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DEVELOPING THE ENGLISH MINISTRY AT CHINESE
BAPTIST CHURCH OF MIAMI, FLORIDA

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DEVELOPING THE ENGLISH MINISTRY AT CHINESE
BAPTIST CHURCH OF MIAMI, FLORIDA

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PREFACE

A project of this magnitude would not be possible without the encouragement, help, and sacrifice of many people in my life. While I am grateful for them all, some deserve special acknowledgement. First, this project would not have come to fruition without the guidance and patience of my doctoral supervisor, Dr. John Klaassen. Our conversations greatly shaped my thinking, writing, and approach to ministry. Few people have challenged me in quite the same way, and his impact on my life has been immense. I am truly better off as a result of our paths crossing.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to my parents, Doug and Deanna. Their support over the years has been invaluable, and I am particularly grateful for their love for God—a love they desired all their children to likewise cultivate. From giving me my first Bible, to assisting me in surrendering to the Lord first for salvation then to his calling to ministry, to celebrating my ordination, they have been part of my journey with the Lord from the very beginning. Similarly, my grandmother, Ann, has been a constant source of prayer and support for many years, even predating my doctoral work. No one has championed my theological studies as she has, and there was never a doubt in her mind that the Lord would provide the strength to see me through unto completion.

Many sacrifices have been made by my in-laws, Tiesheng and Zhoujian, to allow me uninterrupted time studying and writing. My sincerest thanks goes to them for affording me this privilege, and I pray somehow the Lord uses this project to draw their hearts to him so that they too may worship the God spoken of in these pages. My young daughters, Kayla and Sarah, will never know of the heartache I experienced from the times I missed spending with them because “daddy had to do his homework,” but I trust

they will benefit from this project. Moreover, I pray that the churches they are raised in and attend as adults will be strengthened through scholarship such as this.

I reserve my deepest appreciation for my wife, Shelly. She is the greatest gift in my life apart from my salvation. In no way would I be the man I am today without her love, encouragement, and the many sacrifices she has made in our marriage as I acquired three academic degrees. It is impossible to adequately express all she has done, but suffice to say I would not have completed this project without her patience and unwavering support during this time. For that I am forever grateful.

Finally, I would be amiss without thanking God for all he has done and for getting me to this point in my life. I pray that whatever good may come from me or this project would be a reflection of his goodness and mercy, and that above all his name would be glorified.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

God's love for the nations is evident throughout the Bible. God desires people from every country, people group, and language to worship him (Rev 7:9-10). As Christians seek ways to reach the world, immigrant churches can significantly help fill a void. While the gospel is for everyone, churches reaching a certain people group and offering Bible teaching in a certain language can be helpful in reaching first-generation immigrants. However, once the first generation begins having children, what is to be done for them? The second generation grows up in a different country, with a different language and culture than their parents, and typically have a weaker connection to their parents' culture. If an immigrant church's focus is primarily on reaching first-generation immigrants, then what role does the church play in the lives of the second generation and beyond? Additionally, to what extent should the second generation reach out to and welcome those of a different culture or ethnicity into the church? Answering these questions helps immigrant churches chart a course for the future while fulfilling God's mission to take the gospel to all people.

Context

Chinese Baptist Church of Miami (CBCM) was founded in June 1972, and is the only Southern Baptist Chinese church in Miami-Dade County. The group that started the church was previously part of a Chinese-speaking Bible study at an Anglo church in the area that sensed the need to reach the small Chinese population in Miami. Many attending the Chinese Bible study were recent immigrants who were not fluent in English, so offering an opportunity to study the Bible in their own language was the only way to

reach them. Eventually, the group grew large enough to become an independent congregation and call its first pastor.

Since the church's founding, its primary focus has been reaching the Chinese-speaking first generation in the area. The church's mindset is such that as a Chinese church, it exists solely for Chinese people. Over the years, as the neighborhood around the church changed and became overwhelmingly Hispanic, CBCM did not interact with or try to reach its neighbors. The church's small, vacant parsonage is occasionally used by Spanish-speaking church plants until they outgrow the space, but otherwise CBCM has not interacted in substantial ways with those who are not Chinese.

In the early years, most people at CBCM spoke Cantonese Chinese. As more Mandarin Chinese speakers arrived, Bible studies and other ministries in Mandarin were started. Fifteen years after the founding of CBCM, an English-speaking ministry was started for second-generation adults in the church. Although some of the second generation speak Cantonese or Mandarin, all speak English as their primary language. Approximately two years later, CBCM hired an additional full-time pastor to minister to the English-speaking youth and adults. In 2007, a separate worship service completely in English was created. Prior to this, the worship service was conducted in Chinese with English translation. The target audience for the English worship service is Chinese Americans for whom English is their primary language, although there are a sparse number of English-speaking attendees from the Caribbean and South America (Hispanics as well as Chinese-Jamaicans, Chinese-Peruvians, etc.).

Despite CBCM offering various ministries and a separate worship service in English, attendance among English speakers over the last few years has begun to decline. Many second and third-generation Chinese feel out of place attending the church. The majority of those in the English ministry grew up at CBCM and have family members who attend the Chinese-speaking worship service, but for some that is not a strong enough incentive to continue attending the church. Some have left over the years because

they are not content, but many who grew up in the church move out of the area to attend college and do not return to Miami. Seeing friends and family members leave every year, combined with a lack of outreach to grow the ministry, has been demoralizing to the group. Week after week there is a sense of just showing up and “doing church” rather than feeling excited about the work God is doing and anticipating lives being changed.

Moreover, the first generation makes up a significantly larger part of the church and therefore exerts almost total control over decisions—even those concerning the English ministry. For example, while the English worship service is led by various members of the second generation, the order of service and activities that take place are dictated by the first generation. As a result, the English-speaking ministries closely resemble those of the first generation, despite the fact the groups have vastly different needs, life experiences, and expectations of the church. There are also few opportunities for the second generation to be involved in leadership positions. All of these issues have led many in the English ministry to conclude that they have no say in what directly affects them in the life of the church. Some even believe there is no place for them at CBCM.

While generational differences are common between children and their parents, these differences are exacerbated when the child grows up in a different country, with a different culture, and speaking a different language. As the pressure to honor and respect the past and to please one’s parents weighs heavily on CBCM’s second generation, many are hesitant to criticize or suggest changes—either in the home or at church. Each family must decide how much of the old culture and language to hold on to, and these same issues exist at CBCM with many in the first generation desiring to preserve the ways of the past. There is resistance to change for sentimental reasons, but the first generation also does not want to give up cultural practices. Several of these practices do not resonate with the second generation and only further make them feel out of place.

Despite the church’s faults, meaningful ministry still occurs in the English-speaking group. Indeed, there are strengths and evidence that God is at work in the

members' lives. Various Bible studies take place throughout the week, proficient lay leaders are using their gifts, many teenagers and adults are serving in the church, and every year some are baptized. The youth group also attends summer camp yearly, which results in many professions of faith, students rededicating their lives to Jesus, and other meaningful life changes. Several first-generation church members generously donate financially to make the trip possible. People from other ethnicities have also become involved at CBCM (primarily English-speaking Hispanics who live nearby) and bring a new perspective to the English ministry. While being a medium-sized, multi-generational church with three dominant languages spoken could easily lead to numerous fragmented groups, CBCM feels like a family in many regards. There are close relationships between members of all ages and languages, and every Sunday the church provides lunch, which fosters a natural time of fellowship. Finally, the gospel is clearly and faithfully proclaimed, there is a strong reverence for God, and he is glorified in the activities that take place at CBCM.

Rationale

One of the most important questions the leadership of CBCM must answer is what role the English ministry should play in the life of the church and how expansive it should be. The church leadership consists of six deacons and two full-time pastors. Due to the organizational structure of the church, the deacon board has more authority than the pastors and ultimately make decisions regarding the vision and direction of the church. For Chinese churches in areas with a sizeable Chinese population, or in cities with a steady stream of Chinese immigration, issues concerning the second generation are not quite as pressing. Unfortunately, CBCM is not in this situation. With aging first-generation congregants and few Chinese-speaking immigrants living in or moving to Miami, determining the function of the English ministry is crucial. As the English-speaking members make up approximately one-third of CBCM, it is easy to overlook them and focus on the Chinese-speaking members—many of whom have been in the

church for decades. While it is certainly appropriate to care for senior members who have given years of their lives to the church, it is also appropriate to ask why attendance in the English ministry is significantly smaller and what can be done to rectify this.

Given the lack of numerical growth in the English ministry and the slim chance of substantial future growth among Chinese speakers, the church has few options to consider. First, CBCM could decide to solely focus on reaching first-generation Chinese speakers. If this is the case, the English-speaking ministries should be disbanded, and their resources used in other areas of the church. However, doing so sends the message that all members of a family are not welcome, the second generation has no place there, and worst of all it does not address how the English ministry can be of benefit to those who currently need it. Moreover, forsaking the future generations would all but ensure the church's closure in the not too distant future.

Second, CBCM could continue its current strategy of focusing primarily on Chinese-speaking immigrants while still having an English ministry that is a low priority in the church. Selecting this option and not investing in the English speakers would by default relegate the English ministry to a second-class status. Additionally, not giving the English speakers any autonomy or control over their ministries would lead to continued frustration among the group. Instead of having a place where the English-speaking members are excited about worshipping God, a ministry will just exist with no clear purpose, passion, or goals. Progressing down this path will most likely lead to continued decline in the second generation's attendance.

A third option is to intentionally pursue the English-speaking Chinese in the area. Doing so will have to be a conscious decision among the leadership to make the English ministry thrive rather than simply exist. Not only would this require a change in the church's outreach strategies, but changes in the English ministry's structure and programming to make it more attractive to the second generation and beyond. One downside to this option is the potential for the first generation to feel slighted or

disrespected. It is possible a radical shift in priorities and outreach in the church could lead to feelings of anger and resentment among the first generation. After faithfully serving the church for years, they might feel like they are being pushed aside in their old age and not properly cared for.

The fourth option is for CBCM to take the unprecedented step to actively reach out to non-Chinese people and make its English ministry multicultural. Given the church's history, this would be the most radical move. This option will certainly have to be a conscious decision by the leadership to not only foster an atmosphere that is welcoming to those who are not Chinese, but to seek them out and embrace them. Given the extremely small number of Chinese in Miami-Dade County (0.49 percent of the population)¹ and the cultural context of the neighborhood in which CBCM is located, this option seems to have the most potential for considerable numeric growth in the English ministry. However, this option would not be without difficulties; namely, convincing non-Chinese people to attend a Chinese church. Additionally, a challenge in trying to reach the neighborhood is that many neighbors have had no contact with the church in the fifty years it has been in existence. CBCM has essentially gone out of its way to not interact with people in the immediate vicinity for so long that sudden and aggressive efforts to reach the neighborhood would likely be met with suspicion.

At this point the best option is not clear, and each has its own challenge or downside. However, the Bible is not silent on God's desire for people of every nation to worship him, or on the part every Christian can play in reaching the nations to make this a reality. A proper understanding of these facts and a commitment to act upon them could be the impetus CBCM needs to recognize the strategic opportunity it has at this moment, and the potential to see the start of a new chapter in its English ministry.

¹ United States Census Bureau, "2018 American Community Survey, Miami-Dade County," September 2019, https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?id=ACS%205-Year%20Estimates%20Data%20Profiles&table=DP05&tid=ACSDP5Y2018.DP05&g=0400000US12_0500000US12086.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was for members of the English ministry at Chinese Baptist Church of Miami to develop an understanding that God's mission to reach the nations is all throughout the Bible.

Goals

To ensure this ministry project's purpose was achieved, the project was guided by three goals. The successful completion of these goals helped church members understand God's mission to reach the nations, and the need for them to participate in God's mission. The goals were as follows:

1. The first goal was to assess the current missions knowledge among members of the English ministry.
2. The second goal was to develop a six-week sermon series for members of the English ministry detailing God's love for the nations and the biblical basis of missions.
3. The third goal was to increase the missions knowledge among members of the English ministry through preaching the developed six-week sermon series.

The research methodology used to measure the successful completion of these goals is detailed in the following section.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to assess the current missions knowledge among members of the English ministry. This goal was measured by administering a survey to adult members of the English ministry.² The survey was offered to those who regularly attend the English worship service or live in the area and watch online. This goal was considered successfully met when respondents completed the survey to the best of their ability based on their current knowledge and understanding of missions.

² See appendix 1. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use.

The second goal was to develop a six-week sermon series for members of the English ministry detailing God’s love for the nations and the biblical basis of missions. This goal was measured by a panel of local ministry leaders and denominational workers with extensive cross-cultural or missions experience who used a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness and clarity of the sermon series.³ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, the material was revised until it met the standard.

The third goal was to increase the missions knowledge among members of the English ministry through preaching the developed six-week sermon series. This goal was measured by administering the survey before and after the six-week sermon series, and measuring the respondents’ change in missions knowledge. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test revealed a sufficient difference existed between the pre- and post-survey scores.

There is room for all people within Jesus’s church—even those who are unsure about where they fit in—as the gospel is for all people. There is no obstacle too big to prevent them from assimilating into the church, and the Bible speaks to common issues those in the English ministry face. If problems exist, it is not because the Bible is silent on these issues; rather, it is because sufficient time has not been put in to study the relevant texts to find solutions. Three such passages are discussed in chapter 2.

In chapter 3, various issues are examined that immigrant churches in America must consider. First, as members of a multicultural society, there are plentiful opportunities to reach and integrate other ethnicities into the church. For those at CBCM, the sheer number of non-Chinese prospects in the community is staggering. One challenge for

³ See appendix 2.

those at CBCM is to discern what the church's place is in a multicultural society and in a neighborhood that is overwhelmingly Hispanic.

Every culture has certain aspects that make it unique, and another issue examined are the particular aspects of Chinese culture that make people hesitant to accept other viewpoints. Because the Eastern culture of the first generation in CBCM is so different from the more Westernized second generation, it is not surprising that there are conflicts. While some of those in the English ministry want to see substantial changes occur, which would give the ministry a more Westernized feel and potentially be more inviting to those of other cultures and ethnicities, the first generation adamantly opposes many such changes. Therefore, a detailed look at how Chinese culture is different from Western culture, and why the first generation wants to preserve its views, is examined.

Finally, English ministries within Chinese churches must be careful not to let the preservation of Chinese culture become the purpose of their gatherings, but instead must stay focused on the gospel. A multicultural society can give those from any ethnicity a reason to segregate themselves from others, become insulated from outside ideas, and perpetuate their own culture. However, the church must be about building up and furthering God's kingdom and cannot let any other agenda usurp this. The church is about God's mission on earth to reach and disciple the nations, so CBCM must help its members realize their identity is found in Christ—not their ethnicity.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms are used in this ministry project:

First generation. *First-generation* immigrants are those born in a different country than the country in which they currently reside. They left their country of origin for one reason or another and permanently settled in a different country. The *first generation* are typically adults or teenagers when they arrive, and their primary language is their native language.

1.5 generation. *1.5 generation* refers to people born in one country who immigrated to a different country before becoming a teenager.⁴ While not natural-born citizens of the country they live in, those in the *1.5 generation* are raised in a different country than their parents. In many cases they had no say in leaving their country of origin as their parents decided the family would immigrate to a new country.

Second generation. The children of first-generation immigrants born in the country the family currently resides in are *second-generation* immigrants.⁵ Unlike those in the first generation or 1.5 generation, they did not live in the former country and do not have an immediate connection to it.

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the project was confined to a fifteen-week duration. This gave adequate time to develop and evaluate the survey, develop and evaluate the sermon series, preach the sermon series, and calculate the results of the surveys. Second, the accuracy of the survey responses was dependent upon participants' honesty in answering the statements. To mitigate this limitation, participants were promised that at no point (either verbally or in writing) would their names be publicly identified with their responses.

Two delimitations were placed on this project. First, the survey was only given to adults in the English ministry. Although those in middle and high school heard the sermons preached, they were not involved in this ministry project and their level of missions knowledge was not recorded or measured. Additionally, those in the Chinese-speaking congregation were not surveyed because in many ways the Chinese ministry is healthier than the English ministry. Attendance among the Chinese-speaking groups has remained steady over the last several years, and recently new ministries have been started

⁴ Daniel A. Rodriguez, *A Future for the Latino Church: Models for Multilingual, Multigenerational Hispanic Congregations* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 19.

⁵ Stephen Bochner, ed., *Cultures in Contact*, International Series in Experimental Social Psychology (Oxford: Pergamon, 1982), 1:31.

for international college students as well as families. Overall, the needs of CBCM's Chinese speakers are sufficiently being met. Since it is the English ministry that is struggling, this project sought to instill a desire for the group to begin reaching those of other ethnicities. The second delimitation was that only the survey responses of those who listened to at least three of the six sermons were used in calculating the results of this project. While God's Word is always beneficial and does not return void (Isa 55:11), those who listened to two sermons or less were not as likely to gain a full understanding of the biblical basis of missions.

Conclusion

With few options to consider and an ever-pressing need to clarify the direction of the English ministry, the leadership at CBCM cannot postpone a decision much longer. Having to make a decision when an obstacle or inconvenience accompanies every available option and knowing the decision will affect the lives of hundreds of people is no small matter to enter into, but such is the cost of leadership. Yet with the Bible's clear expectation for Christians to reach the nations, and the plentiful opportunities for the English ministry at CBCM to do so, the choice seems clear. CBCM's English ministry has a unique opportunity to build bridges among other English speakers from many nations, and to see a potentially profound work of God across racial, ethnic, and linguistic lines. Perhaps the only obstacles preventing this from happening are an unawareness of God's love for the nations or an unwillingness to engage those who are not Chinese—two issues which this ministry project set out to address.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPING THE ENGLISH MINISTRY

While cultural and generational conflicts can impede the raising up of new leaders, these issues need not deter the church from its mission as the Bible addresses how to overcome these obstacles. Indeed, few problems the church faces today are without precedent in the early church. As the church grew and came to encompass those of various backgrounds, church leaders were faced with decisions such as how to raise up the next generation of leaders, who can be accepted into the church and on what terms, and how to minister to an ever diversifying body of congregants, all while resolving conflict and preserving unity amongst the group. Three such examples from Scripture will be discussed, showing how these difficulties were overcome, and why those in any church facing similar difficulties today can be hopeful in the midst of their situation.

A Mandate for Empowering the Next Generation (2 Tim 2:1-2)

In a letter written to his disciple, Timothy, the apostle Paul succinctly yet powerfully emphasizes the need for discipleship. Although speaking directly to Timothy as a church leader, the command to disciple others applies to all Christians. The knowledge Timothy acquired from Paul is not only for his own personal benefit or ministry. Discipleship is a process of training and equipping others, who will then continue this pattern. As this occurs, not only are individual Christians strengthened spiritually, but the Christian faith is passed on from one generation to the next in biblically healthy churches.

What Has Been Heard Is to Be Passed On (2:1-2)

Paul begins 2 Timothy 2 with a powerful reminder of where Timothy's strength comes from: Jesus himself. As Timothy aspires to fulfill the ministry God has for him, he is not to merely trust in himself but should look to the strength that comes from Jesus. John Stott notes, "Timothy is to find his resources for ministry not in his own nature but in Christ's grace. It is not only for salvation that we are dependent on grace (1:9), but for service also."¹ Since God has given him a spirit of "power and love and self-control" (2 Tim 1:7),² Timothy can be strengthened in the grace that comes from Jesus. Timothy is to persevere in this faith (which as Paul states in 2 Tim 1:5 was passed on to Timothy through his mother and grandmother).³ Empowered and emboldened with this truth, Paul urges Timothy to take the things heard from Paul and teach them to others. The precise content of what Timothy heard from Paul and is charged with passing on is difficult to pinpoint since nothing is explicitly mentioned in this passage. However, later it becomes apparent that Paul is referring to his extensive teachings on Jesus and the gospel. Fred Gealy and Morgan Noyes summarize Paul's appeal to Timothy by writing,

Timothy's chief function as minister and administrator in the church is to transmit intact and unchanged what he has heard from Paul to other faithful men who in turn will be able to teach others also. The deposit of faith is a living word which one generation communicates to another. . . . Paul here pleads for a succession of the teachers, passing on Christian knowledge from generation to generation, as runners in a relay race pass on the torch or the wand.⁴

¹ John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Gospel: The Message of 2 Timothy*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 50.

² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

³ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 52.

⁴ Fred D. Gealy and Morgan P. Noyes, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The Interpreter's Bible, vol. 11 (New York: Abingdon, 1955), 478.

Paul's command in 2 Timothy 2:2 to teach others is not so much revolutionary as it is codifying an already established practice. As H. A. Ironside notes, this passage makes it clear Timothy's responsibility is to pass on "the great historic facts of Christianity and the doctrines based upon them" so that the gospel message may spread.⁵ Throughout the history of the church, the truths of the gospel have always been passed on through the discipleship process from one generation who believes to another so they can share in the same knowledge of God's truth.⁶ It is the Christian's duty to transmit the things he or she has learned to others, and to view oneself as a bridge between two generations.⁷ Ultimately, Timothy is to do more than simply preserve the truth—he is to pass it on to the next generation, and take the necessary steps Paul outlines to ensure this transmission of truth continues.⁸

In giving this command to teach others, Paul is not insisting on a fixed creedal formula per se. He is simply stating the guidelines of what must be disseminated, and entrusting Timothy to fulfill the task.⁹ Rather than merely repeating Paul's teaching, Timothy is to follow that teaching as the basis of his own. Paul's teaching is the starting point for Timothy, as the content of the message is more important than the form it takes.¹⁰ For the church today, the pattern of teaching and discipling still exists, and this mandate cannot be stressed enough. All Christians share in fulfilling this responsibility, and

⁵ H. A. Ironside, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, An Ironside Expository Commentary* (1947; repr., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 114.

⁶ Ironside, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 114-15.

⁷ William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, The Daily Study Bible Series, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 158.

⁸ Stott, *Guard the Gospel*, 50.

⁹ Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 195.

¹⁰ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 14 (1957; repr., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 132-33.

however strong the next generation of Christians will be is directly impacted by how diligently the current generation is laboring to pass on the faith.

Certainly 2 Timothy 2 is not the first time either in the course of their discipling relationship or even in this letter that Paul stressed the importance of the message he passed on to Timothy. In 2 Timothy 1:13, Paul urges Timothy to “follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me,” and in the next verse refers to this body of teaching as “the good deposit entrusted to you.” Because this message entrusted to him is “good,” there is little doubt the “sound words” Paul refers to are anything other than the gospel.¹¹ Regarding 2 Timothy 1:13 (but certainly applicable to 2 Tim 2 as well), John Calvin notes,

I believe that the apostle is telling Timothy to hold on to the teaching he has learned, not only to its substance but also to how it is expressed. For the word pattern gives a vivid picture, as if we saw the object before our eyes. Paul knows how liable people are to rebel and fall away from true teaching, and so he carefully warns Timothy not to depart from the pattern of sound teaching he had received.¹²

The heart of the message Paul references in 2 Timothy 2:2 is the gospel, since Paul uses the same words in 2 Timothy 1:13 when referring to the message Timothy heard from Paul (παρ’ ἐμοῦ ἤκουσας in 1:13, and ἤκουσας παρ’ ἐμοῦ in 2:2).¹³ Further evidence for the connection between the commands in these chapters comes from the οὖν (“then/therefore”) in 2 Timothy 2:1, as it resumes the theme mentioned in the previous chapter.¹⁴

Concerning the content of Paul’s instruction to Timothy, it is debatable whether this body of teaching came at one time (such as Timothy’s ministry ordination) or is the

¹¹ Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 233.

¹² John Calvin, *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 126-27.

¹³ Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 232-33.

¹⁴ Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 239.

culmination of the discipling relationship the two men had. Had this information been given at Timothy's ordination (mentioned by Paul in 1 Tim 4:14 and 6:12), then certainly many witnesses could authenticate the teaching. Most notable would be the elders who were present, but also perhaps individuals such as Barnabas, Timothy's mother, and his grandmother would have joined other believers on the occasion.¹⁵ However, the vagueness of the phrase "in the presence of many witnesses" (διὰ πολλῶν μαρτύρων) in 2 Timothy 2:2 and the lack of explanation does not seem to lend itself to such a significant event as ordination.¹⁶ Additionally, if one specific event is in mind, then it seems improbable that Paul would have been able to sufficiently share the full expression of the gospel with Timothy at that one instance. At best, Timothy would have received a condensed teaching of the gospel, and it is doubtful Paul would so enthusiastically desire this limited knowledge to be further propagated.¹⁷ Without a definitive biblical answer, though, the matter of who these witnesses are and if a specific occasion is in mind must be left to speculation.

In whatever setting(s) the teaching occurred, Paul does not mention these witnesses with the intent to intimidate Timothy. Paul is not trying to imply he will produce witnesses (such as one might do in a courtroom) that could dispute the origin of Timothy's teaching. Rather, Paul is simply stating that many living witnesses could corroborate Timothy's teaching.¹⁸ Paul's pattern was not that of secretly teaching Timothy, and because many others can verify Paul's words, there is no reason for people to doubt Timothy's teaching. Moreover, these witnesses could theoretically pass on the same

¹⁵ Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 202.

¹⁶ Gealy and Noyes, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 478.

¹⁷ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 46 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 505.

¹⁸ Calvin, *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, 131.

teachings to other faithful believers as well. In the end, Paul’s care for guarding and transmitting his teaching is highlighted in that it was not only a concern during his lifetime but he also wanted to preserve it for as long as he could after his death.¹⁹

Entrusted to Faithful Men (2:2)

As Timothy goes about teaching and discipling others, Paul puts a very distinguishing mark upon the type of people he should be looking for. Namely, he is to be selective in his search and only entrust his knowledge to “faithful men” (πιστοῖς ἀνθρώποις). Although Paul probably has in mind those who meet the qualifications of elders, it is not the person’s status but rather one’s character that is emphasized.²⁰ The significance of being found faithful cannot be overstated. William Barclay states that the root word πιστος describes “a man who is *believing*, a man who is *loyal*, a man who is *reliable*. All these meanings are there. . . . [His] heart must be so stayed on Christ that no threat of danger will lure him from the path of loyalty and no seduction of false teaching cause him to stray from the straight path of the truth. He must be steadfast alike in life and in thought.”²¹

While several claim the name of Christ, few are concerned about perpetuating the message entrusted to them. Paul knew that many had other priorities in their lives, which is why faithfulness is a non-negotiable characteristic.²² After all, only the faithful can be counted on to teach others. From a human standpoint, the survival of the church is dependent upon an unbroken chain of teachers.²³ Paul himself knew the importance of

¹⁹ Calvin, *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, 131.

²⁰ Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 240.

²¹ Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 158.

²² Calvin, *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, 131.

²³ Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 158.

endurance and faithfulness in the Christian life and how easily one could be dismayed at the threat of resistance. Indeed, Paul’s faithfulness to God resulted in his imprisonment that provided the opportunity for the writing of this letter to Timothy.²⁴ Because Paul’s life demonstrated faithfulness to the Lord, and because he was intimately acquainted with the hardships that potentially await other followers of Christ, it is not unreasonable for him to demand that disciples be found faithful.

Further showing the continuation between chapters 1 and 2 of 2 Timothy, that which was entrusted (*παραθήκη*) to Timothy in 1:14 is now in 2:2 what Timothy is to entrust (*παράθου*) to other faithful men. By Paul using the verb form of *παραθήκη* in chapter 2, Timothy most certainly would have understood the connection between what Paul had passed on to him and what he must now do with others.²⁵ The idea *παραθήκη* conveys is of entrusting a deposit for safe keeping to someone such as a banker with the intention of receiving it back completely unchanged. As Paul uses the term, he is referring to the message of the gospel which Timothy must not alter, therefore stressing the need for orthodoxy.²⁶ Of utmost importance for the one teaching others—whether Timothy or those he has discipled—is that the message be transmitted faithfully. In giving this command to Timothy, it is clear he is not to be an innovator of religious messages. Instead, he is to faithfully pass on the gospel message to future generations of Christian leaders.²⁷ Indeed, as this letter contains Paul’s last known recorded words to Timothy, Stott notes the apostle stressed “the precious gospel was now committed to *him*, and that it was now *his* turn to assume responsibility for it, to preach and teach it, to defend it against attack and against falsification, and to ensure its accurate transmission to the generations yet to

²⁴ Ironside, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 107.

²⁵ Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 240.

²⁶ Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 4.

²⁷ Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 200.

come.”²⁸ Moreover, because Timothy has been entrusted with this responsibility, Paul is implicitly reminding him that he will one day give an account of his life and ministry before God. For this reason, Timothy is urged to faithfully carry out Paul’s instructions, and by extension the same motivation exists for Christians today.²⁹

Able to Teach Others (2:2)

The only additional requirement mentioned for those deemed “faithful” is that they are able to teach others. Timothy is to preserve what he has received from Paul and at any cost pass it on to others who will be able to continue this progression to future generations.³⁰ It is not enough to just be concerned about others or excited to share important truths with them. Paul knows no amount of enthusiasm or zeal for the spiritual growth of others can substitute for the ability to competently teach the faith.³¹ Donald Guthrie notes, “The transmission of Christian truth must never be left to chance, and is clearly not committed fortuitously to every Christian, but only to *faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also*. Two qualifications are therefore demanded: A loyalty to the truth, i.e. a loyalty which has been proved, and an aptitude to teach.”³²

The ability to teach is a vital component for the longevity of any discipleship process to continue, and as Paul nears the end of his life and can no longer disciple others, he reminds Timothy of this critical attribute.³³ Furthermore, the importance of being able to teach becomes particularly clear by the end of the letter when Paul urges

²⁸ Stott, *Guard the Gospel*, 21.

²⁹ Calvin, *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, 127.

³⁰ Stott, *Guard the Gospel*, 13.

³¹ Gealy and Noyes, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 479.

³² Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 138.

³³ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 489.

Timothy to leave Ephesus and come to him in Rome (2 Tim 4:9, 21). For the health of the church and the propagation of the gospel, others must be able to carry on the work in Timothy's absence, and this necessitates him teaching and discipling others.³⁴ This lends further credence to the possibility Paul has elders in mind, as these disciples are to be faithful men of character, tasked with not only preserving the integrity of the gospel message but teaching it to others as well.³⁵ Stott agrees, saying, "The men Paul has in mind must be primarily ministers of the word, whose chief function is to teach, Christian elders whose responsibility it would be—like the Jewish elders of the synagogue—to preserve the tradition."³⁶

Acceptance into the Church Is Based on Unity, Not Uniformity (Acts 15:1-21)

Almost from the very beginning the church has been a multicultural institution. What started out with a group of Jews in Jerusalem spread throughout sections of the Roman Empire over the course of several years. During that time, many Gentiles believed in Jesus and began attending churches. These Gentiles had very different backgrounds, cultures, and life experiences from the Jews in Jerusalem. As Christianity spread, questions arose as to whether Gentiles must adopt certain Jewish practices to be considered true followers of God. These questions were adequately resolved in the early church, and the decisions made have helped churches ever since navigate situations regarding different cultures and cultural expressions.

The Problem Stated, and Decision to Meet in Jerusalem (15:1-6, 12)

Shortly after the apostle Paul's first recorded missionary journey, which resulted

³⁴ Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 240.

³⁵ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 504.

³⁶ Stott, *Guard the Gospel*, 51.

in several Gentile converts, the church faced its first serious controversy. A group of Jews from Judea, who in one way or another were associated with the Pharisees, began proclaiming to these newly converted Gentiles that in addition to faith in Jesus, circumcision as prescribed by the law of Moses was also required to be saved (15:1). While Paul and others insisted this was not so, the other group kept persisting with their message.³⁷ This faction was not authorized by church leaders in Jerusalem, but by claiming their message came from the apostles they were afforded an outsized influence. This was particularly disruptive to the church because these new Gentile Christians would have respected and not questioned the opinion of those from the mother church. Additionally, since these new Christians lacked the proper discernment to know the message was wrong, this false teaching spread.³⁸ It should be noted that practically from the inception of the church in Antioch there was a combination of Jewish and Gentile Christians (Acts 11:19-26). No mention of circumcision or following the law is made, and when word reached Jerusalem of this development in Antioch with many Gentiles believing in Jesus, Barnabas visited the church to investigate. Strikingly, Barnabas concluded that God was at work among them and they should continue on as they had been.³⁹

Many times in the Bible “circumcision” is understood as shorthand for following the Mosaic law, and here the problem arose when the law became understood as something one must do to be loved and accepted by God rather than as an expression of His love. Lloyd Ogilvie states that many of these Pharisaical Christians did not want to

³⁷ A. C. Hervey, *Acts of the Apostles*, The Pulpit Commentary (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1909), 2:1.

³⁸ John Calvin, *Acts*, The Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1995), 248.

³⁹ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 419-20.

exclude Gentiles from following God, but they did believe these new Gentile Christians should be required to keep the law as they had done. Ogilvie states these Pharisees thought that “becoming a Jew in every sense was required for membership in the church.”⁴⁰ Moreover, Stott superbly summarizes the situation:

So far it had been assumed that they [Gentiles] would be absorbed into Israel by circumcision, and that by observing the law they would be acknowledged as *bona fide* members of the covenant people of God. Something quite different was now happening, however, something which disturbed and even alarmed many. Gentile converts were being welcomed into fellowship by baptism without circumcision. They were becoming Christians without also becoming Jews. They were retaining their own identity and integrity as members of other nations. It was one thing for the Jerusalem leaders to give their approval to the conversion of the Gentiles: but could they approve of conversion-without-circumcision, of faith in Jesus without the works of the law, and of commitment to the Messiah without inclusion in Judaism?⁴¹

The logic from those who insisted circumcision was necessary for salvation was simple enough: to Jewish Christians, Christianity had come out of and was the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. However, what they saw taking place among the Gentiles did not seem to be related to this tradition. By not keeping the law (or even acknowledging its significance) and beginning with Jesus, the Gentile Christians appeared to be jumping into the middle of the salvation process. That is why this faction claimed it was not possible to be saved without also following everything in the law that prepared the way for the Messiah.⁴²

As evidenced in this text, it can be extremely difficult to comprehend that salvation comes through faith alone in the finished work of Christ. This message seems too good to be true, and as a result people are tempted to add something else to the gospel

⁴⁰ Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Acts*, The Communicator’s Commentary, vol. 5 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 228-29.

⁴¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World: The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 240-41.

⁴² G. Campbell Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1924), 357-58.

message. Today it might be baptism, sacraments, or church membership; in the early church it was observance of the Mosaic law.⁴³ After all, the law represented the will of God for his covenant people and there was no indication it had been repealed. Additionally, for the Jewish Christians who continued to live by the law (as that is all they had ever known), the issue arose of how they could fellowship with Gentile Christians without becoming unclean. Beyond times of fellowship, even participating in the ordinances of the church could be problematic.⁴⁴ The Jewish Christians in question believed the new Gentile converts should be accepted into the church the same way Gentiles had always been accepted into the covenant community: through total observance of the law, which included circumcision of the males. If this practice were to stop it would be more than just breaking from tradition—by allowing Gentiles into the church without following these procedures it risked the unity and harmony of the church.⁴⁵

Eventually a decision is made for Paul and Barnabas (a man who accompanied Paul on his missionary journey) to go to Jerusalem to discuss the issue with the apostles and elders there. Rather than having an open forum type of event, the attendees were limited only to those best suited to properly weigh in on the matter.⁴⁶ It is worth noting the moral law was never in question during this debate. Throughout Paul's teaching he constantly reminded the churches of God's moral standards (as evidenced through his epistles). The issue for the meeting in Jerusalem solely centered on the ritual aspects of the law, such as circumcision, food laws, and other purity practices. If these requirements were to be strictly enforced, then Paul's mission to the Gentiles would need to be severely

⁴³ H. A. Ironside, *Acts*, (1920; repr., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 195.

⁴⁴ I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1980), 242-43.

⁴⁵ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 321.

⁴⁶ Calvin, *Acts*, 252.

restricted or perhaps even discontinued.⁴⁷ The meeting that took place (often referred to as the Jerusalem Council) was not a “church council” in the same way as other assemblies throughout history bearing that description. That is to say, this meeting was not a convention of delegates representing various parts of the church, but rather a meeting solely for consultation and discussion concerning whether Gentiles could be saved without obeying the law. It was not to learn what those in Jerusalem had to say as if they were the final authority; instead it was so more Christians—including the apostles—could be involved in the decision.⁴⁸ Paul understood the theological issues at stake and knew the importance of getting them right. He realized the harmony between the Old and New Testaments and how the law is supposed to lead people to Jesus since he is the end of the law and fulfillment of it.⁴⁹ Therefore, the imperative is on Paul to demonstrate that his position does not invalidate the law and that keeping the law is not necessary either for salvation or for being fully accepted within the church.⁵⁰ Put this way, the gravity of the situation becomes clear and it is apparent why Paul and others in the church were so determined to stand for the truth and settle the issue once and for all.

Upon arriving, Paul and Barnabas told the church leaders what had occurred with the Gentiles in various cities and how God had worked in a mighty way. By simply stating what they had observed throughout Asia Minor, the discussion went from the theoretical to actual life change on the part of the Gentiles as the gospel brought life to those who were formerly hopeless.⁵¹ Included in this defense must have been words similar

⁴⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, 324.

⁴⁸ Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 355-56.

⁴⁹ Hervey, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:8.

⁵⁰ Ogilvie, *Acts*, 230.

⁵¹ G. H. C. Macgregor and Theodore P. Ferris, *Acts*, *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 9 (New York: Abingdon, 1954), 204.

to what Paul said in Acts 13:39 when speaking at a synagogue that through Jesus “everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.”⁵² When Paul and Barnabas spoke, they emphasized God’s initiative for their mission and how his signs and wonders confirmed his approval of it. As John Polhill writes, “Paul and Barnabas evidently offered no defense of their position on the Gentile question other than the implicit argument that God had endorsed it.”⁵³ This was essential to help those in Jerusalem understand why Paul and Barnabas accepted Gentiles who did not keep the law. The discussion was lengthy because the Pharisees could not come to the understanding that abandoning the law was necessary either for themselves or for others. They insisted that for Gentiles wanting to be saved, circumcision is the first step in a life of keeping the law. While this is implied by the group’s argument in verse 1, it is made absolutely clear in verse 5. In verse 1, the Pharisees are talking about what Gentiles must do to become Christians; by the time the assembly gathers in Jerusalem in verse 5, their argument concerns what Gentiles must do to remain Christians in good standing. While subtle, the shift in argument is noticeable.⁵⁴

The Pharisees certainly could appeal to tradition and the Old Testament as their reason for laying restrictions on Gentiles wanting to enter the faith. For centuries God-fearing Gentiles had been allowed to practice Judaism after undergoing circumcision and resolving to keep the law of Moses, and the Pharisees carried these rules over into the church as well.⁵⁵ To find strength for their argument, they could have pointed to Jesus as keeping the law rather than abolishing it. This includes being circumcised, attending the

⁵² Polhill, *Acts*, 327.

⁵³ Polhill, *Acts*, 328.

⁵⁴ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 421, 423.

⁵⁵ Ironside, *Acts*, 196.

synagogue as long as he was allow to, and observing feasts and other aspects of the law.⁵⁶ Moreover, these men were advocating for a Christianity which upheld the law of Moses and obligated all Christians to in a sense become Jews. Not only was this prideful and nationalistic, perhaps most importantly it left their long-held prejudices undisturbed. These Pharisees and other Jews viewed themselves as the exclusive people of God and looked down upon every other nation. Therefore, it was inconceivable that Gentiles could have the same standing before God and be loved by him as much as they were—especially since the Gentiles disregarded the law.⁵⁷ Because of the stark differences between the Pharisees and Paul, the church had to define what was required for salvation, who it was available for, and what relation the law has to the believer’s life. G. H. C. Macgregor and Theodore Ferris insightfully note,

In its largest terms that issue was: Is Christianity a national religion or a universal one? Is its Jewish setting and frame a context apart from which it has neither meaning nor power, or is it a chrysalis which, once it has served its creative purpose, must be left behind in the interest of growth? If it is the latter, then the Jewish ceremonial law, having served its purpose, must be abandoned if the church is to fulfill its role as a world-wide religion.⁵⁸

The Jerusalem Council set out to answer these issues.

