



nextstop

*Daily Inspiration for the Most Important
Stops in Beijing*

Paul Durbin

// *Whether you are a new Christian or you have known Christ for years, these daily inspirations will give you clear directions on how to thrive in a foreign country, making it fun and relevant."*

— Daviana Winger, Argentina

// *I really like this. Reading it makes me feel like I am part of a family, not a random person in a church—that there is a purpose beyond just attending and randomly finding my way. It's great! — Kit Thambiratnam, Australia*

// *This book is fantastic. Everyone—even oldsters like me—who need to be re-energized into completing life well would benefit from reading this easy to read explanation of who we are in Christ Jesus. — Jim Habib, Beijing*

// *This is an encouraging book, clearly written with analogies we can relate to. A book to be kept and read alongside the Bible for everyone who wants to finish the Christian race well!*
— Cris Kim-Fan, Brazil

// *nextstop reads the way Pastor Paul teaches: funny, informative, encouraging, true to new daily experiences and easy to relate to. It also helps bridge the gap between culture shock, new Christian experiences, the language barrier and where to go when we're overwhelmed. — Becca Woods, Canada*

// *Pastor writes as a curious, loving child of God, who shares his valuable experiences in a great and funny way. It's so motivating! If you read it, you'll not only be activated to know and trust God more, but you'll also discover useful tools to connect yourself with God's truth and enjoy the diversity and joy of God's family at BICF! — Tatjana Bauer, Germany*

// *nextstop is inspiring and interesting, a wakeup call for those sleeping and encouraging for those who are awake. It's a great book. — Lionel Gatro, Ghana*

// *nextstop summarizes the four books of the Gospel to four stops in my every day journey with Jesus. It's so real and a practical way to make an impact in Beijing! — Chrisanth Jebakumar, India*

// *A must read for every new comer to BICF. I only wish I had read nextstop when I first arrived. Then, I would not have had to make so many U-Turns and unnecessary wrong stops in reaching my ultimate destination—BICF and how to know God better!
— John Samuel, Malaysia*

// *This is such a clear presentation of what faith and church is all about. I really connected with Paul's examples and illustrations, from one Beijing expat's heart to another. BICF is an oasis in this city for us too, and we wouldn't want to be without it!
— Louise Choong, Norway*

// *I found this book to be highly relevant, easy to understand and practical. A must-read for those who are interested to know what God is doing in their lives and how they can be a part of His will in Beijing. — Eugene Choong, Singapore*

// *This is a must read if you are (re)discovering your faith in Beijing. It's doesn't matter if you're fresh off the boat or you've been in Beijing for 20+ years. It's an adventure book I can't put down. Try it! — Ling Lai, UK*

// *Wow! This is excellent! I love the clarity, the logic, the personal sharing, the Chinese-ness and Paul's awareness and identification with incoming expats, the "pastoral" tone—Paul clearly loves BICF and Beijing. Excellent! I love the mnemonic devices and how helpful they are— the NO group, the "first of your day, week, month," BIG group, SMALL group, and more.
Really good! — John Willison, USA*



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Most Important Stops in Beijing

Paul Durbin

Beijing International Christian Fellowship

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*Dedicated to my Family,
Patty, Noah, Sophia, Chloe, and Samuel.
I love being on this journey with you.*

preface

Dear Fellow Beijinger,

Landing in Beijing for the first time can be a bit overwhelming. A few minutes into my arrival, I found myself thinking, *“What is this place? Where did all these people come from? How will I ever understand this language? I’m supposed to eat... that?!”* And to be perfectly honest, I still ask a few of these questions today!

Walking into BICF, on the other hand, felt like walking into an oasis. The music was inspiring; the people were smiling; and something about it just felt like *home*. I loved it then, and I love it today.

Yet I noticed something. Despite all the good things—the *presence of God, the amazing people, the experience of seeing the international family of believers worshipping together*—there was still something *overwhelming* about it. Overwhelming in many good ways, yes—but overwhelming in a few confusing ways, too! As a pastor, it troubled me that in the midst of all this beauty and excitement, people had difficulty finding their way at BICF. After a first visit, *then what?* Where do you go from here?

In contrast, Beijing public transportation is *relatively* easy! (Keyword is “relatively.”) When you ride the metro, you simply look at a map to discover what your next stop is, wait for that stop to arrive, disembark—and you’re on your way.

But, how do you do that at an international church?

This is why I've created **nextstop**. We needed a way to accelerate the process of connecting people to God's *purpose* and God's *family*. Rather than asking a million questions, I pray we ask one, "*What is my **nextstop**?*" In other words, "*On my Beijing journey, what is the next thing God is asking me to do as I grow in my relationship with Him and others?*" I believe this book contains four of those stops—the four most important stops you will ever make.

Living in Beijing and being part of BICF is the privilege of a lifetime for my family and I, and I believe you can also experience this same joy. Make the most of your time here. Take the steps necessary to know God, go deeper in your relationship with Him, experience the love of your Beijing family, and explore the many ways that together we can make a deep impact on this nation.

Welcome to **nextstop**,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Paul Durbin', written in a cursive style.

Pastor Paul Durbin
Beijing, China




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WELCOME TO **nextstop**

We have designed **nextstop** to give you the information and experiences you need to develop into a growing, connected, impact-making follower of Jesus Christ.

1

2

3

4

nextstop consists of four key Stops:

Stop ❶: Know God

Stop ❷: Be Family

Stop ❸: Go Deep

Stop ❹: Make Impact



Every Stop has several Exits

Just like a Beijing metro station, each of these Stops has several Exits helping you to further explore the content of that Stop.



Every Exit has several Points of Interest

Every exit at a Beijing metro stop has several Points of Interest. Most of these exits have signs posted letting you know which points are closest to a particular exit. **nextstop** is no different. Our Points of Interest help you understand:

- **What we believe...** *(from our list of nine doctrinal statements)*
- **What we value...** *(from our statement of six core values)*
- **What we do...** *(things like baptism, communion, and a few other things we at BICF feel are important to growing individually and doing church together well¹.)*
- **What it means...** *(explanation of a few beautiful Chinese characters)*

So, it's... Stop > Exit > Point of Interest



>



>



¹ While we will cover all of our doctrines and core values in this book, the "what we do" portions are not an exhaustive list.



Baggage Check

One more thing. Before moving on to a new Stop, you'll encounter a "Baggage Check." Don't worry, this is just a short self-scored quiz you can take to determine if you are ready for the next stop.

When is **nextstop**?

nextstop is every week. Except for a few holiday breaks, we'll be discussing one of these stops every Sunday afternoon at BICF. On the first Sunday of each month, we'll be at Stop 1. On the second Sunday, Stop 2, and so on.²

nextstop is also every day. Use this book as a daily devotional and spend several days going through each of the four Stops, their Exits, and the Points of Interest. This will allow more time for personal reflection on the various Bible verses, questions, prayers, and thoughts presented in each section.

When should I start?

Why not now? Your **nextstop** is waiting for you!³

² Please inquire about current class time and location.

³ Additional resources available at bicf.org/nextstop.



1 stop one **KNOW GOD**

This stop will help you
understand who God is and how
you can know Him better.

A

God is _____.

B

we are _____.

C

now what?

D

say yes.



he most amazing thing about knowing God is the fact that He wants to be known. That is His plan—for you and I to know Him just as He already knows us.⁴ In fact, as you look through the Bible, you'll discover it's not a story of man desperately searching for God, but one of God persistently and lovingly reaching out to man⁵.

It was God that invited Adam to go for an evening stroll in earth's first garden⁶. It was God that revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush⁷. It was God that summoned Abraham out into the dark night to show him the brilliant star-filled sky⁸.

One man was hiding from God.
Another was running,
and the other wasn't even looking!

Yet God's plan has always been to be known by His creation⁹. He is the One that says, *"Call to me and I will answer"*¹⁰. He is the One that says, *"I will be found by you."*¹¹

As we visit **Stop 1 • Know God**, be encouraged by this: He wants to be known. He has not buried Himself in dogma, tradition, or religion, because His desire has never been to conceal Himself. He wants you to discover Him.

⁴ Galatians 4:9

⁵ Isaiah 65:1

⁶ Genesis 3:9

⁷ Exodus 3:4

⁸ Genesis 15:5

⁹ Romans 1:20

¹⁰ Jeremiah 33:2-3

¹¹ Jeremiah 29:14


How? Let's find out by visiting all four Exits at **Stop 1 • Know God.**

Exit A • God is _____ .

Exit B • We are _____ .

Exit C • Now What?

Exit D • Say Yes!

 *Dear God, I am grateful that knowing You is not difficult, mysterious, or out of reach. You have not hidden Yourself from me; I have been running from You! Today, I declare my desire to respond to Your call to know You. Amen.¹²*

¹² "Amen" is a word often used at the end of a prayer. It means "so be it," or "may it be just as I said."



God is _____.

What word would you put in the blank?

God is distant?

God is near?

God is angry?

God is good?

God is dead?

God is alive?

God is _____?

Here's the thing. Before we come to **Know God**, we need to pause and consider the many preconceived ideas we have about Him. Because even if we have not given much thought to God before, it's unlikely that our view of Him is neutral. It has been deeply influenced by our experiences, our culture, our education, etc. We may think we **Know God**, but do we?


I remember when I first came to China. I thought I knew what it would be like. Everyone would be an expert in the Martial Arts, quote Confucius proverbs all day, drink green tea each afternoon, and eat a fortune cookie after every meal. As it turns out, I was wrong in each of my assumptions! I have discovered that China is far more diverse, exciting, and colorful than I ever dreamed. My knowledge and experience of China has permanently changed me for the better.

And I believe that as you grow in your knowledge of who God is, you will find that He surpasses any and every assumption you had of Him. I guarantee He is far more than you can ever ask, think, or imagine.¹³

At this first Exit, we have one Point of Interest I'd like to draw your attention to. It's **what we believe about God**. This is the first step in coming to know Him — learning what He is like.¹⁴

As you will see in the following pages, knowing God is deeply affected by who He is, and who we perceive Him to be.

So, what do you think? How would you complete the following sentence? God is _____?

 *Dear God, I confess today that I have many preconceived notions about who You are and what You are like. And the problem is, I don't even know which ideas are right or wrong! I need Your help. Open the eyes of my heart¹⁵ and remove any blinders from my eyes¹⁶. Help me to see You and accept You for who You truly are. Amen.*

¹³ Ephesians 3:20

¹⁴ You'll notice that all of our "what we believe...." statements are based on what is found in the Old and New Testaments of the Christian Bible. We'll look more in depth at what we believe about Scripture in Exit 2.

¹⁵ Ephesians 1:18

¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 4:4



Point of Interest

what we believe about God

Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.” Revelation 4:8

While we at BICF are from dozens of nations, speak hundreds of different languages, and come from various denominational backgrounds, the Lord has helped us to agree on a few doctrines¹⁷ that we believe are essential to authentic Christian faith. The first one we'll look at is our belief about God:

We believe there is one God¹⁸, existing eternally¹⁹ in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit²⁰, and possessing the same attributes and perfections²¹.

Let's focus on just a couple words in that statement: “attributes and perfections.” What do we mean by that? Let's start by looking at just a few of God's attributes—some of His special qualities and characteristics:

¹⁷ Appendix B contains our full doctrinal statement

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 6:4

¹⁹ Genesis 1:1

²⁰ Matthew 28:19, 2 Corinthians 13:14

²¹ John 10:30

1. God is good.

He is not just decent, or “not bad.” He is good, and he is good all the time. In fact, God’s Son, Jesus, once said, “*No one is good—except God alone*”²². That is quite a statement, isn’t it? No one but God is good? It’s the truth, however²³. In fact, we wouldn’t even know what “good” is if it wasn’t for God.

2. God is love.

Now take note, It’s not just that God is *loving*—He Himself is *love*.²⁴ And I am not talking about the love we have for, say... finding an empty seat on the subway so we don’t have to stand the whole time (*I do love it when that happens.*) And it’s not the kind of love we have for finding a restaurant that uses ice cubes in their water glasses (*I love that, too*).

God’s love is *sacrificial*. His love is *eternal*. It’s *patient*, *kind*, and *enduring*. The Bible is clear: God. is. love. He sets the standard. If not for God, we don’t even know what love is.

3. God is holy.

This is a big one. *Holy*. What does it even mean? It simply means that God is unlike any other. He is absolutely unique, morally perfect, and without equal.

And if that wasn’t enough, when the Bible says that God is holy, it often does so three times in a row! “*Holy, holy, holy*” the angels of Revelation say, “*is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.*”²⁵ Just as He defines both goodness and love, God Himself is the definition of holy.

²² Mark 10:18

²³ Romans 3:11


²⁴ 1 John 4:16

²⁵ Revelation 4:8

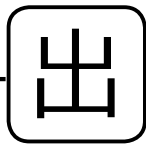
This list of God's attributes could go on and on, describing His power, sovereignty, mystery, grace, justice, etc. But really, He is beyond description. No single language at BICF is adequate to fully describe Him.

Now think about this. Whatever attribute God has, He has it *perfectly*. God is not partly good, or a little bit holy. He is not sort of loving or a little bit great. He is absolutely good, 100% holy, perfectly loving, and beyond great. He is perfect in His attributes, and His attributes are perfect.

This is our God—existing eternally in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit²⁶—all possessing the same amazing attributes and perfections.

 *Dear God, Your goodness is beyond comprehension. Your love defies all logic and reason. You are faithful when I am faithless, and You love me when I am unlovable. Help me to discover Your amazing attributes. Let me stand amazed at Your holiness and celebrate Your limitless perfections. I want to know the love and care of the Father. I want to know the justice and mercy of the Son. I want to know the power and presence of the Holy Spirit working daily in my life. Amen.*

²⁶ We will look further into our beliefs regarding the Son and the Holy Spirit in later chapters.



EXIT B

We are ____.

What word would you put in the blank?

We are amazing?

We are hopeless?

We are alive?

We are dead?

We are good?

We are sinners?

We are _____?

It all depends on who we compare ourselves to.

Think about it this way. When foreigners fresh off the boat (or plane, train, etc.) arrive in Beijing and hear me speak Chinese, they often ask, "So, Paul, are you *fluent*?" After bringing my laughter under control, I usually respond with something like, "Um....there are no fluent foreigners." Because for me, "fluency" implies perfect, native-sounding Chinese, which I know my Chinese is not. Yes, I can get around Beijing without much problem, but I am far from *fluent*. That's just a fact.

You see, the perceived quality of my Chinese ability depends on who I *compare* myself to. I may sound fluent to a fellow expat, but to one of my Chinese friends I sound like just another foreigner "trying" to speak Chinese. Why? Because

only a Native Chinese person can hear when I use the wrong tone, mispronounce a word, or mess up the grammar. (*Which I do incessantly, but thanks to our gracious Chinese hosts, I rarely hear about it!*)

What's the point? It's like this. When we compare our lives with the lives of *others*, we may be fill in the blank like this: "we are amazing." But, when we compare ourselves to the one and only standard-setting God, we have no choice but to say, "we are not."


As offensive as this may seem, the Bible says "*there is no one who does good, not even one.*"²⁷ Now, This is not to say you won't run into a genuinely decent person (I have met a lot of them in Beijing) or that you yourself are not loving or kind. *It just depends on who you're comparing yourself to.* When we compare ourselves to a holy, loving God, we realize how short we fall compared to His perfections. Indeed, compared to Him, "*there is no one who does good, not even one.*"

At this second Exit of **Know God**, we have one Point of Interest I'd like to draw your attention to. It's **what we believe about man**.²⁸ I warn you, you may not like it. You may discover you are not as "fluent" as you think!

So, what do you think? How would you complete this sentence? We are _____?

²⁷ Romans 3:12

²⁸ mankind or humankind

 *Dear God, I'm tired of trying to make myself look good by comparing myself with others. It serves no purpose, and it only frustrates. Just as I have asked for an accurate picture of You, now give me an accurate picture of myself. How can I see You if I won't take off my mask? How can I have relationship with You if I don't give You access to my heart? I'm an open book, Lord. Even if it hurts, I humble myself so that I can know You. Amen.*



Point of Interest

what we believe about man

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. Ephesians 2:1–3

The first doctrine we looked at together described our belief about God. We learned that He is perfect in all of His attributes. However—and I am sure this will not be a surprise to anyone—we are not perfect in ours. Far from it, in fact our doctrinal statement about man²⁹ reads like this:

We believe that man was created in the image and likeness of God, in innocence, and without sin.³⁰ In Adam's sin³¹ humanity fell, inherited a sinful nature³², and became spiritually dead and alienated from God³³. We believe that, within himself, man is incapable of redeeming himself from His lost and depraved condition³⁴.

²⁹ The use of the word “man” in this doctrinal statement refers to a human being of either sex; a person. “Man” is short for “mankind” or “humankind,” and therefore includes all people, both men and women.

³⁰ Genesis 1:26

³³ Romans 3:10-18

³¹ Genesis 3:1-24

³⁴ Ephesians 2:1-3

³² Romans 5:12

That's a mouthful, isn't it? What does it all mean? Let's break it down into four simple phrases:

1. Man was perfect at creation.

God does not make junk. And when He formed Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed His own life into him, man was indeed perfect. Unfortunately, this condition did not last long.

2. Man made a choice to disobey.

As Adam was created in the likeness of God, he therefore had the opportunity to choose. And choose he did, but *wrongly*. God gave Adam and Eve one rule, "*you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*"³⁵ As you might expect, they followed the rule about as well as a Beijing scooter driver follows the traffic laws!

You and I inherited this "sinful nature" from Adam and Eve, similar to how we might inherit our dad's hair color or the shape of our mom's eyes. We now find ourselves doing the wrong thing, even when we want to do what is right.³⁶

3. Man's disobedience means eternal separation.

We cannot live the way we want and not expect a consequence. We sin, and that sin separates us from God.³⁷

³⁵ Genesis 2:16-17

³⁶ Romans 7:18-20


³⁷ Isaiah 59:2

4. Man has no way to fix the situation.

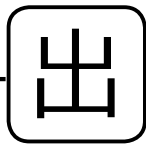
Not that we don't try! We try to do good. We give up bad habits and pick up good ones. We become more "religious." We donate money, and give our seat away on the subway. Yet *none of these things erase the fact that we have sinned.*

I know. This is not good or pleasant news. In fact, you may find it tempting to quickly jump over to the next Exit! Don't do it. Take some time. Ask God to give you a true picture of who you are and your desperate need for Him.

Don't make any excuses, and don't justify any sin. Allow God into every corner of your heart and let Him begin in a new work in your life.

