

The Long Road to the **MASTER'S SEMINARY**

By Ben Bradford

I was born into a loving British missionary family in Auckland, New Zealand. My parents had recently concluded a period of service in Australia and were in the process of preparing to move to the Cook Islands in the South Pacific, where my father was to teach at Takamoa Bible College. This is where my first memories begin, idyllic white beaches, azure blue water, coconut trees, and sugarcane.

Eventually we had to leave our island idyl and return to the U.K. I recall our family arriving in Exeter on a dreary rainy evening - there couldn't have been a starker contrast to the South Pacific. After a period of living in London we settled in Witney, Oxfordshire, where I would spend the next 18 years of my life.

The Lord saved me at the age of 14 whilst attending a Christian camp in Devon, and not long afterwards I was baptised in my home church in Witney. From that time on, I became more involved in the church and was received into membership when I was 18. In the four years between my baptism and becoming a member I had lots of growing to do. Perhaps like many Christian young people I drifted spiritually, I was committed to church and the youth group, but at school, while being happy to identify as a Christian, I was not living a God-honouring life. I have no doubt that the Lord protected me from many pitfalls and mistakes that I could have made during that time. Thankfully He steered me towards certain positive friendships which kept me playing sport, rather than other less wholesome activities.

Another part of the Lord's protection of me was the example and influence of my parents which, although I didn't realise it at the time, was fundamental in guiding me and forming both my moral and theological outlook. One of the significant events in my teenage years was a trip to China with my



John MacArthur and the Bradford family.

parents. We stayed in Hong Kong and visited Xian and Xinning. Within the first day of being in Hong Kong I had fallen in love with the place, and by the end of our visit I was determined to return. After my A-levels I was able to go to Hong Kong for a gap year and worked as a youth intern in St Andrew's Church Kowloon and as a teaching assistant at International Christian School (ICS).

That year in Hong Kong was seminal for me and for the future direction of my life. It was a year of mistakes, frustrations, and disappointments, but also a year of awakening. I realised that I was not being as serious about the Lordship of Christ over my life as I needed to be. I recognised mistakes that I had made and wanted to move forward in a way that would bring glory to God and me closer to Him. It was during this time that I began to recognise some

aspects of the gifting the Lord had given me and how to use it; I began to develop a deeper love for His word and a desire to teach it.

Reluctantly, after the year in Hong Kong I returned to the U.K to commence studies for a degree in Sport and Exercise Sciences. In the second year of my studies the Lord presented me with the opportunity to coach at a Christian basketball camp, and it was here that He gave me the greatest blessing in my life to date; I met Rachel, who is now my wife. We were married in December 2008, and I would go on to work in the field of sports science for a few years until I joined an organisation which worked with teenagers who had been excluded, or were at risk of being excluded, from mainstream education.

Whilst I was happy in my job and was able to share my faith with those I worked with, the desire to return to Hong Kong was constantly on my mind, I specifically wanted to teach at the school where I had been an intern during my gap year. However, I needed more qualifications so, during the first year of our marriage, we moved to Southampton so that I could complete a Post-Graduate Certificate of Education, after which I taught in the UK until the Lord finally granted an answer to my prayers and, together with Rachel, I returned to Hong Kong as a PE teacher at ICS in August 2011.

We lived in Hong Kong for 7 years and it was during this time that I discovered the preaching ministry of Dr John MacArthur. His clear exposition of scripture, devotion to the text, passion, surety, and infectious love for God's word began to impact me, to the extent that I regularly listened to 2 or more of

his sermons each day. It was during this time that my love for reading grew and my relationship with the Lord deepened. We also joined Ambassador International Church, which was another turning point in my life.

During this time my desire to be in full time ministry increased and I investigated the training offered at The Master's Seminary, but when I considered the financial costs that would be incurred in moving to California, and my reluctance to leave Hong Kong I, in my weakness and lack of faith, discounted the idea. I felt the Lord had shut the door on the idea of full-time ministry, but I was still burdened for our students at ICS, where I had the freedom to disciple and preach the gospel, so I poured myself into that, alongside serving as an elder at ICS.

During our 7 years in Hong Kong, the Lord blessed Rachel and me with 3 children, Seth (9), Caleb (8) and Lydia (4), these little ones have brought us much joy, laughter, fun and love over the years and we are very grateful to be their parents. They constantly challenge us, but they also spur us on in our relationship with the Lord, our desire to see them 'grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour' is something that has focused our prayer life, our devotional life, our sanctification and so much more.

The Lord still has much work to do in me, but the desire to be a loving and devoted husband, and as good an example to my children as my parents were to me, is something that constantly has a sanctifying effect; never have I desired holiness as much as I do today, to enable me to model Christlikeness to



my family.

