bible studies, as these young women turned to her for guidance and then stepped back as she responded to questions and issues of discussion.

Over the next two years Galen and Henry turned the weekly services over to three of these young national leaders, all of whom worked in the Internet café. One had become the supervisor of the café and was quite effective in business. However, this man was not an effective preacher, and the people began to complain about him. Some in the group, seeing other local churches, asked that Galen and Henry appoint just one person to be the preaching pastor of the church. When Galen took a stand against this, the man who wanted the role and 15 others from his ethnic group left to form their own fellowship.

When Galen and Kate departed for their second furlough they were deeply discouraged. What had been such a promising church plant seemed shattered. Many young people had responded to the Gospel, and they seemed so ripe for discipleship and leadership training. Yet somehow the momentum was lost! The fellowship was broken, relationships were shattered over who should preach, and instead of a movement, these believers wanted a traditional church structure that focused on Sunday services and preaching rather than mission. The only thriving piece was the Internet café, still managed by Myra to ensure its ongoing success.

‘Default’ Cultural Values?



‘Default’ Cultural Values?

The biggest challenge I see in mission today is that most churches and mission organisations continue to design strategy with the wrong goal in mind. We are driven by ‘default’ cultural values, and we do mission out of our need to complete a task successfully. As in the case study of Galen and Kate, our primary concerns are typically funding and results, and we are driven by the primary business values of American culture cited by Geert Hofstede in his book, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (2011).

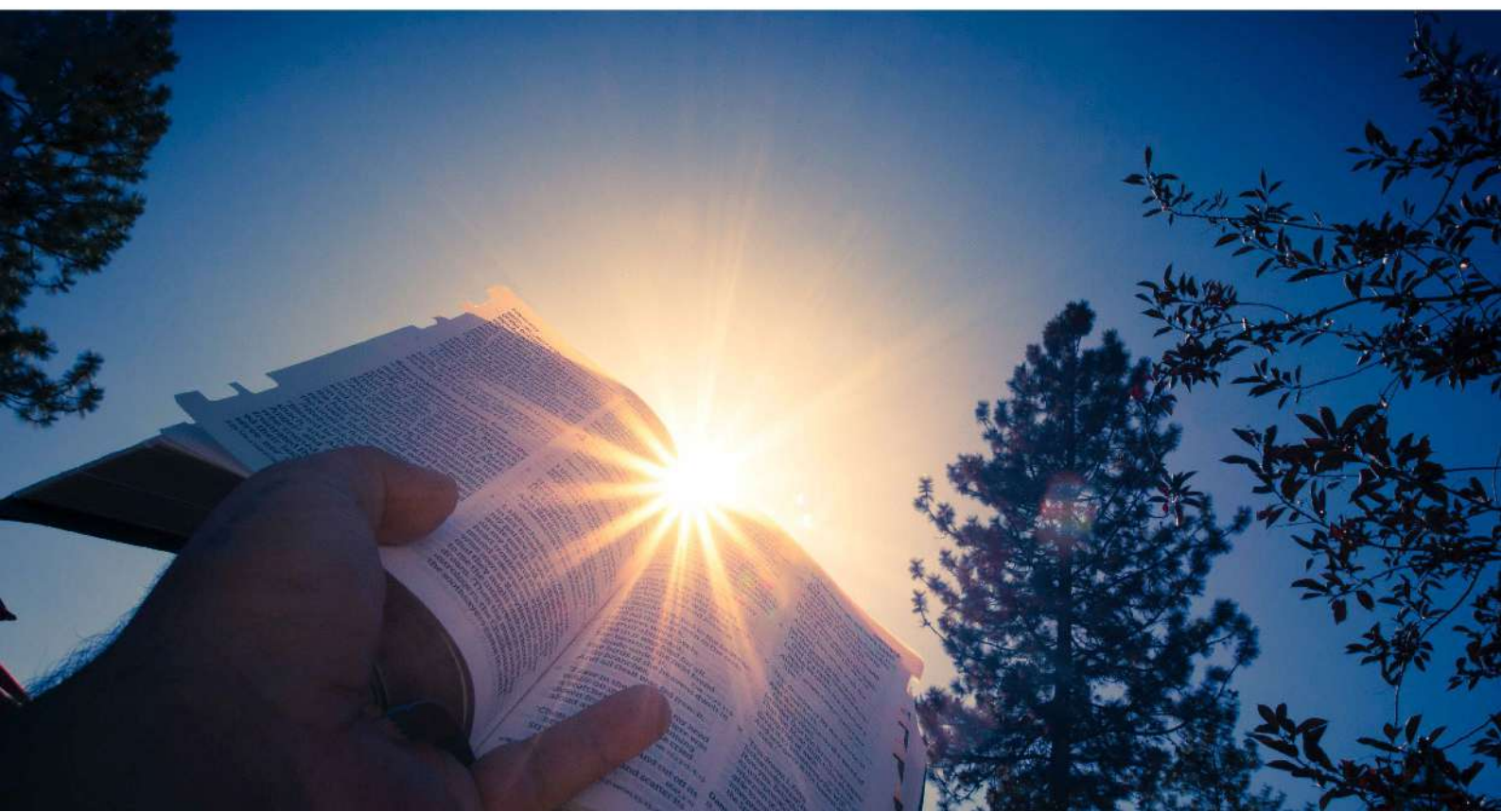
Galen and Kate had a goal to plant a church that reproduced. They organised their ministry around individuals, they trained for results, and they were preoccupied with control to achieve their objectives. Galen and Henry had a plan, and they adapted and changed that plan with quick, unambiguous responses. From the beginning Galen was focused on short-term transition of the ministry to national leaders that he would train to reproduce. While these values have proven effective for profit-driven enterprises, they fall far short of the kingdom values articulated by Jesus in the Gospels, and they failed to accomplish God’s mission for this city in Eurasia.

