**Dr. John H. Armstrong** is an ordained minister in the Reformed tradition, and has been a pastor for many years before he began transitioning to his new ministry which has been dedicated to building Christian Unity in the Body of Christ. He is now co-founder of a new movement called The Initiative, an intentional ecumenical community designed for the healing of the North American church (And I just came back with my whole family from the Initiative’s first gathering together in Green Lake, WI together with many UBF leaders from Chicago/Toledo). It was truly a wonderful taste of the Kingdom of God, meeting with brothers and sisters from other churches and ministries.

Dr. Armstrong is also the author/editor of seventeen books, including his newest book which our session is about: Costly Love: The Way to True Unity for All the Followers of Jesus (New City Press, 2017). And for those interested, here will be opportunities to purchase this book and many other books by Dr. Armstrong after this Interest Group during break time.

Now I’ve had the honor of being friends with Dr. Armstrong for over a decade now. And I always say that the longer I’ve gotten to known Him—I think he is fair to say that if you want to know John, you need to understand and appreciate the three loves of his life.

John deeply loves Jesus.

John deeply loves his bride, Anita of 48 years of marriage, through which together they are the happy parents of two children and many grandchildren.

And so John deeply loves Jesus; John deeply loves his bride. And John loves Jesus’ Bride—the bride of Christ, the church of Jesus Christ which is filled with many kinds of Christians from tongues of all nations, each their own Christian traditions, among which we in the UBF community are one of them. And as a result of Dr. Armstrong loving the Church, he has come to truly love us here in the UBF community and for that I am deeply grateful for his friendship to me and to our community in UBF.

So the topic of this session centers around the question that Dr. Armstrong will speak on: namely,

*“What does it mean to believe that God is love and, more particularly, what does it mean for the church of Jesus Christ to live out this divine love?”*

In this session, Dr. Armstrong will share about 30 mins and then the rest of this session will be devoted to answering some of your questions in a Q/A answer format. Let’s ask deeply honest and respectful questions.

And before I invite John to come and begin his presentation, let me start by reading some excerpts of John’s book:

In the Introduction to his book, Dr. Armstrong writes about a serious defect in our Christian practice—"a defect that has led us to embrace countless new divisions within Christianity. We value our personal views and opinions above all else, including the fellowship of our brothers and sisters, whom God the Father loves and whom Christ redeemed….”

“Pursuing unity as an end in itself will not heal our divisions. We must reconsider our view of God’s divine nature. We must return to the central truth that God is a merciful Father revealed in the person of Jesus Christ, who incarnates holy love (1 John 4:8, 16)…If our experience and understanding of God are merely philosophical, then our love for one another will be philosophical too, which means it may become rigid and cautious. Unless we experience the depths of divine love, no effort for unity will ever become a deep work of the Spirit. The true knowledge of God is expressed in communion with others where mutuality and love are perfected in us at great cost. Jesus’ words in John 13:34–35 demonstrate my point: I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Dr. Armstrong ends this Introduction of his book with an invitation:

*“…I hope extravagant love describes what you desire for your life and church*. I understand *extravagant* love as the kind of love that goes beyond reason, beyond what we call common sense. This leads me to my title: *Costly Love*. God’s extravagant love was ultimately poured out at a great price: Christ’s total sacrifice. Such love is extravagant because it cost God everything. Such love has value beyond words.”

I wanted to share how I first came into contact with Dr. Armstrong, by sharing an email that I sent to him when I first reached out to him many years ago.

*Dr. Armstrong,  
  
How are you? I apologize if you are starting to get overwhelmed or even numbed by the number of emails, replies, counter-replies and counter-counter replies you have received in response to your web blogs about UBF. Alas, my email is, well, yet another one in response to your postings. I actually heard you speak at one of the first UBF staff conferences you attended--a sermon which has since left a lasting edifying impression on me. I have been recently made aware of your blogs and have been following the UBF debate with an odd mixture of great joy and great sadness (joy because of the affirmation I have been frankly receiving from your postings, and sadness because of the deep wounds so evidently expressed in the multiple postings from ex-members of UBF).   
  
