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2021 was the year of acceptance. We had hoped this year would see the end of the pandemic and that our world would return to “normal.” But we have collectively realized that Covid may linger until 2022 and perhaps beyond.

Classrooms, restaurants, and museums have reopened—but with masks and, in some places, proof of vaccination. Many churchgoers are used to registering for Sunday service—a practice that was unthinkable in pre-Covid days.

Despite these changes, our society has adapted and grown. I’m impressed by how my 1st and 3rd-graders proudly wear their masks all day during school. My local church meets faithfully every Sunday, and during our last members’ meeting, we installed new deacons.

Here at SOLA Network, we have also adjusted to our new normal. As we saw more traffic to our website, we relaunched our website in August with a beautiful new design. We continued to publish works surrounding the pervasive pandemic but in new ways, such as encouraging people to reconnect with their local church body and exhorting exhausted pastors.


We continued to highlight our unique heritage as Asian American Christians by writing about the future of the Asian American church, representation in media, transracial adoption, and our identity in Christ. We also wrote about current events, such as our response to the failures of Ravi Zacharias.

So in our 2021 SOLA Network Magazine, we present 10 essays and articles that show the breadth of our work. I am incredibly grateful for all who submitted their work to us this year, as well as to our tireless volunteers who edit drafts, post on social media, and update our website.

While we may never return to “normal,” we are assured that Christ continues to reign supreme, and we await the day that he will bring the heavenly normal when he returns.

**Hannah Chao**

Editor at the SOLA Network



# Rethinking Productivity and Love in Pregnancy

by Heidi Tai

I normally blog first thing in the morning, but as of this moment, it's 4:20 in the afternoon and the winter sun (it's winter in the Southern Hemisphere!) is already making its way down the yellowing horizon. *Sigh. Where did my day go?* Usually, you'll catch me typing fast and furiously at my local café, surrounded by hustle and bustle and powered by coffee and creative juice. But today, I'm bouncing at home on a birth ball, sluggish and sleep deprived, 33 weeks pregnant. *What was I talking about again?*

With only one month till Baby's arrival, my hospital bag is (half) packed, our nursery is (haphazardly) set up, and I'm officially confused as to how a human so small could need so much stuff? Although I want to be prepared and organized, Baby Brain (forgetfulness and mind fog), insomnia, back pain and intensifying Braxton Hicks (practice contractions) are just some of the things that have popped up to slow me down.

Pregnancy, though filled with many joys, is no walk in the park. On this side of eternity, motherhood, like any type of work, has been cursed with thorns and thistles. Neither modern medicine nor Instagram filters can erase the effects of the Fall. But while our story begins

with a curse, God promises that it will end with renewal and redemption.

In the words of [Risen Motherhood](#), *'motherhood is made up of a million tiny moments for worship'*. Although my pregnancy has been littered with unwanted challenges, God has used these moments to strengthen my faith and to reorient my priorities. I am learning that even thorns and thistles can become a means for my sanctification (growth in godliness) and lead to praise and worship.

Here are two ways that motherhood has done this so far...

## **Redefining Productivity**

Pregnancy has encouraged me to redefine productivity and to trust in God's plans for my life. These days, everything feels harder and slower. *Why am I late?* It took me 30 minutes to put on a sock and to remember why I had started the car. Unpredictable bodily changes have forced me to cancel cherished plans and place limits on my social calendar. Never before have I felt so out of control of my own freedoms and schedule, but it is precisely in my feelings of FOMO and discouragement that God has showed up to remind me that His providence pervades my calendar:



**“In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.”**

— Proverbs 16:9

I can make plans for my life, but ultimately it is God who allows me to experience what I do, within the hours and capacities that He has granted. This means accepting my limits in pregnancy and allowing God to set the pace of my productivity.

So, instead of racing through the week with my ‘to-do’ list, I am learning to pray at the beginning of each day, and to waddle slowly and intentionally with my God-given strength.

Instead of proudly tackling everything on my own, I am learning to accept help from God and others...and thus admitting to myself that I am not self-sufficient...never was and never will be!

Instead of feeling like the master of all my days, I am learning to ask God to show me how I can be faithful on my ‘good’ pain-free days and ‘bad’ bed-ridden days. Even in stillness, there is so much to learn!

Instead of resenting interruptions and cancellations, I am learning to accept that every hour—whether painful or comfortable, efficient or inefficient—can be repurposed for good by the One who establishes my days and steps.

Under God, every moment under the sun is *‘made up of a million tiny moments for worship’*. If we put our trust in God’s providence, there is no such thing as a day wasted. We only need to be faithful.

### **Understanding God’s Love**

One of the greatest surprises of pregnancy is the growing love I feel for my child. As the weeks roll by, my heart has been filled with a kind of love that I didn’t know existed—a maternal love that’s fierce, protective, sacrificial and even accepting of pain if it means that I can bring forth new life.

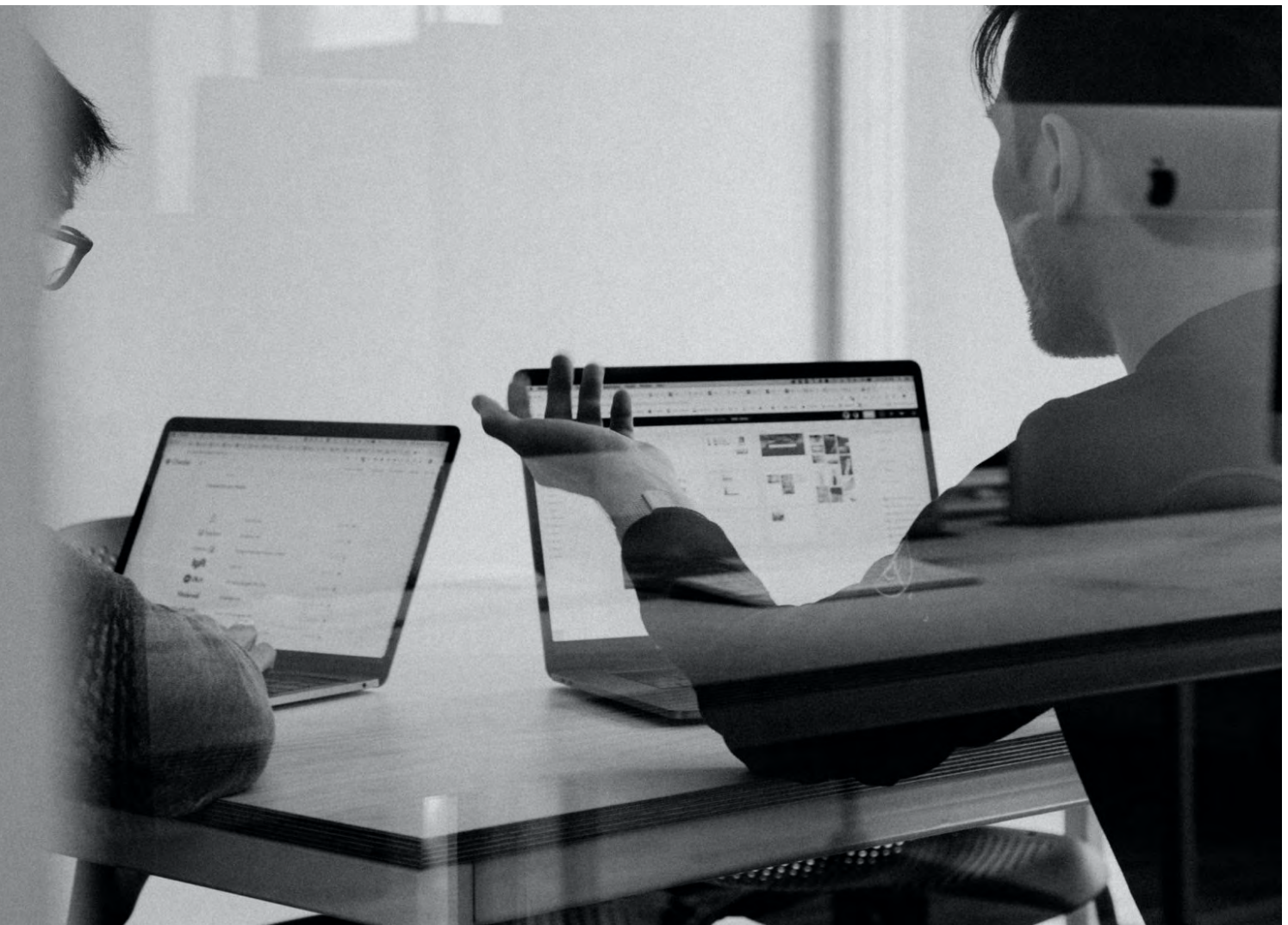
I look forward to seeing her at every ultrasound (even if all I see is a squished little blob). Her kicks to my ribs leave me gritting my teeth—but also grateful for the reminder that she’s growing and healthy. I even started exercising and eating boring (but healthy) food, empowered by the fact that my decisions will affect her future. I haven’t always desired children, so it has surprised me that I could feel such tender affection for someone I am yet to meet.

