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The Transformation of Asian Fathers: From Distant, Income Provider and Disciplinarian to Forgiven, Discipler & Benefactor

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

THE TRANSFORMATION OF ASIAN FATHERS:
FROM DISTANT, INCOME PROVIDER AND DISCIPLINARIAN
TO FORGIVEN, DISCIPLER & BENEFACTOR

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 12, 2018
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics and Future Studies.

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DEDICATION

To my father, Hing Ton Quon, who taught me to be a good father

To my mother, Yoke Sue Quon, who kept my father grounded

To my wife, Jennie, who has improved me as a husband

To my children, Enoch, Naomi & Austin, to whom I leave my spiritual inheritance

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dissertations are supposed to be composed of original material. But only God can create something from nothing. There has been no doubt that the Holy Spirit has downloaded ideas and truths that give divine influence to the contents of these pages. But all those moments of enlightenment stemmed from interaction with many key individuals. There were pastors who told me about their attempts to minister to families in their congregations where issues existed involving the father. Some conversations affirmed pre-conceived ideas, but others brought new insight to the dilemmas faced in Asian families. Most helpful were the interviews with young adult Asian Americans who offered insights from their years of growing up. From them, I learned about the challenges faced by the different Asian ethnic groups. Their stories of forgiveness and reconciliation after dealing with years of pain places hope in between the pages of this volume.

I am what some people call a dreamer. God gives me great ideas and visions of how people can be impacted. But, alas, I am often lacking in attention to details. Therefore, I must express my gratitude to those who have helped me to fill in the empty spaces in my idea factory. My Doctor of Ministry advisor, Dr. Roger Nam, has given me thoughtful critique as I have constructed the phases of this dissertation. Miss Gwen Leong, Dr. Craig Miller, Dr. Tim Tseng and Dr. Lance Lee have offered helpful suggestions as readers.

I appreciate the understanding and support from the leaders of the Japanese Evangelical Missionary Society (JEMS) and Asian American Christian Fellowship (AACF) who have allowed me the time to complete this study while doing our ministry

to college students. Most of all, thanks to my family for their contributions. My wife Jennie has often asked me about the content of my dissertation, when will I finish and what I expect to happen after its completion. I am thankful for her support and anticipation of future ministry opportunities. My kids, Enoch, Naomi and Austin have served as guinea pigs as I have practiced with them the skills of being a father.

Thanks be to God!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
ABSTRACT.....	viii
SECTION 1: THE PROBLEM.....	1
Introduction.....	1
An Asian Father’s Story.....	2
The Traditional Role of the Asian Father.....	3
The Idolatry of Good Things.....	6
The Lack of Equipping.....	10
Only Asian Fathers?.....	12
SECTION 2: OTHER SOLUTIONS.....	14
Cultural Voices.....	14
The Asian Voice.....	15
The Western Voice.....	18
The Voices of Other Asian Ethnicities.....	21
The Need for Cultural Context.....	25
SECTION 3: THE HYPOTHESIS.....	27
Introduction.....	27
The Biblical Determination of a Good Father.....	28
The Transformation of the Asian Father.....	38
Distant to Forgiven.....	41
Discipler.....	44
Benefactor.....	48
A Renewed Vision.....	52
The Role of the Church.....	53
Another Conference?.....	56
The Best Life Stage to Begin?.....	61
How Many Disciples?.....	61
A Tool for Evangelism.....	62

Time to Celebrate	64
More Than Just Becoming Nicer and Gentler	65
Other Asian Groups.....	66
Adjustments for Indian Fathers	66
The Humbling of Filipino Fathers	70
Common Ground.....	75
Conclusion.....	76
SECTION 4: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION	78
Our Fathers' Stories	78
SECTION 5: ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION	83
SECTION 6: POSTSCRIPT	92
APPENDIX A: SAMPLE STORIES.....	97
APPENDIX B: THE FATHER'S DISCIPLESHIP MANUAL	118
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	151

ABSTRACT

Asian fathers have a tough road to travel upon. The proper image of the father is one of the least successful cover-ups in today's Asian church. On the surface, there is the attempt to portray him as being successful in his career, confident in his identity and respected as a spiritual leader in his home. Yet when his children are asked to discuss family relationships in the youth group, a different picture comes into focus. It is one of emptiness, distance and sometimes resentment. The typical stereotype of the stern father who shows more care for his personal success and reputation than for his children is all too common. Yet deep down, most fathers want their family relationships to be better. They simply do not know how to make the necessary adjustments.

Asian churches may be aware of the issue, but have failed to respond with any effective and meaningful ministry. The shame factor, which dominates Asian culture, is a primary culprit in causing this malady. Men are fearful of openly discussing their personal struggles and failures because they do not want to be perceived as being incapable. Likewise, churches are reluctant to expose their weaknesses. Attempts to help men become better fathers have usually been addressed in the behavioral realm. But a deeper degree of transformation is needed that touches a father's heart and soul. In this dissertation there is a call for Asian fathers to take a step upward and outward. Instead of being limited by the normal definition of being distant from his children and then being the family provider and disciplinarian, he is invited to receive forgiveness, and become a discipler and benefactor who leaves a spiritual inheritance. This will serve to put him into deeper relationships and allow him to make significant impact in his home.

Section 1 will define the problem and reveal the broken relationships experienced in many Asian homes. Section 2 states alternative viewpoints and resulting solutions that have been proffered. Section 3 will demonstrate the power of forgiveness and the renewal that comes from a father becoming a discipler and pondering how to be a benefactor. Section 4 describes the artifact which is a collection of stories of Asian fathers as told by their young adult children. Section 5 is the book proposal. Section 6 is the postscript. The appendix contains the artifact which includes sample chapters from the book and an accompanying discipleship guide.

SECTION 1: THE PROBLEM

Introduction

The Western world has long viewed Asians as *the model minority*. Nuclear families, star academic students and acclaimed professionals add to the heightened perception of a culture already possessing a long history of notable achievements. In the Christian world, that lofty view is extended by emphases on learning the Bible, memorizing Scripture, being trained how to teach and live with good moral standards. It is common for Asian churches to develop a deep concern for keeping their next generation in the faith and taking steps to see that they do not stray. Well-established children and youth ministries are developed to provide a healthy spiritual environment for church families. College campus groups are started with the intention of helping young adults to have a place to gather so that they will not stray from the biblical foundation that has been built into them since their birth. With this much attention devoted to the younger generation, casual observers would assume that the Asian family system is one that cares for their children and is relatively free of discord or dysfunction.

Of course, a closer and more intimate analysis will tell a different story. Especially when the focus turns to fathers, many relational issues begin to rise to the surface. Cultural expectations suggest that the father is devoted to his family. While this may be true, it is often manifested in a way in which he is somewhat aloof. His attempts to communicate care for his family are often not received well by his children. He is expected to work hard at his job and provide for the family. When the Asian father is at home, he takes his cues from Confucian tradition which contains a fundamental

philosophy of clear hierarchical relationships and obedience to authority.¹ This leads to “authoritarian parenting” which involves high expectations of children and low emotional support and physical affection. Asian families are seen as authoritarian because Asian parents do not traditionally support their children through verbal affirmation or physical touch.² This may have been acceptable for a father while he himself was growing up in Asia. But when he exudes the same attitude in raising his own children in a Western setting, blind spots lead to neglect or abuse that can become ugly years down the line. The following true story demonstrates how that happens in many Asian homes.

An Asian Father’s Story

David saw the list of seminars being offered at the Bay Area Sunday School Convention and noticed the section devoted to Asian ministries. One of the sessions was entitled *From Generation to Generation*. Even though the description spoke of a topic focused on church ministry, he was drawn to it because of something that happened at home during the previous week. David had been in conversation with Miranda, his 28-year-old daughter, and the subject had turned to her time growing up as a teenager. She started to express how difficult the years had been for her. Miranda had been involved in volleyball in high school and often noticed how many of her teammates’ parents would come to the games. But her father was never there. That day at home, Miranda tearfully asked David, “Where were you all those years?” He was caught off guard. David simply

¹ Grace Y. Kao and Ilsup Ahn, eds., *Asian American Christian Ethics* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 46.

² Eunjung Kim and Seth Wolpin, “The Korean American Family: Adolescents Versus Parents Acculturation to American Culture,” *Journal of Cultural Diversity* 15, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 109.

explained how his job required him to travel at times. He had been a project manager at the time and the job gave him authority, advanced his career and paid well. David defended his actions by saying that his income provided for the family and eventually paid for Miranda's college tuition. This left his daughter feeling empty and did little to dispel her opinion that she had always been in second place on her father's interest list behind his career. David did not know how to respond. He did not realize how much hurt he had inflicted on his daughter. He thought he was doing the right thing as a father by working hard and providing for his family.³

The Traditional Role of the Asian Father

When asked about their primary contribution to the family, almost every Asian father's immediate response is that he is to be the financial provider in the home. This should not be surprising because it is an opinion shared by many fathers all over the world. There has always been a timeless and universal expectation that men work and earn an income. There are exceptions to the rule, but if a father is unable or fails to support his family, the situation begs the *why* question. In shame-based cultures, if a man does not fulfill his responsibility, it reflects poorly upon the whole family. The father's parents are implicated because his failure to be productive in a career must mean that they made mistakes in the way they raised him. This puts added pressure on the father to not only have a job, but to be productive in it. If he excels and receives awards and promotions, it puts him in a position for greater financial success. His advancement is a

³ "From Generation to Generation," workshop by author, Bay Area Sunday School Convention, Castro Valley, CA, March 6, 2010.

demonstration to others that he is intelligent and respectable. People close to him will conclude that he is a good father because he provides for his family.

Nobody will criticize a man for doing his job well. If he is devoted to his company and demonstrates his value as an employee, he will naturally be applauded for his efforts. Achieving anything less would once again invite the shame factor into the family identity. For Asian men who are part of a church community, there is often an unspoken pressure to do well in one's job. In an interview, the English ministry pastor of a Chinese church described a family in his congregation in which the wife would not even allow her husband to have any parenting role with their children. She wanted him to give full attention to his job and career. She feared that if her husband was distracted by child-raising activity that he may lack the time and energy that would be needed for him to do well in his career. The wife insisted that she would take on the full responsibility of raising and caring for their children so that her husband could give full attention to his career.⁴ This situation is extreme, but it illustrates how the concept of a father's role as the family provider is so deeply imbedded in Asian cultural values.

Asian culture does recognize one other parenting role for the father. It is that of being the ultimate line of discipline for his children. The mother will do her best to raise and give guidance to the children. But if her efforts do not yield the desired results and one of the children is acting out or performing poorly in school, the father is called in to lay down the law. This can often result in lectures about working harder, warnings about how shameful it is to be an Asian with bad grades, and finally, comparisons to a higher achieving sibling or relative. There will be reminders of how hard the parents worked to

⁴ Timothy Tseng, interview with this author, San Jose, CA, March 8, 2017.

get to where they are and how those efforts need to be appreciated and rewarded with well-behaved and high achieving children who will maintain the family's standard of excellence.

In the public television series *Becoming American: The Chinese Experience*, two young Chinese women describe the different paths they have traveled that illustrate the high priority given to academic achievement. One of them, Jean Tang, allows the cameras into her parents' home where academic awards earned by her and her brother were prominently displayed in front of the fireplace. Mom and Dad were clearly proud of what their children had accomplished. Jean had followed the most desired of paths and was pursuing a medical degree at the Stanford School of Medicine. Neighbors and friends had great admiration for her parents. They had gained a reputation for raising their kids properly. For many years, they ran a modest clothing store in Los Angeles Chinatown, and were now rewarded because Jean had done well in school and was now achieving their dreams. The second young lady, Michelle Ling, followed a different path. She, too, was bright and had graduated from Cal-Berkeley. But she had rebelled and instead of following her parents' dreams of law, medicine or high-tech, chose a career as a writer. In recalling her upbringing, she described the typical Asian parenting strategy. "On a day-to-day basis, if you did something wrong, you had to answer to Mom. The more, large, overarching bad things you might do, like not become a doctor or a lawyer, or whatever, then there was always the threat of (in an ominous voice) your father!"⁵

⁵ Bill Moyers, *Becoming American: The Chinese Experience*, a Presentation of Thirteen/WNET, New York, New York, 2003, Episode 3, Chapter 9.

It is not uncommon to hear Asian kids describe their relationship with their fathers in similar tones. Many will testify that their only significant conversations with their dads are about grades, school or where to go for college. With so little time spent on more personal and nurturing topics, family relationships begin to sour and grow distant. Both father and children notice, but neither party has any idea how to address the problem. The father will feel that harsh discipline is his responsibility. His reasoning is that the children may not like it right now, but some day, they will understand and thank him. He is willing to wait for that day. The child will often feel like their father's love is dependent on how well they achieve in school. The father, who has been forever aloof, may one day suddenly realize that he has created a chasm between him and his child. When he tries to change his approach, and enter his child's life, the situation can become grossly awkward and uncomfortable for all involved. A father who has never expressed interest in his child's life, who is now suddenly present, can feel like a total stranger to his son or daughter. His pursuit of a relationship that has not existed previously becomes a discouraging quest.

The Idolatry of Good Things

Admirers of Asian culture may not fully comprehend the problem. They will point out that there are numerous examples of families, like Jean Tang's, who have successfully raised their children to do well in the classroom. They may have endured some difficult moments, but the persistence paid off. If the children's feelings were hurt, the assumption is that they will recover and forget. The scolding and name calling were a part of the process to help them to do well in school and prepare them for future achievements. Today, they are excelling in medicine, research, business and high tech.

How can anyone criticize cultural values that teach their children to work hard and achieve excellence? They are role models in Asian communities, and parents can use their story to encourage their children to follow a similar path.

These families should be congratulated. They have done well in attaining the goals they set in raising their families. But the path they have followed is not necessarily the same one that is suitable for every family. For every Jean Tang story, there is another about Michelle Ling. This is not a question of right or wrong, but one of choice. It may have been right for the Tang family to encourage their daughter to pursue a medical career. She has done well and is one of the most respected dermatologists at the Stanford Health Center. But Ling is also very accomplished. She has traveled extensively, pursued her writing career and is now a global communications specialist for First Republic Bank in San Francisco. For a father to tell his children that they must pursue a specific path of study in order to have a successful life was not necessarily true. There are numerous career choices that can bring success and fulfillment.

A case can be made that many Asian families have unknowingly made an idol out of academic achievement. Idols are often created out of something that has admirable and desired qualities. They are not just those statues or figures that ancient cultures worshiped. There is a tendency to associate idols with things that are inherently evil. A desire for power or greed over material things often come to mind. But consider pursuits such as a good appearance, increasing wealth or a job promotion. Nobody would be blamed for seeking those goals. But if a person becomes dependent on those for affirmation or personal happiness, then idolatry is on the horizon. They can easily become replacements for God. The same assessment can be made about academic

achievement. Every student should be encouraged to excel. Parents are doing the right thing when they take steps to help their children succeed in the classroom. Discussions about college and career goals are healthy. But when academic excellence is elevated to the place of a condition for parental love, affection and support, then idolatry is lurking nearby.

Being a disciplinarian can isolate an Asian father from his family. An unhealthy fear can be created in children when interaction with their father is predominantly in a context of correction, reprimand or failure. The father may adopt a viewpoint that engaging in relational conversation can sabotage his ability to dole out discipline. He will maintain emotional distance to help maintain his parental authority. What many fathers fail to comprehend is how authority over a child is developed, not in being an authority figure, but in a healthy relationship. If the child has a sense of trust with the father, then discipline, even if it is harsh or restrictive, will be better received. Author Alfie Kohn confirms this, "...misbehavior is easier to address – and problems are easier to solve – when children feel safe enough with us to explain the reasons they did something wrong. Kids are more likely to come to us when they're in trouble, to look to us for advice, and to *want* to spend time with us when they can choose whether to do so. Furthermore, when they know they can trust us, they're more likely to do what we ask if we tell them it's really important."⁶ Kohn's instruction should lead the Asian father to understand that the establishment of a positive relationship is not an option. If he wants to be an effective disciplinarian, it will be most effectively done from within his ongoing relationship with his children.

⁶ Alfie Kohn, *Unconditional Parenting* (New York: Atria Books, 2005), 123.

When the father makes academic achievement an idol, he simultaneously reduces the importance of the other elements that can build the character of family life. Spiritual activities can become secondary. It is not unusual in an Asian home for a child to be punished for unacceptable academic performance by restriction or removal from church youth group involvement. The line of reasoning is to take away one of the child's enjoyed privileges until the desired academic level is achieved. If participation in the youth group is near the top of the list, that will sometimes become an option for an activity that can be withheld as punishment. This gives the unspoken message that good grades are more important than even one's relationship with God. Another indicator of the idolatry of academic performance is shown when parents gather in a church small group. Their concern with their kids' grades becomes apparent when prayer requests are asked for. It is not unusual for parents to share their concerns for their kids' performance in school. When prayers are solely centered around grades and college acceptances, the pursuit of academic success become an idol. It sends the message that the greatest potential evil facing the family is that their children will end up in a substandard university, which will reflect poorly upon the parents. The shame factor cannot be ignored because it fuels the idolatry. It is not uncommon for a student's spirituality to be at least partially assessed by their level of excellence in the classroom. The high grade point average becomes the goal instead of a growing relationship with God.

Fathers unknowingly step into this idolatry because of the importance that Confucian philosophy places upon education and the role that the father has in ensuring that his children succeed. Confucianism strongly asserts the value of filial piety. The

child owes the parent absolute loyalty and obedience.⁷ If the child fails to comply, the father may feel that he has failed on two different levels. Not only has he failed to instill proper ethical behavior in his children, but he has also fallen short in his obligation to govern his family with goodness, humaneness, love, benevolence, human-heartedness and humanity.⁸ The idolatry of academic excellence becomes a *Cold War* type of battleground between the father and his children. There is little room for a positive relationship to develop. Long-lasting resentment takes root and begins to define the relationship.

The Lack of Equipping

Adding to the predicament is the absence of teaching by many Asian churches. Very few ministries offer any instruction to help men learn how to be better fathers. They are encouraged to take on influential positions such as Bible study leader, Sunday School teacher, board member, elder or deacon. Leadership in church programs take a higher priority. A man gains esteem when he is appointed to influential positions. In some seminaries, Asian men study for a theological degree with no intent of ever entering the ministry. Their goal is to increase their qualification to be appointed to positions of teaching and preaching in their own church. Training a man to be a father, on the other hand, seems elementary and ordinary. He is told to be the spiritual leader in his home. Many Asian men often assume this means leading the family in a regular devotional time. But this is often done in a sterile, academic atmosphere. It is meaningless and boring to the children. The father has not taken the necessary steps to build a relationship which

⁷ Jennifer Oldstone-Moore, *Confucianism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 98.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

would greatly improve communication. Asian churches offer very few resources to train a man how to make that happen and to interact with his children. Japanese churches have been more in touch with Western culture and generally been more aware of the need to train fathers, and a Korean group has developed a *Fathers School*.⁹ It helps Korean men learn how to become more emotionally aware of their families' needs. The school began in Korea and has been spreading throughout Korean communities in the United States. But so much more can be done. No church would deny that being a father is an important role in a man's life, but there seems to be an assumption that men instinctively know how to approach this responsibility. The stories being told by young adult Asian Americans often give an opposing view.

Asian pastors are often ill-equipped to handle a ministry for fathers. Many of them were raised in home situations with a distant father. They are no different than the other men in their congregations. Church members spend an inadequate amount of time with their children because they occupy themselves in the workplace. Pastors neglect their children because they are overwhelmed by the demands of ministry. This creates a blind spot in Asian churches. Nobody knows how to address the problem, and many are not aware that it even exists. Children will sometimes describe the two-sided nature of their father. At church, he is gracious, friendly and helpful to people. But at home, he is stern, distant and not easily accessible. The child becomes a teenager and leaves for college. The father assumes that his job is done. But when his children grow into young adulthood, there may be a wake-up call similar to the one experienced by David prior to

⁹ Nicole LaPorte, "The Korean Dads Twelve-Step Program," *The New York Times Magazine*, May 8, 2011, accessed December 13, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/08/magazine/mag-08Here-t.html>.

the Sunday School convention. A distant or damaged relationship has been cultivated. By that time, the father may desire to reconcile with his children, but it is impossible to recover the missed opportunities of years past.

When a church becomes aware that their families are experiencing problems, the normal course of action is to invite an authority to present a seminar. This may be a good starting point, but the potential impact is minimal and not long-lasting. Whatever is learned becomes superficial because there is no follow-up to help fathers make changes. Men are apprehensive about attending such events. The topic does not feed their egos because there is no direct correlation to enhance their role in public ministry. There is also the fear of being shamed. Wives have a way of elbowing or staring down their spouse when the speaker points out areas where the father may be personally challenged. Churches need to develop a method of training fathers in an environment where men feel safe and can be taught and encouraged by their male peers and friends.

Only Asian Fathers?

Asian fathers are not unique in their struggle. When the question is asked of other cultural groups, fathers all over the world have similar shortcomings. Men from every people group can be distant from their families, and almost every culture expects mothers to be the primary care-givers in nurturing the children. It is common, and often expected, for men to spend a majority of their time with their jobs. Spending little time in the home is normal.

It should also be noted that the problems discussed thus far are not the only ones experienced in Asian homes. The distant father relationship and the overt attention given to a child's academic performance is prevalent in Confucian-based cultures. But in other

non-Confucian-based Asian cultures, difficulties with fathers of a different nature are experienced. Many Filipino fathers are forced to find jobs away from home. The distance prevents them from spending any meaningful time with their children. Indian fathers who have immigrated to the United States no longer have the joint family system available to them which provided grandparents who helped to raise children. The explanation for dysfunctions may differ, but the resulting hurts are the same. Fathers everywhere share the same sin. The purpose here is not to condemn the sin, but to explore the process that leads to the sin. It would not be fair to say that Asian families deal with the same issues as everyone else. The plight of the Asian American family needs to be identified and addressed specifically. A solution to help Asian fathers relate better with their children can revolutionize the culture.

SECTION 2: OTHER SOLUTIONS

Cultural Voices

When trying to address the issues regarding fathers, it is interesting to hear voices from other cultural perspectives. The Asian voice says, “What is the problem?” Asians can tout numerous accomplishments from a long history that continues today. Is there really something wrong? The culture has much to be proud about. Confucian philosophy has been studied, admired and followed for centuries. Why would an Asian father want to abandon a way of life that has worked for generations? Why would he do anything different than what his father did? The Western voice has many authorities who have already written and spoken to fathers about being better in their role in the family. Their question is, “Asian fathers are no different. They are just like the rest of us, right?” The subject is well-documented, especially in Christian circles. If men want help in being a better father, the resources are already available. Then there are the voices of the various Asian ethnic groups which do not necessarily identify as being Confucian-based. They are asking, “What about us? We have issues that are neither Western nor Confucian-based. Where do we fit in?” Fathers from India, the Philippines, Nepal and other nations do not identify with Confucian teaching. Is it reasonable to try to fit them in with other Asian ethnic groups?

The questions are all valid and the voices need to be heard. The ensuing discussion will result in greater understanding and insight. The opinions expressed are potential representations of the three voices which might respond to an argument for the need of a tool to help Asian fathers better relate to their families.

