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D. Michael Crow

Learning and insights from a recent consultation for mentors and coaches are reported in this article. It delves into many aspects of mentoring, coaching, and spiritual formation including the value of both older mentors and peer mentors. It also provides helpful suggestions for finding a mentor and a mentee.

[Into the Deep: Reflections on Discipleship in China](#)

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Veronica Wong

The author shares from her experience as a mentor giving us glimpses of three different women she has shared her life with, and how her interactions with each of them have brought about changes in their lives. She closes with a summary of what being a mentor has required of her.

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Rose and Hunter

Rose and Hunter look at characteristics of churches and businesses that indicate their need for coaching and go on to explain what coaching entails. Rose describes how she has put coaching into practice in the ministries she is involved with at her church and acknowledges the blessings this has brought to the church body.

View from the Wall

[Five Profound Mentoring Needs in China](#)

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Eric Lee

Lee identifies five areas where Chinese leaders need mentoring due to a lack of positive influences in their lives. He examines each of these areas and shows how mentoring can fill the voids left by unfulfilling or nonexistent relationships.

Peoples of China

[Musings of a Mentee](#)

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Tracy

Mentor: "A good teacher and valuable friend." With this definition, the author shares how three mentors have made an impact in her life and testifies to the reality, omnipotence, compassion, and greatness of her Heavenly Father.

Book Reviews

[When the Well Runs Dry: Prayer beyond the Beginnings](#) by Thomas H. Green S.J.

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Tricia Bolle, reviewer

After many years of devoted prayer and Christian living, we sometimes find it difficult to feel God's presence. In our pursuit of a deeper prayer life, we often come up dry and wanting. Fr. Green provides an important understanding of prayer for many Christians who start to wonder why their prayers have begun to feel empty. Using the examples of some of the great mystics of the Christian tradition, he imparts to us some of their wisdom so we can better understand the journey of the interior life and the true call to faith in prayer that the Lord gives us.

Intercessory Notes

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Items that require your intercession.

Resource Corner

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Resources recommended by WWL participants as helpful in coaching, mentoring and spiritual formation.

Editorial

Mentors at Work: A Rare Glimpse behind the Scenes

By D. Michael Crow, Guest Editor

As Guest Editor, I am deeply moved by the articles in this edition of *ChinaSource Quarterly*. It is a rare opportunity to hear stories like these, usually heard only in private by coaches and mentors. These are the voices of experienced coaches and mentors—mainland Chinese, overseas Chinese, and non-Chinese, both male and female. Beyond providing glimpses into the cultural and gender dimensions of coaching and mentoring, their rich authenticity speaks to the heart.

We first heard some of these stories at the *Walking with Leaders Consultation: Coaching, Mentoring and Spiritual Formation* (Hong Kong, May 2014). From the very first session, we were surprised and touched by the vulnerability of the Chinese speakers. Their courageous openness helped us leap beyond the superficial into something special, precious, and unique.

These articles capture some of that atmosphere.

- My own article (“Coaching, Mentoring and Spiritual Formation”) shares some of these precious stories using graphics to illustrate the relationship between coaching, mentoring, and spiritual formation, and to reflect on vertical and horizontal mentoring. My favorite insight came from our Chinese colleagues explaining the rich nuances of 聽 (tīng), the traditional Chinese character for “listen,” the heart of effective coaching and mentoring.
- Veronica Wong (“Into the Deep: Reflections on Discipleship in China”) brings a refreshing female perspective as a Licensed Mental Health Counselor from the United States. She notes how the Chinese she serves recoil from traditional 指導-style mentoring (zhǐdǎo = to guide, direct, coach), a highly directive, top-down approach. Using a “peer-mentoring” approach, Veronica shares stories of three women she has helped: a hard-working “Christian” lacking assurance of salvation; a woman battling the debilitating effects of parental shame/discipline; and a victim of abuse, addiction, and violence, now being used by God.
- As Chinese colleagues, Rose and Hunter (“Coaching in China”) use nontraditional coaching to coach both church and business leaders. They say Chinese churches are often patriarchal and autocratic. Pastors struggle to fulfill an unrealistic “Redeemer Complex.” Meanwhile in business, younger employees from the digital Information Age are led by older managers with an Industrial Age command-and-control mentality. The result is profound dissatisfaction and high turnover. Rose and Hunter describe three powerful coaching techniques that are transforming both churches and businesses.
- In “Musings of a Mentee,” Tracy observes that there is no good word in Chinese for “mentor.” Reflecting on mentors in her own life, she thinks the best description is “good teacher and valuable friend.” Teachers are older and more experienced while friends are highly-valued peers at a similar stage in life. Coming from a Chinese-Muslim background, Tracy shares three touching stories of God using key mentors in her journey toward and with Christ.
- In “Five Profound Mentoring Needs in China,” Eric Lee offers a priceless wealth of insight into the needs of Chinese Christian leaders. Here, a true father in Christ shares his observations and deep concern for the many leaders in China who have never experienced godly, loving fathering. Yet these, who never knew a true shepherd, are trying to shepherd others. The cultural, pastoral, and biblical perspectives of this article alone are invaluable!

In addition, this issue of *ChinaSource Quarterly* includes a book review of *When the Well Runs Dry: Prayer beyond the Beginnings*, and the Resource Corner which contains a list of 25 recommended resources from the consultation participants. Enjoy!

Michael Crow and his wife Katie have served in Asia in various capacities since 1980. They have lived in Southeast Asia and East Asia for 19 years, working largely with Chinese people. In 2008, they started J-Mentors to mentor leaders through the life of Jesus in his first-century context in order to better know and serve him in our own contexts today. They have four adult sons (two are married) and one grand-daughter.



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Coaching, Mentoring and Spiritual Formation

By D. Michael Crow

Three Case Studies from China

Case Study 1: My ministry and marriage were ruined. I was isolated in unbearable agony. Then, God showed me that even if I lost everything, I still had Christ. Friends fasted with me for 12 days. As I confessed everything to them and to God, my guilt was broken. They helped restore my marriage and now God is using me to help others facing similar problems. Friends loved me in my sin, helping me fall in love with Jesus again. Without them, I would not be here.

Case Study 2: My mentally handicapped son cannot talk or even recognize a banana. He bites himself and me, his mother. Eventually I cried, “God, why did you give me such a tough job?” He showed me that I cannot save my son, but I can depend on him. He sent a sister to teach us some communication skills. Now I consider him my “silent coach.” I accept my imperfect son, just as God accepts us, his imperfect children. I am learning humility, realizing I need others to develop my son’s potential. I have no love apart from God; only when I am connected to Christ can I love my son the way God loves him. Now I am using those lessons to help others.

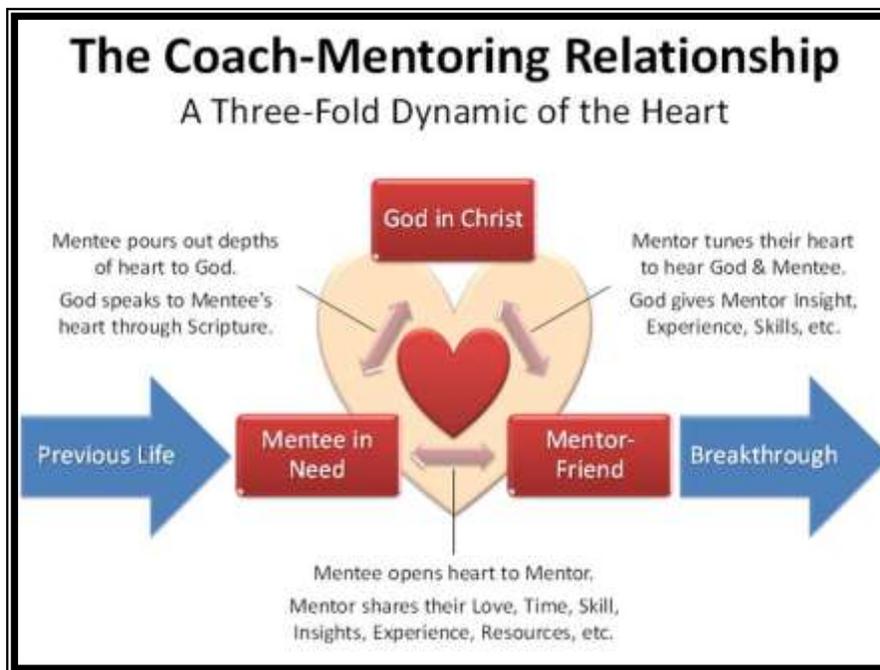
Case Study 3: I was struggling in deep darkness. Henri Nouwen’s writings were a walking stick when I could not walk. With many tears, I spent much time in prayer, journaling, and listening to God. Although I heard from God, I needed to talk with someone, so I called a friend. She was strong for me in my weakness. We prayed over many things. She helped me grasp the drama of God’s work in me. Her words touched me, not just intellectually, but deep inside.