What I find staggering is that my unborn daughter has done nothing to earn my love. My affections aren’t born from her success or good works. I have no idea what her potential is or who she will become beyond the womb. She has no qualifications, no job title, and no capacity for productivity, and yet I cherish her *because she’s my child*.

Pregnancy has given me a taste of God’s ‘perfect love’ for His children—a love that is both joyful and costly, and where acceptance precedes performance. A love that is unconditional and does not demand to be earned. I have no doubt that motherhood is going to come with challenges that will spotlight my selfishness and failure to love, but for now, I am learning to see and taste God’s love for His children through the love that I feel for my own.

Pregnancy may be hard, but it’s certainly been filled with a *‘million tiny moments for worship’*.

*Editor’s Note: This essay was first published at [Heidi Tai’s Writes](#).*



# Five Factors That Will Shape the Future of the Asian American Church

by Thomas Hwang

I feel like Asian American churches are on the cusp of change. Speaking very generally, the 1980-1990s seemed to be the English Ministry days; the 1990-2000s were the days when Asian Americans seemed to establish their own autonomous churches; the 2010s were the days where Asian Americans were trying to figure out their identity (e.g. gospel church? multi-ethnic?).

What will the next decade look like for Asian American churches? I'm not sure, but there are some unavoidable factors that I think will shape the landscape. Of course, normative practices like faithfulness to God's word and prayer will be the main determining factors. But I also think each generation influences the way people experience church.

With that being said, here are some candid thoughts on five factors that I see shaping the way Asian Americans will experience the local church. I'm not saying these will be the main determining factors, but are they simply the ones that I notice most.

### **1. The Rise of Millennial/Gen-Z Leaders**

There was once a time where the only options for Asians to go to worship were immigrant churches or white mega-

churches. Then there seemed to be a wave of second-generation Asian American pastors that started their own ministries. Many of these churches still exist, cornered the "Asian Christian market," and became the way most Asian Americans experienced Christianity.

Most of those Asian American churches are led by Boomers and Gen-Xers. But the time is coming where you're going to see more Millennials/Gen-Zs leading churches, and I think the generational gap will be very noticeable. While Boomers/Gen-Xers assume and accept diversity, Millennials/Gen-Zers pursue diversity; while Boomers/Gen-Xers desire or reject rules, Millennials/Gen-Zers try to re-write the rules; while Boomers/Gen-Xers are learning technology, Millennials/Gen-Zers grew up in technology.

I'm not saying one generation is better than the other. [But the younger generational leaders are answering different questions and engaging in different ways](#), and I think we're going to notice these differences more and more.

### **2. The Partnership With White Majority Evangelicalism**

First-generation Asian American churches generally stuck together. It didn't matter what theological beliefs you had

— so long as your church was predominantly Asian, you were invited to participate in joint retreats and Turkey Bowl tournaments (the Asian Christian version of the Superbowl).

When second-generation Asian churches came into the scene though, they resonated less with their first-generation forefathers and sought to partner with White majority evangelicals. They wanted to participate in ministries with “the big boys” whose books shaped our Christian faith. And when major evangelical networks started to platform more Asian leaders, it almost felt like the popular white kid from school inviting the nerdy Asian student to sit with him during lunch.

But I’m starting to notice that Asian leaders are feeling a little weary these days about this partnership. They’re tired of being the only Asian in the room and listening to a panel of White Christian leaders telling them how to do church. They’re tired of feeling like they need to conform to what feels like subtle White normativity. And to be candid, they’re tired of feeling like they’re only platformed to help organizations or churches tap into the untapped “Asian Christian market.”

So a question that I think will shape the future is whether or not Asian American churches will think it’s still worth pursuing these evangelical partnerships or [if they’ll follow the steps of their Black Christian brothers and start their own ministries together.](#)

### **3. The Use of Social Media to Engage Skeptics and Seekers**

But as Asian Americans have grown warier of the traditional, institutional church, the “*come and see*” approach won’t work as well. The approach probably has to shift to a more “*go and seek*” — but not in the “*go to the streets and ask strangers if they want to talk about Jesus*” way. People aren’t on the streets anymore, and if they are, they probably don’t want to talk to you — especially if it’s about Jesus.

But people are on social media — and they’re more willing to talk there.

New mediums like Tik Tok and Clubhouse are not only popular but are becoming safe spaces where people are willing to share and engage in meaningful conversations. [And just as Asians populated Youtube in the 2000s,](#) they’re beginning to populate these new virtual spaces too. The missional opportunities are becoming more virtual and Asian American churches, whether they like it or not, are going to have to be more virtual if they wish to engage with the growing number of seekers and skeptics.

### **4. The Engagement With Politics and Social Justice**

While the younger generation seems to care less and less about faith, [they certainly care more and more about justice](#) — and this trend includes Asian Americans. While Asian Americans had previously seemed to be apathetic



about things going on in this country, this seems to be changing. Ever since the death of George Floyd, [Asian Americans are becoming more and more thoughtful](#) about a topic that hasn't been really discussed in Asian Christian contexts.

But what will be interesting is seeing the rise of a more politically divisive context. Generally speaking, it was almost presumed that Asian Christians were of the more right-leaning, single-issue voting, Republican-supporting spaces. I'm sure there were plenty of left-leaning registered Democrats in the church, but it seemed like they had to leave those liberal views outside the sanctuary.

But as Asian Christians engage in politics and social justice more, I think we're going to see a type of political diversity amongst Asian Christian churches that we haven't seen in the past. And while I know there's debate about the relationship between the church and social justice, I think if Asian churches don't engage in these social issues, they won't be engaging with their congregation.

## **5. The Deconstruction of Faith Amongst Asian American Christians**

Back in the day, Asian Americans seemed to fall into one of two categories: the church and unchurched.

The *churched* were Asians who grew up in the church and presuppose the basic tenets of the faith.

The *unchurched* were Asians who didn't grow up in the church and needed to be introduced to the basic tenets of the faith.

However, there seems to be a new, third category that's emerging: the de-churched. The *de-churched* experienced church and know all the "right answers," but they still have so many questions about the faith and the typical spiritual pat answers won't satisfy them.

This experience is often described as a "deconstruction of faith" where a person begins to ask questions that often lead to the dismantling of their Christian beliefs. When people experience what some call a "mid-life crisis of faith," they will notice their presuppositions, re-examine Christian doctrine, and critique church institutions. While such deconstruction has been prevalent in most of Europe and America, I feel like we're starting to see this more and more amongst Asians. The challenge will be how can Asian churches remain faithful and orthodox while still creating safe spaces that allow people to ask tough questions.