The Asian Voice

Western culture marvels at the success of Asian families, especially when education is used as a measuring stick. Major universities across the United States are populated with a disproportionate number of Asian American students. In a recent survey, the Brookings Institute estimates that 54 percent of Asians in America hold at least a bachelor's degree. This compares to 36 percent of Whites, 23 percent of Blacks and 16 percent of Hispanics.¹⁰ Some recent surveys have revealed the dominance of Asian students. More than 22 percent of the recent freshman class at Harvard (class of 2021) is made up of Asian Americans.¹¹ In terms of undergraduate populations, Asian Americans account for 40 percent of the total student body at UC Berkeley,¹² 21 percent at Stanford University and 29 percent at UCLA.¹³ It is not just the value placed upon education that stands out, but also how it is achieved. The Brookings survey revealed that a predominant view held by Asian Americans is that their success is based on hard work and not personal talent or skill.¹⁴ It has been instilled in them that greater dedicated effort will lead them to outperform other students. The results are hard to argue against,

¹⁰ Nathan Joo, Richard V. Reeves, and Edward Rodrigue, "Asian-American Success and the Pitfalls of Generalization," *Brookings*, April 20, 2016, accessed August 21, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/asian-american-success-and-the-pitfalls-of-generalization/>.

¹¹ Harvard College Admissions and Financial Aid, Admissions Statistics, "Harvard Admitted Students Profile," accessed August 21, 2017, <https://college.harvard.edu/admissions/admissions-statistics>,

¹² The Office of the Vice Chancellor for Equity & Inclusion, University of California at Berkeley, "Diversity Snapshot," Fall 2013, 2, accessed August 21, 2017, <http://diversity.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/diversity-snapshot-web-final.pdf>.

¹³ UCLA 2016-17 Undergraduate Profile, New Freshmen and Transfers, 2, accessed August 21, 2017, <http://www.apb.ucla.edu/Portals/90/Documents/Campus%20Stats/UGProfile16-17.pdf>.

¹⁴ Joo, Reeves, Rodrigue, "Asian-American Success and the Pitfalls of Generalization."

especially when it is noted that Asians account for only 5.7 percent of the total population of the United States.¹⁵

Similar achievements are noted in the working world. It is a well-known fact that the Silicon Valley high tech industry is dominated by engineers who are of Asian descent. In 2010, Asians made up over 50 percent of the Silicon Valley workforce. This was a double-digit increase from 2000, when they accounted for 38.7 percent.¹⁶ The success is not limited to the high-tech field. Asian Americans are increasingly prominent in other professions such as business, education, law and medicine. In research performed in 2013, the median annual household income for Asian Americans was \$66,000 compared to \$49,800 for other U.S. households. In measuring median household wealth, Asian Americans also compared favorably to the general population, \$83,500 versus \$68,529.¹⁷ Even when questioned about family life, Asian Americans stand out from all other groups. In the same research, 54% expressed their opinion that a successful marriage is one of the most important things in life. This compares to 34% of the general population who held the same view. When asked about parenting being one of the most important things in life, 67% of Asians polled agreed opposed to 50% for all other Americans.¹⁸

¹⁵ United States Census Bureau, "Quick Facts," U.S. Department of Commerce, accessed August 23, 2017, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045216>.

¹⁶ Dan Nakaso, "Asian Workers Now Dominate Silicon Valley Tech Jobs," *The Mercury News*, November 29, 2012, accessed August 23, 2017, <http://www.mercurynews.com/2012/11/29/asian-workers-now-dominate-silicon-valley-tech-jobs/>.

¹⁷ Pew Research Center, "The Rise of Asian Americans," Washington, D.C., Updated Edition, April 4, 2013, accessed August 23, 2017, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/06/19/the-rise-of-asian-americans/>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

When this research is considered, it would be easy to conclude that Asian Americans are doing quite well. They value their marriages and families, raise their children to be hard-working and disciplined and see the results of pursuing excellence in the same way that their previous generations did. The evidence seems to indicate that other cultural groups have something to learn from the way that Asian parents raise their children.

There is no denying the fact that Asian Americans are high achievers in academic and professional fields. But when the question is raised about the quality of the relationship that an Asian father has with his children, should these be the major criteria? Does having a child with an astronomical grade point average presume good parenting? In a secular humanistic world, the answer might be affirmative. But when a family experiences the heart of God, they know that there is more to parenting than academic success. If a man's children do well in school, attend a prestigious university and become successful in a high-paying career, but are lacking in relational depth and have only a superficial understanding of spiritual matters, would he be satisfied as a father? He will not have imparted anything of eternal consequence to his family. He may discover that he has put his children in the predicament described by Jesus when he spoke of those who had gained the whole world, but had forfeited their souls.¹⁹ In the relational arena, would a father have any sense of peace if his children have learned discipline and hard work, but have now rejected him in their adulthood because of hurts inflicted in order to attain those goals? There can be little reward if sons and daughters are engaged in successful

¹⁹ Matthew 16:26.

careers, but are tolerating a distant relationship with their father. Not only might they be in a position of questioning God, but also feeling emptiness with their father.

Confucius believed that a father's discipline was to be administered in such a way that the child is not damaged. His teaching included the admonition that a father should provide care and guidance.²⁰ It may seem odd that an Asian father would be so adamant about instilling discipline, hard-work and academic achievement, but forget this other portion of Confucius' teaching. The success of his family cannot be based solely on academic achievement. A child's self-confidence and personal security is derived from parental affirmation. If the father persists in being critical and verbally abusive, the child may succeed in the classroom, but the hidden values of personal character will be missing. The parenting job will be left incomplete.

The Western Voice

It is no secret that fathers in Western cultures also struggle to fulfill their role. There are countless stories of men who face drug and alcohol issues, abuse their children, practice adulterous relationships and abandon their families. Throughout North America, it is common to find men with broken marriages and multiple families. In comparison, the issues created by Asian fathers may be minor infractions as opposed to what families in Western cultures face. The argument then is to ask, "Why is there a need to specifically address Asian fathers?" Many of the issues raised concerning Asian fathers can also be seen in other North American homes. Being too occupied with a job, not

²⁰ Oldstone-Moore, *Confucianism*, 56.

spending sufficient time with the family and victimizing children are all too common in the lives of fathers regardless of their cultural identity.

From a Christian perspective, there have already been numerous books written that speak to men about their role as a father. One of them, entitled *The Seven Secrets of Effective Fathers* is written by Ken Canfield, who also hosts a website *National Center for Fathering*.²¹ It includes numerous resources to teach, train and encourage fathers on how to grow in their role in the home. Since 1990, *The Promise Keepers* movement has spoken to audiences of men in gatherings across the United States. Encouraging them to be champions in their homes has always been a major part of their agenda. The organization's Promise 4 says, "A Promise Keeper is committed to building strong marriages and families through love, protection and biblical values."²² In the Promise Keepers conferences, this point is always highlighted by a speaker emphasizing the important role that a man has with influencing his children. No matter what cultural influences a father may claim, there is little variance in the issues that have arisen. Likewise, it can be argued that the teachings given to men from Scripture speak of a universal set of truths that speaks into a father's character and guides him to be a positive influence on his children.

However, to simply give answers to questions that fathers face fails to properly consider cultural context. Solutions can be presented that may be helpful to fathers regardless of their background, but the path that one father travels is not necessarily the

²¹ *National Center for Fathering*, accessed August 24, 2017, <http://www.fathers.com/tag/ken-canfield/>.

²² "7 Promises," *Promise Keepers*, accessed August 24, 2017, <https://promisekeepers.org/about/7-promises>.

same as a father from another part of the world. Fathers everywhere struggle with their role in the home, but the reasons that lead to their dysfunction may originate from entirely different origins. A primary example can be taken once again from the place of academic excellence in the traditional Asian home. It is surprising to the general population when reports surface about how Asian families are willing to spend thousands of dollars to prepare their children to improve their scores on college entrance exams.²³ When students fail to perform at acceptable levels, wrath from the father will be the result as he accuses his children of not trying hard enough, not studying properly or just being dumb. This would rarely happen in a westernized home, where staying in school and graduating is the normal goal. The quest for the 4.0 GPA is clearly a part of the Asian context.

Cultural context is not just to be considered in asking the question, but also in providing the answers. An Asian father will generally understand the need to spend time with his children and to develop healthy relationships. Even if he may have difficulty in knowing how to cultivate those values in his life, he will not be surprised that his role is important. But the solution offered to him must be presented in a way that is palatable. He must be able to see himself in the role of a nurturing father. *Raising a Modern-Day Knight* was written to help fathers guide their sons into manhood.²⁴ It is a book that has many valuable tools and activities that can help fathers form healthy bonds with their sons. The lessons offered and the desired outcomes cannot be argued with. But the

²³ Emil Guillermo, "Do Asians Pay More for SAT Test Prep? Report Finds 'Tiger Mom Tax,'" *NBC News*, September 2, 2015, accessed August 28, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/report-princeton-review-s-overcharging-asians-called-tiger-mom-tax-n420401>.

²⁴ Robert Lewis, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2007).

message is an awkward one for Asian men to receive because the metaphor of a knight is European in nature. It is an odd picture to visualize an Asian man as a knight. He needs a different image in which he can see himself. The answer for a man seeking to be a better father needs to be delivered in a proper cultural context.

The Voices of Other Asian Ethnicities

It seems odd to consider that after making a point for cultural context that now the question goes in the opposite direction. Is it fair to say that the issues encountered by one group of Asian fathers are the same for all fathers in the various Asian ethnic groups? Obviously, not. Issues that are prevalent among Asian ethnicities that have been strongly influenced by Confucianism are not going to be the same as in other groups shaped by other influences. Cultural context argues that no two ethnicities are ever going to be the same. But the argument can be made that there is sufficient commonality between the various Asian ethnic groups that an approach to discuss issues related to fathers can encompass the overall culture. Perhaps in other pieces of research, authors who are more familiar with individual cultures can address the specific needs of fathers representing the various ethnicities.

Fathers in South Asian people groups claim little or no influence from Confucius, yet many of them still have a high value for academic excellence. As with Asian immigrants from Confucian-based cultures, Indian Americans have also surpassed the general population of the United States in academic pursuits. Indian American students from obscure towns in the Midwest have been frequent champions at the National Spelling Bee. Their achievements in the business world are also well-known. One out of

eight Silicon Valley startups have been founded by Indian Americans. In 2010, their average annual family income was \$88,000, twice the national average.²⁵

Filipino culture also values children doing well in school, but the encouragement comes with a broader approach about how one is to be successful in life. Filipino society is predominantly collectivist which places a high priority on maintaining harmonious relationships within the family. This value is not rooted in Confucianism or Buddhism, but in the Filipino ideal of “smooth interpersonal relationships”, exemplified in desiring harmony and inclusiveness in relationships and the subjugation of individual interests for the sake of the in-group.²⁶ Children are expected to abide by family rules, and even at young ages, to contribute to the family’s welfare. In raising their children, Filipino parents try to instill cultural values such as respect for elders, good education, good values, good morals and right character. For a Filipino to do well in school does not just reflect upon the child, but also upon the parents, relatives and other extended family members.

With the similarities in the various Asian ethnic groups, it should not be surprising that their fathers share comparable struggles. As with every immigrant, there are difficult adjustments in family life in a new culture. Life in India included the use of the Joint Family System. Grandparents and even any available aunts and uncles assisted in providing daily childcare. This not only helped to provide for daily needs, it was also a deeply held traditional value that provided the underlying principles of household-

²⁵ Sadanand Dhume, “Why So Many Indians Succeed in America,” *The Wall Street Journal*, September 24, 2015, accessed November 25, 2016, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/why-so-many-indians-succeed-in-america-1443112996>.

²⁶ Frank Lynch, *Social Acceptance Reconsidered* (Quezon City, Philippines: Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1973), 164.

building strategies in South Asia.²⁷ This was of great help to the Indian father who could devote more time to his career and his role of being the family provider. It was a normal and natural trade-off. He would earn sufficient income to care for aging parents in exchange for trusted care of his children. Immigration to America caused great disruption with the Joint Family System. Indian fathers had to take on new roles of being coaches, tutors, taxi drivers and play friends. In traditional settings, there was little doubt about who was in charge. The authority of the Indian father was never questioned. He even retained the responsibility of making life decisions for his children which included the choice of career and future marriage partner. In a new westernized setting, his words were now merely “suggestions”. The adjustment for the Indian father was not easy. He may have had concerns that his children were becoming too American and abandoning traditional Indian values. But there was little he could do to reverse the trend. His incompetency in governing his children’s social activities, such as dating, was another step in diminishing his authority in the home.

Filipino fathers have experienced similar frustrations. In his homeland, families are described as “matrifocal”²⁸, meaning that the home is organized around the mother’s abilities, schedule and discipline. The father is known to be more of a distant figure. He is the family provider and the expectation is that he will do whatever is necessary to bring income into the home. This may call for him to work in distant places, even overseas, for long periods of time. There is also a machismo factor in Filipino culture. A man’s free time is not necessarily spent with the family, but with his *barkada* or friendship group.

²⁷ Patricia Uberoi, *Freedom and Destiny* (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2006), 157.

²⁸ Paul Rodell, *Culture and Customs of the Philippines* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 131.

This is a group of men that formed bonds early in their youths. They maintain these friendships throughout their lives.²⁹ The father may also be called upon to spend time with co-workers or with people in the community. These types of activities are often necessary and constructive because they can lead to promotions and advancements in a man's career. But his time devoted to these relationships come at the expense of spending time with his wife and children. The Filipino father can easily become a stranger in his own home.

Conversations with fathers in other Asian ethnic groups would reveal other nuances that are unique to their culture. The Hmong deal with tribal influences, Nepali families face isolation and economic challenges and many of the Vietnamese are trying to regain an identity on what it means to be a father after a century of warfare that took many of them away from their homes.³⁰ Observations of the various ethnic groups indicate that the cultural context lies within the process of how fathers see their roles, not just in their homes, but within the entire society. If their definition came solely from their interaction with the family, their role returns to that basic job description of financial provider for those who depend on him and disciplinarian when children do not heed the words of their mother. But when the father considers his societal reputation, the cultural definition becomes more apparent. Some fathers see themselves as the wise scholar, others are the influential member of the community, another is supposed to be the valued and admired contributor to his company and many want to be viewed as the spiritual leader in their home.

²⁹ Ibid., 132.

³⁰ Hung Pham, March 22, 2016, interview by author, Milpitas, CA.

Asian fathers can be very different, yet their dysfunctions are undeniably similar. No matter the approach they take to their roles as fathers, many Asian men are distant from their children. It is all too common for them to devote a bulk of their daily schedule to work and sacrifice opportunities to influence their sons and daughters. When it comes to knowing how to be an effective father, there are men from every background who have failed to get a grasp on their role.

The Need for Cultural Context

In response to the three points of view expressed in this section, the primary question is that of cultural context. The issues faced by fathers cannot be adequately addressed by use of a broad universal brushstroke. There are too many nuances in cultures that create situations that are particular to the various people groups. But to go in the other direction of dissecting the role of a father in every ethnic group would result in a gargantuan task that would require intricate detail that is beyond the scope of this moment.

It seems that cultural context is most crucial when asking the question of how problems are created. The desired solution is universal. Having more wholesome relationships between fathers and their children is the result that everyone seeks. But to explain the roadblocks in reaching that destination requires an understanding of a father's value system which is rooted in his cultural context. Why is it important in Western culture to portray the ideal father as a strong character such as a modern-day knight? By contrast, why does Asian culture desire a father who is wise and honorable? Are these just stereotypes or do they say something definitive about cultural values? Do they also help to explain some of the flaws that are created that lead to distant relationships? It

seems fair and reasonable that every ethnic group deserves specific attention to explain why their fathers are the way they are. In the meantime, it is most helpful to examine the issues from the broader Asian context. When possible, the characteristics of different people groups will be considered. Ignoring their existence is not intentional. But the primary perspective of this dissertation will stem from the issues within Confucian-based Asian cultures.

SECTION 3: THE HYPOTHESIS

Introduction

It is no simple task to change a culture. It is exponentially more difficult to change a church culture. Nobody lives in a vacuum. We all take our clues from the influences around us. Asian fathers conduct their lives the way they do because it is a lifestyle that has been modeled for them. Confucian philosophy has dominated the cultural patterns of many Asian ethnic groups. It has endured for centuries and shows no indication of evaporating any time soon. What is presented in these pages is by no means an attempt to single out Confucianism for an attack. Every culture in the world is tainted by sin. If Asian fathers expect to become more godly in the way they relate to their children, the strategy is not to look to our cultural values for guidance, but to allow the lens of Scripture to show what our traditional teachings might have missed. The gospel transcends all cultures. When a father is encouraged to experience forgiveness, become his children's discipler or to pass on a spiritual inheritance, the urging is to practice more godliness, not to abandon one's culture.

The same argument can be made in an attempt to transform a church culture. Why Asian churches do not devote more time to equipping men to be better fathers is a mystery. They are taught to be spiritual leaders in their home, yet there is little training offered to help them to be successful in that duty. Could it be as some pastors have surmised that many of the men in their congregations perceive church ministries to primarily target women and children and that they just come along for the ride? No matter the reason, it would seem that if a chronic problem exists that is ruining

relationships in families that pastors and church leaders would be quick to address the situation. But for the most part, that has not been the case. The long term goal with this project is that churches will become active in gathering fathers together for the purposes of training, encouragement and healing the brokenness that many of them have experienced in their homes.

The transformation of a culture does not happen overnight. But it could happen with one father, with one group of fathers, then with an entire church and then the movement can find its next location. If that kind of culture shift occurs, then a new generation of children will be saved from pain and experience the impact of having a nurturing relationship with a godly father.

The Biblical Determination of a Good Father

How many good fathers are there in the pages of Scripture? It may not be as simple a question as one might think. Noah was a drunkard, Abraham was a poor role model and Jacob played favorites with his sons. And that is only in the book of Genesis. Moses, Jephthah, Samuel and David did not do much better. Two Old Testament fathers provide a bit of hope. Job prayed for his children and made it a habit to offer up sacrifices on their behalf.³¹ Joash, the father of Gideon, is a little-known character. But when the townspeople wanted to execute his son because he had destroyed some pagan idols, Joash stood up to them and defended his son's actions. This was done despite the fact that the idols belonged to him.³² With all the stories of the heroes of the faith, these are the only

³¹ Job 1:5.

³² Judges 6:25-32.

two positive references that can be found. This roll call is an indication of how difficult the task of being a good father can be. But there is another father who stands out. He is the father of the young man in Luke 15, who is known as the prodigal son. We don't know this father's name and we're not even sure if he was an actual person. But not surprisingly, he is a representation of God, our heavenly Father. His actions in the parable reveal the heart of God for restoration and forgiveness. When Jesus told the story, it was with the intention of demonstrating the great love that God has for his children.

Despite the popularity of this parable, it causes some difficulties for those whose values have been shaped by Asian culture. The younger son is the spoiled, rotten and misbehaved kid who brings shame to the family. The father is a victim because he is too lenient and fails to exert his authority. The one who possesses all the admirable qualities that the Confucian culture celebrates is the older son. The way the story unfolds makes no sense. It is completely counter-cultural in any setting. But with the Asian mindset, it is clearly nonsensical. No Asian father would handle the situation as did the father in the story. When careful thought and analysis is given to the events of the parable, it should challenge Asian men to take a deeper approach to their roles as fathers. The normal father description is the man who is emotionally distant, the hard-working provider for the family and the stern disciplinarian. These may be culturally acceptable, but do they fulfill the calling of a godly father? What is required to be transformed to a father who experiences forgiveness, disciplines his children and leaves them a spiritual inheritance?

In a seminar a few years ago, the story of the prodigal son was being addressed. An Asian woman raised her hand in order to voice her opinion of the father. She said, "I

don't think he was a very good father. He didn't even know how to discipline his son.”³³ Her comments revealed something about Asian culture. There is difficulty in understanding the parable as a picture of how God our Heavenly Father extends forgiveness to us. The parenting norms in Asian families are often in direct conflict with the actions taken by the father in the story. No Asian father would allow the youngest son to insult him, waste the family's fortune and then forgive him upon his return. The father who would take such foolish actions would be thought of as lacking in his ability to establish the proper authority in his home.

Asian parenting styles are rooted in Confucianism.³⁴ This means that academic excellence, personal success and filial piety are highly valued. Following these pursuits has led to many admirable qualities. Confucian practices are greatly responsible for the label of the *model minority*. Asian students are known for their high academic achievements. Since the youngest son in the parable failed to follow this path, it is no wonder that the woman at the seminar questioned the parenting skills of the father.

The story really doesn't say anything about academic performance. But the actions of the prodigal indicate that he was the type, if found in a classroom, would take shortcuts. He is portrayed as foolish and interested only in worldly and fleshly pleasures. As a student, he would probably be the type who would skip classes and cheat on tests. He is not the classmate that Asian parents would care for their own kids to befriend. If

³³ “From Generation to Generation,” workshop by author, Bay Area Sunday School Convention, Castro Valley, California, March 6, 2010.

³⁴ Grace H.C. Huang and Mary Gove, “Asian Parenting Styles and Academic Achievement: Views from Eastern and Western Perspectives,” *Education* 135, no. 3 (Spring 2015): 392.

this were a modern-day story in the context of an Asian family, most parents would look upon the young man with disdain and question the father's ability to control the son.

Perhaps the worst of the prodigal son's faults was that he had no respect for his father. Within two sentences of the opening of the parable, Asian parents already do not like this young man. His request gives indication that he wants his father's things more than he wants his father. The request is very unusual. It can even be taken as a sign that he wished his father was already dead.³⁵ In Asian cultures, rebellion against parents' authority is unacceptable and would normally result in harsh consequences. Being "unfilial" was considered a crime in the traditional Chinese society. It even could result in death as a punishment.³⁶ It would be a shock if a contemporary Asian father were to do what the father in the parable did – he agreed to his son's request, divided the property, gave his son his share and let him go. There should have been a scolding with words of rebuke and discipline. To let him go, was a sign of weakness and acceptance of shame.

When the son returns, there is more dissonance for Asian parents to read about. The expectation is for the father to either ignore the son or to let go with a profanity-laced outburst to express his anger. By no means would an Asian father run and throw his arms around a troublemaking son. He might allow the young man to give his rehearsed speech. Then he would look at him sternly and burst out with, "Is that all you have to say?" There would be scolding and blaming. Questions would arise about what happened to all the money. Then the final blow would be the comparison, "Why can't you be like your older brother?"

³⁵ Timothy Keller, *Prodigal God* (New York: Riverhead Books, The Penguin Group, 2011), 21.

³⁶ Huang and Gove, "Asian Parenting Styles and Academic Achievement," 394.

According to Asian culture, the older brother would be the family trophy. He is the one who follows the Confucian principles. He is hard-working and successful. He has stayed in the family business and demonstrated his loyalty. He lives a principled life and has done things the right way. Most of all, he has done nothing to disgrace his father or to bring shame upon the family. He is the type of man that Asian mothers wish for their daughters to marry.

But if the parable were to end in such a way that would satisfy Asian cultural values, something would be missing. The father might have maintained his place of authority and gained sympathy and respect from friends and relatives. But there would be a wound in his relationship with his son. The shame would continue to reside in the home. There would be no happy ending.

The parable is a metaphor to help us understand the power of God's love. It describes something that is difficult to grasp, something that is missing in many relationships between Asian fathers and their adult children. The younger son may be the main character in the story. But the hero of the day is the father. He seizes the moment by forgiving his son. His actions change the entire landscape. First, there is irresponsibility, tragedy, sorrow and pain. When the father suddenly surprises everyone, the story becomes one of joy and celebration. It can be difficult to comprehend the enormity of forgiveness. It means more than simply uttering the words, "I'm sorry." The parable shows how forgiveness can be a transforming, life-changing and life-saving experience. In his book, *I is an Other*, James Geary describes a parable as a "narrated metaphor". The metaphorical language helps us to describe that which is indescribable.³⁷ It is indeed an

³⁷ James Geary, *I is an Other* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), 181, 211.

arduous task for an Asian father to rebuild a relationship. It cannot be done by reading a book or hearing a lecture. The narrated metaphor helps to paint a picture to increase understanding and receptivity.

