



Season 2, Episode 14
'Following Jesus Without Dishonoring Your Parents'
with Jeanette Yep and Greg Jao

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

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SPEAKERS

Maila Kim, Ed Gilbreath, Greg Jao, Jeanette Yep, Donna Barber, David A. DeSilva, Nancy Wang Yuen

Donna Barber 00:02

Hi, I'm Donna Barber, author of *Bread for the Resistance: Forty Devotions for Justice People*. And I'd like to send congratulations to IVP for celebrating its 75th anniversary this year.

David deSilva 00:16

I'm David deSilva, author of *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity, An Introduction to the New Testament*, and *Sacramental Life*. And I'd like to say congratulations to IVP for celebrating its 75th anniversary this year.

Maila Kim 00:33

Welcome to The Every Voice Now Podcast where we bring voices of color into the spotlight. I'm Maila Kim,



Ed Gilbreath 00:39

And I'm Ed Gilbreath. In every episode, you'll hear from authors of color about the making of their books, as well as the challenges they had to overcome along the way.

Maila Kim 00:55

Hello, friends, it's Maila Kim here, and I am excited to share with you about a special conversation you are about to hear. You know, many publishers, both in Christian and secular book publishing are trying to do more to diversify their author list, and it's great to see this kind of energy in the industry. But did you know that InterVarsity Press has been featuring authors of color for decades? Today on the show, we get to hear from two amazing individuals who both have a long history with InterVarsity Press and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Jeanette Yep and Greg Jao. They were both part of the team of Asian American leaders who wrote the book *Following Jesus Without Dishonoring Your Parents*, published in 1998. And even though this book came out more than twenty years ago, it's still having an impact and helping Asian Americans even today with how to balance various parts of their identity as followers of Jesus and as Christians with distinct God-given ethnic identities. Jeanette is currently the pastor of missional partnerships and multicultural ministry of Grace Chapel in Lexington, Massachusetts. And Greg is the executive vice president for communications and mobilization of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. This episode is our first in a series of three bonus conversations in conjunction with InterVarsity Press's 75th anniversary, which we are celebrating all throughout the year. I hope you enjoy this conversation with Jeanette Yep and Greg Jao. We are excited to welcome Jeanette Yep and Greg Jao to The Every Voice Now Podcast today. So thank you guys both for being with us for this episode.

Greg Jao 02:54

Thanks for having us.

Jeanette Yep 02:55

Grateful to be here.



Maila Kim 02:56

We have two giants on this podcast, who is an honor to just be able to host. So I'm excited for this conversation just to hear a little bit about your story, but also the book that we're going to be talking about. One of my favorite questions that we get to on this podcast, and I love that we get to it early, is asking you guys to share about your ethnic identity journey. And so can you share a little bit about your ethnic background?

Greg Jao 03:21

Yeah, my grandparents—all four of them—are immigrants from the Xiamen region of China. And they all emigrated to the Philippines, where my parents were born. And I think part of my ethnic identity journey is that my parents, because they were ethnic Chinese growing up in the Philippines, which has been colonized multiple times—my parents were a unique blessing in that they were able to talk about differences of culture with me as a child. They immigrated here to the United States where I was born. Always aware that I was Chinese, always aware we had some cultural overlay with the Philippines, and always able to distinguish, "How was my Chinese identity different than my American identity?" Because my parents talked about that a lot. And then we joined a Mandarin-speaking church. So then they were saying, "Okay, here's how we're different from this Mandarin-speaking church based on who we are. Some of it's from the Philippines immigration experience, some of that's from where we are in China." So I felt like I always had vocabulary to talk about it. But one of the times that it really hit me was when I started taking Spanish in school, and all of a sudden, I found words in the Spanish vocab section that was like, "Wait, I thought that was Chinese!" Because my parents would use words like "perro," or greet people with "Cómo está?" And I just had never thought about it. But I realized suddenly, there were all these Spanish loan words via Tagalog into my Chinese, and so all of a sudden it became clear, as like 400 years or 500 years of colonialization, how that affected the speech that we had in my family. So I always thought the Chinese word for garbage can was "basura" until I got to about junior high. And realized, oh, this is what immigration does. And then probably the next big step of ethnic identity really was meeting Jeanette, who brought it to a different level and began to say, "Well, this is how it's actually impacting the way that you're behaving interpersonally with people, and this is the way that God might be equipping you with your ethnic identity to be a gift as you engage in his mission." And



so, I think I went from awareness to suddenly actually thinking, "What does this look like redemptively?" As well as I think, really through Jeanette's tutelage, "What are the broken places in my ethnic identity that I need to engage with, confess, repudiate, or repent of?" And so being on the podcast with Jeanette, on this kind of topic, feels very redemptive and not full circle, because there's a lot more to go. But I would count on her as one of the people who really taught me to think that way.

