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**Korean Preachers & Worship Leaders**

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## **Ben Shin**

Sam Pack

### **Abstract**

Pastor Ben Shin has made a huge impact in the Korean American community in both Southern California as well as across the United States. As an adjunct professor at Talbot and the Lead English Ministry (EM) Pastor at his church, The L.A. Open Door Church (Los Angeles, CA), Ben Shin has become one of the foremost leaders in the Korean American community today, and teaches a course on the Asian American church and how it fits into society. When dealing with the Korean speaking ministries, Shin's philosophy is that a missional approach must be taken. In other words, Shin believes that leaders and pastors from the EM need to make the first effort to "bridge the generational gap" that is been created between the first and second generation of Koreans in America today. This revolutionary viewpoint may be exactly what the Korean churches in America need in order to survive in the long run.

### **Pastor Ben Shin and His Heart for the Korean American Community**

A California local who graduated college from UCLA and received his M.Div. and Th.M. from Talbot School of Theology (La Mirada, CA), Pastor Ben Shin has made a huge impact in the Korean American community in both Southern California as well as across the United States. As an adjunct professor at Talbot and the Lead English Ministry (EM) Pastor at his church, The L.A. Open Door Church (Los Angeles, CA), Ben Shin has become one of the foremost leaders in the Korean American community today, and teaches a course on the Asian American church and how it fits into society. With his vast knowledge of the Korean American Church, and over 20 years of serving in the Korean Church under his belt, Ben has his finger tips on the pulse of the Korean American community and its need for spiritual revival and growth.

When dealing with Korean churches, Ben believes that a missional approach must be taken. He believes that leaders and pastors need to make an effort to "bridge the generational gap" that is been created between the first and second generation of Koreans in America today.<sup>1</sup> He is saying that the generation gap has become so vast that it will never be something that will be able to fix itself, but requires definite and purposeful

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<sup>1</sup> Ben Shin, "Asian American Church and Society Lecture Notes", La Mirada, February 15, 2006

action. This gap has been affecting both the first and second generations of Koreans in America in every facet of the Korean churches in America. From clothing they wear to their philosophy of ministry, there is a definitely a gap that not only brings separation within the church, but also ends up isolating each ministry from each other preventing the church to make any kind of progressive move forward. Shin isn't the only one who sees this gap as a real issue. In an article on models and issues of English-Speaking Korean-American ministry, Jun Kyung Kim writes that Language differences and difficulties have created communication and relational problems fueling divisions in ministries and enlarging the generation/language gap. This dilemma facing Korean American congregations is the relationship between Korean-speaking first generation parents and English-speaking Korean youth and young adults. In addition to the usual tension between older adult parents and the younger youth population, language barriers heighten tension and dissuade healthy, on-going communication.<sup>2</sup>

Shin suggests that in order to break this mold that has been spiritually crippling the Korean church, it is the second generation that must be willing to “branch out and speak to the churches language.”<sup>3</sup> This doesn't mean that the second generation must become first generation clones, but to be willing to understand and perhaps even compromise some things so that the gap can be filled. For example, in order to create a space where both communities can worship together, Shin suggests that the praise team plays some of the hymns that many first generation congregations are used to, but with a contemporary feel to them. Another is for the second generation pastors and leader to come to church wearing a jacket without a tie. Letting their first generation counterparts know that they respect the social constructs and parameters that have been set in their congregation. Shin believes that in order to bridge the gap, we must understand the other person first. And when that happens, we must meet them where they are at.<sup>4</sup>

### **Pastor Ben Shin and His Philosophy on Worship**

When asked about his own personal definition of worship, Pastor Ben Shin believes that for the believer worship is a lifestyle that ascribes to the Word to God. He

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.urbanministry.org/wiki> models-and-issues-english-speaking-korean-american-ministry

<sup>3</sup> (Shin, Asian American Church and Society Lecture Notes 2006)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

believes that everything believers do, they must be willing to presenting their bodies as living sacrifices, wholly and pleasing to God (Rom 12:2).<sup>5</sup> He believes that in every aspect of one's life, he/she is simply a smaller part of a larger whole. Shin looks beyond the simple understanding of worship being something people do during a Sunday service. Instead, he is fully convinced that worship is a lifestyle that every believer must live. This philosophy has been integrated into the teaching and preaching at Shin's church. And while there is still room to improve in his congregation, he encourages his people to worship in a holistic and comprehensive way.<sup>6</sup> In other words, he teaches his congregation to apply a worshipful attitude in everything they do in life both inside and outside the church doors.

In his ministry, he shows this through his teaching and training of his congregation. In Shin's preaching, he will use both expository and topical forms of preaching. Normally he will schedule out an expository series through one of books of the Bible, pulling out the truth verse by verse for his congregation. After finishing this study he will move on to a short topical series as he prepares for the next expository series. Currently, Shin is coming to the end of the book of Deuteronomy, and will then begin a series about Christmas and the Advent season. Afterward he will move to an expository study on the book of Philippians. Mainly geared towards the believers from his church, he uses this structure of preaching in order to invoke his congregation to live lives that are faithful to God's teaching and to adopt an evangelistic attitude anytime in their lives.