Of course, it is not just the Asian culture that needs help here. There probably isn't a culture in the world in which the father's actions toward the prodigal son would be deemed "normal". Every father in the world would have been offended by the son's request. What sets Asian fathers apart is the influence of Confucian thought. Western culture champions the rugged individual who makes it on his own. The Asian family unit, in comparison, functions as a collective and de-emphasizes individualism.³⁸ Judgments are made about an Asian man, not just based on his personal achievements, but also on how the needs of the family are being met through his loyalty as a son, brother, husband and father to his family and his dedication to fulfill these roles.³⁹ When measured against such a backdrop, the youngest son fails miserably. But when the father's actions are viewed against Confucian theory, he doesn't make any sense. He is the victim in the story. Instead, he turns out to be the hero. By restoring the younger brother to his place as a son, the father's actions bring about that desired happy ending.

How is it determined that forgiveness even took place? The word itself is never used. But the signs are there. They lead us to a clear conclusion that forgiveness has been offered and received. The robe, ring, sandals, the fattened calf and the words of the father lead us to that conclusion.

³⁸ Huang and Gove, "Asian Parenting Styles and Academic Achievement: Views from Eastern and Western Perspectives," 393.

³⁹ Chen Z. Oren and Dora Chase Oren, *Counseling Fathers* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, LLC, 2010), 104.

When the son returns, he tries to give his rehearsed speech to the father. His words tell us that he is aware that he has forfeited his place as a son. He harbors no thought of ever regaining that status. His intention is to settle for a worker-master relationship with his father. That's the best he will hope for. The father does not even respond to the speech. He calls for the best robe, a ring and sandals. The best robe was the father's finest, most elegant robe. The ring was probably a signet ring that indicated authority. The shoes meant a restoration of rank for the young man. Slaves went barefoot, sons wore shoes.⁴⁰ The father offered no qualifying statements, "You are forgiven, but..." He makes it clear that there is not just forgiveness, but also restoration. By ordering the servants to re-clothe his son, he is making his decision public. There is no hiding the fact that the son's rank and relationship has been resurrected.

Such an event demands a celebration. People in first-century Palestine did not regularly eat meat. The calf was being fattened for some special occasion.⁴¹ The "fatted calf" was a grain-fed animal with high quality meat. It was considered a rare delicacy.⁴² There is no mistaking the father's intentions here. If it had been the case that he was merely glad that his son had finally come to his senses, he would have taken the young man in and hidden him from public view. The son's return would only have been revealed to those whom the father trusted. But the father goes far beyond what might be considered normal. In *Changing Signs of Truth*, Crystal Downing notes, "The father is

⁴⁰ Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Cross and the Prodigal: Luke 15 Through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 71.

⁴¹ Frank Gaebelien, gen. ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: The Zondervan Corporation, 1984), 984.

⁴² Bailey, *The Cross and the Prodigal: Luke 15 Through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants*, 72.

just as prodigal as the son, only for opposite reasons.”⁴³ In his book about the parable, Timothy Keller adopts the title *Prodigal God*.⁴⁴ Dictionary.com defines prodigal as “wastefully or recklessly extravagant.” The father went out of his way to let family, friends and the public to know about the son’s forgiveness and restoration.

If there was any lingering doubt, all you had to do was to hear the father’s words. They are the final and most convincing sign that forgiveness had transpired. Never does he humiliate the son by designating him as a hired servant or slave, but accepts him and gives him full status and all the privileges as his son.⁴⁵ In declaring that the young man was once considered dead, but is now alive and that he was lost, but is now found, he refers to him as “this son of mine.” The phrase includes a restoration of status, but also of relationship. This is “my” son.

It is not an easy task for an Asian father to be *prodigal*. Lavishness and recklessly extravagant are not the norms for one who wants to be respected and honored. It has been observed that a traditional Asian family hierarchy positions the father to remain distant from his children in order to gain their respect. He may also perceive sternness as appropriate and desirable.⁴⁶ If an Asian father wanted to offer forgiveness, he would do it quietly and privately. To be more demonstrative would include a risk of losing face. But when the father of the prodigal goes public, his message becomes stronger and more convincing to his son. If there is a broken relationship in the home, it is not going to be

⁴³ Crystal L. Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 256.

⁴⁴ Keller, *Prodigal God*, 21.

⁴⁵ Norval Geldenhuys, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament, The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 409.

⁴⁶ Oren, *Counseling Fathers*, 106-107.

properly healed by just forgetting about it. There is not a true coming home until forgiveness is extended. When that happens, past sins can be dealt with, hurts are released and relationships can be restored.

And what about the older brother? Ironically, he is the one who does not experience forgiveness. On the surface, he's the good Asian son. This in itself is not a problem. His issue is not his good behavior, but a bad heart. By the end of the story, we can see that he is full of pride and resentment. Henri Nouwen observed that even though the older son had stayed at home that in his heart and mind, he had strayed far away. He viewed his relationship with his father in the mode of boss and worker or slave.⁴⁷ It is strange that Jesus does not finish the story. He leaves the account in midair.⁴⁸ The father has invited his older son to come in and take part in the celebration. We do not know what decision was made.

In order for forgiveness to happen, it has to be offered and received. The younger son received it. When he returned home, he had his speech prepared. His offer was to become one of his father's hired servants. But when restoration was offered, he made the conscious choice to accept the offer in deep humility even though he was unworthy.⁴⁹ In the case of the older son, we are left with him, hearing the pleas of his father. No reply is given. Forgiveness apparently is not received.

Sometimes, that happens. Forgiveness cannot be forced upon a person. This may lead to an unsatisfactory conclusion. We want the older son to accept the father's

⁴⁷ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Homecoming* (New York: Image Books/Doubleday Publishing Group, 1994), 102, 122.

⁴⁸ Bailey, *The Cross and the Prodigal: Luke 15 Through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants*, 87.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

invitation. But we cannot be certain if he ever did. Not everyone is willing to take the steps that leads to restoration. In this story, the person most highly considered in Asian culture leaves us hanging. He is unwilling to receive the love of God that transcends all the world's cultures.

Forgiveness is the primary issue addressed in this parable. However, the elements of discipleship and inheritance can be gleaned as well. The father did not receive his son back just to be a nice dad. There was also the act of restoring him to his proper place as a son. There was a desire to impart something meaningful into both sons' lives. For the younger son, it was clearly forgiveness. But it is easy to overlook the fact that the older son needed restoration as well. He is so angry that he refuses to join the celebration. He has distanced himself from his family. The father goes out and pleads with him. Once again, the father's actions are counter-cultural. If this had happened in an Asian home, the father would have been angered. He would have gone outside and lectured the older son. "Why are you doing this? Everyone can see you pouting. You are making me and the family look bad. I don't care if you like your brother or not. Just come inside and act like you're having a good time. If you want to hate him, you can do that tomorrow. Just get in there and greet your brother!" Then he might strike his son or grab him by the ear and force him to go inside. The prodigal father is different. He is not concerned with outer appearances. He is focused on the heart. He reassures his son of his relationship and provision for him. But he also makes it known that his mercy and forgiveness is available to both him and his brother. He is discipling his son by attempting to give him a caring and giving spirit.

The biblical determination of a good father is defined and demonstrated in this story. God our heavenly father is the model for men to follow. The prodigal father was the hero not because he played with his sons, taught them manly tasks or even spent time with them. He turned the story because of acts of his heart. His forgiveness gave opportunity for the younger son to be restored. His reassurance opened the door for his older son to learn compassion. His actions were meant to pass on traits of godliness to both sons. A good father closes distance by learning the power of forgiveness; he disciplines by demonstrating how to bless others and he becomes a benefactor by planting the character of God into his children.

The Transformation of the Asian Father

The typical Asian father is a hard-working man. He might work in a restaurant, repair cars or own a business. Many have taken important roles in high tech, education, business and medicine. He is dedicated to his work and is always looking for ways to improve. He knows that if he performs well, he will be appropriately compensated. His culture has trained him to work hard and not be afraid to put in long hours. He can outwork others who are not willing to make the sacrifices. The Asian father is willing to go the extra mile because that type of effort will lead to advancements and greater prestige. Within the family context, he knows that he is fulfilling his role of providing for his family. His goal is to do that well. If he can afford a better home and provide for his children's college education, he will be well-respected by his family and in his community. But because those costs are rising at an increasing pace, there is additional pressure for the father to find secondary sources of income. This could include investments, property ownership or a second job. This is his responsibility. If he were to

fail in this role, it would not reflect well on his character. There would be concern about how he might be viewed at church, by friends, family members and even his wife. There would be fear that he might be labeled as lazy, unproductive, irresponsible, or worst, unintelligent.

Due to the father's busy schedule, a bulk of the responsibility for raising children falls to the wife, grandparents or a hired caretaker. Not taking a significant role in caring for his family is not unusual to him. Since his own father may never have spent much time with him, it never occurred to him that this was needed. After he and his wife started their family, the father's assumption was that his wife and parents would keep watch over the children. This would free him to devote himself to his career. He knew that he had responsibilities as a father and he was willing to step in when necessary. As his kids grow in age, they are likely to become attracted to video games, social media and time with friends. If overindulgence in these activities cause grades to slip, he could be called upon to deal with the problem. He would intervene and become the strict disciplinarian that he was expected to be. This included limiting their time for fun activities and directing them to focus on completing homework assignments and maintaining a grade point average that would allow them to attend a major university. If the desired response was not achieved, he could take away the privilege they enjoy most – attending the church youth group with their friends. It was not something he enjoyed doing, but his kids had to understand how important it is to compete in the classroom.

This scenario leads to the Asian family becoming fertile ground for hurt feelings, distant relationships and potential dysfunctions in kids as they mature into adulthood. This is a description that is too often true within the Asian community. But the situation

is not without hope. The remedy is found within the gospel. The Holy Spirit has provided the way out. A father may be seen as emotionally distant, the family provider and the stern disciplinarian. That is an identity that can be transformed. This possibility of change is intimidating to the Asian man. There is fear that he will be called upon to abandon his Confucian culture and must adapt himself to the ways of the west. There have been numerous books published that attempt to speak into the character of today's man. Understandably, they have been written from a Western perspective. One example is *Wild at Heart*, written by John Eldredge. He makes a convincing case for how men need to be transformed from a state of boredom to having a passion in their lives. At the end of his first chapter, he gives this exhortation to men, "It's an invitation to rush the fields at Bannockburn, to go West, to leap from the falls and save the beauty."⁵⁰ For fathers who grew up in a Western cultural setting, these words may be motivating and exciting. For many fathers steeped in Confucian philosophy, it means very little. The problem has nothing to do with fear or courage. From an Asian perspective, the attitude portrayed here has very little to do with what it means to be a father. This is not to say that Eldredge is off target. The message simply needs to be re-stated in a context that speaks to the heart of the Asian father. The thesis of his book, which encourages men to live with a sense of adventure, is valid. But if an Asian man is to begin a more meaningful relationship with his children, there must be a launching pad more familiar to him. He needs a picture of a father in which he can see himself.

⁵⁰ John Eldredge, *Wild at Heart: Developing the Secret of a Man's Soul* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 18.

In *Changing Signs of Truth*, Crystal Downing discusses the importance of re-signing, a process of re-defining the meaning of signs, especially as it relates to communicating the gospel. As an example, she points to how the church has often tried to arrange the events of the end times to fit into a predictable theological package. Downing suggests a re-signing, to notice the element of hospitality. She writes, “Notice that signs of inheriting the kingdom all have to do with hospitality. As on the Emmaus road, welcoming the risen Christ is about welcoming the stranger.”⁵¹ Perhaps a similar transformation might prove to be helpful to the Asian father, who has no idea who won the battle of Bannockburn, nor the identities of Wyatt Earp or Kit Carson, characters mentioned in *Wild at Heart*. Note that Downing did not change the truth, just the signs of the truth. A normal teaching of the end times will outline all that must happen before Christ returns. Downing is making the case that there might be something more important that gives a different view of what we might see happen when Christ returns. In the same way, can the Asian father experience a re-signing, not to change his identity, but to reveal something that is in him not previously understood? The re-signing of the Asian father occurs in three areas. – from distant, provider and disciplinarian to forgiven, discipler and benefactor.

Distant to Forgiven

As a reminder from the story of the Prodigal Son, the father became the hero and turned the story by his act of forgiveness. This was an unexpected act of grace and mercy.

⁵¹ Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication*, 196.

It is not an easy task for an Asian father to be *prodigal*. Lavishness and recklessly extravagant are not the norms for one who wants to be respected and honored. It has been observed that a traditional Asian family hierarchy positions the father to remain distant from his children in order to gain their respect. He may also perceive sternness as appropriate and desirable.⁵² If an Asian father wants to offer forgiveness, he would do it quietly and privately. To be more demonstrative would include a risk of losing face. An Asian father might be reluctant to offer forgiveness for fear of being too easy on his kids. His logic tells him that there should be a threat held to bring about a change in behavior. What is sometimes forgotten is that relief is only one of the byproducts of forgiveness. When grace is extended, it also results in peace, trust and empowerment. The reluctance to offer forgiveness can become a deterrent to a child's experience of a breakthrough. A father may also feel that it is better to offer forgiveness with conditions. He would say, "I forgive you, but..." The completion of that sentence might include conditions such as doing better in school, being better behaved or start going back to church. If certain steps have to be taken, has forgiveness truly been offered? Note that the prodigal father did not lay down conditions. He did not tell the younger son, "I will forgive you and allow you back in the family if you pay the money back, get your life straightened out and act responsibly." Forgiveness is given, not earned.

But forgiveness is not always the responsibility of the father. In some situations, the child is the one who becomes aware that forgiveness is needed. If that be the case, the son or daughter cannot wait for the father "to see the light." That may never happen and the wait would become frustrating. The child then is the one who is called upon to become

⁵² Oren, *Counseling Fathers*, 106-107.

prodigal. This, too, is counter-cultural. According to Confucian thought, the child is supposed to apologize for shaming the family, but offering forgiveness implies that the father has erred in some way. This can make the conversation awkward. But breakthroughs rarely happen through casual encounters. There is risk involved. To achieve openness and intimacy in the relationship is going to require courage.

Forgiveness is not manipulative. Whether it is the father or the child initiating the conversation, it cannot be entered into with the thought that everything will be fixed. Things can get messy before forgiveness is achieved. Remember that at the end of the parable, it is not known if the older son accepted the father's invitation. Forgiveness is received, not imposed. It is possible that the attempt to forgive will not end well. Does this mean that the initiating party should not act? By no means. The classic misunderstanding about forgiveness is that it is done to let the other person off the hook. In reality, when it is offered, it is the initiating person who is freed. The years of resentment and anger are given up. If the other person refuses to receive the gift, the offering has still been made. The conversation may end with a lack of satisfaction, but there will still be the understanding that the right move has been made.

When the father experiences true and full forgiveness, whether it is given or received, he will immediately experience greater closeness with his children. The distance that he has lived in will disappear. Opportunities for intimacy and understanding will soon follow. It is so much easier for a child to receive instruction and critique when the relationship with the father is unhindered. Trust develops so that even reprimand will be received because the child will be reassured that the father has the child's best

interests in his heart. Forgiveness opens the way for other constructive parts of the relationship to blossom.

Discipler

A father may not enjoy his role as disciplinarian, but he has little difficulty in knowing how to fulfill it. The portrait of the Asian father as disciplinarian is one of seriousness as he prepares to speak to his children. There is disappointment because one of them has failed to behave properly or is not achieving in school as the family expects. He is lecturing and imploring the child to change personal habits. The father may become incredulous that his child is unable to understand math concepts or scientific theories. He begins to infer that his child is lacking in intelligence or is being lazy. Then comes the comparisons to a high-achieving relative, other kids at church or a sibling. His intentions may be good, but what results is for the child to question if the father's love is dependent upon the quality of a grade point average.

What would it take to re-sign the portrait of an Asian father? Would he have to become less Asian and more western? Can his portrait change so that it does not create fear and resentment when seen by his children? Many Asian men fear that if they let up, and make things "too easy", that their children will lack sufficient motivation to succeed in school. They have bought into the idea of the fear factor. The father feels that it is his responsibility to be the hard disciplinarian who will drive his children to academic success. He trusts that when they mature in age, they will eventually understand why he treated them so harshly and will one day come to appreciate his efforts. As many Asian parents like to say, "They may hate me now, but they will thank me later." Can the

portrait be re-signed so that children don't have to experience years of hurt that may never go away?

The re-signing of the Asian father requires a biblical foundation. Discipline is clearly endorsed in Scripture. One of the reasons that Israel asked for a king was because Samuel's sons did not follow his ways.⁵³ His failure as a father was to provide the discipline needed to instill godliness into their character. Then there is the proverb that speaks to so many parents, "Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it."⁵⁴ What needs to be noted, however, is that discipline was not encouraged simply to help children achieve success. It was done to instill a godly character. Discipline was a part of discipleship. The *shema* was the basis for raising children in the Jewish heritage. Moses gave it to the Israelites prior to his passing in his sermon in Deuteronomy,

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.⁵⁵

But how does a father move from disciplinarian to discipler? The disciplinarian role may not be enjoyable. But at least a man instinctively knows how to approach it. Being a discipler is more intimidating. It speaks of a person who is wise, spiritual and knowledgeable of Scripture. How can the common Asian father be a discipler to his children? Should that not be left to a Sunday School teacher, pastor or church youth

⁵³ 1 Samuel 8:1-5.

⁵⁴ Proverbs 22:6.

⁵⁵ Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (NIV).

worker? In independent conversations, two Asian American young adults told of how they considered their fathers as their first disciplers.^{56 57} They both fondly remembered nurturing times that their fathers intentionally spent with them during their formative years. There were other spiritual mentors who later spoke into their lives, but their fathers were the first ones to instill spiritual principles into their minds and hearts. Re-signing a father from disciplinarian to discipler does not have to be as difficult as it may sound. There is no need for the father to abandon Confucian tendencies that are familiar to him. It should be remembered that re-signing is not equivalent to redefining. Re-signing brings out a truth that had not been previously apparent. In his role as a father, discipline is simply one facet of discipleship. A father can still discipline his child. There is no need to make things “too easy”. A good discipler will challenge his student and prepare the child for life. The father’s role in his family does not change, it expands. He is not confined to speaking to his child only during difficult confrontations involving academic failure or behavioral problems. The father is promoted from disciplinarian to discipler. He is no longer an enforcer or dictator. He now becomes a teacher, trainer and mentor. He becomes more relational because he is imparting life to his children. This re-signing allows a man to fulfill the biblical calling of a father, but it also allows him to retain his Asian identity. The process of discipleship can cross cultures. There is no need for the father to become Western in his orientation. He can develop his own style of discipleship that is true to his identity.

⁵⁶ Christopher Li, February 13, 2016, interview by Author, San Jose, CA.

⁵⁷ Angelique Ichiyasu, April 11, 2016, interview by Author, San Jose, CA.

If there is a change that needs to happen, it might be in the way that discipleship is viewed. Asian culture tends to put the process into an academic arena. Discipleship causes us to think of using a book to study the Bible. The more experienced believer answers theological questions that the student will ask. But if the stories from the gospels are examined, it will be observed that discipleship was more wholistic. Jesus did teach. But he also put The Twelve into positions where they practiced ministry. They spent a lot of time walking and encountering people. His intent was not just to communicate knowledge, but also to change their attitudes and transform their hearts. The truest form of discipleship goes beyond academics and moves into experiencing life together. A father who discipled his children will not be satisfied with doing a Bible study on giving, he will work with his children to address a need to which the family can offer financial support. Discipleship becomes something beneficial to both the father and the child. His son or daughter will be taught and enriched by what is being instilled, but the father grows as well because he is actively spending time with his children in missional activity.

The father will discover that discipling affords opportunities for him to speak into his children's lives. There will be less need for the harsh confrontations when his children are out of line. Many life issues and decisions will arise more naturally in a discipleship process. He may also be challenged to become transparent about some of his own experiences in life. This may sound intimidating to a man who might wish to keep his life private. But a father will discover that as he becomes more willing to share his past struggles and failures, that his children will become transparent in return. Instead of hiding things from one another, the discipleship process brings issues into the open so

that father and child can address them in the presence of God. Being the child's discipler puts the father in a special role that he is uniquely suited to fill.

Benefactor

Leaving an inheritance was a common practice with fathers throughout biblical history. This is not surprising because it is a custom that almost every people group emulates as well. What is unique about the scriptural accounts is that in most cases, what was being passed on included more than just money and property. The father was passing to his son a portion of his character and spirituality. Taking a look at one of the classic biblical stories of inheritance will illustrate this point.

When Isaac was old, he spoke to his favorite son, Esau, and instructed him to go hunting and prepare his favorite food for him. The plan was to prepare a time for him to pass his blessing to Esau. Flocks and herds were probably included in the package, but the central focus was for Isaac to give a prophetic announcement over his son. When Isaac's wife, Rebekah, heard Isaac speak, she quickly called her favorite son, Jacob, to take action. She devised a plan of deception for Jacob to steal the blessing meant for Esau. Jacob hesitated, not for financial reasons, but because he feared being cursed. Jacob followed his mother's instructions and was successful in taking the blessing from his brother. Here are the words that Isaac unknowingly pronounced over Jacob.

Ah, the smell of my son
is like the smell of a field
that the Lord has blessed.
May God give you heaven's dew
and earth's richness—
an abundance of grain and new wine.
May nations serve you
and peoples bow down to you.
Be lord over your brothers,

and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.
 May those who curse you be cursed
 and those who bless you be blessed.⁵⁸

There is mention of heaven's dew and the earth's richness. Isaac mentions an abundance of grain and new wine. These are certainly pronouncements of prosperity. But what follows are the important parts of the blessing. Isaac speaks influence, power and dominance into his son's life. Contrast these words with those that Isaac later spoke over Esau.

Your dwelling will be
 away from the earth's richness,
 away from the dew of heaven above.
 You will live by the sword
 and you will serve your brother.
 But when you grow restless,
 you will throw his yoke
 from off your neck.⁵⁹

These are words of contention and struggle. They give an indication of a life full of conflict and servitude to his brother. It is no wonder that Esau planned to murder his brother. Years later, when the brothers reunite, it is obvious that both men had prospered and neither was living a life of poverty. But Isaac's words clearly impacted Jacob's eventual place in receiving the covenantal blessing.

The biblical concept of inheritance was as much about personal destiny as it was about finances and material possessions. David prepared Solomon for building the temple and the father of the prodigal father offered his sons much more than just the requested inheritance. A case can even be made that in the story of creation that God was passing

⁵⁸ Genesis 27:27b-29 (NIV).

⁵⁹ Genesis 27:39b-40 (NIV).

the things he had made to Adam for him to rule over. There are other examples to illustrate how there was a failure to pass on an inheritance. Moses was reluctant to circumcise his son; Eli's sons blasphemed God; and Samuel failed to pass his ways on to his sons. Inheritances included property, but what marked a difference in a person's life were the qualities that would impact their character and legacy.

