

Why Americans' Perception of the Church in China Is Incredibly Wrong

The Chinese church is growing at tremendous speeds, and China Partner's Erik Burklin is on the front lines to watch it happen. People are coming to Christ, Bibles are being printed by the millions, churches are being built in every province, and pastors are being ordained and starting new congregations all over the country.

So why do some Christians still think they need to smuggle Bibles into the country?

"Overall, I think the misconceptions of China come from the fact that we as Western Christians feel obligated to be the ones to bring them Jesus," Burklin says. True, we have the Great Commission, but it can get perverted when we equate closed countries, higher security, or more persecution with "the Gospel can't get there."

"When we make a statement like that, what we're really saying is 'Well, God can't work in that country since it's closed to us as Christians, and since we're not allowed to go there and give them Bibles, then they can't have the chance to know about Jesus Christ,'" Burklin says.

But God isn't limited by borders, laws, or what His people do.

"It's not up to us, it's up to God," Burklin says. "He picked Abram, not the other way around... "There is no country where God is not already there."

"Even in closed countries today, like in many Muslim countries, we are hearing stories of people coming to faith through dreams and visions where Jesus literally reveals

himself to these people and they believe. There's no missionary there."

That's not to say sharing the grace of the gospel is a thing of the past. "What I'm saying is we need to have another mentality," Burklin clarifies. "Who is actually the missionary? Who is doing the work? It's God himself, and we're part of His mission."

It's about having a missions mindset, not a list of actions. That also means staying informed, which Burklin thinks will clear up a lot of confusion.

"The truth of the matter is, Christianity is not illegal in China. You are allowed to go to church, you are allowed to buy a Bible, you are allowed to read a Bible, you are allowed to share your faith."

True, there are laws that restrict certain traditional methods of missions work, but Burklin says it's rarely a result of an attack on Christianity. Churches are forced to tear down buildings because they didn't follow the proper building procedure, digital Bibles are illegal because of internet censorship and evangelism is restricted to church facilities because no religious groups can attempt to convert people on the street.

One of the most common misconceptions about China's supposed attacks on Christianity is Bible-smuggling. If you see news about someone arrested for smuggling, Burklin says to take a step back before using words like "persecution."

"The reason that person was arrested is not because he was carrying Bibles but because he was carrying them over the border illegal[ly], which is contraband," Burklin says. "They do that with anything you smuggle over the border, not just Bibles."

What's more, "you don't even have to smuggle them anymore

because they're printing them legally inside of Nanjing," Burklin says. "I visit that printing press every year with our teams and they're amazed at what they see."

The church isn't just legal; it's booming.

"In every province that we have visited over the last 30 years of ministry in China, there are more baptisms every year than in most American churches."

It's different and it can be difficult, but God is still at work

So how can you help? Use organizations like China Partner or Bibles for China who are established and know what they're doing to make your ministry as effective as possible. Fund Bibles to be printed in-country or go to China so you can help distribute them. Help China Partner continue leadership training all around the country. Go as an English teacher, because though "we don't need James Bond missionaries" who secretly only care about ministry, living in China presents many opportunities for compassion.

Pray for wisdom for potential missionaries and thank God for the explosive growth of the Chinese Church. {eo}

This article originally appeared on Mission Network News