Peter’s Speech (15:7-11)

After much discussion, Peter speaks and makes several profound points. Given his prominence and authority in the church, he would have commanded everyone’s attention. Moreover, given his own experience evangelizing the Gentile Cornelius’s household earlier in the book of Acts and witnessing the Holy Spirit poured out on them while remaining uncircumcised, Peter was an apt figure to comment on this issue.⁵⁹ As

⁵⁶ Macgregor and Ferris, *Acts*, 199-200.

⁵⁷ Hervey, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:7-8.

⁵⁸ Macgregor and Ferris, *Acts*, 196.

⁵⁹ Hervey, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:2.

Christianity began spreading beyond Jerusalem, this event with Cornelius took place perhaps ten years before the meeting in Jerusalem and is most likely what Peter is referring to in verse 7 when he mentions “the early days” (ἀφ’ ἡμερῶν ἀρχαίων).⁶⁰ If so, the thrust of Peter’s speech is that God working among the Gentiles and saving them apart from circumcision is not a new phenomenon; rather, it is something that has been occurring for years and God has approved of it the entire time. Peter especially accentuates the legitimacy of the Gentiles’ conversion in verses 8-9 by saying God makes no distinction between Jewish and Gentile Christians since he has given the Holy Spirit to both through faith. Through the cleansing of their hearts, both groups are members of God’s family apart from any ceremonies or practices of the law.⁶¹ Moreover, shortly after Cornelius’s conversion Peter gave a defense of his actions (recorded in Acts 11) and there is a chance some of the same people upset with Paul had heard essentially the same line of reasoning from Peter years earlier. By Cornelius receiving the Holy Spirit it shows he was accepted by God and considered equal with Peter because of faith—not because of keeping the law.⁶²

In verse 10, Peter acknowledges that requiring the Gentile Christians to keep the law amounts to “placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear.” He insists this is unnecessary and unbiblical because faith in Christ alone has saved the Jews—not Christ and obedience to the law. In fact, as far as salvation is concerned, following the law brought the Jews no closer to God than the pagans were.⁶³ In one sense, the law is a yoke in that it restrains sinful practices, but also

⁶⁰ Paton J. Gloag, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Limited Classical Reprint Library (1870; repr., Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Christian, 1979), 2:72.

⁶¹ Calvin, *Acts*, 254.

⁶² Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World*, 240.

⁶³ Ogilvie, *Acts*, 234.

a yoke in that it does not promise life without perfect obedience. Since no one is able to keep the law perfectly, if Gentiles are required to observe it the result will be discouragement and frustration just as it had been for the Jews.⁶⁴ Consequently, Jesus proclaims his yoke—without the demands of the law—is light (Matt 11:30). Peter makes the point that a person is either under the yoke of the law or under Christ’s yoke which provides hope and grace. In fact, the purpose of the law is to bring about awareness that one’s own efforts cannot save. Therefore, since a person is freed from the yoke of the law by faith in Christ, Peter rightly says striving to keep the law is not only unnecessary, but impossible.⁶⁵

Throughout Peter’s speech he makes clear God does not differentiate between Jews and Gentiles—they are all saved by grace through faith—and if the Pharisees would recognize this then they would not create any distinctions either.⁶⁶ In a shocking turn of events, Peter says in verse 11 that Jews can be saved through the grace of Jesus in the same way the Gentiles in question were. By reversing the expected order and therefore making the Gentiles the example for the Jews, this is a remarkable statement confirming the authenticity of the Gentiles’ salvation without them having to follow the Mosaic law. Especially coming from someone as respected as Peter, the emphasis on grace and there only being one way of salvation for all would be clearly understood.⁶⁷ Whereas previously the Gentiles were unclean because they did not keep the law, now they were cleansed after hearing and believing the gospel and receiving the Holy Spirit.⁶⁸ The Pharisees failed to realize the radical changes brought about by the coming of Jesus and the gift of

⁶⁴ Calvin, *Acts*, 258.

⁶⁵ Calvin, *Acts*, 259-60.

⁶⁶ Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World*, 246.

⁶⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, 327.

⁶⁸ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 425.

the Holy Spirit being poured out on the nations, so throughout his speech Peter tried to help others understand this—just as he had when he explained Cornelius’s salvation story years before.⁶⁹

James’s Speech, and the Council’s Decision (15:13-21)

James (Jesus’s brother) is the final speaker, and he is in agreement with Peter, Paul, and Barnabas. This is clear by his use of Scripture showing that all they had spoken was in keeping with what God intended for the Gentiles.⁷⁰ Lending further credence to Peter, James reiterates in verse 14 how God first visited the Gentiles to create from them “a people for his name” (λαὸν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ). In the Septuagint, the Greek word for “people” (λαός) is generally applied only to Israel, but the word is also used to speak of Gentiles who will be included as part of God’s people. For example, Zechariah 2:11 (2:15 in the Septuagint) begins by saying, “And many nations shall join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people” (και καταφεύξονται ἔθνη πολλά ἐπὶ τον κύριον εν τη ημέρα εκείνη και ἔσονται αὐτῷ εις λαόν). James’s opening words to the council indicate that Jews and Gentiles becoming a single people of God is not only prophesied but indeed already happening.⁷¹

Scriptural support for James’s argument also comes from Amos 9:11-12, although the passage in the Septuagint differs somewhat from the Hebrew text. While James’s use of the passage has the same spirit of the Hebrew text, instead of saying, “that they [the Israelites] may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name,” declares the LORD who does this” (Amos 9:12), James states, “that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord and all the Gentiles who are called by my name,

⁶⁹ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 421.

⁷⁰ Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 362.

⁷¹ Polhill, *Acts*, 329.

says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old” (Acts 15:17-18). By using the Septuagint, James applies the prophecy (which has no mention of practicing circumcision or observing the law) to the current circumstance, and makes explicit that both Jews and Gentiles shall be the people of God.⁷² As to why James specifically picked this passage A. C. Hervey writes, “Nothing could be more germane to St. James’s argument than thus to show from the words of Amos that God’s present purpose of taking the Gentiles to be his people was, like all his other works, formed from the beginning of the world.”⁷³

While it might seem odd for a Jew in Jerusalem to use the Greek Scriptures instead of Hebrew to make a point, it is feasible James knew and used Greek. The point he is trying to make comes across clearer in Greek, and being familiar with the prophets James surely knows this. Moreover, considering the purpose of the meeting was to determine the fate of Greek-speaking Gentile Christians, the meeting itself could have taken place in Greek, in which case it would be entirely appropriate for James to use this version of the Scriptures.⁷⁴ Since the salvation and inclusion of Gentiles into the church was foretold by prophecy and confirmed by Paul and Barnabas’s ministry, it was enough to convince James the time had come to accept the Gentiles into the church as full heirs to the promise of salvation.

Many speculate James presided over the meeting for two key reasons. In other places in Acts he appears to be a leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17, 21:18), and by speaking last in the Jerusalem Council and having his suggestion be adopted by the group it suggests a level of seniority beyond that of simply a moderator.⁷⁵ On balance, it has been noted there is nothing implicit in James’s words to indicate such authority, and

⁷² Gloag, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:75-76.

⁷³ Hervey, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:3.

⁷⁴ Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 252-53.

⁷⁵ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 429.

Διὸ ἐγὼ κρίνω (“therefore my judgment is”) is simply James’s way of signaling his concluding comments on the matter.⁷⁶ James’s decision is recorded in verse 19, where he says “we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God” by requiring them to obey the law, echoing Peter’s words in verses 10-11. Being as the Greek phrase for “not trouble” is a present infinitive (μὴ παρενοχλεῖν), perhaps a better translation would be “we should stop troubling those of the Gentiles who turn to God.” The forcefulness of the prohibition against requiring Gentiles to follow the law is better conveyed when this understanding is revealed.⁷⁷ While James only spoke for himself and did not impose his will upon others, the rest of the council agreed with him. This becomes clear in the following verses when the council writes to those in Antioch informing them of their decision. The council wrote in 15:25, “It has seemed good to us, having come to one accord,” and again in 15:28, “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us,” stressing this was not a single man’s decision.⁷⁸

After just declaring the Gentiles free from following the practices of the Jews, it might seem strange for the four restrictions in verse 20 to be placed upon them. However, even Paul could heartily agree to these requirements for the sake of peace and unity amongst believers since these restrictions did not involve any real sacrifice of principle or distortion of what is required for salvation.⁷⁹ Additionally, similar rules are written in Leviticus for the resident alien dwelling in Israel to assure the Jews’ purity during social interaction among the two groups. Gentiles living in Israel in Old Testament times were expected to abstain from pagan sacrifices (Lev 17:8), improper sexual relationships (Lev

⁷⁶ Gloag, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:77.

⁷⁷ Macgregor and Ferris, *Acts*, 203.

⁷⁸ Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 363.

⁷⁹ Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 247.

18:6-23), strangled animals (Lev 17:13), and blood (Lev 17:10-14).⁸⁰ It is possible these same ideas were carried over temporarily into the church as Jews and Gentiles were beginning to understand what life together in community looked like. While this explanation is certainly plausible and indeed widely accepted, the text does not offer any clues as to why these four specific prohibitions are selected instead of or in addition to a number of other rules governing Gentile behavior in the Mosaic law. Perhaps these matters in particular were so significant to Jews that there could be no hope of fellowship without these restrictions, although since the text is silent no definitive answer can be given.⁸¹

The first item listed—things polluted by idols—seems to be a food restriction based on further explanation in verse 29. Since meat sold in marketplaces generally had ties to pagan temples, it likely had previously been consecrated to a false god. Similarly, “sexual immorality” could refer to activities in pagan temples such as cult prostitution, or could be speaking more broadly about any improper sexual activity since the word *πορνείας* is used in verse 20. Either understanding warrants that Christians distance themselves from such sexual behavior.⁸² Interestingly, on this point Calvin understood sexual immorality to specifically refer to having concubines as this was rather common among Gentiles. He viewed the prohibition as necessary since the practice was “a wicked and corrupt human custom that had fallen away from the original order established by God” and would create strife between Christian Jews and Gentiles.⁸³ Whether sexual immorality is to be understood in this narrow sense or to encompass a broader range of sexual behavior, since the Gentiles’ sexual ethics were not as strict as Jewish standards this was one area of life where a stark difference existed. As Polhill explains, “For the

⁸⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, 332.

⁸¹ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 434-35.

⁸² Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World*, 249-50.

⁸³ Calvin, *Acts*, 264.

Jew sexual misbehavior was both immoral *and* impure. A Jew would find it difficult indeed to consort with a Gentile who did not live by his own standards of sexual morality.”⁸⁴ Finally, the last two items are related to each other as the meat of strangled animals would undoubtedly contain blood, and such meat was expressly condemned for the Jews in passages like Genesis 9:4, Leviticus 3:17, and Deuteronomy 12:23.⁸⁵ The prohibitions in verse 20 must be understood along with verse 21, which is somewhat ambiguous. Certainly, the Jews were familiar with Moses, but Hervey helps explain the connection between the verses by saying of verse 21,

The meaning of this verse seems to be that, in requiring the above compliances, the council was not enjoining anything new or strange, because the Gentiles who attended the synagogues were familiar with these Mosaic doctrines. . . . The four prohibitions seem to have been a temporary arrangement adapted to the then condition of the Church, with a view to enabling Christians Jews and Gentiles to live in brotherly fellowship. The Jew was not to require more of his Gentile brother: the Gentile was not to concede less to his Jewish brother.⁸⁶

In the end, the council unanimously voted in favor of Paul’s message, and was unified in the decision that a person need not add anything to the gospel or take on certain cultural traits of others to be recognized as a legitimate believer. As I. Howard Marshall explains, “The old rules of the Jewish religion no longer apply: God is making a people out of the nations and nothing in the text suggest that they are to become Jews in order to become God’s people. So there are no entrance ‘conditions’ to be imposed upon them.”⁸⁷ Indeed, if salvation is tied to works and ceremonies as the Pharisees claimed, then it is no longer based on Christ and his free gift of grace.⁸⁸ Had these issues not been settled, the controversy very well could have split the church into a Jewish Christian church and a

⁸⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, 331.

⁸⁵ Macgregor and Ferris, *Acts*, 203.

⁸⁶ Hervey, *Acts of the Apostles*, 2:4.

⁸⁷ Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 253.

⁸⁸ Calvin, *Acts*, 256.

Gentile Christian church—both of which would be marked by division and bitterness, and exhibit minimal witness to the world.⁸⁹ Therefore, Stott writes that the Jerusalem Council was extremely significant for the early church in that it resulted in both “a victory of truth in confirming the gospel of grace, and a victory of love in preserving the fellowship by sensitive concessions to conscientious Jewish scruples.”⁹⁰

The council’s decision not only affected the church then but continues to govern it today. The ramifications of the meeting cannot be overstated, as a proper understanding of exactly what is required for salvation has shaped the church’s efforts on missions and outreach from that time until the present.⁹¹ As Marshall notes, the principle that “no national, racial or social requirements can ever be made conditions for salvation and membership of the church alongside the single and sole requirement of faith in Jesus Christ” has been a guiding light to the church ever since.⁹² Christians today ministering cross-culturally might wonder to what extent new converts must become like them to be truly saved. Fortunately, the Jerusalem Council answers this question—not by focusing on traditions or cultural practices, but on what is truly necessary: salvation is by grace alone through faith. For that reason, Christians can take the gospel to others knowing that all people can be accepted into the church without having to do any works or meet additional requirements.⁹³

Needs Are Often Best Met by Those of the Same Culture (Acts 6:1-7)

With any organization consisting of diverse groups of people, problems are

⁸⁹ Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 359.

⁹⁰ Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World*, 257.

⁹¹ Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 364.

⁹² Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 247.

⁹³ Ironside, *Acts*, 201.

bound to arise from time to time. This is especially true when different cultures and languages are represented. Unfortunately, the church is not exempt from these conflicts, and sometimes a person from another culture is treated differently or marginalized by those in the majority. In instances like this it can be helpful if others from the same culture as the individual being wronged are involved in the process of bringing about restitution. Compared to someone from the outside, those from within the same culture possess an intimate cultural knowledge and are often times better equipped to know what steps must be taken to effectively bring about a solution, while simultaneously preserving unity for all involved.

The Hellenist Widows' Complaint (6:1)

At this point the church was growing rapidly after its inception on the day of Pentecost and consisted almost exclusively of Jews. The only exception to this was an unidentified number of Gentile proselytes who had converted to Judaism and then become Christians. The mission to the Gentiles had not begun yet, so for all intents and purposes the church was strictly a Jewish community.⁹⁴ As more Jews came to faith in Jesus, a notable distinction within the church emerged and there came to be a sizeable number of Greek-speaking Jews, referred to as Hellenists. The Hellenists were diaspora Jews (with therefore little or no knowledge of Aramaic) who had returned to Jerusalem. Even though several became Christians, it was difficult for them to assimilate into the church which consisted of Aramaic-speaking Jews known as Hebrews.⁹⁵ As a result, each group naturally tended to associate with those of the same language and cultural background. The language barrier—which forced the two groups to worship separately—was a stark reminder of the real barrier between them: culture. The Hellenists not only spoke Greek but thought and

⁹⁴ Ironside, *Acts*, 86.

⁹⁵ Ogilvie, *Acts*, 134.

behaved like Greeks; while the Hebrews who were native to Palestine were deeply immersed in Hebrew culture.⁹⁶ Speaking of the Hellenists Stott insightfully notes, “*Grecian Jews* is a good rendering, while *the Aramaic-speaking community* is not, since it refers to language only and not culture. . . . There had always, of course, been rivalry between these groups in Jewish culture; the tragedy is that it was perpetuated within the new community of Jesus who by his death had abolished such distinctions.”⁹⁷

Over time, the differences in culture and language resulted in some of the Hellenists being treated differently. Even though all parties involved were Christians, old habits and prejudices die hard and such tendencies can creep up and create dissension if left unchecked. Therefore, Acts 6:1-7 serves as a warning for Christians in all ages and social contexts of how cultural and racial differences can threaten a church’s unity.⁹⁸ Although there could have been other issues, in Acts 6 a specific complaint arose of the Hellenist widows being neglected in the church’s daily distribution of food, which was a serious issue for several reasons. For one, many times in the Old Testament God shows his concern for widows, orphans, and others who cannot provide for or defend themselves. To not care for such as these is to go against the heart of God. Second, the church had previously accepted responsibility for widows with no family present to care for them by instituting the food distribution, and more than likely these diaspora widows had no such family in Jerusalem since they had lived so long in another region. Therefore, they were truly in need of food and other necessities and it was not right to neglect this group.⁹⁹

The seriousness of their complaint is made evident by the use of the word

⁹⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, 177, 179.

⁹⁷ Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World*, 120-21.

⁹⁸ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 231.

⁹⁹ Polhill, *Acts*, 178-79.

γογγυσμός, which refers to some sort of murmuring, complaining, or discontentment. This same word is used when others were speaking about Jesus in John 7:12, and in the Septuagint when the Israelites were grumbling against God in Exodus 16:7-8 before he provided manna for them to eat.¹⁰⁰ Apparently, the Hellenists' complained directly to the apostles as they were the ones who received money and other resources and were charged with distributing it as necessary according to Acts 4:34-37.¹⁰¹ Although the mistreatment of the Hellenist widows was serious, it was not likely a deliberate slight. Rather, the issue was probably caused by poor administration coupled with the increase in needs as the church grew. Nonetheless, their need was real and this is reflected in the apostle's desire to make sure all were cared for properly.¹⁰² Otherwise the unity and stability of the infant church would be impeded before it even had an opportunity to expand beyond Jerusalem.

The Apostles' Solution (6:2-4)

When the widows' complaint was made, it became obvious that the current system had reached a breaking point and the distribution ministry could not continue in its current form. At the same time, the apostles realized the importance of caring for others and that the distribution ministry pleased God. Rather than disbanding this ministry they looked for a solution to continue it.¹⁰³ Instead of imposing a top-down solution to this problem, the apostles displayed wisdom by gathering others and inviting them into the discussion. While the apostles decided to enlist others who could assist with the distribution ministry and set forth parameters on who could be chosen, the congregation ultimately selected the individuals from within the church. This proposition allowed the

¹⁰⁰ Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 241.

¹⁰¹ Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 124-25.

¹⁰² Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World*, 120-21.

¹⁰³ Calvin, *Acts*, 86.

apostles to keep their priorities straight lest they become distracted from their teaching ministry.¹⁰⁴ While their statement in verse 2 might come across as harsh or even prideful, it needs to be understood within the context of the church at that moment and the primary task of church leaders. As important as serving others and meeting physical needs are, the apostles could not let this dominate their time. They knew they must focus on other matters since they alone were witnesses to Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection which as Polhill writes made their role in the church “unique, unrepeatable, and absolutely foundational for the Christian movement.”¹⁰⁵ Additionally, Marshall summarizes the situation well by stating, “It is not necessarily suggested that *servicing tables* is on a lower level than prayer and teaching; the point is rather that the task to which the Twelve had been specifically called was one of witness and evangelism. The solution to the problem was the appointment of a new group of leaders to *serve tables*.”¹⁰⁶

The apostles knew a change had to be made to best serve the church, so their proposal was for those assembled to choose “seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3) to oversee the distribution ministry. Doing so allows the apostles to focus on the tasks they are best suited for while at the same time allowing others who are better equipped for such tasks to use their God-given abilities to serve in this important ministry. As Macgregor and Ferris state, “Here is the beginning of a specialized ministry to perform specific functions. . . . New situations call forth new devices, new provisions, new organizations, new methods, and above all, new men.”¹⁰⁷ The apostles realized God calls all his people to one form of ministry or another, and those called to more pastoral duties of prayer and Bible teaching must not allow

¹⁰⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, 181.

