

Ministry Reflections

Tim Chan

I believe in ordination of all things under His divine guidance. Ps 104:27. Gen 1:14-15. 1 Sam 10:8. Eccl 3:1. Luke 1:45. As reflected in His creation scheme and His redemptive plan through the Bible, I no longer merely serve as a manager over things but also strive to become an acute participant of the unveiling of His divine plan. Stewardship is reflected in a deep trust of His eternal guidance in all circumstances, through all seasons and behind every challenge. Leadership structure receives His divine guidance through prayer and submission. It also exercises the power of stewardship towards gifts, time, and various resources given to me. A mature leadership decision rests on sound informed thinking, shared values and waiting upon the Lord for His right timing to complete His task through the leaders.

On the two roles as “ruling” gifts, I am mindful of the impersonal approach by speaking to fellow pastoral staff’s raw intellect with facts and figures, accountability and reviews. Leadership generates vision, values and purpose. It is personal and inspirational. Good leaders provide more than just assessments. They appeal to the team members’ intuition and emotion and gently guide the team to determine which wall to lead the ladder against. Knowing and understanding the power of His ordination is the starting point of Christian leadership. Finding and empowering others with complementary gift is the big lifelong step critical to the well being and growth of His church.

I believe in transformation. Romans 12:1. 2 Cor. 12:19. Eph 4:1. 1 Tim 6:19. Heb 6:1. 1 John 5:2-3. 1 Peter 1:13-15. Discipleship is another term for life transformation. A fully owned life under Christ can only live under His pleasure by adhering to His kingdom values. The journey of transformation starts with Jesus Christ and it never arrives. Discipleship is not simply/merely denying oneself. I struggle with the notion that denying oneself is all about giving up one’s rights. It is about negating our identity (to the point of being rejected) that is largely entangled by our filial, social and cultural relationships. Cf. Luke 9:23-24; Matt 10:39; Luke 9:62. Paul’s confession is about a negation of his self identity (Not I as a religious Jewish teacher) but an affirmation of his new identity in Christ (but He as his God and sovereign Lord). Multi-ethnic house churches are apparent in the NT (cf. 1 Peter 1:1; Acts 16:13-14; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col 2:1; Titus 1:12). “Bridge people” are part of the strategic team in the Early Church. Timothy was able to interact with Gentiles, as well as Jews. Aquila and Priscilla extended their hospitality to a mix of people. Apollos was a Jew, a native of Alexandria (in Egypt, a part of Africa), who ministered in Ephesus (in Asia Minor) and Achaia (in Europe). The earliest ministry team in Acts 13:1 reflects the power of oneness in Christ that deflects the popular theory of social homogeneity. It is in my personal pastoral experiences in a cultural and racially diverse church that I begin the birthing process of a true discipleship lifestyle in Christ. Spiritual lessons in diversity, acceptance, grace, and team work are part of my growth through the gleaning process of removing perceptions on

doctrines based on my cultural inclinations. If the past model of church life is not denied, I should be more forthcoming in embracing this model where people of different racial and cultural inheritance can worship the Triune God. Immigrant churches tend to be more socially reclusive and can easily settle on social enclaves based on their language and cultural backgrounds.

Spiritual formation through Christian educational ministries is all about the “forming of Christ” in me, a process of discipleship making. Transformation is the measurement of a mature life changing curriculum. Christian ministry is about Christ’s redemption power over and above human identity. Any Christian ministry, regardless of how incarnational I want to be, needs to first find the centrality of Jesus Christ as the victor over sins and death. As I continue to grow, I need to find His victory over and above my cultural and social identity. Christ is to be the supremacy of all things and the above all relationships. Col 1:16.

The roadmap for every strong church is the spiritual formation in discipleship making. Uncompromising allegiance to Biblical truth, lifestyle carried by “transformed” leaders, teaching philosophy based on the process of building life in Christ and character formation are ways to respond to His great commission. A devoted life in Christ comes under the direct impacts from devoted followers (leaders) of Jesus Christ. Heb 13:7.

I believe in grace and maturity in ministry. Ephesians 2:6-8. 1 Thess 1:4. Romans 5:6. Col 1:13-14.1 Tim. 1:16. 2 Peter 1:5. Cultural forms of excellence can be a trap for over achievers who overlook the importance of process and maturity. Growing ministry means growing people the right way. People are the greatest asset. Dreams are what propel people to create movement. Yet, failures, weaknesses and despair are excellent receipts for deeper growth in ministry. Purifying fires distill vision and life changing ministries require the crucible of pain. Unless grace is emphasized in the process of growth, churches are playing the game of elimination but not growing people to maximize impact for His kingdom. I believe God makes failure as option B in His plan. But option A is for church leaders to help one another to maturity through grace. I treasure a team that will be built on significant traction on growing, learning, reinforcing and affirmation. The Chinese church leadership style has always been tempted to be less graceful but more parental. A mature “people” grower will be sensitive to the needs of the mentee when he is trying to reach higher and fall short. Rush and rudeness are easy ways to destroy a growing plant (like the autumn frost). A wise “people” grower will also be shrewd to help individuals who are spiritually gifted but no yet spiritually mature. To say the right word to channel growth is more than a choice of words. It is wisdom from above. Maturity and giftedness are the best combination in a growing church. Thus, I believe in leadership empowerment that releases and unleashes the potentials. Staff development is a first priority to grow His people. Mentorship programs are strategic to bring growth and maturity.