Every person on a ministry team brings to the team and its relationships a ‘default’ personal culture, formed in one’s childhood and early development. While every person can learn and employ new values, social roles, and forms of organisation, when they find themselves in a situation of crisis they ordinarily default back to the values, roles and organisations that they acquired growing up. This default set of values provides a sense of security and order when the circumstances around them create anxiety and stress.

For Henry and Kate these values included ‘individual evangelism,’ and Galen responded with ‘doctrinal teaching’ for their new converts. Galen and Kate appealed to churches for funding to deal with the economic crises of new believers, and Henry and Kate drew from their prior experience to set up the Internet café as a long-term solution to this need. Galen felt the need to ‘move quickly’ to turn over leadership, and together they introduced a familiar ‘structure of church’ that they imagined would reproduce. All of these actions flowed from their personal values and experiences; and in the crisis of leadership, Galen acted in the masculine, individual, authority-driven role familiar to him.

What is the alternative to ‘default culture’ thinking and living? Christians usually have some understanding that their new life in Christ calls them to an alternative lifestyle. Yet we are culturally blinded about the means to get there. In his letter to the church at Colossae, Paul reminds these Colossian believers that the choice to follow Jesus implies dying with Him in baptism and being raised with Him into a new perspective and way of life. Paul writes, “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your sinful nature ... ” and specifically, “greed, which is idolatry.” And “do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator” (Col. 3:5,9-10, TNIV).

The point of this essay is that any ministry focused on something other than putting on ‘the new self’ in Christ and living and working in and through a ‘covenant-with-God community’ has the wrong priority.





Project-Focused vs. Covenant-With-God-Focused Mission

The hidden flaw in what appeared to be a well-designed church-planting initiative centres in its vision and strategic goal. As Galen described his vision, it was to plant a church that would plant other churches. Galen and Henry organised their practice of ministry around this vision for multiplication church planting. What if Galen had a different vision—a vision to help these local converts realise their potential in Christ? What if he saw this collage of new converts as people on a journey of becoming ‘new creations’ in Christ Jesus, forming a community in covenant with God to be witnesses to God’s power and grace? How might this community look in four or more years, and what would it take to achieve such a vision?

Galen, Kate, Henry and Myra developed training that emphasised technical skills essential to achieve the ‘success’ goals of the ministry. Galen focused on doctrine, Henry on evangelistic skills, Kate evangelism and worship, and Myra on business. All of these are good, but they are focused on ‘tasks’ and ‘ends’ other than Christ. They failed to grasp from the beginning that unless this people became the ‘people of God’ in covenant relationship with God for God’s mission, the church-planting project would not be sustained.

If Galen had focused the ‘church-planting project’ around an agenda to create a community of believers in covenant relationship with God to be about the work of the kingdom of God, that goal demands very different training, practice, schedule and organisation (See Table 1). While the technical aspects of ‘doing church’ may not change, everything else must! The vision shared with the people must focus on being a covenant community with a mission of service as followers of Jesus.

