

The Seriousness of the Mission Vision

One hundred years ago West Africa was a place where missionaries stayed—permanently.

They died there, never to return home. That was yesteryear's seriousness of the mission vision.

The same earnestness is needed today. But how does one train for that?

by Panya Baba

This past year we celebrated the Centennial of frontier ministry of the Gospel that was started by SIM in 1893. I had the opportunity to read the historic background of the three young Sudan Interior Mission pioneers who were so dedicated to the vision of the missionary call, who in their twenties left their home countries USA, Canada, and United Kingdom and headed to West Africa. It was called at that time "The Grave of White Men." Walter Gowans, Rowland Bingham and Thomas Kent arrived in Nigeria on December 4, 1893.¹ discovered that two of them, Walter and Thomas, died and were buried in the Nigerian jungle in less than a year of arrival and left Rowland Bingham to work alone, the latter also barely survived a serious attack from malaria. He didn't give up the cause, but instead appealed and pleaded for a second team of missionaries to come to Nigeria.

In May 29th of this year, some pastors and I had opportunity to visit the grave side of Walter Gowans in the bush at a small village called Girku. As we were there, standing on the spot where the body of the hero of the Gospel was buried, I said to myself, "How serious am I about frontier missions of the Gospel?" I had read about his mother's response to the news of her son's death:

"I prefer my son, Walter, to go to Africa and die alone and he buried in the jungle in obedience to Christ then to stay in Canada to enjoy life in disobedience to Him." I also discovered through their history about their strong faith and prayer lives as they suffered lack of support by mission organizations due to the fact that most of missionaries did not

survive in West Africa. Nevertheless, they determined to come trusting their lives to the hands of our Lord Jesus. They arrived with only 10 (ten pounds) in hand per person. After they arrived in Lagos, the west coast of Africa, they indicated their plan to penetrate into the Sudan. But they were told by the older missionaries: "You will never see the Sudan, your children will never see the Sudan, your grand-children may." But the three young men were not discouraged by these words. They made up their minds and penetrated into the frontier and interior of the Hausa land in North Nigeria. Two of them lost their lives in less than a year as I mentioned above. I said to myself again, "In comparison have I done anything at all for Christ?" How serious are we today in taking the Gospel to the rest of the frontier peoples in our generation?

Biblical Examples

Most of frontier missions began by the personal contact of a vision from God. God's Word says, "Where there is no vision the people perish." Both the Old Testament and the New are full of records of patriarchs, prophets and men of God to whom God appeared in vision in order to reveal His secret plans and then required them to participate and carry out his plan as directed by Him. God's call is mostly a missionary call. Examples abound like Genesis 6:8 with the case of Noah; the case of Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, 18:1-3, 17-22; Moses in Exodus 3:1-10 as well as Isaiah 6:1-8, Jeremiah 1:4-19, Ezekiel 1:3-28, Hosea 1:1 and Amos 3:7-8. There are many more but I just state a few. Let us remember the hard work of Noah, the

sacrifice of Abraham, the boldness of the prophets to face their nation and kings.

In the New Testament, Christ in His incarnation, had personal contact with the disciples when He called them for the ministry of the Gospel. (See Matthew 4:18-22; Mark 1:16-20; 2:14.) Likewise, the Apostle Paul also received his frontier mission call through a personal contact with Christ in a vision. (See Acts 26:12-19; I Corinthians 15:8.) Again, let us remember their immediate responses to the call. They even left their occupations and parents to follow Christ.

In a popular commentary the three editors commented about Jesus' missionary call to the disciples. It says, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19). The editors state, "This promise is linked with the earliest expression of the Gospel call and suggests that the main work of the Christian in the world is to win others for Christ-following Jesus may require the abandonment of occupation and the severance of family ties. It is in any case a call to wholehearted allegiance."¹ The same editors also indicated in that, "The choosing and training of the Twelve, who were to share with Him in the proclamation of the Good News and to continue it after His ascension, was a matter of vital importance in the ministry of Jesus. The two par of brothers here had all met Jesus before (John 1: 15-42) and had believed that He was the Messiah. Now he called them to the further step of leaving their fishing in order to follow Him. He declares, "I will make you to become fishers of men."² It is very interesting to note that one of the two brothers, who had the missionary call by Jesus, namely James, became the first Christian martyr in Jerusalem (Acts 12:2).

