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At Home In Exile: Finding Jesus Among My Ancestors And Refugee Neighbors



Synopsis

Russell Jeung's spiritual memoir shares the joyful and occasionally harrowing stories of his life in East Oakland's Murder Dubs neighborhood—including battling drug dealers who threatened him, exorcising a spirit possessing a teen, and winning a landmark housing settlement against slumlords with 200 of his closest Cambodian and Latino friends. More poignantly, *At Home in Exile* weaves in narratives of longing and belonging as Jeung retraces the steps of his Chinese-Hakka family and his refugee neighbors. In the face of forced relocation and institutional discrimination, his family and friends resisted time and time again over six generations. With humor and keen insight, *At Home in Exile* will help you see how living in exile will transform your faith.

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Customer Reviews

Russell Jeung writes with great compassion, insight, clarity and humor about his remarkable faith journey as an Asian-American Christian. This book is required reading for anyone interested in race, religion and social justice. Prepare to laugh, cry, and transform with Russell Jeung! -- Carolyn Chen, Associate Professor of Ethnic Studies, University of California at Berkeley
Activist. Theologian. Hakka. Chinese American. Follower of Jesus. These words describe Russell Jeung and yet do not fully comprehend the story he has crafted in this masterful book. Part autobiography, part community history, and part liberation lived theology, *At Home in Exile* captures the heart and soul of following Jesus through living in community among the poor in Oakland. Follow and be

transformed. -- The Rev. Dr. Frank M. Yamada, President, McCormick Theological Seminary

In a watershed moment for refugees and immigrants, Russell Jeung felicitously reminds us of God's love for the least of these. This book powerfully illuminates the plight of the poor and disenfranchised while pointing towards the hope that is rooted and ultimately found in cruciform communities that express their faith in love. -- Dominique Gilliard, Board of Directors, Christian Community Development Association

Russell Jeung's life journey is a prophetic challenge to our Evangelical affluent upward mobile suburban culture. A rarity among privileged ivy-leagued Asian American upbringing, his story is a must read for those who are considering a life with a purpose beyond a white picket fence in an upscale suburban neighborhood. The various lives mentioned in *At Home in Exile* fulfill a longing to see modern day monastic examples of those who have given up the American dream for an intentional life of hardship and danger for the sake of the gospel. Written as a narrative of intriguing relationships through communal living, Russell's humor and raw wittiness is accompanied with deeper theological reflection. As a Hakka, a 'guest' in exile living among refugees, Russell reminds us of the simple gospel message; that as incarnate sojourners in a broken world, we find Jesus and trust that the Kingdom is near. -- David Ro, Director of the Christy Wilson Center, Gordon-Conwell; East Asia Director for the Lausanne Movement

Russell Jeung is a rare person who embodies courage, authenticity, and integrity in a culture of consumption and assimilation. Unlike other books, this book, *At Home in Exile* is a page turner because the author, as one of the residents, narrates the stories of Oak Park community of refugees and migrants. It is among the poor and broken, in which Jeung, a fifth generation Hakka Chinese American, experiences the beloved community which resonates with the early Christian community under imperial Roman culture. Jeung takes the readers on his intimately courageous journey who enter into his world with a sense of belonging and ancestral roots. This is a must book for the homeless mind on this shore that longs to retrieve buried memories and roots for social change. -- Rev Young Lee Hertig, Co-founder/Executive Director, ISAAC/AAWOL (Institute for the Study of Asian American Christianity)

An important biblical theme is that God speaks to His people while they are in movement, migrating or in exile. Russell Jeung invites us to recognize that we learn about God and about what God is doing when we live into our own experience of exile and choose to live and minister among migrants and exiles. *At Home in Exile* is autobiography, theology and missiology. This book challenges us to see that exile is a unique place to serve God and to learn about how God is at work in the world. -- Juan Francisco Martinez, Professor of Pastoral Leadership and Hispanic Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary

Russell Jeung's memoir of life in East Oakland is warm, humorous and challenging. He wears his learning lightly but it's obvious

that he can teach us a thing or two about the way faith affects life. -- Tim Stafford, General Editor, *God's Justice: The Holy Bible*