Asian fathers, like most other men, will only give serious thought to leaving an inheritance when they reach the latter stages of life. It is a relatively simple task. He will meet with an attorney who will help him to draft the necessary documents to leave a fair portion behind to each of his children. In many cases, nothing is even verbally communicated about the inheritance. It is not until after death that the amount left behind becomes known. Leaving a personal spiritual inheritance requires more thought, patience and communication. A father may want to leave in his children his love for research and science. He sees his work as something that will impact mankind into the future. One of his children may capture the idea and grasp on to what the father is trying to pass to her. But her brother may have a greater interest in business and accounting. He finds science boring. Has the father failed in passing on his inheritance? Not at all. He needs to be a bit more creative to see the intersection where his passions and his son's gifting come together. Perhaps the son's interest in business can come up with a marketing plan for one of the father's scientific projects. It may also be as simple as giving away that desire to bless future generations. A father cannot take on an attitude of insistence when giving away an inheritance. He must exercise discernment to understand the heart of each of his children. Who looks to the future? Who has compassion? Who likes to work with details? How do those characteristics match with what he is trying to accomplish in life?

Christopher Li, a Silicon Valley engineer, describes how one day his father sat down to have a discussion with him. He was transferring some money into Christopher's bank account. His father told him that he had been saving this money to help put Christopher through college. It was a significant amount, but his father said that was all there was. Christopher had to manage to finish his degree with that amount of money. What did Christopher's father pass on to him that day? He says that, yes, he got some money that he needed to get through school, but there was more than that. He received from his father a mindset to budget and to spend money carefully. It is a personal lesson and quality that has stayed with Christopher into adulthood. But he also received from his father the discipline to save for future expenses, to provide for family members and to love his children sacrificially.⁶⁰

After a father has determined what he wants to pass on to his children, how does he proceed to give it away. Does he do like Jacob and simply pronounce a blessing over his children? That is not a bad start. Christopher's father did that. He sat his son down and told him the story and purpose behind the money he was giving to him that day. It cannot be assumed that children will understand their father's intentions without a pronouncement. Something needs to be verbally communicated. Beyond that, a father's actions and lifestyle need to give his words power and meaning. If the father who wants to use science and research to benefit future generations lives his life selfishly only to benefit himself, his children will eventually see his hypocrisy. When a father needs to travel to accomplish his purposes, his children need to understand why he is away. They may miss him while he is gone, but they will know that they are making a sacrifice for

⁶⁰ Li, interview with author.

his work to be accomplished. As his children mature, the father needs to recognize opportunities that his children may encounter to also impact future generations. Those opportunities may include a certain amount of risk. The father may be accustomed to being his children's protector. There comes a point when he must transition to become the one to launch his kids into their futures. When his children have the chance to do something to benefit others, the father needs to support and send them into those teachable moments.

After he has given his inheritance to his children, the father's task is not complete. He is to seal it into their futures. This is done through affirmation. Too many fathers see their role to be their children's critics. There is a part of Asian culture that desires to focus on the negative. When a child comes home with a B+ grade on an exam, the father's immediate response is, "Why did you not get an A? What mistakes did you make that led to the B+?" There is a time for correction. But often, what a child needs most from a father is affirmation. Criticism comes easily. Affirmation requires observation and insight. When a father notices his child following a productive path, he needs to voice his approval. This will help to plant his inheritance firmly.

A Renewed Vision

In many Asian families, successful parenting is determined by what the child achieves academically. If there is a higher grade point average and entrance into a prestigious university, it will be perceived that those parents did something better than other families in raising their kids. But this is how academic success becomes an idol. The quest is the same as what is sought after by worldly standards. When a father pauses to become discerning, he will begin to see a greater calling. The re-signing to forgiven,

discipler and benefactor gives him a greater vision for what can transpire in the time that he has to raise his children. Certainly, discipline and academic success are still desirable goals. But the motivation for attaining those ideals will go beyond avoiding shame and poverty. Helping to achieve success will become part of the plan that God has for children. And the father will be in a place in which he can be the one to lead them in that direction.

The Role of the Church

There is a hint of evidence to suggest that Chinese fathers, at least, are ready to take on a role that is different from preceding generations. Past research into Chinese families had consistently revealed the expected results. Chinese fathers were viewed as distant and lacking in warmth. However, due to changes in fields such as economics, culture and social trends, it seems that fathers in China see themselves as being equally involved in the raising of children. Immigrant parents in Canada were reported to be open to a more Westernized culture.⁶¹ In the Korean-American community, the New York Times reported about *The Father School* being developed to help Korean men learn how to become more emotionally aware of their families' needs. The program is part recovery and part Christian ministry. The school began in Korea and has been spreading throughout Korean communities in the United States. Men are often led to tears when sharing during the program.⁶² These reports are indicators of a potential attitude shift taking place. Too often, the church is slow to become aware of opportunities to impact

⁶¹ Kwok-bun Chan, ed., *International Handbook of Chinese Families* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2013), 346-347.

⁶² LaPorte, "The Korean Dads' 12-Step Program."

culture. In ministering to the Asian father, the door is now open. But instead of preaching sermons that lament the downfall of the family, the church needs to be proactive by reaching out to men and offer practical training for them to become effective fathers.

Rev. Cory Ishida has been the Senior Pastor at Evergreen Baptist Church in San Gabriel Valley outside of Los Angeles, CA for almost 40 years. He led a seminar at the Asian American Leadership Conference held at Biola University in November 2015. Family ministry has always been important to Rev. Ishida. He has consistently included ministry to men, and particularly, fathers in his role as a pastor. He has always placed his own responsibility as a father and now, grandfather, as a high priority. Rev. Ishida knows that it is important for him to model the role of a father to his congregation. But it goes beyond a mere demonstration. He understands that his family truly is his most important ministry. He has always been involved in his kids' education and athletic activities. On numerous occasions, he served as coach to his daughters' sports teams. In some situations, this provided him with opportunities to take on a father's role with other team members.

When informed that many Asian churches do not have specific ministries to fathers, Rev. Ishida was a bit surprised. He didn't have any ideas to share about why this is the case. Training fathers has always been a part of his ministry and it was hard for him to consider that another church might not hold preparation of fathers as a priority.⁶³ This would indicate the possibility that for a church to have a strong ministry to fathers, it must be championed by a pastor or prominent lay leader who men respect.

⁶³ Cory Ishida, *Asian American Leadership Conference*, interview by author, Biola University, La Mirada, CA, November 7, 2015.

At the same conference, Dr. Steven Chin led one of the main sessions entitled *Leadership in Parenting*. A portion of his presentation was devoted to the role of the father. Dr. Chin grew up in the New England area and shared some of his experiences with his own father. His parents were first generation Chinese. As a teenager, he had some of the common experiences that are common among second generation Asian Americans. His father was caring and provided for the family. But he simply did not have some of the instincts that are expected of fathers in western culture. His observations of the interaction of other students with their parents told him that his family background and culture was different.

In his pastorate, Dr. Chin has encountered many young adult Asian Americans who have had to deal with difficult relationships with their fathers. He provides counseling and instruction to help guide them in processing the hurts and disappointments. He also provides some of the fathering roles that might be missing in those members' lives.

When asked the question regarding the lack of ministry to fathers in Asian churches, Dr. Chin pointed to the shame factor as a possible cause. For men who enjoy their role as fathers, there is no hesitation. But for those who know they are not fulfilling their role, there is the possibility of embarrassment, or at least the potential that they will have to deal with issues that are hard for them to process.⁶⁴ This indeed may be a key factor. Asian pastors are not too different from the men in their congregations. If they are

⁶⁴ Steven J. Chin, *Asian American Leadership Conference*, interview by author, Biola University, La Mirada, CA, November 7, 2016.

experiencing brokenness in their own families, it can become difficult for them to provide a ministry in which they feel that they have failed.

With the increasing awareness of the benefits to the family that an involved father can bring, it is an opportune time for churches to step into the void. In too many cases, Christian leadership in Asian churches fail to be proactive. The tendency is to become problem-oriented. A crisis must arise before leadership takes action. When a teenager begins to act out because of the lack of proper fatherly involvement, the problem has already surfaced. It becomes difficult for a father to suddenly become involved. It would be far more effective if the church can step to the forefront and take the lead before unfortunate events occur. The opportunity can be seized to help men move from being simply distant, providers and disciplinarians to becoming forgiven, disciplers and benefactors.

Another Conference?

A common strategy for churches to address issues such as training fathers is to put together a conference and invite a well-known expert to speak to men and their families. This may be the easiest strategy to follow, but it contains a few flaws. Having a one-time, highlighted event gives the impression that the church is addressing the issue, when in fact, it is just an attempt at a quick-fix. It places the weight of the outcome of the training upon the speaker. Participants become passive learners with no guarantee that any lessons learned will ever become a part of the family's home life. In most cases, people attending the conference may indeed be blessed from what is taught. There may be some changes that will be adapted by some families. But unless there is a concrete follow-up plan, the event will probably have minimal impact upon the fathers in the congregation. A more

likely scenario is that a lot of men, maybe even the senior pastor, will feel guilty, nervous and a sense of shame. Some of the wives will attend and take the information home to use as ammunition when she feels that her husband is not following through on what was taught.

A more effective strategy would be to provide an environment where men feel safe. They must not be threatened with embarrassment or accusations. This means having a men-only gathering where an “iron sharpens iron” atmosphere is created. True, honest and transparent stories about fathers will be shared. In a small group sharing time, men can be encouraged to share their own testimonies. They will begin to discover, as the study of biblical fathers revealed, that being a good father is a difficult challenge. It is not something that simply happens. Every father must purpose in his heart to speak into the lives of his children. Men will be asked to hold one another accountable in completing this assignment.

The training will begin with stories, followed by a time of vision casting of the concepts of becoming forgiven, disciplers and benefactors and then to learn a process to work these elements into regular meetings with their children. Stories are a great starting point. A collection of stories of Asian fathers is the artifact associated with this project. Beginning with the account of a father who is unknown to the group takes the pressure off participants and presenters. Prior to the gathering, attendees will be asked to read one of the father stories and note the impact that his actions had upon his family. When the group meets, fathers will be placed into small groups of 4-6 to discuss the story. It is amazing to observe the power that comes from hearing stories. When people hear the telling of one father, the immediate reaction is to either consider the story of their own

father or the story of themselves as a father. It is a natural process to then tell that story to others. The small group setting provides a safer environment for candid remarks and honest sharing. Men can conclude the time by pledging confidentiality with everything that was shared and by lending support to each other through prayer. As an alternative strategy, if someone is bold enough to do so, he can share his own story as the starting point. The stories in the artifact are sufficient to help get a discussion started. But a live presentation will usually provide greater impact.

The time of sharing helps to create a sense of bonding that gives men the courage to consider the task that will be presented to them. The mutual encouragement will help fathers to see themselves experiencing forgiveness and fitting into the role being their child's discipler. The leader must be careful to emphasize that a man is not being asked to change his cultural identity to accomplish this. He is expanding on the role he already knows. Other training regimens tell men that they have to make cultural changes and set aside time for play and recreation.⁶⁵ If a man feels that he must become something that he is not, then he is less likely to participate. Many Asian fathers already understand what it means to instruct, tutor and discipline his children. All those tasks are included in being a discipler. His role is now expanded. He is not just teaching science, technology, engineering and math (STEM subjects) to his children. He will now spend time with them to impart and give away things in the spiritual dimension. The father is receiving a promotion. Presenting these thoughts helps to break down any fears that a man may have

⁶⁵ Rajalakshmi Sriram and Prachee G. Navalkar, "What is an Ideal Father?" *Psychology and Developing Societies* 24, no. 2 (2012): 224.

in taking on a new role. But it also helps to maintain his dignity and honor. To be a discipler is a high calling.

Of course, this challenge may sound intimidating to some fathers. They may feel a lack of preparation or qualification. The call must be tempered by letting men know that the discipling process is a spiritual journey that he will take with his child. Not only will he teach, train and impart wisdom, he will also be on the receiving end by learning from his child in the process. By expressing an openness to learn, the pathway to a deeper father- child relationship will be opened for him. As a parent, he will be responsible for taking on the leadership role. But if done well, the encounters that the father will have with his children should be more conversational and interactive rather than lecture-based. Every father should be encouraged that being his child's discipler is something that he is qualified and able to do.

The introduction to the training will include the telling of the ultimate father story – that of the Prodigal Father. This will serve to provide the framework for a biblical definition of a good father. It will demonstrate to men that meaning in a father's relationship does not come from teaching and discipline, but from affirmation, forgiveness and demonstrations of love. It will provide the foundation to help the Asian father to understand forgiveness and to know the value of leaving a spiritual inheritance. He will also be aware that certainly, knowledge and discipline are useful in life, but when a father disciplines his children, he is imparting character qualities that will speak to the inner self for a lifetime.

Fathers will then be introduced to the ten-step discipleship experience. Each of the encounters will serve to help the father enter his new-found roles of being a discipler

and benefactor. (See appendix for an outline and overview of the curriculum). Unlike standard discipleship manuals, this is not meant to be an academic-heavy exercise. It is a guide to help fathers spend meaningful time with their children. It encourages dialogue and exchanges of ideas. Both father and children should grow spiritually from the time together and something significant will be imparted from the time spent together. There might be a tendency to complete the curriculum as quickly as possible. But the greatest benefit will be to take the better part of a year to complete the entire sequence. The ideal schedule will be for fathers to engage their children once a month with the curriculum. In between each meeting, the father will meet with other men in the church who are going through the same experience. This will allow them to share triumphs, challenges and questions that might arise. With twelve months in the calendar year, this will make allowances for vacations, holidays and work and school obligations. At the completion of the curriculum, the church may want to arrange a celebration time. It might be viewed as a graduation (to fit the Asian tendency to celebrate accomplishments). This will serve to validate fathers and children who work through the process together. Due to time constraints, a church may choose to have fathers do this project over a summer. This would require weekly discipleship sessions. It may be easier on the yearly calendar, but it will require a high level of commitment over three months. Many other church and family events also tend to get scheduled during the summer. The church leader will need to determine if an accelerated approach would be the best alternative for the fathers in the congregation.

The Best Life Stage to Begin?

The experience of a father discipling his children can be beneficial at any stage. But the ideal time would be when a child is in the middle school years. Attempting it at an earlier age may present challenges for fathers to communicate and discuss life concepts with his children. Trying it during the high school years may present a scheduling challenge as kids tend to get busier the closer they get to entering college. It should never be considered “too late” to begin the discipling experience. But there is risk in waiting until a child is older. Many of the dysfunctions between a father and his children come to the forefront before the teenage years. By entering the process at an earlier stage can help the family to be proactive and head off any potential difficulties and disagreements that might arise. If a father has been negligent in reaching out to his children in the past, there may already be a level of brokenness in the relationship already. The child may need some persuasion, encouragement and assurances to meet with his father. Healing is never easy. With any physical wound, there is going to be a certain level of pain. Hospital patients are sometimes resistant to the efforts that will bring healing. The same is true when the heart, emotions and spirit have been damaged. Just as a doctor will persist in performing the right procedure for a disgruntled patient, a father also needs to do everything possible to heal the brokenness with his children.

How Many Disciples?

A father may have multiple children that he would like to disciple. It is recommended that he meets with one child at a time. He may want to meet at separate times with another child, but that will demand more time from his own schedule. It is

recommended that the discipleship be conducted in a one-on-one setting. Trying to disciple 2-3 kids at the same time offers a greater challenge because it will reduce time for intimate and private conversations. A child may have something to share, but will be inhibited or intimidated if another sibling is in the same circle. It is also more difficult for the father. Kids have different needs. One child may need greater attention on one subject. This will force the second child into the role of a bystander. Jesus may have disciplined twelve at a time. But for mere mortal fathers, discipling one child at a time is sufficient enough of a challenge.

A Tool for Evangelism

There is always the tendency to view a Christian-based program as being designed for believers only. When the invitation is given to men to participate, we limit the opportunity to church members in attendance. But the question should be asked, “Is it only Christian fathers who want a better relationship with their children?” A church should expand its vision to see how the program can be used to build the kingdom of God. There may be students in the church with a non-Christian father or parents who have children who have turned from or yet to come to faith. They should not be disqualified. Fathers in the church who choose to participate should also be encouraged to invite non-Christian friends in their neighborhood or workplace who would benefit from cultivating a more wholesome relationship with their children. The curriculum is not designed as an evangelistic tool, even though it is entirely possible that a father or child may decide to follow Jesus after participating in the process.

There is also the challenge of having a non-Christian father working with a Christian-based curriculum. The common understanding of a discipleship relationship is

having an older and more experienced believer mentoring the recent convert. How can a non-believer be put into the role of a discipler? However, the intent of this experience is to redeem the father's relationship with his children. Most of the exercises focus on discussion and experiences as opposed to heavy-duty biblical interpretation. If a non-Christian father has difficulty with the interpretation of a Bible passage, group leaders and other men should be available to help. During the gatherings where the fathers share together, leaders should be aware of progress that the non-Christian father is making. In this arrangement, he is being disciplined by other fathers as he disciplines his child. Other fathers need to continue conversation with him. There may come a time when he expresses interest in knowing more about Jesus. At that moment, it would be appropriate to share the steps to salvation with him. But even if he were to indicate no interest in spiritual matters, he should still be welcomed and allowed to be an integral part of discussions.

In the past, the path to salvation was thought to be *Believe, Become and Belong*. This was in reference to the process of believing in Christ, praying to become a Christian and then joining a church or Christian fellowship. There has been a culture shift in recent years. Many people have a deep desire for the element of community. The path has changed routes. It is now *Belong, Believe and Become*. A person desires inclusion in a group or community before considering a decision to believe in a truth and then to become someone with a new identity.⁶⁶ If this is true, then the best path for the non-Christian father to travel to discover faith is to find acceptance in a group of believers

⁶⁶ Eddie Cole, "Belong, Believe, Become: A New Process of Evangelism: The American Evangelical Process is Shifting," *The Exchange*, Christianity Today, February 14, 2017, accessed September 28, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/january/church-growth>.

with whom he can identify and feel safe. As he is given time to experience everything the community has to offer, he will become more open to exploring truth claims and then to be positioned to consider making the decision to follow Jesus.

Time to Celebrate

At the conclusion of the discipleship experience, the church needs to celebrate. The participating fathers have just accomplished something that they may have never dreamed of doing. The time they have used to pour themselves into their child's life will have lifelong and eternal benefit. The blessing is not only for the child. The father will have grown in his own relationship in Christ. It is not an accomplishment that should be marked with a brief acknowledgement during the Sunday morning service. It is time for a celebration! A dinner involving every participating father and child along with other family members should be held to commemorate the completion of the discipleship series. Other fathers who may have interest in participating in the next cycle can also be invited. When they hear the stories and testimonies, there will be a turning in their heart to join a future group. No sermon is needed. Having a small sample of fathers and children sharing their stories will give sufficient power for people to see the impact of fathers becoming benefactors and disciplers. A reminder can be given to conclude the evening. A discipler never stops speaking into his child's life. The process does not end just because all the sessions have been covered. The father will disciple his child for the remainder of his life. It will become part of his legacy.

More Than Just Becoming Nicer and Gentler

In recent years, there have been many programs developed to help men to become better fathers. It seems that the desired outcome of these efforts was to transform men to become more westernized, more relatable and better caretakers. Fathers were essentially trained to be nicer to their kids. This goal, while helpful and admirable is based on cultural interpretations of what a father is supposed to be. But for a church to train men to experience forgiveness, become disciplers and benefactors to their children accomplishes much more. It brings the role of the father into a newly highlighted place in the home and church community. It emphasizes the importance of the father as it is presented in Scripture. It is a model of fatherhood that transcends every cultural barrier and is within the reach of all fathers.

Many Asian churches have a youth pastor or volunteer workers to provide effective ministry for students. The assumption is that this specialist will take care of the young people in the church families. But segregating the ministry by age groups will result in a hidden disservice. A youth pastor in an Asian church cannot limit ministry just to that specific age group. The calling is actually to the entire family. The *Shema*, which as quoted earlier includes this decree, “Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” Moses is speaking in reference to the command to “Love the Lord your God.” It does not instruct Hebrew parents to take their kids to a religious teacher for proper instruction. The directive is given to parents, in particular, to fathers. They are the ones responsible for the spiritual upbringing of their children. A youth pastor is not to wrest this duty away from the parents. A trained and gifted young adult leader may

certainly perform a needed ministry in speaking into the lives of church teenagers. But an even greater service is rendered when the church works in partnership with parents in providing spiritual instruction. Training fathers to become disciplers, not only redeems the student, but the entire family.

Other Asian Groups

Asia is a large place and includes a wide variety of people groups. When addressing the role of a father it is impossible to give proper attention to every ethnicity. However, it would also be an injustice to not consider how different Asian fathers function within their cultures and the eventual impact that they have on their next generation. The Confucian mindset has had a great influence on family systems throughout the continent. Due to China's political and cultural dominance in East Asia, Confucianism had a lasting impact in Japan, Vietnam and Korea.⁶⁷ Other cultures such as those in India and the Philippines may not have that influence in their past, but other factors have led to similar family dysfunctions.

Adjustments for Indian Fathers

Indian culture also places a high priority on academic excellence and success in one's career. The majority of Indian immigrants are young and highly educated, and have strong English skills. Many work in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields. In 2016, Indians were the top recipients of high-skilled H-1B temporary visas and

⁶⁷ Oldstone-Moore, *Confucianism*, 11.

were the second-largest group of international students in the United States.⁶⁸ But the motivation for Indian success comes from different roots than Confucianism. In an interview with Jay (fictitious name), an Indian female who immigrated to the United States for college, she tells of her father's desire for her to succeed. He was driven by his Hindu religion that encouraged a better and more fulfilled life for its followers. Despite the fact that his daughter had converted to Christianity, he felt responsible for giving Jay a college education to help her become a better person.

In pursuit of academic excellence for their children, Indian fathers have encountered some unexpected roadblocks. For centuries in India, it was understood that the mother would be responsible for raising the children, while the father would do all that he could to provide for the needs of the family. The system was vertical and hierarchical and the roles of father, mother and children were well defined. Relationship between parents and children were often formal and the authority flowed downward.⁶⁹ This was the traditional way of life defined by Indian culture and religion. But in moving to America, the rules suddenly changed. Indian fathers were put into the difficult situation of adjusting to new cultural expectations. Instead of immersing himself into his job, he was now expected to come home and spend quality time with his children. He was supposed to help with their homework, coach their sports teams and take everyone on family outings. The basic family philosophy had completely turned around. Indian

⁶⁸ Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova, "Indian Immigrants in the United States," *Migration Policy Institute*, Washington, D.C., August 31, 2017, accessed October 28, 2017, www.migrationpolicy.org/article/indian-immigrants-united-states.

⁶⁹ David A. Baptiste, "Family Therapy with East Indian Immigrant Parents Rearing Children in the United State: Parental Concerns, Therapeutic Issues and Recommendations," *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal* 27, no. 3 (September 1, 2005): 349.

children were always taught that they would be taken care of as they grew up, but that the day would come when it would be their responsibility to care for their parents. It was often a normal expectation that when the oldest son married, he and his wife would move in with his parents. This was not to help the young people get started in life, it was for the son and his wife to care for his parents. But now in America, instead of being cared for, the father was supposed to spend every possible extra moment of the day to see that his children were not neglected. Not only were Indian fathers expected to fit into a role that they were not prepared for, but also to swallow their pride in becoming subservient to their children.

Indian culture also has the added feature of the Joint Family System.

Grandparents and any available aunts and uncles assisted in providing daily childcare. If a child had a need, there would always be an older relative around to provide for them. Not only did the joint family system provide for daily needs, it was a deeply held traditional value that provided the underlying principles of household-building strategies in South Asia.⁷⁰ This was of great help to the Indian father who could devote more time to develop his career and his role of being the family provider. It was a normal and natural trade-off. He would earn sufficient income to care for aging parents in exchange for trusted care of his children. But immigration to America caused all kinds of disruption with the Joint Family System. Parents were now on their own to care for children. Where grandparents and relatives were once in plentiful supply, Indian fathers had to learn new roles. Adjustments from the vertical and formal relationships of previous generations to the horizontal, peer and caring methods were not always easy.

