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'Learning to Slow Down from Students in Ethiopia'

By Tom Smith, ITEM Executive Director.

Most of western culture tends to be more time sensitive than other cultures. We like to start on time, end on time and stick to a schedule in between. We also highly value literacy and learn much by reading.

Ethiopian culture is not western, as Rev. Andy Perry found out on a recent trip there. In May, Andy taught Biblical Leadership in the city of Addis Ababa and at another rural site.

As he taught, Andy found he needed to slow down and go deeper by giving more time for questions and answers. At one point, he made a comment to his translator about how they had fallen behind. The translator replied that the students were really learning.

In Ethiopian culture, they learn by talking things out. While they are literate, they prefer learning by listening and discussing.

Ethiopians do not feel (or apply) cultural pressure to follow a carefully planned schedule. Andy observed that Ethiopians are more event oriented than time oriented.

He found the students eager to learn. They had many questions. Those questions varied based on whether the class was held in an urban or rural area.

Questions about church leadership and polygamy were a popular topic in rural areas, while that was not an issue in the city. The classes in both the city and the country were well attended. In Addis Ababa there were 60 students and in the market town of Bussa for the country training for pastors, there were 64.

One translator told Andy students in the class represented at least 15 evangelical denominations.

Although the intensive module was completed, one translator, a church planter, told Andy he plans to continue on the topic. He will turn the 12 lectures into a 12-week study with some of the student pastors so they can absorb even more of the material as they go deeper.

While the trip was exhausting for Andy, it was quite enriching for him, too, and he wants to return. His church in Wisconsin is excited and wants to send him back next year. There are already plans for an elder and his wife to accompany Andy. The hope is that the elder's wife can do a women's conference alongside a female missionary already in Ethiopia.

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When the Son Falls Short of the Wins of the Father

By Tom Smith, ITEM Executive Director

How do you deal with multi-generational leadership in a church or ministry when the second generation who steps up is not as competent as the founder? What if a son succeeds his father as pastor but is not good enough? These and other questions were posed to Rev. John Owen Butler during Q&A sessions of the ITEM Biblical Leadership module.

The questions came from 200 students spread across more than 17,000 islands of Indonesia.

Because of the 12-hour time difference between South Carolina, where John lives, and Indonesia, class began for John at 8 p.m. and went past midnight.

Working on the Zoom platform, students typed their questions to John. If they wrote in Indonesian, John quickly copied and pasted their questions into Google translate to buy time to formulate answers while the translator explained the last question.

John explained to students that when facing a leader who was not as competent as his father, the first step is to pray. The next is to proceed respectfully to the leader with the concerns, involve other church leaders when possible, and make a biblical appeal to the leader about the concern. If the leader demands something that is unbiblical, then do not do it.

These biblical answers from John to the students were much appreciated because their culture is one that values showing respect to elders and leaders. And it is not unusual for sons to

follow their fathers in ministry, almost like taking over the family business.

The students expressed their gratitude to John for this class as many of them were grappling with these and other sticky issues in their churches, Christian schools, and other ministries.

John explained how important it is to recognize that leaders have different personalities, perspectives, concerns and fears. He taught his students to see the others' point of view and build bridges with them to find solutions.

Prayer Requests

Please pray about these issues.

1. Mark Vander Hart is in Riga teaching Hebrew, post-exilic prophets, and theology at Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary in person and with many online students through June 29.
2. John and Willie Van Schapen will teach, preach and travel through Uganda from late May into early June. John is preaching and teaching Foundations of Education, and Willie will do a women's conference.
3. The ITEM trainers in India continue learning the church planting module online. Trainers in Andhra Pradesh will take a break from teaching in Orissa.
4. Alister Torrens, president of Evangelical Reformed Seminary of Ukraine, continues to distribute aid to colleagues, students and others inside Ukraine as well as some who have become refugees.
5. Jobje Lammers, wife of ITEM Board member Warren Lammers, continues chemotherapy in her battle against pancreatic cancer.
6. Praise God for a great Zoom teaching experience for Randy Steele to 31 leaders in Bolivia in May.

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