What Do These Stories Share in Common?

A three-fold dynamic occurs in each story: (1) a person in need cries out to God; (2) Christ meets them by his Spirit; (3) God brings key mentors to provide care, skills, insight, and so on. The mentor is seen as a “friend.” Breakthroughs occur in the context of deep, heart-level communication.



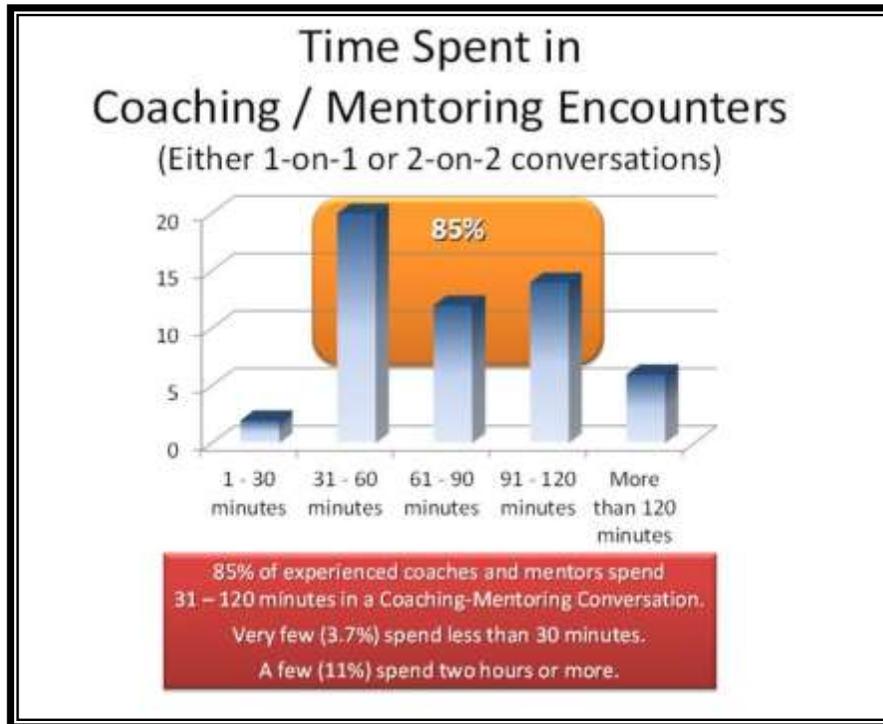
Thomas Hawk via Compfight cc



Walking with Leaders Consultation¹

Fifty-one Christian leaders gathered for the WWL consultation in Hong Kong to discuss coaching, mentoring and spiritual formation. Thirty-seven of these were men and 14 women (16 from China, 9 from Hong Kong, and 26 from other countries). Most (69%) served in cities while 31% served in rural areas.

In the previous twelve months, this small group of people had made a big impact coaching or mentoring hundreds of people from 27 of China’s 34 provinces,² including: business people, church network leaders, pastors, youth, trainers, and organizational leaders.



Spiritual Formation: Becoming like Christ

WWL’s theme was “Coaching, Mentoring and Spiritual Formation.”³ One WWL facilitator shared:

There are many definitions of coaching, mentoring and spiritual formation. WWL sees *coaching* as asking questions to draw out what God has put inside a person and *mentoring* as pouring into a person, walking with them and providing input.

Coaching is drawing out. Mentoring is pouring in.

Spiritual formation is the big picture of becoming like Christ—not watching passively from the outside but participating actively from the inside.

Becoming Christ-like resembles climbing a mountain. It takes a lifetime; it is an eternal journey. Some are halfway up the mountain; others are near the top or bottom. To help them, coaches and mentors ask questions like:

- When did you start your journey? Recently or long ago?
- Are you moving upward, downward, or circling the mountain?
- What are you approaching? A cliff or a meadow?
- Are you healthy or injured? Rested or tired?
- Are you stuck?
- What is your season of life? Personality type? Learning posture?
- How do you hear from God?

Spiritual formation climbs the mountain of Christ-likeness, actively responding to God’s love. God’s grace takes the initiative and pursues us, but we have a choice: to resist or embrace.

Coaching and mentoring are two tools in climbing the mountain of spiritual formation. They are not the only tools, but they are good tools. Mentoring pours in. Coaching draws out. Spiritual formation is the big picture in becoming like Christ.



The key to spiritual formation is contemplating Christ. As we contemplate Jesus in intimacy with the Father, the Holy Spirit gradually transforms us into greater Christ-likeness.

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Cor 3:18).

Mentoring: Pouring In

WWL participants were asked, "Which functions are most important in mentoring?"

Almost 44% felt that "sharing experience" was the most important function of mentoring. Others said, "Listening deeply to identify the needs of the mentee" lies at the core of effective mentoring. Only then can mentors "pour in" what is appropriate.



Mentors also perform other functions, such as: empathizing, suggesting resources, holding accountable, helping form strategic plans, or simply enjoying each other's friendship.

Qualities of a Good Mentor

Participants were asked, "What do you look for in a mentor?" They look for someone who:

- Walks with me, is safe, trustworthy, and accepts without judging. We like each other.

- Is “successful” as a spouse, parent, employer, employee, man or woman of God.
- Openly and honestly removes the “mask.” Deep relationship requires vulnerability.
- Is affirming, gentle and kind. Other mentors are firm and direct. We need both.
- Helps me know what to do; helps me know myself better.
- Is sensitive to the Holy Spirit and speaks into my life. Opens new doors.

Mentoring toward Calling

One participant’s many dreams tortured him—because they were only dreams. His mentor used *Focusing Leaders* (see [Recommended Resources](#) in the Resource Corner) to help him distinguish his dreams from God’s dream. This helped him relax and pursue God’s call.

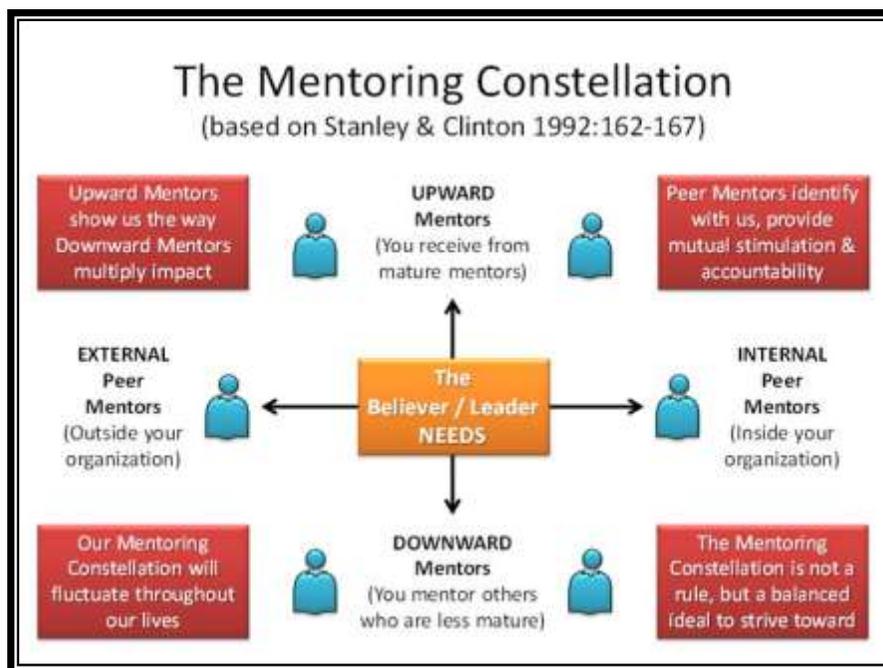
Another team of 40 people used *Focusing Leaders* to develop their Personal Calling Statements. They are much happier in ministry now, helping each other fulfill their callings.

Mentoring and Culture: Upward Mentors or Peer Mentors?

One Chinese participant asked, “Must mentors be older? Can friends act as mentors too?”

An experienced female mentor said friends can be excellent peer-mentors since they journey together with similar experiences; however, older mentors with more life experience provide a broader perspective. Both are needed.