For reasons that are far too convoluted to explain here, the Lord led us to leave Hong Kong and return to the U.K in June of 2018. This was particularly hard as I had thought the move to Hong Kong might be permanent; however, the Lord had other things in mind. It was this move back to the UK that finally opened the door I had been waiting for: full time ministry. My parents had relocated to Gloucester during the years we were in Hong Kong and the church they were attending was looking for a youth worker. It became clear that this was what the Lord had in mind for us, so in October 2018 I began as the full- time youth worker for Abbey Church.

It was during the summer of 2019 that I attended the Summer Institute at Grace Life Church London, where one of my brothers is a member. It was a phenomenal conference, full of wonderful teaching and much encouragement; more significantly, it was here that I met the Director of the Grace to You ministry in Europe, Paul Mitchell and his wife Diana. At the time I had no idea how pivotal this conference would be for me and for the future of my family. As I got to know the Mitchells over the course of the conference, I was able to share my desire to be properly trained for the ministry and Paul connected me with The Master's Academy International (TMAI). In the following year I began studying with Hermeneia, through Grace Life London. I took their whole Bible Survey class, which was fantastic. This was a precursor to starting the Master of Divinity Program (M.Div) through the European Bible Training Centre in Berlin, which is part of TMAI and a sister ministry to The Master's Seminary (TMS).

I was able to study on a part-time basis with TMAI whilst still working for Abbey Church, but in May 2021, by the grace of God and the support of TMAI and GTY Europe, the opportunity came for me to move to Los Angeles to complete my M.Div at The Master's Seminary. I had wanted to attend TMS for many years but allowed doubts and concerns, such as finance and logistics, to get in the way, but the Lord used those years to prepare me for exactly this opportunity.

Someone might ask:

Why go all the way to California?

Why not stay and train in the UK?

It's such a lot of money and hassle moving the family, is it all worth it, is it necessary?



Here is my answer:

I know lots of men who have trained in various seminaries and Bible colleges all over the world, I hear stories of weak theology, lack-lustre preaching, training with token nods to the term 'expository', a minimisation of the original languages, an abandonment of the historical, grammatical, hermeneutic and capitulation to the world's ideologies. I saw none of those things in the men I knew who had studied at TMS.

Now, is TMS the only seminary in the world that has faithful men? No!

Is TMS the only seminary in the world that teaches some of the aspects I have described? No!

But I believe that TMS is the best place to train for the pastorate. And, as many have said before: Would you want a doctor treating you for a life-threatening illness who was not the best at what he does? Of course not!

To lay a solid foundation for many years of effective pastoral ministry I need to get the best training I can, in order to be able to minister in the best way that I can to the souls which the Lord entrusts to my care. I don't want to train somewhere that will not prepare me for the rigours and trials of a lifetime of ministry. I want to be able to give my all to the people that I pastor and to know exactly how to do it. During the months I have been at TMS I have been humbled, challenged, informed, equipped, and blessed. I can see what the Lord does here with men and their



The imperishable souls of men and women depend upon the Holy Spirit's empowering of faithful pastors who will courageously preach and teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ with scriptural precision, so that it may please the Lord to save them to eternal life and not condemn them to eternal death. And Christ's sheep need the sensitive and compassionate care of skilful under-shepherds who will watch over their eternal souls by regularly feeding them the truth of God's word, constantly modelling obedience to God's word, knowing that they will be required to give an account for their ministry on the day the Chief Shepherd gathers His people to Himself.

Churches everywhere, especially in the U.K and Europe, are in desperate need of such pastors – Pray that the Lord of the Church will raise up and equip many such men in this generation!

families. I can see his refining process under the watchful, tender, pastoral eyes of the TMS faculty and Grace Community Church family.

What other seminaries have professors who are both consummate academicians and full-time pastors?

TMS professors don't just care for the quality of my education, but for the state of my soul.

They care for my family and challenge me to not allow the demands of study to become an excuse to be a poor husband and father.

Is TMS perfect? Is it a wonderland of spiritual highs? Does learning happen by osmosis once one enters the campus? No. No. No.

There are faults because no one is perfect. There are many days when one feels overwhelmed by the weight of study and feelings of inadequacy. Learning comes through investing hours and hours in the classroom, attending lectures, reading in the library, and writing essays.

Is it worth it? Yes, it is! Why?

Because it's crucial that every scripturally qualified man entering pastoral ministry has the best training possible. Just as a trainee medical doctor demands the best training possible so he can cure diseases and save lives, so must a physician of souls. This necessity for the best training possible is encapsulated in the TMS mission statement:

"We Train Men Because Lives Depend On It"



Ben Bradford is studying at TMS with the support of a GTY Europe Scholarship. It's his intention to return to the U.K at the completion of his studies to enter church-based pastoral ministry and to train other men to teach God's word. Ben will be in the U.K during the summer of 2023, so please contact the GTY Europe office if you would like to invite him to preach at your church.