¹⁰⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, 180.

¹⁰⁶ Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 126.

¹⁰⁷ Macgregor and Ferris, *Acts*, 89.

themselves to be hindered with other duties—no matter how good or necessary these might be.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the fact that distributing food is a valid ministry and is in no way inferior to pastoral duties is emphasized by the related words describing each work: διακονεῖν τραπέζαις in verse 2 in reference to the serving ministry, and διακονία τοῦ λόγου in verse 4 referring to the pastoral ministry.¹⁰⁹

Interestingly, the qualifications for these new leaders relate to character and spiritual matters rather than organizational or people skills as might be expected for such a task.¹¹⁰ Namely, the men selected were to be “of good repute” (μαρτυρουμένους, meaning their character is to be known and well reported of by others), and they were to be “full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (Acts 6:3). While being able to make wise decisions is necessary for any leader, this quality was particularly vital for those dealing with this complex situation in order to resolve issues involving different cultures and languages.¹¹¹ Wisdom is also necessary as those selected would have to differentiate between people who were truly in need and those who might be trying to deceive the generous hearts of those in the church. Therefore, these men could not properly fulfill their ministry without making wise decisions.¹¹² Even today these same characteristics are necessary for all Christian leaders—regardless of what ministry they are in or in what capacity they serve. While it is tempting to select those with natural abilities or training in the area needed, if those individuals do not possess the character, wisdom, or especially the Holy Spirit then the church is treading on perilous ground.¹¹³ No indication is given as to why seven men

¹⁰⁸ Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 172.

¹⁰⁹ Gloag, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:205, 207.

¹¹⁰ Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 125.

¹¹¹ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 233.

¹¹² Calvin, *Acts*, 88.

¹¹³ Ogilvie, *Acts*, 136-37.

should be chosen. Many have proposed reasons, among them being one man for each day of the week, there were seven stations in the distribution ministry and thus one man was in charge of each, or it could be because seven is a sacred number in the Bible and often viewed as a number of completeness.¹¹⁴ Others believe seven men was what were adequate to meet the needs at the time and there is no special significance or meaning attached to the number.¹¹⁵

The Servants Selected (6:5-7)

The suggestion put forth by the apostles pleased those gathered so they set out to pick men who met the qualifications. What is particularly notable is all seven men mentioned in verse 5 have Greek names. While not conclusive evidence in a day where many Jews were known to go by Greek names, the implication is that all of the men were Hellenists (except for Nicolaus who was a Gentile proselyte). Moreover, of the names listed, Philip is the only one common among Palestinian-born Jews (Hebrews), lending further credence to the likelihood these men were Hellenists. If so, the solution to the problem was found among those who brought the matter to the apostles' attention in the first place.¹¹⁶ If indeed these men were Hellenists, then they of all people would have particular insight into the needs of these recently relocated widows. These men knew the language, mindset, and cultural expectations of those in need and therefore were better equipped to minister to these widows. Thus, having their own views represented by those in leadership was a significant step in solving the problem.¹¹⁷ The selection of the seven also shows that at least in some instances the answer to a problem a church faces is found

¹¹⁴ Hervey, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:193.

¹¹⁵ Calvin, *Acts*, 88.

¹¹⁶ Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 125, 127.

¹¹⁷ Macgregor and Ferris, *Acts*, 91.

among its own members. Even at this early stage there were people within the church who could preach and teach, serve and care for others, and carry out other essential duties. As G. Campbell Morgan insightfully states, “In that company there were all the organs necessary for the fulfillment of the full meaning of the life of the Church.”¹¹⁸ Eventually the seven men selected by the congregation were presented to the apostles who proceeded to lay their hands on them and pray for them, thus commissioning them for this new ministry task.¹¹⁹

While the seven chosen were likely Hellenists, their selection should not be viewed as some sort of ancient affirmative action policy. The text does not imply that these men were chosen simply because they were Hellenists; instead there is reason to believe that in addition to the benefit of having a shared culture and language these men really were godly individuals whose leadership could benefit the entire church. It is unthinkable the seven would not have met the qualifications listed by the apostles, and this is evidenced in the following verses with Stephen who “full of grace and power” did “great wonders and signs among the people” (Acts 6:8) in addition to boldly proclaiming the truths of God before his martyrdom in Acts 7. More information about Philip is revealed in Acts 8 and he is stated as living in the city of Caesarea in Acts 21:8, but with the exception of these two nothing else is stated in Scripture about the men selected for this ministry.¹²⁰ Based on what the Bible says about Stephen and Philip, it is reasonable to assume these seven men were more involved in the life of the church than what Acts 6 describes. While all in the church sought to attain unity among the Hebrews and Hellenists, the seven were instrumental in working with the apostles to bridge the gap. Marshall speculates on their role:

¹¹⁸ Morgan, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 169-70.

¹¹⁹ Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 235.

¹²⁰ Gloag, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:207.

It would seem rather that the two groups were in close contact, even if they worshipped separately in their own languages, and that the Twelve had a general authority over the whole church, while the Seven were leaders of the Greek-speaking section. Although Luke depicts them formally as being in charge of the poor relief, he does not disguise the fact that they were spiritual leaders and evangelists.¹²¹

While this passage is often pointed to as the initiation of the diaconate (based on the commonly used word for “ministry” or “service” *διακονία* used in vv. 1, 4), it is worth noting the seven men chosen are nowhere referred to as “deacons.”¹²² However, since both the work of the apostles and of the seven men chosen is referred to as *διακονία* it implies that both are important and permanent offices within the church. It also seems unlikely such a lengthy explanation would be given to the selection of the seven were they only needed for a temporary emergency.¹²³ It should be noted though that persuasive arguments exist for Acts 6 not being an official founding of the diaconate. As noted, the seven are never actually referred to as deacons, and furthermore when Philip is spoken of later in Acts 21:8 he is spoken of as “Philip the evangelist.” It seems odd not to refer to him by his title of deacon if he indeed was part of the inaugural group years earlier.¹²⁴ In addition, the duties and qualifications of deacons written by the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 bear little resemblance to the duties and qualifications of those in Acts 6. Finally, in Acts 11:30 when Paul and Barnabas brought a gift of financial aid to the church in Jerusalem they gave the money to elders—not the deacons as might be expected if the diaconate had been operating for some time.¹²⁵ Even by the end of the first century there does not seem to be any evidence of deacons in Jerusalem operating any ministry consistently performing functions like those detailed in Acts 6. Rather, as Macgregor and

¹²¹ Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 125.

¹²² Stott, *The Spirit, the Church, and the World*, 121-22.

¹²³ Gloag, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:210.

¹²⁴ Gloag, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:210.

¹²⁵ Gloag, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:211.

Ferris note, it appears deacons primarily assisted bishops “in the conduct of the Eucharist, and the ordering of discipline, as well as in the organization of alms.”¹²⁶ However, whether or not one understands the selecting of the seven as the initiation of the diaconate, at the very least this event seems to be the model on which the office of deacon was influenced.¹²⁷

While this passage begins with a serious conflict, it ends with a positive report of many people trusting in Jesus for salvation. Not only do the widows’ complaints vanish, but verse 7 notes three remarkable outcomes after the seven are selected to manage the distribution ministry. As a result of the apostles being enabled to focus on their primary ministry of praying and preaching, the Word of God continued to increase, the number of disciples in Jerusalem multiplied, and a great number of priests became Christians as well. Concerning the last point, it seems surprising many priests would make such a radical decision given the undeniable social and vocational consequences that would follow. As such, many scholars over the years have tried to discard or explain away this development. However, the scenario becomes more understandable when it is realized that the priests were in a much more privileged position to hear and embrace the truth about Jesus since they had extensive knowledge of the Old Testament messianic prophecies.¹²⁸ In the end, the Hellenists helped resolve the problems affecting their widows, and not only were they able to preserve the unity of the church but they actually helped it succeed in its mission to reach others. Paton Gloag superbly summarizes the church’s situation after the selection of the seven by saying, “All served for the increase of the church. The dissension within it was healed; its unity was restored; the spirit of love again influenced

¹²⁶ Macgregor and Ferris, *Acts*, 90.

¹²⁷ Gloag, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:211.

¹²⁸ Gloag, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:209-10.

its members; and thus united in itself, the church made aggressive attacks upon the world.”¹²⁹

Conclusion

From the very beginning of the church’s existence, God’s presence and power have been on display in the lives of his people. This is particularly evident in the early years as the first Christians were afforded incredible opportunities to take the gospel throughout the known world. As a result, the church experienced tremendous growth as numerous people repented of their sins and believed in Jesus. However, this growth did not always come easy, and at times followed a period of difficulty or conflict. Sometimes this came from society; other times from within the church—especially as people from different cultures, languages, and generations began coming to Christ. Even today problems can arise if these same issues create an “us vs. them” mentality, which will only plague a church and hamper its ability to fulfill its mission. Fortunately, this need not be the case as the early church provides an example of how to address these issues. Through means such as raising up the next generation of church leaders who can perpetuate the faith, focusing on essentials of the faith rather than cultural preferences, and valuing the giftings and perspectives of those from other cultures, the church today can not only resolve conflict and achieve unity but can thrive in whatever circumstance in which the church finds itself. As a body of believers redeemed from “every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev 5:9), conflicts and misunderstandings will arise due to cultural differences. However, when the church can resolve these issues and move forward together, it is a beautiful foretaste of the unity all its members will share in heaven as they sing praises to God for all eternity (Rev 7:9-10).

¹²⁹ Gloag, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:209.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL
ISSUES RELATED TO DEVELOPING
THE ENGLISH MINISTRY

For nearly two thousand years, churches have ministered in the midst of various cultural and societal issues which have caused churches to contextualize their ministry. While ministering in any location can be difficult, a multicultural society such as the United States presents a different set of issues. Churches must work through cultural nuances that would not be present in a monocultural setting, even to the point where churches within the same city or region can have vastly different concerns. Specifically as it relates to Chinese churches, the issues introduced by a multicultural society can profoundly impact the church as it seeks to reach those of a certain culture and language. Therefore, a Chinese congregation must determine its place and purpose in such a diverse society and address the unique challenges it faces in order to make an impact for God's kingdom. Several of these issues and considerations are discussed in this chapter.

**A Multicultural Society Can Be an Impetus for
Chinese Churches to Segregate Themselves**

A multicultural society consists of people from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds and provides an opportunity for churches to reach people it might not otherwise be able to without traveling afar. Especially if many of these people are not Christians, the potential for evangelism and to include a number of people from different nationalities in the same church can be invigorating. However, such an ethnically diverse society can incentivize immigrant churches to become closed off to many in the community. Such churches focus on ministering to one specific ethnicity, and intentionally pursue first generation immigrants in particular. While a Chinese church might desire for

all people in the neighborhood to know and believe the gospel, the church can have justifiable reasons for only targeting one designated ethnicity.

The Language Barrier

Perhaps the most understandable reason for a Chinese church to put its efforts into only reaching Chinese people is because of language. Simply put, if all the activities are conducted in Mandarin, Cantonese, or a regional dialect, then people who do not speak that language will not be able to understand and participate. Conversely, recent Chinese immigrants not fluent in English would feel just as out of place in any other church setting, which is why Chinese churches play such a vital role in reaching native Chinese speakers. While not an identical situation, the apostle Paul speaks to the church in Corinth about the importance of everyone understanding what is being said in the worship service. The matter at hand is speaking in tongues and having an interpreter available for those listening. Paul says,

So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. There are doubtless many different languages in the world, and none is without meaning, but if I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be a foreigner to the speaker and the speaker a foreigner to me. . . . If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. (1 Cor 14:9-11, 27-28)

Regardless of how good a church's programs or ministries are, they will have little to no effect on those who do not speak the language. Language is not the only barrier between people in a multicultural society, but it is a rather formidable one which prevents recent immigrants from immediately assimilating into other churches, thus necessitating the existence of immigrant churches.¹

¹ Hoover Wong, *Coming Together or Coming Apart?* (Pasadena, CA: TRACC, 1998), 199.

High Immigration Rates

In addition to being best equipped to minister to those who are not fluent in English or who prefer to speak in their native language, immigrant churches are needed to reach the vast number of new immigrants coming to the United States. This is especially true for churches reaching Asian immigrants, as Asians are the fastest growing racial or ethnic group in the country. Between the years 2000 and 2019 the Asian population grew by 81 percent.² Moreover, it is projected that by 2055 Asians will be the largest immigrant group in the United States.³ For Chinese churches in particular, opportunities are numerous as Chinese make up the largest share of Asians in the country at 24 percent. Of those, 62 percent are foreign born and thus are prime prospects for Chinese churches who primarily reach out to first generation immigrants.⁴ Such high numbers of Asians coming to the United States would not be possible were it not for The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which brought about drastic changes by abolishing national origin quotas. The Act also substantially increased the number of eligible immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere to 170,000 per year, with a maximum of 20,000 per country.⁵ As long as immigration from Asia continues, there will be a need for Chinese churches—both those already in existence as well as for new churches to be started. Indeed, churches of all

² Abby Budiman and Neil G. Ruiz, “Asian Americans Are the Fastest-Growing Racial or Ethnic Group in the U.S.,” Pew Research Center, April 9, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/09/asian-americans-are-the-fastest-growing-racial-or-ethnic-group-in-the-u-s/>.

³ Pew Research Center, “Modern Immigration Wave Brings 59 Million to U.S., Driving Population Growth and Change through 2065,” Pew Research Center, September 28, 2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2015/09/28/modern-immigration-wave-brings-59-million-to-u-s-driving-population-growth-and-change-through-2065/>.

⁴ Abby Budiman and Neil G. Ruiz, “Key Facts about Asian Origin Groups in the U.S.,” Pew Research Center, April 29, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/29/key-facts-about-asian-origin-groups-in-the-u-s/>.

⁵ Paul Tokunaga, *Invitation to Lead: Guidance for Emerging Asian American Leaders* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 157.

types must be planted in order to keep up with the country's population growth, and certainly immigrant churches must be included in that discussion.⁶

Immigrant Survival Mentality

Another reason immigrant churches do not focus their efforts on reaching people from other ethnicities is because many congregations function almost with a survival mode mentality. That is to say, many churches operate with limited resources and minister to recent immigrants adjusting to life in a new country who require more assistance than the average person in the community.⁷ Preparing for and executing weekly worship services and other ministries consume most of the church leaders' and congregants' time, and many immigrant churches are trying to get by the best they can. Due to these circumstances, church leaders often do not have the time or energy to think through and develop long-range programs to sufficiently meet the needs of the second generation yet to come (or currently within their church).⁸ Joyce del Rosario mentions another reason why immigrant churches are hesitant to reach others beyond their own culture:

For ethnic groups, the church can be a refuge of familiarity that a person of color needs in a community where they are often the minority. For Asian immigrants specifically, a common thread of feeling powerless in a white-dominant culture can be assuaged in church, where they are part of the norm and where their cultural values and practices are not continually questioned. The idea of venturing back out of the walls of the church may not be perceived as evangelism, but instead as becoming vulnerable again to operating in marginalized spaces.⁹

As a result of these factors, it is easy to see why cross-cultural ministry is a low priority and in many cases is nonexistent in immigrant churches—even if the desire for such ministry exists.

⁶ D. J. Chuang, *MultiAsian Church: A Future for Asian Americans in a Multiethnic World* (Lexington, KY: CreateSpace, 2016), 74.

⁷ Wong, *Coming Together or Coming Apart?*, 198.

⁸ Helen Lee, "Silent Exodus: Can the East Asian Church in America Reverse the Flight of Its Next Generation?," *Christianity Today*, August 12, 1996, 51.

⁹ Joyce del Rosario, "Neighboring Well as an Ethnic-Specific Church," Fuller Youth Institute, June 1, 2018, <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/neighboring-well-ethnic-specific>.

Indeed, the story of an immigrant church tends to mirror the lives of its parishioners: marked by struggles and scarcity. Many immigrants strive for years to attain a comfortable lifestyle after leaving the familiarities of their home country, and a strong work ethic is necessary to survive. For numerous reasons, obtaining good jobs and an education can be difficult in the new country, and to achieve these things immigrants face a daily uphill battle to one degree or another. Through it all, one primary motivation drives Asian immigrants to endure and make these sacrifices—the desire to provide adequately for their children so the next generation can have a better life than the parents.¹⁰ This desire to provide more and better opportunities in life for their children—not necessarily a desire to improve their own lives—compels many East Asians to come to the United States.¹¹ Unsurprisingly, the churches these immigrants found and participate in share many of these same characteristics: from humble beginnings, to slowly building up a congregation, achieving some level of security, and finally (after years of struggling) being able to pass on a legacy to the next generation. Many immigrant churches operate with this mindset, and due to the pressures placed upon them it does not come naturally to reach out to others who are not of the same ethnicity or enduring the same struggles. This is not necessarily due to any feelings of prejudice or resentment against them; rather, many immigrant churches simply do not have the resources available to navigate the additional responsibilities that come with being a multiethnic church.¹² For many reasons, the primary if not sole focus in immigrant churches is to minister to current members and continue reaching others of the same ethnicity, and accomplishing these tasks well consumes nearly all available energies.

¹⁰ Susan Cho-Van Riesen, “Doctor or Lawyer?,” in *Following Jesus without Dishonoring Your Parents*, coor. Jeanette Yep (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 59.

¹¹ Patrick Cho, “Helping Asian Churches Become Multi-Ethnic,” *9Marks Journal* (Summer 2015): 79.

¹² Wong, *Coming Together or Coming Apart?*, 33-34.

Differences among East Asians

One easy to overlook reason which prevents Chinese churches from reaching non-Chinese people is the vast number of differences between cultures—even those among other East Asians. East Asians come from the same geographical region and specifically are from China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Mongolia. In addition to a shared geographical proximity, these countries share a strong Confucian influence. As a result, a few notable traits among East Asians are a desire to have a son, respect for one’s parents, and respect for the elderly.¹³ Despite the similarities, some notable cultural barriers keep East Asians from feeling completely comfortable around one another. Besides language differences, a variety of religious influences would complicate the outreach and discipleship efforts of an already struggling immigrant church. D. J. Chuang notes some of the religious influences in East Asian countries: “Korea has shamanism, Japan has Shinto, and China has folk religions characterized by veneration of ancestors, spirits, and deities.”¹⁴ The style of music in worship services is another factor that varies between one culture and another, with Chinese and Japanese churches having music that is generally soft, slow, and meditative when compared to the music in Korean churches which is louder and sung more expressively.¹⁵

The level to which East Asians are assimilated into American culture also greatly varies and can complicate the extent to which various ethnicities can unite in a church. Much of this has to do with immigration patterns and the unique circumstances each group faced. For example, while Chinese and Japanese have a long history in the United States, as a whole, the two groups are practically at opposite ends of the assimilation spectrum. Chinese immigrants first started coming to America in significant

¹³ Chuang, *MultiAsian Church*, 21.

¹⁴ Chuang, *MultiAsian Church*, 26.