The Chinese participant responded, “Traditionally, we respect older people with more authority; however, it is easier to share more deeply and honestly with a friend. It’s hard to find older mentors in the Chinese church. Besides, they may not know how to mentor well. It may be easier to find friends to act as peer-mentors.”



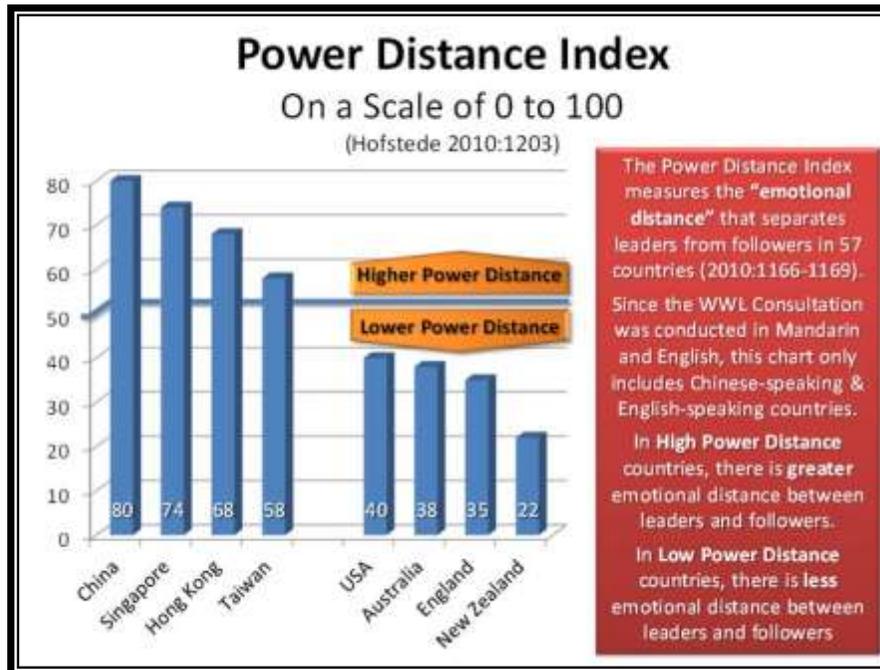
Stanley and Clinton recommend a “Mentoring Constellation” (*Connecting* 1992:157-168. See [Recommended Resources](#)).

The “Mentoring Constellation”—written by two male Westerners—does not emphasize deep-level honesty with peer-mentors (it is probably assumed, but not stated). However, this is precisely what Chinese participants highlighted as the primary benefit of peer mentoring. Heart-level sharing occurs more easily between peer mentors than with upward mentors.

Our three case studies make the same point. All three individuals needed “friends” (peer mentors) to communicate deeply enough to achieve genuine breakthroughs. This may suggest a cultural distinction between Western and Chinese mentoring dynamics related to status, age, authority, and power.

Hofstede’s groundbreaking research on culture in 57 countries defines power distance as the “emotional distance” between leaders and followers.⁴

Leaders in high-power-distance countries tend to be more authoritarian and less approachable. Leaders in low-power-distance countries tend to be less authoritarian and more approachable.



Hofstede’s research seems to confirm the observations of Chinese participants at WWL. If so, friendship style peer-mentoring in China may be more effective in certain situations than mentoring by leaders.

This does not mean that Chinese leaders should stop mentoring; however, leaders who encourage peer-mentoring among subordinates may actually help them more in some cases. This may also relieve the pressure busy leaders feel to provide more downward mentoring for subordinates.

Of course, different needs require different kinds of mentoring. The question is: Which kind of mentoring—horizontal or vertical—best fits the need? Clearly, the cultural (and gender) dimensions of vertical and horizontal mentoring require further research.

Coaching: Drawing Out

Coaching is an “intentional conversation that empowers a person or group to fully live out God’s calling.”⁵ Three of the most important coaching skills include:

Attentive Listening

Listening is a gift we give another person. Experienced Chinese coaches at WWL explained the traditional Chinese character for “listen.”

聽 tīng (listen)

The traditional Chinese character for “Listen” is 聽 tīng.
This character consists of six radicals...

耳 ěr (ear)	十 shí (ten)	一 yī (one)
王 wáng (king)	目 mù (eye)	心 xīn (heart)
Wrap your ear around the king	Focus on him with 10 humble eyes	Listen with one undivided heart

When we truly listen to someone, we treat them as a King or Queen.
A servant never interrupts the king, but wraps his ear around him,
attending every word & facial expression with “ten eyes & one heart”

True listening gives the other person
our full respect & undivided attention

Asking Powerful Questions

Powerful questions have three characteristics:

- **Coachee-centered:** “*Can you explain more about your family?*” helps the coach know the person; but “*How did your family affect you?*” helps the coachee reflect more deeply.
- **Solution-oriented:** “*Why did you do that?*” may cause the coachee to feel blamed; but “*How can I help you solve the problem?*” focuses on solutions, not problems.
- **Forward-looking:** “*How did this conflict happen?*” looks backward; but “*What is the best way to solve this conflict?*” looks toward the future.

Agreeing on Self-Directed Tasks

Coaching is conversation with a purpose. Coaches listen deeply, asking probing questions to help coachees achieve their own self-directed goals.

One Chinese couple asked us to help them improve their marriage—a self-directed goal. We suggested reading *His Needs, Her Needs* in Chinese. Two weeks later, the wife fairly danced into our home exclaiming, “He has changed so much! *Thank you!*” The husband too, was full of smiles.

Goals must be self-directed. If coaches assign goals, coachees take less responsibility. If coachees determine their own goals, they take more responsibility.

Goals must be task-oriented. Good tasks are clear and measurable with deadlines. Coaches should ask, “What action step will you take before we meet again?”

Finding a Mentor / Mentee

Coaches and mentors help us on the journey toward Christ-likeness. How do we find them?

Finding a Mentor

If you say, “*Will you be my mentor?*” people may feel intimidated or not have time. One Bible school teacher suggested saying: “*Pastor, I have a question. Could we chat over coffee?*” Most pastors are glad to help. Afterwards say, “*That was very helpful. Could we meet again in two weeks?*” This is mentoring without using the term.

A WWL participant had gone to that teacher saying, “*I have a problem. Could you help me?*” Later he said, “*Thank you so much! Could we meet again?*” Over the next few years, that teacher became his mentor!

Finding a Mentee

One WWL leader felt it was awkward to say to a younger man, “*Can I be your mentor?*” Instead, he said, “*Let’s have coffee!*” They met once a month. The leader’s goal was to help him succeed. Occasionally he said, “*You seem to be stuck here.*” Because the younger man was teachable, the leader could walk with him through transformation.

Coaching and mentoring are powerful tools, walking people up the mountain of spiritual formation toward Christ-likeness. The challenge of WWL is:

- Pour in!
- Draw out!
- Grow in Christ-likeness. Contemplate Christ!

¹Walking with Leaders (WWL) held in Hong Kong in May, 2014 was a bilingual, invitation-only consultation for experienced Christian coaches and mentors serving in China, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. WWL gave these uniquely qualified leaders an opportunity to compare notes and share learning. This article reports some of that learning.

²Figures include autonomous regions, municipalities, special administrative regions and provinces claimed by China. People mentored by WWL participants came from: Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Chongqing, Hebei, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Liaoning, Heilongjiang, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Fujian, Shandong, Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong, Sichuan, Yunnan, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, Guangxi Zhuang, Ningxia, Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan. Provinces not represented include: Jilin, Jiangxi, Henan, Hainan, Guizhou, Gansu and Tibet.

³The coaches and mentors of WWL were asked, “What are the top needs of leaders in China?” One of the primary needs mentioned was spiritual formation. Other needs included: Bible and theology knowledge, marriage and family issues, healthy relationships in community, coaching and mentoring, leadership and management skills, and a vision for missionary multiplication.

⁴(2010:1166-1169, see [Recommended Resources](#))

⁵Cf. The COACH Model for Christian Leaders, 2012: Kindle Locations 234-235. See [Recommended Resources](#).

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Into the Deep: Reflections on Discipleship in China

Veronica Wong

Those who serve their generation are like the sailors that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters. But it is these, not those who play in the shallows, who see the works of the Lord and the wonders in the deep. Is not that worthwhile? --Amy Carmichael in *His Father Said*

Since becoming a follower of Jesus, I have been graced with brothers and sisters who have walked alongside me at various times and in diverse capacities. I can still recall the anxiety I felt as a senior in college when I led a group of sophomore women in a Bible study. Since those days, discipling others in the faith has become a passionate way of life.

