

Report: ISI Chinese Returnee Discipleship Event in Asia February 13-17, 2019

When was the last time God answered every prayer for an event or group gathering—when there were more than two dozen requests related to the event? A wedding, a family reunion, a business meeting? There were between 300-500 people praying for the ISI Chinese Returnee Discipleship Event... **AND GOD ANSWERED HUNDREDS OF REQUESTS, “YES”!**

Eighteen former students who studied in the U.S or England met with six ISI staff and Ministry Representatives, plus two local missionaries, from Wednesday evening through Sunday afternoon. The event theme was “Every Disciple a Multiplier.” There were presentations, small group discussions, Bible study, prayer, modeling skills, a trip to an ethnic church outside the city, and *FUN* together.

Presentations included Dr. Doug Shaw (ISI President) sharing about the way God has historically used international college students after their college days. That set the tone for the theme how God uses former students to advance His kingdom through their creativity.

Dr. Abel Lam taught several sessions on how to hear God speaking through His Word, ISI’s M28 discipleship efforts (which could develop into a discipleship movement of God), how to model-assist-watch-leave (MAWL) people you assist the Lord in discipling, how to share “Your Story-Their Story-God’s Story” in outreach, how to determine which people God wants you to invest significant time into, discipleship activities, and how to do this in the current climate of Christian persecution in China.

Dr. Sam Chan taught on the changing nature of evangelism and discipleship in China, what relational evangelism looks like now in China, how to pray prayers God answers in discipleship, and finally he issued a challenge to everyone to become disciple multipliers. The response to the challenge was unanimous! In addition, Sam translated more than five hours for Doug Shaw and Derrah Jackson spontaneously as they were speaking (as all of the conference was done in the former students’ heart-language of Mandarin). Most had studied in English speaking countries and were bilingual, so communication socially was not a problem for anyone.

Derrah Jackson (ISI’s Director of Research and Innovation) taught four sessions on “practical Christian living” using Chapters 5-8 of the Bible’s book of Romans as text. The emphases were accepting brokenness from God as His intention for us, knowing our identity in Christ to fight the lies from the world-flesh-devil we hear, extending forgiveness to ourselves and others when we/they act out of our flesh patterns learned in childhood, and setting our minds on the grace of God (and extending that grace to everyone we encounter).

Many of the participants had talked about their sense of aloneness as an educated bicultural Chinese professional who was a serious Christian. All of those present attended house churches (non-registered underground gatherings of believers) where there typically was not anyone like themselves. [The registered churches in China ALL have multiple video cameras for the government to record who attend by using facial recognition software. It is illegal for children under age 18 to attend church.] Note that all of the accompanying photos have faces blurred to avoid facial recognition.

Because of the sense of aloneness, one of the major goals of the conference was for those who attended to become friends with one another and to continue to share their lives upon returning home. In addition, they were challenged to help hold one another accountable to follow God's plan for their lives. To do that, there were small group discussions, many leisurely meals together, large group discussions, and **FUN!** The group all visited the night market together, toured the Old Town in the city with traditional structures characteristic of the culture, and most visited an ethnic church outside of town on Sunday.

On Sunday morning, most of the attendees loaded into vans and went to the ethnic church mentioned above. Colorfully dressed, the locals sang and danced in worship. Also, as part of the worship the former students sang "Amazing Grace" in Mandarin for the church. The pastor of the church had gone to the village ten years ago when there were no believers there and now one-third of the town were believers! This was seeing "every disciple a multiplier" in action! After the ethnic church service, the locals had roasted a pig for everyone to eat lunch together. In addition, the church was having a funeral for a member who died, and the former students were able to pray publicly for the family who was grieving. The Sunday outing was a wonderful demonstration of discipleship multiplication first-hand!

There were numerous one-on-one discussions (some bordering on counseling) with individuals. Almost everyone had issues they needed help with—fears, forgiveness, anxieties about career, personal and family relationships, and identity issues. As best we could, the conference leaders sought to be Jesus' encouragers to each of these future leaders. Many also had theological issues they had never felt free to ask anyone, and some wanted deeper discussions of issues raised in the presentations.

To a person, every attendee said they were blessed to be there. Below are some of the response cards turned in when we asked them to tell us about their take-aways from the conference.

I have received love, understanding, encouragement, joy, knowledge, motivation and strength. God has spoken to me several times during the training both through brothers and sisters, and during my prayers. The message is hopeful and joyful. I feel like I have found a strong family and supported by wonderful, experienced workers. This trip also left me with beautiful memories to share with my parents and other friends. Bless the Lord!