I know Russell Jeung to be a world-class academic, but he is quite unlike many scholars in that he lives out his resulting convictions in his daily life. That by itself is highly noteworthy. However, as demonstrated in this remarkable book, Jeung is also unlike the typical scholar in that he is a masterful and compelling storyteller, taking the reader not just into the daily lives of impoverished immigrants in Oakland, CA, but also inside his own struggles and transformation as he comes to identify with the poor. His talent for narrating these intermingled stories caused me to think more deeply about my own story as a grandson of immigrants from China. And as a devout Christian, it also made me question many of my own choices to avoid regularly intersecting my life with poor immigrants, especially those from parts of Asia that are in my own backyard. By showing himself to be a flawed and humble example of someone who clearly wants to follow Jesus, Jeung manages both to inspire and instruct the reader to take concrete steps in the direction of "the least of these." -- Rev. Dr. Ken Uyeda Fong, Executive Director, Asian American Initiative and Assistant Professor at Fuller Theological Seminary

At Home in Exile is more than exploring Asian-American identity, although that certainly undergirds the story. Russell Jeung's journey is also one of deep Christian faith, committed urban life, and community activism, which together convey a compelling challenge for all followers of Jesus---namely, to embrace our ultimately identity as exiles in Christ who can speak truth to power in all cultures. -- Al Tizon, Executive Minister of Serve Globally, Evangelical Covenant Church

Many times, it is so easy to get severed from one's root and faith along the way of pursuing American Dream in the U.S. It is heartening to read the life of one who God blesses with many achievements, and yet does not get disconnected from one's faith and root. I am confident that this book will inspire many others to participate more in their 'exile' communities and find it at home there. -- Kenneth VanBik, Lecturer, Department of Linguistics and Language Development, San Jose State University

At Home in Exile is the incredible story of a committed Christian disciple living in a poor, drug-infested, and refugee-ghetto neighborhood of Oakland, CA. As an evangelical Stanford-educated professor and a fifth-generation Chinese American, Jeung has tried to live out Jesus in this neighborhood as an exile in the US, suffering alongside with refugees from Cambodia, Laos, Burma, and undocumented Hispanics. He sees the church as a mother and a home providing hope for compassion for the downtrodden, the disinherited, and the disheartened. His autobiography is truly captivating, inspiring, and moving, challenging all of us on a fundamental level to re-examine our lives of following Jesus. -- Andrew Sung Park, Professor of Theology and Ethics, United Theological Seminary

Russell Jeung's book 'At Home in Exile' at first glance, may be read as

an wild adventure tale of ragtag bunch of misfits in exile whether it be Russell - a descendant of the Hakkas or the Cambodian refugee grandmother, or the African American gang members who stole his laptop to the veteran who keeps waiting for his big check all living in public housing complex. But it is so much more as he weaves the stories of their lives to lift up social injustice, racism, poverty, and obeying Jesus in a delightful storytelling! I was inspired, challenged and my faith and conscience pricked at times reading Russell's obedience of truly walking amongst and embracing the poor. At the same time, his transparency of his own humanness facing at times the raw reality of humanity and poverty and living in a crime driven neighborhood makes his faith ever more real. Finally, I was inspired to want to do more as he shares the beauty, joy, life and hope that can be found even amongst the poor and those in exile and the interconnectedness amongst all of us. -- Hyepin Im, President and CEO, Korean Churches for Community Development

Jeung takes us into a decades long journey of relocation into an urban community. He writes with the insights borne from lived experiences. Jeung writes with the acuity of a scholar, the heart of a pastor, and the soul of a Christ follower. A compelling commentary on consumerism, materialism, success, patriarchy, power, marginality. *At Home in Exile* is informed by Jeung's Asian American identity, he gives tremendous insights for people of all backgrounds. His family history takes the reader through a journey that touches on Hollywood's history, immigration history, the emergence and destruction of Chinatowns, and family and social services. It is a portrait of the unexpected way perceptions of race touch many of society's institutions --which has surprising implications for today's contentious issues. -- Nikki Toyama-Szeto, Director, International Justice Mission (IJM) Institute for Biblical Justice; Author, *God of Justice*

Russell (or Dr. Jeung) has taken elements of the Christian faith and theology, the US West Coast Asian American history/experience, life in my beloved Oakland, California, and his own life, and woven them together in a way that is educational, engaging, and authentic. He wrestles with some of the deeper complexities of urban ministry, community justice, Christian community, life calling, and family safety in a way that both gives the issues their due challenge and gives the reader some helps on how to navigate them with intellectual and personal integrity. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in seeing how a humble "Disney princess" has sought to be faithful to his heritage, his community, his calling, his family, and his God. -- Rev. Phil Bowling-Dyer, Director of Diversity Training, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