Recently, while reviewing an article, I raised my eyebrows at the discovery that the Chinese word for “mentoring” had been translated 指导.* I brought this to the attention of the group of ten sisters whom I have been discipling for almost two years and asked them what they thought of this word. Nan, a young believer, shook her head and crumpled her nose. “That reminds me of my uncle who’s a member of the CCP. He called me the other day and was telling me what to do to advance my career.” Susanna nodded her head in agreement and added, “Yes. This is usually a relationship in which a person with a higher rank gives instruction to a person of lower rank.” I was bemused and horrified at the same time. We unpacked the concepts of mentoring and discipleship together, looking at different Chinese words to express this relationship of mutual trust and walking together. I shared with them the fact that a mentor can learn from her mentees too. I also shared the term “peer mentoring” with them. Most of these concepts were new to them.

Some of Christ’s beloved daughters in China have given me the privilege of going “into the deep” with them.¹ The following stories are their stories of continuing spiritual formation. While many of the themes are universal, I have tried to highlight some themes that keep coming to my attention in China.

Sylvia: “Granted all things”

Sylvia greeted me cordially when I entered the apartment she shared with Priscilla, her best friend and a prominent leader in the Christian community. Priscilla had shared with me her worries about Sylvia, who had “served fervently” in the local church for many years after she made a decision to follow Jesus in her early 20s. Now that Sylvia was almost 40 years old and still single, she had expressed bitterness and despair to Priscilla and had stopped going to fellowship altogether. We invited her to the women’s life formation group that was starting up.

Sylvia came almost every week but was silent during most of the studies. Her pixie-face, framed by waves of black hair, attentively took in the words and behavior around her. I make an effort to meet with each sister individually and pray for them. When Sylvia and I had our first conversation, she shared with me how she had decided to follow Jesus after hearing the gospel; soon after she had been asked by the leaders of her house church to lead in various ways. She threw herself into church activities and was often up front leading musical worship. With startling insight, she admitted that she had not truly understood the way of the cross but had probably wanted something from God that she had not been given (i.e. marriage). She had not felt understood by other brothers and sisters in the community and had distanced herself, eventually avoiding fellowship altogether. She also doubted that she was even a believer anymore.

In the weeks and months that ensued, Sylvia continued to participate in the women’s group. Occasionally, I met with her individually. We unpacked the gospel together, bit by bit, verse by verse. Often, she would say, “I *know* all this already!” I would gently challenge her, “You know in your *head*, but do you know in your *heart*?” We talked about the movement between the head and the heart and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Eventually, after several invitations, Sylvia agreed to start going with me to a local church. She still refused to go back to her previous fellowship. Each week, we met outside her apartment complex and walked there together. She would sit through the service and leave, uninterested in small groups or Sunday school. We walked and talked—and prayed too. I asked her what she had been thankful for during the week, and we often talked about the morning message.

One Sunday afternoon, we opened to 2 Peter 1:3-10. In a moment of Spirit-given insight, Sylvia realized that there was a context to verse 5. Our efforts are couched within the fact that Christ has already “granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness.” This phenomenal assurance was something that had been overlooked in her life as a believer, resulting in a dependence on works and performance, which eventually led to exhaustion. Sylvia sat in silence, and while I led her in a prayer of confession and repentance, she cried. She cried out her need to Jesus and came one step closer to knowing the true meaning of the gospel.

Sylvia’s story is not uncommon. So many women (and men) that I have met do not have a clear understanding of what it means to follow Jesus and end up relying on outward performance until exhaustion and disillusionment set in. How often I have “preached the gospel” to believers here! Sylvia’s struggles with singleness, especially the shame and intense pressure from society and family, have been a unique cross for many Chinese sisters.



[Matteo Damiani, on Flickr](#)

Carmen: “No more shame”

Shaming is a culturally appropriate way to discipline children in China. Carmen grew up in an environment where her mother would make fun of her body weight and physical appearance, even calling her “ugly.” Carmen gave her life to Jesus in 2009, responding to Jesus’ amazing love and acceptance. He removed the guilt and shame of sin from her life, and she was literally born again. Carmen and I met weekly for basic follow-up studies on what it meant to be a newborn in Christ. Like a sponge, she eagerly soaked up the word of God. After almost a year of meeting individually, when the women’s group was set up, I invited Carmen to join.

In the challenges of relating to her parents as an adult, first as a single woman and then as a married one, Carmen realized that her growth as a believer resembled more of an upward spiral than a rocket launch. Since she and I also work together, there have been many opportunities to pour into her life professionally as well. One day, when I challenged her to take a new responsibility, her automatic response was an emphatic, “I can’t! (我不行!)” Later on, when I had an opportunity to ask her about her response, she shared that she struggled with a deep-seated fear of failure. If given a new challenge, she feared that she would not be able to successfully complete the task, thereby evoking disappointment from others. She began to realize that her fears were rooted in the parent-child relationship as well as in the culture. We prayed together and committed these fears to the Lord.

When Priscilla asked me to lead a small women’s group focused on life transformation, I refused to be called the “small group leader.” Instead, I shared with these sisters that I would mentor them as we each took turns leading the discussions. *Immediately*, there were exclamations echoing what Carmen had said: “No way! I can’t lead!” “I don’t know enough!” “I’m not trained!” Voices of protest paired up with fearful faces to confront me, and I was tempted to back down. I was also tempted to go down the alluring path of pride and ego-stroking as they looked to me to offer the “expert” first or last word during a study. By God’s grace, I avoided that path as much as possible. Culturally, the “expert mentality” has permeated every sector of society, including, sadly, the church. Mentors are rare, but those who want to form disciples of Christ, not disciples of themselves, are even more uncommon. Mentors who open up their lives and homes to young believers as a “school for discipleship” rather than relying on mass meetings or “trainings” are uncommon.

Beatrice: “All of me”

Beatrice is an accomplished teacher, wife, and mother. She has a sparkling personality and energetic persona that hide the scars of a past marred by abuse, suicide attempts, addictions, and violent conflicts at home. Since meeting Jesus, Beatrice’s life has been changed, and she is now in the process of discovering what it means to go deeper with Jesus. I marveled the first time I saw her lead a small group at her home. Miracles were evident in her home in the very fact that her husband (with whom she had almost gotten a divorce) and mother (with whom she had had so many conflicts in the past) were both present and participating in the study!

As she walked with me down the street and I guided my bike around potholes, we would debrief the evening, and I would start by encouraging her with all the positive areas that I had observed. She nodded, and then somewhat impatiently asked, “But what can I do better?”

Carmen and Beatrice, as well as so many of the women I meet, want to skip the positives and get to the “areas of improvement.” Carmen once said that she was not used to hearing praise and thought there was not much to learn from it. Beatrice had not realized that she was not even really listening to the positives—they seemed to just roll over her.

The more Beatrice starts to disciple others in their walk with the Lord, the more she realizes that she too is called to go deeper with Jesus. She is starting to recognize her fears of intimacy with Jesus, that she feels safer to be doing things *for* him, rather than just being *with* him. As we engage in the disciplines of solitude and silence, Beatrice (and Sylvia and Carmen too) are starting to understand that he wants all of us.

A Long Obedience

I love Eugene Peterson’s description of a life of following Jesus: a long obedience in the same direction. On this journey with Chinese sisters, I find myself leaning heavily on our master, who lived out true humility. More often than not, my attempts have been blundering ones rather than smooth “best practices.”

- In order to challenge the “expert mentality,” I pray for appropriate self-disclosure, sharing examples from my inner struggles. I also continue to refuse the spotlight as much as possible, choosing to take someone with me when I teach or mentor to teach them as well.
- In order to avoid individualism in the faith journey and decrease dependence on the foreigner, I try to bring each sister into relationships with others and meet with them together.
- In order to challenge the “I’m not good enough/able” mentality, I pepper these ladies with encouragement but also just sit with them as they cry. Together we come into his presence with feelings of inadequacy and shame, allowing him to speak and soothe.

Leading by example, inviting others into my home, and noticing how my behavior is observed in the workplace are all reminders for me that our very lives reveal much more than our words. Whether the journey of discipleship is likened to an arduous hike or a foray into great waters, may mentors who are willing to go into the deep with others continue to be called and enabled by the Lord of the harvest to see his great works and wonders in China and all over the world.

Continued on page 16

Coaching in China

By Rose and Hunter

Two years ago, when I (Rose) used the word “coach” in talking to my friend, she associated it with a famous brand of handbags. After seeing my business card, a human resource manager asked me what sport I coached. Further explanation is always needed when I talk about coaching.