Maila Kim 05:58

Jeanette, let's hear from you about your ethnic identity journey.

Jeanette Yep 06:01

Greg is very gracious. But my family is more the long-term, first kind of generations of Chinese American immigrants to this country. So we're kind of the old-time Chinese from the Guangdong province, the southern part of China. Although my grandfather wasn't of the gold rush era, but it was of that generation of folk, of working class folk who were facing famine and hardship in China. So when Westerners and others said, "Come to America," they called it the Gold Mountain. They were saying, "Yeah, I'll go to the Gold Mountain and I'll go make my money." They came as sojourners, make my money, and they go back to China and retire as wealthy people. My grandpa was part of that. It was the end of the Qing Dynasty. Then he came to Boston. He was one of the first settlers, Chinese settlers, in Boston Chinatown. He came in 1901 and somehow ended up first in Portland, Maine, which is not, even to this day, not a high point in the Asian American pantheon of places to go. And then I think he realized, "Oh, gosh, there's not many people like me." So then he moved further south back into Boston. So, so we're from that kind of working class family background. He had a hand laundry on the back side of Beacon Hill. Beacon Hill is the tony section of Boston, where the Boston Brahmins live. And my dad came when he was ten years old during the American depression to help my grandfather run the hand laundry. Because my dad did that laundry for with my grandpa, he only finished secondary school at night. So my siblings and I are the first generation to get university education. So you know, really, this is us. You know, we were really the early Chinatown family. And I think growing up in Boston in those days, there just were very few Asians, just very few. I mean, I have a very strong memory of getting in the family car going down to Cape Cod, or



something like that. And we would go by another car of Asians. And my mother would say to us in Chinese, "Wave!" And we kids in the backseat, we would go like this, and then we'd say, "Why are we waving?" And my mother would say "You don't know if they're your relative or not." And then, you know, even as a little kid, I thought, "Well, if they're our relative, we would know." But anyway, we would wave because they were just so few Asians. So regardless of what kind of Asian you were, there were some friendly Yeps in the backseat waving at you as you went by. It's really hard to understand now, but in our high school of over 2,000 students, I think there were three of us who were Asian American. And if you know Boston demographics now, that whole community is changed. And it's, you know, it's wildly, largely Asian, or at least a large minority. But in my day, it was Italian and Irish Catholic. And there were three of us. So if my brother and I were sick, you know, it was one-third or two-thirds of the Asian population totally wiped out from Braintree High School that day. So really different time and place. You always felt different, you always just felt different, because there was nobody to identify with, only people that were likely were my relatives and people in church.

Maila Kim 09:12

Thank you guys for sharing. I mean, I love the commonalities between how you guys shared, you know, even though ethnic identity formation is so personal and individual, you started with your families and the country that they're from and the language that you guys speak. And I think it's so interesting how generational ethnic identity formation is. And it makes me wonder, when we, I'm thinking of the third or fourth gen of, you know, Hmong Americans, when they don't speak the language anymore, when their parents are from America. What does it look like for them to have these gold nugget moments of, "Oh, this is who I am because of these things," right? For now, it's where our parents immigrated from and the language that we spoke in the homes. What will it look like for the upcoming generations, and so, I just love how personal this identity formation journey is, but also how communal it can be as well. So thank you guys for sharing that. Well, I know that you guys probably both know, this is an episode of our honoring the IVP 75th anniversary. And so a number of the questions we're going to talk about today, it's going to lean into the past and kind of help our listeners



appreciate the history and the heritage of IVP. And that's probably a nice way of saying,

Jeanette Yep 10:25
I'm old.

Maila Kim 10:26

You guys have come long before. You guys have, you know, the history, the heritage. And so I know you guys both are probably familiar with not only the Westmont headquarters of IVP, but also the previous location in Downers Grove. And so, can you share a little bit about your memories of the Downers Grove office? Are there any stories or moments that you remember from that era?

Jeanette Yep 10:51
You mean before it became a brewery?

Maila Kim 10:54
Exactly.

Jeanette Yep 10:56

One of my former offices is now the place where they store hops. So when I started, they very kindly—I was the local InterVarsity staff person. My housemate Linda was involved with InterVarsity Press. So they very kindly gave me a corner. And I literally had a corner of the downstairs part of the Downers Grove office. I had to bring my own furniture. I had an old door top and, you know, two file drawers, you know, very student-y kind of thing that I had brought with me from my move from Cambridge. And that was my little space. But they were very kind to me, you know, gave me a phone, allowed me to use the Xerox machine. You know, in early days when there was desktop computers, I think I got in on that, was invited to office meetings. So they very graciously cared for me. And then eventually, I think they made a commitment to make sure that a local staff person could always office inside InterVarsity Press, in part to keep connections with what the campus was doing. And I think in part out of sadness for us, who were kind of working from home in a day when it wasn't very cool to work



from home. But I was always grateful for that. I do recall getting a tour of the brewery recently, probably five or six years ago, and I walked around the building, and then I felt this bump on the floor. And I said, "Oh, I remember this." It was just a floor memory. It was just a little— isn't it crazy how you remember stuff?