While the teaching and preaching are important to the ministry, Shin also feels that the sermon and music alone cannot be the only things that he considers as "worship". Instead Shin has been able to find other ways to encourages his congregation to worship in a holistic and comprehensive way is through the way he uses the meeting space. He expressed that he and his staff at L.A. Open Door spent many hours simply talking about space, and how they could find the freedom to create what they wanted to do. At first, the space was set up in a long liturgical room, where all the pews were faced towards the front of the sanctuary, and Pastor Shin would stand behind a podium on an elevated stage

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<sup>5</sup> Ben Shin, interview by Sam Pack, *Interview with Ben Shin* (November 21, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> (Shin, Interview with Ben Shin 2009)



to preach. Shin saw this as an ineffective use for the space. He felt disconnected from his congregation, and he felt like he was talking at the people without really being able to engage them on a personal and spiritual level.<sup>7</sup> To remedy this, the EM moved rooms where they could set up their own chairs in a very wide semi-circle formation that looks more like a boomerang than a U. He did this so the congregation members would be able to see each other, and engage one another in worship. He also stands on the floor level with a lapel mic, which gives him the freedom to use the entire space. Shin prefers this over standing behind a pulpit because he likes to feel the people he's preaching to.<sup>8</sup> He feels that a pulpit isolates him to only one part of the room, and to engage in the people, he must be able to reach them both in a spiritual manner and a physical one.

### **L.A. Open Door**

In 2005, Pastor Ben Shin was hired as the Lead Pastor for the EM congregation at L.A. Open Door Church. The church, in itself, is a predominantly first generation Korean congregation, and is structured where the EM falls under the jurisdiction of the KM. But according to Shin, the EM is given quite a bit of freedom and anonymity. And while Pastor Ben is required to report everything the EM does to the KM, their freedom to plan their own ministry is not impaired by a need for control by the KM.<sup>9</sup>

According to their vision statement, The Open Door strives to "open Christ's Kingdom to the World" (Rev. 3:8). It is their main goal to turn irreligious people into deep and devoted followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>10</sup> Shin believes that in order to do this, the sermon alone cannot be the focal point of worship. Instead he feels that everything that goes on during the service is of equal value to the worship of God the Father Almighty. Shin will coordinate with his worship leader, Richard, to create an atmosphere where anyone who walks through their doors can experience worship on a holistic level. Being a graduate from the Music Institute of Los Angeles and the owner of his own music school called Encore School of Music, Richard's comprehensive knowledge of music and creative ability has brought on new levels of worship in the L.A.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> *The Open Door*. <http://www.laopendoor.com/aboutus/whatwebelieve.php> (accessed November 22, 2009).

Open Door EM community. Together, Pastor Ben and Richard have been able to offer the members of their church community a place where they can fully experience worship both on an intellectual level and on an emotional level, which are two aspects that Shin emphasizes for his congregation. He says that he will “hit them in the head while Richard will hit them in the heart”.<sup>11</sup> Charles Young-Chul Ryu writes in his article in the *Journal of Korean American Ministries & Theology*:

*It is critical that we begin to see the pastors not only as preachers and pastoral caregivers, but also as worship designers and liturgical leaders for the faith communities. Only when we can reclaim the importance of worship as the central nexus of all ministries of a given faith community, and therefore when the leadership in all aspects of worship life of the congregation becomes the primary pastoral identity and responsibility, will even the preaching ministry of the pastor find a more authentic and meaningful place in the life of the congregation concerned. Different pastors have different gifts, and the larger church community as a whole needs all these different gifts of our pastors.*<sup>12</sup>

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This is exactly what Pastor Ben Shin is trying to accomplish in his ministry. He strongly believes that worship is the “central nexus” of his community at L.A. Open door church. And while he admits that his congregation is “not quite there yet”<sup>13</sup>, he is able to see many of the people beginning to experience worship in a holistic and comprehensive way.

**Resources:**

Ryu, Charles Young-Chul. "Worship Design and Liturgical Leadership as Primary Responsibility." *Journal of Korean American Ministries & Theology - Worship*, 2008: 30-31. [www.webkam.org/journal](http://www.webkam.org/journal)

Shin, Ben, interview by Sam Pack. *Interview with Ben Shin* (November 21, 2009).

Shin, Ben. "Asian American Church and Society Lecture Notes." La Mirada, February 15, 2006.

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*Urban Ministry*. <http://www.urbanministry.org/wiki> models-and-issues-english-speaking-korean-american-ministry (accessed November 22, 2009).

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<sup>11</sup> (Shin, Interview with Ben Shin 2009)

<sup>12</sup> Chalres Young-Chul Ryu, "Worship Design and Liturgical Leadership as Primary Responsibility." *Journal of Korean American Ministries & Theology - Worship*, 2008: 30-31.

<sup>13</sup> (Shin, Interview with Ben Shin 2009)