Coaching is a foreign concept to the Chinese even though it is very important. One can even say that coaching, and the concept of coaching, has the potential to create transformational thinking and enhance leadership. It can provide an effective leadership model, and for the church, provide tools for discipleship and pastoral care.



[David A. LaSpina, on Flickr](#)

The Need for Coaching

In the Church

Chinese churches with their cultural background are deeply “patriarchal” and “autocratic”; one man has all the say in their governance. Pastors, elders and deacons are coworkers with a “redeemer complex.” If the congregation encounters a difficulty, the pastor and his coworkers are obligated to resolve the difficulty or take over the responsibility for dealing with it. This results in members of the congregation not having the opportunity to express themselves or being hurt by preaching that is meant to correct the problem. The pastor also feels wronged either for not receiving the expected appreciation or for being condemned as incompetent when the problem does not get resolved.

In Business

According to the Chinese Human Resource Survey¹ of companies in China, presently only 24 percent of employees are satisfied with the quality of managers/leaders in their companies while 76 percent are either dissatisfied or neutral.

There are three main obstacles that Chinese business leaders face. First is a need for communication. Employees expect to communicate with their superiors and receive feedback. Second is a need for growth. Employees expect opportunities for professional growth and development. The final problem resides in managers/leaders not meeting staff’s expectations.

The result of these obstacles is high staff turnover. In the software development company I have been following, out of 20 employees only eight remained from May of last year to June of this year. The other 12 have since “quit.” From tracking these technical staff (all born after 1989), the reasons they quit their jobs were ascertained and are summarized below.

Lack of a sense of belonging; not being recognized. The generation born after 1989 lives in a high-speed information age. They possess extensive knowledge and are exposed to many messages, facts, and much data. While they like innovation and quick thinking, they also desire recognition and appreciation. At the same time, they are vulnerable, shallow and cannot handle pressure well. They lack patience and focus. All of the 12 employees who left the company were well educated. They had their own ideas, views and unique creativity; they wanted to be listened to and recognized by their director and superiors. However, the corporate management was still operating in an industrial age management framework with their subordinates subject to their control and requirements. Under this management style, the employees did not feel they were taken seriously or valued. They felt that their director was autocratic and opinionated. Furthermore, they said that how they felt at work was important to them. Since the director used commands, lecturing and control in giving them feedback, they could not effectively communicate their thoughts or innovative ideas and were unable to voice their reasonable demands. They felt ignored when they could not get a timely response or feedback. This, together with their lack of fortitude and ineffective communication skills, led to their choice of resigning.

Lack of career planning. Among those employees who left, some could not see any career development in their future at that company. The director and their superiors did not spend time helping them effectively mesh their personal career goals with the company’s vision. They did not develop a win-win situation for both the company’s vision and the employee’s personal objectives, nor did they help the employees set growth objectives. They did not give authorization for training or provide them with increased responsibilities. The company also lacked initiatives for fostering the development of their creativity and potential through material incentives and verbal encouragement.

A sense of unfair pay, both internally and externally. Internally, they felt the pay scale between the technical resource and development staff and the administrative staff was unfair. The technical employees believed their pay should be higher than that of the administrative workers. Externally, they felt that they received lower pay compared to their counterparts and classmates in other companies in the industry or to the previous workers at the same company.

Coaching has the potential for dealing with these leadership issues both in the church and in the business world.

The Strength of Coaching

Coaching is an ongoing, intentional conversation that empowers a person or group to fully live out God’s calling and develop their

potential. This concept with its techniques² is the answer to resolving the obstacles that are hindering Chinese churches and companies. For the church it has the added dimension that Christian coaches believe, “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Peter 1:3). Every Christian is endowed with potential and unique qualities for life growth. Through coaching, with its appropriate techniques, the work of the Holy Spirit in one’s life is explored and one’s wisdom is mined to aid the individual in fulfilling God’s purpose for him or her.

Coaching focuses on thought processes and actions. It strives to stimulate thinking and concrete actions and avoids the shortcoming of preaching and slogans. The core of coaching is to nurture observation and a sense of responsibility. Thus, coaching is walking alongside someone to empower that individual to be his or her own problem solver. The goal is to empower and affect discipleship training.

Coaching emphasizes effective listening and meaningful questioning. This unique approach helps to establish good communication and boosts the feeling of being respected as well as openness on the part of the one coached. It also promotes the latter’s self-knowledge.

For defensive Christians and workers who have grown up in Chinese culture, the self-assessment and feedback technique of coaching are undoubtedly effective tools to see one’s own blind spots. They are an effective means of self-evaluation. Christian coaching is walking in step with the Holy Spirit. In so doing, not only can one help deliver a pastor from a “redeemer complex,” one also humbly allows the Lord to reign so that he or she can rest in Christ’s partnership in shepherding his church.

The Future of Coaching in China

“As the lotus flower begins to bud, the dragonfly is already on it.”

In the world of business, companies like Huawei, Lenovo, and others have started to bring coaching techniques into their management practices and are gradually establishing a coaching culture. Some companies specializing in offering training in coaching techniques have been established in Shanghai, Guangzhou, Tianjin, and other places. In churches, some pastors, as well as brothers and sisters in caring or counseling ministries, have started to learn how to use coaching techniques in discipleship and pastoral care ministries.

Beginning in April 2012, I have been quietly applying the coaching concept and its techniques in different ministerial dimensions in the church where I serve.

Bimonthly discipleship training. The application of coaching’s self-evaluation feedback allows coworkers to participate in self-feedback as a way of fostering discipleship growth. This approach promotes a sense of security and openness for participants. It also leads to a willingness to change and improve. In team coaching, discipleship topics such as discipline and prayer are studied. Comprehensive and profound questioning stimulates reflection, awareness and a search of Scripture. More importantly, it focuses on a course of action, outlining a step-by-step plan to “work out” the truth. This particular coaching technique is quite powerful; it enables coworkers to personally design their own action plans and first initial steps. Subsequently, each action step will be targeted with training to align it with the SMART Model application.³ This will ensure the steps are feasible. As a result, these coworkers will be effectively assisted in working out their faith while the most critical aspect of discipleship is reinforced.

Shepherding and caring. These are included in the concept of coaching. For instance, at prayer meeting, the hour of sharing before prayer is a group coaching opportunity. One-on-one caring and counseling is even better, allowing the benefits of coaching to shine. Sharing feedback in a group enhances mutual understanding, clarifies questions and indicates the direction of future plans.

Adult Sunday school curriculum. We have been using “The New Disciple Training” curriculum since April. It begins with a weekly message and then daily questions and exercises for the remaining days of the week. On the following Sunday, the class time is used for evaluation of personal exercises and gains. This time of self-evaluation of gains made is also done in a team coaching format which allows all the students to participate by listening and learning as well as by taking the lessons and their applications seriously. This effectively inspires the development of everybody’s potential and encourages deeper and broader thinking.

During our church retreat in early July of this year, it became apparent that the concept of coaching and its techniques have quietly blessed our church, be it in blessing church ministry leaders and their ministries or brothers and sisters in their commitments to God and personal spiritual growth. We cannot help but give God all the glory; it has been his work! He personally established the church. When we, his fellow workers, follow the core of coaching—total dependence on the Holy Spirit and walking in step with the Spirit—then everyone will have the God-endowed potential to solve their problems. There will increasingly be rest from our own work in our ministries. In addition, brothers and sisters will have healthier and speedier growth. Almost all those in attendance at this past retreat say that it was one of the most filled with the presence of God and his blessings. It was also one that was most filled with love, sacrifice, and God’s anointing as well as the most enjoyable.

I believe that whether in depth of training or width of implementation, the concept of coaching with its techniques will be a tremendous blessing to institutions, businesses, churches, and families in China. The momentum of its development will not be stopped.

¹ The source of the survey is a coaching company named Co-Active Coaching. The original information is from China HR Executive

View from the Wall

Five Profound Mentoring Needs in China

By Eric Lee

During the past three decades, we heard Chinese church leaders primarily requesting Bibles, spiritual literature and training. More recently, the two most desperate cries are for cross-cultural missionary training and mentoring. Between these two needs, mentoring represents by far the more difficult request to deliver.

Why do Chinese church leaders so desperately need mentoring? An average Chinese church leader suffers from:

- Not having a loving “father” in his earthly life;
- Not having a godly “shepherd” in his spiritual life;
- Not having a skillful “coach” in his ministry life;
- Not having an intimate “friend” in his social life, and
- Not having a committed “companion” in his suffering life.

Mentoring can effectively fill these five major voids in the lives of today’s Chinese church leaders.