 *Dear God, I confess today that there is nothing good in me. I inherited a sinful nature from my ancient Grandparents, Adam and Eve, and I myself have willfully sinned against You. No one forced me to sin; I made the choices myself.³⁸ I also confess that there is nothing I can do to fix it. Without You, eternity looks hopeless. So, I fix my eyes on You. I need You, and I joyfully anticipate Your solution to the problem of my sin. Amen.*

³⁸ James 1:14



EXIT C

Now What?

Let's review.

God is good.

We are not.

God is love.

We are not.

God is holy.

We are not.

Although we may have been perfect at the dawn of creation, the truth is, now—we are not.

So, Now What? We've fallen so far. We've broken His commandments, willfully sinning against Him. We've behaved shamefully and a huge divide now stands between us and God.³⁹ How can we ever hope to truly know Him?

A friend of mine told me a story of when he was lost in Nanning, a city in the southern province of Guangxi. He'd only been in town for a few days and didn't know a single word of Chinese. Well, he may have known 你好 (nǐ hǎo),⁴⁰ but that's about it. My friend went for an afternoon stroll and soon discovered he could not find his way back to the hotel.

³⁹ Luke 16:26

⁴⁰ the Chinese word for "hello"


This was many years ago, so there were virtually no other foreigners in town, and certainly very few English speakers. So, **Now What?**

My friend needed someone to bridge the gap. He needed someone who understood the city, could relate to a foreigner like himself, and who could speak both Chinese and English. And if he could ever find such a person, he needed that “someone” to be willing to guide him back to his hotel.

To my friend’s surprise, a Chinese man with perfect English walked up to him and asked if he needed help. My friend believes the man was an angel! (Having lived in Nanning myself, I don’t doubt him; there are still very few English speakers there). Regardless of who he was, we both believe God sent this Chinese gentleman to help.

At this third Exit, we have one Point of Interest I’d like to draw your attention to. It’s **what we believe about Jesus**. He is fluent in both the language of God and the language of man, and He has gone to amazing lengths to reconnect us. This is my favorite Exit at Stop 1. I think it will be yours, too.

Before moving on to this Point of Interest, meditate for a few moments on the question, **“Now What?”** In other words, grasp how impossible it is for you to return to God without help, and begin to appreciate the one God has sent to lead us to Him.

 *Dear God, once again, I admit that I am completely lost without You. I am not sure if I should go left or right, backwards or forwards. I need the One You have sent to lead me; I need Jesus. Prepare my heart and mind to receive the full truth of who Jesus is and what He has done for me. I want to know You, and I believe Jesus is the one who makes that possible. Amen.*



Point of Interest

what we believe about Jesus

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. Colossians 2:13–14

There's a gap. A big one. It stands between God and us, and we have no way to cross it without help. Jesus came for that very purpose—to bridge the gap—and I'd love to tell you a little about Him. Our doctrinal statement reads like this:

We believe that Jesus Christ is God.⁴¹ We believe in: His virgin birth;⁴² His sinless life;⁴³ His miracles;⁴⁴ His vicarious and atoning death⁴⁵; His resurrection;⁴⁶ His ascension to the right hand of the Father;⁴⁷ His personal return to earth in power and glory.⁴⁸

Everything in the above statement is amazing. And yes, we really believe it all. But for now, let's just focus on this one

⁴¹ John 10:33

⁴² Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23, Luke 1:34–35

⁴³ Hebrews 4:15, 7:26

⁴⁴ John 2:11

⁴⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:3, Ephesians 1:7, Hebrews 2:9

⁴⁶ John 11:25, 1 Corinthians 15:4

⁴⁷ Mark 16:19

⁴⁸ Acts 1:11, Revelation 19:11–16

phrase, “we believe in.... His vicarious and atoning death.” I am guessing you may have skipped over those words when you read the statement above. We don’t exactly use “vicarious” and “atoning” everyday! Let’s look at what those words mean:

Vicarious?

Once in a while, friends back home will say something like, “we’ll never live in China ourselves, but we do so *vicariously* through your online posts.” Perhaps you have heard the same thing before. It seems we expats experience China for friends and family that cannot; they enjoy this adventure vicariously through us.

Jesus lived the life we couldn’t live, and died the death we should’ve died. When we say we believe in His *vicarious* death, we’re saying that Jesus *died* in our place. He took our place as a perfect substitute. Even though we should die for our sins, Jesus did it for us. His death on the cross was *vicarious*. “*For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.*”⁴⁹

Atoning?

I’m one of the lucky ones. Or maybe I should say *unlucky*. My family has a van that my wife and I take turns driving through the week.

Since the Beijing road system is still foreign to us, and with all the traffic cameras everywhere in the city.... well.... let’s just say we’ve accumulated more than a few traffic violations. I’d love it if these fines just disappeared, but they won’t. I’d like to ignore these fines, but I cannot. *I will have to pay each one.*

⁴⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NLT)

Unless....

Someone could pay those fines for me! Wow, wouldn't that be nice? Not likely, however.


To the point, you and I also have a list of violations against us (and I am not talking about the traffic variety). Every lie we've told, every lustful thought, every shameful deed, every act of disobedience—God has seen it all, and each violation must be atoned for. The problem is that we do not have the resources to atone for ourselves. It's utterly and completely out of our reach. Unless....

Someone pays the fines for us.

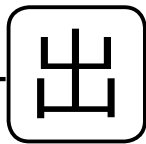
That is precisely what Jesus did. He made atonement for our sins. He paid the price with His own blood, covered our shame, removed the guilt, and made it possible to be in relationship with God. The Bible says, *"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."*⁵⁰

His crucifixion was vicarious, and His death made complete atonement. For your sins. For my sins. All that is left is for us to say is, "yes."

Let's talk about that "yes" at the next Exit.

 *Dear God, thank You for sending Jesus. Thank You for His vicarious death. Thank You for the atonement it provides. I see now that Jesus lived the life I couldn't live, and died the death I should've died. I praise You for making a way for me to be reconciled to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

⁵⁰ 1 John 2:2



EXIT D

Say Yes.

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Luke 18:10–14

This is the Exit we've been looking for. Knowing God begins when we say "yes" to Jesus, and this exit is designed to help you do that. Saying "yes" to Him is as simple as "ABC."

A. Admit you have sinned and ask for God's forgiveness.

When we admit that we have sinned, we're simply agreeing with what the Bible says about us in Romans 3:23, "*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*"

This is why I encouraged you to fill in the blank at Exit B, "we are ____." Saying "yes" to Jesus involves admitting that "We are sinner," that "We are in need" and that "We are helpless without Him."

As you admit your sin, ask for His forgiveness—knowing that when you ask, God forgives. The Bible says, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*⁵¹

Take a moment right now, and in your own words admit your sin and ask for God's forgiveness.

B. Believe in Jesus and become a child of God.

Perhaps the most recognized verse in the Bible is John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* This verse is so well known because it contains everything we need to know about knowing God: Believe.

Believe in Jesus. Believe He died that vicarious, atoning death for you on the cross. Believe He rose again. Believe He is alive today. Believe.

Once we believe, we become God's child. The Bible in John 1:12–13 says, *"Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."*

Take careful note that "B" does not stand for "be better" or "behave." In other words, becoming God's child does not rely on our *effort*. I do not try and improve myself in order to make God love me more. It is not based on what I can do; it is all about Jesus. Once I'm his child, He helps me live a life that is pleasing to Him.

⁵¹ 1 John 1:9

I have heard it said that we do not clean-up to take a shower. We get in the shower to get cleaned up. Similarly, we do not “behave” so we can believe. We believe, and the Spirit of God helps us to “behave.”

Take a moment now to express in your own words your belief in Jesus. As you do so, celebrate the fact that you have become His child.

C. Confess that Jesus is Lord and commit your life to Him.

In Romans 10:9–11, the Bible says, “If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.”

Believing in Jesus is not a private or *partial* thing. I cannot hide my faith in Jesus any more than I can hide that I am a 老外(lǎowài).⁵² Why? Because believing in Jesus has become an all-encompassing fact of who I am.


When I confessed Him as Lord, *I confessed Him as Lord*. That means He is the Boss. He is in control. He is the One who makes decisions. He is the King. There is no way to hide it; it’s a decision that radically changes our life.

The good changes we want to see in our life may not happen immediately or even completely. But, as we confess that He is Lord and commit our lives to Him, we discover that Jesus helps us grow, change, and mature every day.

⁵² the Chinese word for “foreigner”

In your own words, take a moment to confess that Jesus is Lord, and commit your life to Him.

Knowing God begins when you ask Him for forgiveness and new life. Have you done that? If not, I urge you to pray a prayer like this.

 *Dear God, I admit that I am a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe Your Son Jesus died for my sins and rose from the dead. Today, I turn from my sins and invite You into my heart and life. Thank You for accepting me as Your child! I gladly confess that Jesus Christ is Lord of all, and I commit my life to following Him. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*

At this Exit, we'll look at three Points of Interest:

- **What we believe about Salvation**
- **What we do: baptism**
- **What we value: God-Centered Church**



Point of Interest

what we believe about salvation

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8–9

You can't out-give the Chinese.

We've tried. We've given a bowl of fruit to local friends, only to have them respond with a box of tea, an invitation to a meal, and a bigger bowl of fruit. We've given gifts at Christmas, only to have something more costly, more thoughtful, and more extravagant that we could imagine given in return. Not only that, our kids have received 红包 (hóngbāo)⁵³ at Chinese New Year, Moon Cakes at Mid-Autumn Festival, and other gifts throughout the year for no particular reason.

It seems that no matter what my family has done for our local friends, the response to us has always been with gifts and displays of friendship that completely amaze us. We initially tried to keep up, but soon discovered we cannot. It's just one of the many blessings of living in China.

Our friend's generosity has made us appreciate the grace of God more than ever before. No matter what we think we do for God, it doesn't come close to what God has already done for us.


⁵³ a red envelope filled with cash given at Chinese New Year

The gift of salvation through Jesus is a complete gift. We did not earn it. It was not in response to any gift we gave God, and certainly not in anticipation of anything we might be able to give in return.

While it may be true that we can't out-give the Chinese. It's infinitely more true that we can't out-give God. Not even close. Our doctrinal statement about salvation reads like this,

We believe that salvation from the penalty of sin is a gift of God's grace, cannot be gained by any work, and is provided on the single ground of trust in Christ's work on the cross. All who trust Christ in this way are forgiven of their sins and born into God's family by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴

In reality, all we give to God is our faith, and even that is a gift from Him. In response, God saves us from sin and adopts us as His children. How can you beat that? You can't. You simply can't out-give God.

 *Jesus, thank You for loving, forgiving, and saving me. I believe that it is completely by grace that I have been saved, through faith—and even this faith is not from me—it is a gift from You! My salvation is not because of anything I have done, so there is nothing I can brag about. You did it all, and I am so completely grateful. To You be the glory, Amen.*

⁵⁴ John 3:16-19, Romans 3:23, 5:1-9, Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5



Point of Interest

what we do: baptism

Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

Acts 8:35–38

There is nothing like a baptism. It may seem strange to the world—*being dunked into a body of water because of saying “yes” to Jesus*—but to those of us who have experienced the transformation that Jesus’ salvation brings, it is a deeply moving event. What makes baptism so special?

1. Inside outside

Saying “yes” to Jesus makes us a new creation.⁵⁵ Sins are forgiven, hearts are cleansed, and everything is made new. The thing is—we *cannot see this transformation with our physical eyes!* Baptism, however, lets us “see” it; it’s an outward manifestation of an inward reality. As we go under the water, and come back up completely drenched—dirty one second, clean the next—we’re given a beautiful picture of the complete forgiveness and cleansing that we have in Jesus.

2. Resurrection reenacted

You and I did not witness the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We

⁵⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:17

accept it as fact based on the testimony of those who did. In a way, however, baptism lets us see a symbolic reenactment of this history-changing event. As we are “buried” in the waters of baptism, we’re reminded that Jesus’ body was buried in a tomb. As we are brought up from the cool, clear water, we picture Jesus rising from the dead, breaking free from that cold, dark tomb.

3. Future now

Just as Jesus rose from the dead, it is our hope and belief that we will, too. Jesus did not just save us from sin for the here and now; salvation means we’ll spend eternity with Him. So, as we’re dipped under the waters of our baptism and then brought back up again, we’re not just seeing a reenactment of Jesus’ resurrection; we’re given a prophetic picture of our own.


4. Shared experience

When we’re baptized, we’re sharing an experience with countless others. Jesus was baptized, His disciples were baptized, and untold millions of believers over the past two thousand years have also followed Jesus in water baptism. It’s an event that crosses the centuries, and connects us with countless others that have had the same special experience.

What about you? Have you been water baptized? If not, why not? Let the good thing that God has done on the inside show up on the outside. Jesus did it — and commanded it — and it’s an incredible experience that no believer should dare miss out on.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Please see Appendix C for information on how to be baptized and other frequently asked questions about baptism.

If you have been baptized, when is the last time you witnessed someone else be baptized? I find it to be an experience that energizes my faith and reminds me of all that is important in the world: the resurrection of Jesus and the promise of my own resurrection. I believe you'll find it will do the same for you.

 *Jesus, thank You for the gift of water baptism, a rich tradition that countless others have shared throughout the centuries. It may appear strange to the world, but if You were baptized, then I am certainly not above it! This simple act reminds me of so much—Your sacrificial death and resurrection, the forgiveness of my sins, and the promised resurrection of all who believe. Make all of this fresh and real to me again. In Your name I pray, Amen.*



Point of Interest

what we value: God-centered church

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. Deuteronomy 6:5

Have you tried a moon cake yet? If not, just wait, because every Fall during Mid-Autumn Festival you'll see them everywhere. Coffee shops, markets, specialty shops, and roadside stands all carry various flavors and sizes of this interesting treat. Don't worry, they're impossible to miss.

I still remember my first moon cake. It was a bit of a shock. Have you ever taken a drink of water only to find out it was Sprite? It's kind of alarming, right? This was like my first experience with a moon cake.

Maybe I approached it wrong. Because in my mind, all small pastries should be sweet and contain a fair amount of chocolate (the more, the better). This moon cake, however, was a combination of odd spices, chunks of a meat, and chopped nuts, all held together with a chewy jelly-bean like filling. Not exactly sweet, and not exactly "savory," either. It was a not-so-pleasant surprise.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ I discovered later this was a 五仁 (wǔrén) moon cake, or five kernel and roast pork moon cake. And just so you know, I have since acquired a taste for this variety. So, until someone invents a moon cake with a gooey Snickers candybar-like filling, this is my go-to and preferred moon cake.

It didn't have to be a surprise, however. Even though all moon cakes look basically the same (shaped like a full moon), they also have a Chinese character on the top that indicates the flavor of the contents. But, the "label" is only helpful if you read Chinese! At the time, my only option was to take a bite.


When you walked into BICF for the first time, you probably didn't know what you'd find. Your only option was to come and check things out (and we're so glad you did!)

To better define who we are and why we exist, we've created a list of core values. If our doctrines are the *pastry* that holds the moon cake together, then our values are the *filling* that give us our flavor. Let's look at our first core value together:

We are God-centered. *God is our source. We worship Him vibrantly and depend on Him completely. We are rooted in His Word and dependent on His Holy Spirit. Our ministries, services, and events help us develop a closer walk with God, gain a deeper understanding of God, and develop a stronger love for God.*

As an international community of believers, we've learned if anything but God is at the center, it's impossible for us to stick together. It cannot be a certain style, trend, denomination, language, custom, person, Bible version, nationality, government, or age group. Our center must be God. Everything revolves around our love for Him, and our desire to know Him more. This is our core value.

What's at *your* center? I pray you discover the joy of being completely God-centered today.

 Dear God, today I put You at the center. I will never truly know You until all I want is You. Be the center of my life. If my heart is a throne, then Jesus, You are on it. If my heart is a home, then Jesus You have the key to every room. Empower me to love You with all of my heart and with all my soul and with all my strength. Be the One ingredient that intensifies and sweetens the flavor of my life. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.



Point of Interest

what it means: 信 (xìn)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:1,14

One last thing before we leave **Stop 1 • Know God**. Did you know that there is a Chinese character that basically sums up the content of this stop? The character I am talking about is 信 (xìn), which is the word for *faith* or *believe*. 信 is constructed by combining two other characters: 人(rén) and 言(yán), which are the words for *man* and *word*, respectively. So, it's like this:


man(人) + word(言) = faith(信)

This combination of *word* and *man* to create *faith* reminds me of the first chapter of the Gospel of John which says, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God....The Word became flesh (that is, He became a man) and made his dwelling among us."*⁵⁸

Jesus, the *Word*, became a *man*. He lived among us, gave his life on the cross for our sin, and rose from the dead. As we put our *faith* and belief in this truth, we have the freedom to know God, and receive His salvation.

This is the meaning of 信. It reminds us that through faith in the work that Jesus did on the cross, we can truly **Know God**.

⁵⁸ John 1:1,14

 Lord Jesus, I thank You that You, the Word of God, became a man and lived among us. Thank You for all that You taught us, and especially for laying down Your life so we could know God, and receive His gift of Salvation. Prepare my heart, Lord, for what You'd like to teach me during the next stop, **Be Family**. Amen.



Baggage Check

Congratulations! You have visited all the Exits of **Stop 1 • Know God!** Are you ready for **Stop 2 • Be Family?** Answer the five questions below to find out.

1. Have you admitted your sin and asked for God's forgiveness?
2. Have you made the decision to believe in Jesus and become a child of God?
3. Have you confessed that Christ is Lord and committed your life to Him?
4. Have you been baptized?⁵⁹
5. Are you willing to let God be the center of your life?

If you can say “yes” to all five, then we will see you at the **nextstop!**⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Please see Appendix C for information on how to be baptized and other frequently asked questions about baptism.

⁶⁰ Additional resources available at bicf.org/nextstop.



② stop two

BE FAMILY

This stop will help you learn more about BICF — who we are, where we've come from, and how you can join our growing family.

A

Lay the Foundation

B

Build the Framework

C

Join the Fellowship

Someone told him, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.” He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” Matthew 12:47–50

I will never forget the amazing sense of acceptance I felt the first time I heard (and understood) a local mom as she gestured toward me and said to her young son, “给你外国叔叔说你好,”⁶¹ which means, “say hello to your foreign uncle.”

The little boy nervously looked up at me, then said with a timid smile, “你好叔叔”⁶² (Hello, Uncle). Of course, I was shocked that I actually understood a phrase in Chinese.... but I was more surprised by what was said! Uncle. I was being introduced as “family”— *and I didn’t even know them yet!*

Living in China has made me realize two things. First, I completely underestimated how much I would miss and long for my extended family back home. I thought, “I have my wife and kids with me in China, so this should be no problem.” I was wrong. Watching my nephew and nieces grow up through pictures on Facebook is tough. Seeing my parents get older by way of Skype is painful. I knew it would be difficult, but I underestimated *how* difficult.