Maila Kim 12:21

That's so funny. It's still there.

Jeanette Yep 12:22

There was a little rise there they were there might have been a safe or something like that. But when I felt it, I thought, "Oh!" And it just triggered all this.

Maila Kim 12:31

Oh, wow.

Jeanette Yep 12:33

It's funny how places, different memories, you know?

Maila Kim 12:36

Yeah. That's cool. What about you, Greg? You seem like you might have a couple stories.

Greg Jao 12:42

Oh, for those who have never seen pictures, it was an old two-story car dealership. And so picture a pretty narrow two-story building. And I remember the first time I went to IVP. This is probably in the mid 80s. And there's a little bookstore like we have now in the front lobby area, but far fewer books. We hadn't published as many as we do now. But I remember IVP wants to invest in the right thing. So we invest in our authors, we invest in the editorial process. We don't invest in the environment, at least in those years. So I remember duct tape being used to hold the carpet together as you walk from the lobby into the general service area.



Jeanette Yep 13:23

It matched the rug, though—was brown duct tape.

Greg Jao 13:27

Rather than change the carpet, we'll just duct tape it together. Because it used to be an old car dealership, there were two things I loved about it. And the old elevator that they used to move the cars from the second floor to the first floor, so it's an enormous car-width elevator made out of iron. And every now and then, randomly, even though nobody had used it in years, it would shake, and you'd hear a "Thunk!" Right? And that's not bad during the day, because we're all busy. But if you had to work late at night, you'd be by yourself in the office in the dark. And all of a sudden, you'd hear these chains and metal thing rattle. And that's sort of bad, except that the old IVP office was right next door to a cemetery. So if you have a slightly overactive imagination, you're in the dark working in your office in a corner, you hear a "Kakum!", and then the chain rattle and you think, "I'm right next door to a very old cemetery." And so that was a little bit of what it was like to work there. And my second favorite thing about that backroom that I never took advantage of was there was an old blue reclining chair. And that was the place where, if you weren't feeling well, you needed a little bit of a break, you could go and just go to the chair. There's a little blankie, and just rest a little bit. And so when we built the new office, the architects were really wise. They interviewed a lot of people at the Press building and said, "What do you love about this building, and, you know, what will you miss?" And people were like, "Nothing! We're glad to move!" But several people said, "I really miss that—I'm going to miss that blue chair. It was convenient to have a place to get out of the office, rest a little bit." And so as they designed the current office, right, which they, it's beautifully built, a little kind of monastic cloister in the middle to get sunlight because people said they wanted light in the middle of the building. But the architect kept thinking about that blue chair. And so he took what should have been a cleaning closet between the two bathrooms and put a reclining chair in there. And so that became "The Blue Chair Room." If you go to IVP now, I invite you. The chair is no longer blue, it's a much nicer chair than it was before, but it's the massage chair now. But I love the human scale of, when we design a place, let's make sure it serves people, let's make sure that there are places of retreat so that we can be attentive to ourselves, our bodies, and take care of



ourselves in the midst of what would otherwise could just feel like a corporate environment. And so that's one of my favorite stories about IVP.

Maila Kim 15:57

That's really cool. Wow, there's a lot about the old building I never knew. So, love hearing those parts of IVP history. And there's another part of IVP history that we're going to talk about today, which is the book that you guys were both on the writing team of, *Following Jesus Without Dishonoring Your Parents*, which was published in 1998. And so I won't share with you guys how old I was in 1998. But Jeanette, could you share with us what the genesis of this book was? What was happening in the late 1990s in the context of your work on college campuses that made you feel like this was a needed project?

