

Peter Lim

Sam Pack

Abstract

For the past five years, Pastor Peter Lim has been serving as the English Ministry (EM) pastor for Korean Bethany Presbyterian Church in Marietta, GA. When it comes to worship, Pastor Peter Lim feels that “often times we have a misunderstanding of worship, especially in our culture, where worship now becomes synonymous with the music and the kind of contemporary service.” He’s saying that the worship has become limited to simply music and what happens at church for many young adults today. He argues that the general understanding of worship in many of the young adult Korean-Americans at his church focuses more on the form and function of worship than they do on how worship can influence and make a change in their lives. Pastor Peter, on the other hand, believes that worship needs to be based on having a lifestyle of worship. He feels that everything that encompasses our lives can be seen as worship. From the praises we sing at church, to the messages we hear, to the lifestyles we live: It’s all worship.

Pastor Peter and His Ministry

For the past five years, Pastor Peter Lim has been serving as the English Ministry (EM) pastor for Korean Bethany Presbyterian Church in Marietta, GA. Upon entering Bethany, Pastor Peter was faced with the difficult task of starting up the EM from the ground up, because there was no English Ministry prior to his arrival from Chicago, Illinois where he received his M.Div. and Th.M. at Trinity Theological Seminary. When asked about this daunting task of starting up the EM, Pastor Peter expresses that it was something that he regularly wasn’t used to. He says that “because the English Ministry was a start-up ministry, there was a lot of teaching and demonstrating [he] had to do.”¹

This was because most of the congregation members were new believers, and even some of them were non-believers. Because of this, Pastor Peter felt that he had to start off slow, teaching and demonstrating to his congregation what is was to be not only a Christian, but a body of believers who form a church. And while this wasn’t the easiest thing he was called to do, he has enjoyed the fact that there wasn’t “the assumption of a biblical base”² with the congregation members when he started. He enjoyed this fact,

¹ Peter Lim, interview by Sam Pack. *Interview w/Pastor Peter* (November 4, 2009).

² Lim, 2009

because that left the group to “create [their] own culture”³. And it was through this culture where Pastor Peter was able to take a group of 20-30 young adult Korean-Americans, and create one of the largest EM’s in the Atlanta Metropolitan area today.

Pastor Peter and His Worship

When it comes to worship, Pastor Peter Lim feels that “often times we have a misunderstanding of worship, especially in our culture, where worship now becomes synonymous with the music and the kind of contemporary service.”⁴ He’s saying that the worship has become limited to simply music and what happens at church for many young adults today. He argues that the general understanding of worship in many of the young adult Korean-Americans at his church focuses more on the form and function of worship than they do on how worship can influence and make a change in their lives.

Pastor Peter, on the other hand, believes that worship needs to be based on having a lifestyle of worship. He feels that everything that encompasses our lives can be seen as worship. From the praises we sing at church, to the messages we hear, to the lifestyles we live: It’s all worship.⁵ Daniel J. Adams, professor of Systematic Theology at Hanil University and Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Jeonbuk, Korea writes in his article, “Korean Preaching from a Western Perspective,” “Worship is central to Korean church life and virtually every event of significance begins and ends with a worship service”⁶. Pastor Peter would be able to resonate with this statement, because he feels that there must be a holistic understanding of what worship is from a biblical point of view.

He references to the Hebrew translation of the word “worship” and its many different meanings for the word. Two of which he emphasizes are the translations of “offering up” and “bowing down” He explains that worship is where we offer up something to the Lord or fall prostrate and bow down before Him.⁷ Pastor Peter’s

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Adams Daniel, "Korean Preaching From A Western Perspective" Edited by Paul Junggap Huh. *Journal of Korean American Ministries & Theology* (Columbia Theological Seminary) vol 1, no 2 (2009): 43.

⁷ Lim, 2009

understanding of worship goes beyond the walls of the church, and is convinced that worship is the lifestyle in which we all live in all aspects of our lives.

Pastor Peter and His Preaching

When preaching, Pastor Peter leans heavily towards an orthodox reformed faith, and abides by the confessions of the traditional standards of the church.⁸ In other words, the theology Pastor Peter uses in his preaching would be considered very conservative and evangelical to the general consensus. He preaches under the influence of the Scripture, and believes in the authority of the Scripture in its original language. He believes in the inerrancy of Scripture, and uses it as an authority in the lives of everyone in the congregation. Pastor Peter argues that the Word of God gives direction on how we should live our lives, and is true in every sense of the word, as it was stated in the original text.⁹

For the most part, Pastor Peter will preach in expository form and feels that this is the best way to communicate the text to his congregation. Unyong Kim, professor of preaching and worship in Seoul, Korea, argues that the culture today desires to learn more experientially, and feels that “preaching focuses on engaging the hearer in the pursuit of an issue or an idea so that he or she will think his or her own thoughts and experiences his or her own feeling in the presence of Christ and in the light of the gospel.”¹⁰

Pastor Peter, on the other hand, would argue that being expository does not mean that the sermon does not reach his listeners on an experiential level. He says that “being expository does not mean that the sermon is insensitive to the congregation’s experience. In fact it gives more meaning to their experiences, because it ties their lives to the Word of God.”¹¹ When preaching, Pastor Peter will use biblical text for the main points of his sermons. He will use the context of the book to extrapolate the truth from the scriptures, and then preach it in a 21st century context. He feels that the application of the truth to the historical context apply directly to a postmodern context. He argues that the truth of the Scripture remains the same and never changes. Suffice it to say, Pastor Peter will

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Unyong Kim, "Preaching ministry in the Postmodern Era" Edited by Paul Junggap Huh. *Journal of Korean American Ministries & Theology* (Columbia Theological Seminary) vol 1, no 2 (2009): 34.