The second thing I have realized is my need to “adopt” family on this side of the world. I am not talking about replacing

⁶¹ pronounced, “gěi nǐ wàiguó shūshu shuō nǐhǎo”

⁶² pronounced, “nǐhǎo shūshu”

my family back home—*of course not*—but I have learned to make room in my heart for the family God has given me here. A number of kids from various nationalities call me “uncle” now; and I consider my expat friends to be “brothers” and “sisters” as we’ve forged our relationship living life overseas. These relationships are incredibly meaningful to me, and I cannot imagine life without them. They’re family.

Guess what? This is how it’s supposed to be.

From the very beginning, the church was meant to be a place where we can **Be Family**. The ancient King David wrote, “*God sets the lonely in families*”⁶³—not in an institution, program, or training course! No, God sets us in *families*. When we gather as the church, we’re not simply a gathering of colleagues, classmates, and friends, but of aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, mothers and fathers. We’re family. 给我这个老外哥哥打个招呼!⁶⁴ (say “hello” to your foreign brother—me!)

As we visit **Stop 2 • Be Family**, remember this. God sets the lonely in families. He sets the downcast and the confident there, too. The rich and the poor. Men, women, and children. The African, European, American, and Asian—all of those who have come to **Know God**—He gathers together to **Be Family**. How does that happen at BICF? Let’s explore that by visiting all three Exits at **Stop 2 • Be Family**:


⁶³ Psalm 68:6

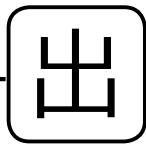
⁶⁴ pronounced, “Gěi nǐ wàiguó dìxiong shuō nǐhǎo. Jiùshì wǒ!”

Exit A • Lay the Foundation

Exit B • Build the Framework

Exit C • Join the Fellowship

 *Dear God, thank You for adopting me into Your family. I am no longer a foreigner or alien, but Your child. Seeing You as my Father is one thing, but viewing Your children as my brothers and sisters is another. Open my heart; I want to be family with those You have redeemed. No matter their nationality, language, or culture—if they're "in Christ," they're family! Help me to love and appreciate them in a new and deeper way. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



EXIT A

Lay the Foundation.

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Acts 8:4

Every Spring Festival, the families of China get together and celebrate the New Year. People travel thousands of kilometers to their 老家 (lǎojiā)⁶⁵ where they reunite with family and friends. Many say it's the largest migration of people the world has ever known.

Because of this amazing family-foundation that many Chinese have, I always feel a little embarrassed when a local asks me if I will be returning to my own 老家 (lǎojiā) for the festival. I have tried explaining that we don't celebrate Chinese New Year where I am from—but I might as well be speaking *Martian*⁶⁶. They simply cannot conceive of not returning home for Spring Festival. It's just what you do. The whole year centers around this one event!

As Christians, you might say we feel the same way about getting together to worship and share the love of Jesus. No matter where we are in the world—it's what we do. Whether it's in a home, an office space, school gymnasium, church,

⁶⁵ literally means, "old home." It's what we would refer to as our "hometown"

⁶⁶ Not a real language that I am aware of, but it would be the language spoken on Mars.

or lecture hall, God has put a desire in His people to gather together and share His love.

So, despite any risk there may be, we actively get together every Sunday as a church family and celebrate Jesus' resurrection. We simply cannot conceive of not doing it; its foundational to who we are.


This is how BICF began—a deep desire for the family to come together and serve God. In 1980, a handful of expats from the USA and England combined their small groups and began meeting on Sunday mornings at the American and British Embassies for corporate worship. God was faithful, and the little “church” of around 20 people grew quickly.

They were soon in need of two things: a larger space, and permission from local authorities. Until these needs were met, however, BICF continued to find a way to meet. Why? It's what we do as a family. We worship Jesus. We do life together. We share the love of Jesus. It's not easy or convenient, but the life we receive from one another in exchange for the effort is completely worthwhile. Sharing our life in Christ is foundational to who we are.

Fourteen years after our first worship service, BICF was given permission to begin holding services in the lower auditorium of the 21st Century Hotel. And by 2002, the Religious Affairs Bureau granted the very first Religious Activities Certificate to BICF—a certificate we have renewed every year since. (So, yes, BICF is completely legal and approved by the local government, something we are extremely grateful for!)

The bottom line is this—BICF was founded on the desire for the family to get together. It's what we did then, and it's what we do today. This desire hasn't faded; it's only become stronger!

This Exit has two points of interest that are foundational to our family—our belief about Church, and our value for unity. Before we move on to those, pause and give thanks for the amazing family God has given us.

 *Jesus, thank You for the call You put on those small groups back in 1980 to come together and start doing church. Thank You for those who negotiated rental contracts, sought approval, granted approval, prayed, fasted, preached, taught, led worship, and gave. You put a dream in their hearts and the faith to pursue it. They saw a future that we get to enjoy. We're so grateful for the foundation they laid, Lord! Please, continue to bless this family. In Your powerful name we pray, Amen.*



Point of Interest

what we believe about church

And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way. Ephesians 1:22–23

There's a big Church in Beijing. It's not us.

Don't get me wrong, we're a part of it—but we're not *it*. This Church is bigger than us. It's older than us. As colorful as we are at BICF, this one is more vivid. It's richer, wider, and more beautiful than we can imagine. Our doctrinal statement describes it like this:

We believe that the church, called in Scripture the Body of Christ⁶⁷, is a spiritual organism and that every true believer is a member of His Body⁶⁸. We also believe that Scripture affirms the establishment and continuation of local churches⁶⁹, groups of Christian believers called together for worship, instruction, fellowship and service⁷⁰.

Let me highlight two thoughts in that statement that stand out to me:

⁶⁷ Ephesians 1:22-23

⁶⁸ 1 Corinthians 12:13

⁶⁹ Acts 13:1

⁷⁰ Acts 2:42

1. Every believer belongs to the Church


You may have guessed by now that the Church I am talking about is not just in Beijing. In fact, no one city, nation, or generation contains this Church. It's spread through every corner of the globe, and every follower of Jesus throughout history is a part of it. It's a big church. It's an old church.

Think of it, no matter what denominational name may be proudly written over the church door—or how hidden away a house-church might be—any family of Jesus-followers are a part of this greater Church. It's this belief that drew BICF together in the beginning, and a belief that sustains us today.

2. Every place needs the Church

I love the Church. I just wish there was more of it! BICF began when two home groups merged together for Sunday worship in the 1980's, but it didn't replace those groups. It was never intended to. In fact, we feel there should be more of them! Wouldn't it be great if some of our current small groups later became fully functioning churches, proactively reaching corners of this city we haven't touched? Why not? That is how we began; there is no reason to stop now.

There's a big Church in Beijing, and it's not us. But, we're deeply honored to be a part of it.

 *Lord Jesus, thank You for the Church, and thank You that I am a part of it. May Your Church in Beijing expand in every way, reaching people of every language, socio-economic status, and nationality. In Your powerful name we pray, Amen.*



Point of Interest

what we value: unity

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:3–6

Unity takes effort.

From the time we were kids, we've been told to get along with our friends. Don't fight. Share. Say "sorry." Be nice. However, we kids were smart enough to realize that even adults have a hard time getting along and staying in unity! Why?

Unity takes effort.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in ancient Ephesus and told them to, *"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit."*⁷¹ In other words, work at it. Devote yourself to it. Plan for it. Pray for it. Fast for it. Do it.

Regardless of the effort it takes, unity has been a core value of BICF from the very beginning—most likely because we had no other choice! Think about it; the first expats of BICF were from various nations. They were small in number. They were limited by local rules and regulations. Their preferences in worship and preaching styles, Bible translation, and church governance all

⁷¹ Ephesians 4:3

varied. But, to get something done, they had to work together. They had to be in unity. They just had to do it.

However, somewhere along the line (and quite early, I believe) we developed a liking for it. Unity just felt right. It felt like... it should be this way. After all, if we really are one body, with one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all...then maybe we should live like it's true. What would that look like? Our statement of core values describes it this way:

We are in Unity. *We are a beautiful mixture of cultures and denominational backgrounds, and Christ has made us one. We joyfully affirm that there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of all.*

The strength that fuels this unity-effort is the simple fact that Christ Himself has made us one. He paid for it. The Father wills it. And the Spirit of God empowers us to walk in it. Therefore, unity does not imply a compromise of the Gospel message. Rather, as we enjoy the love of Jesus, and share the Good News of the Gospel, unity seems to be a natural byproduct.

So, unity takes effort, but it's an enjoyable sort of effort.


I have been told that one of the favorite hymns of BICF in its first few years was, "In Christ there is no East or West."⁷² I find it a fitting meditation as we prepare to move on to the next exit of this stop.

⁷² written by William A. Dunkerley, a.k.a, John Oxenham

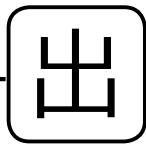
*In Christ there is no East or West,
In Him no South or North⁷³;
But one great fellowship of love
Throughout the whole wide earth.*

*Join hands, then, members of the faith,
Whatever your race may be!
Who serves my Father as His child
Is surely kin to me.*

*In Christ now meet both East and West,
In Him meet North and South;
All Christly souls are one in Him
Throughout the whole wide earth.*

 *Father, I am so grateful to be part of a church that is a beautiful mixture of cultures and denominational backgrounds. I joyfully affirm that there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of all. Jesus, continue to make us one. It's in Your name I pray, Amen.*

⁷³ Luke 13:29, "People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God."



EXIT B

Build the Framework.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. Ephesians 2:19–22

One of the things that struck me upon moving to China was seeing the amount of construction that takes place in this country. New buildings, new subway lines, new roads and new bridges rise up everywhere. I have never seen anything like it. I am also surprised by the type of construction. Nearly everything is built with bricks! Where I'm from, wood is the most common construction element. But in China, it's billions of bricks carefully placed one on top the other. These rectangular "stones" join together to create some of the world's most impressive structures.


I am reminded of how Jesus builds His church. He builds it one person at a time, lovingly placing each of us into the beautiful family-framework that God is building by His Spirit. Peter calls us *"living stones....being built into a spiritual house."*⁷⁴ Paul

⁷⁴ 1 Peter 2:4–5

paints a similar picture when he writes, *“the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.”*⁷⁵

Something new is indeed being built in Beijing, but not just another new building or subway line. God is building His Church. Are you a part of that framework yet? In other words, are you a part of His family—one of the *“living stones”* joining with others *“to become a holy temple in the Lord”*? I pray that you are! And if not, I challenge you to fully engage with your Church Family in Beijing. That is the purpose of this stop.

This Exit has a few points of interest that help **Build the Framework** I am talking about—our core value of life-giving relationships, and the various environments we’ve created for those relationships to take place. Before we look at those, pause and pray that God will help us to be that *“spiritual house”* where *“God lives by His Spirit.”*

 *Father, I can see that You are building something special in Beijing. You are building Your church, and I want to be a part of it! With Jesus as the cornerstone, use me as one of the many life-giving stones You are using to form this beautiful framework — a dwelling place for Your Spirit. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

⁷⁵ Ephesians 2:19–22



Point of Interest

what we value: relationships

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. Ecclesiastes 4:9–12

Relationships are the currency of China.

Maybe that's stating it a bit strongly, but I don't think so. During my time in China, I have witnessed moments where relationship has trumped legal contracts and opened previously closed doors. It has cut through bureaucratic red tape in record-time and made mountains of paperwork magically disappear. I have learned that relationship, expressed as 关系 (guānxi) in Chinese, cannot be overestimated; it is indeed a powerful form of currency.

However, as with any form of currency, relationships can be used and abused. Just like you, I have seen the abuse many times—broken laws, shattered trust, unfair treatment, unmet expectations, and hurt feelings. For some, a relationship simply means, “I'll do something for you, but you had better do something for me in return.”⁷⁶

⁷⁶ This abuse of relationship is true of any culture anywhere in the world, not just China. The root is selfishness, something every person must deal with. See James 4:1–3.

Relationships don't have to be like this.

The picture painted in the verse above talks about mutual edification. It's not me doing something for you—keeping a record of it—and then “cashing in” on that favor sometime in the future. No, it's simply the two of us loving each other enough to serve one another in selfless love. One of us falls down, and the other picks him up. We're cold, defenseless, or at the end of our frayed rope, but together we supply warmth, protection, and mutual strength. It's relationship the way it should be. Our statement of core values says it like this:

We are relationship oriented. *All of us—our families, couples, and individuals—are centered on Jesus and growing together in loving community. We honor one another by forgiving, encouraging, and serving each other in love.*

I would like to think that the currency of BICF is *relationship*—the selfless, putting others before myself, keeping no record of wrongs kind of relationship.

Are we there yet? Probably not.


Are we trying? Yes.

Can we get there? Definitely.

How?

We get there as we officially adopt this new form of currency. We commit to a framework that is NOT nationality-first, denomination-first, or skin-color-first.... but *relationship* first.

It happens as we, *“Love one another with brotherly affection,”* and endeavor to *“outdo one another in showing honor.”*⁷⁷ May God bless us to that end.

 *Father, bless us with an attitude that is truly others-first. It's so easy to put rule before relationship, law before love, and paperwork before people. We need Your heart. We need You to help us grow together in loving community. Empower me, Lord, to honor others, forgive others, encourage others, and serve others in a spirit of love. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

⁷⁷ Romans 12:10 (ESV)



Point of Interest

what we do: BIG group

All the people came together as one in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the teacher of the Law to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel. So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. Nehemiah 8:1–3

Despite my best efforts, I cannot 包饺子(bāo jiǎozi) — I cannot stuff and seal a Chinese dumpling. I have had friends coach and demonstrate—even holding my hand as I try and seal the edge of a dumpling—but I have yet to succeed.

I do, however, know how to 煮饺子(zhǔ jiǎozi). That is, I can boil dumplings once they've been stuffed! The process is simple. Drop the dumplings in boiling water, wait for them to rise to the top of the pot, send them back down with a cup of cold water, wait for them to rise again, repeat the process two more times, then scoop the dumplings into a bowl and eat. Easy!

This may sound a little odd, but boiling dumplings remind me of Sunday morning worship at BICF. Life may douse us with cold water during the week. Things didn't go well at work, school, or home, and we feel discouraged and down. But as Sunday arrives, we lift one another back up as we enjoy God's presence together. Some call it church. Others call it corporate

worship. I have even heard a few call it Mass.⁷⁸ For simplicity, I like to call it our BIG Group.

What does BIG stand for? Well, other than the obvious reason (it's size), the letters of **B.I.G.** remind us of a few of the BIG Group's qualities:

BIBLE-BASED

When God's people returned to their land after years in captivity, one of the first things they did is gather and hear the Word of God. Being starved of Scripture for decades left them empty, and they knew God's Word held the key to a secure and blessed future. They asked Ezra to read and explain the Word of God to them—a practice we feel is equally important today.

INTER-

• **Inter-national**

The Bible says that one day, *"every nation, tribe, people and language,"*⁷⁹ will stand before the Lamb of God and worship Him. At BICF we get to "practice" this Heaven-like worship now!

• **Inter-generational**

Our young people set an example for the believers in love, faith, conduct, and purity⁸⁰; the old declare God's power to the younger generations⁸¹. Just as a pot of cold water is brought to a rapid boil, so the generations inspire one another to a deeper walk of faith as we worship together.

⁷⁸ These names are just random examples.

⁸⁰ 1 Timothy 4:12

⁷⁹ Revelation 7:9

⁸¹ Psalm 71:18

- **Inter-denominational**


Friends from traditional backgrounds worship alongside those from a more charismatic experience—and we love and appreciate them all. It's what makes BICF so special.

GOD-CENTERED

Finally, our Big Group is not just a few songs and a motivational speech. Far from it! It's a time to learn from God's Word, and worship Him for all He is and all He has done.

Aside from these basic qualities of our BIG groups, my favorite aspect are the *moments*. I'm referring to those moments where God speaks personally through a song, sermon, testimony, conversation, or prayer. To me, these are the most meaningful aspects of our BIG groups—those moments where our lives are forever transformed by the Spirit of God.

Before you move on to the next Point of Interest at this Exit, take some time to imagine what it would be like if every one of us approached our moments of corporate worship with an expectant heart—ready and willing to be touched by God. How would that impact your church family? How would that impact you?

 *Father, enlarge my heart for the BIG family You have given me in Beijing — my international, intergenerational, interdenominational family. Increase my expectation of what You can do during our times of corporate worship. I want my heart fully open to all You desire to say through Your Word, with my thoughts completely fixed on You. Begin a revival in my heart; begin a revival in my church family. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



Point of Interest

what we do: small group

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42–47

If the BIG group creates moments where the Spirit of God can speak into my life, then our SMALL groups provide the *mix*:

- A *mix* of food, fellowship, and Bible study.
- A *mix* of faith and action.
- A *mix* of prayer, worship, and purposeful conversation.

The variety of people may not be as great as the BIG group, but the unique atmosphere of a SMALL group provides the right mix for relationships to go deeper with God and one another.

Depending on your background, you might have a certain idea of what a SMALL group is like. At BICF, we have a *mixture* of approaches. The letters of “**S.M.A.L.L.**” might help you remember:

SERMON-BASED

Some of our small groups use the notes from the previous Sunday's sermon. They take a deeper look at the scripture from the weekend message, and discuss creative ways to apply it.

MINISTRY-BASED

Many of our ministries (e.g., ushers, musicians, greeters, ministry leaders, etc.) function very much like a small group. They get together for fellowship, prayer, and ministry-specific training. There is no need to choose between small group or ministry; you have two in one.

ACTIVITY-BASED

Perhaps you are not comfortable sitting at a table discussing a passage of scripture, but you are passionate about a certain hobby, and you love sharing it with others. Why not combine your love for _____ (hiking, camping, coffee, knitting, computer-programming, etc.) with even more purpose? Could you create a small group centered around your favorite pastime, and include a time of prayer and scripture reflection? Why not? Be creative!

LESSON-BASED


We often need God's help to grow in a very specific area—marriage, relationships, finance, cultural adjustment, etc. Whatever the issue, you are not alone. I guarantee there are others dealing with the exact same thing. Many of our small groups focus on a specific topic for a season, or a new group is formed to bring teaching, freedom, and confidence in a particular area.

LIFE STATIONS

Quite often, we have a need to grow with others who are in a similar station of life that we are. To that end, we have several small groups for women, men, singles, and youth.

Perhaps the most important *mix* that a SMALL group provides is the mix that it demands of me (and you!) I cannot attend merely as a participant. A SMALL group, by its very nature, requires that I become fully engaged. I do not just sit back and receive; I give. When the group sees a need, I join together with others to meet it. When a problem needs to be addressed, I am a part of the solution. When a question is asked, I offer my input.

This is the *mix* that a small group requires of all of us, and I believe you will be amazed at how that mix produces amazing growth in your life.