Loving Father

I used to think that children in China were “neglected” by their parents—especially their fathers; fathers are rarely seen interacting with their children. However, as I meet with an increasing number of church leaders who are still carrying deep scars from childhood, I have come to the sad conclusion that fathers are not neglecting their children but are destroying them through misguided attempts to “perfect” them. Most Chinese church leaders struggle with damaged self-images inflicted by their over-demanding fathers whose faces of displeasure are constantly looking over their shoulders.

High expectations: Fathers pile unrealistic expectations on their children (hoping they will achieve at least part of them) and show their displeasure every time they come up short. Fathers firmly believe their rejection “motivates” their children to try harder and eventually achieve the higher goal they have set for them. These fathers do not realize that every rejection actually destroys their children's self worth and the motivation they are intending to create.

Misguided modesty: It is true that some children can be motivated by rejection and will work harder. Their added efforts will bring some achievements. What will fathers do when they see these improvements? Will they give praise and encouragements? Not a chance! In response to their children’s improved efforts and increased achievements, fathers will not show their inner pleasure but will further drive their children using belittlement. They will say the children are dumb, lazy and arrogant, easily puffed up, and will not amount to anything. The fathers are totally sincere and convinced that this kind of put-down represents the highest Chinese virtue—“modesty.” Any form of praise is frowned upon as leading to pride and downfall.

Damaging comparisons: Some children will endure these abuses and have outstanding achievements. What will fathers do then? Since they feel they must protect their children from becoming arrogant and being unable to “sustain” their achievements, they will find others with higher achievements and compare them with their own children, hoping they will never feel they are good enough. This is exactly what many Chinese leaders feel in their ministry today. In their minds, they are never good enough to be loved by God. They serve God in order to be loved instead of because they are loved. These church leaders have an awful time trying to help rebuild the damaged self-images of others because their own self-images have never been mended.

Destroyed self-image: A fifty-year-old church leader once told me with a hopeless look on his face that all the words his father had ever spoken to him could not fill up half a sheet of paper. He had studied the Heavenly Father's unconditional love and had taught about that love to thousands of believers, but he himself could not believe it because he had never experienced such love by an earthly father. Years of mentoring and a deep, inner healing process enabled him to finally say, “I walked into my Father's open arms today. I am loved!” He was a totally different person after that encounter. Today he is using his painful past to serve others.

In China being a mentor is being a father. Chinese church leaders need to be firmly embraced by a mentor who can help them to experience God’s unconditional love. Without this process, they can only talk about God’s love; they are unable to experience and live out the blessings of God’s children who are loved unconditionally. Mentorship is the only way to fill this void.

Godly Shepherd

Most Chinese church leaders did not grow up in a healthy local church with a godly pastor. When these “sheep,” who have never experienced shepherding, try to be shepherds and pastor churches, they are at a loss. They do not know what they are doing. They are one-hundred percent willing and two-hundred percent faithful, but they are less than ten percent equipped. When it comes to pastoring churches, most are “winging” it.

Once I asked a very seasoned church leader how he got directions from God for all his busy projects. With a surprised look on his face he replied, “I never knew that you needed to get direction from God for anything! I thought that I just needed to work hard!”



[David Robert Bliwas, on Flickr](#)

As urbanization continues, evangelism-based church ministry is shifting towards a shepherding-focused ministry making it even more difficult for pastors to “wing it.” Chinese church leaders need a shepherding mentor who can patiently walk alongside them to encourage personal spiritual growth, explain church growth steps, enhance ministry capabilities, and empower the inexperienced shepherd. Without such mentors, there will be much wasted spiritual energy through confusion, floundering, misunderstanding, and missed direction.

Each mentee needs a mentor who, as a father, helps to establish the fundamental assurance of being loved unconditionally and, as a shepherd, provides patient, daily guidance and direction. With modern communication technology, mentors can easily provide mentees with these in a timely manner as needs arise.

During the Sichuan earthquake, a large number of task forces were established. I had the privilege of mentoring a couple who were in charge of one such working team. They worked hard and the team was effective. One complaint they had was that these team members (who came from all over China) did not always submit to their authority which made them quite upset. I quietly reminded them to lead the team in love and patience. Even after repeated corrections and rebukes, the situation did not improve much. I continued to remind them to be loving and patient. One day they burst into our meeting room quite upset and said, “Don’t tell us not to get angry. It’s impossible to not get angry with those team members. After so many repeated reminders, they still do not do what we told them! Don’t tell us not to be angry! That’s impossible for anyone!” So, I looked at them both and said, “I told *you* not to get angry so many times. *You* still do not do what I told *you*—but I am not angry with *you*.” They looked at me, then said, “Oh, okay.” They had gotten the point. I used to train hundreds of pastors in five days, but helping this couple learn God-given patience took twelve months. Mentoring is far more time consuming than training; many key lessons are learned only when we invest the time.

Skillful Coach

Although many leaders are under equipped, they are highly teachable and excellent self-learners; however, they have not been privileged to have someone take an interest in them, listen to them, and show them how to improve and grow. If mentors are willing to prayerfully listen to them as they share their hearts and skillfully identify the areas of their lives where God is working, they will be able to identify enormous areas for further growth and development. Mentees will often respond with immediate obedience to the Spirit’s correction, willingness to change unhealthy habits, and aggressive implementation of new, suggested activities. Effective coaching can truly help Chinese church leaders to grow and reach their full potential.

I think of one Christian leader who is an excellent learner/leader with God’s special favor clearly upon him and his ministry. It seemed as though he was doing well without mentorship. When he asked for mentoring, I was not totally sure what more we could do for him. However, once we began a mentor-mentee relationship, we were in for a ride. Near the start of our first meeting, I was thrilled to hear him say he was facing a new challenge which needed coaching. After many get-togethers, he said his eyes had been opened to critical blind spots he had not previously realized. Coaching enhanced an already strong ministry and prevented it from falling into ministry traps.

Intimate Friend

Many believers forget that their pastors are also human. One church member went to a hospital for treatment and saw his pastor receiving treatment. With bewildered eyes, this believer said to the pastor, “I just had no idea that even pastors got sick.”

Many believers have unrealistic mental pictures of pastors, and many pastors try to live up to these false pictures. Often Christians wrongly believe that pastors do not sin. As a result, church leaders will do anything to hide any sin in their lives. Very few pastors have soul-friends with whom they can honestly share the deepest matters of their lives. This makes their lives isolated and their ministry ineffective. Being unable to share their innermost feelings and needs will force their ministry to become superficial and take away the important “one-another” aspect of their ministry.

Effective mentoring will open a new world of “true friendship” for most Chinese church leaders who have never had the courage to become vulnerable and share their true, innermost selves and then receive the joy of unconditional acceptance. They need to be around a mentor who knows how to be friends and can show them how to have transparent interaction and community life. This is key to enriching, deepening, and renewing all of a leader’s interpersonal relationships—including his personal relationship with the Lord.

Committed Companion

Over past years, while Chinese Christians have experienced greater “wobble room,” restrictions are still very real. When various restrictions are placed on church leaders, mentorship is the best way to help them face suffering and then to rebuild their lives after the ordeal. Hardship will expose every weakness and vulnerability inside a leader. Having a mentor makes the process bearable as one goes through such trials.

When one Christian leader suffered severely inside a prison, he was reminded by the Spirit how his mentor’s earlier imprisonment had already prepared him to face this trial. After his release, three years later, he continued to be affected by constant fear and unexplainable anxiety. What troubled him most was his uncontrollable anger towards his innocent family members. His mentor explained to him that living with criminals for three years had hardened him, causing him to respond to everyone harshly. His mentor likened his situation to a man who was forced to hold a rock in his hand for three years; then suddenly the rock was replaced by an egg. The egg would crack because he had forgotten how to hold an egg after being forced to hold a rock for so long. His mentor taught him he had to relearn how to hold an egg. He visited him regularly and spent days with him watching and gently reminding him when anger crept up inside him. This leader relearned how to hold an egg without cracking it.

Eric Lee is from Canada and has been involved in training Christian Leaders for 33 years.

Peoples of China

Musings of a Mentee

By Tracy

For Chinese Christians, the word “mentor” has been a problem to translate and understand. In the context of Chinese culture, there seems to be no exact vocabulary equivalent, much like words such as vulnerability, fellowship, and others. In Greek mythology, Odysseus entrusted the good teacher, Mentor, with educating his son. Presumably, the word “mentor” comes from that and today is used by people in that connotation. To me, the closest meaning to this word in the Chinese language is “good teacher and valuable friend.” A “good teacher” is often someone who is much older in age and has more experience when compared to oneself, while a “valuable friend” is someone who is of value to oneself in one or several aspects and does not have to be older but can be a peer.