*Editor's Note: This article was originally published at [Tom Talks](#).*

# Ravi Zacharias' Failure — And Mine

by Kevin Yi



In 2018, I flew out to Atlanta, GA, to be a part of a small apologetics leadership group meeting at the RZIM headquarters. This was about 5 months after the [Christianity Today](#) article wherein Ravi Zacharias defended himself against the allegations of an inappropriate sexual relationship with Lori Anne Thompson.

We spent much of the day discussing issues relevant to apologetics and how various ministries could work together to be more effective for the kingdom of God. Ravi was given an opportunity to speak from his heart for about an hour, and he was forthcoming about the scandal that had embroiled him the last few months. He was deeply saddened by everything that had conspired, and encouraged everyone in the room to be diligent about personal integrity.

In light of the [exposé](#) by Christianity Today in September 2020 and an independent [investigation](#) that was released in full last week, I can only conclude that Ravi Zacharias lied to every single person in that room as he defended himself and perpetuated more lies about the scandal. I should have retracted my earlier [article](#) about Ravi Zacharias, but found it incredibly difficult to write a response in a timely matter because I have been so utterly discouraged and ashamed by the news.

**First, I must apologize and repent for my complicity in praising Ravi Zacharias as a hero to be admired.**

Beyond a shadow of a doubt, it's clear that Ravi had been living a double life for decades, and even when presented with evidence to the contrary, I continued to allow my admiration for him to cloud me from seeing the truth.

During that 2018 meeting, Ravi described how he had broken his back early on from sleeping on so many people's couches as he did ministry all over the world. It turns out, he was masterful at creating sympathy and admiration for his condition that would give him the excuses he needed to travel around with a masseuse. (This was his cover for sexually abusing and raping the unfortunate women who were his massage therapists.)

Someone during the meeting asked Ravi what kinds of pitfalls we should avoid as ministers of the gospel. Ravi focused on integrity. He pushed us to make sure that our financials were above board. He spoke of the dangers of counseling people individually and how that can lead to scandal, especially when corresponding with those of the opposite sex. He shared how these interactions can be manipulated and used by the enemy to take us down. He talked about the spiritual warfare he experienced in his life as he described how his family was threatened multiple times and even had to deal with stalkers and other security risks. He ended by talking about how much he regretted not being more involved as a father to his family.

I soaked up his every word and questioned none of it. Even when his explanations of what happened with the nude photographs didn't quite match up, I chose to ignore them and to defer instead to the celebrity and charisma of Ravi. I'm ashamed of how I defended him in personal conversations with others who would question the events of the scandals surrounding his career.

## **Second, I have to be honest about my anger.**

I'm furious that Ravi "got away" with this behavior for years, and I'm livid at the [senior leadership of RZIM](#) for not standing up for the victims of Ravi's abuse and for only acting in ways to [cover themselves](#).

The reports of what he said and did are horrifying for their sexual and spiritual abuses. The fact that he even had the nerve to pray with the women he was abusing is disgusting and wretched. This kind of bold faced evil is hard to read about.

I have come to see that there is very little separating Ravi and a cult leader like [Warren Jeffs](#), the spiritual abuser of the polygamist [Short Creek Community in Utah](#). Some may find this comparison too harsh, but given the trauma and havoc that was left behind in the wake of Jeff's toxic leadership, I believe it to be an apt comparison.

I mourn for the women that Ravi abused, and especially for [Lori Anne Thompson](#), whose character was maligned for years as she had to suppress the truth under an oppressive NDA. If Ravi had abused my daughter, my sister, or my wife, my anger would overflow, and I would want swift

justice. Even though Ravi died before he could personally reckon with the full scope of the investigation, as Colin Hansen notes in his article at TGC, the [judgment of God](#) is real, and we can place our hope in the truth that God's justice will be done.

## **Third, what about Ravi's legacy, his ministry, and his teachings?**

As much as I hate what Ravi did, I also understand that if he taught the truth, his character does not undo the facts that he preached about. If a racist murderer teaches someone that  $2 + 2 = 4$ , the truth of that math equation is not annulled by the character of the person teaching it. Or if someone buys you a car and teaches you that  $2 + 2 = 3$ , it doesn't mean that because their generosity did good for you, their teaching is true. In this sense, Ravi's teachings and illustrations can stand as truth on their own.

However, in light of his duplicity and moral failure, I will no longer be recommending his teachings, his books, etc. to others as they're all tainted by the scandal and hypocrisy of his life. His life is a stumbling block to the truth of the gospel. Thankfully, there are many other resources I can point people towards.

#### **Fourth, what do I do as a leader?**

My personal repentance as a leader means that I must re-evaluate the areas where I am biased and blind to abuse; be it sexual, spiritual, emotional, etc. Where has my discomfort or unfamiliarity with these things led to ignore or worse, enable this kind of behavior in me and my spheres of influence?

I am responsible for creating a ministry environment where it's safe to report abuse, and that the victims of abuse will not be gaslighted, manipulated, or ignored. It's my responsibility to defend and protect those under my care. I admit that I have much to learn about sexual and spiritual abuse, and how to help those affected by these things, and I must not be so prideful as to ask for help and accountability in these areas.\*

I partnered with RZIM as a church leader for many years because I wanted our congregants to know the truth of the gospel and how to share that truth with others. But simply knowing the truth is not enough; the Christian witness is not being harmed by [a lack of knowledge, but a lack of integrity and faithfulness](#). I have to humble myself and recognize that I am capable of doing much harm when I disconnect gospel application from gospel truth in my own heart.

I also need to evaluate my own guardrails and ask the hard questions of whether or not I have some kind of accountability as a leader. I know that in my Asian church contexts, this is very difficult because of our point-leadership driven structures. However, it's devastatingly clear that we must make efforts to be accountable to our people in order to protect the church as a whole.

**Lastly, as I have been reflecting on the gospel of Philippians, this paragraph from Paul has been life-giving in the midst of discouragement:**

*“[17] Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. [18] For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. [19] Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. [20] But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, [21] who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.”*  
(Philippians 3:17–21)

Even though Ravi was a failure, it doesn't mean that there aren't genuine spiritual heroes out there. I know of men and women who have lived faithful lives, loving Jesus, serving the church, and making an impact in their family and community. They were not [celebrity pastors](#), but ordinary church members that served and loved and let their hospitality and work ethic shine a light onto the gospel that changed their very hearts.

I need to be reminded that it's my everyday leaning on Christ's power that transforms me. This is why Paul was so confident in telling others to follow him in his example, because he wasn't leading from a place of hubris or ego, but he was leading from a place of weakness. He was very aware of those whose lives would be a hindrance to the gospel, and he mourned for them. But he never gave up hope that Christ can transform us from the inside out.

From the church grandmother that hosted a community group in her home every week for over a decade, to the elder that ran our church's kitchen as a training ground for gospel servanthood, I am hopeful that Christ's church will prove to be more faithful than these kinds of scandals would lead us to believe. Our hope is not in charismatic church leaders, but Christ alone, who leads and guides his church.



# God Among The Crowds

by Faith Chang

“Can I just have 15 minutes?” is my request, delivered with more edge than I expected. Sometimes, I just don’t want anyone touching me — which is to say, my body hurts, I’m tired (or busy), and I don’t want anything else asked of me right now.

I used to imagine Jesus’ relationship with the crowds like that of a speaker with an audience: They’d listen to him in large numbers like a sold-out stadium, then gather around as people might surround a guest lecturer after a talk. Even with a sizable group, listeners instinctively wait their turn and respectfully give the famous person some breathing space. Being a mom of 4 has changed that perception.

