

The China Connection

4/3/16

I feel it's important (for all who are using, or considering to use my three-year discipleship study-system), to read this exciting and encouraging report from China.

Here's the back story, first, on how the Lord brought this all about.

One summer, in Allentown, Pennsylvania, I had been invited to teach a workshop on discipleship. It was a week-long conference for Chinese Christians. In my class was a nineteen-year-old young man named, Samuel. I took him and two others (who spoke English) through my first discipleship [and supplemental books] each day. Samuel enjoyed it so much he told his mother, Maia, about it. I had actually passed her in the corridor once during that week and felt the Lord impress upon me that she would become a spiritual daughter that I would mentor and disciple. Maia was one of the main speakers at the general sessions of this conference and was there because she had become a successful fashion designer. At that time, she had written seven published books about fashion [two more since then], and she owned a company that made and sold her product line of clothes.

After Maia was saved [and later started her own company], she had won her employees to the Lord and felt responsible to create a Saturday evening service to help them grow in Christ. She didn't feel trained or equipped enough to shepherd them, only to encourage them in their faith and share what she best knew and discerned in the Lord. To help her do this, she searched for a local pastor to train and teach her, but to no avail.

At the end of the week, when the conference was over, Samuel wanted me and his mother to spend the afternoon of the last day together. It was then that I learned through our translator about her situation. She asked many questions about the Lord, His Word, and pastoring a flock, and after two to three hours of this, she asked me to become her mentor and spiritual father—i.e. to serve as an apostle to her and her church. I felt then that the Lord gave me this assignment, because I had received a prophecy from a prophet two years earlier about this very thing. The prophecy said that I would become a "father to China." So through the wonderful technology of Skype I have since discipled Maia on an average "weekly" basis now for over three years. The Lord provided us with an interpreter/translator for the first two years, and now [Abbey] who has translated [into Chinese] all my discipleship books, leadership blogs, materials and any other studies I have given to Maia that comes up in our weekly discussions.

Last year [March 2015], I went to China to teach relational/business principles to Maia's company staff during the day, and Biblical truths to her church at night. It was a jam-packed schedule, but they couldn't get enough and about wore me out. Ha! A good problem to have for a teacher. At the end of my visit we had a large baptismal service [Maia and her husband, Abraham, did the baptizing, and I prayed over the ones who were baptized]. For my role in their life as a spiritual father/mentor and to serve them as an apostle, I provide guidance for infra-structure and training through my discipleship program to raise up a healthy local church body. I do not dictate anything, but provide the ideas/concepts of church life and structure that are shown in the early church of the Bible. In the course of this process they've chosen to use the method of discipleship after the pattern Jesus used with his twelve.

In January this year, Maia launched a series of teachings on discipleship, and then invited all the members of her church family to consider joining a group of three to four others with a facilitator she would provide to serve them through the experience. She had selected 24 facilitators, which included herself, her husband, Abraham, her father, Matthew, and her son, Samuel [each leading their own group] to be an example to the others they had asked to lead.

This is what Maia decided to do. She asked me to draw up a “covenant” document for each participant in a discipleship group to sign. This would be used as a public demonstration in a church service of their commitment to finish the first book and attend each week faithfully. I’ve attached this “covenant” document for you to see. Next, she encouraged each group to come up with a name that gave their group a unique identity, similar to the idea of the identifying symbols/names or banners of the tribes of Israel. She then decided to devote a whole service, once a month. They would start early in the afternoon with communion, followed by a “love” feast of food. After the meal was over, they would start the service with a song and then have each group share their report of what God had done in their experience with God [and each other] through the discipleship studies.

Maia encourages the facilitators to email her each week with any questions or challenges they might have from their groups. She then answers those questions after she presents them to me for accuracy.