Grace is unconditional acceptance of divine forgiveness despite my weaknesses. I am more than weak. I am weakness by nature. A strong church culture of support, encouragement and prayer lift up pastoral staff and His people. An encouraged heart goes a long way.

I believe in the hidden life in Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:4. Exodus 33:11. Ps 42:1. Mark 1:15. John 15:9. Christian ministry is an extension of what I truly believe in from within. I believe ministry starts and rests on the gravity of divine intimacy. Growing in the Lord has to focus on a daily encounter with Jesus Christ. Commitment based on obligation can result in limited impact. Good work ethics is just primary in Christian ministry. Without vision, people cannot go far. Without passion, people cannot be inspired. Without daily intimacy, people descend from faith to religiosity. Vitality in Christian walk brings vitality to Christian ministry. Personal blind spots cleared daily (Cf. 2 Cor 13:5) will result in healthy paradigm shift for both the pastor and the congregation.

I believe in a healthy growth community. Matt 13:23. Act 4:32. Titus 3:8. I believe in shepherding to bring the church to the community. Faithfulness is both a “yes” and a “no” indicator of healthy church. It is no if it means show up. It is yes if it means fruitfulness. Americans are enamored with power and thus Christian churches are drawn to display power (parking spaces, budget and staff) as signs of church health. Being functional is just one sign of health. Christian ministry and shepherding priorities should strive to disengage the temptation of power and influence and refocus ministry in the pursuit of health in Christ through imitation, spiritual habit formation and self management. A functioning heart beat cannot really tell if the body is free from a heart attack. Shepherding guidelines include protecting the flock, guarding the truth and feeding the flock. Healthy shepherding of “ruling” over the flock (1 Tim 3:4-5), equipping the flock for services (Eph 4:11-12) and setting example are equally important. Credibility leads to trust and ministry service rises out of a devotion to God inspires people to follow. Holy living is healthy living, both for individuals and congregation members.

With that I believe in healthy ways to see conflict in church. I believe in Matt 18 to defend His church from misconception, lies, rumors and accusations. A healthy Christian moves from negativism and is ready to move away from polluted conversation. A healthy Christian keep short accounts.

I respect differences of viewpoints. Yet I do not endorse a divisive spirit based on ego, personal agendas and immature misconceptions. Healthy church removes debris and hurts from His people, especially among ministry leaders.

Healthy church embraces truth, relationship and restoration. Peacemaking is a true mark of a healthy church.

Thus, I believe in a strong team where they are more than care givers. They are leaders being charged to minister with love by example. Men and women as Christians can serve based on giftedness and can grow together without overly dependent on power structure or position.

I believe in worship. Rev. 4:11. Ps 96:1. Acts 16:25. Matt 11:25. Christian churches lose the power of adoration and fail to see His awesome presence in the congregation of His people. His sovereignty should be exalted in the praise of His people. Worship can be the high point of our weekly spiritual journey. Worship is a declaration of His nature and an invitation to fellowship

with Him. Good spirit-filled worship can draw seekers to Him. Ministry planning on Sunday worship needs to move away from assignment to building teams of people who come with a worshipful heart. I encourage reverent and vibrant form of worship where I praise Him as my Creator and Redeemer. He possesses eternal life and gives life abundantly. Preaching is to focus more on the power of His transformation than an exercise of an apologetic debate or rhetoric. In my freedom to worship, I include Him in every thought and every deed of my life. There is “prayer” vs “music” in my worship and there ought to be “surrender” in every encounter with Him. The cultivation of a worshipful community within pastoral and leadership team is the germination process of all people to come before Him.

Cultural sensitive worship needs to be balanced with Biblical worship. The deep understanding of the meaning and purpose of worship may need to be taught on a constant basis.

I believe in lifestyle evangelism. John 4:13. 1 Peter 3:4. 2 Tim 2:25. Eph 4:1. 2 Cor 1:4.

Conventional ways of distribution of tracts, testimonies, visitations are laudable and blessed by the Lord. Lifestyle is more than just a cultural ornament. It demonstrates our true allegiance with God. Boldness in post modern era is expressed in the declared lifestyle as a Christian. Each congregation and people group needs to have the most effective way to bring the church to their community. Proclamation ministry (teaching, preaching, etc) and personal evangelism are God’s means of disclosing His plan of salvation. Unconventional ways of pre-evangelism need to be explored in light of the diversity of one’s context.