Jeanette Yep 16:38

That's a lot of history ago, so I'll try to recall. But obviously, there was a switch in the student demographics when there was an immigration law that was passed, I think it was in the '60s, 65. And then those immigrants' kids, Greg included, are the ones that came into the university, and they started to flood the university. So in my day, when I was a student involved in InterVarsity here in Massachusetts, my staff worker would say to me, "Jeanette, if you come to this conference, all New England conference, I can introduce you to two other Chinese Americans." And I said "Two?" He said, "Yes, we can find you two other Chinese American Christians for you to meet—Marty from Harvard and Liz from Yale. I said, "Oh!" And that was incentive for me, because there were so few of us on campus. So anyway, so I, you know, I joined IV in the late 70s. And I watched that demographic change. At first, I think our supervisors couldn't figure out what to do with an Asian American category. They had an understanding of international students. And so my, my well-meaning first boss said, "Well, you're interested in Asian peoples. Why don't you go to the local Chinese Bible study?" And I was in Cambridge at that point here in Massachusetts. And I went to a Chinese Bible study, and they were Mandarin-speaking, a small group of Cantonese-speaking, and I thought, "These are not my people." I'm not a Chinese native speaker, you know. They were international students from Taiwan, Hong Kong at that point. And I said, "But I want to find my tribe," which were the English-speaking kind of second generation and



beyond types. And they started coming to campus, really in the 90s. And as we were working on campus, we saw that demographic shift. And yeah, so the book really was in response to seeing the changing demographics of campus and then realizing, as we tried to minister to the whole campus, we needed to make that kind of segmentation or, you know, make some distinction that way and start doing that work. And, you know, lots of stories, but you know, some of the first Asian American things was done through the Chicagoland InterVarsity ministry and things, and so we started exploring some of that. And I think it was Cindy Bunch who said, "Why don't you guys get together write a book?" And so she's the one who organized us, you know? And we thought through what kinds of people and what people groups, and then we sat together, you know, figured out who would write, and then figure out what we would write. And then we met in the conference room at IVP in Westmont, kind of banged out the details.

Maila Kim 19:18

That's awesome. Anything you'd like to add, Greg?

Greg Jao 19:21

Yeah. You know, Cindy also, I think, initiated with Tom Lin, InterVarsity's current president, to do a Bible study book called *Losing Face and Finding Grace*. And so that may have been the first targeted Asian American publication that came out of IVP. There were other Asian American authors before that. Folk like Ada Lum and other folk. But I think it was the first one targeting that demographic group and there was such deep resonance of finally a resource that speaks to us. And as the numbers of Asian Americans increased on campus, and in InterVarsity, I think part of what we realized was that the current discipleship books were fantastic. But they could not and did not address some of the questions that Asian Americans were raising in their discipleship. Well, how do I engage with my parents? How do I understand race issues from an Asian American context? Not assuming that it's a black/white binary? How do I understand my identity and the gifts that we bring? And so I think it was out of that deep sense of, these were the questions we were having to answer on campus with students, the other questions staff were wrestling with, and they were questions that churches were not wrestling with because they were assuming a particular culture. So



students who were bicultural were really adrift. And so I'm so grateful that IVP thought, "I don't know how many of this will sell, but there's a need that it will meet. And so let's take a risk and do it."

Jeanette Yep 20:46

There was an overlap too, with the Urbana Missions Conference, because somebody—might have been Paula Harrison—started ethnic-specific little workshops as part of Urbana, and I remember leading early on a workshop called "Missions and the Asian American." And it was an attempt to say, "Your ethnic identity makes a difference. God didn't make a mistake in making you who you are. And in fact, you can leverage your kind of cultural understandings and navigating American life and your home culture, you can use that for mission." And so that kind of brought out other people and, you know, started gathering some of the early folk in, in Asian American ministry and all the rest. So there was all kinds of overlap between the student work and the coming of this book.

Maila Kim 21:36

That's great to hear the history behind all of this even today, like, it's still a book that people look to as a resource. And so, I mean, Holy Spirit was there when you guys had this gut feeling of, "I think there's something that we need to produce." And I want to ask you guys about the process of writing this book because I heard that it was written in this manner that reflected its own Asian American heritage. And so can each of you guys share about that experience?

Greg Jao 22:02

I think part of what made it feel like a distinctly Asian American writing experience was we told a lot of stories. Before coming up with chapter titles or subjects, before coming up with a general approach, I remember just sitting in a conference room telling stories, our own stories, but also stories of students that we knew. Stories of students who had struggled and not made it out with their faith intact, stories of students in pain. It was an all East Asian writing team at the times since that's who we had access to. The Korean experience was different than the Japanese experience was different than the Chinese experience. And even between Jeanette and I representing two



different streams of the Chinese immigrant experience. And so we were disaggregating before it was popular, at one level. But it was important to have that sense of nuance, because if we were going to try to speak together, it was important to be able to go, "Oh, because I heard that story from Peter Cha, 1.5 generation Korean American, I need to nuance what I'm going to say in this way so that it's more fully inclusive of what they're going to do." So an enormous amount of storytelling. I remember, in the middle of the writing, one of the writing, the early meetings, one of our colleagues hit a crisis with his parents in calling. And we had known his parents were really opposed to him coming on staff. And he lived nearby. And so I remember we called and we said, "Do you need us to come get you?" And then we took time to pray with him. We took time to be slightly aggrieved at a letter a senior InterVarsity person wrote trying to intervene in the situation which was largely to the parents going, "You know the point of being a parent is that you're supposed to let your children go and be free!" And we just thought, "You are so not Asian in writing this." So I thought it was interesting, even in the midst of trying to define what this book would be, we were also engaged in what was for that person, a very deeply felt personal crisis around the very themes of the book. And so choosing to intervene, to pray, to call, to be present, and to look at the systems that were contributing to some of that felt like a very distinct Asian American moment.

