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Why We Need Each Other.

By Greg Jao · Shared by Tommy Lee

Learning to read the whole Bible, together.

A note from Tommy. This is the second of a two part post from Resource Global's Founding Chairman, Greg Jao, on the importance of global community. Read Part 1 first. And once more, a special congratulations to our dear friend and leader Greg on being named President and Publisher of InterVarsity Press.



Greg Jao, President and Publisher of InterVarsity Press. Adapted from a teaching given to the Resource Global community.

From Genesis all the way to Revelation, God has been gathering a people to himself out of every nation on earth. That is the real story we are living in. And when you start to see it, it changes something very down to earth. It changes how you treat the people right around you, even the ones who are nothing like you.

A lot of the work we are doing fits right inside that story. When we learn together, listen to one another, and share what God has given us across the world, we are part of that same gathering. We bring what we have to God, and we serve one another with it.

Paul says it in 1 Corinthians 12. The body is one, but it has many parts, and every part belongs. He says the foot cannot say to the hand, I do not need you. Part of what we do together is simply to live out that truth. We need one another, because we are one body that God has joined together.

A story about two ways to read the same Bible

Let me tell you why I am so convinced of this. I am Chinese American. My family came from China by way of the Philippines to the United States, and almost everyone in it is a doctor. Eighteen of my aunts, uncles, and cousins are doctors, so everyone assumed I would be one too. I spent two and a half years preparing for medical school. But my love for ministry kept growing while my interest in biology kept fading.

Eventually I told my father I did not want to be a doctor anymore. His first question was, then what will you do? I panicked and said maybe I would become a lawyer. He said, you would settle for being a lawyer, how will you support yourself? So you can imagine how it went a year later when I told him the truth, that I wanted to go into ministry with InterVarsity and raise my own support by asking churches, family, and friends to give. My father is a committed Christian and has led in his church for decades, and even he said, I did not sacrifice to send you to university so you could go begging for money. He was strongly against it.

So I went for advice. First I went to my Chinese American and Asian American friends. Every one of them quoted the same thing, honor your father and mother, one of the Ten Commandments, repeated twice by Paul in the New Testament. See, Greg, they said, it is right there, and it lines up with everything we were raised to believe. Then they told me stories of missionaries who waited years, even decades, for a parent's blessing, and were honored by God when they finally went.

Then I went to another part of my Christian community, mostly white North Americans. They said, Greg, it is so clear what Scripture says. And they quoted completely different verses. A man told Jesus, let me bury my father first, and Jesus said, let the dead bury their own dead. Jesus said, anyone who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. He said, I did not come to

bring peace, but a sword. Follow Jesus, they told me, and do not let the idol of pleasing your parents hold you back. And they too had their missionary stories, of people who left disapproving parents, went to the field, and saw thousands come to faith.

Here is what struck me. Each group reached for the passages that fit what their own culture already believed. My friends shaped by Confucian values went straight to honor your father and mother, because it matched everything they were taught, though no one said that out loud. My Western friends, shaped by individualism, went straight to the verses that let a person strike out alone and do what they felt called to do. It is the theme of almost every Disney movie, the young person with absent or clueless parents who leaves home, chases a dream, and comes back with the treasure. The one exception is Mulan, which comes from a Chinese story, where the daughter does not leave to find herself but sacrifices herself to protect her father, and at the end brings everything she has won back home and lays it at his feet. That film struggled in the United States because the story did not compute. For many of you from other parts of the world, it makes perfect sense. You win honor, and you bring it home to your family.

Both groups handed me the verses they liked best and told me that was what the Bible said. What finally helped me was a Chinese American woman on staff with InterVarsity. She said, Greg, you do not get to choose which Scripture to obey. All of it is Scripture, and all of it is authoritative. Your question is how you will hold both of these together, how you will honor your parents and follow Jesus to the campus at the same time. That is why we need one another.

The gifts we only get from each other

Left to ourselves, we each read the Bible through our own culture and quietly skip the parts that make us uncomfortable. American Christians like me will almost always tell you faith is about you and what you can achieve, with little thought for the community or the neighbors you belong to. Friends from outside the United States can see that blind spot in us clearly.

I need my South African brothers and sisters, in Johannesburg and Cape Town, because they make me face questions of injustice that are easy for me to ignore here. I need the believers in Cluj, who came through communism, because their experience may hold wisdom for brothers and sisters living as Christians under other pressures. I need the voices of women in my life, because they see things in Scripture I skip right over when I read it only as a man. More than once I have sat under a sister's teaching and thought, I completely missed that, thank God she opened it for me. I even need my loud, warm hearted Texan friends, because they speak to this reserved man from the Upper Midwest in a way I need to hear.

When we bring everything we are and lay it before the throne, under the authority of Scripture, and then offer it to one another as a gift, God is honored. We are forced to face the parts of the Bible that cut against our own culture, and at the same time the good gifts inside each of our cultures become tools that help someone else follow Jesus more faithfully right where they are.

Two postures to carry

If you gather with believers from around the world, two postures will serve you well.

The first is anticipation. Walk in believing that every person you meet has something valuable that Jesus wants to say to you. It is easy to listen politely and think, that is nice, but it does not apply to me. Anticipation is different. It assumes this person is filled, empowered, and sent by the Holy Spirit, and that if you are willing to do the work of translating their experience into your own setting, God will bless you through them. Even when the context is completely different, there will be something about their faithfulness that speaks to yours.

The second is honor. Paul says we never have the right to tell another part of the body, I have no need of you. To honor someone is to say, you are essential, and you are essential to my own growth as a disciple. That lets us do something rare. I can say to a brother or sister, I may disagree with you deeply, about politics, about economics, about how to read a hard passage, and still say, I cannot claim I do not need you. We belong together. So let us work together, as a fuller picture of the body of Christ, for the glory of God in the places he has put us.

What all of you are doing, learning from one another across cities and cultures, is a small picture of what the church is meant to be. It is an honor to be part of it with you.

Back to Part 1: Every Tribe and Tongue

Greg Jao

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ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Greg Jao wrote this article for Resource Global. Tommy Lee shares it here on tommyplee.ai.

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