

Throughout the course of the week, I met with my triad consisting of Joshua Kwon, Shian Der Yuan (Charles), and myself. We were complete strangers before this course. But throughout our meetings, we were able to get to know one another and develop a close-knit relationship as we discussed the various topics at hand. It was an enriching time of learning from and being encouraged by my brothers.

At a cursory glance, Joshua, Charles, and I may look very similar. All of us came from Eastern Asia; Charles coming from China, and Josh and I coming from South Korea. However, I was able to gain many insights and encouragements from some of the differences that were seen. For one, Charles was an older gentleman who has children who are already adults. On the other hand, Josh is father of a younger child. As a single and unmarried man, I was able to listen to their insights of the challenges and victories they have seen in their respective life stages which I have not yet experienced. For example, Joshua shared often about the strain that working in a ministry setting often places on our family lives. He spoke of how he and his wife would have regular discussion on how to best lead their family, all the while seeking to honor God in the places that He had called Josh's family to. Charles on the other hand provided examples of being faithful in the "empty-nested" years of his life. He shared of how he and his wife would serve the church and attend different gatherings such as bible studies. For myself, I have yet to experience any of these things. However, as someone who is hoping to one day start a family, the stories of their struggles and the faithfulness they've displayed in seeking to serve God in their settings were some of the most incredible encouragements and reasons for hope I've received in these past couple of years.

In the beginning of our meetings, I felt that our group was fairly shy and awkward. Personally, I am introvert who takes a while to warm up to new faces. However, the exercise that was employed, where the three roles of speaker, listener, and observer, helped us begin our discussions. I thought this exercise was another crucial aspect of the benefits of this course because with each role, I noticed different things about myself and the others.

As a speaker, I had initially struggled a lot to put my thoughts into words. Especially discussing the “hot button topics” that we thought would be difficult for us to talk to others about, such as gender orientation identity or differing political viewpoints, I found myself stumbling for the “correct” words. I learned of the need for myself to be able to speak on these topics, especially in non-ministry settings, as there will be people I will encounter dealing with these exact circumstances. It was revealing that I had been in a Christian “bubble”. I hope to be able to reach and develop relationships with a larger range of people of differing views on these issues, not to seek to disagree with them for disagreement’s sake, but to meet them where they are at. Overall, I was incredibly encouraged as my brothers listened to what I had to say without judgement or disdain.

As a listener, I learned that it took a different skill to be able to listen, make good quality interjections, and ask questions that are beneficial to the person speaking. Especially when we shared our stories during the first session, I found it challenging to listen to the speaker for what they had to say, rather than interjecting with my own thoughts and opinions. Coming from a different background, it really taught me to lay aside my own preconceived notions and prejudices and hear the meaning of what was being shared rather than just merely listening to the words. I think it is true that good listening is a rare yet very necessary trait for us to develop in.

As an observer, I got to look at Josh and Charles in a new light. I was able to see the passion that Josh spoke with as the speaker. I thought it was encouraging to see him share without worry of judgement. Especially in opening up about his struggles he had faced in his personal life as well as the ministry settings he had been in, I was able to look at how all of himself, both in speech and body language, did all that he could to convey his thoughts to Charles. One thing I found interesting was the distractions that existed that become more prevalent as the observer. Not being an “active” part of the conversation, I really had to keep myself from looking at the clock or at different objects around the room. It required me to put my phone upside down and actively give my undivided attention to both the speaker and the listener.

Personally, the session that stood out to me the most was when we got to share our lives with one another. I had stated above that I began this course as an awkward participant, who was too introverted to feel comfortable sharing. However, in sharing with both Josh and Charles about where we came from, what we aspire for in our lives, and even the challenges we have faced in our walks up to this current point, it was hope-giving and anxiety-relieving to be able to meet these brothers as people, not just parts of ministry programs and meetings. I am reminded of the teaching we’ve received that the goal is life transformation through discipleship rather than looking to solve things through programs and methodologies. It reminded me that the goal of working with people is to be with them, to give our undivided attention to each individual, and to see the work of God even in the regular and mundane stories of our lives.