Since all of these local people were newly 'followers of Jesus,' bringing to the 'assembly' emotional wounds, life-long habits of self-gratification and unfulfilled hopes and aspirations, Galen and the team must begin with the work of healing and Christ-focused transformation. Galen must discuss with each of them what 'following Jesus' might mean for their wounds, habits and way of life. Following Jesus must have consequences for how they relate to their families, how they work on their jobs, and how they support one another in times of crisis.

Whether or not they agree to this 'new vision,' the training must address 'default' cultural behaviours and how 'following Jesus' rather than culture in mutual relationships would change the way they worked and the rewards of working in covenant relationships. To do this, Galen and Kate would need to spend much time listening and discerning the 'default values' of these converts, and at the same time share openly their own 'default values' and invite these new believers to hold them accountable to submit these 'habits' to Christ. By modelling mutual submission to Christ, Galen may help these new converts experience what it means to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2).

The relationships and rewards in this covenant-with-God community must focus on achieving the spiritual outcomes of truth and trust in all areas of work, fellowship and ministry. These include acts of compassion for fellow-workers who are suffering physically and/or emotionally, acts of forgiveness to those who are tempted to 'be sick' when they should be at work or on mission, and providing personal accountability for one another in the community. Finally, the love shared within this community for the mutual needs of its members becomes an opportunity for witness and sharing to related families and friends; by their love they will be declaring God's blessing, and giving to those in need as a way of serving Christ. While these new converts might not accept 'following Jesus' and the 'Jesus way' of work and service, this type of training forces them to confront the alternatives and make a conscious choice.



The work of forming and sustaining covenant-with-God communities cannot be placed on a strategic planning sheet that plots annual objectives and outcomes. Jesus did, however, have a limited time-frame to call, teach and equip His disciples. While He taught thousands, only 11 walked the whole journey with Him, and even they fled in the final moments of His crucifixion. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit moved in power upon the eleven and a small community of disciples who were willing to sacrifice their lands, money, security and lives for the sake of the Gospel. These people became the 'living fire' that spread throughout the Roman world and beyond. God has always chosen a small group of people who are willing to deny themselves, take up this cross, and follow Jesus to the ends of the earth.

Our priority must always be to pray for, seek out, and equip people who have been touched by Jesus to 'follow Him.' At that point, whatever they plant in the power of the Holy Spirit will multiply, some 100 times, some 60 times, and some 30 times what was sown.

Table 1: Task vs. Covenant Community-Focused Church Planting

Task-Focused Team	Covenant Community Team
<p>Goal: New church that reproduces</p> <p>Means: church-planting social game</p> <p>Training: Doctrine, worship, witness</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Evangelism 2. Worship and teaching 3. Skills for leading and teaching 4. Skills for witness and work 	<p>Goal: Covenant-with-God community</p> <p>Means: church-planting social game</p> <p>Training: Becoming people of God</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Default play vs. Covenant play 2. Rehearsal of the options 3. Rewards for covenant play 4. Cost of 'default' play
<p>Structure:</p> <p>Teacher, student</p> <p>Leader, followers</p> <p>Employer, employee</p>	<p>Structure:</p> <p>Truth, trust in relationships</p> <p>Compassion, sharing re: needs</p> <p>Witness to other communities</p>
<p>Outcome:</p> <p>Missionary-managed ministry</p> <p>Converts, church meetings</p> <p>Default culture destroys trust</p> <p>Church splits, fragmented ministry</p>	<p>Outcome:</p> <p>Covenant-with-God community</p> <p>'love one another' play</p> <p>Surrendering 'default' habits</p> <p>People of God on mission of God</p>

This article was originally published in *Missio Nexus Anthology* [Vol. 1, No. 1 (May 2013): 50-53] and is used here with the author's permission.

For a more thorough development of the Covenant Community Team concept, see Lingenfelter, Sherwood G. *Leading Cross-Culturally: Covenant Relationships for Effective Christian Leadership*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.

Alumnus Testimony

Shepherd A

I miss those days I spent at BTS when I discovered new truths through my lecturers' earnest teaching. I came to understand that the mission of preachers is part of God's plan, and I realised that the return of the prodigal son could be understood through the stories of the lost sheep, lost coin and the Father's love. However, I was baffled by the Greek language!