Jeanette Yep 24:22

I'm so much more superficial than Greg is. I remember that we essentially ate our advance. Still, they were all of us writing together and we were given an advance to work on gathering and all that stuff. And we made sure that we ate really well. So there was a lot of fun eating, a lot of fun sharing and you know, a lot of storytelling as you're saying. I would say not self-promoting. So when we kind of came up with the outlines of the chapters was a lot of, "How about you write that chapter?" As opposed to saying, "I'll write that chapter." It was kind of like, "I, you know, I really think you should." And, "You really think I should?" "Yeah, I think you're really the best one for that." And a little more of that, as opposed to, you know, "I'm the best at this, not you, so I'm going to take it on." So it was a lot of that working together, calling out one another's gifts, and then harmonizing the work as we did as we worked on it. And, again, Cindy, because she had spent some time living in Japan, she had just a different



sensitivity to the Asian experience, even as a non-Asian person. And as she guided us, it was really helpful to have her, you know, have an alertness to Asian cultures, as we were living it out.

Maila Kim 25:34

Thank you guys for sharing that. We're gonna take a quick break. But when we return, we'll hear more from our guests about the unique impact of this historic IVP book. So stay tuned. And thanks for listening to The Every Voice Now Podcast.

Nancy Wang Yuen 25:51

I'm Nancy Wang Yuen, co-editor of *Power Women: Stories of Motherhood, Faith, and the Academy*, and the host of IVP's podcast, *The Disrupters*. And I'd like to say congratulations to IVP for celebrating its 75th anniversary this year.

Promo 26:12

Ever wonder how God is specifically inviting you into a deeper walk with him? Join a diverse group of students and mission-minded hearts in Indianapolis this December the 28th through the 31st for the Urbana Student Missions Conference. Since 1946, Urbana has been a space for whole life, whole world discipleship—a place to discover how God is calling you to use your gifts and passions in his global mission. You'll encounter stories of people who have answered their call to the Great Commission, and have served it around the world. You will engage in dynamic, joyful, multicultural worship unlike any other worship experience you've had, and you'll enter a sacred space to interact with missions organizations and experts to discern where your gifts and experiences fit in God's global work. It's time to rise up. Learn about conference discounts by signing up for the Urbana Insider Community at urbana.org and register now. That's u-r-b-a-n-a.org. Join us at Urbana 22 to discover, discern, and decide how to pair your passions with God's purpose.

Ed Gilbreath 27:32

Hello, this is Ed Gilbreath, author of *Reconciliation Blues* and *Birmingham Revolution*. And I would like to say a big congratulations to IVP on this special occasion of 75 years.



Happy anniversary! It has been an honor and a blessing for me to be counted as part of the IVP family.

Maila Kim 27:49

You're listening to The Every Voice Now Podcast and I'm Maila. Kim. Today we've been talking with Jeanette Yep and Greg Jao, members of the writing team of the IVP book *Following Jesus Without Dishonoring Your Parents*. Keep listening to find out how you can get a special 40% discount on this book at ivpress.com. But first, let's find out a little bit more about the heritage and the history of this notable book. So I'd love to start by talking about the title, right? This is truly a unique title. It encompasses the book's essence. And so can you recall who came up with this title? And what was the process of it?

Jeanette Yep 28:32

One of the folks who did a lot of background things that we continued to call upon was an East Asian Studies graduate student at Harvard named Marty Chu. And she did a little chart that compared the scriptures with Confucian Analects. So Greg mentioned earlier, there were no Southeast Asians in the book. Well, we kind of narrowed our scope to folk from East Asian traditions because there was the Confucian background cultures, because we knew the target of Asia was so large. So we wanted to aim at that Confucian background cultures. And so Marty came up with a little chart that would have a Confucian Analect. And then she would have a scripture kind of to compare. So you could contrast your way through what was kind of formative in our Asian cultural backgrounds with what the scriptures had to say, you know, about honoring parents, sons, daughters, you know, family members, and all that sort of stuff. So that had something to do, I think, with this whole idea about honoring parents and not dishonoring them. It came a bit from her handout that she gave us.

