

## Paul T. P. Wong: For Me, A Man of Many Titles

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Dr. Paul Wong: the name of my mentor, counselor, supporter, teacher, cheerleader, coach, and friend. There are few people who have influenced my life more than Paul.

I feel I have had a privileged connection with Drs. Paul and Lilian Wong throughout the years. There are not many who can say, as I can, that I had the privilege of being their pastor for a number of years. Can you imagine that? Imagine getting up to preach Sunday by Sunday, knowing you have Dr. Paul Wong sitting there critiquing your sermon with his head slightly tilted and his eyes half shut. And I am thinking, “Is he sleeping, or in some deep, reflective, critiquing thought? Oh Lord, I hope he’s sleeping!”

The first time I met Paul and Lilian, they came walking through the church doors on a Sunday morning. I greeted Lilian who was so gracious, and then I see this little Asian man pulling off his toque, his hair disheveled: he waves hello with the turn of his finger, and flashes me his famous grin.

I had no idea that morning that I was meeting a giant of a man who would leave an indelible mark upon my life.

Only weeks prior to Paul and Lilian attending the church, I had been sensing the need for a mentor and praying for direction in this regard. Shortly after getting to know Paul, I could see this as an answer. Paul agreed to mentor me, and despite the constant demand upon his work and tireless effort he puts toward it, he has always graciously set time aside to connect, and would attend to our sessions as if nothing else mattered. I recall the numerous times of sitting together in the living room, as Lilian kindly provided refreshments, and Paul entertained the myriad of my ponderings, challenges, questions, and struggles. I seemed to always be wrestling through something, but Paul did not appear to mind—or at least he never let on to! He caringly walked with me and entered into these struggles with me.

What fascinated me was how often at the end of our sessions Paul would hold up his hand and say, “Here are three things...” or “These are seven essentials...” or “We must keep in mind these five perspectives...”. I was always amazed at Paul’s ability to synthesize our discussions into manageable considerations and practical advice for living. I remember leaving our sessions feeling so blessed to have mentors like Paul and Lilian.

Not only did Paul coach me through our monthly mentoring sessions, but he was also my primary cheerleader to expand my influence and education. He could see more potential in me than I could in myself. He pushed me into the doctoral arena by inviting me to participate with him in writing and presenting a paper at a doctoral roundtable on Servant Leadership. What I wrote was terrible, but Paul was so gracious in his response, and he kept me in the game. I ended up presenting the paper at Regent University, which became a pivotal experience for me, and instilled confidence for further academic work.

Another area Dr. Wong and I have worked extensively on is what we call *The Five-Fold Path: Spirituality for the 21st Century Christian*. We both shared a grave concern on the lack of holistic spirituality that forms the soul, is grounded in the body, and nurtures practical expression of Christian virtues. *The Five-Fold Path* combines meditative practice with kinesthetic movements, accessing deep reflection for outward loving action. Paul urged me to run with this spiritual practice and develop it. He has continued to encourage me in this work through the years as I have bounced ideas by him for refinement. *The Five-Fold Path* is now a recognized Christian spiritual practice that I teach to all of my freshman students. A new generation of

Christian leaders is being shaped by the insightful wisdom of Dr. Wong. I am so thankful to be a conduit of that wisdom.

Paul and Lilian have had an incredible impact upon me professionally, but what I also value is the tremendous influence they have had on me personally. There are so many things I could share about our regular mentoring sessions in their home, the numerous times they graciously and practically blessed me and my family, the opportunities to partner on projects and leverage me in the academic arena, along with the constant outpouring of wisdom and insight. But I would like to close this piece by highlighting a key moment that moves outside of Dr. Wong the educator and researcher, but as Paul my mentor and friend.

What I, and so many have experienced, is that Drs. Paul and Lilian Wong do not simply teach these themes of meaning and positive psychology, servant leadership, and building into the lives of others. Many have been inspired and benefitted from their insights, but what I have come to experience is that these are not merely ideas on a page to speak about, these are integrated truths and principles they live by as true friends.

It was just over 10 years ago when I was at the Toronto airport and I had just received some personally tragic news. It was the darkest moment of my life, and it propelled me into a season of suffering like I had never known. And as I stood there, alone, I didn't know what to do, or where to turn. And then I thought, "I will call Paul and Lilian." In my darkest hour, it was them that I turned to, because with them I knew there would be safety, acceptance, and hope.

It was their understanding and non-judgmental spirit, their consistent encouragement and affirmation (to still see in me potential when I and others could not), that helped see me through that season, and really the reason why I am presently completing my Ph.D. dissertation focusing on suffering as a transformative process. (This is in large part my focus due to my appreciation of Paul's realistic approach to positive psychology through the embrace of suffering. Paul continually exemplified depth of life, of thought, and of friendship.)

I am so grateful for what I have learned from Paul and Lilian, but I am even more grateful for what I have gleaned from how they live. They have continually and consistently been so hospitable to me. Whenever I reached out to them, they always seemed to make the time to connect. Usually, we did this over a meal, and they would never allow me to pay. For me, their kind hospitality, just that simple, gracious, practical care has provided me with an example to live by. With them, I feel safe and at home.

My simple response to them both is "thank you."