As long as I’m at home, there is no escaping our little crowd. I could be sitting on the mat in front of the stove and somehow it’s now their new favorite hangout. Not only am I no longer alone, but the kitchen floor also becomes strewn with books and toys. Case in point: Since I wrote that last sentence, a metal bowl has been placed on my left arm and two kids now flank me, holding clementines for me to peel. Another has pointed a large stick in my face.

*“Please don’t sit on my arm.”*

*“I’m not sitting on your arm!”*

*“Yes, you were. You were **JUST** sitting on my arm.”*

*“I’m not sitting on your arm now.”*

Maybe I used to picture how tired and busy Jesus might be, constantly surrounded by crowds. Now I feel it in my body.

I opened the Scriptures this morning, and I watched Jesus walking by the sea, then making his way up a mountain. He sits down. And that’s when the crowds come.

“The lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others,” the text says. “And they put them at his feet, and he healed them” (Matt. 15:29-31.)

This week, my husband served our church in a way he always has. For some reason, it caught my attention differently this time. And when I paid attention to how he interacted with the church members around him, gratitude for my husband swelled.

That same interaction was what I had noticed when I saw this crowd surrounding Jesus. I saw my King with fresh eyes.

In an earlier chapter, the moment the crowds recognized him in town, people “sent around to all that region and brought to him all who were sick and implored



him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment” (Matt. 14:35-36).

*All the sick in the region?*

I look across the street at my neighbor’s house and imagine what it’d be like to see homes empty out in Staten Island if everyone chronically or critically ill went to seek healing all at once at the same place. Who would they bring? Would I go for my back pain? How uncomfortable would it have been to be among those pressing in to touch him? To hear people yelling out for help, their voices so persistent that the disciples would plead with their Master to tell them to stop?

Then I saw Jesus, literally surrounded by the broken.

The lame.

The blind.

The crippled.

“*And many others.*”

I saw him bending down to speak, to listen to a request, to touch, and to be touched.

What kind of Love must this be to not only acquiesce to, but also welcome, such a crowd? What power would stoop so low? What humility to heal and then, unwilling that the weak would faint on their way home, in compassion prepare a meal for thousands? How tenderly, how kindly, and how joyfully he serves. What a sight it was to behold, even if only in my mind’s eye!

In the future I may remember this scene in the context of motherhood, of Jesus as an example to follow. (Like how to treat my little flock which, at this very moment, is talking to me about June birthdays, pushing me off the couch, and pulling my hand off the computer keys. “I’m hungry, I’m hungry!” says the arm-tugger.) But right now, I’m just marveling at my King. He is the God of the broken, who welcomes the weak. The God who serves the crowds.

We answered this question after church on Sunday: “What difference would it make for you to see the church as a hospital for sinners and not as a waiting room for a job interview?” This morning the Lord answered for me: Seeing the sick, I’d behold the Physician among them, and having seen him, my heart would love him so.





# When Representation Becomes More: A Reflection on the Film “Minari”

by Rachel Seo

“I have never felt this seen before in my life,” I texted my boyfriend last September after watching the [trailer](#) for *Minari*; the slip into cliché underlined the extent of my excitement. The dialogue and details in the scenes carried a certain poignance that emanated even through a two-minute teaser, and I anticipated the movie not only for its promises of “representation” but also because it felt personal.

If you’re a second-generation Korean American, parts of *Minari*’s premise might sound familiar to you: a Korean American family moves from California to Arkansas during the 1980s to pursue the father’s dream of starting a farm to ensure his family’s financial stability.

Partially based on director Lee Isaac Chung’s own childhood, the film conveys itself primarily through the perspective of seven-year-old David, who absorbs the complicated relationship dynamics swirling around him with wide-eyed innocence. His mother Monica, frustrated with the demands of farm life and reluctant to endorse her husband Jacob’s farming fantasies, sends for her mother, Soon-ja, whose arrival creates an added wrinkle in the family’s already-tenuous dynamic.

David and his older sister Anne struggle to communicate with their grandmother, whose Korean idiosyncrasies don’t align with their preconceived notions of what “real” American grandparents are like. In the meantime, their parents clash with increasing frequency over the viability of the farm as support for their family. As we watch all of them struggle to adjust, to the Arkansas town where they now live and also to each another, the stakes rise, inch by inch, through each setback and quiet moment of pause. We wonder: Is the farm a true livelihood or a half-baked pipe dream? Are we watching the assemblage of a family legacy or its disintegration?

I began watching *Minari* with the hope that I’d feel represented and ended it with the idea of representation completely absent from my mind. In its place, instead, was a subliminal sense of triumph I couldn’t define until a few days later. My ideal movie-watching experience involves allowing the story to reel me in until it wholly absorbs everything I’m thinking about in the present moment, a purity of mindset that I realized I hadn’t quite achieved when I’d watched *Crazy Rich Asians* or *The Farewell*. Even though I enjoyed both films, questions like “Is this good

enough? Is this true of us? Is this true of me?" ran in the background of my mind when I saw them — a tentative, irrational fear that the films wouldn't be good enough, that it wouldn't represent "us" well to the non-Asian public. This was, at the time, how I saw the idea of representation: the necessity of performance, of showcase, of explanation to the box office and, by proximity, the outside world.

But the pull of *Minari's* story drew me most into the idea of what it means to be unselfconscious about oneself. David and Anne call their grandmother *Halmoni* and drink Mountain Dew for breakfast and speak in alternating English and Korean to their parents without, seemingly, thinking anything of it. There's no sense of explanation, no "this is what it is because this is who we are." They simply are.

Even now, as the train of Asian-American cinema and culture surges forward full steam ahead, with essays about [the boba generation](#) passing through Twitter and Subtle Asian Traits posts clogging up my Facebook timeline, the idea of "celebrating Asian culture" so publicly often feels disingenuous to me because all I really have ever done is just exist. If someone asked me what it's like to be Korean American, I'd tell them that probably the biggest part of my life experience is that I forget that I'm Korean American most of the time. Obviously it's nice to see faces like mine on-screen, but *Minari* relieved me of the idea that I even needed to be represented — an experience that proved liberating in that it granted the space to simply state what is.

Both Chung and Steven Yeun, who plays Jacob, pointed out this lack of a need for overt demonstration in an [interview with Deadline](#). "We're not just telling a story that is meant to explain who we are to white people basically," Chung said. "But I wanted the film to shift away from those ideas and to be more about themselves and the barriers that they have within their own families...It's not assimilation to the culture, but to each other, in a way."

"It feels this generation and on is really more about the space that we occupy ourselves, and less about being trapped by anything," Yeun said. "We're not trying to ignore our culture, or where we came from, or who we are now, but rather just to plant a flag in some way, at least for me, about where we're at and what we are now."

It's an unselfconsciousness that translates to the relationship between faith and art as well. Chung, who's [identified himself as a Christian](#) in interviews, previously directed the award-winning *Munyurangabo*, about two boys in Rwanda dealing with the aftermath of the 1994 genocide; it was inspired by his wife's work with the Christian organization YWAM (Youth with a Mission). *Minari* seems to build on his own experiences of going to Methodist and Southern Baptist churches growing up.

In an attempt to make friends and integrate themselves within the town, the Yis attends church every Sunday, where they encounter both casual racism and genuine community. Jacob hires a white Pentecostal man named Paul, who helps him out on the farm

and lugs a wooden cross down the main road every Sunday as his form of church. But the explicit religious references don't function as overtures; they're simply there because they add to the narrative. This keen sense of quiet integration seems to be one that Chung involves in his own creative lifestyle.

“When I'm making films,” he said in a [2009 interview](#) with *Christianity Today*, “I really draw from this idea—what Bonhoeffer references, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ Cinema feels like a medium in which I'm wrestling with that...It's not a medium in which I want to evangelize or to be didactic.” Indeed, the “dark night of the soul”—the emotional climax of *Minari*, the moment which most makes viewers feel as if all things are futile—burns brighter and hotter than any other scene.