Greg Jao 29:36

I think the other thing is, the target really was that first generation of children born to that post '65 immigrant group. And so, it's the generation that creates the model minority story, which has been weaponized, but as I keep pointing out, it was weaponized against Blacks and Latinos, but it accurately described many of our



experiences. Like I am the model minority in every possible way. And in that first generation, the issue was trying to understand, "How do I engage my parents' expectations, and our, our inability to communicate?" Right? So that's the era that *The Joy Luck Club* becomes famous for trying to grapple with those issues. And I think it's interesting. The issue we were helping them wrestle with really was, "How do you manage your parents and the home culture of your parents?" Later generations of Asian Americans, right, are writing very different books. So Kathy Khang is not asking, you know, following Jesus without dishonoring your parents—it's "Raise your voice." And it's an assertion of, "I know I'm here, and I know I belong," and another Asian American book that will be coming out that's the descendant of this book is *Learning Our Names*. And so it's acknowledging that, but also inviting people, "Learn our names, be attentive to who we are." And I think you see the development of Asian American self-confidence and identity, even in the titles that are being chosen and the folk side that they're bringing to it. And so this first one, it really was, let's figure out how we're going to engage with Mom and Dad. And the other books are now turning a little bit more outward to culture—"We're here. Engage with us."

Maila Kim 31:13

That's cool to think about them side-by-side, and even to the trajectory of what these titles mean, and in the era that they were published. And I mean, Greg, you wrote, you write a section called "Honorable Disobedience." And I thought that was just interesting, because I think we tend to associate dishonor and disobedience as the same thing. And you kind of nuanced that a little bit using scripture, right, Naomi, and Ruth and all of those instances. And so I think that was just really helpful to see that nuance and to know that you can still honor your parents and feel like I can be obedient to the thing that I feel like God is calling me to.

Greg Jao 31:46

I really attribute that to Jeanette, honestly. So Jeanette was my staff worker, and I tell the story in *Following Jesus*. My parents were really opposed. And the way I describe it now is, good Christians who loved me so much that they did not want to trust my financial future to the church if I was going to do fundraising. And it was fascinating as a case study. All my Asian friends kept saying, "Greg, honor your mother and father."



It's in the Old Testament and New Testament. It's reiterated." And then they would tell stories, right, of missionaries who waited until their parents' death, but decades later, before they would go into mission. Thousands of people come to faith because God was blessing that obedience. And none of my white friends, quote, would quote that passage. They were all like, you know, "Jesus came up to a man and said, 'Come follow me.' And the man said, 'Let me bury my father first.' And Jesus, 'Let the dead bury their own dead.'" Anybody who loves . . . and I didn't know what to do with these two passages, because one is follow Jesus at all costs over your parents. The other one is obey your parents as a way of following Jesus. And in my own journey, it was, I didn't know what to do. I wanted to go on staff, but my parents were opposed. And it was Jeanette, who asked the really crucial question, "What's God calling to do right now? If he's calling you to come on staff right now, then obey him. But if he hasn't given you a time thing, then you have to figure out how to also honor your parents in the midst of that." And it just opened the door for me wide enough to go, "Okay, here's how you live in tension between these two passages of scripture. You're not free to ignore one over the other. But you have to hold them in creative tension together, doing your best to live them out." And it was really, I think, Jeanette's advice at that moment that gave me a way forward, that allowed me to go ahead without being bitter with my parents, or feeling oppressed by them. Because I was, my choice was to go to law school then. I was doing it to honor Jesus. But also not just to completely concede to what my parents wanted because it would have been emotionally easier. There was still a demand that you must follow Jesus on that. And I think it's Jeanette's wisdom in holding those passages together, holding various identities together, wanting the whole of scripture to inform Asian American ministry at InterVarsity in the ways that we did it, that I think actually helped make this book possible. Because it would have been so easy to write a book that tipped either to one side or the other—"Abandon your Asian heritage, choose the Western way of freedom!" And you saw a lot of that, in that period. And the heroes were the people who threw off their bounds, who adopted the Western story of, "I'm going to leave this provincial life and find my destiny." And there are other people who then went the essentialist, like, "Oh, all Asians must just hew to the parents." And that was more, maybe, the ethnic church story. And I think it was Jeanette's vision of like, "Actually, there's a Jesus-shaped story that's gonna hold together both sides of your identity. And you're gonna have to redeem it, you're going



to have to repent from some of it. But ultimately, it's going to be a beautiful thing that you use as a Kingdom thing." And that really, I think, permeated the way that we approached the book. So we were really cautious like, are we just fighting Asian churches and the conservatism there? Or are we just conceding to a cultural idolatry and not taking Jesus seriously? And that's really Jeanette's model for all of us in that book.