While I can also use this concept in secular culture, within Christianity I add a more transcendent and spiritual connotation. After becoming a Christian, I experienced blessings in my life through the Lord’s provision of a “good teacher and valuable friend.” This was far superior to what a worldly mentor could offer. It was only because of Christ that such a relationship and blessings were possible. My “good teacher and valuable friend” in the Lord has been due to God’s grace and blessing that he prepared for me at the time I became a seeker of the faith.

I am the oldest in my family. From the time I was little, I had felt bad for not having an older brother or sister. However, upon becoming a member of the Father’s family, I realized that my Heavenly Father had prepared older spiritual brothers and sisters to walk alongside me to keep me from being alone in my growth. Due to the space constraints here, I can only share brief stories of three mentors: the sister who led me to Christ, my pastor, and my present best friend.

The Sister Who Led Me to Christ

Strictly speaking, the one who initially sowed the seed of faith in me was my college professor. However, due to my doggedness and subtle pressure from my Muslim family, until my college graduation, my attitude towards Christianity was that “it is a good religion I can draw from but I am still my own god.” When I returned home after graduation, I soon realized that Sister N., from New Zealand, had assumed the role of mentor in my life—even before I had taken the step of coming to Christ.

At the time, I met with Sister N. weekly at my own initiative because my soul was troubled, lonely and thirsty, and she was able to give me a sense of security, inexplicable comfort, encouragement, and hope. Every time we met, I brought with me lots of questions about faith and life; she would brew me a special, flavored tea and then just talk with me. My questions were mostly disorganized and loaded. They reflected the weariness and turmoil in my heart and life. However, each time, regardless of whether Sister N. could give me an answer or not, by the time I left her place, my heart was filled with an indescribable sense of peace. Then one day, I said to her, “My present situation is like standing before the door of a big family, peering in to watch all the kids having a fun time together, but I don’t understand why I cannot bring myself to step over the threshold.” Finally, one day after returning from a business trip and putting away my luggage, I immediately headed for Sister N’s home. As soon as I stepped through her door, I told her, “I have made the decision. I want to believe.”

Shortly after that, I left home to further my education. Several months later, Sister N. came from my hometown to visit me bringing a guitar with her. We had a full day of worship and sharing. It was then she told me that the night before I showed up at her door and told her “I want to believe,” she had prayed for me, and the Lord had said to her, “Tomorrow you will reap.” She immediately knew that it was me that the Lord meant. Later on she had to return to her country due to illness. This was before the e-mail and internet era, so we gradually lost touch. However, in the two to three year period before that time, Sister N. was a most precious “good teacher and valuable friend” in my life.

My Pastor

Not long after becoming a Christian, I started attending a college fellowship group. The one who headed the group at that time is now my pastor. He and his wife were not much older than the students, but they were very different from most of us. They had already graduated from college and were married with children. During those years, for me the most important thing every week was to attend the Bible study, prayer meeting and Sunday worship. Furthermore, since I still struggled with various life issues, I would often contact the pastor for his counsel. Frequently, the pastor’s wife would invite me to stay for dinner. After dinner, I would play with their two children and observe how the couple interacted with and nurtured them.

The relationship between my parents has never been good. They often fight, and I have not felt much love from my parents and family. One day, after having lunch at my pastor’s home, I sat on the couch and watched the children play. Suddenly, I realized that my pastor was like both a father and an older brother to me. These were the two types of love I had missed experiencing throughout my childhood. Right then, the Heavenly Father opened my eyes to see that in him, through my pastor, He was allowing me to experience the two kinds of love that I had been yearning for but had never known. In that particular moment, I felt so warm, so blessed, and so thankful.



[Brian Ujiie, on Flickr](#)

My Present Best Friend

At present, the one who is playing the role of mentor in my life is my good friend, Sister A. Actually, we were in the same class when we were students. However, our relationship was just casual until several years ago. We had been working apart for a few years until God brought us together through a seeming coincidence. I had matured a lot since my student years, and now I immediately sensed that Sister A's life demonstrated many virtues. She possesses quite a few qualities that I am lacking or struggling with. Though she is basically my age, she has a nurturing and motherly heart. Although her work is more demanding and higher stress than mine, she still has passion and zeal to love and care for many people. Though she is very talented, well-learned in Chinese and foreign poetry and is an associate professor in a prestigious university, she is very humble and modest without arrogance or conceit. While on the surface, I appear to be more rational and collected, in actuality, I soon discovered that her understanding of the faith is more thorough and spiritually deep. She is close to God's heart and walks at Jesus' side.

Because of these things, I was attracted to her and often sought her out for sharing. Over the past two years, we have been meeting consistently every week or two for lunch and then have a time of deep sharing and prayer. I can share with her my deepest secrets, the weakest and darkest things in my heart. Sometimes, I break down and weep as we share and pray; yet, when we part, I am filled with warmth, encouragement, strength, and peace.

The difference between her and the other mentors in my life is that Sister A. is not only my good teacher, she is also my valuable friend and peer. We have common problems and challenges. We can support each other and intercede for each other in prayer. I can say that she is a sister who is closer to me than my own blood sister.

In my life journey, the presence of these mentors testifies to the reality, omnipotence, compassion, and greatness of our Heavenly Father. They make up the cloud of witnesses who surround us. They are God's messengers to inspire us to "run with perseverance the race set before us" (Hebrews 12:1).

Tracy is from Mainland China and has been involved in publishing for 16 years.

Into the Deep: Reflections on Discipleship in China

Continued from page 10

* To better describe the concept of mentoring and avoid these negative connotations, other terms are being considered and used such as 师徒关系 (Shītú guānxì) meaning apprenticeship and 生命师傅 (shēngmìng shīfù) meaning life mentor.--Ed.

¹ While the stories related in this article are true, all names are fictional to protect the privacy of the individuals mentioned.

Coaching in China

Continued from page 12

Board of the Human Capital Practice at www.ChinaHRExecutiveBoard.com.

² For further information on coaching techniques, see the Resource Corner in this issue.

³ The SMART model of goal setting is widely used in business and management. It refers to goals that are **S**pecific rather than vague, **M**easurable rather than vague, **A**ttainable rather than unachievable, **R**ealistic rather than impossible, and **T**imely with a deadline rather than open-ended.

Rose and Hunter are currently involved in promoting coaching techniques and training in China as well as personally coaching others. They are also actively serving in their churches.

Book Review

***When the Well Runs Dry: Prayer beyond the Beginnings* by Thomas H. Green S.J.**

Reviewed by Tricia Bølle

When the Well Runs Dry: Prayer beyond the Beginnings by Thomas H. Green S.J. Ave Maria Press; Revised edition (October 1, 2007), ISBN-10: 1594711372; ISBN-13: 978-1594711374; 224 pages, paperback; \$13.85 at Amazon.com.

Prayer forms the foundation of every Christian's spiritual life. It is our lifeline to God and, like our God, is itself a mystery—initiated by the Holy Spirit—that draws us into mystical communion with our Creator. As Christians, we go to prayer to show our devotion and be close to our God, seeking peace, consolation and wisdom for our lives. We then often return refreshed and renewed from our encounter with the Beloved. Thus, to develop our interior prayer life ought to be the desire of every child of God.

Yet, we commonly find that in the pursuit of a deeper prayer life we often come up dry and wanting. Where is the God that I first struggled to find and then felt so clearly in my prayer? Why do I now labor to find any refreshment at all where a wellspring of peace and love once filled my soul? Why, after so many years of devoted prayer and Christian living, do I find it so difficult now to feel God's presence? Such feelings of despair and desolation may arise as we desire to open ourselves up further to the Lord in our prayer and in our lives. During such times of spiritual dryness, our efforts to be one with God seem to have left us alone, wandering, and lost by the side of a once familiar road looking for someone with whom to connect.

In his book *When the Well Runs Dry*, Fr. Thomas H. Green, S.J. provides a very important understanding of prayer for many Christians who start to wonder why their prayers have begun to feel empty—even as if God has departed them. Through the examples of some of the great mystics of our Christian tradition, such as St. Teresa of Avila (圣女大德兰) and St. John of the Cross (圣十字若望), Fr. Green is able to impart some of their wisdom to us in a readable fashion to help us better understand the journey of the interior life and the true call to faith in prayer that the Lord gives us. Indeed, Fr. Green reveals to us, that it is out of his great love for us that the Lord allows us to encounter such struggles in our prayer and discernment in seeking to follow God's will.