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Many of the pioneer missionaries did receive the missionary call. They got the vision that spared them no more time to stay and enjoy life in their home countries, found themselves in the ships for long voyages to foreign countries, taking the Gospel to the frontiers and regions beyond. Examples: Hudson Taylor went to China, Adoniram Judson went to Burma, William Carey to India and many others including the three SIM pioneers through whose sacrifice, I am here today. Some of these missionaries didn't have a chance to see their homelands again. Their remains were buried far away in foreign countries. They followed the steps of the biblical patriarchs, prophets and men of God whom the Holy Spirit listed in the Bible's chapter of Who's Who, (Hebrews 11). There is no doubt that we have a lot to study and learn from those who have gone before! Their total commitment and dedication are the great lessons for all of us in our missionary endeavour in this generation.

Evaluating Ourselves

Having said these things, the question that should now be asked and addressed is, "How serious are we for the Gospel to penetrate the final frontier peoples and countries in our generation before we pass away?"

"David, after he had served his own generation, by the will of God, fell asleep," said Paul in Acts 13:36. It seems we need to be more serious in reaching the un-reached wherever they are, no matter what cost we have to bear, even to the point of losing our lives. Why? Because there is no alternative. We have to learn from Jesus and go with Him to the next towns where other people have little or no opportunity to hear the Gospel (Mark 1:38), so that they too might hear.

Matthew testified in writing that, "Jesus went through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and

healing every sickness and every disease among the people." (Matthew 9:35) This testimony is very interesting and challenging to us today as we notice Jesus covered all cities and villages for evangelism in only a short three years. No wonder, He was able to say in His last prayer that, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do." The New International Version reads, "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do." (John 17:4) We can hardly say this prayer today at the end of our lives since we still have lots of unevangelized peoples and unbelievers in our generation. It was a real eye opener, a challenge and heart touching event in Manila, during Lausanne II, to notice from the record of provisional data for Lausanne II that more than 2 billion people, or some 40% of the world population in our generation are yet to hear the Gospel of Christ. That means that these unbelievers are still in frontier areas that badly need the Gospel today. We were informed that there are about 2000 ethnolinguistic groups or peoples among whom there is no indigenous community of Christians with adequate members and resources to evangelize their groups. About 12,000 unreached mini-peoples or sub-peoples defined by dialect and subculture are without adequate Gospel witness. About 1000 unevangelized cities and 30 unevangelized countries—most of these countries are in the 10/40 window area of the world.

In 1989 the Ghana Evangelism Committee, as the result of the Survey and Research that was done, witnessed to 15,000 towns and villages in the whole country that were without Protestant Churches, consisting of an area of about 5 million unreached northern and alien people in Southern and Northern Ghana. The Nigerian Evangelical Missions Association, (NEMA), has updated the unreached tribal groups to nearly 100 tribes that are yet to be penetrated with the Gospel. Without doubt there are many other countries and areas of the world that have frontier unreached people groups.

All of this confirms that the problem is still the same. There is no question about the great need of the harvest, as well as the great need for workers. After almost 2000 years, the harvest is still plentiful, and the workers are still few (Matt. 9:38).