⁷⁰ Uberoi, *Freedom and Destiny*, 157.

Loss of authority has been another uncomfortable change for Indian fathers. In traditional settings, there was little doubt about who was in charge. A father's authority extended to important life decisions for his children, including career and marriage partners. Arranged marriages were the norm in old India. In more contemporary settings, the practice has changed to "suggestions." But it is still the case that if a young man or woman remains unmarried, fault is not placed on the young person for not being sufficiently attractive or active in finding a life partner. The Indian father feels the shame of not taking the necessary steps to find the right person. When Jay came to the United States, she quickly adapted to American customs, including how young men and women interacted. On a visit back to India, her father suggested that it was time for him to find her a suitable mate. Jay declined the offer. Her father understood because there were so few Indian Christians with whom he was familiar. His task would have been difficult. Jay told her father not to worry, but he still admitted to feeling as if he had failed as a father because he had not located a proper husband for his daughter. (Jay later married, but shortly after her father had passed away.)

Fortunately, in recent times, steps have been taken to teach Indian men to deal with changes. A new generation of Indian fathers are being taught a new identity of becoming the kind provider-protector in his family.⁷¹ Studies are being conducted that encourage Indian fathers to alter their lifestyles and habits to include time for play and recreation with their children.⁷² New roles such as guide and mentor are now being

⁷¹ Sriram and Navalkar, "What is an Ideal Father?" 211.

⁷² Ibid., 224

suggested for Indian fathers. These are certainly welcome changes to help Indian fathers to better relate to their children.

The Humbling of Filipino Fathers

The Filipino culture is another non-Confucian-based ethnic group with significant representation in America. Their immigration is not recent, but has a long history and covers a wide spectrum of their population. In the early part of the 20th century, Filipino immigrants were composed of non-sponsored students seeking further education, farm workers, laborers and those associated with U.S. military service. When the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act was enacted, the door was opened for Filipino professionals to make their move. Doctors, nurses, lawyers, engineers, medical technologists, pharmacists and physical therapists began arriving in the United States.⁷³ Other Filipino Americans became involved in business, politics, sports and entertainment. Despite their accomplishments, the Filipino story has also been filled with oppression, war, poverty and political chaos. All these factors have had significant impact on their family systems and the plight of Filipino fathers.

In the traditional Filipino home, the mother is the one who is always present in children's lives. The families are described as "matrifocal"⁷⁴, meaning that the home is organized around the mother's abilities, schedule and discipline. The father is known to be more of a distant figure. He is the family provider and the expectation is that he will do whatever is necessary to bring income into the home. On many occasions, this has

⁷³ Veltisezar Bautista, *The Filipino Americans: (1763-Present)* (Naperville, IL: Bookhaus Publishers, 2002), 113.

⁷⁴ Rodell, 131.

called for him to be away from the family. During the 20th century, many Filipino men took jobs as laborers or farm workers, which meant that they worked away from home and even overseas. During World War II, when the United States made a special provision for Filipinos to join the Navy, many men jumped at the opportunity because of the lucrative pay.

For centuries, most people never ventured far from the place where they were born.⁷⁵ But, to make a better living, Filipino men have recently been drawn to various foreign nations. And it is not just blue collar workers who are seeking these jobs. College graduates are also willing to find jobs in faraway places.⁷⁶ This, again, takes fathers away from home for long periods of time. But it was deemed to be acceptable because he was fulfilling his role to provide for his family. Even in today's professional world, fathers have been occupied outside of their homes. They will spend much of their free time with their *barkada*⁷⁷, or friendship group. This is a group of men that formed bonds early in their youths. They maintain these friendships throughout their lives. Fathers will also be called upon to spend time with co-workers or with people in the community. This type of activity is often necessary and constructive because it can lead to promotions and advancements in the father's career. But it is done at the expense of his relationships with his wife and children. It can lead to him becoming a stranger in his own home. Even

⁷⁵ Parag Khanna, *Connectography: Mapping the Future of Global Civilization* (New York: Random House, 2016), 357.

⁷⁶ Magdalena Munoz Shih and Marie Segura, "World View: Focus on the Philippines," *Training* 46, no. 6 (July/August 2009): 5.

⁷⁷ Rodell, *Culture and Customs of the Philippines*, 132.

though much of this father absenteeism takes place in the Philippines, it becomes integrated into the family culture when men move to the United States.

For centuries, the Philippines have been a part of colonial culture. From 1521-1896, Spain ruled and dominated the islands. Then in 1898, war broke out between Spain and the United States, which led to American colonization until the outbreak of World War II. Even when Philippine independence was declared after the conclusion of the war, American influence continued to be strongly felt in everyday life. Filipinos learned how to adapt. It was how they learned to move forward in a changing culture. But there were still struggles for families who immigrated to the United States. Jordan (a fictitious name), who came to the United States from the Philippines when he was six years old, can recall the adjustments that his father had to make. His father worked hard after the family arrived in San Diego. As Jordan grew up, he admired his father. But when the teenage years came around, he could sense a clear disconnection. When he asked questions about dating and relationships, his father had no ability to respond. There was also a lack of emotional or relational support. This was not healed until Jordan grew older and then understood his father's situation from a more mature perspective.

In the 21st century, some of those struggles continue. In raising their children, Filipino parents try to instill cultural values such as respect for elders, good education, good values, good morals and right character. The children are told that they should act like Filipinos and should not forget the good things about being Filipinos and their culture.⁷⁸ This has led to conflicts within the home with children who are striving to blend in with American classmates. Filipino society is predominantly collectivist which

⁷⁸ Bautista, *The Filipino Americans: (1763-Present)*, 154.

places a high priority on maintaining harmonious relationships within the family. But unlike other Asian cultures, where the principles of Confucianism and Buddhism are considered the foundation of familial attachments and obligations⁷⁹, Filipinos' collectivism is thought to be rooted in the pivotal value of "smooth interpersonal relations," exemplified in desiring harmony and inclusiveness in relationships and the subjugation of individual interests for the sake of the in-group.⁸⁰ Children are expected to abide by family rules, and even at young ages, to contribute to the family's welfare. Fathers adopt the traditional authoritarian stance in which there is little or no compromise. But children, growing up in America, are influenced by Western culture which emphasizes the role of the individual. They are taught to be assertive and to express their views. Filipino fathers will often have difficulty in knowing how to respond and may resort to harsh forms of punishment for displays of rebellion or failure to obey. This tension puts Filipino children in the uncomfortable place of living in two worlds – being Filipino and being American.⁸¹

A man's role in Filipino culture is well-defined. In a predominantly Catholic nation, his religion teaches him about the virtues of a man supporting his family. The father has responsibilities in his home, authority over his children and privileges in his society. He is comfortable with those definitions. But in coming to the United States, he has been faced with the cultural changes that have come with a new country and with a changing world. It is not uncommon to have a Filipino household in the United States in

⁷⁹ Ruth Chao and Vivian Tseng, "Parenting of Asians," in *Handbook of Parenting, Volume 4*, ed. M.H. Bornstein (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. Publishers, 2002), 59-93.

⁸⁰ Lynch, *Social Acceptance Reconsidered*, 63.

⁸¹ Bautista, *The Filipino Americans: (1763-Present)*, 154.

which both mother and father are working. One could have a job during regular working hours while the other will take a night or graveyard shift. Suddenly, the father is replacing time spent with his *barkada* with duties at home such as helping kids with their homework or taking them to the park for recreation. Deciding how to divide household chores and the proper way to discipline children has left many Filipino fathers with bruised egos. Their machismo has taken a beating.⁸²

When they immigrate to the United States, they are like many other ethnic minorities. They may feel oppressed or condescended to by White neighbors. There is a desire to regain self-esteem and pride by reaffirming their heritage.⁸³ Fathers may long to return to the Philippines and the former way of life in which they felt more in control. But the economic benefits of living and working in America are too beneficial to abandon. Men are forced to swallow their pride and learn how to adjust. Jordan spoke of the Filipino Colonial culture. He said that Filipinos have always learned to adapt. It doesn't matter who is ruling the country or where their new home is located. Filipinos do their best to blend in and to learn new ways. There is a characteristic of the Filipino culture that is symbolized by bamboo. As the bamboo bends with the wind, the Filipino can survive under any circumstances.⁸⁴ Younger and more educated fathers have taken a long look at their culture. They know that there is a dark side. Many Filipino fathers have been involved in extramarital affairs, drug and alcohol abuse and neglect of their children. They have determined to follow a different path. In a shifting role, they see the

⁸² Fatima Arkin, "Fatherhood 101," *Maclean's* 127, no. 29 (July 28, 2014): 34-35.

⁸³ Wilfred M. McClay and Ted V. McAllister, *Why Place Matters* (New York: Encounter Books, 2014), 304.

⁸⁴ Bautista, *The Filipino Americans: (1763-Present)*, 175.

nurturance of their children to be of equal importance to their role as the family breadwinner.⁸⁵ They engage in learning activities to gain skills in taking care of their children and strive to be integral in their lives.

Common Ground

Even though fathers from the different Asian ethnic groups identify with the universal role of being the family provider, each of them have unique factors that determine how they function in their homes and relate to their children. Men from Confucian-based cultures are motivated by honor and the avoidance of shame. In India, fathers want to make their children better people. For Filipino families, it is the desire to bring harmony and joy to the extended family. If there were room to explore the roles of fathers in other ethnic groups, there would certainly be further definition revealed. It is understandable to see the struggles that many immigrant fathers have experienced in their attempts to exercise authority with their children. The normalcy of the homeland does not always translate well into the western world. Yet, the culture gap does not bear the entire burden for the difficulties that fathers and their children experience. There have been numerous attempts by social scientists to educate and change fathers to learn new ways of parenting. Their goals are usually focused on communication and learning a new attitude that is softer and gentler. These training sessions are helpful and opens the eyes of fathers to relational techniques that might be foreign to them.

⁸⁵ Liane Peña Alampay and Maria Rosanne M. Jocson, "Attributions and Attitudes of Mothers and Fathers in the Philippines," *Parenting: Science and Practice* 11, no. 2-3 (April 1, 2011): 167.

But for a father to have an impact that is deep and eternal, something more is needed that goes beyond mere social skills. The call for a father to become his children's benefactor and discipler moves him ironically into being both cross-cultural and counter-cultural. The values that he imparts are spiritual and biblical. Their meanings can transcend any cultural barriers. Leaving a spiritual inheritance and imparting biblical truths to children are not normal to any culture. This propels a father into a relationship that can only happen under the authorship of the Holy Spirit.

This brings fathers from all cultures to a common ground. The reasons for dysfunction in the relationship of a father and his children stem from the pressures, idolatries and misjudgments produced within the various cultures. Fathers are prone to follow what their ancestors and parents propagated. This is only natural. But there is no perfect culture. The power and influence of sin is universal. The commonality comes in the discovery of the antidote. The gospel of Jesus Christ paves the way for healing, forgiveness and reconciliation to take place. It is a message that transcends any of the world's cultures. Leaving an inheritance and discipling one's children is a father's expression of planting the gospel message into the life of his next generation.

Conclusion

Fathers underestimate the impact they have upon their families. They may exercise influence in their workplace and at their church. People in the community may respect them for their professional achievements. But it is in their home where they leave the most significant footprint. Many have assumed the universally accepted roles of family provider and primary disciplinarian in difficult circumstances. They fail to see that their children are paying attention to other things about them. Every father is a role model

for his children. Some men understand this profoundly. But others, who have abused, neglected or abandoned their families have an impact as well. Unfortunately, it is negative and harmful. No matter which path a man chooses to be a role model, he leaves his mark on his children for a lifetime. One piece of research reveals that today's average father spends less than ten minutes daily in one-on-one conversation with his children.⁸⁶ For an Asian father, how many of those minutes are devoted to school, homework and which college to attend? Are there any minutes left for more meaningful conversation, discovering a child's interests and communicating spiritual matters?

The behavioral remedies that teach men how to play with their children are helpful, but hardly life-changing. But the re-signing of the Asian father from Distant/Provider/Disciplinarian to Forgiven/Discipler/Benefactor can have a lasting impact. It is easy to exaggerate and get carried away with the possible long-term benefits. But there are countless dysfunctions that young adult Asian Americans live with today that can be traced back to a damaged or empty relationship with their father. Some are lacking in self-confidence, women experience difficulties in relationships and many live with unexplained anger. It is not a cure-all solution. But it is not hard to imagine how a young person's life could have been changed by a father who chose to do something extraordinary and to go beyond what the normal expectations might be. When today's Asian father devotes himself to leave a lasting impact in his children, it is a pattern that can continue for generations to come. Indeed, a culture can be changed.

⁸⁶ "The Importance of Positive Male Role Models", *First Things First*, August 15, 2017, accessed October 3, 2017, <https://firstthings.org/importance-of-positive-male-role-models/>.

SECTION 4: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

Our Fathers' Stories

The artifact is a book that is made up of a series of true stories of Asian fathers as told by their young adult children. (The names used in the book are fictitious, with the exception of the stories of the author's father and father-in-law). The intent of the book is to reveal to readers the ways that the various fathers impacted their children's lives. Some of the stories are encouraging and tell about how a father had great influence, supporting the premise of how a father can fulfill the roles of being his children's discipler and benefactor. Other stories are sad and even tragic. But these accounts are also constructive, ending in forgiveness and sometimes, reconciliation. Others illustrate how missed opportunities could have changed a father's relationship with his children.

The book begins with the telling of the story of the Prodigal Father from Luke 15:11-32, with commentary that shows how the father in the story acted in a way that is counter-cultural to Asian expectations. It is meant to speak to Asian fathers for them to re-evaluate how they view and carry out their role in their family. In many of the stories, fathers can be seen in the traditional role of being the distant family provider and disciplinarian. Ultimately, they are challenged with the idea proposed in this dissertation, of being rebranded as forgiven, discipler and benefactor.

The desired result of reading the book is two-fold for two different generations. For fathers, storytelling becomes a safe passageway for them to reflect on their own story. Men are encouraged to gather together in a small group with other fathers to share their stories with each other. This is not intended to be another *How-to* book that presents all

the easy steps to becoming a better father. The stories are meant to illustrate how difficult the role of a father can be, especially for an Asian man who may not have had a very positive experience with his own father. As men share their stories with each other, they can be encouraged that it is not too late for them to change or complete their legacy as a father. If the need should exist, they can receive support from their small group as they seek an audience with their children to confess mistakes they may have made or oversights that they were not aware of. The opportunity is presented for reconciliation, healing and forgiveness to take place in their families.

For fathers who still have children growing up in their homes, the stories can help them to understand steps that they can take to become more involved with their children. They should be relieved to know, that if they grew up in a foreign culture, that the role of becoming a discipler to their children can be done in their own cultural context. There is no need for the leopard to turn in his spots for the stripes of the tiger. These fathers will be encouraged to begin the process of spending meaningful time building into the character of their children.

Even though there is clearly a Christian distinctive to the stories, they can certainly be received and processed by fathers outside the church. Regardless of his faith background, any man can participate in a small group discussion and experience growth in his relationship with his children. They should be encouraged to know that some of the fathers in the stories were not Christians, but that their accounts are still relevant and meaningful to the conversation. If a church forms a small group for fathers, there should be encouragement to invite friends in the neighborhood or workplace to read the book and to gauge their interest to become a part of the small group.

The second desired result is aimed at Asian American children who are now young adults. Reading the stories can have a similar impact as it does on fathers. When young adults read the stories, it will be natural for them to begin thinking of their own father. For some, it may be a warm and heartfelt experience. They may be prompted to consider their own father's story and to remember the ways that he may have acted as a discipler. The plan is to create a website where individuals can go to share those stories. It is hoped that this process fosters an online community that can encourage those who visit to be in healthier relationship with their own father. Of course, there will also be several young adult Asian Americans who may be afraid to read the book. They may find themselves identifying too closely with some of the more difficult stories. But as they persist, they may encounter the desire to close wounds and heal scars that have existed over the years. As with fathers, young adults will be encouraged to come together with others to form a small group or Sunday School class for the purpose of seeking out ways to bring forgiveness, healing and reconciliation to their relationships with their fathers.

The book has the potential to minister to countless individuals in the various Asian American communities. After all, if the question is asked, "Who has (or has had) a father?", will anyone not be able to raise a hand? There are even possibilities for the book to reach out beyond the cultural barriers. The context may be Asian, but the desired result is universal.

The stories are concluded with a chapter that teaches the concept of a father being rebranded from distant, family provider and disciplinarian to forgiven, discipler and benefactor. It will not be a critique of a father's performance, but an encouragement for what he can become. The message is to show a man that he does not have to change his

identity. He can go beyond the ordinary expectations of a father and expand his influence in a way that will build his family and establish his God-given role in his home.

In the book's appendix, there will be a discipleship manual that a father can use to begin a discipleship process with his children. The prescribed topics are not made up of the usual theological items that might be contained in a normal discipleship book. Most of the tools available on today's Christian market are curriculum-based. There is typically a workbook that guides participants through a study of Scripture. When the disciple meets with the mentor, they go through their responses to the questions provided. Yet when the gospels are read, it is clear that Jesus taught his disciples, not from a book, but in the context of everyday life. Certainly, he took time to teach. But a large portion of his discipleship included encounters with people, dialogue with critics, performing miracles, healing the sick and raising the dead.

A father will not be expected to do everything that Jesus did, but he will be enabled to lead his kids into a deeper relationship with God. There will be times set aside for studying Scripture, but this experience should be more than just another academic exercise. The curriculum is designed to encourage conversation and exploration of life. The topics are focused on situations that arise in life and how a disciple of Jesus would respond in those moments. The dialogue created should give opportunity for the child to share with the father personal opinions, preferences and favorite activities. In exchange, the father will be able to voice his points of view, discuss Scripture and impart wisdom gained from his life experiences. There is a prescribed order of topics to be discussed. But each session is independent of the others. They can be covered according to seasons, interest or opportunity. It is highly recommended to start with *Favorite Food & Drinks*

and conclude with *Calling*. The former is a session that is introductory and meant to be more casual. Doing it first increases the possibility that the initial encounter will be a positive one. The latter is a conclusion to the discipling process and encourages the child to think about his/her life and future. The scheduling is flexible. For some families, it may be best to meet once a week for ten consecutive weeks, possibly over a summer. For most families, meeting once a month over a longer period of time is probably preferred. This makes room for unexpected interruptions and give the father adequate time to process the encounters with other men in his small group and gain insights in preparation for the next session.

SECTION 5: ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

Query Letter

February 1, 2018

Dear Book Agent,

Thank you for the opportunity to present my idea for a possible book publication. I believe that this concept has great potential to attract a readership that has yet to be tapped. For many years as a youth pastor in Asian churches, I became keenly aware of the difficulties that many fathers were experiencing in relating to their children. This prompted me to interview young adult Asian Americans asking them to tell me the story of their father. Some of the accounts are sad, but others are redeeming. I believe that reading these stories can be used as a tool for reconciliation and healing in broken relationships that have taken place in many Asian homes.

Asian fathers are often products of a Confucian-based culture which has taught them that a father's role is to be emotionally distant, provide financially for the family and be a strict disciplinarian to their children. The stories of Asian fathers will invite them to consider a re-branding of their roles to being forgiven, then becoming a discipler who mentors his children and, finally, being a benefactor who plants a spiritual inheritance for the next generation.

The proposed title for the book is *Our Fathers Stories: the Asian Voice*. It includes approximately 50,000 words which makes up thirteen stories and a biblical exhortation for fathers.

My purpose and passion for writing these stories is based upon my thirty years in student ministry with Asian Americans. I have spoken in conferences and church retreats and am aware of the particular issues that surround Asian families. The book will give me a greater voice in ministering to fathers and their families. Please inform me if this topic is of interest to you.

Sincerely,

Victor N. Quon

Cover Letter

February 1, 2018

Dear Publisher,

Asian families in North America are experiencing a *frog in the kettle* crisis. Fathers in those homes have little understanding in developing meaningful relationships with their children. When they finally become aware of the problem, normally when their kids reach the teenage years, it becomes more difficult to right the ship.

There are numerous other books available on the Christian market that speak to fathers. However, the cultural context of those publications fails to connect to the hearts and minds of Asian men. Many Asian fathers are products of a Confucian-based culture which has taught them that a father's role is to be the distant provider for their family and a strict disciplinarian to their children. When they hear instructions to become friendlier with their kids and to play games with them, it discourages them because that is not the context in which they were raised.

This book is a series of stories about Asian fathers. They speak into the heart and soul of the Asian father. He will be able to see himself in the stories. The objective of the book is for the stories to invite an Asian father to consider a re-branding of his role from emotionally distant, income provider and disciplinarian to being forgiven and becoming a discipler and benefactor who passes on a godly inheritance to his children. The beauty of this transformation is that it can be accomplished in the Asian cultural context. The father does not lose face. His role in the family is actually elevated.

My personal background has been in student ministry in Asian churches. I have spoken and numerous conferences and retreats. In many interactions with students, I have heard of the pain that many of them have endured because of distant relationships with their fathers. I have also been called upon to write articles addressing issues in Asian youth ministry and taught a class on the subject at Alliance Theological Seminary. I believe that this book has the potential to impact lives and save many family relationships.

Thank you for your consideration of my book proposal. I am hopeful that it will be a work that you will strongly endorse.

Sincerely,

Victor N. Quon
Asian American Christian Fellowship
1901 Cottle Avenue
San Jose, CA 95125-3430
(408) 887-1654
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Non-Fiction Proposal

Title: Our Father's Story – The Asian Voice

Author: Victor Quon
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Hook: Many Asian fathers are products of a Confucian-based culture which has taught them that a father's role is to be emotionally distant, and act as the provider for their family and a strict disciplinarian to their children. This series of stories of Asian fathers will invite them to consider a re-branding of their roles to being forgiven, becoming a discipler who mentors his children and a spiritual benefactor who passes on a godly inheritance to his children.

Overview: So many times, when an Asian father encounters difficulty with his children, he assumes that the reasons are rooted in the cultural differences that occur between immigrant parents and western-born children. Those factors cannot be ignored, but neither are they insurmountable. The collection of stories in this book are meant to impart hope to fathers. Some of the stories recount struggles while others are more reassuring. But no matter the outcome, fathers who read the stories will be prompted to consider their own story and how it is being written.

The book is not just an anthology. It leads a father to a point of decision about how he relates to his children. The first story told is that of the father of the Lost Son from Luke 15:11-32. This was a man who was counter-cultural in every way in how he reached out to his sons. He sets a standard for other fathers to remember. The book concludes with an explanation of how a father can have a long-lasting impact in his children's lives.

There is a discipleship curriculum in the Appendix that is meant to be a tool for use by churches and men's groups. Asian churches do almost nothing in reaching out to fathers. It is a sad indictment because every congregation believes that a man must join his wife to exercise spiritual authority in the home. Yet very few pastors offer any kind of training to prepare a man for this role. The father either fills the role poorly, or in frustration, defers to his wife. The curriculum is meant for fathers to meet together and to lend mutual coaching and encouragement as they disciple their children.

Purpose:

- To help Asian fathers to recognize the importance of their role in their families
- To bring reconciliation, healing and forgiveness to families that have experienced brokenness between a father and his children

- To transform fathers from being providers and disciplinarians to becoming disciplers and benefactors.

