

stated: “Since we started home schooling two years ago, our child has becoming very withdrawn and introverted. He used to be out-going and friendly towards everyone at church, but now he avoids people and seems to be frightened when out in public places. How do we teach our children to face the world properly? Some parents say we need to strengthen the child’s worldview, so that they can better see the world through God’s eyes. We teach our children with the end goal that the child will use his or her talents to serve the body of Christ. Children can start learning to serve others even when they are very young. By observing how their parents serve others at home and church, they learn that serving others is a life-long goal given by God. When they see this lifestyle in practice, they will be willing to imitate it, instead of waiting to be served by others.

Contemporary Chinese culture is an amalgam of tradition and secularism, with the goal of maximizing material enjoyment. We thank God that many Chinese Christians are embracing biblical values instead. The church does not live in an environment that allows them to be a visible Christian community. Because of this environment, they have an even more important role in teaching their children biblical values, especially within the family unit. Of course, it is not only the Christians that seek to raise their children properly, many seek this goal but often struggle. It is even more important for biblical family values to take root, so that society will be influenced by them. This is not an easy task, but we can see how important it is for biblical family values to transform the lives of Chinese Christians, their churches and the communities in which they live. They need our prayers.



Prayer Letter

February 2019

The Creation of Christian Family Culture



Below is a conversation that took place between a seminary student and his four-year-old son just before Christmas 2018:

Son: Is our church really closing down?

Father: Yes!

Son: The Christmas tree will be removed as well?

Father: Yes!

Son: (Crying) Why would they want to take our Christmas tree away?

Father: Because they don't know God! So we need to go and tell people the Good News, right?

Son: OK...(choked up)

Father: Will you be able to forgive them?

Son: OK!

During the second half of 2018, many changes took place in society, and these affected local churches by varying degrees. In some places, the traditional Sunday Service had to be cancelled and the weekly worship services were held in small group meetings. Most youth and children's activities were suspended due to a new law that stipulates: "No one under 18 can enter a religious establishment." Many Christian publications also stopped running, and personal Wechat accounts were shut down. Some rural Christians who displayed Christian calendars were asked to take them down. In this atmosphere of change, many Christmas services were also cancelled.

Any Christian who wants the Good News to be made known might ask: "If God has allowed all this, what will happen to the spiritual lives of Chinese Christians? Will the church continue to grow as it has been doing?" The conversation at the top of this article reveals a different aspect of the church's development: the establishment of contemporary Christian family culture.

The Chinese Church has been renowned for its practice of meeting in 'house churches'. However, the term 'house church' is not a theological term, nor does it describe a kind of denomination. It came about as a way of expressing the principle of separation of church and state. Most of the current pastors of house churches established in the last thirty years are first generation Christians. So 'house churches' were not established due

to some long held traditions, but in response to the situation that Christians found themselves in in past decades – a way in which they sought to stay faithful to God.

During the last twenty years, the church has grown fastest in the urban centers, and most of its members are highly educated young adults. Many of these are also first generation Christians and they are still looking to find the most appropriate form of corporate worship. They are also looking for ways to practice Christian family culture. This writer has interviewed some urban church members and has found the following three trends:

1. There is a trend to break away from traditional Chinese family values and attempts to develop a new cultural paradigm.

We interviewed a pastor couple who graduated from university in the 1990's. They freely admitted that, after coming to Christ in college, they tried to build their marriage on biblical principles (including the teaching about submitting to one another), but they still held on to society's traditions. These included:

- A. Men and women should get married when they reach the appropriate age.
- B. Children should all receive the best education possible to ensure finding a good job in the future, so as to be able to take care of the family.

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One teacher from a Christian school said that, although their students all come from Christian families, many of the students have a very superficial understanding of the faith. Some students know how to pray, and may have a little biblical knowledge. Some would say they believe in God, but they do not have a personal relationship with Him. Looking at these students, one would not necessarily know they are Christians because they do not show the fruit of the Spirit. Sadly, this truth accurately reflects the reality of many Christian families in China.

Faith is not just a subject to be taught at church; it also needs to be lived out at home. One couple reflected in this way. "We used to focus on using the Bible to train our child, but we didn't let the Bible teach us. We certainly did not admit that we are sinners in front of the child." As time went on, they realized that, although the child had a lot of Bible knowledge, he did not know that everyone has sinned against God and he showed no sense of repentance when he made mistakes. Praise God that the parents were able to see how they had failed in this way, and they started to live out a life of repentance, thus influencing their child towards a life of repentance.