Jesus finally had to give His life for the sheep (John 10:11). Paul testified that, "However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me to do, the task of testifying to the Gospel of God's grace." (Acts 20:24)

Regarding both the missionary call and the training by Jesus to the disciples, His words to them must be taken very seriously: "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." These are the twins who must be born together, grow together and be used together. There must be no separation between the two. They have to go hand in hand. "To make" means to train them. To receive the call to go without the training would not be an effective ministry. Jesus Himself invited us to learn from Him (Matt. 11:29). The goal of His call was not only to follow Him, but to follow Him until they had been sufficiently trained to become the fishers of men He wanted them to be. Training has a great role to play in frontier missionary work. Here it seems there are two steps to the goal, 1) to follow and 2) to be trained. The problem with some Christians is they only take the first step, and ignore the second. "No one is born a medical doctor or an engineer or a teacher, etc., with all the knowledge, but training has to be done, no matter what difficulties there are or length of time it takes. That is why we have schools, seminars and courses."³

Since the whole world of peoples has differences in culture, geography, history, nationality, government, rules and structures, etc., frontier missionaries must learn these things about these peoples wherever they are called to proclaim the good news. They should be very aware and sensitive to these issues. Training helps to produce qual-

ified missionaries. Greater results can be obtained by workers who have been well trained. Training should therefore be a high priority in the frontier mission endeavour. It is not only useful, but a great necessity.

Abraham conquered four kings and their multitudes of soldiers, not with many soldiers, but by using an army of only three hundred well trained and disciplined men from his household (Gen. 14:14). "It took Jesus three years, day and night, to train His disciples for the work of evangelism. Even then He commanded them not to start yet, despite the urgency, but to stay in the city of Jerusalem until they were clothed with power from on high (Luke 24:29). This was designed to avoid discouragement when facing problems and persecution. They needed boldness to face the task."⁴ (Acts 4:13, 29)

Likewise, frontier missionaries need to be disciplined in courage and boldness. The first and greatest need of the apostle Paul was meditation, study and learning in Arabia, then he returned to Damascus where he continued with proclamation of Christ and the Gospel. The "training schools" for the prophets are even indicated in the Old Testament (11 Kings 2:3-5). They were in Bethel and the city of Jericho. In addition to Christ's intention and plan for training the disciples, the disciples themselves saw their limitation and great need to learn how to pray. They requested Jesus, "Teach us to pray." (Luke 11:1) He took time to teach them (Matt. 5:1-2). He gave them the Great Commission including to go, to disciple and to teach (Matt. 28:19, 20). Paul mandated the teaching of others for the Gospel ministry to his spiritual son (II Tim. 2:1-2,3:14-15).

Methods of Training

When we talk about missionary training, we believe there are two methods of training: both the theoretical as well as

the practical. Our Lord Jesus used both to train His disciples. Sometimes He taught them verbally (Matt. 5:2), but at other times He took them along with Him to show them how He did things.

Furthermore, He asked them to take part in what He was doing. Sometimes He even sent them away to put into practice what

2. They should be trained in prayer, to prevail by prayer in impossible situations, seeing Satan bound and God's redemptive power released. They should be trained to combat the forces of evil through prayer.

3. They should be taught what their resources are and what spiritual authority they have in Christ.

4. They should learn how to live and work in fellowship with others.

5. Young missionaries must be trained to submit to godly leaders in the field and in the mission headquarters.

The Determination and total commitment of Paul was demonstrated by pressing on the goal of his high missionary call.

they had learned and been told. He gave them instruction on cross cultural work (Matt. 10:5,7-8,12; Luke 10:5). He set up some examples (John. 4).

"When he had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out and to heal all manner of diseases" (Matt. 10:1). When a mistake was made Jesus corrected them (Mark 9:28- 29; 38-39). The best correction is done in practical situations (Lk.10:17-20).

For this reason our training must not be one or the other, but both theoretical and practical. We must remember that some training schools produce missiologist, while other schools produce missionaries. Dr. Theodore Williams wrote, "Spirituality and Servanthood should be the two major emphases of our missionary training." He continued to analyze them as follows:

Mission Spirituality

1. Missionaries must be trained to walk in obedience to the Lord, trusting Him for all their needs and in their difficulties. Living by faith should be their lifestyle.