¹¹ Lim, 2009

generally base all his sermons on a scriptural context more than basing his sermons on current events and issues the congregation might be going through.

Bethany EM and Worship

Korean Bethany Presbyterian Church's EM ministry can be seen as very separate and independent in practice, but is still considered a part of the entire church as a whole. While the EM does work independently both on an administrative and financial level, Pastor Peter is still under the supervision of Rev Choi, Bethany's Korean Ministry's pastor and senior pastor of the entire church. Happily, however, Pastor Peter and Rev. Choi work very well together and they both have a mutual understanding and sensitivity to each other's ministry.

Due to the closeness between Pastor Peter and Rev. Choi, there are now many similarities between the EM and the KM. One of which is the fact that both congregations are predominantly Korean by heritage which creates an affinity to other Koreans. Another similarity that can be seen is the fact that there is a cultural draw to church with both the KM and the EM. In other words, Korean-Americans in the area will more likely be drawn to Bethany's EM than a predominantly Caucasian church. Likewise, Korean speaking people will be more drawn to Bethany's KM than an English speaking community. There is also an innate affinity towards guilt and shame found in the members of Bethany's EM. Pastor Peter says that this is due to the fact that there are entire families that attend the church. And while many of the members of the EM are married with children, there is still a fear of dishonoring their parents, who are in the other side of the building attending their own service.

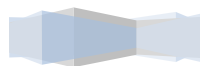
With similarities, there are also differences that set apart the EM from the KM. The major one being that each ministry has a very different worldview. David Ng, author of the book, *People in the Way: Asian North Americans Discovering Christ, Culture, and Community*, writes that "Koreans consider community to be created when a group of people develop mutual trust and an bond over a period of time; such a bond is established when the parties in the group can share certain traditions and can incorporate these traditions into a common world view."¹² This can be seen in both the KM and the EM.

¹²David Ng, *People on the Way: Asian North Americans Discovering Christ, Culture, and Community*, Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1996, 35.

But the issue is that these worldviews that these ministries have sometimes will clash with each other. At Bethany, the EM will do things purposely when it comes to ministry. Pastor Peter will make sure that everything done during the worship service serves a purpose of some sort. Whether it is having the worship pastor lead off the service with the Apostles' Creed or have a congregant member give a response prayer after the music portion of worship. Pastor Peter is very deliberate about what goes on with the EM. The KM, however, is driven by program, and will hold many events in a short period of time, continually bringing the members of the church together in worship and fellowship. Rev. Choi does this because he feels that the church must continuously be active within itself and within the community and it must work extra hard to be a successful ministry. The clash between the ministries comes when the EM feels that the KM is needlessly holding events, and the KM feels that the EM is simply being lazy. Like most Korean churches, there are both similarities and differences between the EM and KM at Bethany, but both are integral parts of the church. Truth be told, upon further review of the ministry, I personally feel that neither ministry would be able to survive without the other. Both are ministries that cater to their congregations, and both are ministries that have the ultimate goal of "making the name of the Lord famous through loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves."¹³

A normal Sunday during Bethany's EM begins with a declaration of the Apostles' Creed, lead by their Worship and Arts Pastor. After that, the praise team will lead three songs of worship that have to do with the message. Next, a congregation member, who was chosen beforehand, will lead a time of prayer in response to the worship. As he/she is praying, the stage will be cleared off by the praise team, and Pastor Peter will situate himself on stage, so that when the prayer is done, Pastor Peter can begin his sermon. As Pastor Peter is giving his closing prayer, the praise team will come back on stage and lead a song that responds to the message that was just given. Afterwards, the praise team will transition to the offering song, and the ushers will collect the offering. The worship leader will then close in prayer, and one of the deacons will come up and give announcements, after which the praise team will close off the service with one final upbeat song and give a final closing prayer which will also excuse the congregation to be

¹³ Lim, 2009.



dismissed. One of the biggest aspects Pastor Peter and the rest of his staff continuously try to accomplish is fluidity within the service. The “awkward silence” is frowned upon, and is avoided at all cost.

Finally, there has been some recent developments that, Pastor Peter feels that will revolutionize the EM ministry as a whole. The main development is that the EM now has two English speaking commissioned elders who will be part of the session of the entire church. These are not simply “EM Elders”, but elders who will represent Bethany as a whole. Jeff Choe, one of the newly appointed elders is hopeful that their voices will bring a new perspective and awareness of what’s going on in the EM to the church as a whole.¹⁴

In the end, it seems like Pastor Peter and Bethany’s EM is on the forefront of revolutionizing the English Ministry culture and worship in the metropolitan areas of Atlanta, GA. I am both curious and excited to see where God will take this ministry for the glory of the God’s kingdom.

Pimary Source:

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¹⁴ Choe, Jeff, interview by Sam Pack. *Interview With Jeff Choe* (Nov 6, 2009).

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