We know that the spiritual life of the parents will influence the child's spiritual life. At the same time, the spiritual life of the child also influences the parents. One father testified in front of the congregation about a time in his life when he was

fighting incessantly with his wife; the wife was packing up her things ready to leave. Their 9-year-old son cried and said: "We are all believers, why aren't you praying now?" The parents realized their mistake, and with tears, they all knelt to pray together, seeking forgiveness from one another.

Chinese Christians have started to recognize the importance of relationships at home, whether it is between the parents and the child, or between the parents themselves. Urban families often put the child's needs first, but now they are beginning to realize that a strong marriage relationship is top priority. They are learning to better inculcate biblical teachings into their marriages and family life.

3. The testimony of Christians has an impact on society and culture.

Christian family culture does not need to be limited to within the family unit. Though often ridiculed, a young girl continued to share the gospel with other children at her kindergarten. Then while attending elementary school, she continued to share the gospel with classmates, and the ridicule continued. She did not give up, always asking her parents to pray for her to have strength from above.

The example of this young Christian girl's sharing can happen anywhere in the world. For the parents, they may struggle with how to encourage their child to face this kind of seemingly insurmountable challenge. One father

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C. If the children know Christ, they will be blessed abundantly by God and have a wonderful life (which is of course the main desire of parents for their children).

They assumed that these traditions are also Christian values, and that this is the way to live.

However, after almost two decades of family life and thinking through what is biblical, they came to realize the true meaning of Christian family:

- A. Marriage is a gift from God.
- B. Children are a heritage from God.
- C. The family unit is a basic social unit that should glorify God.
- D. Parents are the ones with primary responsibility to teach their children.
- E. Children belong primarily to God and not to the parents.

Thus their understanding of family values has changed significantly, breaking away from Chinese traditions concerning family life. It has become more biblical; with more emphasis on Christian values. The road to this position has not been easy. The most difficult of all has been for the wife to become a full-time stay-at-home mother.

During the past half century, there has been equal pay for men and women in the same jobs, as well as the expectation in society that everyone

gets a job after graduation, unless they are physically unfit. For women in China, especially those with university education, it is a very big challenge for them to accept staying at home as a full-time mother. For this couple, in order to stay true to the biblical principle of teaching their own children, they declined the grandparents' offer to take care of their children. The wife resigned from her job and became a stay-at-home mother. It was practically unheard of at that time for a wife to do this, and they were looked down on by others. Many would ask: how are you going to survive on just one salary? What will happen if you divorce? Why trust your husband so completely without creating a back-up plan just in case? These voices of opposition came not only from society but even from within the church. No one within their circle supported their decision.

Fast forward twenty years, and stay-at-home mothers who take care of the family on a full-time basis are quite common now. Since 2015, according to official statistics, over 18,000 families have stay-at-home mothers. This means that over 18,000 wives resigned from their jobs and became full-time mothers.

It is not easy to practice "Christian family culture" in 21st century China, but these Christians are starting to make an impact on some social norms.

2. The role of Christian parents in forming a Christian family.

PRAYER POINTS

February 2019

1 Chinese New Year is coming soon. Please remember the many migrant workers traveling home during this time. Pray for safe journeys and quality time with their loved ones.

2 Remember the many preachers, church workers and their families who feel isolated because they are standing firm in their faith and continuing to share the Gospel in difficult circumstances.

3 Today is the last Sunday before the Chinese New Year. At this time, most rural evangelists are very busy receiving Christians who are coming home. They are also busy visiting the elderly and the sick, as well as preaching. May the Lord sustain them and grant them daily grace.

4 Today is Chinese New Year's Eve. As they gather for this important celebration, let us remember those Christians whose family members are not all believers. May God grant them courage to decline from taking part in activities that are not suitable for Christians.

5 Today is the first day of the New Year. Giving out red packets containing money gifts (hong bao)

is a festive practice for all. Pray for Christian families, that they will teach their children to be grateful and content,

6 Rural churches begin special meetings starting today for several days. Pray that the Lord will protect these meetings no matter what local circumstances are like. Pray that, if there are interruptions or interventions, the Lord will guide church leaders to make wise decisions concerning future meetings.

7 Last year, some rural Christian families were asked to take down their Chinese New Year's paintings with Christian messages on them, and replace them with political slogans. Of course, Christians would like to retain Christian content on their New Year decoration. Pray for wisdom and discernment.