*(Editor's Note: There are slight spoilers in this paragraph.)*

Other scenes almost feel like call-and-responses, or answered prayers. Near the beginning, shortly after the family moves into their new home, Jacob wishes aloud that they could all sleep together in the living room — a first act of togetherness, he probably thinks, as a family living on its own terms. Towards the end of the movie, they all lie side-by-side on the carpet in the dark, breaths commingling in the depths of slumber: his wish, finally granted. Another scene depicts Halmoni teaching David how to plant minari down by the river, espousing to him the extent of its usefulness in cooking and medicine; the film ends with Jacob teaching him how to harvest it.

We watch as the family grapples with the idea of sowing and not knowing whether they'll be able to reap. We see Jacob treat life as a series of gambles, each decision a pair of dice tossed with the faith that the numbers earned might deal kindly with the family's fate. But we also see that even though each gamble might be made in good faith, every dice roll risks losing something he might not know he's lost until it's gone.

Similarly, I didn't know the specificity of what I'd gained from watching the film until after it was over. Within *Minari* lies inherent a marked lack of demonstration, and as I meander through a world in which “performance” is necessary — the performance of Asian American identity, the performance of Christianity — to legitimize one's identity and sense of belonging, I've begun to realize how nice it is to draw closer to works that feel least like they have something to prove; they tend to be the ones, I think, that simultaneously demand the least from me.

My only imperatives now: Let the story compel me. Help me forget that I even need to be so aware of who I am. Allow me to stand in the middle of the grassy Arkansas fields with characters I care about — Jacob and Monica, Anne and David and Soon-ja — for a moment. And in my care for them, let me lose myself, too.



# Addressing the Struggles of Adoptees with the Father's Love

by Jonathan Holmes

“Could I see your driver’s license, please?”

My debit card at Wendy’s had been declined, and the cashier asked to see my license. As he peered over it, he looked up at me, then back down to my driver’s license.

“You don’t have a funny sounding immigrant name, do you?”

Stunned at first, embarrassed seconds later, I mumbled something quickly about being adopted, grabbed my receipt, and headed to the drink stations.

## **The Adoption Dilemma**

Time and time again, I’ve had conversations that range from the awkward to the awful:

“Where are you from?”

“Why don’t you look like your parents?”

“Why did your mom give you up?”

“Why can’t you speak Korean?”

“Do you want to meet your birth parents?”

“I’m going to hire you to prove I’m not racist against Asian people!”

Now, I want to say that most of the time, the questions were and are borne out of curiosity and not malice, confusion, or meanness. And yet, therein lies a dilemma for those of us who are adopted. Consistent questions asked out of concern (or ignorance) ultimately lead to a dissonance in the heart and mind of the adoptee. The message is clear—you are not like us.

I do not presume to speak for all Korean American adoptees. But the more I listen, learn, and speak with other adoptees, the more I hear echoes of my stories in theirs. The experiences of never truly fitting into a majority

white culture and yet quite disconnected from your own. The experience of desperately trying to fit in as a young child, only to realize that to some degree you'll never fully be accepted as *one of them*. Looking for someone in life who looks like you, and finding that when you do, even that's not always a guarantee of acceptance.

Even more, it is realizing that fitting in brings with it its own set of problems (see: the [model minority myth](#)). So you press into seeking to reconnect with your heritage and culture—but there are few guides for such a task.

For a long time in Christian circles, stories of adoption were compared to the believer's adoption in Christ. While I concur that the *soteriological* aspects of our adoption in Christ are wonderful (see J.I. Packer in [Knowing God](#)), the *sociological* aspects of our adoption are filled with grief, trauma, sorrow, and loss. **For every person who has told me, "You're so lucky that you were adopted!" a voice deep inside replies, "I'm not sure I feel so lucky though."**

### My Adoption Story

In my own story, I know very little that surrounds my adoption. I came over to America as an infant with a flight attendant from Delta Airlines. My parents picked me up from Atlanta International Airport, and that was that. No trips to Korea to learn the culture. No visits to ensure the match was a fit. It was a transaction as simple as picking out a piece of clothing from a catalogue and having it shipped over. (In fact this is how my adopted mother has described the process to me.)

Part of my trouble as an adoptee now is reconciling my childhood as a Korean American adoptee growing up in the deep South with a family, who I do believe loved me, but had little interest or ability to do anything to connect me to my culture. All of the insensitive statements that are taboo today were repeated to me by my parents:

"God knew we couldn't have children, and so he gave us to you!"

"We don't think of you being Korean, you're just like us!"

"You're not different!"

Reflecting back over my childhood and adolescence, it is deeply difficult for me to process the dynamics surrounding my adopted family. My parents are now divorced, and the

relationship with both is estranged. Another grief. Another loss. It's a loss that becomes acute at the oddest of moments—like filling out my health history at the doctor or my children asking me about my *real* parents. If you are a parent of an adopted child, I'd encourage you to seek out counsel and help in navigating this terrain with your adoptee.

### Known and Loved

Well, someone might say, "Where is God in the midst of all this?" Good question. That's one I have asked many times over the past few years. As a biblical counselor, it's one I ask somewhat frequently, and yet it's one I also have felt puzzled by. Yes, I know all things happen for a reason, but still questions persist in my heart:

"Why was I given up?"

"Do I have brothers and sisters?"

"When will I get to go back to Korea?"

"Do my birth parents ever think of me?"

"Is something so wrong with me that I have lost two sets of parents now?"

At times like this, I lean on what I *know* to be true, even though I often desperately do not *feel* it to be true. I lean on the fact that I am known and loved by my Heavenly Father. The Apostle John writes, "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known" (John 1:18). So, in Christ I see a reflection of the Father's love and care for me. I take to heart that any reflection of godly, Christlike love then is a reflection of the Father.

That is helpful and comforting to my soul. That means I see the Father's love for me in my loving and patient wife, the guileless joy of my children, the friendship of dear brothers and sisters in Christ, and the fatherhood of godly mentors and disciplers in my life.

I know the journey of myself and many adoptees is ongoing as we seek to reclaim and reconnect with our cultural heritage and reconcile our narratives with what we know to be true of our loving, Heavenly Father. What I have yet to fully experience this side of heaven, I know will soon be a reality as I add my voice to the chorus of thousands of adoptees everywhere saying, "This I know, that God is for me." (Ps. 56:9b)

# How Do I Know If Someone is “The One”?

by Daniel K. Eng

I remember the moment when I knew she was the one. That’s right—there was a point when I *knew* who my wife would be. I even remember the exact date and even the location of when I knew.

When did I know she was the one?

*It was the moment I was pledging my marriage vows.*

Standing with my wife on that wedding day, making a promise before God—that was when I knew I’d spend my life with her. Before that, I didn’t know. I hadn’t made the promise yet.

Many of us believe in “The One,” the idea of a soulmate or a single person meant for each person. In other words, it’s the belief that there is *only one particular person* God has reserved for each of us.

But accompanying this belief is the worry that we have to figure out who this person is. It’s as if God gives us the burden of solving a mystery in order to find the person we have to marry. But is that really how it works?

Here are four reasons why we should let go of the Idea of “The One.”

## 1. The Notion of “The One” Leads to an Absurd Conclusion

Consider the implications of the idea that “The One” exists. If Person #1 marries the wrong person, he/she has

married “The One” of Person #2. Then Person #2 ends up marrying “The One” of Person #3, and so on. In other words, if each person has “The One,” then marrying the wrong person leads to a catastrophic chain reaction where many, many people are in the “wrong marriage.”

## 2. Searching for “The One” Degrades Singleness

Subscribing to the notion of “The One” often makes us think that our “soulmate” will complete us, which means we are incomplete without marriage. This is toxic thinking as life is made complete only through Christ. He is the One who makes us whole. A married person is just as empty without Christ as a single person.