 *Dear God, I need this mix in my life—the mix of relating with others, talking about spiritual issues, sharing a meal, studying scripture, and praying for one another’s needs. Help me connect with my church family at a deeper level. Open my heart to others, and open my schedule to spend more time building these important relationships. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.*



Join the Fellowship.

Perhaps the question I am asked most often in China is 你有会员卡吗?⁸² (Do you have a membership card?) The hair salon, grocery store, restaurant, coffee shop, clinic—nearly every place we spend money in Beijing—all offer a membership card.

Sometimes, a card is worth it—buy nine coffee drinks and get the tenth for free. Other times, I think they're just trying to make me feel special.... *along with the million other people that have the same card!*

As we look at how to **Join the Fellowship**, you need to understand that we're not talking about the kind of membership you might find at a coffee shop. While we do offer BICF *membership* (complete with a membership card), we must be clear that being a member of BICF is nowhere near as important as being in *fellowship* with the body of Christ.

Fellowship with the body of Christ is *free*, and it's not something we can even offer. Only Jesus can. In fact, He paid for it with His own blood! Yet true fellowship also demands a decision and a commitment on your part.

⁸² pronounced, "nǐ yǒu huìyuánkǎ ma"

Koinonia is a Greek word used throughout the New Testament, which is translated as “fellowship” in most English Bibles, but a more accurate translation might be, “*participation fellowship*.”

The word, “participation,” is important because the *Biblical* sense of koinonia is “*the act of sharing in the activities or privileges of an intimate association or group; especially used of marriage and churches.*”⁸³

This sense of koinonia shows up several places throughout the New Testament. Here are a few of them:

- Paul writes to a friend and says, “*I pray that your partnership (koinonia) with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ.*”⁸⁴
- The writer of Hebrews says, “*And do not forget to do good and to share (koinonia) with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*”⁸⁵
- Luke describes the early church in this way, “*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship (koinonia), to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*”⁸⁶
- John says, “*if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship (koinonia) with one another.*”⁸⁷

⁸³ Faithlife Corporation. (2016). Logos Bible Software Bible Sense Lexicon (Version 6.13) [Computer software]. Bellingham, WA: Faithlife Corporation.

⁸⁴ Philemon 6

⁸⁵ Hebrews 13:16

⁸⁶ Acts 2:42

⁸⁷ 1 John 1:7


First, consider a few of the requirements of joining the fellowship (koinonia) that these verses imply:

- partner with others
- do good
- share
- devote yourself (time, resources, energy)
- walk in truth

Just as important, consider the benefits of fellowship:

- pleases God
- gain a deeper understanding of all you have in Jesus
- enjoy deepened friendship with other believers

This Exit has three points of interest that give just a few examples of how we can demonstrate our fellowship with one another: communion, church membership, and the meaning of 爱 (ài)⁸⁸. Keep in mind, however, that these are merely expressions of what should first take place in your own heart. I commit myself to you, and you commit yourself to me; we commit ourselves to one another. As we do, we **Join the Fellowship** and become family.

 *Lord Jesus, I purpose in my heart to embrace and join the fellowship of believers. You paid for my membership; all I need to do is receive. Help me to walk in this truth. May my mind be willing to partner and share with others, and may my heart be willing to devote time, resources, and energy to encouraging and blessing the family You have given me. In Your name I pray, Amen.*

⁸⁸ the Chinese word for “love.”



Point of Interest

what we do: communion

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 1 Corinthians 11:23–26

Where I am from, a man's plate is a man's plate. Whatever food is on that plate belongs to him, and he doesn't have to share it. And if he is a real man, he will personally finish everything on the plate!

With this sort of background, you can imagine my reaction when someone thinks they can sample a piece of my chocolate cake, or "borrow" one of my French fries. *"No way! Those are mine! Get your own!"*

You can also imagine the adjustment I had to make when we moved to China where most of the dishes are served family style. Everyone gets a tiny plate, with all the dishes of food placed in the middle of the table. I found myself thinking, *"which plate of food is mine?"* and *"why is everyone eating from the same dish?!"*

For many reasons, living in China has been good for me; It's relaxed some of my former pet-peeves (like sharing a meal or eating from a common dish) and I have become less selfish regarding my French fries (you may borrow a fry anytime...but you still can't touch my cake).

To be honest, I actually prefer family-style dining now. I really do! If I don't care for one dish—such as the quivering bowl of blood tofu—I can take more of the dish I do like, like 地三鲜 (dìsānxiān)⁸⁹ or 椒盐蘑菇 (jiāoyánmógu)⁹⁰. More importantly, the whole process can be a fun, shared event—the ordering of food, the enjoyment of the dishes, the discussion of “what's good” and “what's not”—helping us remember that life is best when it's a shared fellowship of family and friends.

When Jesus gathered His disciples for one Last Supper before He went to the cross, He didn't approach them one at a time and serve them their own individual meal. Peter didn't get to specify how he wanted his bread baked, and Thomas didn't have a chance to run and grab his own cup.

Jesus broke one piece of bread and shared it.

He took one cup and shared it.

It was a communal event.

It was a family event.

⁸⁹ literally translates as, “Earth's three freshes.” As with most Chinese dishes, this dish will vary by location, but it's generally a dish composed of three deep fried vegetables. It's one of our family's favorites.

⁹⁰ literally translates as, “pepper salt mushrooms.” It's basically breaded, deep-fried mushrooms, and they're wonderful.

When we take communion at BICF, our thoughts are first and foremost directed to Jesus and the price He paid for our sins. It's an act of celebrating and remembering all that He has done for us.

We, therefore, believe in "open" communion at BICF, meaning that all who trust in Jesus are welcome to receive. No special training is needed, and nothing needs to be signed. *"Freely you have received,"* Jesus said, so we *"freely give."*⁹¹


However, we also recognize that communion is an expression of our *fellowship* with one another. When the bread and juice come my way, I take what I need, and pass it on to you. We share the experience, and in doing so, we practice what it means to **Be Family**. As the Apostle Paul says, *"Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf."*⁹²

During our next communion⁹³ service, I encourage you to truly worship Jesus for all He has done. Imagine the scene of His crucifixion. Renew your faith. Repent of sin. Thank Him for His grace and mercy. As you do, take a look around. Notice and appreciate your beautiful Beijing family. And give thanks to God for the amazing fellowship and rich communion we share.

⁹¹ Matthew 10:8

⁹² 1 Corinthians 10:17

⁹³ Generally speaking, we celebrate communion the first Sunday of every month.

 *Lord Jesus, how can I thank You for all You have done? Your body broken so mine can be healed. Your blood shed so my sins can be forgiven! And if that wasn't enough, You went on to give me the communion of this amazing Beijing family. I am so blessed, Lord, and so thankful. I pray that Your grace, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all ⁹⁴, now and evermore. Amen.*

⁹⁴ 2 Corinthians 13:14



Point of Interest

what we do: membership

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. Colossians 3:15–16

I am not sure how it ended up in my possession, but I somehow became the unfortunate owner of a counterfeit ¥100 bill. Chairman Mao was still there with his little smile, but something was just a little bit off. Hoping they could help, I took my fake bill to the bank.

To be honest, I was a little surprised by the process. This was my first experience with a counterfeit, so I assumed I could just turn it in and be done. *Wrong*. The teller wanted a copy of my passport. They also wanted to know where the counterfeit came from (*how should I know?*). But, the part that made me the most nervous — they wanted me to sign a paper acknowledging that I had possessed the fake bill and was now turning it in. Sign my name? *What? Why?*

It's a little scary signing our name, isn't it? Going from that place of a verbal commitment to something more concrete—a spoken promise becoming a written one. The promise is the same whether spoken or written; but seeing it in black and white is a bit sobering.

You can relax. BICF membership is not like that! There will be no interrogations or signed confessions. BICF membership is merely a way to express the fellowship we already enjoy. It's a willingness to take the next step and commit to that fellowship in writing.

It's a little bit like a marriage. When Patty and I said, "I do," before God, family and friends, we were married. Done. Settled. But, because of this marriage covenant, we also had no problem signing a marriage certificate that put our promises on paper—a paper that gives those who witnessed our vows the right to hold us accountable to our marriage covenant.

This is church membership. It's expressing our willingness to be held mutually accountable, and to serve one another—for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health.

BICF membership requires a commitment:

- To Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.
- To seeking Him through a life of faith and to obedience to the teaching of Scripture.
- To the BICF Mission, Vision, Core Values, and Doctrinal Statement.
- To attending congregational meetings as diligently as possible.
- To seeking a knowledge of spiritual gifts and using those gifts as God provides opportunity for service.
- To participation in a small group as family and other priorities permit.
- To relating graciously and lovingly to other members.

- To supporting BICF in prayer.
- To supporting BICF through systematic, proportionate giving as God supplies and directs.


You have likely made these commitments in your *heart* already. If so, and you are ready to take the next step—receiving both support and accountability to keep these commitments—we invite you to consider BICF membership.

Here are the requirements for membership:

- attend Stop 1 and 2 of **nextstop**
- profess faith and be water baptized
- discuss the BICF Mission, Vision, Core Values and Doctrinal Statement with a pastor or ministry leader.
- sign the Fellowship Agreement
- fill out and submit a member information form.

Sign. Fill out. Hmmm. I agree, those can be scary verbs! What am I committing myself to, right? Believe me, I have felt the same way. However, I have discovered that BICF is a family worth being in covenant with.

Membership requires commitment and accountability; this is true. But, there is also the joy and reward of joining a fellowship that is impacting the world. I hope you'll join us.

 *Father, I pray for wisdom concerning membership with my BICF family. I don't want to enter into a covenant lightly; I want my "yes" to be "yes" and my "no" to be "no."⁹⁵ Speak clearly to my heart, Lord. If You lead me to join this fellowship as a member, I pray You'd help me to do it wholeheartedly. And regardless of how You lead me, I pray Your blessing on the Church of Beijing. Let it grow, thrive, and bring many into relationship with You. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

⁹⁵ Matthew 5:37



Point of Interest

what it means: 愛 (ài)

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also. 2 Corinthians 6:11,13

One last thing before we leave this stop. I'd like to introduce you to a Chinese character that sums up the content of this stop: 愛 (ài)⁹⁶, the word for "love."

- In the middle of the character for love is a heart: 心 (xīn)⁹⁷
- Covering the heart is a lid: 冫⁹⁸
- Removing the lid from the heart is a long-finger-nailed hand (the fingernails probably help get the cover off!): 爠⁹⁹
- Below the heart is "pursue": 攵¹⁰⁰

Put together, love resembles a picture of one person willingly opening their heart and pursuing relationship with another. It's a beautiful character and expresses so well the vulnerability and frailty we often feel as we open and share our hearts with another. I think of the apostle Paul when he humbly said to the believers in Corinth, *"we've opened wide our hearts to you—open your hearts to us also."*

⁹⁶ pronounced "ài"

⁹⁷ pronounced "xīn," radical 61, heart

⁹⁸ radical 14, cover, lid

⁹⁹ radical 87, claw, nail, or talon

¹⁰⁰ radical 34, go, pursue

That is what it takes—opening our heart. Having church, being in unity, enjoying relationship, worshipping in community, becoming a member, sharing communion—none of it happens until we open our hearts and pursue one another in Godly love. I open my heart to you, and you open your heart to me.

This is the meaning of 愛 (ài). It's a reminder of what it takes to **Be Family**—lift the lid from our heart, and lovingly pursue relationship.

One of the songs we often sing at BICF is, “Make Us One, Lord.” Meditate on the lyrics as we prepare to move on to the next Exit.

*We've come to celebrate
We've come to sing your praise
We've come to lift your name
make us one Lord, make us one*


*We need a touch of grace
We long to see your face
We want to spread your fame
make us one Lord, make us one*

*We are one in the Father
We are one in the Lord
We are one in the Spirit
Make us one*

*From all nations we've gathered
From the ends of the earth
Make us one Lord, make us one*

*Your Kingdom come
Your will be done
From every nation tribe and tongue*

*Your Kingdom come
Your will be done
Make us one Lord, Make us one ¹⁰¹*

 *This is my desire, Jesus. I want to be one with my BICF Family. I need a touch of Your grace, so I can open my heart and share my life with others. Give me the understanding I need to receive and appreciate others who do the same. You opened Your heart to me, Lord. Now I open my heart to my family. In Your loving name I pray, Amen.*

¹⁰¹ "Make Us One, Lord" by TJ and Jenni Johnson, ©2013



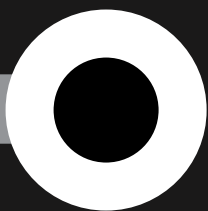
Baggage Check

Congratulations! You have visited all the Exits of **Stop 2 • Be Family!** Are you ready for **Stop 3 • Go Deep?** Answer the five questions below to find out.

1. Are you willing to walk in unity with your Christian brothers and sisters from around the world?
2. Have you made a commitment to worship weekly in one of our BIG groups?
3. Have you joined a SMALL group for weekly fellowship?
4. Have you made a decision regarding BICF membership?
5. Are you willing to open your heart to others as they open their heart to you?

If you can say “yes” to all five, then we will see you at the **nextstop!**¹⁰²

¹⁰² Additional resources available at bicf.org/nextstop.



③ stop three **GO DEEP**

This stop is about deepening your relationship with Jesus—taking root in Him and bearing the fruit He desires.

A

Take Root Below

B

Bear Fruit Above



this year you will eat what grows by itself, and the second year what springs from that. But in the third year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit. Once more a remnant of the kingdom of Judah will take root below and bear fruit above. 2 Kings 19:29–30

A year after my family and I moved to China, there was a terrible construction accident in a Shanghai neighborhood known as Lotus Riverside. A nearly-completed 13-story apartment building fell over on its side—almost completely intact. According to China Daily, the building toppled because, “pillars that were supposed to be buried deep under the earth were uprooted.”¹⁰³

The pillars were “*supposed to be buried deep*”—but they weren’t. How sad! A tragic waste of effort, resources, and life could have been avoided had the contractor simply made plans to **Go Deep**.

Going deep takes intentionality.¹⁰⁴ It takes time.¹⁰⁵ It takes commitment and perseverance.¹⁰⁶ But, the good news is: if we’re willing to pursue depth in our relationship with Jesus, two things will happen. We’ll “*take root below and bear fruit above*.”

¹⁰³ http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-06/29/content_8331218.htm. Anger and tears over collapse of building by Cao Li (China Daily) Updated: 2009-06-29 07:33

¹⁰⁴ Luke 14:28-33

¹⁰⁵ Galatians 6:9

¹⁰⁶ Hebrews 12:1

We have two Exits at this Stop:

Exit A • Take Root Below

Exit B • Bear Fruit Above

These Exit names are inspired by the story of an ancient king, Hezekiah. He and his people were under attack by Senecharib, a king who wanted to remove Hezekiah and his people from their land. Completely surrounded, King Hezekiah knew their only hope was God.

How did Hezekiah know this? His relationship with God ran deep. The Bible says, *"Hezekiah trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel. There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to the LORD and did not stop following him."*¹⁰⁷

Realizing the likelihood that he and his people could lose their land and perhaps their lives, Hezekiah went up to the temple, spread out the latest threatening correspondence from King Senecharib and prayed, *"Now, LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone, LORD, are God."*¹⁰⁸

God heard this prayer coming from the depth of Hezekiah's heart. He saw the anguish of Hezekiah and his people. God


¹⁰⁷ 2 Kings 18:5–6. It's probably no coincidence that *"the LORD was with"* Hezekiah and that Hezekiah, *"was successful in whatever he undertook,"* See 2 Kings 18:7.

¹⁰⁸ 2 Kings 19:19

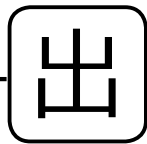
made a promise through His prophet Isaiah—things may not be how they would like for a year or two, but in time, Hezekiah and his kingdom would be more solid than ever. *“This year you will eat what grows by itself, and the second year what springs from that. But in the third year sow and reap, plant vineyards and eat their fruit. Once more a remnant of the kingdom of Judah will take root below and bear fruit above.”*

They would not be moved. They would not be shaken. In fact, they would *“take root below and bear fruit above.”*

Buildings last. Plants bloom. And People thrive when they **Go Deep**. Are you ready for that? Take a moment to let God know now.

 *Jesus, You said that anyone who comes to You and hears Your words and puts them into practice is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.¹⁰⁹ That is the kind of house I want to be, Lord. I want my foundations—my roots—to go deep. As my roots go deep, I know You’ll also enable me to bear fruit. Make it so, Jesus. In Your name I pray, Amen.*

¹⁰⁹ Luke 6:46–48



EXIT A

Take Root Below.

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. Psalm 139:7–10

When I was growing up, I was treated to a unique site. As my dad drove our car along the highway in early fall, I would look out my window to see large, round weeds racing across the plains—sometimes going faster than we were! Yes, you read that right. *We were racing with weeds.*

These special plants are called “tumbleweeds.” Once a tumbleweed reaches maturity, a strong wind comes along, breaks it where the stem meets the root, and it then rolls across the plains, rootless and without direction.

After my initial “honeymoon” experience in China was over—that time in our China-life where all the food seems delicious, every souvenir is a good deal, and every tourist site seems fascinating—reality began to sink in. I began to realize that I wasn’t just *visiting* this place. My family and I *lived* here. A creeping sense that I “didn’t belong,” and that “I had no purpose” began to set in. Honestly, it felt like my roots had been severed. Nothing was familiar. Even though I had been

“somebody” back home, I felt like a “nobody” here. I didn’t speak the language, I was a language student (at the age of 35), and I didn’t even know how to ride a bus! I was a tumbleweed.

The problem was—I *had been rooted in things that can be moved, changed and shaken.*

Our career. Our address. Our family. Our friendships—all of them are susceptible to change. And if we’re rooted in them, we find ourselves rootless the moment they change. What is the answer? Study harder? Become a bigger success? Go “local”? Get more fluent in Chinese? Learn how to use TaoBao?!¹¹⁰

The answer, of course, is to sink our roots into something that cannot be shaken.¹¹¹ Because, if we root ourselves into something unshakable, then we won’t be shaken either.¹¹²

I love the lyrics of one of King David’s songs, *“If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”*

To put it in our own words, we might say something like this, *“No matter where I go, or who I become—you are there, God. If I move to Africa, you are there. If my company downsizes and I am unemployed, you are there. When I move into a new neighborhood, begin studies at a new school, or spend the holidays alone—you are there. You are always there.”*

¹¹⁰ TaoBao is an online shopping platform that has just about everything you can imagine for sale.


¹¹¹ Hebrews 12:27-28

¹¹² Acts 2:25

Jesus is unshakable. Nothing in His kingdom spoils or fades;¹¹³ it's impervious to moths, rust and thieves.¹¹⁴ If we're going to be rooted in something, it has to be Him. He is the only way—that no matter where I go in life, and no matter how often my job title or job description changes—I don't have to be uprooted. Ever. Because no matter where I am or who I am, He stays consistent. My roots just go deeper.