Jeanette Yep 34:54

I have to say first, that Greg is overly generous in his memory. I think what I recall very strongly was just hearing people's stories. And hearing students tell us that things were hard, because they sense God calling them one place or another. And that Mom and Dad were so concerned about their security and wellbeing, that they wanted them to make sure that, you know, they could pay for their expenses and provide for themselves. They didn't want them to suffer like they had suffered before. And so that was really the big paradigm, I think, that got us together is that we were hearing these stories all around the country. And we wanted to help students navigate what that meant, to love their parents in the midst of this, but also to figure out how to honor that. But Greg is being overly generous. But you know, God has been very good to this whole generation, I think, of leaders, you know, Helen, Greg, Tom Lin, and all those guys. God has been very good to that group of folk. And it's wonderful to see the impact that they're having in the Church overall, and in InterVarsity in particular.

Maila Kim 36:00

So this book has sold more than 17,000 copies over nearly 25 years that it's been in print. And so I'm curious, Jeanette, can you give us a sense of what does that mean to you to hear that so many people have sought out and purchased this book?

Jeanette Yep 36:16

I don't know if that's good or not, this number, but it sounds like it is. And it is amazing that you know, I still get sent copies periodically. And there's a little note that says that this is the "blank" edition, and you know, this number of copies have been sold. And it's very humbling to think that book has had this long shelf life. And I think it just says that these are tensions folk feel. What I've heard, Maila, is that folk overseas have used



it. So I have friends who work with YWAM Thailand, and they pull this out, because this is the tension they're feeling as some of their first generation of formerly-Buddhist staff are interacting with their parents. And you know, there is a similar paradigm where they have to do some amount of fundraising, and you know, bring shame to their parents. And, "What are you doing doing fundraising?" You know, "You've also brought shame to our family by no longer be Buddhist." So this book is one of their go-to resources that they use to help their people navigate this tension. So I think it's it's kind of a first generation coming-to-faith, maybe as well as first generation immigrant experience commonality. And maybe that's why it continues to sell. It's very humbling, because it's really the stories of our students, it's, I think that's the best way to put it—the students that entrusted to us the pain and some of their struggles, and allowed us to come alongside them and learn from them. It's a great privilege.

Maila Kim 37:42

I want to honor you guys for writing this book, for being obedient. As somebody who represents the next generation of Asian Americans trying to figure it out, it's so comforting to know we don't have to figure out and start from scratch. Like, there is a generation of giants who have gone before who've asked the hard questions. Even as I read this book, I think that the stories, and I know a friend who I'm like, "I need to give them this book!" because this is exactly what they're going through, or this is exactly the conversations they're having. And so, just really want to honor you guys, even though it's been 20 plus years, it's still relevant, it transcends time. Truth is still so important for the next generation as well.

Greg Jao 38:19

It sounds self-serving because IVP sponsors the podcast, but I still am flabbergasted that in the last century, right? In 1997, or 1996, when we started working on this, IVP thought, "Asian Americans are not a big part of the conversation. They're not a big market, right? They're not even an identifiable market outside of campus ministry right now. But this is worth doing." And it's one of multiple books around ethnic identity and ethnic representation that, long before it became trendy, like in the last ten years or five years, IVP said, "We'll keep this book in print for 20 plus years," when I think any other publisher would have said, "It's had a great six months. We're done now." And



and I think it has been incredibly moving to have students, or even adults, reach out and say, "Actually, I read that book when I was in my twenties. And it guided me through difficult things." Whether it was, "I'm in an interracial marriage, and my parents don't know how to manage that." Or, "I'm single and it gave me words to describe to my parents what it meant." Or, "This was the introduction for me of how Asian Americans should engage in justice and racial justice issues, because nobody else had talked about it. We weren't even part of that conversation. And your book talked about it in 1998. Thank you for helping me understand even back then." So I think it's that that's really humbling.

Maila Kim 39:43

Why was it important for Asian American voices to be represented in this way in the marketplace at that time? Like, what were your collective words bringing to the church that nobody else was during this time?

Jeanette Yep 39:56

One thing I've noticed being outside of the kind of, the InterVarsity bubble for almost 20 years now is that InterVarsity has maintained a commitment to issues of multiethnicity, racial justice, all these kinds of things from the start—always, not always wonderfully and smartly done, but maintain that commitment through time. And what I've noticed in other parts of the Christian or the evangelical world is the trendiness of certain topics that come and go, that money funding will flow in for this thing, and then it goes away. But InterVarsity has kept it slow and steady. And I think the Lord has honored that. So I saw that in publishing and the kinds of books and titles that the Press does. And I've seen that the student ministry. It's been slow and steady. It keeps going, even when it's no longer popular to sponsor to give funds to. There's something about the call of God in this space that the Fellowship has been faithful in. And I think, you know, it's something to be commended for. And I'm grateful for.