Also, the idea that someone is incomplete without a spouse can lead to single people being shamed. Sometimes churchgoers can even treat singles like they have a disease: “Still single? I’ll keep praying for you.”

But singleness is not a curse. Singles are often the most faithful and available servants in the church. Accordingly, marriage is the hardest thing I’ve ever done. It takes a lot of work. I have to constantly die to myself and serve an imperfect person, and as an imperfect person myself, it is a difficult and constant task.

## 3. Believing in “The One” Can Lead to Idolatry

If you’re single, trying to find “The One” can lead to a “me”-centered attitude about marriage. You might be tempted to think: “Is she the right person for *me*? Will he

meet *my* needs? You might even believe that your “soulmate” will provide all the blessings without you putting in hard work.

But marriage is more about *servicing* than being served. It’s more about *giving* than getting. If you’re married, believing in “The One” can lead you to wrongly think about “me” more than “we.”

If you’re married, believing in “The One” can lead to idolatry of your spouse. Many married folks can lose themselves in their marriage by putting their spouse before all else—even above God. Your marriage should glorify God, not replace him. As both of you follow Jesus, your union should grow to reflect the relationship between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:31-32).

#### 4. The Bible Doesn’t Support The Idea of “The One”

The Scriptures don’t teach that there’s only one right answer to the question, “Whom should I marry?” To be sure, sometimes God points out someone in particular. The Lord made it clear that Rebekah would marry Isaac (Genesis 24:14-15) and urged Joseph to have Mary as his wife (Matthew 1:20). But this is not the norm. In the vast majority of marriages described in the Bible, there’s no indication that one particular person is meant for someone. In fact, many marriages were (and are still) arranged.

While the Bible doesn’t support the concept of “The One,” it is clear that marriage is a *lifelong commitment*. Here’s the teaching of Jesus:

**“...from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”**

(Mark 10:6-9)

Unless your spouse has broken the wedding vows through adultery, negligence, or abuse, Jesus teaches that we must

remain committed. Once you start entertaining the idea that your spouse might be the “wrong person,” you’ve become unfaithful to your spouse. If you ever wonder if you’re “missing out,” you’ve mentally broken your wedding vows and are walking on the path to divorce.

Perhaps you have freedom in choosing whom to marry or perhaps you don’t (if marriage is arranged). In any case, the Bible clearly teaches that marriage is *for life*. That’s why my wife and I made vows to each other on our wedding day. We intend to keep those vows for life.

If you’re single, instead of, “Is this person The One?”, a better question would be, “If we got married, would it be *wise*?” The Bible and wise counsel can help answer this and additional questions:

- Would we spur each other to follow Jesus?
- Would we have the same values when making decisions?
- How would our union impact others?

If you’re married, instead of wondering, “Did I marry the wrong person?” a better question would be, “How can we make our marriage healthier and more God-pleasing?” Again, the Bible and wise counsel can help answer this and additional questions:

- How can our marriage reflect the relationship between Christ and the Church?
- How can I serve my spouse best?
- How can we bring glory to God together?

God doesn’t necessarily reserve one specific “soulmate” for each person, expecting each of us to solve the riddle. Rather, marriage gives each of us an opportunity to reflect the committed, sacrificial love God has for his people. So let us put aside thoughts of “the One” and instead follow the Lord’s leading in all things, including our relationships.





# Come Back to Church

by Heidi Wong

With almost everything we know experiencing a digital transformation in the past year, it's sometimes surreal to think we ever used to actually do things "in person."

During the past 15 months, we have witnessed work "off-sites" morphing into draining "virtual summits." Neatly structured plans dissolved into organized chaos before finding their footing in the "new normal." Playing Settlers of Catan with a board, table, and snacks turned into "bring your own snack" while attempting to replicate the familiar banter over Facetime and Wi-Fi. While some praise the efficiency gained as a result of a virtual event—"I'm so glad we didn't have to travel for that!"—this format often leaves us wanting.

## **The Insufficiency of Digital Presence**

You may have attended a virtual wedding during the course of the pandemic. The sub-par audio quality, static video frame, and other small squares cheering on mute were never the ideal experience but rather the accepted norms given the circumstances. Feelings of joy for the newly wedded couple coalesced with a sense of lingering discontentment.

I felt like the well-intentioned livestream made me feel like I was being shown a cheapened glimpse of their radiance. The groom was dashing and the bride beautiful, yet for such a sacred event and celebratory occasion, the experience felt incomplete.

You may have attended virtual funerals as well. You witnessed the shuddering of shoulders that could only imply

soul-wrenching sorrow. From behind your screen, you realized that the halting moments of silence were not due to Wi-Fi issues but rather due to emotions overwhelming those sharing in memoriam of the deceased. But you only heard echoes of what was in the vicinity of the microphone and could only see from one particular vantage point.

When the stream ended, you were back in your room, grieving in a ringing silence. For such a sacred and somber occasion, the experience felt disrespectful and wrong. While you saw others mourning together, no one could see you.

**While neither the wedding nor funeral is primarily about you as an attendee, to be acknowledged in your presence still holds weight.**

## **Being Seen**

The phrase "being seen" has proliferated throughout the AAPI community in the past year. In the wake of ongoing anti-Asian hate crimes or even in light of a film like *Minari*, many in the AAPI community have expressed feeling like the world is now finally seeing their story for the first time. It has emboldened some and empowered others to speak up and no longer be satisfied with being relegated to the fray.

It is shining a light on pain and darkness, boldly declaring that it is "not okay" and that there is a better way forward. It emphasizes that this better way requires community, affinity, and commitment. Crowds have gathered to speak up, boldly, audibly, and visibly.

**Yet oddly, this same desire to “be seen” may not extend to the way we view our presence at church.**

Many of us have slowly tapered off, disengaging bit by bit until it seems like we’re past the point of no return. We don’t want a light to shine on our personal pain and darkness. We don’t want to be told that the sins we indulge in are “not okay,” and we’re afraid of what people would think if they found out about the sins committed against us because we have tried so hard to erase them from existence.

While some of us have legitimate reasons which preclude us from worshipping in person just yet, others of us have grown so comfortable in our secluded pandemic lifestyle that the very thought of having to socialize with a room after service (even at limited capacity) triggers negative body language and anxiety. Reflecting upon relationships, you recognize that once-budding friendships fell apart during the pandemic because they weren’t rooted enough. Even the foundational relationships you had were challenged and perhaps broken.

You may have even realized that your church involvement prior to the onset of the pandemic was superficial, even if frequent. You went to “get something out of it” or “start

your week right”—for strictly habitual and social reasons. Now, you’d rather not have to interact with “that person” or make the trek because it all does not seem really worth it—but you still consider the threads of your relationship with Jesus to be important.

Perhaps you feel conflicted, oscillating somewhere between resentment, apathy, or shame for feeling these or other things. It’s easier to continue on with this “new normal” rather than to try to go back to the way things were, or figure out a new way forward.

But consider for a moment these conflicting feelings as a part of God’s grace — dissatisfaction with the way things were can lead you to deeper and more fulfilling fellowship with him. *But God sees me, isn’t that enough?* To skirt meeting others face to face will certainly help to avoid certain inconveniences, yet in perpetuity, it will rob you.

Sure, no one will see how the COVID weight you’ve gained, or how your face has broken out due to constant mask-wearing. But if you never come back, no one will notice something is off about your body language—the way it droops and slants because of the crushing disappointment of a miscarriage. No one will realize that you actually are going through a divorce and are temporarily

staying with family. They won't see you trying to hold onto threads of hope, all the while knowing that your close kin's battle with cancer is nearing its final end.