This Exit has four points of interest. Three of them are tools God uses to root you deeply in the faith: the work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Word of God. The fourth is a tool to maintain the momentum of going deeper. It's something we call "the NO group."

Before we move on to these points of interest, take time now to ask God for His help in taking you deeper. He doesn't want you to be a tumbleweed! He wants you to **Take Root Below**.

 *Dear God, I pray that out of Your glorious riches You may strengthen me with power through Your Spirit in my inner being, so that Christ may dwell in my heart through faith. And I pray that, being rooted and established in love, I may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that I may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all I ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within me, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*¹¹⁵

¹¹³ 1 Peter 1:4

¹¹⁴ Matthew 6:19–20

¹¹⁵ this prayer is a personalized paraphrase of Ephesians 3:16–21



Point of Interest

what we believe about the work of Christ

The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.
1 John 3:8–9

The single most important tool God uses to deeply root you in Him is the work of His Son on the cross. The moment you received Jesus as your Lord and Savior, God put His seed in you. And by the power of the Spirit, that seed will take root and flourish in your life.¹¹⁶ Our doctrinal statement says this about the work of Christ:

We believe that God's eternal Son, Jesus Christ, became man,¹¹⁷ without ceasing to be God,¹¹⁸ in order to reveal God¹¹⁹ and redeem sinful man.¹²⁰ We believe Christ voluntarily offered Himself¹²¹ as our sacrificial substitute on the cross,¹²² satisfying God's righteous judgment against sin.¹²³ We believe God's only provision for our sin is Christ's death on our behalf,¹²⁴ through which God reconciles us to Himself.¹²⁵ We believe Jesus is the way and the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except through Jesus.¹²⁶

¹¹⁶ Matthew 13:31-33

¹¹⁷ Matthew 1:23

¹¹⁸ Colossians 2:9

¹¹⁹ John 14:9

¹²⁰ Acts 4:12

¹²¹ Galatians 3:13

¹²² John 10:17-18

¹²³ 2 Corinthians 5:21

¹²⁴ Colossians 2:13-15

¹²⁵ Romans 5:10

¹²⁶ John 14:6

Let's focus on a couple concepts in that statement that I believe will help deepen your awareness of the rootedness you have in Jesus.

1. You are redeemed.

Jesus came to *redeem* sinful man. Sounds great, right? *But what does that mean exactly?*

A simple definition of redeem might be "to buy back." Before you came to Jesus, you didn't belong to yourself; you belonged to the Devil. At the cross, Jesus paid the price and purchased you for His own; He redeemed you, *"that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God."*¹²⁷

Redemption means that whatever claim Satan had on you before, he has it no more. Jesus is your master now, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, you are free to worship and serve the Living God.¹²⁸ You are redeemed!

2. You are no longer condemned.

There is often a disconnect between what we think we believe and what we truly believe. For example, we will *say* we are completely forgiven and have been given a new start in Jesus. When in reality, we subconsciously *believe* there are still a few of our past sins God cannot forgive.

If anyone's sin "shouldn't" have been forgiven, it was the woman *"caught in the act of adultery."*¹²⁹ She'd been sleeping with someone's husband, and the religious experts brought her to Jesus to see how he'd respond.

¹²⁷ Romans 7:4

¹²⁸ Hebrews 9:14

¹²⁹ John 8:4. It should be noted that the man also would have been caught in the act. The religious leaders weren't interested, however, in seeing justice done. They were just looking for an excuse to accuse Jesus of a crime.

The law of God said the woman should be stoned to death.¹³⁰ Yet with one simple phrase—*“let him who has no sin cast the first stone”*—Jesus sent her accusers away. He then asked the woman, *“Where are they? Has no one condemned you?”*

“No one, sir,” she said.

*“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”*¹³¹

How could Jesus do this? How could He ignore the law? Actually, He didn’t ignore the law. Instead of the woman receiving punishment, Jesus offered *His* life on the cross. He voluntarily offered Himself as a substitute, satisfying God’s judgment against her sin.

Jesus didn’t do that just for the woman, of course—He did it for you and me, too. Through faith in Jesus’ substitutionary death on the cross, we too are no longer condemned. Every sin—even the ones you think are too big to forgive—has been forgiven.

3. You are reconciled.

Have you ever noticed that even if you *forgive* someone, you are not necessarily *reconciled*? We can forgive, but it’s hard to forget. The memory of an offense lingers, and our relationship suffers as a result.

God, however, does both. He forgives and reconciles. The Bible says He, *“blots out your transgressions”* and *“remembers your sins no more.”*¹³² In other words, through Jesus, you receive more than mere forgiveness of sin; you are also restored to the


¹³⁰ stoning was a form of capital punishment. People would throw rocks at a person until they died.

¹³¹ John 8:10–11

¹³² Isaiah 43:25

loving relationship God always intended to have with you. You are reconciled!

These are the kinds of seeds we need in our lives—"redemption," "no condemnation," and "reconciliation." Meditate on these today, and let them take deep root in your life.

 *Jesus, by faith today, I believe I am redeemed, no longer condemned, and reconciled to a life-giving relationship with You. You have forgiven every sin and given me a new start. Because of Your great love, I am not consumed, for Your compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.¹³³ In your name, Amen.*

¹³³ latter part of prayer is a paraphrase of Lamentations 3:22–23



Point of Interest

what we believe about the Holy Spirit

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. John 16:7 (ESV)

At the end of our first full summer in Beijing, Patty and I took our kids on a camping trip north of Beijing. As night fell, we had the rare treat of seeing the sky filled with thousands of stars; a sight we seldom enjoy in the city.

We noticed something else that night. We could see a faint glow on the skyline to the south, almost like the sun was about to rise. Well, we knew the sun doesn't rise in the South, so it couldn't be that! We quickly realized the glow was from the lights of Beijing. Despite being over an hour out of the city, the lights still glowed brightly on the horizon. It's hard to hide the lights of 20 million people!

But truthfully, you don't need 20 million people to create a glow. You only need *one*. Take one person that has been filled with the presence and fire of the Holy Spirit, and you have a person that is taking root below and glowing; that glow has the potential to give light to any depth of darkness. Our doctrinal statement says this about the Holy Spirit:

We believe that the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, dwells in every true believer.¹³⁴ We believe that the Holy Spirit seals and dwells in every believer, spiritually uniting them with one another.¹³⁵ We believe the Holy Spirit enables the trusting, obedient believer to live a godly life¹³⁶ and continues to endow believers with gifts for the purpose of building up the body, for the common good, just as He wills.¹³⁷

Putting that statement in simple terms, we could say the Holy Spirit makes us **"G.L.O.W."** He...

GIVES GIFTS

I always find it amazing to witness the huge variety of skills, talents, gifts and abilities that are present in the BICF family. Like the Apostle Paul says, *"To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits....then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues."*¹³⁸

What are these gifts for? They help us mature, build us up, and empower us to take deep root in Him.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ 1 Corinthians 3:16, 2 Corinthians 6:16-17

¹³⁵ Ephesians 1:13, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Romans 8:9, Galatians 3:26-28

¹³⁶ Romans 8:13-14, 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19-20, Ephesians 4:30, 5:18

¹³⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

¹³⁸ 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28

¹³⁹ Ephesians 4:11-16

LIVES INSIDE

Have you ever felt lonely after moving to China? I am sure you have. Surrounded by strangers, a foreign language, and a culture so different than your own—it can make any of us feel lonely. Yet as a follower of Jesus, you are never truly alone. He promised that He *“will not leave you as orphans,”* and that His Spirit would *“be with you forever.”*¹⁴⁰

The next time you feel lonely, keep this in mind: *“you are God’s temple and.... God’s Spirit dwells in you.”*¹⁴¹ Furthermore, *“when you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.”*¹⁴²

That is amazing, isn’t it? The Spirit of God lives inside you! You have a relationship with God that is as close as any relationship can get! That knowledge alone gives a sense of rootedness that can be achieved in no other way.

OPENS HEARTS

How is it possible that people from dozens of nations and denominations can worship together as they do at BICF? I believe it comes from a special unity that only the Spirit of God can give.

Think about it. If I have the Spirit living inside me, and you have the Spirit in you—and other believers in the BICF family have the Spirit in them—how can we not

¹⁴⁰ John 14:18,16

¹⁴¹ 1 Corinthians 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁴² Ephesians 1:13

have unity? We share the same Spirit! As a result, our hearts are naturally open to one another in ways the world can only dream of.

"We were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body," the Bible says, *"and we were all given the one Spirit to drink."*¹⁴³ This oneness—this unity—opens my heart to other believers, bringing strength and depth to my roots.

WALKS ALONGSIDE

China has changed me forever. Foods I wouldn't touch before.... *I now crave.* Riding a city bus used to confuse me.... *now I barely have to think about it.* I am sure you have discovered that living here has positively affected you in one way or another.

Nothing compares, however, to the deep positive change that the Spirit works in our lives. Because, in addition to living on the *inside*, the Spirit of God also walks *alongside*, helping us live the life that God desires.

The Bible teaches us that, *"The Spirit helps us in our weakness,"*¹⁴⁴ and If we walk alongside Him, we *"will not gratify the desires of the flesh."*¹⁴⁵ Those things we craved before, we will not crave anymore! Unhealthy mindsets, bad habits, and destructive ways of relating to others will all be transformed as we, *"keep in step with the Spirit."*¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ 1 Corinthians 12:13


¹⁴⁴ Romans 8:26

¹⁴⁵ Galatians 5:16

¹⁴⁶ Galatians 5:25 (ESV)

How do we **Take Root Below**? By allowing the Spirit of God to give the “GLOW” only He can give! Allow Him to:

*Give you His gifts,
Live inside,
Open your heart to others, and
Walk alongside.*

 *Heavenly Father, I thank You that I do not lack any spiritual gift as I eagerly wait for my Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed! He will help me by keeping me firm to the end, so that I will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁷ I open my heart to the positive GLOW You want to give me by Your spirit, and I allow Him to cause my roots to go deeper in You. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.*

¹⁴⁷ based on 1 Corinthians 1:7–9



Point of Interest

what we believe about Scripture

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever." And this is the word that was preached to you. 1 Peter 1:22–25

One of the upsides of living in Beijing is the constant flow of great deals on gently used furniture. With all the people coming and going, there is always a good deal to be found. In fact, as I write this, I am sitting on a used IKEA chair I purchased from a family leaving Beijing. They sold it at 10% of its original cost, and it still looks brand new. What a deal!

There is only one problem with this chair: the manual is missing! There is a little slot on the bottom of the chair where the manual should be—but it's not there! You are probably thinking, "Why do you need a chair manual? Don't you just sit on it?" How I wish it were that simple! This chair adjusts in at least six different ways, allowing for complete customization of the "sitting experience." There are knobs and levers all over the place!

You might also ask, "IKEA manuals are not overly descriptive, so what's the point?" Believe me. Even a few pictures would help me understand this chair! Thankfully, after pulling and twisting the levers and seeing no visible change, I finally found the manual online. With the help of a few helpful pictures—I now know exactly how to make all the necessary adjustments.

Have you discovered living in Beijing also requires adjustment? (and in more than just six ways!) In fact, living life—no matter where you are at—requires adjustment. It seems that nothing stays the same; the only “constant” is “change.”

How can we make the necessary adjustments? Is there a manual for life? Is there something that doesn’t change—something that functions as an anchor for life? I believe there is. It’s called the Bible.¹⁴⁸ Our doctrinal statement describes our belief concerning the Bible in this way:

*We believe the Bible is the verbally inspired Word of God, without error and infallible in the original manuscripts.*¹⁴⁹

*We believe the Bible is the final authority in faith and life.*¹⁵⁰

In other words, The Bible is the perfect Word of God. It doesn’t change, and it can teach us all we need to know about living a life of faith. It may not have the clever pictures of an IKEA manual, but the word-pictures, stories, explanations, poetry, song lyrics, history, and prophetic imagery more than make up for it.

“People are like grass,” the Scriptures say, “and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” Therefore, if you are going to take root, you need to read, listen, and meditate on the Word of God.¹⁵¹ Nothing else lasts! Nothing else is suitable ground for taking root.


¹⁴⁸ also known as “The Holy Scriptures,” or the “Word of God”

¹⁴⁹ 2 Timothy 3:15-17, 2 Peter 1:20

¹⁵⁰ Psalm 19:7-9

¹⁵¹ Joshua 1:8

Will you do it? Will you commit to spending more time in the Bible than you ever have before? Go for it! It's the only "manual" that can teach you how to make all the adjustments this crazy life demands.

 *Dear God, forgive me for trying to take root in anything but the work of Jesus on the cross, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the unchanging wisdom of the Word of God. Open my eyes and mind to understand the Bible. May it be a book that is fresh, alive and exciting to me once again. I want to take root, Lord, and I believe You will give me the roots I need as I spend time in Your unchanging Word. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*



Point of Interest

what we do: NO group

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.
Mark 1:35

I know it sounds crazy, but there have been days—even high AQI¹⁵² ones—where I have just needed to take a long walk, find a place to sit, take a few deep breaths (yes, without a mask), and just spend a few quiet moments with God. I don't enjoy the pollution, of course, but sometimes I feel the pollution in my heart is greater than the pollution in the air, and my need to quiet myself before God and be renewed by Him is greater than my need for a lower AQI.

Earlier in our **nextstop** journey, we looked at a couple groups that God uses to bring greater growth in our life: The BIG group, where we experience *moments* of Spirit-directed transformation; and the SMALL group, where we experience the needed *mix* of worship and fellowship with other believers.

There is another group that is equally as important as the first two; I call it the NO group. This NO group is just as it sounds; there is no group! It is time set aside to get alone with God and spend time with Him. It is the NO group that gives the *momentum* needed to continually **Take Root Below**.

Only two tools are needed for the N.O. group:

¹⁵² Air Quality Index, a pollution measurement

NOTEBOOK

Have you considered how important it is to God that we write things down? Thousands of years ago, when God gave instructions as to how His people should live, He said to *"Impress them on your children. Talk about them.... Tie them as symbols on your hands and Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."*¹⁵³ Later on, God instructed one of His prophets to, *"Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it."*¹⁵⁴

Writing something down took quite a bit of effort in those days. Have you ever tried inscribing something in stone?! And I am sure Papyrus wasn't the easiest surface to write on either!

Today, however, we have countless methods to record our impressions and prayers as we spend time with God. I use my laptop; Patty prefers her journal. I'm digital; she's analog. I have written simple songs to help document what God is speaking to me, while others may write poems or create works of art. The important thing is to use some form of "notebook," and begin documenting your prayers and God's revelations in the secret place.¹⁵⁵

OPEN BIBLE

Right next to my "notebook" is my Bible. This is the key ingredient to a successful "NO group." If the mindset of

¹⁵³ Deuteronomy 6:7-9

¹⁵⁴ Habakkuk 2:2

¹⁵⁵ Isaiah 45:3; Daniel 2:47; Proverbs 25:2; Amos 3:7,8

Jesus is to be in me,¹⁵⁶ and if the choices I make are to ever be pure,¹⁵⁷ then I need to be aggressively intentional about getting God's thoughts into my head. How will that happen? By daily spending time in His Word.¹⁵⁸

By the way, while I love my smartphone, I am hopelessly old-fashioned when it comes to reading my Bible. I prefer an actual black, white, and red,¹⁵⁹ hard-copy version of the Bible. I call it my DFV, short for "Distraction Free Version." This hard-copy Bible has no pop-up windows, notifications, low battery warnings, or other distractions. It's just the printed page, filled with pen-marks and underlining, reminding me of the various verses God has highlighted to me in the past.

The NO Group is often referred to as a "quiet time," but your NO group doesn't have to be quiet. Turn on worship music, if you like, and loudly sing along.¹⁶⁰ Others refer to the NO group as their "prayer closet,"¹⁶¹ but your NO group doesn't have to be in a closet! It might be a private corner at a coffee shop, a hidden away park bench, or at home in your favorite chair. The name or place doesn't matter; the important thing is to get alone with God, read His word, and spend time talking with Him.

How about you? Has it been a while since you've had a NO group? Don't feel bad. Just start, and keep the following in mind:

¹⁵⁶ Philippians 2:5

¹⁶⁰ Psalm 95:1

¹⁵⁷ Psalm 119:9-11

¹⁶¹ Matthew 6:6

¹⁵⁸ Romans 10:17

¹⁵⁹ the "red" refers to the words of Jesus, which is printed in red in many Bibles. I have also heard that even better than a black, white, and red Bible is a black, white and read Bible!

1. It doesn't have to be super early.

Mornings are great (Jesus liked them¹⁶²), but it doesn't have to be 3am. Rise early enough to give you ample time for your NO group, then begin the rest of your day.

2. It doesn't have to be super long.

We don't impress Jesus by lengthy prayers. In fact, He knows what we need before we ask—so just talk with Him. Once you have brought something to Him, don't repeat it endlessly. There is simply no need for that.¹⁶³

3. It doesn't have to be super.

Honestly, I often have no idea how to pray. All I can do is sigh. Do you ever feel like that? Guess what? Those sighs count!¹⁶⁴ I believe Jesus hears our sighs and groans. He knows our hearts,¹⁶⁵ and receives those sighs as simple prayers. They may not be “super” or “poetic,” but who cares? God hears, and that is all that matters.

The BIG group is important; it provides *moments*.

The SMALL group is important; it provides the *mix*.


The NO group is equally important; it provides *momentum*—momentum that takes your roots and sends them deep into a growing relationship with God.

¹⁶² Mark 1:35

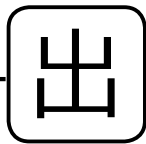
¹⁶³ Matthew 6:7-8

¹⁶⁴ Romans 8:23-27

¹⁶⁵ Romans 8:27

 *Dear Jesus, I believe that no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has conceived what our God has prepared for those who love Him—but You reveal it to us by Your Spirit. Your Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.¹⁶⁶ Help me to develop a deeper, richer, more daily relationship with You, Lord. Cause my heart to be willing to spend quality, momentum-creating time with You. In Your name, I pray. Amen.*

¹⁶⁶ paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 2:9–10



EXIT B

Bear Fruit Above.

"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you."
John 15:15–16

Ever since moving to Beijing, I have had a desire to go camping on an unrestored portion of the Great Wall. So, when I discovered a friend of mine had successfully done it, I quickly recruited him to take me and my boys to the same spot. Another friend joined the group, so nine of us (three men and six boys) went out one Friday afternoon, arriving at the trailhead around 4pm. It was a bit later than we had hoped, but what could possibly go wrong? We had an experienced trail guide!¹⁶⁷

After thirty minutes of hiking the trail, my buddy suggested we turn and hike straight up the mountain toward the wall. He couldn't remember if this was the best spot to ascend, but if we went up, we would eventually hit the wall, right?