I also, provide Maia with a weekly leadership blog she makes available on WeChat to all the participating members within each group. It isn’t required reading, but there for their personal use to have for additional training and equipping them into a healthy leadership style with people skills. It also helps them become more effective leaders in their homes, the marketplace, and in the church. All disciples, devoted to the Lord, will eventually become leaders wherever God assigns them in life. So it’s important they’re taught humility and servant-leadership qualities to avoid pride and arrogance from their acquired knowledge, as well as to deter them from becoming little “lords” over others. I believe it’s important that all members in a group are seen as “potential” leaders, growing in their skills and style as a healthy, gracious leader. There are to be no “rock star” leaders being held up on a pedestal in these groups. It is to be made up only of members who are learning to be humble, servant-hearted disciples. They become leaders with this mindset: “I’m merely one beggar, showing another beggar, where the food is.” Therefore, the focus in these groups is not on “a leader,” but upon Jesus, our Lord and Chief Shepherd. Through this system, all are on a foundational journey of becoming lifelong, disciplined learners, who want only to see Jesus, and live as he lived before God and each other.

So here’s the first report of the first testimonial service from our faithful interpreter/translator, Abbey. This is what each group shared since “Beracah” church launched their first discipleship groups a month ago, this year—2016.

Dear Papa (Jay),

Yesterday evening’s gathering was glorious beyond description. We first had communion together, then the love feast, and, lastly, the testimonial sharing about the first four to five weeks of their discipleship group experience. For the love feast, each group made their own special dishes with much love, and every dish had its own special name. Each name represented either a special prayer to the Lord, or a symbol of resolution to follow Him to the end. A few samples of the names of each dish were:

- *Full of Strength* (for stewed beef)
- *Wells Spring Up* (coconut milk)
- *Meeting Salvation* (steak with taro)
- *Taste of Lord’s Favor* (osmanthus & sweet potato syrup)
- *The Fire of Thorn* (braised spicy diced rabbit)
- *Never Give Up* (dried wild bamboo shoot)
- *Fellowship* (fungus & stir-fried chicken with mushrooms)
- *Anointment from a Loving Heart* (sticky rice with Chinese date)

- *Wise Teachings* (sesame and walnut)
- *Inseparable* (chopped green onion with eggs)
- *Bread of Life* (corn bread)
- *Desert Manna* (fried dumplings with egg Jiao)
- *Last Resort* (sausage gravy)

Because there were so many discipleship groups, their sharing time was limited to five minutes per group. I think five minutes for each group was too short, because they had so many good testimonies to share, and were always running out of time and had to stop. Maia is planning to start earlier next time.

Here are their testimonies and the name of each group they had picked for themselves:

Power of Seed—wrote a poem for the Lord and shared that if it was not for this discipleship study, their spiritual life would not have begun to grow so rapidly. They didn't see this study as an assignment, but of sheer enjoyment. And they felt everything else came about smoothly because God was their partner in it. There was one member whose birthday was actually on the day she got baptized. One shared that every day she would spend more than 1 hour on the disciple-study assignment. The more she endeavored on the study, the more she became thirsty for it. Another one shared that she felt everything became so easy to handle when God was partnering and working with her. She had been sharing the gospel to her subordinates for two years without any response. However, since she began this discipleship study, she shared with them again and two of her subordinates were moved to tears when they were in her car (separately, and at different times). One of them even dreamed of Jesus. This member also shared that her daughter asked her what the difference was between God and Mom. She answered: "God sees everything as good in you, but Mom doesn't." And her daughter said: "No wonder I found myself loving God more than I love you."

Blessed—had two members in the group join their discipleship study group as soon as they were baptized. So they felt extremely blessed. And they felt Papa [Jay] knew them so thoroughly that they didn't even need to worry about not finishing the assignment in time, since what Papa wrote in Lesson 5 released their anxiety.

Rock—Fiona, their facilitator, shared the reason they named themselves "Rock" was because God put this name in her heart after her prayer, and also because Papa [Jay] mentioned that we were all bricks [living stones] in a church body. The other members shared that since they began this discipleship study, they fell in love with reading, and their reading now came with a clear direction and goal. They said they were so grateful whenever they opened the book, since this was a book written with Papa's life (as they shared there were grateful tears). They also shared they had adjusted their lifestyle to forsake more useless habits and become more organized with a sense of mission. Every time they met, they all came with so many things highlighted in their books.

Salt and Light—A brothers' team, said they enjoyed from their group, the living in harmony they were experiencing together as brothers. They watched and prayed for each other, and didn't keep anything from each other. One of the brothers [Peter] sang the song: "*A Grateful Heart*," and the whole congregation joined in to sing. One brother shared that the biggest gain for him in this discipleship study was that he was able to share more about himself and, whenever he met difficulties, he had two brothers in the group who could pray for him. He believed salt was something inside our inner self, and if we live it out, it became light to others. They also said that every time they studied and shared together, they felt so warm and encouraged by each other that their anxiety to share disappeared.