Likewise, you won't see many things either—that newcomer who is sitting in a far corner, his mind teeming with so many questions while hearing the gospel for the very first time. Or sense the long-time attendee next to you, who is worshipping in person after a year-long hiatus, so overjoyed just to be with beloved brothers and sisters all raising up a sonorous melody to the Lord.

### **Embodied Community**

Sunday worship is first and foremost about worshipping God. It is both somber, as we recognize the destructive implications of rampant sin, and celebratory, as we praise him for raising Jesus, defeating death, and imparting to us eternal life.

Worship is meant to be raised the way God intended—in an embodied community. When we say, “Hallelujah,” we, along with so many who came before us, are actually calling upon a *group of people* to praise God. In addition, an embodied community that is deeply rooted in the Word of God can be a healing and powerful force, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer so aptly expressed in his book, *Life Together*.

**“When one person is struck by the Word, he speaks it to others. God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother... Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God’s Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ.”**

Experiencing the embodied community of the church doesn't allow us to selectively choose our interactions. We will inevitably do life with those who make us uncomfortable, vice versa. At the same time, physical presence alone is not enough. To be physically present with a hurting friend but emotionally absent can be more damaging than being absent altogether. Yet doing spontaneous life together will help us to see more than just a finite vignette through a camera lens. From this starting point and through the Spirit's prodding, we will hear and sense things that can lead us to recognize opportunities to minister to and more fully love others.

**Brothers and sisters — I long for your honest presence, and I humbly offer you mine.**

# An Open Letter to the Pandemic- Surviving Pastor

by Tom Sugimura



Dear Pastor (myself included),

Breathe. Breathe deeply.

You've just completed a marathon (which you thought would only be a 5K when you laced up your shoes). This past year has been exhausting with unexpected challenges. Once the adrenaline wears off and churches start to reopen, many pastors like you will be ready to crash. Some will drop out entirely. You've made it this far, so don't give up.

Here are a few words of advice.

**Be patient.** Your church needs time to get back to "normal." Many won't like the post-pandemic changes. Some are hesitant to return, and 20% won't ever come back (according to Thom Rainer). Others have developed stubborn sins that have grown into habits. Shepherd all of them faithfully like Jesus shepherds you.

**Watch your health.** Check your sleep, diet, exercise, and hydration. Do what you must to replenish your strength. Be humble. Many pastors have pushed themselves beyond the breaking point this year. Your workload has increased and won't taper off even after the pandemic. So take time to rest. Recuperate. Your church and your family need you.

**Feed your soul.** Scripture, prayer, silence, solitude. Spend time with God. Confess the ways you've sinned in word or deed. Be humble. Ask for help before you need it. Soul care begins with you.

**Resist the temptation to compare your church with other congregations.** Such thinking only leads to pride or jealousy. We've all handled this pandemic differently. So give grace to those you think are wrong and thank God for those you think have flourished. Be humble.

It doesn't matter if your congregation has shrunk or your livestream audience has grown. Care for the people Christ has given to you and let him build his church.

**Trust and train your small group leaders.** After this past year, your people crave connection in micro-gatherings. Encourage them to open their homes, grow in hospitality, and connect one person at a time.

**But also remember to say, "No."** Your role is not to carry the entire church on your shoulders, but to equip members to carry one another.

Revitalize. Ask what new things God is doing: ministries, people, additions, and subtractions. Take this opportunity to start afresh. Challenge your people to think outwardly and give themselves away. Adopt or plant a church. Offer counseling to your community. Refocus your vision, but make changes slowly and with prayer.

**Help other pastors and churches.** They are feeling the same weight as you and they've just run the same marathon. Serve. Pray. Fellowship. Care. We're in this together.

Pastor, I'm praying for you to lead well and to keep running the race.

**"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."**

(Hebrews 12:1-2)



# **Pastors, Please Don't Forget About Sexual Assault Survivors When Responding To Ravi Zacharias**

by Soojin Park



Pastors may post articles about the recent events surrounding Ravi Zacharias with genuine grief and add commentary on why abuse should be condemned. They may even reference it in their sermons and talk about how God hates any type of abuse.

But on many occasions, the pastors will forget to address the victims and survivors in their own congregation who may be triggered and re-traumatized by such news. I have sat through countless sermons and read countless online posts by pastors to know that every single time this happens and they are ignored, as a survivor of sexual abuse myself, I am left feeling slightly conflicted. Why?

I am glad pastors are willing to speak out against these crimes instead of choosing to stay silent. But I'm also a little empty inside. I have a million thoughts and emotions racing in my head, and my body has a visceral reaction to this news. As much as I appreciate the pastors' sense of justice, I can't help feeling I need something else. I need

care. I need pastors who will care for me as a sheep that is confused, angry, and brought back to her own abuse through this news.

### **Dear Pastors,**

I humbly write this letter asking you to consider a different and underserved area of ministry that is needed in times like this. Although I recognize that every victim's experience is different, and I speak largely for myself and other survivors I have personally heard from, I still want to write this on behalf of the many victims that sit under your teaching and in your care.

Sexual assault is a traumatic experience, which means the body and mind will react to its memory differently than non-traumatic experiences. Psychologists say that these memories can activate a "fight-or-flight response," resulting in increased heart rate, headache, nausea, difficulty focusing, etc.

There is already enough news of sexual assault in the world to keep a survivor feeling like he/she has to constantly navigate a minefield of triggers. Add to this the harrowing news of a Christian leader's abuse, and it can all become too much to handle. Not only is the body and mind reacting at that point, but it is also the heart, which enters its own sort of "fight-or-flight" mode that leaves the survivor utterly confused.

In his or her most vulnerable moments, the heart can tempt the survivor to choose "flight": abandon the Church that fails to protect and the God that fails to be good. This is why I, and so many others in the Church, need pastors who will choose to recognize, listen to, and care for us in these moments. We may not have been directly impacted by the abuser, but the incompatibility of his prominence as a Christian leader and the pure evil of his abuse can indirectly lead us to emotionally and spiritually dark places.

Pastor, at this point I want to say — please don't be naive in thinking that there aren't people like me in your congregation. Please don't stop reading because you think this doesn't apply to your ministry.

While all pastors know that sexual assault is a terrible crime, many pastors don't realize that sexual assault is a terrible crime *that many of their own congregants have been, and are currently, victims of*. You may not personally know of many in your church, but I would bet that there are probably many survivors you don't realize are survivors.

The [CDC reports](#) that more than a third of women experience unwanted sexual contact and about 1 in 5 women experience attempted or completed rape in their lifetime. Almost one-fifth of men report unwanted sexual contact and

almost three million men in the country have experienced attempted or completed rape. So if you have a congregation of 100 adult members (50 men and 50 women), you may have 17 women and 10 men who have experienced unwanted sexual contact. I plead with you, please care for the victims in your congregation as they try to process and even wrestle with their own faith in times such as this.

I want to offer two suggestions for how you can care for victims and survivors in your congregation at this time:

### **1. Make spaces for safe conversation**

On a number of occasions, I have had the chance to share the story of my own abuse and healing with groups of college students. Every single time, I left an open invitation for any other survivors and victims in the room to share with me. And every single time, I had a handful of students share with me about their own experience of abuse and/or assault.

I have realized from my own experiences as a survivor and my time doing ministry that *victims deeply desire safe spaces to share and process their experiences*. These students that came to me all displayed some sense of relief at the fact that they were offered a space to talk explicitly about their experiences.

It can be extremely lonely to try to comb through the mess of thoughts and emotions on your own. Sexual assault is also so complicated because there's often a component of shame and guilt mixed into the bag of emotions.

I must confess to you: I feel completely naked writing this letter. I don't feel this because I'm sharing that I was once a victim of sexual abuse. I feel it because I'm sharing the confusion and chaos that goes on in my heart when I read about stories like Ravi Zacharias. I feel exposed because, more often than not, I weigh myself down with



the assumption that people would think I was “crazy” or “overreacting” if they knew how affected I was by abuse that wasn’t committed on me but on other people. I feel shame for not being stronger and not being fully healed of something that happened so long ago.