¹⁶⁷ The friend I am talking about read the draft of this book, and wanted me to point out that he hadn't been to the spot for over five years!

The sun set soon after our ascent, so we switched on our headlamps and continued battling through the brush as we make our way up the mountain in the dark. We could not wait to set up camp on the wall and have our evening meal!

We did reach the top after another half hour of hiking.... *but there was no Great Wall*. Either the wall had moved (not likely) or we had simply followed the wrong trail. We continued hiking around for a few more hours in the dark—hoping to stumble upon the Wall—but eventually succumbed to our weariness, and camped on the side of the hill for the night.

As I lay in my sleeping bag that evening, I was grateful for a couple things. One, everyone was safe. None of the boys had dropped off the side of the mountain. And two, everyone was happy. We men had wanted an outing with our boys, and that is exactly what we got; I really had nothing to complain about. In fact, the following day my youngest said, *“this is the best camping trip of my entire life!”*

Yet I was still disappointed in the *fruitlessness* of our search. We had set out to have a fun outing with our boys.... but a big part of that “fun” was our plan to camp on the Great Wall. How could we miss such an “easy” objective? *How could we not find the Great Wall?*

Fruitlessness is frustrating, because it’s simply not natural. When we look for something, we expect to find it. When we plant something, we expect it to grow. When we harvest, we expect to find fruit. This is how things work.

You, also, were designed to bear fruit. Jesus didn’t save you

just to save you. Rather, *He “chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.”*

That is the focus of this Exit: **Bear Fruit Above**. You have taken root below through the work of Christ, the indwelling power of the Spirit, and the nourishment of the Word of God. Now it's time to **Bear Fruit Above**—bearing the fruit that God has planned for you.¹⁶⁸

By the way, you cannot force fruit! Have you ever seen an apple tree working up a sweat to produce an apple? No! Fruitfulness is a byproduct of taking root in Christ. Jesus said, *“Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*¹⁶⁹


The Points of Interest at this Exit give a few examples of the fruit we will bear above as we **Go Deep** in our relationship with Jesus:

*God will be first,
The Church will grow, and
You will bear more fruit.*

In case you're wondering, my family and I eventually found the Great Wall! In fact, as I write this, we are resting up from several hours of hiking and spending the night in one of the towers of the Wall. *I can't tell you how good it feels for our search to finally bear fruit!*

¹⁶⁸ Ephesians 2:10

¹⁶⁹ John 15:4–5

 Dear God, I ask You to fill me with the knowledge of Your will and the understanding Your Spirit gives, so that I may live a life worthy of You and please You in every way. Help me to bear fruit in every good work, grow in my knowledge of You, and be strengthened by Your glorious might. Grant me endurance and patience, and may I give joyful thanks to You Father, for You have qualified me to share in the inheritance of Your holy people in the kingdom of light. You have rescued me from the dominion of darkness and brought me into the kingdom of the Son You love, in whom I have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. In Jesus' name, Amen.¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ paraphrase of Colossians 1:9–14



Point of Interest

what we do: give God first

"In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. This is why I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.' And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the LORD brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand." Exodus 13:14–16

From my American point of view, it felt strange to be sitting in our friend's living room, enjoying a meal while our hosts hustled back and forth, ensuring we had everything needed to enjoy the meal. Nothing was missed, and the "service" was better than you'd expect in a restaurant! "We'll eat later, we want you to eat first," was their only response, despite our pleas to have them join us.¹⁷¹

Travel the world, and you'll find it's true in nearly every culture: showing honor is expressed by putting others first. In fact, I have experienced scenarios like the one above in South America, North America, China, Korea, Eastern Europe, and

¹⁷¹ The specific scene I'm thinking of is a time where our whole family was invited to celebrate the birthday of one of my son's friends. This friend's family was from India, and it was their custom to invite the entire family of each of their son's friends, and everyone was fed a huge, delicious meal which they had spent the day preparing.

many other places. It's just the way it is; people around the world express honor by putting others first.

Do you realize God wants to be first, too? He absolutely does, and I believe the single most important fruit to develop as a maturing Christian is the fruit of putting God first.¹⁷² Take a moment to consider three areas where you can put God first:

1. Give God the first of your day.

When we talked about the “NO group” in the last Exit, we saw how Jesus would get up *“very early in the morning, while it was still dark,”* and then He *“left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”*¹⁷³ King David had a similar practice. One of his poems says, *“In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly.”*¹⁷⁴

We all have a ton to do every day. There are emails to read and send, papers to write or correct, homework to do or help with, things to be bought or sold, a house to be cleaned, and meals to be made. An excellent way to express your faith that God will help you get done what needs to get done is to spend the first moments of your day with him.

¹⁷² I feel putting God first is the most important fruit because this mindset creates the framework for all other fruit to grow on. If I can trust God enough to put Him first in everything, then the other fruit He wants to develop in my life will follow naturally. Love, patience, forgiveness, and many other attributes are difficult to develop in a heart that doesn't trust God enough to put Him first.

¹⁷³ Mark 1:35

¹⁷⁴ Psalm 5:3

2. Give God the first of your week.

In the Old Testament, the people of God took a day of rest at the end of every week. God had rested on the seventh day of creation (the Sabbath), and He asked His people to do the same.¹⁷⁵

In the New Testament, however, Christians take a day of rest on the first of the week. Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday (first day of the week), so His people have come together for corporate worship the first of the week ever since (we call it our BIG group).¹⁷⁶

Giving God the first of your week is another expression of faith. In our highly competitive world—with everyone wanting to be first in line at the coffee shop, subway stop, and everything else—it's significant that God's people give the first day of their week to Him.

Besides, isn't it nice to start the week from a place of rest and worship, rather than a place of rush, worry, and stress? Try it; I think you'll like it!

3. Give God the first of your month.

When I say, "give God the first of your month," I am not talking about January 1, February 1, and March 1. Giving God the first of your month is a bit different—and perhaps more faith-stretching—than giving Him the first of your day and week.

For many of us, the "first of the month" is the day we get paid.

¹⁷⁵ Exodus 20:8–11

¹⁷⁶ Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2

Whether it's on the second Tuesday, the last Friday, or the 22nd of every month—the day your paycheck lands in your account can feel like the first day of the month!

Now, here's the million-mao¹⁷⁷ question.... *"what is the first thing you do with your paycheck?"* In other words, "WHO gets first place?" The grocery store? A loan payment? New clothes? A new gadget? Whoever or whatever gets first could arguably be the thing that takes first priority in your life.

Look through the Bible. Anytime God gives His people increase, the appropriate response has always been to give God the first of it.¹⁷⁸ Whether it was the first fruits,¹⁷⁹ the firstborn,¹⁸⁰ or the first city in the Promised Land,¹⁸¹ God's desire has always been that His people would honor him by giving him first.

I personally believe a great starting point for giving God the first of our month is something called the tithe. I define the tithe as *"responding to God with a grateful heart by returning a tenth of my income to Him the moment it is credited to my account."* In other words, the moment God gives Patty and I increase, we endeavor to return at least 10% to the work God is doing

¹⁷⁷ In American English, we might say the "million-dollar question," indicating a very important question. As Chairman Mao appears on the front of Chinese currency, I've adapted this American expression for the local context!

¹⁷⁸ here are a few examples: Exodus 13:11–13; Exodus 23:16–19; Genesis 4:3–4; Hebrews 11:17; Joshua 6:17, 19; Genesis 14:17–20; Genesis 28:20–22


¹⁷⁹ Exodus 23:16

¹⁸⁰ Exodus 13:12

¹⁸¹ Joshua 6:17–19

in Beijing.¹⁸² Tithing is something we have done since the day we were married—and not once have we regretted it. We’ve “tested” God in this habit of the tithe, and have discovered He is faithful to bless and watch over the other 90%.¹⁸³

This is the visible fruit of a disciple that has gone deep and taken root below in the good things God has done. With God’s help, we put Him first in everything—our day, our week, and our month.

 *Lord Jesus, forgive me for not putting You first in every moment, day, week, and month. I don’t want to just “say” You are first—I want to actually “put” You first. Help me to trust You like never before with my time, talents, and finance. Today, I recommit myself to the discipline of putting You first. In Your name I pray, Amen.*

¹⁸² I use the word “return,” because I believe the tithe actually belongs to God, so it’s not mine to give. I am simply returning to God what rightfully belongs to Him. I also say “at least,” because Patty and I enjoy giving an offering in addition to the tithe.

¹⁸³ Malachi 3:10



Point of Interest

what we value: a reproducing church

He also said, “This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. Mark 4:26–28

Before moving to the big city of Beijing, I imagined living in a city this size would rob me of ever seeing green (or blue for that matter). I expected everything to be cement, smog, and glass—without a blade of grass for miles. I have discovered however, that my expectations were a bit off! While Beijing is no tropical paradise, I have been quite surprised at the amount of trees, flowers, and greenery.

In addition to the manicured Beijing parks and greenways, have you also noticed the tufts of grass that grow in the crack of a sidewalk, or the groupings of shrubs near vacated construction sites? How about roses in the median of a ring road—or a tree growing on the Great Wall? How does nature do it? How does beauty grow and reproduce in seemingly adverse conditions?

Basically, when conditions are right, things *grow*.

Jesus said when a man scatters seed, *“the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.”* From our perspective, the growth of a plant is a mystery. We take a seed, throw it in

the soil, add a little rain and sunshine, and “*all by itself the soil produces*” a cucumber! We take another seed, throw it in the ground, add some rain and sunshine, and “*all by itself the soil produces*” a rose bush. Amazing!

Again, when conditions are right, things grow. It doesn't matter if those conditions are on a busy sidewalk, a freeway median, or on top the Great Wall. If the conditions are right, the seed develops into a plant, and reproduces after its own kind.¹⁸⁴ This has been God's design for life since the very beginning, and is His plan for your life, too.

If you are committed to going deep in your relationship with Christ, and you have allowed Him to help you take deep root in Him, guess what is going to happen next? *You are going to bear fruit.* You are going to reproduce after your own kind—and the work God has done in you will naturally spread to others.¹⁸⁵ Because, when conditions are right, things grow. Our statement of core values describes it this way:

We are Reproducing. *We are not a static organization. We are a growing and learning community that equips and empowers each other to use our gifts for God's glory. As we do so, we anticipate a multiplication of Jesus-followers, small groups, and churches.*

Beijing may not be the ideal location for a *church* to grow. There are regulations to deal with, expats moving in and out,


¹⁸⁴ Genesis 1:11

¹⁸⁵ 2 Timothy 2:2

rising rent costs, etc. But have you noticed? The seed of God's Kingdom doesn't seem to mind! It's gone deep, taken root, bearing fruit, and growing anyway.

You might feel that Beijing is not the ideal location for you to grow. Loved ones are far away, your job is not what you'd hoped, the language is difficult, and you cannot find your favorite comfort food. But have you noticed? The seed of God in you doesn't seem to mind. You are going deep, taking root below, bearing fruit above, and growing anyway. Because, when the conditions are *right*—not necessarily “*perfect*,” or “*up to our standards*,” or “*exactly like we want them to be*”—things grow.

BICF is not static, and neither are you. You are growing. God is doing a work in your life as you experience Beijing, and that work will produce fruit in your life that will surprise and delight you. Let it continue. The conditions are right, and you will grow.

 *God, I am amazed that “the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world.” No matter where we go in the world, Your Kingdom is taking root. I also give You thanks that Your work is growing in me, ever since the day I heard and understood Your grace.¹⁸⁶ Spirit of God, I give You unlimited access to my life. May I continually bear the fruit You desire to see in me. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

¹⁸⁶ Colossians 1:6



Point of Interest

what we do: stay accountable

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.... This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. John 15:1–2,8

When my family and I first moved to Xi'an, some local friends wanted to show us the sites. As Xi'an is a city with a long, rich history, I assumed we would visit the Terra Cotta Soldiers, the ancient City Wall, or the Stele Forest. We eventually saw those sites, of course, but our friends were more anxious to show us something most tourists don't see.

So, my family and I packed ourselves into a couple of their cars, and we drove outside the city....to an apple orchard. Nothing ancient—just a field of beautiful apples, ripe for the picking. We later learned that Shaanxi Province (where Xi'an is located) is known for their apples, and our local friends were excited to show off the fruit to their new foreign friends.

This reminds me of an important truth: If we are bearing fruit, we won't mind if it's checked!

In the following Exit, we'll talk about DCAT (Doing Church as a Team). It's our belief that every Christian is a minister—and every minister has a part to play in doing church together well. Before we can DCAT, however, we need to do a fruit check.

Ask yourself, “Am I bearing fruit? Am I willing to let others inspect it?” This is the essence of accountability. It’s a willingness to be honest, to have an occasional difficult conversation, to learn from mistakes, and to grow through it. Believe me, it’s not for the “casual Christian;” It’s only for the believer who wants to **Go Deep**.

How about it? Are you ready to **Take Root Below, Bear Fruit Above**, and **Go Deep**? If so, take a look at the following character guidelines that our BICF staff and volunteers submit to. If these guidelines accurately describe the state of your heart, then you are ready for the following Exit: **Make Impact**.

1. **I am willing to be held accountable** to what God has called me to be—a Christian representing Jesus in thought, word and action.
2. **I am willing to be disciplined and mentored** so that my mind, life and heart will be constantly renewed to be more like Jesus.
3. **I will honor and respect my leadership**, knowing that leadership honors and respects me.
4. **I have read and agree with** the BICF Mission, Vision, Core Values, and Doctrinal Statement and desire to represent BICF well.
5. **I welcome biblical evaluation and will submit to pastoral correction** to insure my continued growth in Christ.
6. **I will keep myself sexually pure**¹⁸⁷ according to God’s Word for the sake of the Kingdom and the ministry God has entrusted to me. I will be wise in all my relationships and avoid all appearances of evil.


¹⁸⁷ Galatians 5:19

7. I understand the acts of the sinful nature¹⁸⁸ and choose God's ways rather than the world's ways. I will not be known for: immorality, idolatry, association with witchcraft, hate, creating discord or schisms, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and things like these.

8. I understand the fruit of the Spirit¹⁸⁹ and as the Holy Spirit enables me, I will do my best to exemplify love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

As you open yourself up to a greater level of accountability, I believe you'll experience even greater fruitfulness. Because accountability has a way of discouraging bad fruit, and encouraging the good fruit you and God want to see.

*Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.... This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."*¹⁹⁰

 *Father, I believe that just as iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.*¹⁹¹ Grant me the willingness to be accountable to others in my BICF family—a willingness to allow sharpening and pruning in my life—because I want to bear even more fruit for You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

¹⁸⁸ Galatians 5:19-21

¹⁸⁹ Galatians 5:22-25

¹⁹⁰ John 15:1-2,8

¹⁹¹ Proverbs 27:17



Point of Interest

what it means: 果 (guǒ)

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field.... 1 Corinthians 3:6–9

There is one more thing I'd like to introduce to you before we leave this stop. It's 果 (guǒ), the Chinese character for "fruit." 果 is an amazing picture of going deep, taking root below and bearing fruit above.

Depending on how you look at it, 果 is a composite of three other characters,¹⁹² 十 (shí), 人 (rén), and 田 (tián), which are *cross*, *man* and *field*, respectively.

Therefore, to produce the character for fruit (果), you need a *man* (人), on a *cross* (十), placed in a *field* (田).

Similarly, in order to produce fruit in you, you need the God-*man*, Jesus (人), on a *cross* (十), placed in God's *field*—you! (田)


¹⁹² Some would rightly suggest that 果 is a combination of two characters, 木 (mù) and 田 (tián), or "tree" and "field." This is also a perfectly logical way to look at 果, as fruit comes from the trees of a field. In this case, however, I prefer to see the bottom half of the character, 木, as a combination of 十 and 人.

At this Stop, we've learned that you cannot **Go Deep** by yourself. Why? because it's "*only God, who makes things grow.*"

He takes us deep by helping us to **Take Root Below**—using the Word of God, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and cross of Jesus as the seeds. These seeds are planted in the soil of our hearts, and amazing transformation begins.

As we **Take Root Below**, we naturally **Bear Fruit Above**. First of all, God gets *first*. Where He may have been forgotten before, we give him first place now. Second, we grow and reproduce. The good work that God has done in our life becomes contagious; sharing it is not a burden, but a joy. Last, we're so grateful and confident in the work God is doing in our life, we don't mind being accountable to others in the faith. We realize this accountability produces even more growth.

"You are God's field." May the seed of all that God wants to do in you **Take Root Below**, and **Bear Fruit Above**.

 *Dear Jesus, so be it! I am Your field, and You have the right to plant whatever You want in it. Develop in me Your gifts, mindset, and passions. May I take root below, and bear fruit above like never before. I declare that I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.¹⁹³ In Your matchless name I pray, Amen.*

¹⁹³ Galatians 2:20

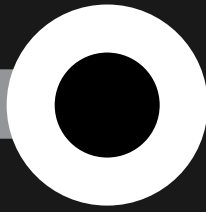
Baggage Check

Congratulations! You have visited all the Exits of **Stop 3 • Go Deep!** Are you ready for **Stop 4 • Make Impact?** Answer the five questions below to find out.

1. Are you reading your Bible on a regular basis?
2. Are you giving God the first of your day (*doing the “NO group”*)?
3. Are you giving God the first of your week (*taking a day of rest and worshipping with the BIG group*)?
4. Are you giving God the first of your Month (*returning to Him the tithe—10% of your income*)?
5. Are you willing to be held accountable to other believers?

If you can say “yes” to all five, then we will see you at the **nextstop!**¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Additional resources available at bicf.org/nextstop.



4 stop four **MAKE IMPACT**

This stop is your launchpad for making positive, eternal impact.

A

Get Motivated

B

Get Moving

Remember your leaders, those who have spoken God's word to you. Think about the impact of their lives, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today—and forever! Hebrews 13:7–8 (ISV)

Jeff, a good friend of mine, has spent much of his adult life in China. He once said to me, *"You're going to spend your life somewhere, why not spend it where you can make a difference?"*

It was a simple comment, and he didn't expound on it much, but it made a deep impression. He is right; we're given just one life to live, and we'll spend it somewhere. We're all given a set of gifts, talents, and experiences—and we'll spend them doing something. *Why not spend what God has given us to make positive, eternal impact?*

Think back upon your own life. What caused you to make the good choices you have made? What led you to take another step in your walk with Jesus? Was it when someone said or did something and it made impact? Quite often, it is.

The author of Hebrews tells us to *"remember our leaders"* and *"think about the impact of their lives."* In other words, think back upon those who have influenced you, led you, challenged you—spoken the Word of God to you. Remember them, and consider the impact they've had on your life.