8 Today is the first Friday after New Year. Many urban churches hold winter conferences for students beginning today. May the Lord use and protect these meetings, so that many student seekers may hear and respond to the Gospel.

9 May the Lord protect the various forms of small group meetings being held in urban house churches. These meetings provide a good context for Christians to continue to grow spiritually and enjoy fellowship.

10 Please pray for urban church pastors. As many churches are now meeting in small groups, it

is harder to maintain ministries of teaching and pastoral care. A church with three full-time pastors may need to pastor more than eighty small groups scattered in different places. It is impossible for them to preach at all the groups each Sunday. May the Lord raise up more preachers to meet this need.

11 The Internet has played an important role in facilitating church small groups. However, with restrictions imposed on the circulation of online religious information, this communication channel has been impacted. May the Lord help churches find suitable ways of communicating with brothers and sisters and strengthening partnership in the Gospel.

12 There is almost no open sharing of the gospel on university campuses now. Pray that the Lord will continue to bless Christian students and help them to be salt and light on their campuses.

13 There are restrictions on Christians visiting hospitals, praying with patients and baptizing them. Pray for creativity and wisdom for Christians who want to be involved in hospital ministries.

14 Today is Valentine's Day. Unlike Christmas and Easter, the celebration of Valentine's Day is not restricted, and it is very popular among young people, including college students. May the Lord protect Christians in this secular climate and give them opportunities for witness to friends and classmates.

15 Many urban church pastors (who are themselves migrants) go home during Chinese New Year. They find themselves kept busy with preaching and visitation. Some feel they are even busier than they are in the city. Pray that God will grant these pastors much grace and sufficient strength, and help them enjoy quality time with their families.

16 Chinese New Year is the best time for pastors to visit missionaries serving cross-culturally far from home. Pray that the Lord will grant them safe journeys and bless their time with missionaries and their families. May He also bless the missionaries and grant them renewed vision for the year ahead.

17 Today is the last day for holding evangelistic meetings during the New Year period. Please pray for all who have decided to follow Christ during this time. May they experience God's touch on their lives in a very personal way.

18 The new semester starts today for many schools after the New Year. Please pray for Christian high schoolers in boarding school. May the Lord protect them – their hearts, their minds and their relationships. Pray that He will grant them opportunities to witness for Him.

19 Today is Lantern Festival. Some rural areas hold activities related to folk religion. Pray that God will protect rural Christians - so that not only do they decline to take part in these activities, but also discourage their family members to be involved.

20 Migrant workers who went home for Chinese New Year will go back to their workplaces today. Pray for travel safety and that Christians among them will bring blessings from churches at home to share with their co-workers and urban churches.

21 After migrant workers return to the cities, the villages once again quieten down. Remember the preachers serving there; many of them give up opportunities to work in the city in order to pastor in rural areas. May the Lord bless them for their faithfulness, and protect and look after their families.

22 Due to the fact that some factories are closing down, not all migrant workers have a job to return to after Chinese New Year. Some need to stay in the rural areas and they may try to start a local business. May the Lord help rural churches to accept and enfold these former villagers, and enable them to experience God in their new chapter of life.

23 Christian teenagers are forbidden to take part in church activities, yet there is no restriction for young people to worship in Buddhist temples. Some seekers after truth are going to visit temples. May the Lord help young Christians live for Christ and be led by the Spirit as they seek to live out their faith.

24 Some urban Christians feel called to serve in rural areas, so they take the initiative to move to and settle down in the countryside. Pray the Lord will use these brothers and sisters mightily to bless rural communities.

25 Pray for a rural evangelist couple called Mr. & Mrs. Li. Mrs. Li is quite sick but they have no access to good medical care because they are poor. They still look up to God in faith for healing and provision. Pray for them, and other rural evangelists who have similar needs.

26 Another rural evangelist couple are called Mr. & Mrs. Liu. They help migrant worker families do farm work and looking after elderly people that are home alone. The needs are way beyond their capacities. May the Lord raise up other brothers and sisters to partner with them in this meaningful ministry.

27 Please pray for some young Christians in the rural area who are around 30 years of age. They are committed to stay behind in the rural church to serve yet due to the situation, they may not be able to receive steady Bible and pastoral training. May the Lord provide.

28 Please pray for a Christian pharmacist who has had to face real challenges in order to operate an ethical practice as a Christian. There is pressure to sell counterfeit medicine. Pray for protection and strength to witness for the Lord in their business, and to help patients to be given the right treatment.