Promotion and Marketing: Most of the literature available today to instruct men about being a father has two flaws in attempts to minister to Asian fathers. They are written from a western cultural perspective which makes it difficult for them to identify with and to determine how they might apply the lessons to their own lives. This leads to the second issue of causing Asian men to feel guilt and shame about being a father because they feel that they cannot measure up to the standards that are being presented.

Having a book of stories about Asian fathers addresses both of those flaws. The stories are about Asian men told by their young adult children. The issues that arise in the stories should have an immediate and closer connection. This will make it more natural for Asian fathers to see themselves in the stories and to comprehend how their own story is being written with their children.

The primary exhortations in the book are for men to be disciplers and benefactors. These are roles that they can enter because they can be presented with a connection to Confucian culture. Men are not forced to abandon the ways that they know and become someone that they are not. They can save face, and at the same time, develop closer relationships with their children.

The book can be promoted as the author is able to engage in speaking opportunities at Asian churches and conferences. He will encourage the formation of fathers groups to help men begin the process of discipling their children. A website will be established that will invite others to share additional stories about their fathers. This will lead to interaction and further promotion through Facebook and Twitter.

Competition:

- Canfield, Ken, *The 7 Secrets of Effective Fathers: Becoming the Father Your Children Need*, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL, 1992, 244 pages.
- Daly, Jim, *The Good Dad: Becoming the Father You Were Meant to Be*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2014, 224 pages.
- Dorsey, Charles, *Fathers and Sons Speak: Telling My Father's Story*, Amazon Digital Services LLC, Seattle, WA, October, 2017, 66 pages.
- Eldredge, John, *Wild at Heart*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, April 2001, 224 pages.
- Lewis, Robert, *Raising a Modern-Day Knight: A Father's Role in Guiding His Son to Authentic Manhood*, Focus on the Family, Colorado Springs, CO, February 2007, 208 pages.

Uniqueness:

There are a variety of books that reach out to fathers to encourage and teach them about the influence that they can have in raising their children. What makes this book unique is that it speaks directly into the world of the Asian father. Knowing the cultural context is crucial because it helps the father to identify himself in the issues that face Asian families. The telling of stories also provides an easier venue for fathers to engage in discussion because there is more empathy encouraged and less shame incurred than there might be in a lecture. Finally, the exhortation to become a discipler to his children helps to maintain honor in the life of the Asian father.

Endorsements:

Daniel Lee, Fuller Seminary

Craig Miller, The General Board of Discipleship, United Methodist Church,
Nashville, TN

Roger Nam, Portland Seminary

Leonard Sweet, Portland Seminary

Timothy Tseng, Pacific Area Director for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship's
Graduate and Faculty Ministries

Chapter Outline:

Invitation

This is the introduction to the book. But it is not written just to be a prelude to what follows in the book's chapters. It is meant to put fathers at ease as they read the stories. Too often, the Asian mindset teaches us to read a book as an academic exercise with the anticipation of learning something new. When reading stories, lessons are caught rather than taught. Men will be encouraged to experience and participate in what is told about other fathers.

Story 1 – The Father's Chair

Before moving into the telling of the stories of Asian fathers, I begin with a biblical account of a father. Luke 15:11-32 gives us the parable of the Lost Son. Even though there is no evidence of the father ever sitting in the story, I ask the reader to consider the picture of a father's chair. A man's heart can be read by the way he sits in his chair. The

father of the Lost Son can be seen as the hero of the story by the way he reaches out to his sons from his chair.

Story 2 – Missed But Not Missing

The first story is told by a young adult Asian American woman who lost her father to cancer when she was 10 years old. Despite only having her father in her life for such a brief period of time, she is now able to trace many of her spiritual roots back to him. The story is meant to encourage fathers to know that even in a short life that it is possible to pass on a spiritual inheritance to children.

Story 3 – Honor Your Father and Mother

It is normal to assume that a man cannot change his ways later in life. It seems that the older people get, the more they become set in their ways. This is a story to show that it is never too late to change. But the turning point does not come by a father learning something new or being trained to live life differently. In this case, a young man decided to treat his profane and angry father in the way he had learned from studying Scripture. It brought about a dramatic change in his dad.

Story 4 – He Did It Right, But...

If a godly man does everything right as a father, this should be a recipe for family fulfillment. But life is not always lived out in a formulaic pattern. The unexpected happens. How does a father respond in those circumstances? The story should speak to fathers who have encountered difficult moments with their children. It will also help the rest of us to support other dads with compassion and grace instead of judgment.

Story 5 – I Am Somebody's Son

How does a man learn to be a godly father when he himself was abandoned as a child? This father was not just able to marry and raise a family, he did it with distinction. A man with a dysfunctional past may feel that he is disadvantaged as a parent. But this story shows how God can use significant people to fill in the gaps and provide a young man with a foundation that was lacking in his personal life.

Story 6 – I Bet My Family Can Do This

Gambling can become a serious issue in many Asian families. Men get involved because they enjoy the camaraderie and the potential for gaining extra income. But it is a habit that can lead to various sorts of problems that impact the entire family. Whether it be gambling, alcoholism or any other social disease, this story will help fathers to understand how their personal conduct can have serious negative consequences.

Story 7 – Forgive or Not to Forgive

Child beatings are accepted as normal in many parts of the world. That does not help the victim to wipe out the terrifying memories. Fathers do more than just inflict physical pain when they beat their children. The emotional and relational damage inflicted are more difficult to heal than the physical ones. This chapter is about how the beaten child, now as an adult, faces the question about forgiving an abusive father. It is a story that will cause a father to think twice about the consequences for him when he beats his child.

Story 8 – A Blank Page

What is it like to have no memories of your father who abandoned the family when you were a young child? He was there, but never engaged you in any relational manner? You do not miss him, nor do you hate him. There is nothing. Fathers need to understand their responsibility to nurture the lives that they helped bring into the world. But they also need to see that when they fail to take up this role that their neglect becomes an indictment on their personal character.

Story 9 – The Hole in the Middle

There are many fathers who know how to spend time with their children. He may purchase gifts for them, take them places and participate in recreational pursuits. They count the hours and feel like they have done better than other fathers in spending time with his children. But they miss an important part of being a father. They fail to connect emotionally and spiritually. It leaves a feeling of incompleteness that is felt more strongly as the child matures and understands.

Story 10 – A Father for Others

This father was not only careful to take time to raise his own children, he also made himself available to others. He went to work early and finished his duties on time so that he could pick up his kids from school and participate in their school and sports activities. But he was also known for being a father to kids who lacked that kind of relationship in their own home. This story illustrates how men can reach children in their community and churches and be a father to them.

Story 11 – The Non-Asian Father of Asians

In the first 58 years of his life, a Caucasian man goes through a divorce, becomes estranged from his children and gets involved with a Christian cult. But then God brings clarity into his life and a random meeting with some Asian young adults at church leads him and his wife to open their home on Friday nights providing a welcoming environment and a father's heart to people who desperately needed both.

Story 12 – My Wife's Father's Story

My father-in-law lived an interesting life. He was a good man, but not a follower of Jesus for almost his entire life. He was like the laborers in the parable recorded in Matthew 20 who worked one hour but were paid the same as those who toiled the entire day. His tearful conversion to knowing Jesus will bring encouragement for those who have a father who has yet to come to faith.

Story 13 – My Father’s Story

I could not write a series of fathers’ stories without including the story of my own father. He was not a Christian for most of his life. But he did many things as part of his lifestyle that were built into my own ability to be a father to my children. The impact that I am looking for in sharing his story is for readers to consider the story of their own fathers and to examine the story that they are creating in being a father to their children.

Re-Branding of the Asian Father

The conclusion to the book is to invite fathers to be a part of a transformational process. The roles that Asian men most commonly identify with fathers is to be the family provider and disciplinarian to their kids. I am asking them to make two cultural shifts. Instead of just being a provider, they also become a benefactor – they look for a way to leave a spiritual inheritance to their children. Secondly, they expand their role of disciplinarian to become their child’s discipler.

Intended Readers:

Primary

- Asian fathers who desire to build their relationships with their children
- Young adult Asian Americans who desire reconciliation and healing in broken relationships with their fathers

Secondary

- Asian mothers who desire to intervene in relationships between their husbands and children
- Non-Asians who may be drawn to the concepts of a father becoming a spiritual benefactor and discipler

Manuscript

The stories have been collected and written. Some editing is necessary. The introduction and conclusion need to be written. The book’s estimated word count is 50,000. An additional 90 days would be necessary to complete the additional writing and edits.

Author Bio:

The author is a second-generation Chinese-American who has had a ministry to Asian American students for more than 30 years. He is a frequent speaker and conferences and

retreat. Not only has he heard from students who have experienced difficult and broken relationships with their fathers, he has also counseled parents who were experiencing cultural and generational differences with their children. He, too, is a father to three young adult children. He is a M.Div. graduate of Bethel West Theological Seminary and now a D.Min. graduate of Portland Seminary.

Publishing Credits:

Quon, Victor, "Teenagers in the Chinese Church: Part of the Problem or Part of the Solution?", *Challenger*, 40, No.1, February/March 2001.

Quon, Victor, 2003, "Becoming Multiethnic." In *Making God Real for a New Generation: Ministry with Millennials Born from 1982 to 1999*, authored by Craig Kennet Miller and MaryJane Pierce Norton, 145-148, Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN.

Quon, Victor, 2006, "Do We Really Believe in the Great Commission?" In *Asian American Youth Ministry*, edited by DJ Chuang, 79-96, L² Foundation, Washington, D.C.

Future Projects:

Discipleship Manual and Leadership Guide for Asian Fathers

This would be a companion publication to *Our Fathers Stories*. It would provide a topical discipleship experience for fathers and their children to walk through together. It would also include instruction for church leaders to provide guidance for participating fathers.

Asian Fathers Re-Branded

This would be a popular publication of my doctoral dissertation. It would provide a detailed teaching to help guide Asian fathers through the transformation of becoming benefactors and disciplers. The book would also provide guidance for young adult Asian Americans who desire healing and reconciliation with their fathers.

Asian Mothers

It would be a great oversight to not speak about the influence of mothers in Asian families. However, the theme of this volume would be to affirm mothers. There are many women who feel that they have failed in their role. It would also be a collection of stories that would demonstrate the contributions that mothers have made in the lives of their children.

SECTION 6: POSTSCRIPT

This dissertation project has taken a lifetime to complete. I have been greatly influenced by my own father. Despite not having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ until late in his life, he exuded many characteristics that were blessings to me and my siblings. We would not be the people we are today without my father's presence in our developmental years. I can still trace many of my important life philosophies back to my dad. Maybe because I had a father who spent time with me, I found it quite surprising during my career as a youth pastor that there were many students who had fathers who spent minimal time with them. Then the moments that they did get was dominated by reprimands over poor academic performance or behavior that was frowned upon. It seemed that many of the fathers had little or no capacity for speaking positively into their children's lives. Many of them abdicated their role to their wives, a nanny or to me, the youth pastor. I can recall numerous occasions that I spent with students on camping trips, baseball games and amusement parks. I had privileges with young people that should have been taken by their fathers. As I have shared with those who have questioned me about the topic of my doctoral thesis, many have responded enthusiastically to what I am attempting to accomplish. The distant relationships that many young adult Asian Americans have experienced with their fathers is a malady known to many, and yet it has never been addressed in a helpful form. A book that targets Asian fathers could very well have the same kind of impact as a new invention – something that is definitely needed, but until now, not developed.

My original idea was simply to publish a series of stories about Asian fathers. Every time one of the stories was shared in a public forum, it was obvious that hearts

were touched. There did not seem to be any need to teach anything. The stories seemed to communicate powerfully on their own. My thought at the time was that the primary outcome of the stories was a movement of forgiveness and reconciliation that could be initiated between fathers and their children. But the readings, conversations and interviews that were done in conjunction with this project have shown me that there is something didactic that needs to be communicated. Forgiveness is only the first step in restoring relationships. In interviews, I continued to hear the traditional description of a father's role – that he was often distant and saw himself as the family provider and the primary disciplinarian. But in independent conversations with two young adult Asian Americans, they both identified their fathers as their *first discipler*. This told me that there was a more significant godly calling for fathers. Who is in a better position to disciple a child than his/her father? This led to the idea of a second transformation. First, there was *distant to forgiven*. Now, there would also be *disciplinarian to discipler*. But as I spoke further with one of the young adults, he told me about how his father instilled specific qualities into his life. These were lessons that he continues to follow as a married man. They focused on areas of life such as finances, family life and being faithful to God. This gave me the third transformation of *provider to benefactor*. Paying the bills and financing an education is what any ordinary father would do. When considering an inheritance, there is often little or nothing said. What is left behind is not discovered until the father has passed away. But a spiritual inheritance must be verbalized and given away during the lifetime. It cannot be silent or wait until death. To live in a relationship where forgiveness is present, to disciple your children and then to download a spiritual inheritance into their futures puts the Asian father on a level that is truly heroic.

Critics might think that the proposed transformations are a subtle attack on Asian culture. But that is not the case. A father being forgiven, discipling his children and leaving them a spiritual inheritance is not a westernized idea. Fathers in America do not fit the description either. The transformation is counter to every culture in the world. Most of the behavioral approaches to addressing this issue have been problematic in that their approach is to change the father from something that he is not. Generally, the unspoken goal was to change Asian men into a kinder, gentler and a more westernized model of a father. There are at least three issues with this plan. It is asking a man with Asian roots to abandon his heritage and acquire a new identity. This is virtually impossible to accomplish. Many Asian men would feel uncomfortable and even humiliated in attempting this transformation. This premise communicates the second issue that there is something wrong with Confucian-based Asian culture. The child psychologists who encourage Asian fathers to change may merely be trying to help men to adapt to a new culture and help them to better relate to their children. But men who were raised in their homeland may not understand the problem. They will point to the many accomplishments in their culture and question why a change is needed to a style that seems too easy and lacking in accountability. The final issue is the most critical of the three. Producing a kinder and gentler father only addresses the present-day symptoms. It does little to help a father accomplish what he is supposed to do as a parent – launch his children into a meaningful and productive life of their own. This is what is accomplished with the re-branding to forgiven, discipler and benefactor. It not only helps him to relate better, but it also gives the father a platform to speak into the emotional and spiritual development of his children.

My greatest hopes for this dissertation is twofold. For young adult children who grew up under dysfunctional relationships with their fathers, I would hope that the stories would lead them to become bold and transparent in identifying the story of their father and that this will begin a process of healing and reconciliation. But for fathers who are still in the midst of raising their families, the best outcome would be the further development of resources that fathers can use in discipling their children. There is strength in doing this in numbers. Churches can thrive with a ministry to fathers. It can be a great gathering place for church members and non-church going friends to develop in their role as a father.

There are great branching opportunities that have come to my attention in the process of developing this project. Discipling children is not something exclusive for Asian fathers. It is a calling that goes out to all fathers, regardless of their cultural background. It is possible to add to the collection of fathers stories by publishing separate volumes which would include the Latino voice, the African-American voice or the Western voice. There are other voices in our society that can also be addressed – military, imprisoned or divorced.

At the conclusion of this project, I also became aware of the need to address the role of the Asian mother. The issues would most likely be different. The Asian mother, as the primary caregiver, is normally not distant from her children. But there is a need for affirmation. The pressure for success in raising children is often on the mother's shoulders. The book, *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mom* demonstrates how obsessed an Asian mother can be about pushing her children towards academic success. If the children do

not achieve as expected, the mother may question her parenting abilities or methods. Her role needs to be highlighted and applauded.

Completing this dissertation has taught me the power of story and the impact of metaphor. Hearing the stories always beats sitting through a lecture. The stories stay with us and speak to our hearts. Hearing a story causes us to consider our own story. They have a way of growing us as we listen or read. Identifying an Asian father as forgiven, a discipler and a benefactor are distinct and enabling. These are metaphorical descriptions that an Asian man can accept. They elevate his character and increase his standing in the home. But they also encourage him to do something futuristic and developmental for his family. With deep humility, I would conclude with the prayer that this dissertation might serve to transform a culture by saving future generations from neglect and building the relationships of fathers and their children.

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE STORIES

Story #1 - Missed, But Not Missing

A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.

– Psalm 68:5 (NIV)

For most fathers, they will have about 18 years to influence their children until they leave the house. But what happens when that time is suddenly cut in half? Can a father still leave something meaningful and lasting in his children's lives? The story of William will demonstrate how powerful a father's life can be.

It was a typical Saturday evening. Andrea, and her younger brother Sean, had gone to the children's fellowship at church and now were being brought home by family friends. Everything had been pretty normal that night until they reached their driveway. The darkened house let them know that nobody was at home. After a few phone calls, the instructions given were for them to be dropped off at their uncle's home instead. Right away, they knew what was happening. Eight months prior to that April night, their father, William, had been diagnosed with incurable liver cancer. The sickness had been rapidly robbing him of his strength and energy. He had endured chemotherapy treatments and was doing his best to cling to life. But earlier that evening, William had slipped into a coma and was rushed to the hospital. Andrea and Sean went to the hospital the next day. Their mother tried to alert her husband saying, "William, your children are here." He was too weak to wake up. William passed away a few hours later.

Andrea was almost ten years old at the time. Sean had turned eight three months earlier. As anyone might imagine, William's death made life tragic and difficult for Andrea, Sean and their mother. William had not only been successful in his career as an electrical engineer, but he also had taken ample time to be a devoted father. It would be easy to conclude that when a father passes away so early in the lives of his children that his presence would be missed. But that is only the beginning of William's story. His life was cut short by an aggressive disease. He would not be a part of the normal rites of passage that his children would experience later in life. Yes, William would be missed, but he was never missing. During the first eight years of her life, Andrea's father was always involved in her and Sean's lives. Even though he is gone, William's imprint is still clearly stamped on the lives of his children.

When discussions on mortality arise, a common discussion question is, "If you knew you had ___ number of months to live, how would you spend your time?" It might be interesting to hear how people answer that question. What are the items that might appear on the *Bucket List*? Maybe it's to have as many life experiences as possible. Others might pour themselves into writing down their thoughts. Unfortunately, some will choose to withdraw to die in loneliness. William had been told by his doctors that he might only have three more months of life. What would he do with that time? What were the things most important to him? The answer that you hear from Andrea might surprise you. He played. It was hard for him. But William knew that the best investment of his final three months was to spend time with his children. At times, he didn't even have the strength to lift his head. But he played as best he could. Play was

how his children learned. It was also the best way to nurture relationships. As they were growing up, he had taught them to swim and to play Chinese chess. As the cancer continued to attack his body, William managed the strength to watch Andrea swim. It required all of his energy to accomplish something he had always enjoyed. When he could no longer sit up to move the chess pieces on his own, his children would make the moves for him according to his instructions.

So why in his dying days did William choose play over other more noble pursuits? Because, to him, playing with his children was something no one else could do. He was their father. Play was what fathers were supposed to do. In the old movie *Field of Dreams*, Ray Kinsella (played by Kevin Costner) can be remembered at the end of the film asking, “What’s in this for me?” Every other major character had experienced a fulfillment of a lifelong dream. But for Ray, thus far, there was nothing that he could take away. Throughout the story, his brother-in-law had nagged him about selling his farm. Maybe that wasn’t such a bad idea. Then as he looked at the last baseball player left on the field, he noticed that it was his father. After some casual dialogue, his father was ready to leave. But before he departed, Ray managed to ask his father, “Would you like to have a catch?” The movie closes with Ray and his father tossing a baseball with each other. To the untrained eye, it looked rather innocuous. But if you had followed the entire story, you would have known that playing catch with his dad was something that Ray had missed his entire life. It had left a hole in his emotions. He didn’t need fame, riches or education. What he needed was to play with his Dad.

Andrea says today that memories of her father playing with her and her brother communicated that they were important to him. William was willing to spend time with

his children doing things that all of them enjoyed. On family trips, his wife would sometimes share the driving while he played with his children in the back seat. Playing was not something that William did because his children would be better educated. He did it because of something far more important. It spoke to his children's spirit. Playing helped to communicate a piece of the father's heart to Andrea and Sean.

Many Asian fathers think of play as taking a break. For some, it's even considered a necessary annoyance. But play is much more than time away from what we consider more productive activities like work, study or church service. Those are all worthwhile uses of our time, but a father cannot minimize the importance of spending time in playing with his children because it clearly communicates to them that they are important. When a father leaves playing with his children to someone else, he misses out on unplanned and unexpected teaching moments. When William played with Andrea and Sean, he wasn't just entertaining them. He was demonstrating what is important in life. If the thought arises that William must have had a lot of spare time, it should be noted that up until his cancer was discovered, he was an electrical engineer and held a management position in his company. He was always busy, had people working under him and was well-respected by his peers. But playing with his children was always high on his priority list, even later in life, when he was physically unable to do it as energetically as he would have preferred.

But play was not the only memory that Andrea has about her dad. He was the family's spiritual leader. This is a role that many Christian men, even pastors, find difficult to fill. Some may lead Bible studies, teach Sunday School and serve on church

leadership boards. But leading children in their spiritual walk can be a lifetime challenge. William was different. From the time she was a toddler, Andrea can remember her dad praying with her every night. He did it differently than most parents do. There was no standard memorized prayer and he didn't just pray for his children. William would tell bedtime stories that had moral values in them. Then he would ask Andrea what SHE wanted to pray about. He didn't want his daughter to be involved passively. He wanted her to own the prayers that she spoke. When this involved friends or other families, William would be careful to note when prayers were answered. This showed Andrea the importance of prayer – that it really worked and it made a difference when she would pray for others. William also made it a habit at the breakfast table to ask his children, “What did you dream about?” He knew that, on many occasions, God speaks to us through our dreams, as he did with Joseph in Egypt. This would encourage Andrea to remember her dreams so she could tell her father about them.

This has had a profound impact on Andrea, who is now an adult. She regularly prays with purpose. She expects God to listen to her and answer her requests. The intimacy that Andrea experiences with God in her prayer life goes well beyond obligatory conversations with God. She continues to see ways that God speaks to her in dreams. This is a spiritual sensitivity born from her early years of praying with her father, the spiritual leader in her home.

William also taught his children about generosity. In pastoring his children, he taught them to learn how to take care of other people. Andrea learned, shortly before her father passed away, that when he as a college student, her father had helped to finance a friend's tuition payments. From early in his life, William had practiced a gift of

generosity. He was aware of the ways that God had blessed him and he made sure that he and his family would always practice a ministry of giving towards others.

Andrea's life has not always been easy. The stress caused by the loss of her father caused many heartaches in the family. She had promised her father that she would be responsible to take care of her mother and younger brother. This vow became a burden during her teenage years. Andrea felt incapable of living up to the promise. There were years of anger, frustration and rebellion. But somehow, Andrea and Sean managed to stay in church. When she attended a summer youth camp in her junior year of high school, God broke through. The speaker used Jeremiah 29:11 in one of his messages - *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.* In those words, Andrea came to understand why her father had died and why she was now living. Andrea started cultivating Christian friendships with other girls, helped to launch a new youth ministry and got rid of what she called "her sailor's mouth". After high school, Andrea entered college and began to study for a career in elementary education. In the midst of that, God called her to serve for a time as a youth pastor in a church plant. She began to practice what William had taught her about helping to care for other people. Andrea taught her youth group the lessons that she had learned in life and she helped to counsel at the summer camp that had helped turn her life around. Today, she is married, a mother, teaching in elementary school and has served as the director of that same summer camp. On numerous occasions, young students have confided in her because Andrea displays the caring attitude passed to her from her father. When asked about the lessons in life that her father left with her, Andrea lists hearing the voice of God, developing a life of

prayer and a love for teaching children. William knew what it meant to be Christlike. He wanted his children to have a heart for the world, how to care for people and be generous.