Why would Hebrews tell us to do this little exercise of recollection? That's easy—it's to help us realize that it's our turn to do the same thing. *"Imitate their faith,"* Hebrews says.

Make impact. Change lives. After all, you are going to spend your life somewhere doing something. *Why not spend it making a difference?*


This final stop encourages us to **Make Impact**. But, “making impact” is not just another idea, class, or stop on your **nextstop** journey. The concept of “making impact” must get *inside*; it has to motivate and move. To that end, we have two Exits at this stop:

Exit A • Get Motivated

Exit B • Get Moving

To get us motivated, we’re going to look at the *mission* that Jesus gave His church over two thousand years ago. To get us *moving*, we’ll take a look at the *vision* we believe Jesus has given us at BICF. It’s our prayer that you’ll join us, and together **Make Impact**.

Before moving on to these Exits, take a moment to remember your leaders—those who have spoken God’s word to you. Think about the impact of their lives, and ask for the Lord’s help in imitating their faith.

 *Jesus Christ, You are the same yesterday and today—and forever! Just as You have used believers throughout the centuries to make incredible impact on our world, I know You can do the same with my life. I offer it to You as a living sacrifice.¹⁹⁵ After all, I am going to spend my life somewhere doing something, I might as well spend it making impact. I need Your strength and courage to do so. In Your powerful, unchanging name, I pray. Amen.*

¹⁹⁵ Romans 12:1



Get Motivated (Our Mission)

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” Matthew 9:35–38

Patty and I had just started Chinese language studies in Xi'an. We would be in class for a few hours, get a lunch break, and then head out to do our homework in the afternoon. For lunch, we would go out with a few classmates and teachers to a local “hole in the wall”¹⁹⁶ cafe and order the same several dishes or noodles that we’d had many times before.

I am not sure if we just wanted to be by ourselves, were feeling adventurous, or just wanted a change in the menu—but the two of us left the crowd one day and went off to find our own place to eat. Somehow, we picked a restaurant with only a text-based menu. Most restaurants in China have big beautiful menus with lots of pictures. All you have to do is

¹⁹⁶ These are the small cafes and restaurants all over China. There’s usually enough seats for 10-15 people, and have some of the best food in the world.

point at the picture, say, 这个 (zhè ge)—the word for “this”—and you’ve ordered your dish. Easy.

This restaurant, however, had no pictures to point at. Their one-page menu had several columns of Chinese characters followed by a price. That’s it. No pictures! So, throwing all caution to the wind, we pointed at three random items, and said, “这个，这个 and 这个.” We had no idea what we were ordering, but figured it would be good. All we had to do was wait and see; it felt like Christmas.

I don’t remember what the other two dishes were, but the plate piled high with cold donkey meat left a lasting impression on us! Being fairly new to China, and having never tried donkey meat before.... we were not exactly thrilled with our choice. It didn’t help that one of our teachers showed up at the restaurant, and asked with a laugh, “*Wow, so you two like donkey meat?!?*”¹⁹⁷

Now I was motivated. I never wanted to sit in a restaurant again and not know how to read a menu. *I had to learn Chinese characters.*

Quite often, the choices we make in life—those things we resolve to do—are based on an experience we’ve had. Sometimes it’s negative. Sometimes it’s positive. Whatever

¹⁹⁷ For the record, I like donkey meat now. There is an expression, 天上龙肉，地下驴肉 (tiānshàng lóng ròu, dìxià lǘ ròu), which literally means, “in Heaven there’s dragon meat, on the earth there’s donkey meat.” I think what they’re trying to say is, “eating donkey meat is about as close to heaven as one can get.” That may be a stretch....but I have to admit that it is pretty good.

the reason, our eyes are opened and our resolve is quickened. Where we were complacent before, we are now motivated; something must be done.

As Jesus went through the various towns and villages of Israel, He directed His disciple's attention to the masses of people—people that resembled sheep without a shepherd—and said, *"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field."*

What was Jesus doing? What was He saying?

He was *motivating* His disciples. Something had to be done. People were hurting and hopeless, and no one seemed to care. **"Get Motivated, guys. Look around! The people are harassed. They're helpless. Do you see them? Pray to the Father! Get a heart for my people! Open your eyes, friends! Open your hearts! If you were complacent before, **Get Motivated** now. Something must be done."**¹⁹⁸

Over two thousand years later, our world is still filled with harassed and helpless people. The harvest hasn't gone away; it's only ripened further. Jesus' invitation to look on the fields and ask the Father for help still stands. Will you accept?

¹⁹⁸ I truly believe Jesus commanded His disciples to pray so that the Father would give them a heart for the people. The moment they began to pray, the Holy Spirit would begin to give a burden. We don't pray to change God's heart on a matter as much as we pray for our heart to be changed. All that to say, I don't believe the only thing Jesus wanted them to do is "pray," although that is very important. Praying was just the first step in getting aligned with Jesus' heart for the people.


You need to know something, however. Jesus may ask you to do more than just look and pray. Looking and praying are vital, of course—seeing with His eyes, and praying what is on His heart opens ours—but, once you have looked and prayed, He may ask you to get involved. In fact, he has *planned* for you to get involved.

Just before He ascended to the Father, Jesus gave His Church a mission. Many call it the Great Commission, and it's a mission BICF takes seriously.

Our Mission: *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:19-20*

At this Exit, we'll take a look at two Points of Interest that I hope will inspire and motivate all of us to accept this great mission: our belief about eternity and our value for the mission.

Before you move on to those, take a moment to look and pray. See the world as God sees it. And pray for more people (including yourself!) to enter His mission and **Make Impact**.

 *Father, this world is full of harassed and helpless people that You created and love. Just as Jesus asked us to, I pray that You would send more workers into Your harvest field. Motivate us, Lord, and give us faith to accept Your mission. I ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.*



Point of Interest

what we believe about eternity

When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. Psalm 73:16–17

I never get tired of going to the Great Wall. To me, it's more than just a tourist attraction or an historic site. It's a chance to take a nature walk, get my fill of fresh air, and see Beijing from a different perspective. Our city can start to “close in” on me during the week, but seeing it from a vantage point like 慕田峪 (mùtiányù)¹⁹⁹ can make it all look beautiful again. A change of vantage point often does that—it *gives a fresh perspective*.

At King David's appointment, a man named Asaph led praise and worship in the sanctuary of God.²⁰⁰ And like King David, Asaph wrote several songs that have been preserved in the Old Testament book of Psalms.²⁰¹ You would think Asaph had a pretty good vantage point. Working in the sanctuary, writing praise music, leading others in worship, spending every day in the presence of God—*what could be better?*

Unfortunately, it seems Asaph wasn't allowing his privileged vantage point to influence his *perspective*. As an example, one

¹⁹⁹ Mùtiányù is one of the more popular stretches of the Great Wall. On a clear day, and from certain vantage points, you can see the Beijing skyline while standing on this portion of the wall.

²⁰⁰ 1 Chronicles 16:4-7

²⁰¹ While there is more than one Asaph in the Bible, it's quite likely that the Asaph mentioned in 1 Chronicles 16:7 is the same Asaph that wrote the Psalms. In total, twelve Psalms are credited to him.

of Asaph's praise songs begins with about twelve verses of whining. Yes, *whining!* "*The wicked,*" he writes, "*have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong.*"²⁰² From his perspective, the wicked are carefree, never get sick, and always make lots of money.²⁰³ He basically says, "What is the deal, God? Why are they blessed and I am not? I feel like serving you is a big waste of my time!"²⁰⁴ Have you ever complained like this? I know I have—usually on a day where the Beijing AQI is over 200!²⁰⁵

Asaph's complaining continued until he allowed his vantage point to influence his perspective. "*It troubled me deeply,*" he wrote, "*till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.*" When Asaph entered the sanctuary—which I am sure he must have done countless times before (it was his job, after all!)—and kept the eyes of his heart open, he began seeing things from an eternal perspective. His vantage point hadn't changed much, but his perspective had.

This brings us to the final portion of our Doctrinal Statement—our belief about the eternal state. Read it slowly, and let it change your perspective:

*We believe that at the moment of death, the souls of all who trust in Christ for salvation immediately enter Christ's presence, awaiting the resurrection of life. We believe that at death the souls of all who do not trust Christ for salvation immediately enter into conscious separation from God, awaiting the resurrection of condemnation, the eternal consequence of unbelief.*²⁰⁶

²⁰² Psalm 73:3-4

²⁰³ Psalm 73:12

²⁰⁴ Psalm 73:13-14


²⁰⁵ Air Quality Index

²⁰⁶ Luke 16:19-26; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians, 1:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; Revelation 20:11-15

Keep in mind: the point of this Stop is to **Make Impact**, and the point of this Exit is to **Get Motivated**. *Can you think of anything more motivating than the realization that those who do not know Jesus—including those in our families, neighborhoods, cities, and nations—will spend an eternity in Hell, forever separated from the love of God?*

This life will not last forever. One day, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. What happens on that day matters. Whatever we complain about now will be meaningless then. The high AQI, waiting in endless lines, slow internet, visa issues—none of that matters. Only eternity does. This is our motivation for impact.

We have an amazing vantage point, don't we? *"God raised us up with Christ,"* the Bible says, *"and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus."*²⁰⁷ Let's allow this vantage point to radically influence our perspective. Let's **Make Impact**.

 *Heavenly Father, I believe that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord.²⁰⁸ I pray that more and more people make that decision on this side of eternity, and not wait for the day when it will be too late. Give Your people strategies and dreams about how to reach this lost world for You. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

²⁰⁷ Ephesians 2:6

²⁰⁸ Philippians 2:10-11



Point of Interest

what we value: the mission

During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. Acts 16:9–10

It was my family's first trip to a nursing home in China. One of the workers reminded us that the elderly of China typically live with their grown children, "Only those who have no family will come here. It is lonely; the people here have no one."

About a dozen teens from the USA joined us on the trip. They came to Beijing to serve God and love people, so my family and I acted as translators—giving the young people a chance to chat with all the grandpas and grandmas at the home.

I was walking around with Cory, a young man with the group of teens. Unbeknown to me at the time, Cory had been dealing with some doubts and cynicism before coming on the trip, "Is God for real? Can He do what the Bible says He can do?"

Cory and I were approached by an elderly gentleman, Mr. Lee, and a nurse that volunteered at the home. As Mr. Lee approached, he asked, "头晕怎么说(tóu yūn zěnme shuō)." He was asking me how to say "dizzy" in English. "What an odd question," I thought. I'd never been asked that before!

As soon as I told him the word, "dizzy," he quickly asked, "你

们吃什么药 (nǐmen chī shénme yào),” which meant, “what medicine do you westerners take for dizziness?” (I would later find out that Mr. Lee had been dizzy for six straight months).

A few of the teens suggested a nap for dizziness relief, which I translated and mentioned to Mr. Lee. I then felt impressed to say, “the best thing for your dizziness, Mr. Lee, is prayer. Will you allow us to ask Jesus to heal you? Can we pray for you?”

I got the impression that Mr. Lee had never even heard of such a thing, but he agreed to let us try. Honestly, I felt awkward praying in my second language, but the Holy Spirit impressed on me that Mr. Lee must hear the prayer in his own tongue. So, I mustered up my best Chinese and said, “头晕你要走, 耶稣请你来 (tóuyūn nǐ yào zǒu, Yēsū qǐng nǐ lái),” which literally means, “dizziness, go. Jesus, please come in.”

The volunteer nurse started getting a little nervous with our interaction, so she found a way to break things up a bit. Mr. Lee was escorted off to visit with other guests, and Cory and I found ourselves gathered with the group in the nursing home’s cafeteria.

Mr. Lee, however wasn’t finished with the interaction yet! Patty saw him coming down the hallway asking people on the left and right, “Where are those people who prayed for me? Where are they? What were those words they prayed?”

The nurse hesitantly brought Mr. Lee over to us and said, “He wants to know the words you used when you prayed. He is not dizzy anymore, and he wants to remember how to get rid of the dizziness if it comes back again.”

I smiled and reassured Mr. Lee that there was no power in how the prayer was worded. The important thing is Who we talked to. “Jesus healed you, Mr. Lee; it doesn’t matter how we said it. We asked Jesus to heal you and He did!” Tears filled Mr. Lee’s eyes—and Cory’s, too. Mr. Lee received a miraculous healing, and both were convinced that God is powerful and real.

I will never forget Mr. Lee’s next question. “Why would God care enough to heal me? I’m nobody and I have no one.”

In response, we shared a simple verse from the Gospel of John, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*²⁰⁹ Then I said to him, “Jesus loves, you, Mr. Lee. That is why he healed you. Do you believe?”

“Of course, I believe!” he replied. “Jesus healed me. What is there not to believe?”


It’s easy to think in general terms when it comes to “making impact” and obeying the “great commission.” At times, the mission seems generic and vague; it can feel like it’s all about spreading the “religion” of Christianity. But, that is not what it is about at all.

The mission is about connecting real people with a real God. It is hearing the Holy Spirit speak to the Church, and the Church rising up in enthusiastic obedience. Our statement of core values describes it this way:

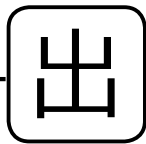
²⁰⁹ John 3:16

We are Mission Focused. *We believe it is the privilege and responsibility of every follower of Jesus Christ to be led by the Holy Spirit in sharing the truth, love, and compassion of Jesus with those in our families, neighborhoods, cities, and nations.*

Are you mission focused? Are you willing to hear His voice as you go about your day today? Are you willing to let Him lead and guide you, directing you to those who need a word from God, or experience His touch? He wants to empower and use you. Allow Him to guide you on His mission every moment of your life.

 *Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.²¹⁰ I am willing to be led by You every moment of my life, Lord. Give me ears that hear and eyes that see. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.*

²¹⁰ Psalm 139:23–24



EXIT B

Get Moving (Our Vision)

So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds. Acts 26:19-20

Many years ago I had a dream. I saw a friend of mine leap from the top of a cliff, hit the ground doing a summersault, dust off his clothes, and continue his walk to work. I ran up to him, shouting, “*how did you do that?!*”

He just smiled and said, “It’s easy! You can do it, too.”

I cannot explain why, but when I woke up and shared the dream with Patty, we both knew that God was leading us to serve Him overseas. Serving God internationally had always been a desire of ours, but we had never felt the Spirit’s release to pursue it. This dream, however, seemed to be His way of saying “yes, go for it.”

Receiving a call from God to serve Him overseas, however, is a bit vague! So, we began asking God to give us clarity. As I was driving through our small town one morning, I said out loud, “*what do you want us to do, God?*” Within a second of asking the question, a voice came on the radio that said,

“what do you think about teaching English in China?”

No, the voice wasn't the audible voice of God! *It was actually a radio ad for a group that brings teachers to China!* But for me, it was confirmation of something Patty and I had already been considering. To make a long story short, we sold most of our possessions and came to China. And for nearly five years, we studied Chinese and taught English.

Assuming we would work at a Chinese university for many years, you can imagine our surprise when God began to put a burden on our heart for the International Church. *We didn't even realize there were international churches in China!* This, too, made sense, however, when we received an invitation to come and serve at BICF.

The point is this: God has given His church—and indeed all believers—a mission to, *“go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”*²¹¹

This mission, however, needs clarity for our particular context. And this is where prayer comes in. We ask God for clarity; His answer is called vision. *A vision is taking the Mission God has given and personalizing it for our context.*

I am grateful for the early leadership of BICF who sought the heart of God for a clear BICF Vision. Here is the answer He gave:


²¹¹ Matthew 28:19-20

Our Vision: *To build a vibrant, reproducing community unified in Christ that embraces and transforms people of all nations to impact their cities, their nations, and the world for Christ.*

This is what we believe God is calling us to; it's the vision of BICF. I have included three Points of Interest at this Exit that will help clarify it further: our belief in Doing Church as a Team (DCAT), our value for being catalytic, and the meaning of the word 望 (wàng).

But, enough about me and BICF! How about you? What is the vision Jesus has given you for living out His mission? The Holy Spirit wants to give you a vision that fits your context perfectly, compliments the vision He has given your BICF family, and fulfills a portion of the Mission He has given the Church.

Spend some time today thinking and praying about the vision God wants to give you for your context. I believe you'll be excited about the clarity He gives.

 *LORD, I know that people's lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps.²¹² Therefore, I need the clarity and direction You alone can give. Forgive me for being fearful of what You might say, God! I know that the vision You have for my life is good. Increase my faith, trust, and willingness to fulfill the vision You have for my life.²¹³ In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

²¹² Jeremiah 10:23

²¹³ Acts 26:19



Point of Interest

what we do: DCAT

For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. 2 Timothy 1:6–7

During my first year in China, I went to a coffee shop for an evening English corner.²¹⁴ On my way to meet with the students, I stopped at the counter to order a drink. The girl at the till asked me, “你想喝咖啡吗,”²¹⁵ “Would you like some coffee?”

While I love coffee, I typically don’t drink it past mid-afternoon, or I cannot sleep. So, I replied, “不, 我要水饺”²¹⁶ which means, “No thanks, I want some dumplings.” Dumplings?! What? At a coffee shop?

Thankfully, the girl understand what I meant to say—“不, 我要睡觉,”²¹⁷ which means, “No thanks, I want to be able to sleep.” The mistake was easy enough to make because “sleep” and “dumpling” sound nearly identical in Mandarin. The only difference is the tones.

²¹⁴ An English Corner is a place to practice English. It’s usually in a relaxed atmosphere like a coffee shop, and is conversation-based. It’s a great setting for a native English speaker to develop a relationship with a non-native English speaker who desires to improve his or her English skills.

²¹⁵ nǐ xiǎng hē kāfēi ma?

²¹⁶ wǒ yào shuǐ jiǎo

²¹⁷ wǒ yào shuì jiào

I have discovered that the most difficult thing about learning Chinese is to simply **Get Moving**—to force myself to talk with people before I fully understand the language. It's a battle! As I first began, I recall saying things to myself like, *"I'll look like a fool; I don't have enough vocabulary; I won't understand them; they won't understand me."*

In reality, these thoughts were probably accurate! Yet, getting "out there" and *failing* is exactly what I needed to do. Because with every failure, I learned a new phrase, speech pattern, or aspect of local culture that I wouldn't have known otherwise.

Perhaps you have discovered the same types of fear keep you from using the gifts God has given you for ministry. Whether its sharing the good news with someone, helping a new believer grow in their Christian walk, serving at BICF on a Sunday morning, or enjoying the fellowship of a small group—we're often plagued by fears. We say things to ourselves like, *"I'm too shy; I can't lead; I'm too busy; I don't know what I'm doing; I'm too old; I'm too young; I'll look like a fool; I won't understand them; They won't understand me."*

The truth is, until we try, we won't *know*.