¹⁵ Chuang, *MultiAsian Church*, 64.

numbers in the 1850s due to the California gold rush and later the need for laborers to build the transcontinental railroad. By 1870, there were approximately 60,000 Chinese living in the United States—the vast majority of whom were men.¹⁶ However, one significant setback to their continual growth and assimilation came in the form of the Naturalization Act of 1870. While not specifically targeting Chinese-Americans, the law delivered a twofold blow by barring Chinese from becoming citizens and preventing wives who were in China from immigrating to the United States to be with their husbands.¹⁷ An even more devastating setback came in 1882 with the Chinese Exclusion Act, which prohibited Chinese laborers from entering the United States for ten years. Upon expiration, the policy was extended another ten years, and was made permanent in 1902 (although it was eventually repealed in 1943).¹⁸ Due to these factors, it became impossible for a sizeable second generation to develop in the United States. By contrast, Japanese immigrants did not start migrating to the United States until the late 1890s. However, one advantage they had over the Chinese is that the Japanese government introduced English into its secondary schools starting in 1876.¹⁹ While the Japanese also faced discrimination in the United States, no laws such as the Chinese Exclusion Act were passed targeting them, and over the years more Japanese women came to the country. This allowed for a robust second generation to be formed, and by 1940 almost two thirds of Japanese in America were native born citizens.²⁰ As a result of these factors, by 1940 there were approximately twice as many Japanese as Chinese in the United States and they were significantly more

¹⁶ Ken Fong, *Pursuing the Pearl: A Comprehensive Resource for Multi-Asian Ministry* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1999), 52.

¹⁷ Fong, *Pursuing the Pearl*, 54.

¹⁸ Fong, *Pursuing the Pearl*, 54-55.

¹⁹ Fong, *Pursuing the Pearl*, 52-53.

²⁰ Fong, *Pursuing the Pearl*, 56-57.

assimilated into American culture than the Chinese, despite the Chinese’s migration having a nearly fifty year head start.²¹ Needless to say, a ministry today geared at an American-born Chinese would not resonate the same way with a similarly aged American-born Japanese due to the histories and level of assimilation of each culture.

Another distinction is the way pastors are viewed in immigrant churches. In Korean churches, congregants highly respect the pastor and view him as an authority figure chosen by God to lead in this high calling. Many in the church are quick to follow his decisions with little or no pushback—even if his decisions are made autocratically.²² Contrast this with the comparatively low view of the pastor in a Chinese church, who is often seen as having to be a minister because he failed at securing a “real job,” such as a doctor, lawyer, or engineer. Rather than being divinely called by God for a special task, the pastor in a Chinese church is seen as little more than a beggar who is utterly dependent upon the congregation for his financial support and livelihood.²³ Therefore, a Chinese church is not as quick to follow the pastor’s decisions and leadership since he is not as highly esteemed as a Korean pastor is by his congregation. As a result, it is not uncommon for Chinese pastors to first establish themselves in a more culturally respected career before entering the ministry to help establish credibility and respect in the congregation’s eyes—even if that means delaying his calling by several years to complete the necessary schooling for each profession.²⁴ Despite how similar East Asians might appear on the surface, these are a few of the many reasons that incentivize an immigrant church to only minister to members within its own culture.

²¹ Fong, *Pursuing the Pearl*, 56-57.

²² Benjamin Shin and Sheryl Silzer, *Tapestry of Grace: Untangling the Cultural Complexities in Asian American Life and Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 83.

²³ Shin and Silzer, *Tapestry of Grace*, 84.

²⁴ Shin and Silzer, *Tapestry of Grace*, 84.

Aspects within Chinese Culture Make Outside Ideas Difficult to Accept

Every culture possesses certain characteristics that make it unique and explain why people behave the way they do. Although many cultures share several of the same qualities, no two cultures are exactly alike, and the differences are noticeable. Moreover, each culture desires to preserve its uniqueness and will find ways to distinguish itself. Chinese culture is no different, and several characteristics demonstrate why Chinese people—and by extension Chinese churches—resist the integration of other cultures’ ideas and practices.

Confucian Influence on Chinese Culture

While culture is made up of several contributing factors, Chinese culture is impossible to fully understand without recognizing the extent to which Confucius’s teachings have influenced and continue to influence it to this day. This might seem astounding given that Confucius lived from 551-479 BC, but his teachings are looked upon favorably in part because of the order and stability they have brought to East Asian societies.²⁵ Helen Lee explains the appeal of Confucius’s teachings: “Confucianism is defined by hierarchy and patriarchy—in the simplest terms, there is a distinct leadership structure defining who is above whom; that is, those who are younger serve those who are older, and women serve men.”²⁶

Confucius taught that five relationships are essential for a harmonious society. These relationships are the ruler to subject, the parent to child, the husband to wife, the older brother to younger brother, and the older person to younger person.²⁷ Additionally, within each of these relationships it is improper for someone in the inferior position to

²⁵ Paul Tokunaga, “Pressure, Perfectionism & Performance,” in Yep, *Following Jesus*, 20-21.

²⁶ Helen Lee, “Healthy Leaders, Healthy Households 1,” in *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, ed. Peter Cha, S. Steve Kang, and Helen Lee (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 61.

²⁷ Tokunaga, *Invitation to Lead*, 39.

disrespect or disagree with the wishes of the superior as this could be construed as a personal attack against that person. Even something as seemingly trivial as using the incorrect title to refer to the superior can be interpreted as a sign of disrespect.²⁸ Therefore, each person is to know his or her place in society and within the Confucian hierarchy, and should behave appropriately within that framework instead of overstepping boundaries.²⁹ Once these beliefs were solidified within the culture, they were passed on from one generation to the next. This happened in part because, as Hoover Wong explains, “Such values and ideas were unquestioned and unchallenged, therefore accepted, absorbed and assimilated over centuries of time. . . . In time China became a monolithic, consensus society in the main, one oriented toward the past. Satisfied with the ‘truth,’ China became conservative and passive toward change in the future.”³⁰ Knowing that certain teachings and principles have been perpetuated for thousands of years makes it is easy to understand why people are reluctant to challenge what for so long has been central to Chinese identity.

Confucius also taught proper family relationships are important not only for the sake of individuals but also for the betterment of society. For a society to flourish, the family unit must be healthy and orderly.³¹ One aspect of a healthy family, and another foundational virtue of Confucianism, is the concept of filial piety. Filial piety can be defined as performing the expected social responsibilities to honor and care for one’s parents (especially in their old age) based on the love and care the parents have shown the child.³² Practicing filial piety is especially important for the oldest son as he occupies the

²⁸ K. Connie Kang, “Asian American Pastors Minister across Culture Gap,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 29, 2007, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2007-sep-29-me-beliefs29-story.html>.

²⁹ Wong, *Coming Together or Coming Apart?*, 141-42.

³⁰ Wong, *Coming Together or Coming Apart?*, 81.

³¹ Tokunaga, *Invitation to Lead*, 36.

³² Shin and Silzer, *Tapestry of Grace*, 143.

place of highest honor and responsibility among the other children. As the role model to younger siblings, the oldest son's actions and decisions have an outsized ability to either bring honor or shame the family name.³³ Moreover, because the family unit is such an important part of East Asian culture, from an early age children are taught to unconditionally honor and obey their parents, and put the parents' comfort and wishes ahead of their own.³⁴ One way a child does this is by acting appropriately within the relationships of the Confucian hierarchy. Thus, a child properly respecting those in authority or who have a high social ranking reflects well upon and brings honor to the parents who raised the child.³⁵ These considerations weigh heavily upon individuals when deciding how to act in a given situation due to Confucianism's high priority on duty and obligation to conduct oneself in the expected manner.³⁶

The Confucian hierarchy not only pervades Chinese culture but also Chinese churches. Therefore, the needs of younger English-speaking members could go unmet for quite some time given that the older Chinese-speaking members hold the power to make decisions—including who is invited to participate in the decision making process.³⁷ Due to the rigidity of the hierarchy, in addition to younger congregants feeling marginalized another group often does as well: women. As a result of their subordinate status within the culture, and by extension also the church, women are typically relegated to serving in ministries such as working with children, and there are few if any opportunities to take on

³³ Tokunaga, *Invitation to Lead*, 94.

³⁴ Tokunaga, *Invitation to Lead*, 46-47.

³⁵ Shin and Silzer, *Tapestry of Grace*, 143.

³⁶ Greg Jao, "Relating to Others—Understanding Yourself," in Yep, *Following Jesus*, 74.

³⁷ Elizabeth Conde-Frazier and Andrew Y. Lee, "Intergenerational and Intercultural Issues," *Common Ground Journal* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 68.

any type of substantial leadership role.³⁸ In this regard, Chinese churches might be operating more from a cultural leadership model than a biblical model, and church leaders may be unaware of this implicit bias.³⁹ Peter Cha describes the cultural views about women that are often present in East Asian immigrant churches:

While women tend to be viewed as inferior in most traditional Asian societies, it is especially so among groups that are deeply influenced by centuries of Confucian teaching and practices. From its early years Confucianism emphatically taught that the hierarchical relationship between men and women was an important ethical mandate that should be firmly practiced in order to maintain order within families, communities and societies.⁴⁰

The strong Confucian influence and emphasis on hierarchy, authority, submission, and filial piety clearly tend to favor the viewpoints of men and the elderly while suppressing the views of others in society and the church. As a result, it is difficult for outside viewpoints to be acknowledged or considered, and even less likely these views will be accepted by those in positions of authority.

East versus West Cultural Differences

Due in part to the Confucian influence on East Asian culture, it is strikingly different from the Western culture found in Europe and North America where many Asians immigrate. Moving to a different country with a different culture is always difficult, but at times the influences, values, and expectations of Eastern cultures are at odds with what is found in Western cultures.⁴¹ Processing these cultural differences is perhaps most difficult for children and young adults being raised in the West as they not only are exposed to each culture but are expected to know and master both to succeed. While a thorough examination of the differences between Eastern and Western cultures is beyond the scope

³⁸ Conde-Frazier and Lee, "Intergenerational and Intercultural Issues," 71.

³⁹ Peter Cha and Jeanette Yep, "The Gender Trap," in Yep, *Following Jesus*, 113.

⁴⁰ Peter Cha and Grace May, "Gender Relations in Healthy Households," in Cha, Kang, and Lee, *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, 165-66.

⁴¹ Lee, "Silent Exodus," 50.

of this project, two significant differences are detailed in this section.

Collective versus individualistic society. One of the most fundamental differences between the two cultures is the way a person is defined. In collectivistic Eastern cultures, a person's identity is found within the context of a larger group or community, and the group's health and survival takes precedent over the desires of any single individual. In Western cultures a person is viewed as an autonomous individual, and therefore strives to distinguish oneself from the larger group rather than blending in.⁴² Depending upon which understanding a person has, culture greatly affects everything, from how people view their purpose and role in society, all the way to how they make daily decisions. Equally as important to consider is if a cultural hierarchy exists. As mentioned, collectivistic East Asian cultures have a strict hierarchy based on differences such as one's status, career, age, gender, and birth order. While more individualistic Western cultures do recognize such distinctions between people exist, there is not as rigid of a cultural structure that categorizes and separates people based on these factors.⁴³

One practical example of the differences between collective and individual societies concerns how each group makes decisions. In Western culture, a sign of maturity is thinking for oneself and making decisions based on what feels right (instead of making decisions simply out of duty or to please others); in Eastern culture, such a mindset is viewed as a sign of immaturity. In collective societies a person's duty to the group takes precedent over all else—including personal feelings or desires.⁴⁴ Additionally, in collective Eastern cultures decisions are made in a top-down fashion by the oldest male. His decisions are not to be questioned, and others in the group, workplace, or family are expected to

⁴² Jayson Georges and Mark D. Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures: Biblical Foundations and Practical Essentials* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2016), 45.

⁴³ Shin and Silzer, *Tapestry of Grace*, 108-9.

⁴⁴ Greg Jao, "Honor & Obey," in Yep, *Following Jesus*, 44.

submit to the decision regardless their personal opinions are on the matter.⁴⁵ In the more individualistic Western culture though, people believe they have the right to make decisions for themselves because it is believed a person's decisions do not affect others. Therefore, no one has the right to tell someone what decision he or she should make, and certainly no one should make decisions on another's behalf without his or her permission.⁴⁶

While much more could be said about the differences between how Eastern and Western cultures view the individual in relation to the broader culture, one interesting way the views are perhaps subliminally emphasized is through the use of language and communication. In East Asian languages people do not establish their identity by expressing their own opinions but instead say things that express respect for the hierarchy and larger group. The communication style is indirect, and of utmost importance is harmonious relationships. Thus, a central concern is how others will respond to what is said.⁴⁷ Contrast this with the more direct communication style of English speakers in the West, who are eager to share their own opinion on a given subject and distinguish themselves from the crowd. Additionally, while many do not set out to offend their listeners, if that were to happen in a Western context most likely the speaker would not feel responsible and instead would see this as the listener's problem.⁴⁸ Even the order of one's name can reinforce the culture's collective or individualistic nature. For example, in Chinese, a person's family name is spoken first, with the given name following afterward. When introductions are made, the first thing heard is the name which identifies that individual with a larger group. This should not be surprising given that many Eastern cultures prioritize group identity above that of the individual. In Western cultures the

⁴⁵ Shin and Silzer, *Tapestry of Grace*, 125.

⁴⁶ Shin and Silzer, *Tapestry of Grace*, 125-26.

⁴⁷ Shin and Silzer, *Tapestry of Grace*, 127.

⁴⁸ Shin and Silzer, *Tapestry of Grace*, 127.

opposite is true, with the given name being spoken first. This is done to distinguish the person from the group and reinforces the importance of the individual's identity above that of the group.⁴⁹ Moreover, family names might not even be announced during introductions in the West—something unthinkable in a Chinese context due to the significance of the family in defining one's identity.⁵⁰

Honor and shame versus innocence and guilt. Many missionaries, missiologists, and anthropologists classify cultures by one of three primary types: honor and shame, innocence and guilt, or power and fear. While all three of these influences are present in every culture, one of these dynamics tends to be more prominent than the others.⁵¹ Jayson Georges and Mark Baker describe honor and shame cultures as “collectivistic societies where the community tends to shame and exclude people who fail to meet group expectations, and reward loyal members with honor.”⁵² They go on to state that cultures influenced by innocence and guilt are more individualistic in nature and rely on “conscience, justice and laws to regulate social behavior,” and in mostly animistic contexts those in power and fear cultures “fear the unseen world of spirits, curses, ancestors and so on, and so act to gain the power of the spiritual world.”⁵³ Approximately 80 percent of the world operates on the honor and shame system, and this includes people from the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and Asia. China certainly fits within this group of cultures most influenced by honor and shame. Even though China is not unique in this regard, it is worth understanding how this viewpoint influences Chinese culture—

⁴⁹ Jao, “Honor & Obey,” 44-45.

⁵⁰ Wong, *Coming Together or Coming Apart?*, 82.

⁵¹ Georges and Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures*, 18-19.

⁵² Georges and Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures*, 18.

⁵³ Georges and Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures*, 18.

especially since many Chinese are immigrating to Western nations classified as the innocence and guilt culture type.⁵⁴

In Chinese culture the concept of gaining honor and avoiding shame is referred to as “face.”⁵⁵ As taught within the Confucian hierarchy, a person’s social role determines how he or she should respond in various situations, and in order to not lose face a person will avoid doing certain things or even being in certain places which could bring shame upon oneself or one’s family.⁵⁶ When every person fulfills the expectations placed upon him or her due to one’s social role, not only does the individual save face but the group’s face is maintained and exhibited by harmony both in families and in society. Therefore, properly relating to others ensures one’s own good standing among the group.⁵⁷ In all honor and shame cultures the goal is the same: to not do something against the crowd’s wishes (which would in turn bring shame upon oneself), and instead conduct oneself in such a way so as to be viewed favorably by others.

One defining aspect of honor and shame cultures is the group’s influence on a person’s everyday actions. Honor and shame—which are relational concepts—thrive in collective societies where a person’s identity is determined by the expectations of others.⁵⁸ Greg Jao describes the effect of this group dynamic: “A failure to satisfy these community-defined obligations defines our identity. We experience shame. When we fail to satisfy others’ expectations, we internalize the message *Not only have I failed, but I am a failure.* Studies confirm that Asian Americans experience disproportionately strong feelings of

⁵⁴ Georges and Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures*, 18-19.

⁵⁵ Jackson Wu, *Saving God’s Face: A Chinese Contextualization of Salvation through Honor and Shame* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey International University, 2012), 151.

⁵⁶ Helen Lee, “Hospitable Households,” in Cha, Kang, and Lee, *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, 126.

⁵⁷ Shin and Silzer, *Tapestry of Grace*, 152-53.

⁵⁸ Greg Jao, “Spiritual Growth,” in Yep, *Following Jesus*, 133.

shame compared with others.”⁵⁹ This is vastly different from innocence and guilt cultures which rely on people’s internal conscience rather than external social pressure to keep them from doing wrong. In innocence and guilt cultures the rules and laws from various authority figures are ingrained into a person’s conscience so that he or she develops a strong internal sense of right and wrong, which therefore dictates behavior.⁶⁰ While someone unfamiliar with these culture types might get the impression that honor and shame cultures do not have a sense of right and wrong since obeying rules are not the driving force in a person’s behavior or decisions, this would be an incorrect assessment. Rather, as Georges and Baker state, “Honor-shame cultures do have morality, but their basis for defining right and wrong happens to be communal and relational (not legal or philosophical). For them, what is best for relationships and honors people is morally right; what shames is morally wrong.”⁶¹ Another key distinction between honor and shame cultures and innocence and guilt cultures is the way negative traits are absolved. In innocence and guilt cultures a person’s wrong actions are seen as bad and are forgiven by that individual’s confessing and apologizing for the wrongdoing.⁶² Conversely, honor and shames cultures view the offending person as bad (not his or her actions), and the offender is unable to rectify the situation. Therefore, the offender hides or withdrawals from the group until the offender’s relationship to the group changes—usually by means of someone in a higher status restoring the offending person to a place of honor once again.⁶³

These points of distinction concerning collective societies and honor and shame cultures help explain not only why Chinese culture is reluctant to accept new ideas, but also why individuals are unlikely to propose new practices and thus risk bringing shame

⁵⁹ Jao, “Spiritual Growth,” 133.

⁶⁰ Georges and Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures*, 37.

⁶¹ Georges and Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures*, 37.

⁶² Georges and Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures*, 37.

⁶³ Georges and Baker, *Ministering in Honor-Shame Cultures*, 38.

upon themselves or their family. With cultural pressure urging conformity to the group and prioritizing the group's needs above an individual's desires, it is unsurprising that honor and shame cultures tend to perpetuate the past rather than look for ways to be innovative in the future.

Chinese Churches Must Help Members Find Identity in Christ, Not in Culture

Many immigrants who come to the United States find that leaving behind the comforts of home and settling into a new culture as a minority can be difficult and at times overwhelming. Longing for any semblance of home, immigrants tend to congregate with those of the same language and culture in whatever setting they can. Thus, immigrant churches have a strong appeal to first-generation immigrants—regardless of an individual's spiritual beliefs. As a result, church leaders must be on guard that allegiance to the gospel is not usurped by allegiance to one's culture or the desire to preserve it. This can be challenging (especially if numerous non-Christians attend the church), but it is the task of church leaders to help Christians realize their identity is found in Christ and not their ethnicity or culture. Equally difficult, yet necessary, is determining what can be done to keep the 1.5 generation, second generation, and subsequent generations in church, considering that their needs and experiences are vastly different from those of the first generation. Therefore, it is imperative for church leaders to not only minister well to existing members, but to take steps to ensure their churches can adequately minister to succeeding generations of Americanized Asians.

The Role of a Chinese Church in First Generation Immigrant Life

When one thinks of a church, images of people worshipping together, studying the Bible, praying, and engaging in other spiritual activities might come to mind. While not the only actions that take place in a church, these important practices give a sense of unity and belonging to those gathered. It would also not be uncommon for many people in the

United States to view church simply as an activity or a place to go for a few hours on Sunday morning.⁶⁴ However, for attendees in an immigrant church, the perception of what the church is and the services it provides vary greatly from that of attendees in most other churches. For first-generation immigrants, a Chinese church fulfills many roles in life beyond simply meeting spiritual needs. Describing the founding, appeal, and importance of an immigrant church, Jonathan Wu insightfully writes,

Asian congregations frequently began as gathering places for recent immigrants. They emerged in concentrated demographic pockets like Koreatown or Little Saigon. They formed from small groups of international students who finished their academic studies, found work, started families and strengthened relational networks with other postgraduate peers. Other Asians, Christian or not, were drawn to these fellowships because a common language was spoken, food was recognizable and they felt comfortable, at home. These churches frequently served as community centers. Business, social and spiritual interests commingled, forging a vibrant and vital haven where fewer barriers needed to be crossed and where one felt at ease. The relentless feeling of being alone and a stranger here in America provided additional incentive for our first-generation Asian sisters and brothers to gravitate toward shared life together.⁶⁵

It is hard to overstate the value of the immigrant church in the lives of first-generation immigrants—even those who have little or no interest in Christianity. Such a bond would certainly be uncommon between non-Christians and churches in the majority culture, which makes the relationship between the immigrant church and immigrant community all the more difficult for an outsider to understand.