1. In these days there is much talk about leadership training but very little is said about training in servanthood. Yet, this is what the New Testament emphasizes. Missionaries should commit themselves not only to be servants of Christ but also servants of people (II Cor. 4:3).

2. They should be trained for costly involvement in the needs of the people whom they serve. This includes their physical and social needs as well as spiritual needs. More effort should be given for cross-cultural training to the frontier missionaries."⁵ Furthermore, there is need of continuing training in frontier missions. Missionaries must be kept up-to-date with new ideas, methodologies, and approaches, culture change, government rules, etc. Furthermore, the missionary's vision also needs to be sharpened from time to time.

Most missionaries depend on their academic training and sometimes they come to the stage that they forget what they learned while in school. Missionaries must be motivated to keep on studying and be creative for new idea" for the work. Therefore, methods for research is one of the important subjects that will be taught to the missionaries.⁶

Servanthood

Cross Fertilization

“One of the most effective ways of missionary training today for World Evangelization is the idea of exchanging of teachers and students alike. Both the students and visiting lecturers can be blessed by sharing ideas and learning from each other. This should be emphasized and practised between the missionary training institutes in all continents of the world in order to prepare missionaries for World Evangelization. One given training model won't necessarily work in every situation, since cultures and peoples differ from one country to another. The category of missionaries also needs to be different.

However, a few things should be emphasized generally. For example, Cross-Cultural Evangelism, Church Planting, Discipleship and Prayer, etc., should be primary things in every frontier mission training school since our ultimate goal is to evangelize the un reached peoples throughout the whole world.”⁷

The Apostle Paul, in his personal testimony about his missionary call before one of the great kings, Agrippa and governor Festos, testified that, “O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven” (Acts 26:19). To Paul the greatest event in his life-time was his missionary call and vision. It was more important than anything else. To him it was the call for the highest office by God's grace. He felt he was not worthy for God's confidence in him and honor given to him. His deep gratitude and thanks was expressed by writing to

Timothy that, “I thank Christ Jesus our lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service” (I Tim. 1:12). The implication of this grace of God to him made him change his life's priorities. He wrote to the Macedonian Church that, “But whatever was to my profit, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ” (Philip. 3:7).

He found that his frontier missionary call was too important to respond in silence, but instead, he had to say yes to the call and be obedient. These were facts that led him to obedience immediately (Galatians 1:17). This reveals the following:

—That the call was from the highest authority in heaven far above the Roman Empire (Matt. 28:18; Acts 26:19). It was from the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

—that it was God's grace who pardoned his sins ([Tim. 1:15,16).

—that God gave him the additional grace to have confidence in Him, and be trusted faithful, to proclaim the good news to the Gentiles.

—that God had made him a witness, not to simply witness, but to be a representative or ambassador of Christ the lord (Acts 26:16, II Cor. 5:20).

—that Jesus gave him the same job description as His own (Luke 4:18; Acts 26:18).

—that God invited him to invest his life and ministry in God's enterprise and become a shareholder of the Kingdom of God (II Tim. 2:11-12).

—that God counted him to be a partner with Him in the business enterprise of His Kingdom (I Cor. 3:9—a co-worker or fellow worker with God.

—that God made him a channel of blessing to others (II Cor. 2:15).

Our total commitment to the task of frontier missions is need. The determination and total commitment of Paul was demonstrated by pressing on to the goal of his high missionary call (Phil. 3:14). He was joyfully willing not only to suffer but even to die for the sake of the Christ. He knew the seriousness of the missionary vision.

We must follow in the footprints of our lord Jesus and those who have gone before us if we really mean business for frontier missions. We must have the same burden and burning love for Christ in our hearts which will compel us towards the lost ([I Cor. 5:14). There is no alternative route to take the Gospel into frontier mission situations, especially the 10/40 window area of the world. Without the willingness to shed tears in sowing the seeds of the Gospel there will not come the time of sharing of joy to reap the harvest. May the lord, by His Spirit, give us courage and boldness as we face the seriousness of the unfinished task of World Evangelization.

References

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