And until we try, we won't *grow*.


At BICF, we believe in Doing Church as a Team (DCAT). What do we mean by that? Simply that church is not done for us by a superstar staff. Church is done by *us*—together. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we overcome our fears and insecurities. We affirm that God has given each of us gifts, and we willingly use them to serve one another. *"For we are His workmanship,"* Paul wrote, *"created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God*

prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”²¹⁸

Now, here's the most profound thing you'll read all day. Ready? The best way to start.... is to start.

That's right. Just **Get Moving**. Get out there and try! Will you make mistakes? Probably. Will you fail? Perhaps. Is that ok? Absolutely! With “on the job training” and “job-shadowing” many of our ministries provide, you have a safe environment for learning and growing with your DCAT team.

Every week, members of your BICF family give of their time and talent to serve you. Don't you think it's time to join them in serving others? Let's do it; let's DCAT! *Let's Do Church as a Team.*

 *Lord Jesus, I believe that I am Your workmanship, created for good works.²¹⁹ By Your Holy Spirit, help me fan into flame the gifts You have given so I can complete every work You have called me to. I believe that the Spirit You gave me does not make me timid, but gives me power, love and self-discipline.²²⁰ Thank You for my church, God. Give me the courage to “do church” together with them as a team, and grant me clarity to know where I can begin serving. To You be the glory, Amen.*

²¹⁸ Ephesians 2:10

²¹⁹ Ephesians 2:10

²²⁰ paraphrase of 2 Timothy 1:6–7



Point of Interest

what we value: a catalytic church

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:10–11

The Apostle Peter says we are, “stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” As I re-read that recently, the “various forms” part caught my eye. I thought, “wait a minute.... isn’t God’s grace just that—God’s grace? How can you have various forms of it?”²²¹

I’m reminded of green tea. Before coming to China, I thought it only came in a little bag attached to a string that you steep in a cup of hot water for a few minutes and then throw away. How wrong I was! Like God’s grace, green tea has many forms. Besides drinking it (hot or cold, as a smoothie, or with little

²²¹ As we talk about grace in this context, we’re not talking about salvation. We whole-heartedly affirm that salvation is provided on the single ground of trust in Christ’s work on the cross. Jesus is the way, truth, and life. No one comes to the Father but through Him (John 14:7) In the context of 1 Peter 4, the various forms of grace refer to the various gifts that God has given His Church. Peter specifically mentions hospitality, speaking, and serving, which are just a few examples of the various forms of God’s grace.

globes of goo called zhēnzhū)²²², green tea can be eaten! I have encountered green tea ice cream, Oreos, mooncakes, and even chewing gum! That is a lot of forms of green tea!

A better picture of God's grace might be an old coat—like the colorful one that Jacob gave to his son Joseph.²²³ This “coat of many colors” was so beautiful that Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery after taking one look! Did you know that the same word the Bible uses to describe Joseph's coat (*poikilos*) is the same one used to describe God's grace?²²⁴

My thought is this—God's grace made known to His Church through His son Jesus is just as extravagant and varied as the colors in Joseph's coat. So, just as Joseph's brothers saw the coat and longed for the same relationship with their Father that Joseph had—may the various forms of God's grace at BICF create a hunger in Beijing for all people to know Him.²²⁵ That is the essence of another of our core values:

²²² Written as 珍珠, and literally translated as “precious pearls.” They're little round chewy balls made of glutinous rice. You'll sometimes find them in milk tea or similar drinks. My kids have discovered that it's fun to have a little “war” with these round, sticky projectiles by blowing them out the end of their drinking straws at each other.

²²³ Genesis 37:3

²²⁴ The word in the Greek New Testament, and the Septuagint (ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) is ποικίλος (pronounced “poikilos”). Depending on the English translation from the Greek, ποικίλος may be translated as many-colored, various, manifold, etc. Both Joseph's coat and God's grace are described with this same word: ποικίλος.

We are Catalytic. We recognize that BICF is unique. Over the years, God has helped us thrive in our special context, and we happily share our experience with others. The Kingdom of God is bigger than us, and we believe God has called us to network, learn from, and help others accomplish His work in China and around the world.


In other words, we believe we have an amazing portion of God's grace to share. Not everyone gets to say they're an international church from Beijing, China—but, we do! What a privilege! What an honor! What a blessing to wear this multi-colored grace-coat the Father wove from the variety of people, grace, and talent He has brought our way.

But, it's more than that. When we say we're catalytic, we're recognizing that when you arrived in Beijing, you brought a form of God's grace with you. You are a part of this colorful coat! You have joined the rich diversity that makes BICF special, and we believe there is much we can learn from you—and we are thrilled at the chance to do so.

²²⁵ We pray that what God is doing at BICF will attract the attention and imagination of the world, but we also know that just as Joseph's brothers became angry when they saw Joseph's coat, the reaction of the world to the Church is not always positive. If you read the entire context of 1 Peter 4, you'll see that Peter addresses the reality that believers often suffer because they are doing good. He then reminds the Church to not be "*surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.*"¹ 1 Peter 4:12. As we live out the Christian life as God intends, we will most likely draw attention. What that attention looks like (from our perspective) may not always be pleasant. But, if we maintain the right attitude, God will be glorified.

We believe and anticipate that God will lay a dream on your heart while you are in Beijing—a way to make eternal impact in ways we haven't thought of yet. We would love to find a way to empower that dream and partner with you to make it a reality. Pray about it, dream about it, and reach out to a ministry leader or pastor and discuss it with them.

Let's **Get Moving**, friend. Let's be faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. Let's be catalytic.

 *Lord Jesus, I am so grateful to possess various forms of Your grace, and just as grateful to be surrounded by others who are equally blessed. As we band together, the rich tapestry of Your amazing grace is vibrant and beautiful! I pray that BICF (including me) would continue to be catalytic, dreaming of ways to reach this nation. As we do, may we inspire other International Churches here and around the world to do the same. In your name, Amen.*



Point of Interest

what it means: 望 (wàng)

The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Acts 2:20–21

One more thing before we leave this final stop. I'd like to introduce you to a Chinese character that sums up the urgency of making impact. It's the word for *hope*: 望 (wàng).

The character for *hope* is constructed of three other characters: 月, 亡, and 王 (yuè, wáng, wáng), which are the words for *moon*, *death*, and *king*, respectively.

The sermon Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost two thousand years ago comes to mind.²²⁶ In his message, Peter quoted the prophet Joel who wrote, *"The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."*²²⁷

Peter and Joel saw a disturbing, and yet comforting vision of the future. Disturbing, because it predicts the death of our sun and moon.... and nearly everything else. *"The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood,"* the prophecy says. Peter later confirmed it in a letter he wrote to the church, *"the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with*

²²⁶ Acts 2:14–41

²²⁷ Joel 2:31–32

*a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.”*²²⁸

Comforting, because it's linked to the return of King Jesus. As Jesus taught His disciples about the last days, He told them, *“the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.”* *“At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.”*²²⁹

As followers of Jesus, this is our hope: even though our world will one day pass away, King Jesus will return for His Church. This hope of all believers is summed up in 望 (wáng), the character for *hope*:


Even though
the moon (月)
will die (亡),
We still have *hope* (望),
Because the *King* (王) is coming.

That is a great little picture of hope.... but, what does it have to do with making impact? Just this—the hope you and I have is not possessed by all. There are still many who haven't experienced the hope we have in Jesus. Therefore, you and I cannot just *celebrate* hope; we have to *share* it.

²²⁸ 2 Peter 3:10

²²⁹ Mark 13:24–27

The purpose of our Christian walk is not to **Know God, Be Family**, and **Go Deep**—*only*. It's also to **Make Impact** on the world around us. And the best impact we could ever make is sharing the hope of Jesus so that *others* may **Know God, Be Family, Go Deep**, and **Make Impact**.

 *I praise You and I thank You, Jesus! In Your great mercy You have given me new birth into a living hope through Your resurrection from the dead! ²³⁰ And I believe You are coming back soon. The signs of Your return are everywhere. Help me, Jesus, to make a positive and eternal impact on those around me, introducing many to the same hope I have in You. Amen.*

²³⁰ 1 Peter 1:3



Baggage Check

Congratulations! You have visited all the Exits of **Stop 4 • Make Impact!** Are you ready for the next stop God has for you—whatever that may be? Answer the five questions below to find out.

1. Sundays at BICF require the help of literally hundreds of volunteers, which is why we have DCAT. Have you joined DCAT yet? In other words, have you found a way to serve *in* the church?
2. The Holy Spirit wants to give you a vision that fits your context perfectly, compliments the vision He has given your BICF family, and fulfills a portion of the Mission He has given the Church. Have you prayed and asked Jesus to give you clarity regarding the particular vision or call he has for you—especially as it relates to ministry *outside* the church?
3. Are you mission focused—willing to be led by God as you go about your day?
4. Are you praying that God will send more workers into the harvest field who will join Him in reaching people for Jesus?
5. Are you willing to do what you can to help others **Know God, Be Family, Go Deep, and Make Impact?**

If you can say “yes” to all five, then we pray God’s biggest blessings on every **nextstop** he has for you! ²³¹

²³¹ Additional resources available at bicf.org/nextstop.

postscript

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. Philippians 3:10–14

I must admit, the nextstop analogy of metro stops eventually breaks down—as any analogy does. And it does so in a critical way. When I take the Beijing Metro, I get on at one stop, and get off at another. Depending on where I'm going or where I came from, I may not visit those stops ever again. They were a means to an end—to get to my *destination*.

My relationship with God, however, does not work that way. I don't visit **Know God** and never return. Quite the opposite—**Know God** becomes a part of who I am. The same can be said of **Be Family**, **Go Deep**, and **Make Impact**. These stops are not the “visit-once-and-then-never-return” kind of stop. I keep growing in them—growing closer to God and family; going deeper in my relationship with Jesus; consistently making impact.

The **nextstop** analogy is also *incomplete*. Officially, nextstop only has four stops—**Know God**, **Be Family**, **Go Deep**, and

Make Impact. That's because these are the essentials. These are the stops each of us must visit—and visit daily. Consider them your new daily commute. Yet they are not the end of the line. Far from it. There are many more stops after these.

The stops I'm talking about are both geographic and abstract. Chances are, you'll move away from Beijing one day. That is to say, there is quite likely other *geographical* stops in your future—each with its own unique challenges. Just as God has helped you here—he will help you there. You can count on that.

More importantly, however, I guarantee there are additional *abstract* stops in your future—higher levels of faith God will call you to, deeper depths of trust in His promises, and greater confidence in the good things he's planted in you.

As you come to the end of this book, the burning question in your heart must be, "Jesus, what is the **nextstop** You have for me? What is the next thing You are calling me to do? What is the next area You're calling me to live in greater obedience?" The answers to these questions is your **nextstop**, and I have no idea what those stops are! But, God does. And whatever they are, I pray His biggest blessing on your **nextstop**.

Appendix A • our core values

We are God-Centered. God is our source. We worship Him vibrantly and depend on Him completely. We are rooted in His Word and dependent on His Holy Spirit. Our ministries, services, and events help us develop a closer walk with God, gain a deeper understanding of God, and develop a stronger love for God.

We are Relationship-Oriented. All of us—our families, couples, and individuals—are centered on Jesus and growing together in loving community. We honor one another by forgiving, encouraging, and serving each other in love.

We are in Unity. We are a beautiful mixture of cultures and denominational backgrounds, and Christ has made us one. We joyfully affirm that there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one baptism; and one God and Father of all.

We are Mission Focused. We believe it is the privilege and responsibility of every follower of Jesus Christ to be led by the Holy Spirit in sharing the truth, love, and compassion of Jesus with those in our families, neighborhoods, cities, and nations.

We are Reproducing. We are not a static organization. We are a growing and learning community that equips and empowers each other to use our gifts for God's glory. As we do so, we anticipate a multiplication of Jesus-followers, small groups, and churches.

We are Catalytic. We recognize that BICF is unique. Over the years, God has helped us thrive in our special context, and we happily share our experience with others. The Kingdom of God is bigger than us, and we believe God has called us to network, learn from, and help others accomplish His work in China and around the world.

Appendix B • our doctrinal statement

What we believe about...

1. God: We believe there is one God, existing eternally in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and possessing the same attributes and perfections (Genesis 1:1, Deuteronomy 6:4, Matthew 28:19, John 10:30, 2 Corinthians 13:14).

2. Jesus Christ: We believe that Jesus Christ is God (John 10:33). We believe in: His virgin birth (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23, Luke 1:34-35); His sinless life (Hebrews 4:15, 7:26); His miracles (John 2:11); His vicarious and atoning death (1 Corinthians 15:3, Ephesians 1:7, Hebrews 2:9); His resurrection (John 11:25, 1 Corinthians 15:4); His ascension to the right hand of the Father (Mark 16:19); His personal return to earth in power and glory (Acts 1:11, Revelation 19:11-16).

3. The Holy Spirit: We believe that the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, dwells in every true believer (1 Corinthians 3:16, 2 Corinthians 6:16-17). We believe that the Holy Spirit seals and dwells in every believer, spiritually uniting them with one another (Ephesians 1:13, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Romans 8:9, Galatians 3:26-28). We believe the Holy Spirit enables the trusting, obedient believer to live a godly life (Romans 8:13-14, 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19-20, Ephesians 4:30, 5:18) and continues to endow believers with gifts for the purpose of building up the body, for the common good, just as He wills (1 Corinthians 12:4-11).

4. The Scriptures: We believe the Bible is the verbally inspired Word of God, without error and infallible in the original manuscripts. We believe the Bible is the final authority in faith and life (2 Timothy 3:15-17, 2 Peter 1:20, Psalm 19:7-9).

5. The Condition of Man: We believe that man was created in the image and likeness of God, in innocence, and without sin. In Adam's sin humanity fell, inherited a sinful nature, and became spiritually dead and alienated from God. We believe that, within himself, man is incapable of redeeming himself from his lost and depraved condition (Genesis 1:26, 3:1-24, Romans 3:10-18, 5:12, Ephesians 2:1-3).

6. The Work of Christ: We believe that God's eternal Son, Jesus Christ, became man, without ceasing to be God, in order to reveal God and redeem sinful man. We believe Christ voluntarily offered Himself as our sacrificial substitute on the cross, satisfying God's righteous judgment against sin. We believe God's only provision for our sin is Christ's death on our behalf, through which God reconciles us to Himself (Acts 4:12, 2 Corinthians 5:21). We believe Jesus is the way and the truth and the life and no one comes to the Father except through Jesus (John 14:6).

7. Salvation: We believe that salvation from the penalty of sin is a gift of God's grace, cannot be gained by any work, and is provided on the single ground of trust in Christ's work on the cross. All who trust Christ in this way are forgiven of their sins and born into God's family by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit (John 3:16-19, Romans 3:23, 5:1-9, Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5).

8. The Church: We believe that the church, called in Scripture the Body of Christ, is a spiritual organism and that every true believer is a member of His Body. We also believe that Scripture affirms the establishment and continuation of local churches, groups of Christian believers called together for worship, instruction, fellowship and service (Ephesians 1:22-23, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Acts 2:42, 13:1).

9. Eternal State: We believe that at the moment of death, the souls of all who trust in Christ for salvation immediately enter Christ's presence, awaiting the resurrection of life. We believe that at death the souls of all who do not trust Christ for salvation immediately enter into conscious separation from God, awaiting the resurrection of condemnation, the eternal consequence of unbelief (Luke 16:19-26, 2 Corinthians 5:8, Philippians 1:23, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, Revelation 20:11-15).

Appendix C • baptism FAQ

Why should I be baptized?

- follow Jesus' example²³²
- obey Jesus' command²³³
- demonstrate my faith²³⁴

What is the meaning of baptism?

- illustrates Jesus' burial and resurrection²³⁵
- illustrates your new Christian life²³⁶

Why is baptism by immersion preferable?

- only Biblical example we have²³⁷
- "baptize" literally means "to dip under water"
- best picture of a burial and resurrection²³⁸

When should I be baptized?

- after you have believed²³⁹
- as soon as possible²⁴⁰

What are the conditions for Christian baptism?

- repent²⁴¹
- believe²⁴²

²³² Mark 1:9

²³³ Matthew 28:19-20

²³⁴ Acts 18:8

²³⁵ Colossians 2:12

²³⁶ Romans 6:4

²³⁷ Matthew 3:16, Acts 8:38-39

²³⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:17

²³⁹ Acts 8:12

²⁴⁰ Acts 22:16

²⁴¹ Acts 2:38

²⁴² Acts 2:41

What should I wear?

- Loose-fitting shirt with round, high-collar (dark color is best)
- dark pants or shorts

What should I bring?

- dry set of clothing
- towel
- up to 2 friends or relatives (foreign ID holders only)

How should I prepare myself?

- Prepare a brief answer for why you have chosen to be baptized. You may have an opportunity to share it during the baptismal service.
- Pray and ask for God's blessing on the baptismal service, as it provides a great opportunity for others to experience the transformational power of the Spirit of God as they witness your baptism.

I'm ready to be baptized! What is the next step?

- Send an email to pastoral@bicf.org and let us know, or
- Talk to any pastor of BICF

Appendix D • membership FAQ

Can I retain membership at my home church?

Yes! We understand that many of us are in Beijing for a short time, so we have no problem with dual membership. In other words, you can be a member of BICF and your home church simultaneously. Let us know if you need help explaining this special situation to your home church.

Do I still need to bring my foreign ID?

No. As a BICF member, you will be issued a BICF membership card, which can be used as your identification to participate in BICF services.

Do I need to choose just one BICF church or congregation?

Yes and No. While we prefer that you commit yourself to one congregation (in terms of volunteer ministry, tithes, etc.), you are free to participate and serve in any of them you like. Every BICF congregation has its own leadership team and personality, so please take time to visit and find the best fit for you. Just remember, however, that you will connect best with your BICF family when you choose to devote a majority of your time and energy to one of our congregations.

Does BICF membership last a lifetime?

No. Because of the transient nature of our church family, we reset our membership role every two years and ask all current members to renew. (Simply respond to an email or sign your name at our info counter). This process helps us keep track of which members are still in Beijing, and who has moved on.

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About the Author

Paul Durbin has been a follower of Jesus since childhood and a China expat since 2008. He and his wife Patty have been married for 24 years and have four children. Paul serves as one of the pastors and elders of Beijing International Christian Fellowship.



BICF

While there are hundreds of subway stops scattered around Beijing, four stops must take priority.

You won't find these stops on a subway line, of course. You will discover them as you commit to a journey of connecting with God's plan for your life. That is the purpose of this book—to provide daily inspiration for these life-changing stops. Where are you on this journey?

What is your nextstop?

- 
- Know God
 - Be Family
 - Go Deep
 - Make Impact



nextstop