A Small Family Devoted to the Lord—shared that every disciple-study gathering was like when they were going out for a date. And since they began to get right with God, their relationship with everyone else just got smoother. They said when they were alone doing their assignments, they would not spend as much time meditating and chewing over the Word. But when they all got together, things became different and the difficulty of spending more time was resolved. They became like a family, accompanying each other to grow up together.

Streams—The facilitator is Daniel, and one who always liked to ask Maia hard questions. He admitted that he was a little proud and arrogant when they first started because he came to the Lord earlier than the other brothers in this group. But this discipleship study enabled him to find that everyone had their uniqueness and they could complement each other. They also shared that when the four of them studied and shared their thoughts together, the gains were four times more than when, from past experiences in a small group study, there was only one person sharing. The more they all shared with each other, the more highlights jumped out from their readings.

Thirst for Stream Water—This is a group combined with two younger sisters and two elder sisters. The elder sisters were surprised to find out that they could get so much wisdom and enlightenment from the two younger sisters. One member shared that for more than two decades she had been desiring to attend a university study, and now she believes she is in the best university in this study-system. The other member shared that this study-style made them step forward from being a nominal Christian to a disciple. Now they weren't like they were before, they have begun to carefully and [really] read the Bible with their hearts.

Highlight—They shared that they were treating every assignment seriously. One of their members had been sick for over one month during the discipleship study, but every time they met, she would leave the hospital to attend and, after the study, go back to the hospital. They were all feeling like students again and couldn't stop doing *all* the assignments.

Walking Together—Their name came from Ruth 1:19. Two of the group members received this verse at the same time, and three of the members had visited the land of Bethlehem before. They concluded their sharing with the letters “l-o-v-e,” which also represented that they must love the Lord and love each other. This is how they defined each letter:

L—means this discipleship study enabled them to focus completely upon the Lord. They thanked God for giving Papa [Jay] to them.

O—means this study helped them to overcome all kinds of difficulties they met in life.

V—means victory, we need to live a victorious life.

E—means this study helped them to establish a lifestyle of an eternal plan which is to be His disciple.

Their facilitator, Maria, shared she felt like she was in “hot,” zealous love with the Lord and her three group members.

Cedar—They shared that through this discipleship study, they established an intimate relationship with the Lord. One member shared that Papa [Jay] was very practical and down-to-earth. The teachings were for us to practice truth in our life. This study was a sheer blessing to them, not an assignment. They were so grateful for this book, since it was condensed from Papa's whole life. They also wrote a poem about it. One shared that now she felt like every day was a brand new day to her.

A Securely-Kept Heart—Abraham [Maia’s husband] is the facilitator and shared that a securely-kept heart was what was precious to the Lord. He said, through this study, he got to really know the other member’s lives. He felt this study was alive and it made him feel like he was walking towards God’s temple.

The “Aha” Group—They shared this study-system had brought more hope to them. They all shared the same goal and direction, caring for each other and wanting to continue to grow in this journey together.

Plum Blossom—Maia’s father [Matthew] facilitates this group. Three sisters in this group were baptized in the same day. Their group’s name was from the ancient Chinese culture of “Plum blossoms, orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum.” One sister shared that since she had joined this discipleship study, she found her whole family was greatly blessed and the kids and grandchildren were so obedient and her grandson even said: “All we have now is from God.” Maia’s father shared that coincidences happen everywhere, but never like what so miraculously happened in Beracah [the name of their church, which means “Blessed”]. Before Beracah started this discipleship study, God had sent several of His servants to come inform them about this. He felt that God was now going to greatly bless Beracah Church, and he praised Papa’s humility to want to be a fly on Beracah’s wall to watch this develop in their church. The other elder sister in their group shared that this study increased her desire for the Lord. The second sister shared that she began to understand there were priorities for different things.

Glorious Bride—They shared that one person’s abundant life was limited, so we indeed need this kind of study to gain more truths through different individuals. One member shared that through this study, she was sharing the gospel with others, even in her night dreams.