A story from her childhood sums up what Andrea, and maybe others, thought about her dad. Her school was conducting a Parents Day. William tried to be there, but because of his responsibilities at work, he couldn't make it. He only managed to come for just the last few minutes. As the class lined up to go back to class, William went up to Andrea, said, "Hello" and gave her a piece of gum. A friend of hers marveled at seeing this stately, but loving man. He gave the appearance of being someone important. Andrea's friend asked, "Wow, is that the President?" Andrea answered, "No, that's just my dad."

Parents who have raised their children to young adulthood will often tell younger moms and dads, "The time goes by fast." With William, the time with his children was even shorter. But regardless of the number of days that God gives to us, the time is sufficient for a father to deposit something of value into his children's lives. Too often, the assumption is that children learn through lectures and books. But the vital lessons of life are imparted as fathers spend time. Character and values are imparted through conversation and joint activity. When William asked Andrea what she would like to pray for, he was passing on a spiritual characteristic not learned in a book.

Andrea and Sean were not perfect children. They experienced a variety of difficulties as they grew up without having their father around. But in many ways, William prepared them for those years. He knew he wouldn't be there to provide the stability they would need. But he poured into them all that he could offer. But perhaps

what meant the most to them was that William did not give up and withdraw. He is missed, but not missing.

Story #2 - The Power of Honor

"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you."

Exodus 20:12 (NIV)

A common question among young adult Asian American Christians is regarding their non-Christian parents. If a father does not follow Jesus, how can he possibly disciple his children? What options are there for the young believer? Greg will show how the lessons of Scripture can help to heal family relationships.

Greg wasn't sure how this conversation was going to turn out. He was an engineering student, but knew that this was not what he wanted to do the rest of his life. His true desire was to drop out of Arizona State and enroll in a nearby Bible college. In his own mind and heart, he knew it was the right thing to do. The major hurdle was to sell the idea to his father. As a young Japanese American, it was proper to seek his father's consent for such an important decision. But beyond the cultural expectations, Greg had recently studied the passage that says, "Honor your father and mother." If he was serious about living out the words of Scripture, this was a conversation that he had to have. He would never know how his father might respond until he could get the courage to ask him. It was time to go upstairs to his parents' room and present his plan. He had actually asked his father, Walt, the same question a year earlier. The answer he received was not entirely satisfactory. His dad had told him, "No. But if you really want to do this, go ahead and go." Technically, he had been given Greg the green light. His father had just basically told him that it was his decision to make and he really did want to go.

So maybe this was all the permission that he needed. But something in his father's tone didn't sit right with Greg. His father was not a Christian and he himself had only made a decision to follow Christ a few months back. He remembered what the Bible had said about honoring your father and mother. Having his father's blessing was important to him, so Greg had decided at the time not to make the switch.

It was not easy for Greg to talk to his father about anything, much less something as important as his future career. His father had always been a person with a fiery disposition. In conversations with his oldest uncle, Greg heard a story from his father's childhood. His father was the youngest of three brothers. Walt's oldest brother had a "happy go lucky" attitude towards life and the middle brother was mellow in personality. Walt, however, was the one who had the temper. He had a habit of causing fights and making trouble. He also had a reputation for talking back. One day, the three brothers were waiting for the school bus in the morning. When it arrived, the door swung open. The driver pointed to the two older brothers and said, "You two can come on the bus." Then he pointed to Walt and continued, "But you! You're not allowed on here." The driver quickly shut the door on the young boy's face. Walt's temper often created problems. He had a habit of causing trouble, starting fights in the back of the bus and talking back. The driver had just cause for his actions. But not being allowed to ride the school bus just increased his anger and bitterness.

After completing high school, Walt joined the Marine Corp and rose to the rank of captain. He fought in the Korean War and always did things by the book. He was a hard

worker, very honest, well respected, but mostly, very intense. With his military service completed, Walt decided to go to college on his GI bill. He completed his engineering degree and promptly started working at Motorola. He was a diligent worker and a valued member of his team. But his temper continued to impact his life. Other employees had to continually remind him, “Walt, cooler heads prevail.” After many years on the job, Walt considered the possibility that he may have been passed over for promotions because of his inability to control his anger. He was talented and skilled, but without the ability to get along with other team members, he was not advancing as quickly as his contemporaries.

Of course, in his social life, his temper also caused difficulties. He had friends, but they were all aware of Walt’s disposition. Greg can only remember one conversation that his father had with a friend in which that person simply wanted to talk to him. On other occasions, it was always information-based conversations. Someone would tell him, “Oh, this is what’s going on at church”, “We need you to bring this item” or “We’re going fishing, we need you to pick up this person.” Asian men are not known for their openness between each other. But in Walt’s case, it seemed as if his friends were thinking, “I’m just going to call Walt and tell him what he needs to know.” There were too many potential land mines for his buddies to get involved in a friendly chat. They would spend time at church, go fishing and play bridge. But there was not much more to Walt’s social life. He stayed home most of the time and watched television.

His wife, Joanne, had to learn how to cope with her husband. He yelled at cars, strangers and also at her. Walt was never physically abusive, but would become upset over little things. Simple clumsiness was enough to get an angry reaction from him. Greg was the youngest of Walt and Joanne's three children. He was very young because his brother, Eugene and sister, Tricia were both more than ten years older. Greg had always thought his father's temper was as bad as it could get. There was always fear in the house when Walt came home at the end of the day. But Greg's siblings informed him later on in life that he had not seen the worst of it. Before he was even born, his father had already gained a reputation in the community for his anger and intensity. It was to such a degree that a friend had to convince him to see a therapist. The counselor suggested that he exercise and find a hobby to help channel some of his intensity. Walt chose to work out in a gym and to take up woodworking. Those activities helped to keep him occupied, but did little to curb his temper.

As Greg grew up, he simply thought that his father's anger and intensity was normal. But then Greg would talk with friends on his baseball and basketball teams. They would tell him, "Oh yeah, your dad was the meanest of all the dads." He asked them, "Your dads aren't like that?" They said, "No, just your dad." Greg began to shamefully understand that there was something different about his father. He wasn't quite sure what to do about it.

Joanne was the exact opposite of her husband. She was very laid back, patient and loyal. Walt would often yell at her. She took a lot of verbal abuse, more than what most

wives would endure. There were times, however, when she couldn't take it anymore. She would stop the car, get out and just walk away. After calming down, Walt would have to drive, find his wife and pick her up. Greg's siblings later told him about a time when their father totally lost it with their mom. Joanne was so upset that she packed her belongings and took the kids to live at their aunt's home. A day or so later, Walt came over, was sad, knew that his behavior had been wrong and apologized for what he had done and said. Joanne agreed to bring the kids and move back home. Greg considers it a miracle that his mother never walked away permanently. She certainly deserved a better relationship than the one she had with her husband.

Amazingly, by God's grace, Walt was able to keep his wife and friends. When he celebrated his 50th birthday, some of his buddies got up and talked about him in the fashion of the old Dean Martin Roasts. They all talked about his younger days and how angry he used to be. He was still an intense person. But by comparison, he had actually calmed down a bit. Even the pastor of his church talked about Joanne and Walt being "sweet and salty". There was never anything in particular that would set him off. His anger defined who he was. It was his way of dealing with the difficulties that he had faced in life – not having much money while growing up and then having to deal with society's racial prejudices against Japanese Americans that were prevalent after World War II. He took his anger out on others and sometimes simply got tired of people. His reputation was well known throughout the community.

As Greg and his siblings grew older, their father's anger began to take a toll. Tricia turned 18 and was admitted to Arizona State. At first, she became a commuter student from the family's home in North Phoenix. But one night, her car was vandalized and she feared driving and parking for evening classes. She had recently met someone on campus. He was not a student, but lived near the school. Tricia decided to move in with him. Today, she lives in Texas and maintains some contact with the family. She is able to tolerate her father in short doses. But she never came back home after that time. It was her escape.

Greg was entering his teenage years and didn't like to be home for very long. He hung out at night in places that opened late - usually bowling alleys and pool halls. These were not the most positive of environments, nor did Greg have the best of friends, or great influences in his life. He tried to stay out of his father's way as much as possible. During high school and college, Greg did not interact with his dad on very many occasions. His father was not happy with him, but as long as Greg maintained his grades, life was sort of OK. After getting into college, things got worse between father and son. At one point, Walt had totally given up on Greg. On one occasion, Greg stayed out all night long and didn't come home until 8:00 in the morning. He thought it odd that as he was coming home that he had to deal with traffic from people who were on their way to work. Even though he was in college, it was obvious that his life was headed nowhere.

The family had always gone to church on a regular basis, but the experience was at best, lukewarm. The church was involved in family and community events, but there was

nothing life changing or transformational about the preaching or teaching in the church. Greg just considered church to be another activity with his family. But as a student in college, he was invited by a friend to attend a Harvest Crusade. Something sparked in his heart that evening that he had never previously experienced in his church. He walked forward with others to receive Jesus Christ as his LORD and Savior. It was real because Greg's life suddenly changed. He and Eugene had been at odds for the previous two years. His older brother was not happy about Greg's late night activities. But now there was a change. Eugene didn't understand, but the two brothers started talking again. Greg was able to eventually lead his older brother to also make a decision for Christ. Walt noticed the changes in his youngest son and became concerned. He went to talk with his pastor. He told him, "Greg stays out late at night, just like before. But he doesn't carry a pool stick around with him. He carries a Bible!" Then he asked, "Is he going to be ok?" The pastor reassured Walt that he had nothing to worry about. Despite the changes in Greg's life, he and his dad still fought from time to time.

It was over a year now that Greg had made the decision to follow Christ. He felt more certain than ever that Bible college was where God wanted him. But he still remembered his dad's words and attitude from the first time that he raised the question. Nothing much had changed in the last twelve months. Why would he respond any differently now? But he would never know until he asked. Finally, Greg summoned the necessary courage and started walking upstairs to his dad's bedroom. He entered and started the conversation, "Dad, I don't know if engineering is for me." Surprisingly, his father understood that Greg had given engineering his best shot. "So what do you want

to do?” Greg responded, “I want to go to Bible college.” His father remembered the previous conversation and asked, “Why didn’t you go last year?” Then Greg remembered the Bible studies about honoring his parents and said, “Because I didn’t want to go without your blessing.” The words startled Walt. This was something new to him. “You mean, my opinion matters to you?” His youngest son mustered all of the sincerity that he could find within himself and confidently said, “Absolutely!” He told his father what the Bible said about how he as a son was to honor his father and that he was now seeking his blessing. There was a silence that seemed to last for an eternity. His father suddenly became emotional. This surprised both of them. They were not alone in the room. Joanne was sitting nearby. She saw what was happening and broke the silence at the right moment. She started coaching her husband. “Come on Walt! Give your son a hug! Give him a hug!” Father and son embraced like never before.

Something was suddenly released in Walt. He remembered how as a child, when Greg was disobedient, his father would punish him with a belt. He paused and looked at his son and said, “I want to tell you something.” After a brief pause, he said, “I apologize for whipping you when you were a child.” Honor was opening up something in both of them. Prior to this exchange, Greg had only known his father as an intense and angry man. Walt had only experienced negative things in people. The act of honoring from his son suddenly changed all that. Both of them were truly humbled that night. Greg accepted his father’s apology and he and his dad spent precious moments allowing the gospel-driven forgiveness to flow through both of them. Their relationship experienced a revolution at that moment. The father-son dynamics that had been blocked by anger

mystically began to flow between the two men. And, oh, by the way, Walt also gave his blessing for Greg to attend Bible college.

This exchange also opened the way for Greg to share his faith with his father over time. It was not always done with a lot of grace. There were still some raised voices. But eventually the conversations changed from debates to discussions. They would talk about different subjects. At some point, it all came together and Walt made a personal decision for Christ. The exact moment is not known to Greg. His father is still a private person, but something definitely was different. At some point in time known only to Walt and God, he made a decision to follow Christ. There was clearly a visible change in his life. On one occasion, Greg's aunt was espousing a theological view that was contrary to biblical teaching. Walt instructed her, "Only if you believe in Jesus can you be forgiven." He said it with conviction and firmly believed what he was saying. It was obvious that something had changed in Walt's heart and mind.

There are still occasional outbursts. Walt is Walt. Tricia sometimes visits from Texas. She probably is not aware of the spiritual transformation that her father has gone through. But Greg and Eugene both can see that Walt has mellowed. He has become much more patient. The word of God has helped him to restore relationships. He is more at peace with his children and has a more fulfilling relationship with Joanne. He now has normal dialogues with his family.

Greg looks back to that night and will forever acknowledge the power of the fifth commandment. There was something critical and special about the phrase *Honor your father and mother*. Greg could have prepared a speech that night based on logic and principle. He could have argued that he did not enjoy engineering and that he had to pursue something that he really wanted to do. He could even have tried to say that it was God's will for him to go to Bible college and that he would rather follow God than the dreams of his father. Greg might have been right on all those counts and maybe even have won the argument. But the distance between him and his father certainly would have increased. Instead, the act of honoring his father broke down all the barriers. Greg received the permission that he was seeking. But he got much more than that. He got his dad back. The relationship that had always been missing was suddenly discovered.

His dad was the intense army guy. He bounced quarters off the bed, was arm wrestling champ in his barracks and had always kept family relationships at an angry distance. But when Greg asked for his father's blessing, Walt was disarmed. He didn't know what to do or how to react. When he stuttered out the question, "My opinion means something to you?", it was clear that something meaningful and powerful had just happened. Greg says that it was something beyond appreciation or respect. Honor is given from the depths of one's heart. It took humility to give it and produced humility when it was received. It was an exchange engineered by the Spirit of God.

Greg is now married and has a growing family. He is thankful that his kids can know their grandfather in his new and improved mode. Walt is respected and loved. His

grandchildren don't have to know him as the man that the kids in their father's neighborhood once feared. Greg tells his kids stories how when he was a boy, he would pile up his toys at his bedroom door to try to block his father from coming into the room. But his dad would always get in anyway, one time breaking the hinges off of the door. The kids can hardly believe the stories. They only know the grandfather who is always so happy to see them. He is by no means, a playful grandfather. But none of the kids are scared of him either. He always takes time to talk with all of them before he sneaks off to watch the next Suns game.

As he watches his dad interact with the grandkids, Greg recognizes that there is something clearly redemptive in seeing his father enjoying a relationship with his extended family. He has sensed that God worked to bring that healing into the different generations. Many Asian families, like his own, immigrate to America to seek greater financial prosperity. But God had a greater blessing in store. He knows that if his own grandparents had not immigrated to the United States, then it is less likely that he would have become a Christian and learn what it means to honor his father and mother. When he grasped that concept, it led him to talk to his father. It produced a dynamic between him and his dad that would not have existed had God not placed the element of honor in his relationship with his father on that night not too long ago.

Discipling Your Parents

There are going to be families in which the father is not in a position to disciple his kids. Greg's family is a prime example. His father had experienced hurts in his early life which contributed to the overt anger that developed as he grew up. By the time he became a parent, Walt had never been trained how to be an effective father. He was a man of skill with leadership qualities. But to ask him to become a disciple to his children would have been fruitless. It was just not a part of his personal makeup. By the time Greg grows to college age and walks into his father's bedroom to ask for his blessing to attend Bible college, the roles become reversed. It is Greg's time to disciple his father. This can feel very awkward in Asian culture. A son does not necessarily show respect to his father by trying to teach him something. But Greg handled the situation well. He took a risk. Walt could have turned down the request. But with the humility demonstrated that night, the family culture experienced a deep transformation.

There might be some who are reading these stories with a feeling of helplessness. It is difficult for you to imagine having a father who would be willing to spend quality time in a discipleship process. Do you have to wait for a miracle? Are you powerless to experience something meaningful with your father because you have to wait for God to get a hold of him and shake sense into him? You can take this passive route, if you so desire. Or, you can be proactive. In families like yours and Greg's, someone else, besides your father, needs to take action. It requires a great amount of courage, but God is calling you to be the one to initiate forgiveness and reconciliation. Follow Greg's example and find an opportunity to talk to your father. It would be wise to identify friends who can support and pray for you before having the talk. If your father rejects

your request or does not respond well, you do not want to have to face the consequences alone. But whatever the result might be, God will bless you. If your father is open, then you will experience transformation. If he closes off conversation, then you will at least know that you made the attempt. You won't have to live with "What if?" type of thoughts. You can be at peace.

If you would like to share about your experiences, go to www.M46.org to tell others about the conversation.

APPENDIX B: THE FATHER'S DISCIPLESHIP MANUAL

Introduction

Many people find the prospect of discipling to be intimidating. There is a fear of being unqualified. It is thought that to disciple others requires a certain level of spiritual training, maybe even a seminary degree. The common view of a discipler is that of some sort of Christian guru, a person of respect, wisdom and accomplishment. Certainly, the task of raising up a young believer in the faith should not be taken lightly. One who discipled another is passing on what God has revealed to him in his life. (2 Timothy 2:2) To disciple someone means the passing on of inner qualities such as character, goodness and integrity. But the role of discipler is not limited to those with so-called "spiritual training." It is easy to forget that the first disciples were common men. They had been trained as fishermen, business people, tax collectors and political activists. None of them had "Rev." in front of their names. Anyone who has the opportunity and desire to mentor can effectively disciple another person.

A father is an ideal person to do this for his children. You may not be the only discipler that your child will ever have. But you may be the most important. Asian culture has trained a man to believe that one of his primary roles in his family is to be the strict disciplinarian in his home. He is supposed to provide support to his wife in helping to keep their children on a course that will lead them to a good education and eventually, a successful career. What many fathers fail to realize is that the disciplinarian role is only the beginning of his calling. Discipleship gives a man a fulfillment in his role as a father.

When a man is a disciplinarian, his end goal is to mold his children to get good grades and be well-behaved. Discipleship speaks to the inner qualities that will bring a fuller development of the whole person. More importantly, discipleship will bring a closer relationship between a father and his children.

If you have ever seen a standard discipleship manual, you will know that the usual theological topics are covered. They teach about worship, studying the Bible, evangelism and other lessons to help a new Christian to know what it means to pursue a relationship with God. The intent is to make this discipleship experience different by making it more than just another academic exercise. If you think about how Jesus disciplined his followers, he didn't use a book, nor did he meet with them in a classroom. They lived and encountered life together. Jesus taught his disciples as they walked together, discussed topics and encountered people. That is how a father disciplines his children. This curriculum is designed to encourage conversation and exploration into real life scenarios. The dialogue that is created should give opportunity for the child to share with the father opinions, preferences and favorite activities. In exchange, the father will be able to voice his points of view, discuss Scripture and impart wisdom gained from his life experiences. There should be ample opportunity for the impartation of biblical values, godly wisdom and sound thinking.

There is a prescribed order to the curriculum. But the topics can be covered in any sequence. Each one is independent of the others. They can be covered according to seasons, interest or opportunity. However, it is highly recommended to start with

Favorite Food & Drinks. This session is introductory and meant to be more casual. Doing it first increases the possibility that the initial encounter will be a positive one. It is also ideal that *Calling* be covered last because that session gives a fitting conclusion to the discipleship process. The scheduling is flexible. For some families, it may be best to meet once a week for ten consecutive weeks, possibly over a summer. But the most ideal schedule would be to meet once a month over the period of a year. This will make room for unexpected interruptions and give the father adequate time to process the encounters with other men in his small group and gain insights in preparation for the next session.

Encounter 1 - Favorite Food & Drinks

Setting: Son/daughter gets to choose a favorite eating spot. It could be a place for a meal, dessert or boba.

It is important to allow your son/daughter to choose the location of this first encounter. Giving the option communicates that their opinion is important and that you are willing to listen to them. This will help to open conversation as you proceed.

The first encounter is casual in nature, but do not mistake its importance. Your initial conversation will set a pattern. If you rush through this time just to get it over with, your son/ daughter will pick up those clues. They will see the discipleship process as meaningless and routine. It will be just another assignment that they have to complete. But if you are relaxed, unhurried and interested in what your child has to say, you will be

making the statement that these encounters are meaningful for both of you. You may eventually be surprised by some of the things that will be shared in your conversations.

Purpose: The father will share the reasons for these discipleship gatherings. This encounter is to provide an enjoyable activity that father and child can share together and give opportunity to possibly learn something new about each other. If you have not yet done so, share with your son/daughter the reasons for these encounters. There should be emphasis that you expect to learn as well as lead. The purpose is to build your relationship and to help each other grow closer to God.

Conversation: Talk about each other's favorite places and foods to eat. What makes them so appealing? You can also share about your least favorite types of food and what makes them so disgusting. Share your thoughts about different foods, but avoid lecturing about why your choice of food is superior. Opinions tend to make room for other opinions. Lectures tend to cut off conversation.

Lesson:

The table is not just a platform to place your food upon. Meals are normally eaten with other people. We share experiences, express ideas and bond together in conversations. Take a look at the passages listed. Jesus was a social person and enjoyed talking with people, even those he may have just met. He taught, communicated and spoke into people's lives when he ate meals with them. Talk about how your family

engages in conversation when you eat at home and when you go to your favorite eating establishments.

What is different about going out to eat with friends or family as opposed to eating by yourself? What does that say about the purpose of eating together?

What were some of the occasions when Jesus ate and drank with others? (e.g., Luke 5:27-32, Luke 7:36-50 and John 2:1-12) Why did Jesus spend so much of his time at parties and banquets?

What are some of the best places where we and our family can go to celebrate special occasions?

Special Reminder:

Remember to take a selfie together (one on each of your phones) to commemorate this occasion. Hopefully, it is a memorable time for both of you.

Encounter 2 - Education & Career

Setting: Either the father's workplace or a nearby university. Take some time to walk through this location. It can be difficult for a young person to know what they might

want to do in a career. Their likes and preferences can change frequently before they reach adulthood. Too often, parents want to put their kids on a single track without understanding the ways that they are gifted and where their passions might be. What is important in this encounter is not for your daughter/son to determine their eventual career, but to understand how God has uniquely gifted them.

Take the opportunity to let them know the process you went through to determine a career. Do not be afraid to share any doubts or failures that you may have faced in the past. Your child will respond more positively to your honesty and transparency than to a polished image of success you might want to portray.

Purpose: For the father to share what is required for someone to be productive in a career. For the son/daughter to know how God enables them to do well in school. Your child needs the freedom to select a productive career, as opposed to having one imposed upon them. They need to know that you are supportive of their pursuit of that field, but they also need your wisdom in understanding the challenges and potential pitfalls. Most importantly, guide them to see that the reason for them to pursue excellence is based on their relationship with God. Knowing that their personal success leads to glorifying God is much more fulfilling than making money, having power or making the family look good.

Conversation: Share the story of how you came to be in your profession. Was it a field you always enjoyed or did you discover your skill later in life? What were the challenges

you faced to succeed in your job? What do you like most about your profession? You can also share about how you experienced school during your growing years.

Then your son/daughter can share about how they feel about school. What are their favorite classes? Which are most challenging? If they are old enough, ask them to share about some potential college majors or a career. Talk about what is needed to succeed in that field. You might even consider some people to talk with or places to visit to explore that career. Caution: do not discourage your child if they choose a field that is not financially lucrative. At this point, you don't want to take away their dreams. You can always return to the conversation later to help them think through potential challenges.

Lesson:

A study in the life of Daniel will reveal that God's people pursue success in whatever career they might have. As a young man, he chose to maintain the standards that had been taught to him. He did not compromise his faith or character. If you are not familiar with Daniel's story, read chapters 3-6 to see how he and his friends were not only trustworthy servants of the king, but how they were also able to have a spiritual influence upon those around them.