All this has helped in my ministry back at home. During the Covid period, our biggest challenge was how to conduct the monthly Lord's Supper ministry. There were many suggestions, but finally we decided to send the elements to the various districts and have the Lord's Supper together online. Considering the needs of those church members who are unable to attend the service in person, we are still continuing with this practice even now. Some deliveries could be to areas as far as two hundred kilometres away, so we use these delivery opportunities to fellowship with the members. I do not know how long I can sustain these deliveries, but I know I can do it now and I will continue to do it for as long as I can.

I miss those days at BTS. It was a difficult time – I remember the hard work of the teachers as they huddled together in their offices, the sourness upon hearing BTS's financial deficits, and the helplessness of having to repeatedly partition and open the classroom for different classes due to limited space. On top of that, there was the frantic pressure to submit assignments, the anxiety of not being able to find reference books, and the haggardness after sleepless nights...

However, at that time, everyone encouraged us and reminded us that the difficult times would not last. I am facing difficulties in my current ministry with the minority tribal group too. How do I deliver their medication? How do I reach out to them? In one of our trips to a home in the grasslands, I could not eat their food and went hungry. Many church members are not willing to reach out to these families due to their difficult living conditions. I encourage myself and those who are willing to carry on this ministry for "God knows and He will send His people."

I miss those days I spent at BTS. They were wonderful days that I will never forget! The international cultural exchanges, the laughter, the sports days, the rooms during retreats were always spacious and well-lit, small group prayer and fellowship on Fridays, pot lucks, BBQs, and even the public transport – all are special memories to me.

The good old days are still fresh in my mind. I cannot remember my grades, but I know I grew spiritually and learned much that is of value to me now. My current scope of work includes Christian education and developing my peers, so I was gratified when I observed that my peers are able to share Bible teachings in context. Recently, I received a gift of honey from a student serving in a border town. Though I have yet to taste it, I know it is as sweet as those days at BTS.

Alumna Testimony

Shepherd B

I started my missionary work with international students at the university (focusing on tribe M) after my graduation. We got to know each other through various workshops and events, such as classes on the English language, photography, coffee appreciation, handicrafts, emotional intelligence and calligraphy; as well as midsummer and winter solstice celebrations. I also built a deeper rapport with them by helping them adapt to living in a Chinese city, as they needed assistance with tasks such as medical appointments, eye check-ups and translation services. For many, I was their first Chinese Christian friend! As we got to know each other better, we were able to discuss spiritual matters and they were willing to join me in my Christian fellowship activities. Now, when I bump into them in town (at bus stops and markets, etc.), we engage in conversation. They are willing to meet Chinese friends and are open in sharing their thoughts and opinions.

Though these 'new' friends are willing to engage in spiritual conversations and activities, they are not yet ready to commit and accept the gift of salvation through faith in Jesus. They are fearful of persecution from their family if they renounce their current faith. In addition, they have received many false teachings about Jesus, such as that Jesus is a prophet and not God, which has influenced their thinking. This false teaching makes our missionary work more difficult and requires perseverance and faith. I can only depend on God as only He can change hearts. Knowing the challenges my new friends are facing, I feel more committed to serve in this ministry.

I am thankful for the work of the Holy Spirit and I am encouraging more Christians from my church to join me. May God affirm His work by doing a miracle among my new friends and leading them to Himself!



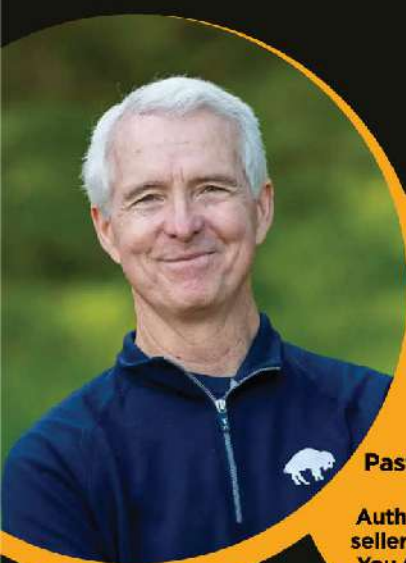
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From Survival To Revival

SOUL RESTORATION IN THE POST-PANDEMIC SEASON

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SPEAKER

PASTOR
John Ortberg

Founder of BecomeNew

Pastor with 40 years in ministry

Author of many books including best sellers "If You Want to Walk on Water, You Got to Get Out of the Boat", and "Soul Keeping".

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