One reason why the immigrant church is so significant is because it plays a vital role in helping recent immigrants absorb culture shock as they acclimate to a new country.⁶⁶ In addition to these churches providing a feeling of familiarity, shared culture, and shared language, church leaders have realized the impact their churches can have by strategically and intentionally providing practical ministries at little or no cost. For

⁶⁴ Chuang, *MultiAsian.Church*, 66.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Wu, “Trusting Households,” in Cha, Kang, and Lee, *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, 106.

⁶⁶ Chuang, *MultiAsian.Church*, 25.

example, Chuang writes, “It is fairly common for Asian churches to provide assistance with language translation, English classes, free legal advice, and other related social services” in an attempt to build goodwill with these new church prospects.⁶⁷ Being a collective society, it is unsurprising Chinese and other East Asian churches see the need to take care of one another by helping people find jobs, housing, and making sure other daily needs are taken care of.⁶⁸ Additionally, new immigrants often arrive with emotional needs after being thrust into a new culture, social needs for companionship, psychological needs as they face loneliness and discouragement, and spiritual needs as they search for meaning in life. Despite how challenging and diverse these needs are, the immigrant church is best suited to adequately meet these needs as the church not only consists of people who have been in this exact same situation before but has people who are able to minister to others in their native language.⁶⁹ The immense value such services provide often results in people who respect the church and are willing to engage in spiritual conversations. For some, this means an attempt to rediscover their family’s religious faith, while for others it results in an openness to discuss Christianity—possibly for the first time in their lives.⁷⁰

While it is important to meet needs and help others, church leaders should be aware of the potential danger of allowing the urgency of meeting physical needs to overshadow opportunities to meet spiritual needs. The church has failed its mission if new immigrants in the community are settled in and taken care of but have not heard or had a chance to respond to the gospel message. An equally dangerous pitfall to avoid is for the church to become focused more on cultural identity than spiritual identity. To help counteract this, proper teaching and preaching from the Bible is especially important in

⁶⁷ Chuang, *MultiAsian.Church*, 16.

⁶⁸ Shin and Silzer, *Tapestry of Grace*, 151.

⁶⁹ Wong, *Coming Together or Coming Apart?*, 198-99.

⁷⁰ Chuang, *MultiAsian.Church*, 25.

immigrant churches. Speaking to this issue, Patrick Cho says, “God-honoring churches will not allow cultural identity to become their primary concern. They recognize that all believers need constant spiritual nourishment to foster healthy growth and development, so they provide solid exposition for their congregation.”⁷¹ Due to the fact many who attend an immigrant church come because of a shared cultural identity, if church leadership does not remain diligent, then a Chinese church can easily degenerate into little more than “a conservatory for the culture and an emotional refuge from the dominant host culture.”⁷²

Describing the danger of this situation Cha explains,

From the beginning immigrant churches have played multiple roles in our communities. They could not simply function as spiritual communities when there were so many varied and urgent needs in our immigrant families and communities. The fact that our churches play these multiple, sociocultural roles is not bad or unbiblical. In fact, because they played these sociocultural roles so effectively, many of our parents and their peers have become Christians. What becomes problematic is when the immigrant church’s various sociocultural roles become more visible and prominent than its spiritual functions as a church, or, to put it differently, when its own ethnic, traditional values and norms—rather than biblical values—shape the life of the church.⁷³

However, churches need not fall into any of these traps. Instead of merely providing assistance to those in need or being a place to retreat from the majority culture, Chinese churches can take the lead in challenging unbiblical cultural views while simultaneously emphasizing and building upon cultural traits which do have a biblical basis. By being aware of potential pitfalls and committing to keep Christ at the center of his church, leaders in Chinese churches can increase the likelihood of producing Christians who value obedience to God more than perpetuating cultural traits and also provide first-generation parishioners with the tools necessary to pass on a legacy of faith to their descendants.

⁷¹ Cho, “Helping Asian Churches,” 80.

⁷² Wong, *Coming Together or Coming Apart?*, 202.

⁷³ Peter Cha, “Finding a Church Home,” in Yep, *Following Jesus*, 149.

Meeting Needs of the Second Generation and Beyond

One of the most significant issues facing Chinese churches (and immigrant churches in general) is retaining the 1.5 generation, second generation, and beyond. It stands to reason churches cannot help those in emerging generations find their identity in Christ if these individuals do not attend church. Despite the surge in immigration and the proliferation of East Asian churches over the last fifty years, equally astounding has been the rate at which those raised in the immigrant church have left. Writing in 1996, Helen Lee was one of the first to bring attention to this problem, which she described as a “silent exodus.”⁷⁴ Differing cultural values, a lack of leadership opportunities for the second generation, and the first generation’s resistance to change are a few of the reasons Lee noted why those in the second generation leave.⁷⁵ Sadly, many of these same problems persist decades later, and cultural misunderstandings resulting in unresolved conflict are frequently the root cause of these departures which often times end up leaving all parties involved angry and bitter.⁷⁶ While generational conflict is common between parents and children (and between older and younger members in a church), these differences are amplified in a Chinese church as the generations are influenced by different cultural values and ways of looking at conflict.⁷⁷ Given the fact that many immigrant churches also lack adequate conflict resolution skills, when conflict arises there seems to be no hope of resolving the issue(s). Therefore, many people in the younger generations feel their only option is to leave the immigrant church. This is unfortunate because not only is the health of that congregation negatively impacted, but in

⁷⁴ Lee, “Silent Exodus,” 50.

⁷⁵ Lee, “Silent Exodus,” 50-51.

⁷⁶ Shin and Silzer, *Tapestry of Grace*, 1-2.

⁷⁷ Peter Cha, Paul Kim, and Dihan Lee, “Multigenerational Households,” in Cha, Kang, and Lee, *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, 146-47.

some cases a significant number of people leaving can call into question the viability of that church's long-term survival.⁷⁸

Another reason younger generations leave the immigrant church stems from the first generation not understanding (or sometimes even acknowledging) how much American culture influences those born in this country. Due to the strong pull of acculturation that begins with the second generation, Asians who are born and raised in America truly are different than their parents—despite the fact they are raised according to their parents' values and traditions. This results in children living with a certain tension, an experience Paul Tokunaga describes by saying, “We are always in between, with a foot in this world, a foot in that world. . . . Usually it isn't a balanced in-betweenness. One foot leans more heavily than the other. The closer one is to the immigration experience, generally the greater the lean toward their ethnicity.”⁷⁹ Elaborating on this tension Steve Chang explains, “Asian Americans, especially the second and third generations, are often a third-culture people—belonging neither to the white-majority culture nor the Asian-immigrant culture. We may set our culture aside when we have no choice (for example, work, school, children's education), but we long for a church where we can be ourselves.”⁸⁰

As a result, different methods and approaches are necessary for a church to reach and retain succeeding generations, but Chinese churches are often hesitant to make such changes. Change in Chinese churches can be difficult because it introduces a sense of disruption and uncertainty, and because there is no guarantee the changes will bring about the desired results many congregants feel as though the cost of change is not worth

⁷⁸ Cha, Kim, and Lee, “Multigenerational Households,” 147-49.

⁷⁹ Tokunaga, *Invitation to Lead*, 50.

⁸⁰ Steve S. Chang, “Why Asian Americans Struggle to Feel at Home in White-Majority Churches,” The Gospel Coalition, November 16, 2017, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/asian-americans-struggle-feel-home-white-majority-churches/>.

the risk.⁸¹ A reluctance to change may also be due in part to many in the first generation not understanding that an immigrant church heavily influenced by overseas elements and primarily focused on reaching first-generation immigrants will not appeal to American-born Asians.⁸² Therefore, as long as Chinese churches make the second generation and beyond conform to the styles and customs of another culture, many English speakers will find the immigrant church to be a dissatisfying, irrelevant, and stifling experience.⁸³ Unfortunately, the desire to preserve culture and create a place where new immigrants feel at ease has inadvertently alienated succeeding generations; and the alternative to change for those who founded these churches is to continue watching their children and grandchildren become disengaged and disassociated from the immigrant church—and in some cases from Christianity altogether.⁸⁴

While there are no easy answers to fix the problems or address all the issues facing immigrant churches striving to keep the next generation, one way forward is to be aware of different models of ministry for English-speaking Asian Americans and which one(s) might be appropriate for a particular congregation to use. *Coming Together or Coming Apart?* by Hoover Wong was the first book to distinguish these different models and make them accessible to audiences beyond his students at Fuller Theological Seminary.⁸⁵ Over the last twenty years these models have been modified and elaborated on by others, but Wong listed four models of English-speaking ministries that Chinese churches use. Wong describes each model in terms of a different housing arrangement, with the first model being the Room-to-Let Model. In this scenario, church leaders set

⁸¹ Wu, “Trusting Households,” 105-6.

⁸² Fong, *Pursuing the Pearl*, 185.

⁸³ Lee, “Silent Exodus,” 50.

⁸⁴ Lee, “Silent Exodus,” 50-51.

⁸⁵ Wong, *Coming Together or Coming Apart?*, 202.

aside a room or space within the church for activities such as English Bible study classes and youth ministry, while still having a sermon preached in Chinese and translated into English.⁸⁶ The second model is the Duplex Model, which typically forms when the church has a significant number of English-speaking youth and adults. At this point a separate worship service completely in English is created, an English pastor is hired, church meetings become bilingual, and church unity is expressed by occasional joint worship services and other activities.⁸⁷ Some distinguishing factors of this model are that while the English-speaking members have some representation they lack autonomous authority over decisions affecting the English ministry, there is still only one governing board for the entire church (comprised primarily if not exclusively of first-generation members), and although the ministry has an English pastor he is subordinate to the Chinese-speaking senior pastor.⁸⁸ The third model is the Town House Model in which the English speakers are fully responsible for their own affairs. In this arrangement the English speakers share a facility with the first-generation members, but the groups comprise two separate churches as the English ministry has its own pastoral staff, governing board, and manages its own finances.⁸⁹ The fourth model is the Lodge Model, which brings together English-speaking, Westernized Asians of various ethnicities and backgrounds to form a new church in a different location than the mother church. In these types of churches the pastors and congregants are second, third, and fourth generation Chinese-Americans, Korean-Americans, and Japanese-Americans who come together simply as Asian Americans in a place where “commonality and sense of community lie in being Asian in ethnicity and American (western) in culture.”⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Wong, *Coming Together or Coming Apart?*, 203.

⁸⁷ Wong, *Coming Together or Coming Apart?*, 203-4.

⁸⁸ Wong, *Coming Together or Coming Apart?*, 204.

⁸⁹ Wong, *Coming Together or Coming Apart?*, 204.

⁹⁰ Wong, *Coming Together or Coming Apart?*, 205.

While Wong’s housing models form somewhat of a progression and might even appear to offer a strategy for English speakers to gain more autonomy and experience managing church affairs until they can assemble their own churches, Wong is quick to point out this is not his intention. Each model has its strengths and weaknesses, and if a church’s current English ministry structure is meeting the needs of its members then there should not be pressure to advance to the next model. Wong states, “There is no one correct church in this spectrum. In fact, they are all legitimate in terms of meeting the needs of those moving along the assimilation path.”⁹¹ Concurrently, Wong states his approval of monolingual immigrant churches as well as Anglo megachurches, saying both can be beneficial for Asians to attend (depending of course upon their level of assimilation into American culture).⁹² Writing in the late 1990s, Wong estimated that half of the Chinese churches with an English ministry were using the Duplex Model, but he also stated that the Lodge Model was beginning to see increased numbers—particularly in California. He noted that while the Room-to-Let Model was generally the most unsatisfying to English speakers, many of them view the Town House Model as the most desirable.⁹³ However, Wong believed the Town House Model was the least frequently practiced option in Chinese churches because the first generation views the arrangement as “too radical, too individualistic, [and] an open denial of the Chinese concept of family.”⁹⁴

In recent years there has been a focus on Wong’s Lodge Model as these types of churches appear to be better suited to reach the next generation than the other models which take place in traditional immigrant churches.⁹⁵ For example, D. J. Chuang believes

⁹¹ Wong, *Coming Together or Coming Apart?*, 207.

⁹² Wong, *Coming Together or Coming Apart?*, 206-7.

⁹³ Wong, *Coming Together or Coming Apart?*, 203-5.

⁹⁴ Wong, *Coming Together or Coming Apart?*, 205.

⁹⁵ Chuang, *MultiAsian Church*, 67.

the Lodge Model (which he refers to as “multi-Asian”) is the key to reaching and retaining future generations of Asian Americans. Chuang writes,

Multi-Asian churches are also best contextualized to reach next generation Asian Americans. Some next generation Asian Americans have a difficult time feeling at home in an ethnic Asian church or the mainstream American church; both of those tend to be too homogeneous. A multi-Asian church can be a more inviting place for next generation Asian Americans and non-Asians alike, because its ethos of bi-cultural elasticity can accommodate more diversity. When I’ve experienced a healthy multi-Asian church, I describe it as entering a church community not having to explain myself so much, because I’m with people who have shared experience and empathy for my bi-cultural background.⁹⁶

Peter Cha notes that many Asian Americans see these types of churches as beneficial because the ministries are influenced by and focused on the unique needs of Asian Americans, and because these churches tend to be multiethnic and more inclusive than the immigrant churches many of these Asian Americans came out of.⁹⁷ Ken Fong also believes such churches are necessary given the unique challenges Asian Americans face, as well as their complex backgrounds and identities. For example, even though second or third generation Asians are more westernized than their parents, this does not necessarily mean they want to deny any aspects of their Asian identity or completely blend into the majority culture. At the same time, even if they strongly identify with their Asian roots it does not necessarily mean they prefer or are more comfortable in immigrant churches.⁹⁸ As a result, while second and third generation Asians who feel most comfortable among those of their own ethnicity can attend immigrant churches with English ministries, and those who do not identify with their Asian heritage can attend Anglo churches, the growing number of those who identify as both Asian and American have few options. Therefore, Fong believes one of the best ways to reach this unique group of assimilated Asians is

⁹⁶ Chuang, *MultiAsian.Church*, 89.

⁹⁷ Cha, “Finding a Church Home,” 154-55.

⁹⁸ Fong, *Pursuing the Pearl*, 9-10.

through multi-Asian churches.⁹⁹

Regardless of what model a church's English ministry selects, it is vital the model facilitates spiritual health and growth. Therefore, church leaders should not be afraid to make changes when doing so is strategic, wise, and helpful in accomplishing the church's objectives.¹⁰⁰ For some churches this might mean adopting a different model for their English ministry, and for others it might mean making a conscious shift to intentionally reach non-Asians in the multi-ethnic community around them. Noting that sometimes a church may even move back and forth between models at different points in its history, Chuang notes, "Different structures are needed at different times in different places for different peoples. We have a responsibility to create an environment where disciples from different backgrounds can grow into Christ-like maturity."¹⁰¹ Indeed, immigrant churches that want to endure beyond just a few decades must hold on to the faith more than culture or tradition, and must be willing to make the necessary adjustments to reach the next generation.¹⁰² Although the task of selecting and operating the right English ministry model is daunting, church leaders must be willing to take action and move forward, trusting that as they seek the Lord in this decision he will lead them to do what is best in order to reach this vital group.

Conclusion

Although there are legitimate reasons for Chinese churches to exist and there will continue to be a need for them as long as immigration continues, pastors and other church leaders must recognize the limitations which come from primarily focusing their efforts on reaching first-generation immigrants. At the same time, Chinese churches must

⁹⁹ Fong, *Pursuing the Pearl*, 10.

¹⁰⁰ Chuang, *MultiAsian.Church*, 71.

¹⁰¹ Chuang, *MultiAsian.Church*, 72.

¹⁰² Chuang, *MultiAsian.Church*, 94-95.

also consider to what extent they will reach out to English speakers in their community—whether Chinese or not. Furthermore, even though many who grow up in the immigrant church leave, this need not be the case. Chinese churches have a unique connection to those in the second generation who were raised in the church, and these churches have a key opportunity to impact the lives of the second generation and beyond by being willing to adapt ministry methods or by giving their blessing to new models such as multi-Asian churches. Whether the answer for a particular congregation is to develop thriving English ministries to American-born Chinese, multiethnic ministries which reflect the diversity those in succeeding generations encounter on a daily basis, or to assist new churches ministering to those across the East Asian spectrum, God has given Chinese churches in America an amazing opportunity to be part of reaching the next generation. The way forward might not be easy, but just as the Chinese church was there at a crucial time to reach growing numbers of people with a certain culture and language, the church's impact can continue to reverberate throughout the generations by seizing the opportunity to minister to Americanized Asians—another growing group with a certain culture and language in desperate need of gospel-centered churches.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

This chapter discusses the preparation, implementation, and results of the ministry project. The purpose of this project was for members of the English ministry at Chinese Baptist Church of Miami to develop an understanding that God's mission to reach the nations is all throughout the Bible. To achieve this purpose, the project was guided by three goals. The first goal was to assess the current missions knowledge among members of the English ministry. The second goal was to develop a six-week sermon series for members of the English ministry detailing God's love for the nations and the biblical basis of missions. The third goal was to increase the missions knowledge among members of the English ministry through preaching the developed six-week sermon series. The sermon series began on September 25, 2022, and concluded on November 6, 2022, as there was one week I was sick and unable to preach.

Project Preparation

In preparation of the project implementation, I began praying about, selecting, and outlining the six passages from which I would preach. This occurred over the course of several weeks, as I wanted to take time and thoroughly consider which passages and topics would be the most helpful for the congregation. I also wanted to intentionally avoid some of the more common missions-themed passages such as Acts 1:8 and Romans 10:11-15 so the congregation would stay engaged and not feel as though I was simply repeating the same sermon many of them had already heard over the years. At the same time, I hoped to introduce new material through passages which the congregation might not be as familiar. Much time in particular was spent considering Old Testament passages in order to clearly show how God's mission to reach the nations is unchanged from the

beginning. I also began thinking about the types of questions I would ask on the survey before creating the survey. Finally, I made a list of potential participants who I could ask to complete the survey and listen to the sermons when all preparations were complete and it was time to initiate the project.

Project Implementation

The first goal was to assess the current missions knowledge among members of the English ministry. This goal was successfully met upon the completion of the Missions Knowledge Assessment Survey¹ by adult members of CBCM's English ministry who regularly attend the English worship service or live in the area and watch online. Not including the background and demographic questions, the survey consisted of eighteen statements related to an individual's understanding of missions. Sermons 1, 2, 4, and 6 each addressed two of the survey statements, sermons 3 and 5 each addressed three statements, and the remaining four statements were about missions in general. To help each participant answer the survey honestly and to help ease concerns about being identified with their responses, participants were given an identification number to use on the pre- and post-surveys.

For each statement on the Missions Knowledge Assessment Survey, participants responded by selecting from six possible responses: strongly disagree, disagree, disagree somewhat, agree somewhat, agree, or strongly agree. For scoring purposes, each response was assigned a numerical value. Statements 1, 2, and 8 were written in such a way that strongly agree was the correct answer. For these questions a value of 1 was assigned to the strongly disagree response, 2 for disagree, 3 for disagree somewhat, 4 for agree somewhat, 5 for agree, and 6 for strongly agree. All the other statements on the survey were written in such a way that strongly disagree was the correct answer, meaning that a value of 1 was assigned to the strongly agree response, 2 for agree, 3 for agree somewhat, 4 for

¹ See appendix 1.

disagree somewhat, 5 for disagree, and 6 for strongly disagree. This made the scoring on the surveys consistent, as for each statement a higher score is desired (even if the participant disagrees with the statement).

