



Learning from the Global Family of God

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We were all ready. We'd just finished seminary and had a sense of excitement about the future. One of my classmates was "Sam." Sam and I had both been to southeast Asia during a short term a few years before. He sensed God's call to return, so he was on his way to China as a professional and he has been there (or near there) pretty much since.

After years of language learning to become barely comfortable enough to try, Sam met with a believing family and sought to help them grow in their understanding of the Bible. He and the father, "Lee," didn't agree on certain areas of doctrine or practice, but they remained friends as Sam loved and accepted him. This impressed Lee, because at times, Chinese believers split over the smallest things. Lee had not seen this kind of commitment for the sake of the Gospel and their relationship. Both of them were learning lessons.

As is typical, Lee and his wife both had to work. In order to be with his children, Lee took a job working at night in a coal power plant. He would shovel coal to keep the plant running. In between shoveling, he would read his Bible.

All night long.

As Sam reflected on this with me recently, he noted that he was pretty sure that Lee knew a lot more about the Bible than he did. Yet Lee was gracious and thankful for Sam's faithfulness and friendship. Of course, Lee was faithful to his family and to the Lord. At one point, he was arrested and spent a few months in jail. Thankfully it was not longer.

As Sam and I talked further, we were considering the things we'd learned since those days in seminary. Sam's becoming fluent in Mandarin taught him a different perspective on, among other things, the Greek and Hebrew we had learned in seminary. Life has a way of providing wisdom and perspective over time, if we are willing to learn.

All too often, however, we get entrenched into our own perspective. We can't imagine how someone else might view something differently. We might,

for example, say to this family in China, "Why doesn't the wife stay at home? They must be doing something wrong, if she can't be with her children when they are young." We draw the line in the sand, or in stone. Moms who don't stay at home are automatically out of God's will, right? Now we are polarized.

Actually, Sam felt they loved and cared for their three daughters more than many "stay at home moms" in the states. All three are serving the Lord in various kinds of ministries now. Of course staying at home is not a clear, Biblical requirement of God's people. Certainly, Lee and his family are not living above their means like many here do. Lee's family was barely making it financially.

When we get polarized over issues in Christian circles, it terminates learning. We draw our line in the sand and cover our ears on issues that are simply clear to us. We value areas of practice over relationships—like "worship wars" in many churches. While we like it black and white, there seems to be many more areas that are gray than we would like to cope with.

I hold my foundational views firmly, but lightly. I don't push them on others. I work with those who don't push their views on me.

Relating to brothers and sisters from other cultures who do not hold to all of our perspectives helps us learn more about what God is doing around the globe. It has solidified my own perspective in the process, as well as expanded my thinking in new areas. By considering the perspective of faithful, God and Bible-pursuing people from different backgrounds, we are taught new lessons in the family of God. 🌐



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