In many Asian circles, it seems that personal success in school and a career are tied to the practice of a person's faith. God is really not that interested in our GPA or our

achievements in the workplace. But he does want us to live in such a way that he is glorified and from which we have a platform to speak for him.

Why is it important for a follower of Christ to perform as well as possible in school and at work?

Read Daniel 1. How are Daniel and his friends described in v.4? How was their relationship with God related to their abilities to serve the king? What were some ways that Daniel and his friends were later influential in the Babylonian kingdom?

Think of some examples of Christians who have been influential in their professions.

Special Reminder:

Write down a dream that both of you have for how you might be able to influence others in your career. We always remember things better when we write them down. Both of you should write out a dream that you have for how you might be able to influence others for Christ in the workplace and classroom.

Encounter 3 - Worship

Setting: Your normal place of worship, preferably when not a lot of people are around, but also at a time when you can gain access to the sanctuary.

Do you have concerns about whether your child will remain in his/her faith after leaving home? Rather than making the practice of Christianity a list of rules and codes of behavior, it will make more sense to your son/daughter to personally experience what it means to follow Jesus. Making worship an intimate experience with God is more meaningful than telling your children that they must fulfill a weekly obligation.

But what is worship like for you? Is it personal and meaningful? Or, is it just that weekly obligation? Take time to examine your own worship experience before you attempt to convey something meaningful to your son/daughter.

Purpose: For each other to understand what draws people to worship God. There are a variety of ways to worship. What touches one person's life might be different for someone else.

Our ability to worship God is not confined to a church building. We can worship God from wherever we might be. During this time together, you will want to emphasize that worship is a personal exchange between God and his people. It is not an obligation to a person or organization. This time will be helpful to you to understand how your son/daughter approaches God as a worshiper.

Conversation: Share with each other what you enjoy about the act of worship. What is the most meaningful part about being in church? What would life be like if you did not go to church? Have an honest conversation about what it is like to go to church. No church is perfect and it is possible that there are aspects of church life that your child may not enjoy, agree with or understand. Ask them if there are parts of church life that are difficult for them to comprehend. Explain that we do not attend church for entertainment, but because of the commitment to our relationships with other people and with God. Talk with each other about what draws you to worship and how it impacts your life. Then also imagine what life would be like if you did not attend church. What would you miss? How should we handle moments when we don't particularly feel like coming to church?

Lesson:

The two passages to be studied address different parts of worship. Psalm 95 speaks about our vertical relationship with God. It expresses the attitude that we have when we come before Him. The verses from Hebrews talks about our horizontal relationships with other believers. Both aspects are important and should be discussed here. Corporate worship will always have certain cultural tastes and generational preferences. Talk about those differences. It's not a question of right and wrong or what is better. There are different ways for people to worship. Take time to understand the variety that can be experienced in worshipping together.

Read Psalm 95:1-7a. How does the act of worship place us in a closer relationship with God?

Read Hebrews 10:24-25. How does worship place you in a closer relationship with other people?

Share your thoughts with each other about what it is like to come and worship in your church? What do you find meaningful? What are some things that you wish were different? How do the two previous verses speak to you?

Special Reminder:

Sing, play or listen to two worship songs (each of you gets to pick one) and worship the LORD together. Perhaps one or both of you have some musical ability that you can use to worship God by singing a couple of praise songs together. If not, just find a couple of familiar songs online and sing together.

Encounter 4 - Re-Creation

Setting: The father will select a recreational or leisure activity. You and your child will engage in the activity together. If it is helpful and necessary, the father should introduce or train his child in how to participate ahead of time. If the activity is passive in nature (e.g., listening to a concert or watching a sporting activity), there can also be preparation prior to the event.

As important as work and study is in our lives, rest and recreation helps us to be more productive in our daily tasks. It's the father's turn to pick today's destination. Consider something that you enjoy and that you can participate in with your daughter/son. Some fathers prefer a sporting activity like hiking, tennis or fishing. Others may prefer music or the theatre. Whatever the choice might be, prepare your child to participate and enjoy.

Purpose: To understand the importance of leisure and recreation. Our performance in school and at work improve when we have time for rest. The most important lesson for today is not just how to enjoy life, but how to manage the different parts of our lifestyle. Some people (students included) only participate in work. Others never seem to get to work and want to have a life of leisure. Managing our lives effectively means having time for rest and recreation, but also in understanding that there comes a time to focus. Recreation is not something that stands in the way of personal success. It is an important part of the overall plan.

Conversation: What are each other's favorite leisure activities? Why are they enjoyable? How does it contribute to your identity and productivity?

Share about how you originally came to be interested in this form of recreation. What benefits do you gain from it? The conversation should be in a sharing mode, not necessarily one of convincing. In return, ask your daughter/son about their favorite forms

of recreation. (Note: sleeping is not a valid response). Ask how they developed interest in this activity?

Talk about how important relaxation and recreation are important to us. Too often, parents only want to talk with their kids about school, homework and college destinations. This is an opportunity to show interest in other aspects of your child's life. Share with each other how rest and recreation have made you more productive.

Lesson:

There may be some tendency to downplay the seventh day of creation. God was already finished with his work and didn't make anything new on the last day. But there are some unique features about the seventh day. It was the only day that he made holy. There is no compromise with it. The seventh day was not for work, but for rest. It is the only day that is not involved in the debates about creationism and evolution. No matter which side of the argument someone might take, everyone agrees that the day of rest is good and necessary. Ironically, then, it is the one day that is most frequently violated. Many cultures of the world ignore the day of rest. Finally, it is the day that keeps on going. God continues to rest from His creative work. His creative work ended after six days. But the day of rest continues.

Share with each other the importance of the day of rest. It is not only peaceful for our bodies and minds, but more significantly, it is a time to re-ignite our spirit. It gives us the proper space in our lives to draw near to God and worship Him.

What makes the seventh day of creation just as important as the other six? Of all the days of creation, why do you think God declared the seventh day to be holy? (Genesis 2:1-3)

What are some images that come to mind when you think about being restful?

Why is rest important? How is God present in our times of recreation?

Special Reminder:

Take a memento home to remind you of this place. Let it serve as a reminder of the sanctity of rest and recreation.

Encounter 5 – The Opposite Sex

Setting: Meet at home in the father's bedroom. This may not be an easy topic for either of you to discuss and could feel awkward. But that's one of the reasons why the topic needs to be addressed. It's not likely to arise in any normal circumstance. To talk about a life partner may not be something that your child has even thought about. The idea here

is not to prepare them for marriage, but to learn about interacting with people of the opposite sex. It's not necessary for you to become an expert on dating and relationships. But you should be ready to be honest and candid about your own experiences.

Hopefully, meeting in your bedroom does not come across as creepy. It is meant to depict the intimacy that is involved in personal relationships. It might be helpful to keep a door opened, but also to make sure that you are not disturbed during this session.

Purpose: To discuss the sanctity of marriage and the commitment that a husband and wife must have to God and each other. But, also, to share about the challenges of building a strong relationship and how we depend on God to intervene in moments of difficulty.

Unlike other cultures, it is unlikely that you will be selecting a future spouse for your child. Your role is to help your child to learn how to build strong relationships and how to be wise in their interactions with members of the opposite sex. It is not uncommon for a young person to think that a marriage relationship just happens and that couples will live happily ever after. Your son/daughter will greatly benefit from knowing about the bumps on the road. One of the most useful skills they can acquire is to learn how to work through difficulties and disagreements. You will not answer every question in this encounter. But you can demonstrate the openness you have in talking about the topic. This can create possibilities for future dialogue.

Conversation: Has your child ever asked about how you and your wife met? This is an

opportunity to share your story, what your dating life was like and how you decided to marry. Include information about what brought the two of you together, what you admired about your future wife and how your parents felt about her. If the son/daughter are able, they can share about the type of person they would eventually like to marry. Do they like people who are quiet or talkative? Are they comfortable with people of a different cultural or ethnic background? How important is another person's spiritual standing? Offer a reminder that our likes and dislikes can change as we grow older.

Lesson:

There are no biblical passages that talk about dating because the practice was not a part of ancient cultures. But the Genesis passage does talk about how men and women were made for each other. Talk about the meaning of the words *bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*. When a man and woman become husband and wife, it is a unique, sacred union that is formed. Even with the proliferation of sex outside of marriage, most cultures agree that a permanent marriage relationship is the norm that we were made for. There may be questions about singleness, divorce and homosexual relationships. But marriage between a man and a woman is the union prescribed in Scripture and the predominate norm for all of history.

The second passage is not limited only to marriage. But the words are certainly true for a husband and wife. It is crucial to recognize that the Holy Spirit is present in a

marriage. The statement that *a cord of three strands is not quickly broken* demonstrates the strength that the presence of God brings to a marriage.

Read Genesis 2:23-24. In the relational and spiritual realms, what does it mean for a husband and wife to become *one flesh*? How is this relationship different from a couple who are merely dating?

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. As it applies to a married couple, what is the meaning of the last statement, “A cord of three strands is not quickly broken?”

How does God strengthen a married couple during difficult times in their relationship?

Special Reminder:

Each of you write a note to your wife/mother to express your love for her and leave it on her pillow. Leaving two notes for your wife/mother will allow both of you to express a message of thanks and affection for a special person in your lives. It will help to model for your son/daughter how we need to actively declare our affections for those we love.

Encounter 6 - Family

Setting: Go to a park or local mall, find a place to sit and do some people watching for a few minutes. Look for families. The family is the most basic unit of belonging. It is where our identity is formed, and values are developed. Unfortunately, for some individuals, the family becomes a place of disappointment and the origin of hardships. No family is perfect. But they can do their best to persevere and eventually endure. Some families struggle to get along while others thrive. Take some time to do some people watching. Observe those who appear to be together with their families. Notice their interaction. What are the indicators to demonstrate how close they might be? Are there signs that might indicate the relationships are more distant? What unique characteristics do you notice about small families, large ones, families with older kids and those with infants?

Purpose: To understand how a person's family life impacts character, relationships and future success. You may also discover ways for your own family can build a strong foundation.

Today's encounter is a significant part for your identity as a benefactor. The family is often the vehicle that is used to pass on the important values in a person's life. There are many who have grown up in a family, but the experience was empty or even negative. Nothing was given to them to form a foundation in their character. Today's discussion

with your child can continue or start you in the process of giving away a spiritual inheritance.

Conversation: Note how families interact with each other. What are some activities, events and conversations that draw families together? What are the basic qualities that brings strength to family relationships?

Take a few minutes to share what your family was like as you were growing up. When you look back, what are some ways that you can see how your family shaped the type of person you have become? What are some of the characteristics you have tried to build into your family today? Ask your daughter/son to share some family memories. Why do those moments stand out? What are some of the basic elements of life that have strengthened your family?

Lesson:

In the story of Gideon, there are many references made to his tribe and family. When it comes time for him to obey the commands of the LORD, he is still fearful. He destroys his father's idols, but does so at night because he does not want to be seen. However, his deed is discovered, and he is threatened with death. If anyone might choose to be angry with him, it should have been his father. After all, it was his altar that was torn down. But surprisingly, his father intervened and defended Gideon. He demonstrated restraint and discernment in handling the mob scene. This paved the way

for his son to answer the LORD's call and to form the army which would be used to deliver the Israelites.

How does this story demonstrate the strength that we receive from a supportive family? But if our family fails us, the second passage describes how God intervenes and provides what we need. Share about your family. Ask your daughter/son what they have gleaned from your family life. Describe times when God intervened and supplied something that was needed in your family.

Read Judges 6:14-15 and 25-32. In response to the LORD's call to Gideon, what can be observed about his character? Why do you think the people of the town were so upset with what Gideon did? How did Joash respond to the whole situation? What kind of impact must this have had on Gideon?

Read Psalm 68:5-6. What is the significance of God filling gaps for those who are fatherless and lonely? What is the potential impact for those who live in broken families?

What is your family like? Is there a spiritual heritage being passed on as with Timothy? How has God intervened in your family to provide for a particular need?

Special Reminder:

Give your child a dollar bill (or more, if you prefer) as a symbol of an inheritance that you would like to pass to your son/daughter. Describe the inheritance that you would like to leave in her/his life. It might be a characteristic, a quality that your family is known for or a particular need or ministry to which you and your family are devoted.

Encounter 7 - Finances

Setting: Arrange to visit a local rescue mission, food shelter or senior facility. See if you can volunteer time for 1-2 hours.

Most kids know about what money can buy. Where they may have less competence is in learning how it is earned and how it can be used to bless others. In particular, they may never have considered how finances can be used to expand the kingdom of God. In his teaching, Jesus often connected the vitality of a person's spiritual life with skill in managing money. A proper management of money is not limited to generating income, but also how to save and share. Volunteering to help will give you a better idea of what this facility's ministry is about. You should contact them ahead of time to make arrangements to offer the type of help that they would need when you visit. As you help today, find out what are some areas where they may need financial assistance.

Purpose: To become a good steward of material blessings that God has given. To learn how to earn, save and give with a generous spirit. This is another opportunity for you to pass on an inheritance of godly character. You will discuss how to handle money and

teach your child to be a cheerful giver. It is not often that our kids are shown the crises that others deal with every day. Exposing them to these needs will reveal how you and your family can exercise acts of generosity and compassion. If your family is presently not in a position to give financially, there are still ways to give time and effort to help others. Generosity is not limited by the size of a person's bank account.

Conversation: Talk about the responsibilities of being productive and earning a living. Talk also about the responsibility of being a cheerful giver with what God has given you. It would be best to have this conversation after your experience at the facility you visit. Talk about why people have jobs and earn incomes. What is required for parents to be able to afford to rent or buy a home, pay for food and later to finance children's educations. You can also talk about paying taxes and the importance of saving money. But be sure to include in your conversation the responsibility we have as followers of Jesus to give to our churches, different ministries and other needs. There is a blessing that we receive when we give with a generous spirit.

Lesson:

Saving is not just an ability, it is an attitude. The third servant in the story buried his money in the ground because he did not trust the master. He had a poor relationship with him. He makes damaging accusations about the master, while the other two servants did not express any such concern. They were able to put the money to work and doubled

what had been given to them. Our attitude towards God makes a big difference in the way that we handle money.

The second passage teaches us to have a generous spirit and giving to needs that exist. You should also teach your child about being discerning in choosing where we give money. Not every person or organization acts with transparency and integrity. But the key point in this passage is that God is the one who gives us the abundance. When we realize that we have been given a gift, it should cause us to live with a generous spirit.

Read Matthew 25:14-30. What did the first two servants have to do in order to double the amount that the master had given them? According to the master, what is the least that the third servant could have done?

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-8. What does it take to be a cheerful giver? What difference does it make when we realize that it is God who is blessing us abundantly?

How are we being good stewards of our finances when we earn, save and give with a generous spirit?

Special Reminder:

Come together to determine a financial gift that you can give to the ministry where you volunteered. You should both contribute something to the gift. Your child can

generate income from allowance, a part-time job or a fundraising effort.

Encounter 8 - Decision Making

Setting: A city hall or government building where decisions are made. Watch the scene from *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* when Jones and Walter Donovan were faced with choosing which chalice was the cup of Christ. You can find it on YouTube. What criteria did each man use in making his choice?

With many important life choices, if thought is not given to them ahead of time, it is too late to make a wise decision. Your son/daughter is making decisions every day that will impact his/her future. You can never be around every moment to make choices for them. But you can teach them how to think through their options and be wise in their decision making. Choosing a church for worship and a college to attend are important. But don't forget the common routine choices we make. The way we approach those decisions will shape our character.

Equally important is to teach your child how to handle bad decisions. Nobody is right 100% of the time. How do we handle failure and disappointment? Do we punish ourselves? Blame someone or something else? How does a person rebound from a bad decision? Learning how to cope with setbacks will also determine the type of person that your child will become.

Purpose: To help your child to exercise wisdom in making decisions. Launching our kids into adulthood is never easy for any parent. We never think that they are prepared for independence. But it would be a sad situation if our son/daughter never matures. Teaching them to make wise decisions will help them to grow. What may help them even more is to learn how to cope when things do not go as expected. Instilling wisdom and maturity will teach them what to do when you are not around to supervise.

Conversation: Discuss some of the important decisions in life. Where to go to college? Choice of career? Which church to attend? What are some of the wise and unwise choices that you have made in life? Share those with your son/daughter. How did you come to make those decisions? If you had the choice to go back, how might you approach the situation differently? What criteria does your child consider when thinking about a college, where to go with friends, how to use their free time? Talk about criteria for choosing wisely. How does God fit into our decision-making process? Also, discuss the consequences of choosing poorly. How do we recover from those?

Lesson:

It is easy to read this story of Abram and Lot and assume that it was a simple decision for the men to divide the land so that their herds could be fed and watered. But a closer examination will give hints about the spiritual maturity of each man and the criteria they used in making choices. Take note that Abram, as the older relative, should have been given first choice. Lot was hasty and disrespectful in not deferring to his

uncle. Lot also made his decision on his own without ever seeking after God. He selfishly took what appealed to him. Abram, on the other hand, did not look up until the LORD instructed him. When he viewed the land, he was reminded of the covenant that God had established with him.

Chapter 14 will show part of the consequences of a bad decision. Lot had ignored the presence and influence of Sodom and Gomorrah. His relationships with the citizens of these cities would lead to his eventual downfall. This should serve to remind us how important it is that we seek the LORD's guidance in the decisions we make in life. How can we see the spiritual maturity level of each man?

Read Genesis 13 and compare how Lot and Abram went about making their decision about the land that they would settle in. Who made his own decision and who waited for God? What did Lot not notice about the inhabitants? What was significant about the land that Abram chose.

Read Genesis 14:13-16 to see one of the results of Lot's choice.

What are some of the criteria revealed in this passage that serve as guides in the way decisions should be made?

Special Reminder:

Write out a list of at least three questions to ask and answer before making important decisions? Make sure that the questions reflect the virtues of wisdom and maturity.

Encounter 9 - Friends

Setting: Arrange to meet in the home of one of your child's friends. It's ok to have the friend and her/his father join the time together.

Parents are still the greatest influencers in a young person's life. But friends have a prominent place as well. The types of friends that your daughter/son choose may say something about the type of character that they are developing. With the presence of social media, those friendships are longer lasting than in the past. A schoolmate can move across the country or to another continent and still stay in contact with old friends for years to come. But at the same time, social media has been used to hurt feelings and damage reputations.

It is important to teach your child to take control of their friendships. They cannot allow others to dictate who they are, what their habits are and the types of activities that they choose. No friend should be able to hold your daughter/son hostage in order to continue a relationship. A healthy friendship is mutually beneficial for each person. True friends will want what is best for each other.

Purpose: To understand the value of a good friend. How we can influence others and how they can influence us. It is not always easy to talk to our kids about their friends. It can be quickly perceived as an invasion of privacy. When you have this conversation, your intent is to talk about the value and influence of good friends. It is not a time to be critical or judgmental of friends that you may not approve of. It is more helpful and far more important to talk about friendships than about specific friends. The desired outcome is for your child to know the importance of friendships and how she/he can function as a good friend to others.

Conversation: Discuss what makes a good friend and how they influence lives. Ask your daughter/son and friend to share about what makes them good friends. How did they meet? What do they like to do together? How do they help each other? You can also ask them about other friends that they have. What makes each of them unique? Think back on your own life. Who were some of your best friends? What did you do for each other?

Discuss with each other what traits make a person a good friend? Are there some friends who may not be so good? How do you handle those kinds of relationships? How do friends challenge each other? Look out for each other? Say something critical when it becomes necessary?

Lesson:

Psalms and Proverbs are great biblical resources for discussing human relationships. If you are familiar with the story of David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18-23), you may discuss that as well. The passages from Proverbs describe the virtues of a good friend. You may want to discuss each one and consider why those traits are important to a good friendship.

The passage in Psalms will lead you to consider another aspect of friendships. What happens when a friend lets us down? That will happen on occasion because people are imperfect sinners. Anyone can say or do something that will lead to hurt feelings. Talk about how the Bible teaches us to handle those situations. What needs to happen for forgiveness and reconciliation to take place?

Read these Proverbs that talk about the value of a good friend: Proverbs 12:26, 17:17, 18:24, 22:11, 22:24, 27:6 and 27:9. Which of these verses do you find most meaningful?

What are some ways that friends influence each other?

Who is your best friend? What is that friend's best quality?

Read Psalm 41:9. How do you respond when a friend lets you down?

Special Reminder:

You will need to arrange this ahead of time. Have your daughter/son present a gift to their friend as an act of appreciation for true friendship.

Encounter 10 - Calling

Setting: Go to a nearby cemetery. Take a walk and read some of the headstones. What do they say about the person's life? Cemeteries are interesting places. When you read what is on a headstone, you don't get the whole story of the deceased's life. You are only told about how the family wanted that person remembered. But what about other details? How long did they live? Are they buried next to a spouse? What years did they live through? There is an untold story about each person.

How do each of us want to be remembered after we pass away? What did our life stand for? What is our legacy? It may be difficult for your child to look that far into the future. But they probably have some clues about the type of person they are. How has God gifted them? What is their calling? Perhaps they can get some clue about the person that they will become.

Purpose: For your child to gain some understanding about the reason for which God has created them. What are their passions? What is the legacy that is being made from his/her life?

Too often, parents put limits on what their children can do. They are directed or even told what their career will be. Today is his/her chance to dream. You may not agree with the answers you hear. You may not understand how your child can have an interest in the response they give you. That's ok. There is plenty of time for adjustments for both of you. But try to find something that you can support. A calling can be multidimensional. As your child matures, you may see their dream unfold and you will find ways to encourage their development. Today's encounter is the last in this series. The ideas that your child shares will tell you how you might follow up and continue the process of discipling in years to come.

Conversation: Talk about any sense of calling that God has upon your life. This is not just your career. It is more about who you are rather than what you do. Share with your child how that calling was developed in you over the years. Who were the important people who helped you understand your calling?

Then ask your son/daughter to share how they think God might be calling them. Don't limit the conversation to talking about what your child might want to study in college or what kind of career he/she might want to have. A future job might be related to his/her calling, but there might be something in the future bigger than a career. What is the mark they want to leave upon this world? What will someone write on their headstone at the end of life?

Depending on your child's age, these are questions that they may not yet have seriously considered. This could be the starting point. What are important concerns in his/her life? In what areas does your child have a passion? It might be something humanitarian, spiritual or in the fields of science and research. Is there a field of study that your son/daughter may be devoted to? Ask the questions and see what kind of responses you get.

Lesson:

Each person is created by God for a special purpose. Look at the verses from Psalm 139 to see how God created us. Don't let these verses pass by too easily. Consider what they mean for our lives. We are uniquely created with a divine plan.

The passage in Matthew shows how deeply devoted the woman was to Jesus. Anointing him had nothing to do with her skills or tasks that she did day by day. It was an act of worship that the disciples were criticizing. They had missed the point. Jesus was quick to point out that this was what the woman would be remembered for. It was her legacy.

Our calling is something that we may discover at a certain point in life. But it is also certainly developed over time. Your child may not have a clear idea of that calling just yet. As he/she grows, you will have the opportunity to help bring that calling into focus.

Read Psalm 139:13-18. What do these verses say about the way that God created you?

Read Matthew 26:6-13. Why do you think Jesus commended the woman with a statement about her legacy?

What are the passions that God has placed upon your heart? What is something that you believe God would have you accomplish during your time on earth? What needs to happen for that to be done?

Special Reminder:

This is the final *official* discipleship encounter. Go out to dinner to celebrate. Invite other family members along. Share with everyone one lasting memory you have of the times you have met together.

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