Just to introduce myself--I am a "second-generation" Korean-American. As you might have guessed, my parents were also "missionaries" from Korea who felt called to come to America to "preach the gospel" to American students. UBF being the tight community that it is, my parents also knew Dr. Mark and Grace Yoon while they were all college students in Korea during that spiritually dynamic time of my parents' generation...Anyhow, my wife and I, along with my pastor's family, sort of took over the student UBF ministry the Yoon family had while at University of Chicago before their moving to Boston. Currently I'm a physician working here at the university and live in Hyde Park. By the grace of God, I'm praying to establish a spiritually meaningful student ministry here on campus, building from the foundation that Dr. Mark and Grace Yoon's family had already established through their long-suffering sacrifice and prayers here.   
  
All throughout my formative Christian years, I had been struggling with what I would call a "UBF inferiority-complex"--always trying to explain my involvement to my well-meaning friends at Campus Crusade or Intervarsity on why UBF is not a cult; I was zealously defending its strengths in regards to discipleship, while also acknowledging its quirky, Korean-based, institutional culture that has its fair share of disturbing weaknesses and pitfalls.  Over the years, my attitude towards other Christians who could not understand our ministry swung back and forth from immature defensiveness to outright indifference. Sometimes in defending UBF, I would zealously point out the faults/weaknesses of other ministries as if to justify my involvement in mine. Other times, I would try to ignore other people's perceptions of our ministry with the attitude that I should not be "living before men"--that I should only concern myself of serving God with a clear conscience and focus on being faithful to my calling, rather than wasting time trying to convince other Christians of the spiritual legitimacy of my church. As a Reformation History major in college, my philosophy became that of John Calvin's who reportedly said something to the effect that "even if Martin Luther were to call me a devil, I would still consider him a great servant of God." I might be butchering the quote, but the general gist being that even though Christians I respect believed I was part of a demonic cult, I should still serve God faithfully in the role he has called me to and live before Him, not man. And that has been my approach up to now whenever I was confronted with the whole issue of UBF's Christian legitimacy.   
  
The older I get, and the more I find myself more in a leadership role, I realize I cannot swing between these two positions anymore. Long term, neither my arrogant defensiveness nor my stubborn indifference to other's perceptions would help the UBF ministry long-term. Eventually and ideally, we have to work side by side with the rest of the body of Christ and learn from other fellow brothers and sisters--and perhaps share to them what God has taught us. Recently, I've appreciated our organization's willingness to embrace the larger body of Christ and to allow for accountability as well as to share with the outside what God has been doing in our midst as well. Personally, I've appreciated your willingness to help shepherd our church to a more healthy interaction with the rest of the Body as well as serve as a mediator between those we have tragically wronged and grieved. You don't know how much of an encouragement it is for individuals such as myself who have been longing for someone on the outside to speak objectively on our behalf--someone who can highlight to the larger body of Christ the evident work of God that is clearly in our midst and not be seen as an biased insider, while still graciously helping us from the inside to reform our persistent ministry-stumbling blocks and not be seen as an unedifying critic.   
  
Therefore, the main reason I have finally started to email you and share these struggles is three-fold:  
1) To express my appreciation I've received from your Barnabas-like approach in coming along aside us to encourage us in our sincere service for Christ as well us standing by us as a fellow brother in Christ when no one else outside UBF seemed to be wanting to do so on our behalf   
2) To ask for your advice as a seasoned pastor and communicator on how our fellowship at University of Chicago should go about in our ministry to students, given our current constraints and "bad publicity" among the administration   
3) To further suggest--when the time is ripe--that you consider writing an article for Christianity Today that will allow the rest of the Christian community understand UBF according to your honest, objective assessments--including our strengths and pitfalls--so that there is better mutual understanding between UBF and the rest of the Christian community, perhaps opening lines of spiritually edifying dialogue between our leaders and the other mainstream Christian leaders. For I suspect that only an article written by a sympathetic outsider has the best chance of being fairly received by both UBF and the rest of the Christian community, versus an article written by a UBF insider or one written by UBF's more vocal detractors). I don't know if my motives for more positive "public relations" with the rest of Body of Christ is right or not, but I don't want there to be any unnecessary stumbling blocks between UBF and other ministries in our mutual goal to bring the gospel to every student of every tongue, tribe and nation.   
  
Thank you for graciously reading this email. I hope for the chance to meet you personally someday. Perhaps if it is God's will, in the setting of one of your Wheaton classes someday...  
  
In Him,  
  
John Yoon   
  
"Nothing that we despise in the other man is entirely absent from ourselves. We must learn to regard people less in the light of what they do or omit to do, and more in the light of what they suffer." - Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