I asked 55 members to participate in the project, and from this group 35 people completed and returned the pre-survey before the sermon series began. Upon completion of the post-survey, 6 responses were unable to be used as those individuals did not listen to at least three of the six sermons as per the second delimitation on this project. Therefore, the survey responses of 29 people were used in this project. This group was a good representation of the church's adult English ministry, as it consisted of 17 males and 12 females from a total of 12 different countries. The age distribution also represented a good mix of the congregation. Only 1 participant was older than age 65, and among the other age divisions listed on the survey, the two groups with the most participants were age 55-64 with 28 percent, and age 18-24 making up 21 percent of the participants. The remaining age groups each had almost the same number of people. Seventy-nine percent of the participants were Asian, 14 percent were Black/African American, 4 percent were Non-Hispanic White, and 3 percent were Hispanic. Additionally, when examining how long the participants have attended CBCM, there was an equal number among those who have attended for at least 35 years, and among those who have attended 5 years or less. Both groups were tied for the most participants, with each group constituting 21 percent of all respondents.

Considering how diverse the sample group was based on age, race, country of origin, and length of time attending CBCM, it was difficult for me to even make a confident guess as to the current level of missions knowledge among those in the English ministry. Therefore, I was pleasantly surprised when the pre-survey showed an average score of 4.59 out of 6 for each participant. The highest individual pre-survey score was 5.56 and the lowest was 1.94. Concerning particular statements, 7 had lower scores than

the 4.59 average. These were statements 2, 3, 4, 5, 12, 15, and 16. Table 1 details the scores to these seven statements.

Table 1. Pre-survey response averages to statements 2, 3, 4, 5, 12, 15, and 16

Statement	Avg Pre-survey Score
2. I can name three Bible passages that show God's love for the nations.	3.79
3. The concept of missions was a new development that began with the Great Commission and was implemented by the early church in the book of Acts.	2.79
4. In the Old Testament salvation was only for the Israelites and they had no thought about it being available to those of other nations.	3.62
5. In the Old Testament God only promised the blessings of salvation to the Israelites and not to people of other nations.	3.86
12. Even though God desires people from every nation to believe the gospel, He is partial to some groups/nations.	4.52
15. Specialized or formal cultural and theological training is necessary before engaging those of another culture with the gospel.	3.24
16. When God chose the Israelites, He did so at the expense of those from other nations.	4.52

Based on the responses to the statements in table 1, it became apparent to me this project was necessary. Specifically, a need existed for CBCM members to understand that the Old Testament is not silent on God's plan or desire for peoples of all nations to know and worship him. One finding to note was the results to statement 3. This statement had the lowest score on the pre-survey, and it was the only statement to receive an average score below 3.

The second goal of this project was to develop a six-week sermon series for members of the English ministry detailing God's love for the nations and the biblical basis of missions. This goal was successfully met when a panel of local ministry leaders and denominational workers with extensive cross-cultural or missions experience evaluated the sermon outlines and determined at least 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level. From the beginning I knew I

wanted to show CBCM members that God’s mission to reach the nations is clear all the way from Genesis to Revelation. Moreover, I wanted to pick passages from the Old Testament to show that God’s love for the nations is not a recent development in salvation history, and I wanted to pick passages from the New Testament showing how the church is to participate in God’s mission. While numerous passages meet these criteria, in the end I settled on two passages from the Old Testament and four passages from the New Testament. Each sermon lasted approximately thirty-five minutes.

Sermon 1 was from Genesis 12:1-9 and was titled “The Beginning of God’s Mission.” This sermon focused on God choosing Abraham as the means through which God brings the blessing of salvation to all peoples on earth (Gen 12:3). I picked this passage to begin the series for two reasons. Of utmost significance was that this passage is the first instance in the Bible where God indicates his concern for all peoples of the world. Therefore, this passage truly is the beginning of God’s mission and a key place to start when having a discussion on missions. Second, based on the scores from the pre-survey, I felt this passage would challenge many peoples’ faulty assumption of missions being a New Testament development. I wanted to show from these verses that God’s choosing of Abraham was not just for the benefit of Abraham or his descendants (which would later become the nation of Israel), but rather God’s plan from the beginning was for the blessing of salvation to extend to the furthest regions of the earth. The three sermon points for this message were (1) God’s mission involves all peoples, (2) God’s mission involves sacrifice, and (3) God’s mission involves obedience. This sermon addressed statements 8 and 16 on the Missions Knowledge Assessment Survey.

Sermon 2 was from Isaiah 56:1-8 and was titled “God’s Mission Clarified.” This sermon expanded on the foundation of missions in Genesis 12 by focusing on the fact God’s house “shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isa 56:7). My initial plan for this sermon series was to begin with Genesis 12 then move on to the New Testament to show how the church is expected to participate in God’s mission and what

the normative Christian life living on mission looks like. However, upon reviewing the pre-survey results, I concluded that another Old Testament passage would be helpful. Although the concept of the nations worshipping God is mentioned different times in the book of Isaiah, I picked this passage due to the familiarity of Isaiah 56:7 as a phrase Jesus uttered while cleansing the Jewish Temple during Holy Week. I thought it would be insightful to look at the context in which this phrase is first recorded, as it clearly has a missional focus. The three sermon points for this message were (1) all peoples are invited, (2) all peoples are blessed, and (3) all peoples are accepted. This sermon addressed statements 4 and 5 on the Missions Knowledge Assessment Survey.

Sermon 3 was from Matthew 28:16-20 and was titled “God’s Mission for the Church.” While this is certainly a common passage for a missions sermon series, I tried to approach this passage differently than what one might expect. This sermon focused on how the church’s mission to fulfill the Great Commission is not the starting place for missions, but rather a continuation of God’s desire from the Old Testament to bring salvation to all peoples. The three sermon points for this message were essentially a one-sentence summary of the sermon: (1) the church has a mission, (2) to make disciples, (3) of all nations. The primary focus of the sermon was on points 1 and 3 as I stressed the continuation of God’s mission to reach all nations as it extends from Genesis 12 to the present time. This sermon addressed statements 3, 7, and 13 on the Missions Knowledge Assessment Survey.

Sermon 4 was from Acts 10:34-43 and was titled “Understanding God’s Mission.” This sermon focused on the need for Christians to cross ethnic and cultural barriers to tell others of the salvation found only in Jesus Christ, as evidenced by the apostle Peter (who was Jewish) going to a Gentile man named Cornelius. The reason for such action was due to Peter’s newfound understanding that God shows no partiality, and therefore “in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:35). I also used this sermon to emphasize the necessity of a person explicitly

believing in Jesus as the only means of salvation by referencing how Cornelius is described earlier in Acts 10. Cornelius was a devout man who prayed frequently and generously gave money to those in need (Acts 10:1-2). By all accounts, Cornelius was a good man; yet this was not enough for him to be forgiven of his sins—he needed to believe in Jesus. Likewise, the congregation was challenged to follow Peter’s example of intentionally taking the gospel message to those of other cultures and ethnicities—even those who appear to be “good” people, as they are still in need of a Savior. The three sermon points for this message were (1) salvation is for all people, (2) salvation must be proclaimed, and (3) salvation only comes through Jesus. This sermon addressed statements 6 and 12 on the Missions Knowledge Assessment Survey.

Sermon 5 was from Acts 11:19-26 and was titled “Obedience to God’s Mission.” This sermon focused on so-called “ordinary” Christians who took the initiative to engage both Jews and Gentiles with the gospel—despite lacking formal cultural or theological training—and made a significant impact for God’s kingdom. I wanted this sermon to be an encouragement to the congregation that no matter who they are or what they perceive their limitations to be, even “ordinary” Christians can make a difference through their obedience and participation in God’s mission. Furthermore, I mentioned how a simple act of obedience by a Christian can make a profound impact later on—such as how it was “ordinary” Christians who, by committing to God’s cross-cultural mission, ended up founding the church in Antioch, which was the same church that later sent out the apostle Paul on his New Testament missionary journeys. This might not have happened had those anonymous Christians not joined in God’s mission; therefore, I urged the congregation to be obedient like those early Christians in Antioch. The three sermon points for this message were (1) obedience despite adversity, (2) obedience from “ordinary” Christians, and (3) obedience which blesses all peoples. This sermon addressed statements 9, 15, and 17 on the Missions Knowledge Assessment Survey.

Sermon 6 was from Revelation 7:9-12 and was titled “God’s Mission Completed.” This sermon focused on encouraging church members to persevere in God’s mission to reach the nations since his mission will be successful—as evidenced by “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev 7:9) one day praising God for the salvation they have received. Whereas the sermon in Acts 11 intended to spur church members on to join God’s mission if they had not previously done so, the sermon in Revelation 7 intended to instill perseverance in times when obedience to God’s mission becomes difficult or does not seem to be making a difference. This sermon also served as a general wrap up and somewhat of a review of the entire series. The three sermon points for this message were (1) God’s mission is successful, (2) God’s mission is unifying, and (3) God’s mission is accomplished through his people. This sermon addressed statements 14 and 18 on the Missions Knowledge Assessment Survey.

Before the sermons were preached to the congregation, a panel of three local individuals evaluated the sermon outlines to ensure the clarity and biblical faithfulness of each message. The first individual has lived in Miami for twenty-five years. For nine years he served as senior pastor of a multiethnic church before becoming the Associational Mission Strategist for the Miami Baptist Association (MBA)—a position he held for sixteen years until his recent retirement. The MBA is comprised of over three hundred churches containing almost the same number of English-speaking, Spanish-speaking, and Creole-speaking congregations. The second individual recently retired from the International Mission Board after serving as a missionary for twenty years (most recently in Mexico) to become the Associational Mission Strategist for the MBA. The final individual is a second-generation Cuban American who currently works for the Florida Baptist Convention. He was born and raised in Miami, and over the last sixty years has seen the city and county become majority Hispanic. He has also served in many pastoral roles in Miami over the years. Each member of this panel used the Sermon Evaluation

Rubric² to assess the sermon outlines before I preached the messages. The second goal required a minimum of 90 percent of each criteria to meet or exceed the sufficiency level, meaning at least a 3 out of 4 score for each criteria. After evaluating the sermons, each panel member determined that the messages were clear and accurate in describing the biblical basis of missions. Table 2 details the panel members' scores on the Sermon Evaluation Rubric.

Table 2. Sermon Evaluation Rubric average scores from panel members

Missions Sermon Series Evaluation Tool					
1=insufficient 2=requires attention 3=sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	Number of Times Response Given				Avg Rating
	1	2	3	4	
Each sermon is theologically sound.				3	4
Each sermon is faithful to the Bible's teaching on missions.				3	4
Each sermon adequately covers the main idea of each passage.				3	4
The sermon series thoroughly covers the biblical basis of missions.			1	2	3.6
The big idea of each sermon is clear and concise.				3	4
The main points of each sermon are clearly identifiable from the sermon passage.				3	4
Each sermon contains practical application points.			1	2	3.6
Overall, the sermon series will equip people to see that God's love for the nations is all throughout the Bible.				3	4

The third goal was to increase the missions knowledge among members of the English ministry through preaching the developed six-week sermon series. This goal was successfully met when a sufficient growth in missions knowledge was shown to exist among participants who had completed the Missions Knowledge Assessment Survey pre-survey, listened to at least three of the six sermons, and then completed the Missions

² See appendix 2.

Knowledge Assessment Survey again. The results and amount of growth on these surveys is discussed in the following section.

Project Results

To calculate the growth in participants’ responses from the pre- to the post-survey, a *t*-test was utilized. After using the scoring method described previously in this chapter and comparing the responses, a sufficient growth in missions knowledge was shown to exist among participants after listening to the sermon series. The results of the *t*-test showed an average pre-survey score of 82.7, while the average post-survey score was 91.9. Participants’ missions knowledge increased by an average of 9.2 after listening to the sermons, thus showing the sermon series achieved the third goal. Table 3 details the results of the *t*-test.

Table 3. Missions Knowledge Assessment Survey *t*-test results

	Pre-survey	Post-survey
Mean	82.7	91.9
Variance	166.44828	155.63793
Observations	29	29
Pearson Correlation	0.812864779	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Df	28	
t Stat	-6.42626561	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.000000293	
t Critical one-tail	1.701130934	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.000000586	
t Critical two-tail	2.048407142	

To view the results in a different way, the average pre-survey score for each participant was 4.59 out of 6 and the average post-survey score was 5.11. The highest individual post-survey score was 5.94 and the lowest was 2.50. Furthermore, when comparing an individual’s average post-survey score to his or her pre-survey score, every participant showed some level of growth on the post-survey—ranging from 0.06 to 1.77.

While the minimum requirement to participate in the project was to listen to at least three sermons, 45 percent of participants listened to all six. Twenty-four percent listened to five sermons, 21 percent listened to four sermons, and 10 percent listened to three sermons. While there was growth by every person and growth on every statement, five statements had lower scores on the post-survey than the 5.11 average. These were statements 2, 3, 4, 5, and 15—all of which also had lower scores on the pre-survey than the average. Table 4 details the scores to these five statements.

Table 4. Post-survey response averages to statements 2, 3, 4, 5, and 15

Statement	Avg Post-survey Score
2. I can name three Bible passages that show God's love for the nations.	5.00
3. The concept of missions was a new development that began with the Great Commission and was implemented by the early church in the book of Acts.	3.45
4. In the Old Testament salvation was only for the Israelites and they had no thought about it being available to those of other nations.	4.38
5. In the Old Testament God only promised the blessings of salvation to the Israelites and not to people of other nations.	4.31
15. Specialized or formal cultural and theological training is necessary before engaging those of another culture with the gospel.	4.21

One commonality among many of these statements is the theme of missions in the Old Testament. A possible explanation for the lower scores on statements 3, 4, and 5 could be the newness of this information and not enough time for participants to fully engage with the information to the point where it changed their beliefs. My own process of understanding that God's mission is all throughout the Bible took some time to fully comprehend, and in some cases I have had years to contemplate the implications of various Old Testament missions passages. For these reasons it is understandable how after only listening to a few sermons there could still be confusion among participants concerning this theme.

Upon examining the scores of the post-survey, of particular note was the results to statement 3. This statement had the lowest score on the post-survey (as it also did on the pre-survey), and it was the only statement on the post-survey to receive an average score below 4. This was extremely disappointing. While there was growth on this statement (meaning fewer people now believe the concept of missions has no Old Testament basis and instead began with the Great Commission), I was hoping for a larger improvement on this statement in particular. However, I was encouraged when looking at the bigger picture of growth on the entire survey. When examining which statements saw the largest improvement in participants' knowledge, I was pleased to discover statement 3 near the top of that list (as well as statement 4, which also relates to the idea of missions in the Old Testament). Indeed, the top four statements for improvement were all among those which scored the lowest on the pre-survey. In that regard, even though the final average scores might not be as high as I desired, it is unmistakably clear the participants' knowledge did increase over the course of this sermon series. Table 5 details the growth among the top four statements on the survey.

Table 5. Missions Knowledge Assessment Survey statements with the most growth

Statement	Avg Pre-survey	Avg Post-survey	% Growth
2. I can name three Bible passages that show God's love for the nations.	3.79	5.00	24%
15. Specialized or formal cultural and theological training is necessary before engaging those of another culture with the gospel.	3.24	4.21	23%
3. The concept of missions was a new development that began with the Great Commission and was implemented by the early church in the book of Acts.	2.79	3.45	19%
4. In the Old Testament salvation was only for the Israelites and they had no thought about it being available to those of other nations.	3.62	4.38	17%

Another notable finding came from examining which individuals increased knowledge the most as a result of this project. Not only did each person score higher than

the average score on the post-survey, but examining the results of the top five individuals reveals this project was beneficial for all sectors of the English ministry. There were three males and two females in this group; four were Asian and one was Black/African American; three were born in Asia, one in the United States, and one in South America; two participants were in the 18-24 age group, two in the 45-54 age group, and one in the 55-64 age group. One's length of time attending CBCM varied greatly, as four individuals had attended five years or less, and one had attended the church's entire fifty-year history. Table 6 details information about the individuals whose knowledge increased the most as a result of this project.

Table 6. Top five individuals by increase in missions knowledge

Participant Number	Gender	Country of Origin	Age Range	Years at CBCM	Avg Pre-survey	Avg Post-survey	% Growth
26	F	China	45-54	1	3.56	5.33	33%
23	M	Peru	55-64	50	3.89	5.28	26%
24	F	Malaysia	18-24	3	4.11	5.22	21%
20	M	USA	18-24	1	4.28	5.22	18%
12	M	Hong Kong	45-54	5	4.89	5.89	17%

While it is hard to know for certain why these particular individuals learned the most, one thing the group has in common is that they all listened to the entire six sermon series (except for participant 20 who only listened to three messages). Another similarity among the group is all except for one have attended the church five years or less. I found this significant because in the nine years I have been a pastor at CBCM there has not been any comprehensive or structured teaching on the biblical basis of missions. Having little substance in the way of missions teaching for nearly a decade likely contributed to the low missions knowledge these individuals had at the beginning of this sermon series. Additionally, as I began investigating the demographic data from the participants, I discovered that generally speaking the shorter amount of time an individual attended

CBCM correlated to more growth on the survey. When looking at the average growth between the pre- and post-survey of each individual, and grouping people into how long they have attended CBCM by decade, the scores of those who attended ten years or less increased by an average of 0.71, those who attended eleven to twenty years increased by an average of 0.56, those who attended twenty-one to thirty years increased by an average of 0.18, and those who attended thirty-one to forty years increased by an average of 0.27. The number of participants in each decade grouping ranged from six to ten and therefore were relatively the same size. Only one individual (participant 23) has attended longer than forty years, so I did not compare data for that decade of attendance. I cannot speak to what CBCM's previous pastors have taught or preached, but it appears as though overall the church has done a sufficient job of teaching on missions in the past—even if teaching on the Old Testament basis of missions has been lacking.

Concerning participant 23, while initially I was alarmed to discover one of the people who learned the most has been attending this church for fifty years, I nonetheless was pleased to see how the Lord used these sermons to impact his life. I believe much of his growth is due to the fact this individual is very open to learning and discussing spiritual things, and particularly during this ministry project he often approached me with questions or comments about the sermons. Moreover, recently this individual has begun studying the Scriptures more diligently and I can sense some real growth in many areas of his spiritual life. His growth through this experience is one of the most encouraging to me, as it is a great reminder that sanctification and growth in the Lord is indeed a process, but it is never too late to learn—just as he and all other participants have throughout the duration of this ministry project.

Conclusion

Overall, this ministry project was successful as all three of the project's goals either met or exceeded expectations. After listening to the sermon series, the *t*-test revealed a growth in participants' knowledge and understanding that God's mission to

reach the nations is all throughout the Bible. While there is still room for growth among many of the participants, CBCM's leadership would be wise to capitalize on the understanding and possible excitement that now exists concerning the importance of reaching the nations. Rather than seeing this project as the end of the learning process, hopefully the church can continue to build on this momentum and channel it into the local community by reaching the nations in Miami-Dade County, and also begin exploring how the church can become more involved in global missions. God's mission to reach people from every nation, tribe, and language will one day be successful, and Christians have the amazing privilege to participate in this mission now and see lives changed for all eternity. I believe this ministry project has opened the eyes and hearts of those in CBCM to this reality, and as a result I hope they will apply this newly acquired knowledge to further God's kingdom among the nations.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

This chapter serves as my evaluation of the ministry project. After the conclusion of this project, I have been able to reflect upon many components which went into making this project what it was. The following pages will evaluate the project's purpose, goals, strengths, weaknesses, and what I would do differently if I were able to do this project over again. Finally, I will discuss theological and personal lessons learned throughout the process of researching, writing, and implementing this project.