Greg Jao 41:08

I also hope it opened doors. So this book did well enough that it made it possible for IVP to go, "You know, we should do this for the LatinX community as well." And so *Being Latino in Christ* by Orlando Crespo was maybe 10 years later, *Hermanas* just



came out three or four years ago. But no other publisher I know was like, "You know, let's find the voice of that community." And honor that community, not as an example of "This is how it should interact with a larger white evangelical community," which is the popular thing to do right now. Right, everybody's either engaging with or disaffiliating from a largely Black/White conversation. But IVP has said, "There are people who are wrestling with deep discipleship issues and their culture, and what that means in light of Scripture," which is what I think has always been IVP's sweet spot. And we're not going to buy into just the binary White/Black narrative. We're going to make sure we hear these other voices. And I think what's remarkable is, it's difficult for those voices to get a platform and to have the ability to go, "I can promise you 10,000 sales the first day." It's been 20 years. We managed to get close to 20-ish thousand. But there was a need, a group that needed to hear the gospel in a compelling way. And so I hope it's opened doors like that. I hope it's open doors for some of the African American authors who are not writing to a primarily White audience, but are saying, "I would like to address the Black community." And I don't think most evangelical publishers know how to reach that audience or know what to do with it. But I think this book helped open the doors to say, "But it's important to do, and we should try."

Maila Kim 42:55

The good news is those doors are continuing to open. This August, we're going to be releasing *Learning Our Names*, which is similarly written by an Asian American staff team. And so, Greg, you know these authors. What are your hopes for what this book could be that might be similar or different from *Following Jesus Without Dishonoring Your Parents*?

Greg Jao 43:16

I hope that they will initiate new conversations that this generation of Asian Americans are actually wrestling with. That as much as I'm grateful for 20 years of *Following Jesus Without Dishonoring Your Parents*, the conversation has moved. The culture has moved. Asian America is different. I know the writing team isn't all East Asian. And that's a blessing to us, right? There's South Asia and Southeast Asia. And so the diversity of voices is bigger. And the questions are different. So I'm so excited that



they're taking the same posture, "What is God saying and doing in our community? And how do we equip the next generation seriously?" And I suspect, there are going to be some of those essential classic questions that will continue to resonate, that people will be able to say, "Oh, there's a through line of the Asian American experience that we can see here." So I'm so excited to see how they're addressing what Asian America and Asian Americans are engaging with in this generation.

Maila Kim 44:22

Absolutely. Well, I'm sad to say we've come to the end of our time together. But before we go, I want to give you guys a few moments to share with our listeners any special projects you have going on right now or even where people can best reach you.

Jeanette Yep 44:38

Special projects—I'm working on an email inbox that is daunting.

Maila Kim 44:47

That is a large project.

Jeanette Yep 44:48

That is a large project. Getting down to zero would be after the Lord takes me home. But yeah, I'm honored to be part of this conversation today. You can write me at jjep@grace.org. That, that works. And I'm on Instagram and Twitter as well. I'm intermittent, but if I get you, I will respond.

Maila Kim 45:11

Well, we'll link it in the show notes so people can find you. What about you, Greg?

Greg Jao 45:15

I'm late in turning in a LifeGuide Bible Study guide on the Church, because I realized there was no one Bible Study Guide for the Church. And I hope what I'm bringing to it is anchoring the story of the Church, not in Acts, but in actually Genesis 12, which gets us the multiethnic perspective of, the Church exists because of this promise that God



made and conclude it in Revelation. And I think it's partially, as a person of color, it matters to me that the story of the Church is anchored in this larger multiethnic reconciliation that God intends. So that's what I should be working on, as I fear my editor may be listening to this. I'm also on Twitter at Greg Jao. And people can always contact me through InterVarsity.

Maila Kim 46:01

Awesome. Well, thank you guys, both. It's been so good to have you on this show. And just to hear all the history and the background behind *Following Jesus Without Dishonoring Your Parents*. And so we wanted to share with our listeners that you can find *Following Jesus Without Dishonoring Your Parents* at everyvoicenow.com. And if you use the code, EVN40, you can get 40% off and free US shipping. So visit our site to get a great deal on this historic and unique book.

Ed Gilbreath 46:34

Thanks, everyone for listening to The Every Voice Now Podcast brought to you by IVP. Our producer is Helen Lee, and our sound engineer is Jonathan Clauson. If you are enjoying our show, please share about it with your friends. We'd be grateful for your reviews and recommendations on Apple, Spotify, or wherever you listen to your podcasts.

Maila Kim 46:53

And we'd love to hear from you directly anytime. You can find us on Instagram and Twitter at Every Voice Now. Or you can email us with your comments, questions, or suggestions at evn@ivpress.com. And join us next time for another inspiring episode of Every Voice Now.