Displacement and longing for a home are not only a contemporary reality for many, but also interweaving thread throughout the Biblical Narratives. Russell Jeung's account of his family history and diasporic calling are profoundly moving and inspiring to all Christ followers. In these stories we learn how to journey like Jesus and make sense

of our own wanderings and hope for our eternal destiny. -- Dr. Sam George, Executive Director, Parivar International
I've gotten to know Dr. Russell Jeung these past few years. I've stayed in his home. Visited the men and women he has served. I've witnessed his sacrificial love for the Cambodian families and other refugee families in Oak Park. He is an inspiration to me and to those who know and respect him. His book about his life with Cambodian refugees reveals the strength and depth of my people. -- Ken Kong, Director, Southeast Asian Ministries-The Navigators; Director, Southeast Asian Catalyst

Dr. Russell Jeung is a leading sociologist of Asian Americans, race, and religion. He is professor of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University and author of *Sustaining Faith Traditions: Race, Ethnicity, and Religion among the Latino and Asian American Second Generation* (with Carolyn Chen) and *Faithful Generations: Race, Religion, and Asian American Churches*. Dr. Jeung is also executive producer of *Prophetic Voices*, a social media project addressing key social issues of the Asian American community within and in the public square. He serves as Board Chair of New Hope Covenant Church and lives with his family in East Oakland, CA. Along with his wife, Dr. Joan Jeung, they have two foster daughters from Burma and a son.

This is a truly unique book. And the best book I've read this year. Part memoir / sociology / theology / Asian corny hilariousness. It's funny, it's educational, it's deeply moving. Russell moves into and ultimately finds home in the Murder Dubs of Oakland. But it's not a triumphant American superhero story. Nor is it a sappy romance about 'the poor.' It's a complex, humble story about how he found community, identity, and ultimately Jesus in his mostly Cambodia refugee & Latino neighborhood. It's a story that asks: What if Jesus wasn't as much an American superhero, but more like a Chinese Hakka exile (his ancestors)? What if Jesus was more like my Chinatown grandma than that powerful hipster pastor I'm always jealous of? He re-explores things like MISSION, JUSTICE, COMMUNITY, FAMILY & CALLING through this lens. I finished this book richly proud of my Chinese ancestry, broken over the plight of disenfranchised non-model-minority Asians in the Bay Area, hopeful about what God is still doing through amazing yet mostly "invisible" people, but challenged to live my faith in a way that may run counter to the power and reward structures of our world.

a fascinating memoir of a 6th generation Chinese American Christian who discovered that his own spirituality and life-changing decisions are tied to the little-known experiences of the early Chinese

Americans. Jeung combines his PhD in sociology, his evangelical penchant for Bible-verse-dropping, and his own sense of humor in an accessible way that should be read by many who want to understand a different path within American Christianity, one that invites us to inhabit the same space as the marginalized, advocate on their behalf when necessary, and simply be a friend. Highly recommend.

In *At Home In Exile*, Russell Jeung takes his readers through a personalized historical journey of self-discovery. He interlaces his own ancestral background in the larger context of Asian Americans and minorities in the United States and finds himself gravitating away from the typical upward mobile path of the Asian American success story. Rather, he builds for himself a much richer and story-worthy adventure among the poor and marginalized in East Oakland. Russell Jeung's memoir is both relatable and challenging at the same time. It is a book I will come back to for reference and for inspiration.

This book is a must-read for anyone concerned about our country, about broken promises to immigrants who helped our armed forces and about the state of well-being of many citizens. It also outlines some of the disgraceful treatment of immigrants to California by our famed 'Robber Barons.' It is a book that should be assigned as required reading for every member of the US Congress, Executive and Judiciary. Perhaps these affluent and uncaring because often (willfully) blind people would learn something important.

A refreshingly compelling picture of embodied Biblical justice. I tend to shy away from contemporary spiritual memoirs because of the trend towards personality-driven writing. While thoughtful and humorous in his own right, Dr. Jeung focuses on identity, rather than personality, to build a framework for a radical Biblical ethic that is true to both his cultural heritage as well as the model of Jesus. I am grateful for men and women like Dr. Jeung to whom justice is an integral part of their practice of faith.

Genuine and sincere!

GREAT book. Very well written. I am an ethnic studies major at Cal, and loved that some of it took place when he was a grad student at Cal. If you are in the Bay Area, I would also recommend going to meet him and getting the book signed. He's a very insightful person

Part memoir, part theology, *At Home in Exile* is replete with both wisdom and humor.

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