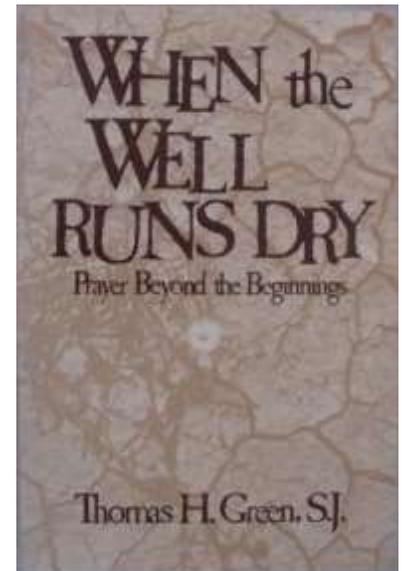
The call to prayer and, indeed, the call to faith is an invitation that originates from God and reminds us that it is God who chooses us; it is he who initiates a relationship with us for which he gives us the grace to freely respond. Thus, as our prayer life progresses beyond the early stages and we begin to take for granted the Lord's presence in our prayer as though it is we who call him to be there, God quietly reminds us that it is he who draws us to prayer and replenishes our soul. In so doing, God invites us into a deeper relationship in which greater trust and effort is required to bear the fruit of our devotion. Yet in the end, like a marriage that carries beyond the honeymoon period and through its own share of difficulties as well as the mundanity of ordinary life, the Lord rewards our fidelity with a far deeper and more mature love than we ever could have previously imagined.

Green relays St. Teresa's metaphor of watering a garden to describe the various stages of growth in our interior prayer life. The first stage examines the laborious effort involved in prayer as beginners who, while doing our best to remain open to God, are easily distracted and have yet to develop the discipline to "confront ourselves honestly," choosing instead to avoid the pain that often comes with such deeper levels of soul-searching. St. Teresa likens these early efforts at prayer to using a bucket to draw water from a deep well in order water a garden—a lot of sweat for not a whole lot of water.

Once we are able to maintain a steady discipline, we are able to transcend the great effort involved with drawing the water of prayer from the well and receive the divine grace that Teresa likens to a water pump. This grace enables us to collect our will and focus on our prayer with far greater clarity than ever before. While there are still some effort and distractions involved, our will is "captured by the love of God."

This stage then leads ultimately to the last two stages of the interior life in which God provides a stream of water to flow through us without any effort on our part beyond irrigating the soil for the water to reach the flowers of the Lord's garden. In much the same way, we must actively cooperate with God's gift of grace and love in order for the Incarnate Word that dwells within us to bear great fruit. When we ultimately transcend even this stage in which the Lord takes on more and more of the work, we find that we can finally let the Lord lead us in prayer so that he can use this time to more fully shape and transform us "to be simply the clay in the hands of the potter." Only when we truly let go in prayer can the Lord lead us into the depths of his mystery on a journey of beauty and discovery.

In this way, faith leads us to hope and, in turn, to love. This love of the Father that we encounter in different ways throughout our spiritual journey grows stronger as we mature in our faith and understanding of God's will for our lives. However, Green insists, having experienced God in such a real and meaningful way through prayer is not meant to be an end unto itself. To experience God in prayer necessitates a call to action—to live out and share that experience with others and not cling to it. In so doing, Green says we imitate Mary Magdalene, who, upon seeing the risen Lord, rushed off to tell the others rather than staying by him. Thus, not merely by the act of prayer, but through the virtues strengthened through it and by living out those virtues, we attain the true goal of prayer—not mere devotion but a living out of the faith that is fortified through such prayer.



When we are capable of this, that is, having our faith and will tested through prayer and living out those virtues strengthened by such prayer, then our prayer will often begin to take on a new character of dryness—in which it may become more difficult to encounter God and understand his will—that enables us to more closely imitate the struggles and true faith of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are given a cross to bear for which our prayer prepares and strengthens us so that we, too, like Jesus, may “learn obedience through suffering.” This dryness in prayer, that we experience as our interior life matures, is what Green describes as the “cross of desolation,” only through which we are able to have true faith in God’s merciful love and truly learn to love as Christ.

In a beautiful and sincere way Fr. Green weaves us through an understanding of prayer beyond the beginnings. With his many clear and relatable examples, he guides us through the insightful writings of the early church mystics on the interior life. In so doing, he opens our eyes to see where God is truly leading us and to know that when we do experience dryness in our prayer lives, it is our Lord purifying us. He does this so that we might let go of all that inhibits his grace from more perfectly flowing within us and allow his mercy and love to more completely surround us in our prayer.

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Intercessory Notes

Please pray

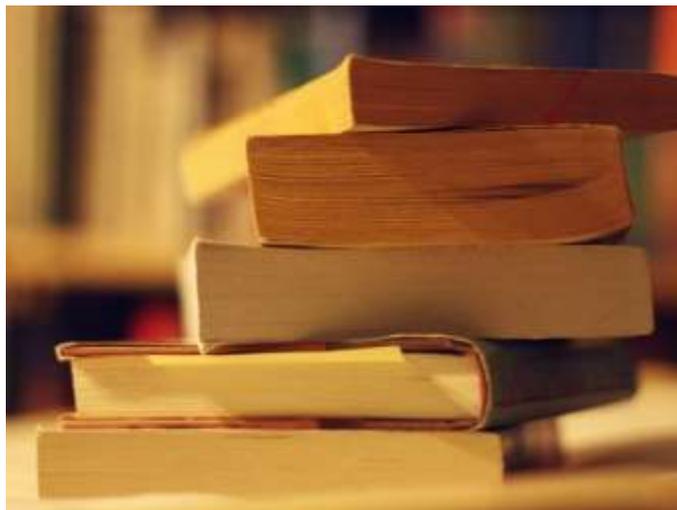
1. For mentors and coaches as they seek to encourage and strengthen mentees in their walk with the Lord.
2. That those training mentors and coaches would have insight, sensitivity and understanding as they impart techniques and spiritual understanding to those learning from them.
3. That those desiring to be mentored would find mentors, and as mentees be open to learning, changing, and growing in Christ.
4. That churches and families would be strengthened and grow in Christ as a result of mentoring and coaching.



Resource Corner

Recommended Resources: Coaching, Mentoring and Spiritual Formation

The following resources were recommended by WWL participants as helpful in coaching, mentoring and spiritual formation. Of course, the Bible is the first resource—Jesus is the greatest coach, mentor, and spiritual director. Other resources included spiritual disciplines and various personality instruments, such as: Myers-Briggs, the Enneagram, PDP Tools (ProScan, JobScan, TeamScan), and others.



[Ginny, on Flickr](#)

Recommended books included the following (arranged in alphabetical order by author).

1. Anderson, Neil: *The Bondage Breaker*
2. Anderson, Neil: *Victory over the Darkness*
3. Arbinger Institute: *Leadership and Self-Deception: Getting out of the Box*
4. Barton, Ruth Haley: *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*
5. Benner, David G.: *Surrender to Love: Discovering the Heart of Christian Spirituality*
6. Blanchard, Ken: *Lead Like Jesus: Lessons from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time*
7. Clinton, J. Robert: *Leadership Emergence Theory*
8. Clinton, J. Robert: *The Making of a Leader*
9. Clinton, Tim: *The Bible for Hope: Caring for People God's Way*
10. Coleman, Robert: *Master Plan of Evangelism*
11. CRM Singapore: *Focusing Leaders* (English and Chinese versions)
12. Crow, D. Michael: *J-Mentors: Multiplying Jesus Mentors*
13. Harley Jr., Willard: *His Needs, Her Needs*
14. Hersey, Paul: *Situational Leader*
15. Hofstede, Geert: *Cultures and Organizations* (Kindle version)
16. Hunter, James C.: *The Servant: A Simple Story About the True Essence of Leadership*
17. Sande, Ken: *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict*
18. Smith, Gordon T.: *Courage & Calling: Embracing Your God-Given Potential*
19. Sorge, Bob: *A Covenant with My Eyes*
20. Stanley, Paul D. and J. Robert Clinton: *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need*
21. Thomas, Gary L.: *Thirsting for God*
22. Wakefield, James L.: *Sacred Listening: Discovering the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola*
23. Walling, Terry B.: *Focusing Leaders*
24. Walling, Terry B.: *Stuck! Navigating the Transitions of Life & Leadership*
25. Webb, Keith: *The COACH Model for Christian Leaders*