Evaluation of the Project Purpose

The purpose of this project was for members of the English ministry at Chinese Baptist Church of Miami to develop an understanding that God's mission to reach the nations is all throughout the Bible. The gospel is for people of all nations and languages, and a necessary (yet easily overlooked) part of reaching the nations involves immigrant churches. There are several valid reasons for immigrant churches to exist—especially if first-generation members of such churches are not fluent in the majority culture's language. However, since the children of these members almost certainly will become fluent in another language and familiar with another culture, those in the second generation and beyond (and even possibly the 1.5 generation) are in a much different situation than their parents. Moreover, in a multicultural city like Miami, this process is repeated numerous times among people of various countries and languages, thus allowing the second generation from all these groups the possibility to build bridges across racial and ethnic lines due to a shared language. Thinking about this unique opportunity and how it can be coupled with God's clear command for Christians to participate in his mission of bringing the gospel to all peoples, ultimately led to the development of this ministry project.

Because there was no intentional outreach to non-Chinese people taking place among CBCM's English ministry, I set out to discover if this might be due to a lack of knowledge about God's mission, or a lack of obedience to participate in God's mission. If it was a lack of obedience, then the matter is mostly one of discipleship; but if the understanding of God's mission to reach the nations is absent or underdeveloped, then that is a different situation altogether. Even if those in the church have a general understanding of missions and the importance of reaching the nations, without a comprehensive understanding of God's mission it is likely any further ministry endeavors at CBCM will be shortsighted and only focused on Chinese people. Therefore, the purpose of this ministry project was well warranted and necessary for teaching church members of God's mission to reach the nations and of the role each Christian can play in seeing that mission accomplished.

Evaluation of the Project Goals

Upon determining the project's purpose, three goals were established to ensure this purpose was achieved. The project's goals were successfully met, and an evaluation of each goal is described in this section.

Goal 1: Assess Current Missions Knowledge

The first goal was to assess the current missions knowledge among members of the English ministry. This goal was accomplished by administering the Missions Knowledge Assessment Survey. Due to the wide range of ages, the number of countries represented, and the varying length of time people have attended CBCM, it was hard for me to even guess what the average church member knew about missions. Therefore, the Missions Knowledge Assessment Survey was administered to obtain a definitive answer.

Upon reviewing the results of the survey, many participants scored better than I anticipated. Examining the average scores on the pre-survey revealed the congregants had a good understanding of general missions principles yet showed a lack of knowledge

particularly as it relates to missions and the Old Testament. When looking at the top three scoring statements on the pre-survey (statements 8, 6, and 14) it can be said most adults in the English ministry believe God's desire has always been to save people from every nation, that salvation only comes through faith in Christ so Christians must intentionally participate in missions, and missions should be a primary task of the church. While these results are encouraging, some of the lowest scoring statements revealed a disturbing trend. To summarize the findings of statements 3, 4, and 5 (which were among the lowest scoring statements), most participants believed the concept of missions was a New Testament development, and in the Old Testament salvation was only promised to the Israelites. Furthermore, most participants believed that in Old Testament times God did not mention salvation would become available to those of other nations, and the Israelites gave no thought of such a development ever occurring. While to the early Jewish Christians of the first century the idea of salvation being available to Gentiles was indeed startling (and the apostle Paul had to explain this concept in his New Testament letters), Christians today have the full canon of Scripture to read through and can discover a unified theme of God's mission to reach the nations. Because this perspective was lacking among many members of CBCM (as indicated by the pre-survey results), the need for this ministry project was confirmed. By administering the Missions Knowledge Assessment Survey, the first goal was accomplished, as the survey sufficiently captured people's responses to a variety of missions-related statements.

Goal 2: Develop a Sermon Series

The second goal was to develop a six-week sermon series for members of the English ministry detailing God's love for the nations and the biblical basis of missions. This goal was accomplished after the sermon passages were selected, the sermon outlines were reviewed by a panel of local ministry leaders, and the members of this panel determined the sermons were clear and accurate in describing the biblical basis of missions. I designed this sermon series to give participants an overview of God's mission

to reach the nations as it unfolds from Genesis to Revelation. I was also careful to select Bible passages I thought would be most beneficial for a Christian with some understanding of missions, but who was unaware that God's desire to bring the blessing of salvation to the nations is a constant theme all throughout Scripture.

While I thought the sermon passages I picked would be extremely helpful for the congregation, I was unsure if the panel would be as enthusiastic about the messages as I was. Given that these men have more ministry experience and more cross-cultural experience than I do, I was anxious for their feedback. For these reasons, it was very reassuring to hear their positive assessment of my proposed sermon series. One specific affirmation came from the current Associational Mission Strategist of the Miami Baptist Association, who is the only individual with long-term experience on the mission field. He especially liked that not only did I start with the Old Testament as the biblical basis of missions, but also that one third of the sermon series came from the Old Testament (as opposed to just a few verses in passing). This encouragement greatly boosted my confidence and reassured me of the need to emphasize the Old Testament's focus on missions. Upon each member of the panel completing the Sermon Evaluation Rubric and having a minimum of 90 percent of each criteria receive at least a sufficient rating, the second goal was accomplished and I was ready to begin preaching the sermons.

Goal 3: Increase Missions Knowledge

The third goal was to increase the missions knowledge among members of the English ministry through preaching the developed six-week sermon series. This goal was accomplished by preaching the six sermons and administering the Missions Knowledge Assessment Survey to the same participants after the series. When comparing the pre- and post-survey results, there was indeed an increase in the participants' scores on the post-survey. The sermons were preached during the English worship service starting on September 25, 2022. The sermons concluded on November 6, 2022, as I was sick for one week and unable to preach. Preaching the sermon series was the best way to convey the

information to church members because Sunday morning worship service attendance is greater than the small group Bible study attendance. Additionally, many members live a considerable distance from the church building which makes a weekend seminar or midweek presentation difficult to arrange. Another reason why the Sunday morning worship service was best is because members could watch online if they were unable to attend in person (only the worship services at CBCM are recorded—no other regular activities or gatherings).

After the final sermon was preached, the Missions Knowledge Assessment Survey was given to participants again to document any changes in their understanding of missions. As many members scored better on the pre-survey than I anticipated, I was unsure how much growth there would be on the post-survey. Therefore, I was elated to see growth from every participant and on every statement when comparing average scores to the pre-survey. The *t*-test revealed an average pre-survey score of 82.7 for participants, and an average post-survey score of 91.9, thus showing an average increase of 9.2. When examining individual participants' scores, the average growth ranged from 0.06 to 1.77 out of 6, and when examining each statements' scores, the average growth ranged from 0.17 to 1.21 out of 6. This growth in knowledge unequivocally showed the success of the sermon series, as well as the need that existed in church members' lives to better understand God's unified mission throughout the Bible to reach the nations.

Strengths of the Project

Overall, there were many strengths of this ministry project, one of which was the vast scope of sermon passages used as texts, from Genesis to Revelation. A systematic approach to what the entire Bible says concerning missions was employed, which was perhaps the greatest strength of the project. It is easy to selectively pick Bible passages that only support a particular stance or idea, and this is especially tempting to do when discussing a topical theme such as missions. In that regard, it is not uncommon to ignore large portions of the Bible, use various Bible verses out of context, or view the Bible as

little more than a collection of helpful life principles. Therefore, by systematically working through various passages on missions, the congregation came away with a balanced and fuller understanding of how God's plan to bring salvation to the nations is a unified theme that unfolds throughout the entire Bible. While six weeks certainly limited the amount of content to be covered, and this project by no means constitutes a thorough examination of God's mission, the project did provide a clear explanation of the origin of God's mission, what the end goal of God's mission looks like, and how the church is to participate in God's mission until it is accomplished.

A second strength of this project was how each sermon built upon the previous one to provide a logical flow and understanding of God's mission. To summarize the sermon series, God's mission to bring salvation to all peoples began with Abraham as the means through which salvation would ultimately come (Gen 12); God's mission was later clarified to Abraham's descendants, explicitly stating one day all peoples will worship God (Isa 56); the church is tasked with fulfilling God's mission of old (Matt 28); Christians must cross barriers to tell others of the salvation found only in Jesus (Acts 10); God's mission is accomplished through the obedience of "ordinary" Christians taking the gospel to all peoples (Acts 11); and Christians can be encouraged to persevere while participating in God's mission because it will be successful (Rev 7). Although each message could be a stand-alone sermon, taken together they show a clear progression of God's mission throughout the Bible.

A third strength was the six-week format that allowed ample time for congregants to reflect upon and process each sermon. Every week I encouraged participants to take notes during the message, and I did this in part so they could refer to the material later to help the concepts sink in. Moreover, this format allowed me to review and reinforce some aspects from previous sermons in the series as well as explain how these particular sermon passages are related to one another and fit into the overall revealing of God's mission throughout the Bible.

A final strength of this project was the good representation of adults in the English ministry. Specifically concerning age, many adults who regularly attend the English worship service are in their mid-fifties or older, so I was concerned that this age group would be overrepresented in the project. However, only 31 percent of the participants were age fifty-five and above, and overall the age distribution was relatively even. Furthermore, the breakdown by gender, country of origin, length of time in the United States, and number of years attending CBCM revealed a balanced representation of all segments of adult members.

Weaknesses of the Project

Any undertaking such as this project is bound to have flaws or weaknesses. One weakness of this project was some statements on the Missions Knowledge Assessment Survey were only discussed in a single sermon and not referred to again in great detail. Part of this is simply due to the nature of preaching and how only so much can be said in a thirty-five-minute sermon. However, if a participant missed a particular sermon and did not listen to it later online, then he or she would not likely know the expected answer to that sermon's corresponding statements on the survey. For example, statements 4 and 5 were both primarily discussed in sermon 2. Statements 4 and 5 were among the lowest five scoring statements on the post-survey, and a possible explanation could be if some participants did not listen to that particular sermon. CBCM does not track individual's worship service attendance, and participants were not asked to indicate which sermons they listened to. Yet with 55 percent of participants missing at least one sermon in the series, it is plausible a scenario like this could have affected the participants' level of growth.

A second weakness was the six-week format of the sermon series. While this structure had its strengths (as discussed in the previous section), a downside was participants had to retain the initial sermons' teaching on missions from the Old Testament for many weeks before completing the post-survey. This meant the likelihood of

participants forgetting information was greater than if the sermon content has been compressed into a different format, such as a weekend seminar, or three weeks of Sunday morning and Sunday night sermons. While the six-week format was overall the best option for this project, I recognize the potential shortfalls of such a structure.

What I Would Do Differently

After completing the project and having time to reflect on the overall process, there are two things I would do differently were I to start this project over again. First, I would be intentional to create some sort of feedback loop with participants to better gauge the effectiveness of the sermons. While I am pleased that every person showed at least some level of growth on the post-survey, knowing what participants were thinking during the project would have enabled me to make any necessary changes to possibly facilitate more growth in knowledge. Most CBCM members are reserved and do not give regular feedback on my sermons—especially if it is negative—therefore, I wish I would have initiated more conversations with congregants during the sermon series.

Second, I would have begun this project earlier so as not to conflict with the academic calendar of those in school or those who have children in school. CBCM members place a high priority on education and preparation for exams, therefore church attendance noticeably declines toward the end of the fall and spring semesters as the school year gets busier. This is true for both students in the youth group and college, as well as parents of those in the youth group. Since this ministry project did not begin until late September, as the sermon series progressed, overall worship service attendance declined. This might help explain why over half of all participants missed listening to at least one sermon. For these reasons, it would have been ideal to begin this project earlier in the school year before other activities or commitments began encroaching upon church members' time.

Theological Reflections

Several times throughout this project I was reminded of the fact God created different ethnicities who in turn have different cultures, languages, and ways of viewing the world, yet also how God desires people from each of these different groups to know and worship him. Similarly, the importance of and urgency to reach different kinds of people with the gospel and the need for these individuals to believe in Jesus and be involved in a local church has also been paramount in my mind. Contemplating these things over the course of this project has given me a deeper love for missions and cross-cultural ministry, and a renewed passion to see all Christians—including myself—engage in God’s mission to reach the nations.

Additionally, as I was writing the sermons for this project—especially sermon 3 on Matthew 28—I was reminded afresh of how God’s mission should be the church’s mission as well. Indeed, the Great Commission deserves much of the attention it receives, and it should be a regular focus in churches. If God desires all peoples to know and worship him, and if this has been God’s desire from the beginning, and if God’s mission is accomplished through his people taking the gospel to all nations, then missions is not just another commendable ministry of the church—it should be a primary focus of the church as missions is one of the church’s reasons for existence. Rather than viewing a church’s missions efforts as competing with other activities, such as age-graded ministries or music ministries, the need to keep God’s mission on congregants’ minds is important as it is the mission and mandate of the church.

Personal Reflections

As a result of this project there are several ways I have grown and am better equipped to minister to those in the church, but two developments are especially noteworthy. Researching the material for chapter 3 was particularly insightful and greatly helped me understand some of the complexities of cross-cultural ministry. Specifically, I came to a better realization of just how much the first generation’s culture influences the

second and third generation in an immigrant church. One mistake I made in my first few years of ministering at CBCM was to assume anyone in the English ministry who was born in the United States views himself or herself as American and is primarily (if not exclusively) influenced by Western culture. Besides attending a Chinese church on Sunday, I assumed other aspects of their lives were essentially like mine: consuming Western media and entertainment, attending school or going to work in organizations influenced by Western thought and culture, etc. I had no understanding then of bicultural issues and could not understand why someone born in this country would not want to fully embrace Western ideals. Fortunately, I have moved beyond this stage—due in large part to the resources I encountered while writing chapter 3. While the issues facing immigrant churches are immense and often much more difficult to work through than issues in monolingual Caucasian churches, I feel significantly more prepared to tackle these issues and feel hopeful there is a way forward for those in the immigrant church.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, although this project was designed to help members of CBCM's English ministry better understand how God's mission to reach the nations is all throughout the Bible, this project also helped me better formulate and explain this concept. While throughout this doctoral program I have engaged with many of the ideas and Bible passages I ended up preaching during this project, writing the sermon series forced me to organize my thoughts on God's mission in a way I had not previously done so. I preach all my sermons from a word-for-word manuscript, meaning I had to invest much time and energy to be able to coherently articulate God's mission throughout the Bible. Yet this was an invaluable experience for me as it made me wrestle with the Bible, my convictions about missions, and find a way to clearly and succinctly define God's mission and the biblical basis for it.

Conclusion

I am very pleased with this ministry project as it succeeded in its purpose of helping members of the English ministry at Chinese Baptist Church of Miami develop an

understanding that God's mission to reach the nations is all throughout the Bible. Each of the three project goals were achieved, and growth occurred in each participant. As a result, I trust the Lord will continue to work in the lives of those at CBCM so that the knowledge gained during this project will be used in reaching the nations. A firm grasp of God's mission throughout the Bible to bring the blessing of salvation to all peoples has changed my perspective on missions and what the church's focus should be, it has changed the perspective of several members of CBCM's English ministry, and there could be an amazing work of God just on the horizon if more of God's people were to understand God's mission and commit to participating in bringing this worldwide redemptive mission to fruition.

APPENDIX 1

MISSIONS KNOWLEDGE ASSESSMENT SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess your current level of missions knowledge. This research is being conducted by Russell Williams for the purposes of collecting data for a doctoral research project. In this research, you will provide answers to the following questions pertaining to your understanding of missions throughout the Bible. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Background Questions:

1. What is your name? _____
2. What is your primary language spoken?
English ____ Cantonese ____ Mandarin ____ Spanish ____
3. What is your race/ethnicity? (Please choose only one)
Non-Hispanic White ____ Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin ____
Black/African American ____ Asian ____ American Indian/Alaska Native ____
Two or more races ____ Some other race ____
4. What is your country of origin? _____
5. What is your gender? Male ____ Female ____
6. What is your age? 18-24 years old ____ 25-34 years old ____
35-44 years old ____ 45-54 years old ____ 55-64 years old ____
65-74 years old ____ 75 years or older ____
7. How long have you lived in the United States? (Please round to the nearest year)

8. How long have you attended Chinese Baptist Church of Miami? (Please round to the nearest year) _____
9. How many sermons in this series did you listen to?
0 ____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5 ____ 6 ____

Directions: Respond to the statements by circling your agreement or disagreement, using the following scale:

SD = strongly disagree

D = disagree

DS = disagree somewhat

AS = agree somewhat

A = agree

SA = strongly agree

1. I can explain the purpose and basis of missions/reaching the nations.
SD D DS AS A SA
2. I can name three Bible passages that show God's love for the nations.
SD D DS AS A SA
3. The concept of missions was a new development that began with the Great Commission and was implemented by the early church in the book of Acts.
SD D DS AS A SA
4. In the Old Testament salvation was only for the Israelites and they had no thought about it being available to those of other nations.
SD D DS AS A SA
5. In the Old Testament God only promised the blessings of salvation to the Israelites and not to people of other nations.
SD D DS AS A SA
6. As long as people practice some religion it is not necessary to cross cultures or other boundaries to reach them with the gospel.
SD D DS AS A SA
7. Missions is a noteworthy cause for a church to participate in, but it is not an essential function of the church.
SD D DS AS A SA
8. God's plan and desire from the beginning was for people of every nation to have a relationship with Him.
SD D DS AS A SA
9. Even if the opportunity readily exists to minister to those of other ethnicities, cultures, or languages, it is acceptable for Christians to only focus on ministering to those within their own ethnicity, culture, or language.
SD D DS AS A SA
10. Generally speaking, missionaries and those engaged in cross-cultural ministry do more harm than good to the culture they enter.
SD D DS AS A SA
11. Time and effort spent on learning about a different culture's characteristics and language in order to participate in missions would be better spent ministering to those of one's own culture.
SD D DS AS A SA

12. Even though God desires people from every nation to believe the gospel, He is partial to some groups/nations.
SD D DS AS A SA
13. Advocating for missions or financially supporting missions takes away resources from other more important ministries within the church.
SD D DS AS A SA
14. The missionary task has largely been completed, therefore churches should focus on other endeavors.
SD D DS AS A SA
15. Specialized or formal cultural and theological training is necessary before engaging those of another culture with the gospel.
SD D DS AS A SA
16. When God chose the Israelites, He did so at the expense of those from other nations.
SD D DS AS A SA
17. The difficulties and rejection the early church experienced while taking the gospel to the nations is indicative of God's disapproval of the church's work.
SD D DS AS A SA
18. Ethnic, cultural, and linguistic barriers are too great to overcome and will continue to prevent Christians of differing backgrounds from achieving true unity.
SD D DS AS A SA

APPENDIX 2

SERMON EVALUATION RUBRIC

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Missions Sermon Series Evaluation Tool					
1=insufficient 2=requires attention 3=sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Each sermon is theologically sound.					
Each sermon is faithful to the Bible's teaching on missions.					
Each sermon adequately covers the main idea of each passage.					
The sermon series thoroughly covers the biblical basis of missions.					
The big idea of each sermon is clear and concise.					
The main points of each sermon are clearly identifiable from the sermon passage.					
Each sermon contains practical application points.					
Overall, the sermon series will equip people to see that God's love for the nations is all throughout the Bible.					

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING THE ENGLISH MINISTRY AT CHINESE BAPTIST CHURCH OF MIAMI, FLORIDA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
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Immigrant churches are uniquely equipped to play a part in making disciples of all nations by ministering to people that other churches are not able to reach due to linguistic or cultural barriers. Yet immigrant churches must also be intentional to reach beyond those of their own ethnicity. This ministry project sought for members of the English ministry at Chinese Baptist Church of Miami to develop an understanding that God's mission to reach the nations is all throughout the Bible and to help them to realize every Christian is expected to participate in this mission. Various aspects of Chinese culture and practices with Chinese churches which prevent a congregation from having a missions-minded outlook are examined with the goal of helping church members grow in their knowledge of and commitment to God's mission.

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