Lamb—The facilitator shared that she felt this saying was so true—“The last will be first, and the first will be last.” She said this discipleship study was a wonderful opportunity from the Lord, so working hard on it was what we should do. Three of the members joined this study the same week they got baptized. Their kids were all under three years old. Though they had never read the Bible before, and were busy with family chores, they had so much thirst for the Lord that they were willing to spend more time to read it. The joy and delight was from their deepest heart.

Delight—This group set the meeting place in Shenzhen University, since one of their group members was a student there. She shared that since she joined this study, she found herself more highly effective in everything else. She was running after a college class to attend the sharing meeting for discipleship, and then running toward another college class after the meeting finished. They shared that they had this delight ever since they heard about the discipleship study and they witnessed how the new believer’s growth accelerated. One member shared that she was looking for a method for her growth and it came through Papa’s discipleship group study. It gave her revelation and help.

Grace Spring—They chose their group name from Jeremiah 2:13 as well as Psalm 32:8. They felt that God was watching everything they were doing. It was like the Holy Spirit set His eyes upon them. They shared that through this discipleship study, they learned that *we* must initiate to search for the Lord and have a passionate thirst for Him. The discipleship study also taught them the importance of their relationship to each other.

Four Living Beings—Samuel [Maia’s son, who took my class in Allentown] is the facilitator and was very humorous. He said every group was trying their best to condense their sharing that night into five minutes, while in his group they were worried they couldn’t make up enough words to

say for five minutes. All of the four members in his group were introverted brothers, so they didn't have much to say, but they could feel their growth in each week's lessons. He joked that maybe after they complete the three years' study, all the words they spoke could become a long sermon. Samuel shared that all of them gained much understanding in this study, and that they must emphasize their relationship with family members, with friends and unbelievers.

The Taste of the Lord's Grace—This name came from Psalm 34:8. They shared that this discipleship material contained strong spiritual logic with layering effects. It helped them to have a clearer knowledge of sin, but also getting the taste of reborn joy in their walk with God, and they gained a lot from each other. They ended with their five minutes with a prayer of thanksgiving to God for giving them this special gift of discipleship group study.

Olive Leaf—One member shared that she chose this name because, when she visited Jerusalem, she saw the olive tree and found the backside of its leaves were silver. Each leaf was like a beam of light which gave out hope. She liked Papa's mention of our relationship with the Bible needs to look more like our relationship with our cell phones. And she shared that we should have the heart to bear fruit for the Lord and to help each other. They shared that through their discipleship studies, they learned how to establish their spiritual library, and how to share the gospel in the Lord's way. All the four members in this group had similar personalities, yet they learned so much uniquely from each other.

His Beloved—They shared that they were very grateful for this method/system and felt they must be completely devoted to the Lord. This study enabled them to know more about God and the deep meaning of His Word. They gained more wisdom and, therefore, became more obedient. They also shared that the facilitator must strive to be more responsible, humble, and devoted to the Lord.

Lydia—One member shared that God's Word became her knee-jerk reaction. That is, she was hypercritical before entering this study and went for perfection. But now she has learned to be more tolerable and accept others where they are in their journey with God. Their group also learned to establish priorities in their lives and to fight off the old-self.

Amazing Grace—This group is led by Maia. Two members in her group were baptized last March 28, 2015 when Papa [Jay] was here. Maia shared that she was being fed by many wise words brought out by the members in her group. Everyone is special with his or her unique gift. One of them shared that she was so grateful for this study. She felt every sentence in Papa's book was important and she couldn't find any single main theme because she actually cherished every word Papa [Jay] wrote, and she couldn't lay down the book, once she began to read it. Also, her relationship with her husband was greatly enhanced as a result of her learning. One shared that she didn't really know herself before, when she didn't know God, but now she is learning who she is in God. The other member shared that this study could be called the starting point of her new spiritual life. Maia concluded their turn with two points: 1) *Water seeks its own level*. The more a person acknowledged their weakness and poor spiritual foundation, the more highlights and anointing they would receive in their studies. 2) *Unity of knowledge and practice*. She felt so grateful to see a repented life that sought for right relationship with God and each other, after they learned their wrong. God will use and add more to it, as long as we maintain a thirsty heart.

Love,

Abbey