For these few days, God reminded me of my dream and vision. I was disappointed that God didn't lead me in the way I expected, but God strangely brought me to Thailand and let me know that He has something for me and hasn't forgotten about me. I will continue to lead the small group as I did in USA. I will keep loving and caring for people that God has brought into my life. I will not be afraid of what will my life be because it is all in His hands. He never forgets about me.

This is my first month back in China after 5 years in the US. It is really by God's grace and bigger plan that I met so many returnees here and now. I'm really encouraged to learn what's going on in many cities in China and how the gospel is spreading under the restrictions and persecution. My biggest take away from this conference is my identity in Christ as a saint instead of a sinner. Still growing and will always grow to glorify God and benefit others.

I thank Jesus Christ for saving my life, giving me the Holy Spirit, giving me a new life and joining his great commission of making disciples of all nations. Lord Jesus is my savior and hero. He also brought so many great pastors, spiritual leaders, spiritual mentors and bros and sis to me. I am so grateful for it. I am very excited to be a disciple and am making disciples with God. God have me a vision when I returned from the US to Shanghai in 2016. I saw so many tall buildings and God says, "I will raise up that many spiritual leaders in this city." This meeting truly helped me to open eyes and see God's work globally.

It is such a tremendous grace to attend this conference. I really thank you for your great love and care for the ministry work in China. The most enjoyable part for me is to see so many young international graduates share the same vision on discipleship. We shared and exchanged experience, thoughts, and encouraged each other. I cried when Dr. Shaw and Mrs. Susan prayed with us. I felt tremendous love of God for us, and I know God loves the other nations as well.

Although the world is dark, there are still many bright lights shining. God loves the world, and the world needs us. Every one of us can be a multiplier, we can influence others.

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- 1. MAWL is very useful. It's a good guideline for disciple training. I'll apply it when I return home.*
 - 2. Romans is the most difficult book for me to understand. In this camp, Derrah leads us to review part of the book. I benefit a lot from the big picture provided by him.*
 - 3. Return to God and the Holy Spirit, always, and do not depend on yourself, ever. All topics in the camp remind me of this. It's very important for me in the future, to keep this reminder in mind.*

I am so thankful for this opportunity to be able to come to Thailand and hear stories of other fellow returnees. It's both encouraging and comforting to know that I am not alone in my struggle. God shows his kindness through the leaders of this events. I am hoping to pass down his love and kindness towards others as I go home as well. I have learned I am capable to disciple a couple of people in my life. I would be excited to put M28 into practice and to see what God's purpose for me and the friends he put in my life.

What I love about the training in the last a few days is that it really helped me to re-commit myself to Lord's mission of discipling more Christ-followers. I re-focused my vision to the Great Commission and supplied me with practical tools to achieve the mission. Most of all, it allowed me to meet and get to know other brothers and sisters who have similar mission hearts, and the friendship we developed will be a great supporting system for all of us in reaching our goal – to share the Gospel with more and disciple them to become disciple-makers themselves. I'm very grateful for this learning opportunity and give thanks to the Lord for leading His people who made this training a reality. May the Lord bless them!

This conference reminded me:

- 1. I am Jesus' disciple who makes disciples, a multiplier.*
 - 2. God is so kind to share His love and grace to me.*
 - 3. Discipleship is life influencing life, to walk with them, to pass this passion on and on.*
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At this conference God met with me and challenged me to be bold for him and to trust him no matter how difficult my circumstances – even if it means suffering. I committed to be a disciple multiplier.

As one of the trainers, I am grateful to God and fellow-laborers in Christ because you enabled me to invest my time and the spiritual gifts that God gives me into these future leaders of Chinese churches.

[some of the responses were in Chinese script and have yet to be translated into English]

The participants were deeply touched when Dr. Doug Shaw and Susan prayed a blessing over the group as they were leaving. This was truly a unique event in terms of the Lord guiding every aspect. And He gets all the praise! Please pray with us about the Lord showing us when, where, and how to follow up.

Report written by Derrah Jackson February 21, 2019

A fun postscript:

On the first morning back in the U.S., the author received an email from one of the event participants. She was staying another week in Thailand and had met another Chinese woman also visiting there. The former international student led the new acquaintance to the Lord! It was the first person she had ever led to the Lord, and she was so excited. Below is the first text in what became a dialog:

Hello Derrah, I really want to share with you something great. God led me to meet a woman on Sunday evening. I introduced her to Jesus Christ as the Savior of her life, she was willing and follow my prayers to invite the Holy Spirit into her heart. We read the Bible together yesterday. She will return to China soon. We're in different cities, but we can still keep in touch online. I pray that the Lord will prepare a suitable church for her. I am amazed by what God is doing. Are you praying for me in the airplane? I also pray for you, hoping you have a good rest and continue to be a blessing for more people.

Using encrypted email services, I am able to continue to encourage and coach this former international student.