I know that this is unbiblical and unnecessary shame. I know now from my years of listening to other survivors, receiving counseling myself, and pouring over Scripture, that I am not expected to heal at any particular pace and that I am no less of a Christian because I’m still wrestling with the effects of my abuse. But this is a hard truth to tangibly grasp when events like Ravi Zacharias trigger me so deeply.

Survivors need to know they are not alone. They need to hear that they’re not overreacting and that their pastors want to hear them out. They need to be invited into safe spaces where they could make the decision on their own to step in and share their stories and pains. It starts with you recognizing that there may be some in your congregation who are survivors themselves and need help processing what is happening. Then it could be as simple as this: Let them know you acknowledge their pain and leave an open invitation for them to receive care about this if they desire.

If and when they come to you, be empathetic. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you every ounce of his power needed so that you could display true, Christ-like, empathetic care for your hurting sheep. Listen more than you speak. Acknowledge that if you haven’t experienced sexual assault yourself, you can’t claim to understand what they’re dealing with, but that you want to better understand by listening well.

Ask questions to help them process. Don’t try to forego the process and rush to the conclusion by throwing Bible

verses and Christian-isms at them in untimely ways. Part of making a safe space may require having qualified women be available for the shepherding. You yourself may not sit in the conversation but as the pastor, I firmly believe even making spaces for women is part of your care for the flock.

Don’t let the conversation end without recognizing the tremendous courage and vulnerability it took for the survivor to share with you. Thank them for the personal costs it took for this conversation to happen. Show appreciation for the level of trust they just demonstrated in you.

Lastly, don’t let the ball drop. Nothing hurts more than sharing the most vulnerable part of your life with someone, only to have them neglect the most crucial part of the conversation: What happens after you leave. As best as you can, keep the invitation for conversation open to them and if appropriate, recommend them to good counselors or mentors. You may not personally be in regular contact with this person afterward, but make sure that some part of the Church is!

## **2. Be an example of good male leadership**

I first want to say that it is really important for us to recognize that sexual abuse doesn’t just happen to women. Male victims are even more shamed because of their gender and it is imperative that we are cautious with our narrative so we don’t add to the shame.

However, I do believe that the Ravi Zacharias case, along with similar cases of abuses with Christian leaders, is undeniably tied to the stronghold of male dominance in evangelicalism. I also believe it is a part of the conversation regarding male leadership in the Church and even complementarianism’s practical implications. So I want

to focus this next suggestion on the male pastor-female congregant relationship.

In a previous [letter I penned to complementarian pastors](#), I wrote that “It really is not a natural thing for some women to easily believe that men, even men in the church, want what is best for them.” As I explained in that letter, all you have to do is look at the news and the daily life of a woman to see why women struggle with this.

I can't begin to explain how much this very struggle is intensified for women who have been sexually assaulted by men. The idea that men could overpower and take advantage of a woman isn't just a possibility to us survivors; we have lived through the very experience of it. Every victim is different but it is not uncommon for your mind to build defense mechanisms by convincing yourself of lies that men cannot care for women or that all men cannot be trusted.

One of the hardest parts of my healing process was unraveling these very lies. It's painful because you have to tell yourself to not be afraid of the very object of your fear. You have to wrestle with the ideas of sin, God's designs for gender, and even God himself. It takes years to have normal relationships with male friends and learn to trust your pastors as your overseers.

I am so thankful that God has taken me through highs and lows to separate my sin from my pains and to have peace in a right view of men. But when I hear of people like Ravi Zacharias, the first place my heart goes is to question male headship. I know my head believes in what I read in scripture but in these moments, my heart cannot make sense of male headship. I question God: “Could you really be good and sovereign over this? How could we tell that to the victims?”

The doubts I thought I dealt with long ago when I processed my own pain trickle back into my head and I feel like a puzzle piece I worked so hard to fit into my understanding of God's design goes missing once more.

I don't know how else to say this: Survivors in your churches need you to be a godly man. We need you to be an example to us of good, godly, male leadership. We need you to show us that what God has designed is good and that the moral failings of men like Ravi Zacharias do not have to strip us of our trust in God's design. When lies start creeping into our hearts as we read the news of fallen pastors and apologists, we need to be able to confidently say to ourselves: “No! This is not a reason to distrust God. My pastor is an example of why I can trust.”

You don't have to be perfect. In fact, you cannot be perfect and you should acknowledge that! We need to see that male headship is not about giftedness or perfection, but calling, and that God calls the weak and empowers them with his grace. We need to see that very grace in action! We need to see that you may not have everything down yet, but that you're trying. We need to know that you desire to genuinely care for the women in your flock by seeking to understand their unique experiences in your church and their spiritual needs, and by seeing them as your sheep, not your sheep's wives or “the other.”

We need to know you are willing to be held accountable and display transparency. We need to see that you aren't just crying out against abuse after it happens but you're actively seeking to protect and prevent. We need to see that you are moving away from a “boys club” culture of ministry at our churches where women are constantly looking in from the invisible fences that keep them “outside.” We want to know that your relational capital with other men

doesn't get used as a weapon to give the benefit of doubt to each other while questioning the intentions of women.

We need to see you trying to practice the most robust form of complementarianism you can, with women at the leadership level that can truly complement you by offering perspective for your decisions. In this way, we need to see that it is possible for men to fulfill their God-given role to lead without dominating, controlling, isolating, or belittling women.

I know that being a godly leader may not be the first thought that comes to mind when considering how to care for sexual assault survivors. But trust me when I say that it will go an extremely long way to help survivors work through their own healing. Your day-to-day efforts to grow in this manner will not go unnoticed by the women, and the survivors, of your congregation.

So when situations like the Ravi Zacharias case happen (which unfortunately will continue to happen) the survivors in your care may fall into less confusion and frustration because of your example. They'll also be much more likely to trust you enough to speak with you. My first suggestion of an open invitation to safe conversations won't be very effective if the survivors in your congregation don't trust that you are fundamentally different — that you are a leader who cares and protects.

It's not just for the sake of gender roles that I am pleading with you to be a godly example. I have witnessed on numerous occasions how easy it is for hurt, disillusioned women to go from questioning God's design to questioning his goodness then coming to conclusions that only leave them outside of the Church. Even outside of complementarian circles, I see women who still have the same

struggles and questions as they see men failing women in the Church. *This is not just a matter of guarding gender roles but fighting for the faith of countless women, particularly those who are victims of abuse, and helping God's people see the beauty of his goodness even in this broken world.*

## Conclusion

Pastors, please see and care for the survivors in your congregations that are being deeply impacted by the recent events surrounding Ravi Zacharias. I will personally attest to the level of emotional, mental, and spiritual turmoil experienced while reading through the investigation report and other materials that showed the organization's cover-up of abuse. Don't leave the women (and men) in your churches to be in pain on their own. Be an example to them and invite them to safe conversations. Don't just denounce Ravi Zacharias' actions but also teach your church to grieve over the pains of his victims — your members who have experienced abuse need to know that their church is growing to care for all victims. May God use you to care for your sheep well and help many to find deep and lasting healing.


*Resources for pastors wanting to better understand the effects of sexual assault, as well as how to provide gospel-informed care to survivors:*

- [Rachael Denhollander](#) “The Lion & The Lamb – How the Gospel Informs Our Responses to Abuse”
- [Dr. Justin Holcomb](#) “Rid of My Disgrace: The Work of Christ and the Effects of Abuse” I have realized from my own experiences as a survivor and my time doing ministry that victims deeply desire safe spaces to share and process their experiences. These students that came to me all displayed some sense of relief at the fact that they were offered a space to talk explicitly about their experiences.

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